

The Emergence of “Creeds” in Earliest Christianity According to the Acts of the Apostles

Christoph W. Stenschke, Department of Biblical and Ancient Studies, College of Human Sciences, University of South Africa (Pretoria), South Africa

ORCID: 0000-0002-0009-8461

Author's email: cstenschke@t-online.de

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Abstract

This article briefly summarises the history of research on creedal formulations in the New Testament and argues that the socio-religious context of earliest Christianity, that is early Judaism, would have fostered the creation and use of such formulae from the earliest stages onward. This is followed by a detailed examination of credal statements in the Book of Acts, including evidence for early fixed formulae and their origin and life-setting within the believing community, in the proclamation of the Gospel, vis-à-vis opposition and in the geographical spread beyond Jerusalem and Judea. In closing, the article emphasises the need for creeds and their present-day significance in the life and ministry of Christian congregations.

Keywords:

Creed, Acts of the Apostles, Earliest Christianity, Creedal formulations, New Testament theology, Early Christian liturgy, Early Christian mission, Early Christian catechesis, Early Christian apologetics, Religious conflict in Acts, Peter Stuhlmacher

1. Introduction

As we commemorate the First Council of Nicaea in 325 AD and rediscover and re-assess the creed to which it led, the question rightly arises where and why the idea and the need for creeds had their origin. Was it only imperial pressure which led to this remarkable consensus after and amidst the emerging different Christological controversies?ⁱ

Was there anything in the Bible, in particular in the New Testament, which led to the formulation of creedal statements? Indeed, there are some passages in the New Testament which have been

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identified as creedal statements or as fixed formulations of the earliest Christian convictions and doctrine. Often scholars refer to passages such as the Christ-hymn in Philippians 2:5–11, the opening verses of Paul’s long treatment of the resurrection of Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15 (1Cor 15:3–5) or the way in which Paul summarises the benefits of the death of Jesus in Romans 3:21–26.ⁱⁱ Such identifications derive from the fact that Paul occasionally indicates that he is passing on earlier traditions (e.g., Rom 10:9).

It is plausible, if not most likely, that the earliest Christ-believers formulated core-convictions of their faith in such statements and passed them on in their missionary and catechetical ministry. While New Testament scholars of previous generations (such as R. Bultmann, H. Conzelmann, O. Cullmann or V. H. Neufeld, see Martin 1993:192) were quick and confident in identifying such material (and their conclusions are readily available in monographs and commentaries), today’s scholars are more careful (for instance, see the survey in Öhler 2013, who refers to such material as “components” of early Christian theology; see also Gordley 2023). They rightly question some of the criteria used earlier for identifying such material. For instance, arguments from the stylistic differences of such formulations (see Gordley 2023:457) often proved to be subjective. To identify statements as early creedal formulations simply based on the vocabulary also begs a range of questions. In addition, could not Paul himself or one of his co-workers (active as teachers in congregations over many years) have produced such succinct summaries?

In view of these developments, our quest is different. Rather than trying to identify such material in the letters of the New Testament, to study how it might have been adapted and expanded (for an example, see Stuhlmacher 2005:293–297), to inquire about its function and to reflect on the implications for the development of New Testament theology and its nature or the history of early Christianity, our focus will be on the portrayal in the Acts of the Apostles, the canonical account of the era in which some of these statements originated. We examine whether traces of such material can be discerned in the Book of Acts, and in which contexts they appear. What light do these traces shed on the circumstances of the emergence of creeds in earliest Christianity? What are the implications for understanding later developments and the validity and need for creeds today? Before we turn to this portrayal, a number of issues need to be addressed.

1. That the earliest Christians would carefully formulate, teach and pass on their core convictions, summarised as “the teaching of the Apostles”, that characterises the earliest community in Jerusalem (Acts 2:42), does not come as a surprise in view of the intensive teaching ministry of Jesus (see Riesner 2023). The idea of such formulae and much of their content derives from the ministry of Jesus, who intensively taught his disciples before and after Easter. While also teaching the crowds and individuals or interacting with his opponents, Jesus spent much of his time systematically instructing his disciples. He did so in longer sermons or as the opportunity arose. An

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instructive example is Luke 12–13. He used different approaches and genres such as parables, short wisdom sayings, or expositions of the Old Testament. For instance, there are the Beatitudes, the woes he pronounced, the prayer which taught the disciples, or short ethical maxims such as the so-called Golden Rule (Matt 7:12). Jesus did so repeatedly and used methods which would help his disciples to memorise and remember his words (see the survey in Stuhlmacher 2005:74–83 and Riesner, 2013). The process was assisted by two factors:

2. Jesus and his earliest followers lived in early Judaism, a culture which valued teachers, that is, people who were instructed and well versed in the Scriptures of Israel, gathered disciples around them and instructed them carefully. They did so in a holistic way, in that they invited their students to share their lives, to listen and to observe carefully. All this took place in an *oral* culture, where large amounts of material (narratives, systematic teaching) could be memorised and passed on with great care. A recent focus in Jesus- research and Gospel studies is orality studies (see Botha 2012 and Eddy 2013), with its focus on the origin and processes of transmission of oral traditions. Ancient (and modern) people in oral cultures have enormous capacities to memorise and transmit faithfully what they listened to carefully.
3. As they followed and observed Jesus, the disciples increasingly realised that he must be more than one of the prophets of old, John the Baptist or King Solomon. Eventually, they came to confess Jesus as God’s Messiah, God’s long-promised Christ (Mark 8:27–30, see Bird 2013). This was even more reason to listen carefully to remember what Jesus, commissioned by Israel’s God, would teach and entrust to them.

Therefore, in this cultural context and with their experiences of Jesus and the convictions which they derived from them (a shared experience of following Jesus, witnesses of his death and resurrection, a shared commission) it is only to be expected that the earliest followers of Jesus would carefully transmit his teaching and condense it into formulae which could be easily passed on and remembered, just as Jesus himself had done. In addition to the continuity in teaching between the pre-Easter and post-Easter ministry of Jesus and the early developments, there is also the continuity vouchsafed through the people who were involved. The very people who were with Jesus as his faithful students (on the apostles, see Keener 2012: 661–662), would transmit and formulate the core convictions of the earliest community in Jerusalem.

2. Creed and credal statements in the Acts of the Apostles

The Gospel of Luke closes with Jesus’ intensive teaching of the disciples, be it on the road to Emmaus or in Jerusalem (Luke 24:25–27, 32, 44–47). The Book of Acts begins with a summary statement regarding the repeated and intensive teaching of the risen Jesus (Acts 1:3): “appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God”.ⁱⁱⁱ

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The earliest post-Pentecost Christ-believing community is described as being “devoted to *the apostles’ teaching*, and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42; see Keener 2012:1001–1002). The *teaching of the apostles* will have included an account of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus for those who did not know the details already or only heard from hearsay (such as the inhabitants of the city and the many pilgrims who had come for the festival, see Acts 2:22: “as you yourselves know”; Luke 24:18). In addition, the apostles would interpret the entire ministry of Jesus and “the things that have happened” (Luke 24:18), carefully narrated, as a fulfilment of the Scriptures of Israel. As they did so, they followed the model of Jesus’ own post-Easter teaching (24:25–27, 44–48). Later, Luke himself would follow their example and provide an orderly account of “the things that have been accomplished among us” (1:1–4, *ESV*) or, more literally, the things “which have come to fulfilment among us”. Their teaching also included the implications of what had happened in fulfilment of Scripture. The apostles’ teaching would also have comprised their personal testimony (closely related to the ministry of Jesus) and also their commission by the risen Lord, from which they derived their authority as the leaders of the people of God gathered and restored through Israel’s Messiah.

The activity of teaching by the apostles (and probably others, such as the Hellenists) is not restricted to the earliest community in Jerusalem. Throughout Acts, believers in Jesus receive a generous dose of teaching. Paul is depicted as a pioneer missionary, but also a dedicated teacher (Acts 11:26) and faithful pastor of the congregations which he founded.

References to intensive teaching cannot be equated with or taken as evidence for creeds. However, the speeches in Acts provide clues to the content of the apostles’ teaching and to the succinct manner in which it was presented (for an assessment of the speeches of Acts, see Keener 2012:258–319). This can be seen in the so-called missionary speeches of Acts. On several occasions, divine and human actions are contrasted:

Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know – this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men [that is the non-Jews]. God raised him up, losing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. ... Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified (Acts 2:22–24; see Keener 2012:924–944).

Similar summaries appear in Acts 3:13–15 or on Paul’s lips in Pisidian Antioch (13:23–33). In addition, there is Peter’s summary of the Gospel before Cornelius and his house (Acts 10:36–43; see Keener 2013:1799–1809). Obviously, Peter’s speech lasted for longer than the 70 to 80 seconds it takes to read it. As the readers of Acts are familiar with the detailed account of the life and ministry of Jesus in

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Luke’s Gospel, a summary is enough. The Gospel is initially for Israel; it is the good news of peace through Jesus the Christ, who is the Lord of all (Acts 10:37). The events took place in Judea and began with John the Baptist. “How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing those who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ...” (10:37–38). The disciples are witnesses to these events. Eventually, Jesus was executed by crucifixion (10:39). God raised him from the dead; Jesus appeared to the disciples, who are witnesses to Jesus’ bodily resurrection. On the appointed day, Jesus will be the divinely appointed judge of the living and the dead (10:42). In fulfilment of the Scriptures, through him all who believe will receive forgiveness of sins (10:43).

This presentation of the Gospel reflects the basic structure of the Synoptic gospels. Some have argued that the summary in Acts 10 aptly summarises the plot of Mark’s Gospel (see Stuhlmacher 2005:49). Either the author of Acts took this structure from written gospels (e.g., Mark), drew on the oral tradition of proclaiming the Gospel or knew and followed this summary of Peter’s preaching (or a combination of these options).

Such summaries also appear in defence speeches (Acts 4:10–12).^{iv} In addition, there are summary references to the content of the proclamation of the apostles and others. They are portrayed as proclaiming Jesus as the Christ. Such summaries are short creedal statements: Jesus of Nazareth was, is and will prove to be God’s Messiah promised in the Scriptures. Philip proclaims the Christ in Samaria (Acts 8:5). In Damascus, Paul proves that Jesus was the Christ (9:22). In Athens, Paul proclaimed Jesus and the resurrection (17:18; for a survey of the presentation of Jesus in Acts, see Stenschke 2010a).

In summary, this shows that Acts gives some evidence of fixed formulae of proclaiming the Gospel and confessing the faith. These formulae can be seen as nascent creedal formulations, as precursors of the latter ecclesial creeds. From the early stages of Christianity onwards, there is evidence of the concern to speak precisely and adequately of Jesus, the pre-eminent content of the earliest Christian conviction. In the next section, we examine the life setting and function of such statements. When would the earliest Christians have needed fixed formulations of their faith? How did they employ it?

3. The life settings, the origin and the need for creedal formulae

The traces of creedal formulations that we find in Acts are what one would expect from the needs of the Christ-followers from an early stage. Such systematic and fixed formulaic summaries of core Christian convictions, that is, creeds, were required for several reasons. What Martin (1993:191) has identified regarding the context and function of creedal statements for the Pauline communities (and has been observed by others as well) also applies to Acts. The proclamation of the Gospel “gave the communities a sense of identity in the social world around them ... and a missionary impulse to proclaim and embody

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the gospel in that social setting ... Moreover, possessing a body of Christian truth explains how, from the start, the church was a worshipping community with a devotion that centred on Christ as living Lord” (see also Gordley 2023:460 and 2018). In addition, Martin (1993:191) also refers to situations “in which Christians were encouraged or required to confess their faith”. Three main life settings for early creedal formulae can also be identified in Acts, that is, an *inner-community setting*, a *missionary setting* and an *apologetic setting*. This agrees with the assessment of Stuhlmacher (2005:160–161, my summary; see also pp. 180–181) who notes that since Pentecost, the earliest Christ-believing community in Jerusalem developed global missionary impulses. This community consisted of a (predominantly) Aramaic and Hebrew speaking group as well as a (predominantly) Greek speaking group of converted Jews, the so-called Hebrews and Hellenists (cf. Acts 6:1). For their communal practice of their faith in Jesus as God’s Christ, both groups needed confessions and catechetical texts, prayers and liturgical rules for their regular gatherings, for the instruction of new converts and for carrying out baptism and communal meals. Both groups also had to develop summaries of their core convictions for their evangelistic endeavours. To meet these needs, both groups required a thorough comprehension of the faith regarding its essential contents and purposes, that is, theological reflection and the formation of Christian doctrine. The “teaching of the Apostles” had to be formulated for both groups and therefore in both Aramaic (Hebrew) and Greek. Yet, this was not only the case for Jerusalem.

After the martyrdom of Stephen and the expulsion from Jerusalem of the Hellenists who had gathered around him (cf. Acts 7:54-8:3), scattered members of Stephen’s circle founded the missionary community in Antioch on the Orontes ... From Jerusalem, the Christian mission reached as far as Rome (cf. Acts 2:10 with Rom 16:7), and from Antioch, Syria, Asia Minor and Greece were reached with the Gospel. Like the believers in Jerusalem, the Antiochian church also needed theological reflection and Christian teaching for itself and its mission (Stuhlmacher 2005:161).

3.1. Life setting within the Christ-believing community

The Christ-believing community, in particular as it multiplied quickly from the 120 disciples who had come with Jesus from Galilee (Acts 1:15) to a few thousand (2:41; 5:14), required *in-depth systematic instruction* in the apostles’ teaching as identified above. This instruction will have taken place in the context of baptism (the roots of the later catechumenate) and in the regular assemblies on the temple premises, in different homes and elsewhere (2:46; see Adams 2015).

Another inner-community life setting would have been *communal worship*, that is, liturgy (see Whisenand Krall 2023). How was Jesus to be addressed in worship? What could and what should be said of him in praise of his being and his past, present and future deeds? What designations or claims about him were inadequate (in the portrayal of Acts, heresy was not an issue)? How could and should the familiar forms of early Jewish prayers and hymns be adapted in view of God’s revelation in Jesus?

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What role did the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts play in all this? Acts 2:42 mentions the apostles’ teaching together with fellowship, the breaking of bread and communal prayers, the latter two requiring some forms.

In this combination, such formulations served in two important functions. They were expressions of the community’s core convictions, as summarised and taught by their leaders and others. At the same time, they shaped the identity of the community (for identity in earliest Christianity, see Rosner 2023). The convictions which people share and that they confess together have a lasting impact on their identity. Those who share these convictions belong to the community; those who do not, do not (yet) belong to the community. This explains why confessions of faith (often in combination with a testimony of one’s encounter and acceptance of faith) came to be associated with baptism, the initiation into the body of Christ.

3.2. Life setting in the proclamation of the Gospel

We have seen that the apostles are portrayed as succinctly summarising the Gospel in Jerusalem. Those who had to leave and were dispersed (Acts 8:1), did so in other places (8:4–5; 11:19). The summary references to the content of their proclamation (see above), recall the formulae used by the apostles. In this way, the proclamation was not limited by the apostles but eventually mission in Acts became the mission of the entire church: People, who had *not* been the followers and witnesses of Jesus, “who had not accompanied the apostles “during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us” (1:21–22), knew how to proclaim Jesus adequately and did so faithfully (see Stenschke 2010). This applies to Paul, the missionary par excellence, who dominates the second half of Acts. Like Peter and Philip before him, Paul proves that Jesus was the Christ (9:22, and elsewhere).^v

3.3. Life setting vis-à-vis opposition

Acts indicates that the proclamation of the Gospel also met fierce opposition from an early stage (Acts 4:1–22; 5:17–41). Those proclaiming the Gospel who were called to account had to give apologies for their words and behaviour. The apostles had to do so early on, then Stephen and Paul on various occasions. However, this would also have applied to the rank-and-file believers (8:1; see the survey in Cunningham 1997). In such contexts, fixed formulations of their convictions would have assisted them (in addition to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, promised to the disciples of Jesus for exactly such situations, see Luke 12:8–12).^{vi}

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3.4. Life setting in changing circumstances

The developments in these life settings had consequences which in turn required fixed formulations of the community's core convictions. One aspect was the geographical spread beyond Jerusalem, another aspect was the increasing age of the protagonists and persecution:

1. While in Jerusalem, the apostles and the other followers of Jesus (the 120 mentioned in Acts 1:15) did and could warrant the content of the teaching. However, when the church spread beyond the confines to Judaea, Samaria, and Syria (due to persecution and dispersion of the Hellenists, the apostles had to leave Jerusalem, 12:17), the teaching had to be fixed so that it could be transmitted within the newly founded communities for their communal life, just as it was needed in Jerusalem (see above). These communities would have needed such formulations also for their evangelism and in situations when they had to defend their commitment to Christ and its implications for their behaviour.

This spread did not lead to disparate theologies as the traditions were fixed early on and as the communities were and remained closely linked (for a survey see Thompson 1998). Again Stuhlmacher (2012:181) states:

The confessions and historical tradition of Jesus, the Christ was also formulated and used in churches that were in close contact with one another. Capernaum and Jerusalem were in contact with each other through Peter and the Twelve (cf. Acts 1:1–26 with Matt 28:16–20; John 21:1–23), Jerusalem and Antioch were in contact through Barnabas (Acts 4:36; 9:27; 11:22), Silas/Silvanus (Acts 15:22–40) and itinerant prophets (Acts 11:27–28). The Samaritans converted by Philip (Acts 8:4–8) were introduced to the traditions of the early church in Jerusalem by Peter and John (Acts 8:14–17), etc. The formation of disparate and competing Christologies in these churches is historically inconceivable under these circumstances.

Disputes which could not be solved in the places where they arose, were referred back and resolved in Jerusalem (Acts 15:2–32). The decisions taken there were carefully communicated in writing and by word of mouth.

2. A further factor needs to be kept in mind. Not only did the first generation of witnesses get older as time went by. Increasingly, this raised the issue of how the apostles' teaching could be passed on faithfully to the next generation and generations. In addition, the apostles were persecuted from the beginning in Jerusalem, their lives being under threat. Stephen was the first to die, followed by James (Acts 12:2). The Hellenists were dispersed. Later the apostles had to leave or left Jerusalem (12:17). This added to the urgency of fix and transmit the early traditions carefully, be it in oral tradition or writing.

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These life settings in Acts do not and cannot prove the early existence of concise formulations of core Christian convictions. Yet, they indicate that the atmosphere and need for such formulations existed from the beginning. Add to this the fact that the leading people at this stage were Jews who were familiar not only with succinct summaries which Jesus himself had provided them with, but also with the existence and regular use of the confessional texts of the Old Testament and the prayers and liturgies used in Jewish synagogues and homes. The life settings that we have surveyed would have occasioned and favoured concise formulations like those that have been identified in the letters of the New Testament and the later creeds. The functions of such formulations that we have outlined for Acts are not limited to the apostolic age. This takes us to an application.

4. Summary and present-day significance

Succinct and fixed summaries of core convictions were characteristic of Christian faith from the earliest community in Jerusalem onward. Such summaries arose and had their place and life setting in the teaching within the Christ-believing communities and in their worship. They were expressions of Christian identity and shaped this identity further. They would have been used and were necessary in the proclamation of the Gospel to Jews and non-Jews, and also when Christ-believers were summoned to defend themselves and give an account of their convictions and the practices which they derived from them.

Together with the continuity guaranteed through Christ-followers of all kinds who travelled and ministered in different places (see Thompson 1998), fixed traditions contributed to vouchsafing and maintaining the theological unity of the church despite its rapid spread throughout the Eastern Mediterranean world. In this process, diverse people were involved, such as the apostles, the Hellenists of Jerusalem, Paul and his co-workers and others from Antioch and elsewhere. Thus, it is very likely that fixed traditions were around for use (for instance, by Paul) or could be formulated as needs arose. The authors of the New Testament either put in these traditions in writing (the evangelists, the Jesus tradition) or drew on them in combination with the Old Testament in addressing the pressing issues at hand. This common recourse contributed to the theological unity of the New Testament. As time went on, shorter summaries were developed (for a summary of the early developments, see Flanagan 2012 and O’Collins 2009:158–187). One of the post-apostolic and post-biblical formulations which proved to be a lasting contribution was the Nicene creed of the year 325 AD, which was commemorated this year.

How does what was discussed relate to churches today? There is a popular video game called *Need for Speed*. To draw on the name of this game, one could argue for the “Need for Creed”, for succinct formulations of core Christian convictions in contemporary forms and language which can be used today. The different life-settings for which they are needed today are remarkably similar to what we found in Acts.

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There is the need for such summaries for systematic catechesis in churches. This will, in turn, be an expression of the identity and forge this identity. If such summaries do not shape the doctrine and practices in congregations, other factors will readily do so. Such formulations guide the liturgy and worship of the church. Adeyemo (2006:251) outlines the nature of “Worship and Praise” in the African context as follows.

Biblical worship is rooted in redemption, relationship and representation. ...Worshippers of Yahweh have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. They have a dynamic relationship with him as his sons and daughters ... and represent him in the world as his ambassadors. ... Worship flows from gratitude ..., proclaims God’s greatness and glory ... and anticipates Christ’s return.

For all these functions, those actively involved and those joining them, need sound guidance. In much contemporary Christian music, often the very subjective experiences and feelings of the authors and presenters of worship hymns will determine our theology more than our doctrine.

There is the need to formulate the Gospel and core aspects of Christian faith in a way that is biblically sound and readily understandable beyond the confines of churches for missionary purposes. Those called to share the Gospel in families, neighbourhoods, workshops, and offices need to have the words at hand to do so; otherwise they will remain silent. Much of our Baptist missionary impetus in the past was due to the fact that not just the pastors and evangelists were able to share the Gospel, but many other believers as well.

Christians are called to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in them (1Pet 3:15). It would be a good exercise to formulate the content and consequences of the hope that Christians have in the multiple crises of our time. In some cases, the defence will be more formal and occur in the context of persecution. Also in such circumstances, believers will need the words to explain and to defend themselves.

The circumstances which gave rise to such formulations have significantly changed, and we have benefitted from the developments back then and up to the present. With the New Testament, we have at our disposal what was formulated and put into writing at the time. Today, these formulations, other proven summaries of the faith^{vii} could help us to maintain the unity in local congregations (“This is what we believe, agree and act on, and expect our members to adopt”) and the unity of a larger group such as a Union. In this way, we explicate what we believe, teach, stand for and what people can expect when they come and join one of our congregations. And we are prepared for “contending for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

Flanagin (2012:1024) notes that “despite significant challenges to the basic idea of a creed that have arisen out of the Enlightenment and the dawn of historical consciousness, the same basic forces of self-

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definition, arising from both internal and external pressures, have continued to give rise to the production of new creeds and confessions of faith by churches around the world”. In some areas of doctrine and in view of recent developments, new creeds will have to be formulated. Some of the more recent creeds have captured significant biblical aspects which have been neglected previously (for example, see Pelikan & Hotchkiss 2003). For instance, the confession of faith of the Masai *Church of the Holy Spirit* in Eastern Nigeria (1960) rightly emphasises the Jewish identity of Jesus in formulating: “We believe that God kept his promise in sending his Son, Jesus Christ, a man according to the flesh, a Jew by tribe”. This confession also includes the ministry of Jesus: “... born poor in a small village, who left his home and was always on safari [that is, on a great journey], doing good, healing people by the power of God, teaching about God and people and showing that the meaning of religion is love”.

With all the emphasis on creed in this issue of the *SABJT*, and in the present article, Kenyan theologian Samuel Ngewa (2006:1444) rightly reminds us that “what we believe should become part of all that we do. Living like this could transform Africa! We need to ask God to give us the will and the power to do what we believe”. Amen to this.

Endnotes

ⁱ See the survey in Kinzig (2023:393–399). He identifies the many allusions to the New Testament in the Nicene Creed. For the relationship between creed and the Scriptures, see Bockmuehl & Eubank (2024).

ⁱⁱ For all three passages, see the survey in Martin 1993:190–192, and in detail, Stuhlmacher (2005).

ⁱⁱⁱ For an interpretation of Acts from an African perspective, see Kisau 2006.

^{iv} The assessment of these occurrences depends on how the speeches of Acts are to be seen. If they are faithful summaries of what was said, they provide early evidence for such formulations. If they are Luke’s creation, as has often been proposed by critical scholarship, they provide evidence for a later time, that is, either the time of the composition of Acts or for how the author wished to portray the beginnings of the Christ-believing movement and wished it to be remembered, see the discussion in Keener (2012:256–319).

^v The speeches in Acts 14:15–17 and 17:22–31 indicate that Paul and others could also draw on OT creedal language to speak about God. This underlines the Jewish origin of the Gospel Vollenweider (2012:1020) has pointed out that the NT authors readily draw on creedal formulations from the Old Testament.

^{vi} In times of crisis, the community could also draw on the OT. This helped the community to understand what was happening to them, see Acts 4:23–30. Throughout the believers had not only their nascent traditions but also the Old Testament to which they could turn for guidance and for understanding the situation they found themselves in; for a survey see Stenschke (2024).

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vii See the *Basic Principles* of the Baptist Union of South Africa, <https://baptistunion.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Membership-Manual-English.pdf> (access 29.06.2025).

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