

Chapter II

THE ECCLESIASTICAL FORM OF
FAITHI. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS ON THE HISTORY AND
STRUCTURE OF THE APOSTLES' CREED¹⁸

ALL that we have said so far has done no more than attempt to answer the formal question what belief as such is and whereabouts in the world of modern thought it can find a position for itself and a function to perform. The deeper questions relating to its content thus necessarily remained open – with the whole problem perhaps looking only too pale and ill-defined. The answers can only be found by looking at the concrete shape of Christian belief, and this we now mean to consider, using the so-called Apostles' Creed as a guiding thread. It may be useful to preface the discussion with a few facts about the origin and structure of the Creed; these will at the same time throw some light on the legitimacy of the procedure. The basic form of our profession of faith took shape during the course of the second and third centuries in con-

¹⁸ The standard work on this subject remains F. Kattenbusch, *Das Apostolische Symbol*, Vol. I, 1894, Vol. II, 1900 (unchanged reprint, Darmstadt, 1962; henceforth referred to as Kattenbusch). Other important books are: J. de Ghellinck, *Patristique et Moyen-âge*, Vol. I, Paris, 2nd ed., 1949; the survey by J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, London, 1950; and W. Trillhaas, *Das apostolische Glaubensbekenntnis, Geschichte, Text, Auslegung*, Witten, 1953. A short summary and further literature are to be found in the patrologies; for example, B. Altaner–A. Stuiber, *Patrologie*, Freiburg, 7th ed., 1966, pp. 85ff.; J. Quasten, *Patrology*, Vol. I, Utrecht, 1962, pp. 23–29; see also J. N. D. Kelly, "Apostolisches Glaubensbekenntnis", in LThK, pp. 76off.

nection with the ceremony of baptism. So far as its place of origin is concerned, the text comes from the city of Rome; but its internal origin lies in worship; more precisely, in the conferring of baptism. This again was fundamentally based on the words of the risen Christ recorded in Matthew 28.19: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

In accordance with this injunction these questions are put to the person to be baptized: "Do you believe in God the Father Almighty? Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God . . .? Do you believe in the Holy Spirit . . .?"¹⁹ The person being baptized replies to each of these three questions with the word "Credo" – I believe – and is then each time dipped in the water. Thus the oldest form of the confession of faith takes the shape of a tripartite dialogue, of question and answer, and is, moreover, embedded in the ceremony of baptism.

Probably in the course of the second century, and even more in the third, the originally quite simple tripartite formula, which simply uses the written text of Matthew 28, was expanded in the middle section, that is, the question about belief in Christ. Here after all the decisively Christian element was involved and it was felt necessary to give in the framework of this question a brief summary of what Christ means for the Christian; similarly, the third question, the profession of faith in the Holy Spirit, was further clarified and developed as a confession of faith in the present and future of the Christian attitude. Then in the fourth century we meet a continuous text detached from the question-and-answer plan; that it is still in Greek makes it probable that it dates originally from the third century, since by the fourth the final change to Latin even in the liturgy had been made in Rome. A Latin translation also appears very soon afterwards in the fourth century. Because of the special position acquired by the Church of Rome in relation to the whole of the West, the Roman baptismal profession (known as the "*Symbolum*", symbol)

¹⁹ Cf. for example the text of the *Sacramentarium Gelasianum* (ed. Wilson), p. 86, cited in Kattenbusch, II, p. 485, and especially the text in the *Traditio apostolica* of St Hippolytus (ed. Botte), Münster, 2nd ed., 1963, p. 484.