

Reformed and Ever Being Reformed — Our Creeds and Confessions

The Symbolism in the Confessional Banners of The PCUSA



I. The Nicene Creed (4th Century)

The Cross which is also a Sword: A symbol for the Emperor Constantine and his successors, because he called the ecumenical council which began the process of thinking that resulted in this creed. The cross is central here because the doctrine of Christ is central in the Creed. **The Green Triangle with Three Symbols:** The doctrine of the Trinity is formalized in the Nicene Creed. **The Hand Reaching Down:** God the Father. **The Chi Rho Monogram:** The first two letters of the Greek word for Christ, used by Constantine on shields and helmets of his army. **The Dove:** The Holy Spirit. **The Crowns:** The rule and glory of God.



II. The Apostles' Creed

The Somber Brown Color: The difficulty and rigor of early Christianity under persecution; also, the monastic tradition. **The Purple Arches:** The entrances to caves or catacombs, where early Christians met in secret; also, the shape of Gothic church windows. **The Fish:** An ancient symbol for the Christian faith, perhaps a secret code. Letters of the Greek word for fish can be used as first letters in the phrase, "Jesus Christ God's Son Savior." **The Chalice:** The Lord's Supper, and thus the earnest and simple fellowship of the early church. **The Upside-Down Cross:** Peter, chief of the apostles, who in legend, is said to have been crucified upside down because he thought himself unworthy of a death like his Master's.



III. The Scots Confession (Scotland, 1560)

Blue of the Shield: The background color of the Church of Scotland. **The Tartan X-shaped Cross:** A form called St. Andrew's Cross, he being the apostle who brought the gospel to Scotland. The Hamilton clan tartan honors the first martyr of the Scottish Reformation, Patrick Hamilton. **The Celtic Cross:** Another ancient form associated with Christians of the British Isles. **The Ship:** A symbol for the Church. **The Bible and the Sword:** Paul called the word of God "the sword of the Spirit;" the sharpness of John Knox's preaching of the Word was major power for reformation in Scotland. **The Burning Bush:** which is Not Consumed Reminding us of Moses' Sinai experience, a symbol of God's presence and call.



IV. The Heidelberg Catechism (Germany, 1563)

The Red and Gold: A tribute to the rule of Frederick III, who ordered the writing of the Catechism for followers of John Calvin in Germany.

The Crown of Thorns, the “German” Cross and the Tablets: Symbol of Misery, Redemption and Thankfulness, the three basic themes of the Catechism. The tablets stand for the Ten Commandments, which appear in the Catechism where it teaches that obedience is the proper form of thankfulness. **The Two Lights and the Fire:** The Trinity, with the Hebrew name of God on the left orb, the Greek monogram for Jesus on the right orb, and the flame standing for the Holy Spirit. There is a long discussion of the Trinity in the Catechism.



V. The Second Helvetic Confession (Switzerland, 1566)

The Blue and White: Heraldic colors of ancient Switzerland. **The Cross:**

Again dominant on this banner because of the extensive discussion of salvation in the Confession. **The Hand and the Burning Heart:** A traditional symbol for John Calvin, father of Presbyterianism in its Swiss homeland. **The Lamp:** Knowledge and discipline, two of the themes of the Helvetic which make it unique. **The Shepherd’s Crook and the Pasture:** The pastoral ministry and flock’s care for its own members. **The Chalice and the Waves:** Holy Communion and Baptism.



VI. The Westminster Confession and The Shorter Catechism (England, 1646)

The Three Long Panels and the Maroon Triangle: The Trinity. **The Eye:** God’s providence and control of all life and history, a dominant theme of Westminster. **The Crown:** God’s Rule. **The Open Bible:** The authority of the written Word, basic to this Confession’s teachings. **The Alpha and the Omega:** The A and Z of the Greek alphabet, the first and last, referring to Christ and his death for us as central to our faith.



VII. The Theological Declaration of Barmen (Germany, 1934)

The Swastika Crossed Out and the Cross Rising: A protest and witness against Nazi tyranny and any effort to take the role of God and control of the church **The Fire:** The suffering and death which follows from defense of the faith against tyranny, as for some of the Barmen signers. But the cross survives such persecution and crisis of war, rising out of the flames.



VIII. The Confession of 1967 (United States of America)

The Blue, The Red and the Gold: Colors of the official seal of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. **The Golden Down-reaching Hand:** Repeated from the Nicene Banner. God, relating to God's world. The Crown: and the Nail-scarred Hand: The death and victory of Christ as he reconciles the world. (The crown is repeated from the Westminster Banner) **The Four Hands of Different Colors, the Clasped Hands and the Green Circle:** The reconciled world at the foot of the cross, God's act of reconciliation being the starting point and theme of the Confession of 1967. **The Stars and Planets on the Blue Background:** The Space-Age setting of this Confession.

IX. The Belhar Confession (not on display)

Originally published in 1986, and added to the PCUSA Book of Confessions in 2016. This set of banners predates this Confession and we are not aware that a banner has yet been created for it.



X. A Brief Statement of Faith

The Cross: A rainbow of colors representing the celebration of unity with the diversity of cultures and races living in Christ. **The Blue Background:**

Symbolizes the universe as the light of the Word of God bringing us together.

The Earth: Cracks symbolizing our divisiveness and diversity, yet our faith unites us with the one universal Church. **The Secure Hands of God:** Remind us that he who holds our world together in turmoil will unite us in grace of Jesus Christ. This is the foundation of our knowledge of God's sovereign love and our living together in the Holy Spirit. **The Presbyterian Church**

(U.S.A.) Symbol: The descending dove represents peace and the baptism of Christ. The open Bible symbolizes the Word of God. The Font recalls the Sacrament of Baptism, while the table recalls the Sacrament of Communion, and the pulpit, the preaching of the Word. The flames represent the burning bush and Pentecost. The overall image suggests the human figure with stretched out arms.