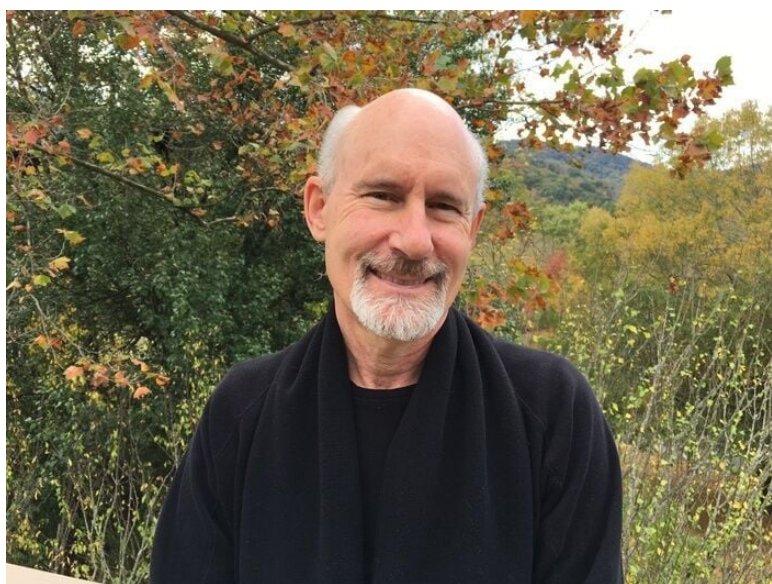




https://www.blackbeltnewsnetwork.com/religion/friendly-freethinker-seeds-of-the-creeds-in-our-deeds/article_4f2ab3b6-3d7f-4666-b54d-9a4ae461a2e8.html

Friendly Freethinker: Seeds of the Creeds in Our Deeds?

By Chris Highland
Sep 16, 2026



Raised in a Protestant Christian tradition that values the historic creeds of the Church, I learned from an early age to respect and repeat them every Sunday. The central creed—an “I believe” statement—memorized from Sunday

School days, was the Apostles' Creed. Not written by any of the original followers of Jesus, the current version of the creed wasn't established until about six hundred years after the death of Jesus.

If you aren't familiar with it, or don't remember it as I do, here is the full text:

"I believe in God, the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead; and ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen."

I'm not sure why this statement of faith would end like a prayer, with an "amen," but let's look closer at what this claim to faith really says. (by the way, the word "catholic" here is intended to mean "universal," not the Roman Catholic Church). What do we notice about this ancient statement? Think about the life ministry of Jesus, his teachings and acts of compassion. Where are they in the creed? Where is the Sermon on the Mount? He's born and immediately crucified.

It's as if the writers couldn't wait to get him resurrected up into heaven to be the judge of sinful humanity. Where is the ethical responsibility to practice the kind of life Jesus exhibited?

One answer is that this isn't really about Jesus. It's about Christ. Not about the human being who lived and breathed like us, but about the heavenly Lord above. How could we tell from this statement, hearing it repeated by an individual or congregation, that the person or group of people "believe" in serving others, living an ethical life for the benefit of the world?



This reveals a seed of the Christian emphasis on believing rather than living, faith rather than actions, creeds rather than deeds.

A creed doesn't bleed. What I mean is that a statement of faith has no blood, bone or brain. An "I believe" or "We believe" has no substance or actual meaning until and unless it leads to practical action. The rote repetition of words, especially sentences memorized in childhood, only shows opinions passed down through centuries. Does this give us any idea if the believer is a good person who seeks the best for others?

What about the creed's mysterious "Ghost"? Contemporary versions insert "Spirit," but I think this is another clear indication the creed is completely concerned with super-natural things. The natural world, where we live, is simply not as important as the super-natural, a realm above and beyond Nature. Faith is otherworldly directed. To put it bluntly, forget Jesus and believe in Christ.

A creed is essentially a test. Missionaries can use it to convert non-believers, and test a genuine conversion by requiring each new believer to repeat the formula of faith. In some lands, indigenous people, Jews, Muslims and others were forced to comply with a public statement of orthodox ("correct") Christian faith.

The first phrase of this creed invites deeper thought. Though the Gospels sometimes refer to God as "Father," they, like the historic creeds, were written by men, primarily for men, and deemed orthodox by the "Church Fathers." The humanity of Jesus himself—his own earthly manhood—was lost in Christian theology in favor of the exalted Christ, with God as a strict Male Parental Deity overshadows the rest of Church history. Women have never been given high positions in most of Christian history. The "Virgin Mary" only appears as a useful vessel to bring the divine into the world to fulfill the divine plan. And, though she's venerated in the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, women are still not

worthy of priesthood (Protestant churches have only ordained women slowly over the last century).

The Apostles' Creed was embedded in my young brain decades ago. I suppose it will always linger there, but probably not in the way it was intended by Church leaders. It will continue to remind me of what I do believe: I believe that creeds distract us from the deeds that are the true "statements" of our common humanity, whether a believer or not.

Chris Highland

2026

Chris Highland was a minister and chaplain for many years. He is a writer and teacher in Asheville, NC. www.chighland.com, (chris.highland@gmail.com)