

György Papp\*  
Nagyenyed, RO

## The Passion of the Lord Jesus Christ in Early Christian Confessions

In this short paper I would like to provide a comparative analysis of the passages concerning the passion of the Lord Jesus Christ of the Early Christian confessions (among them the Apostolic Creed<sup>1</sup> as well), because these passages are frequently the source of theological misunderstanding and debates. The main question which urged me to do this research had occurred in relation with the Apostolic Creed. How do we say correctly: ‘I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord: Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, *suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified*, died, and was buried; He descended into hell...’ or ‘I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord: Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, *suffered, under Pontius Pilate He was crucified*, died, and was buried; He descended into hell...?’ I shall try to answer this question by analysing the relevant passages of the creeds which were composed in the first six centuries.

*‘You have redeemed us through many passions...’  
(Jan Hus) – Biblical introduction<sup>2</sup>*

‘The Messiah of God was behaving to suffer all these things, and to enter into his glory’ (Luke 24,26) – this is the kernel of the teaching which even the disciples did not understand. They were waiting for the Messiah who would redeem Israel, and somebody came from Nazareth, ‘who was prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people’ (Luke 24,19), but in the end it became evident that he was totally different from the Messiah they had been waiting for. And they were hoping that he would be the one about to redeem (λυτροῦσθαι) Israel (Luke 24,21). The verb λυτρόω expresses the idea of ‘setting free’ by the payment of a ransom. The Messiah-expectations interpreted this expression suggesting that once God’s Messiah arrives, he will deliver Israel from under the rule of its current enemy – in this case from under Roman oppression. The strong political connotation of this Messiah-image is seen when after the feeding of the five thousand the crowd wanted to proclaim Jesus king (John 6,14–15). Yet He was not a political Messiah, and His duty was not the origination and establishment of political independence, but He was the one, who were to save (σώσει) his people from their sins (Matthew 1,21). In this way it is proclaimed before his birth that He will not repair the relation between Romans

---

\* György Papp (born in Beszterce, RO, 1983) is a Reformed minister and a PhD researcher in the Protestant Theological Institute as well as the research assistant at the Bethlen College Library in Nagyenyed. His expertise is Early Christian history of doctrine, especially Theodoret of Cyrus, on whom he published several articles in *Református Szemle*.

<sup>1</sup> Here we must note that the Apostolic Creed is apostolic only concerning its teaching, and not its authorship.

<sup>2</sup> I shall present only the most important biblical teachings.

and Jews, but rather the relation between God and humankind. That is why he was behaving to suffer and die, since according to the Torah there is no remission without shedding of blood (Hebrews 9,22). He foretold his future passions to his disciples (Mt 16,21; 20,14; Mk 10,32); after His resurrection He explained their meaning on the way to Emmaus, and He has been proclaiming the same message for the past two millennia.

The prophets had spoken and written concerning His passion, and He revealed that to the two disciples, ‘*beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself*’ (Luke 24,27). The most important prophecies concerning the passion of our Lord are undeniably the prophecies of Isaiah about the Suffering servant of God (especially Is 50,6; Is 52,13 – 53,12). Likewise in the passion of Christ the prophecies of Psalm 22 are fulfilled.<sup>3</sup> According to Isaiah the passion of the Suffering Servant is undoubtedly a ‘locum-tenens’ sacrifice:

Surely he hath borne our grieves, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all (Is 53,4–6).

The canonical books written after the resurrection of the Lord are speaking about His passion as the fulfilment of the prophecies of the Old Testament. Those three decades between the events and their phrasing<sup>4</sup> did not becloud the events, moreover, the Apostle Paul wrote after many years to the Galatians: “*before your eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you*” (Gal 3,1). The Gospels and the apostolic Epistles are setting forth the events of Jesus’ life as historical facts, signifying that they are preaching the might and the Second Advent not by following some cunningly devised fables (σεσοφισμένοις μύθοις), but they are speaking as eyewitnesses (ἐπόπτῃς) of His majesty (2Pet 1,16). This claim of authenticity is confirmed by the fact that during the time of the Gospels’ composition the eyewitnesses of His life, including the people healed by Him were still alive.<sup>5</sup> Based on the biblical testimony we cannot agree with those exegetes who claim that the redeeming death of the Lord and His resurrection was merely a later interpretation by the disciples, an interpretation triggered by the psychological effect of Jesus’ teaching.<sup>6</sup>

The writers of the New Testament emphasise that the death of Jesus was not a simple death, but it was a redeeming death. The goal and result of His passions and death are set forth by them in plastic and dynamic images in the Church:

---

<sup>3</sup> In patristic literature, but not only there, Psalm 22 is interpreted as a Christological prophecy about the Messiah’s passion.

<sup>4</sup> Concerning the dating of New Testament books I follow here the thesis of Carsten Peter Thiede and J. A. T. Robinson, who claim that the whole New Testament was complete until the year 70. See J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, London, SCM Press LTD, 1976; Carsten Peter Thiede, *Eyewitness to Jesus*, Doubleday, 1996. (in Hungarian: *Aki látta Jézust*, Debrecen, Goldbook, sine anno).

<sup>5</sup> Carsten Peter Thiede, *Aki látta Jézust*, Debrecen, Goldbook, é.n. 16. (*Eyewitness to Jesus*, Hungarian edition).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Geréb Pál, *Barth Károly Dogmatikája*, Kolozsvár, Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület, 2006, 527. (Geréb Pál, *A compendium of Karl Barth’s Dogmatic*, Hungarian edition).

Knowing that ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers; but with precious blood, as of a lamb without spot, even the blood of Christ (cf. εἰδότες ὅτι οὐ φθαρτοῖς, ἀργυρίῳ ἢ χρυσίῳ, ἐλυτρώθητε ἐκ τῆς ματαίας ὑμῶν ἀναστροφῆς πατροπαραδότου ἀλλὰ τιμίῳ αἵματι ὡς ἄμνοῦ ἁμώμου καὶ ἁσπίλου Χριστοῦ – 1Pet 1,18–19).

The result of this redeeming death, of this sacrifice for our sins (ἰλαστήριος) is the redemption, liberation (ἀπολύτρωσις), atonement (καταλλαγή), and salvation (σωτηρία). The goal of His death is presented in the clearest way in the Epistle of Paul to the Romans:

So then as through one's trespass the judgment came unto all men to condemnation; even so through one's act of righteousness the free gift came unto all men to justification of life" (Rom 5,18).

Upon reading these one may ask: when did the redeeming passions of our Lord truly begin? In the Garden of Gethsemane, where He was sweating blood? The New Testament teaches us that the Passion of the Lord did not begin with the events preceding Good Friday, but with His birth, when 'He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men' (Phil 2,7). The great Hungarian bishop of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, László Ravasz wrote concerning the passion of the Lord:

*The passion of Christ* is a grandiose crescendo, which began with His birth and continued until His death. Here we can speak about His poverty, homelessness, solitude. Here must we mention that his own people despises Him and gives Him to death. And to here belongs his gradual abandonment [by His own disciples] and His pain on account of the destructive effect of sin. That people did not receive His Gospel. 'But you would not' (cf. Luke 13,34). The pinnacle of this passion are the events in the Garden of Gethsemane, when His most faithful disciples fell asleep, while He, sweating blood, implored His Father: 'Father, if it is possible...' [...] His death is the essence, the multiplication of His sufferings. Let us observe the disgracefulness of this death...<sup>7</sup>

So, the Passion of our Lord began with His incarnation (ἐνανθρωπήσις), which is called by the apostle Paul self-humiliation, or self-emptying (exinanitio, κενόσις, in the patristic literature: ταπεινóσις). The 37<sup>th</sup> question of the Heidelberg Catechism reflects upon the same issue and confirms this interpretation:

What do you understand by the word "suffered"?

That during his whole life on earth, but especially at the end, Christ sustained in body and soul the anger of God against the sin of the whole human race. This he did in order that, by his suffering as the only atoning sacrifice, he might set us free, body and soul, from eternal condemnation, and gain for us God's grace, righteousness, and eternal life.

---

<sup>7</sup> Ravasz László, *Kis dogmatika*, Budapest, Kálvin Kiadó, 1996, 92–93. (László Ravasz, *Little Dogmatic*, Hungarian edition)

*To know only about the crucified Lord (1Cor 2,2)*

While the apostle decided 'to have knowledge of nothing among the Corinthians, but only of Jesus Christ on the cross' (1Cor 2,2), no confession can avoid the testimony concerning the redeeming passion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

From history we know that the earliest Creeds, some of which we can also read in the Bible, were very short and concise, expressing only a few aspects of the faith. For example when somebody says, 'I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God' (John 11,27; Mt 16,18; Acts 8,37), he/she gives the answer to the question: *who is* Jesus in his person (*persona Christi cognoscere*). Yet the statement 'I believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God is our Saviour' is the answer to the following question: what did Jesus *do*, and who is He in His acts (*beneficia Christi cognoscere*). Later, during the period of great theological debates, when newer problematic questions came forth, the detailed creeds were formulated, which were sketching out the teaching about salvation, detailing each article. In the following I shall present those parts of the Christological passages from the earliest Creeds, which discuss the passion of our Lord in some detail.<sup>8</sup>

We find one of the earliest Creeds – following the apostolic age – in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch:<sup>9</sup>

ἀλλὰ πεπληροφορηῆσθαι ἐν τῇ γεννήσει καὶ τῷ πάθει καὶ τῇ ἀναστάσει τῇ γενομένῃ ἐν καιρῷ Ποντίου Πιλάτου· πραχθέντα ἀληθῶς καὶ βεβαίως ὑπὸ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ – [...] but may be fully persuaded of the birth, the passion, and the resurrection which happened in the time of the governorship of Pontius Pilate, which things were truly and surely done by Jesus Christ (Magnes 11).

The first particularity we can observe is that in this fragment with the name of Pontius Pilate Ignatius dates not the crucifixion, but rather the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, apparently because he wanted to demonstrate that the resurrection of the crucified Lord was a real and historical fact. He did not enclose the Lord's passion into a specific time-frame, and from this one may presume that he saw the Passion as a chain of events which began with the birth of Jesus Christ. The same idea can be seen in the Epistle to the Ephesians as well:

For our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived in the womb by Mary according to the dispensation, of the seed of David but also of the Holy Ghost; and He was born and was baptized that by His passion He might cleanse water (Eph 18,2).

In the Epistle to the Trallians one may observe that Ignatius, whilst describing the events endured by Jesus Christ under Pontius Pilate, does not use the verb *πάσχω*, but the passive voice of *διώκω* (to persecute): 'ἀληθῶς ἐδιώχθη ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου – He was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate' (Trall 9). In the epistle to

<sup>8</sup> For the original text of the Creeds discussed here see August Hahn (ed.), *Bibliothek der Symbole und Glaubensregeln der Alten Kirche*, Breslau, Verlag von E. Morgenstern, 1897 (hereafter Hahn, *Bibliothek der Symbole*).

<sup>9</sup> Ignatius of Antioch died as a martyr (in 110 AD) under the reign of Emperor Traianus (98–117 AD) in the Colosseum. He wrote six letters to the following congregations: Magnesia, Tralles, Ephesus, Rome, Philadelphia and Smyrna; and one to Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna.

the Smyrnaeans we read: ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου καὶ Ἑρώδου τετράρχου καθηλωμένον ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἐν σαρκί – in the time of Pontius Pilate and Herod, the tetrarch, he was truly crucified for us in the flesh' (Smyrn 1,2).<sup>10</sup>

In his writings Justin Martyr<sup>11</sup> uses the verb σταυρόω (= crucify) to denote the events which happened during the time of Pontius Pilate: '[...] Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, τὸν σταυρωθέντα ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου – [...] Jesus Christ, who was crucified in the time of Pontius Pilate' (First Apology 13; 61). In his *Dialogue with Trypho* Justin distinguishes the passion of the Lord Jesus Christ from the crucifixion which he endured under Pontius Pilate:

Κατὰ γὰρ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ τούτου τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ προτοτόκου πάσης κτίσεως, καὶ διὰ παρθένου γεννηθέντος καὶ παθητοῦ γενομένου ἀνθρώπου, καὶ σταυρωθέντος ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου ὑπὸ τοῦ λαοῦ ὑμῶν – ... for against the name of this same Son of God and Firstborn of the whole creation, who became man by the Virgin, who suffered, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate by your nation,<sup>12</sup>..." (Trypho 85).

We can see that in this fragment the verb πάσχω refers to the whole life of Jesus, and denotes those sufferings which the apostle Paul described as κενόσις. In the background of this usage we find Isaiah's prophecy, according to which the Messiah who will deliver his own nation from their sins, will be 'a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering' (Is 53,3).

The next important stage in our research concerning the early creeds about the Suffering Messiah is represented by the work *Adversus haereses* of Irenaeus of Lyons (in antiquity the name of Lyon was Lugdunum), who died around the year 202. Here we encounter for the first time the expression *passus sub Pontio Pilato* (Adv haer III. 4,2). In the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter of the same work he uses the verb *patior* without dating:

Non ergo alterum filium hominis novit evangelium nisi hunc, qui ex Maria, qui et passus est – The Gospel, therefore, knew no other son of man but Him who was of Mary, who also suffered; and no Christ who flew away from Jesus before the passion; but Him who was born it knew as Jesus Christ the Son of God, and that this same suffered and rose again (*Adv. haer.* III. 16,5).

With the expression 'passus est' Irenaeus seems to refer here to the sufferings endured in the time of Pontius Pilate. This usage differs from that of the aforementioned authors, since he denotes the events of Good Friday with the verb πάσχω – patior, which in the previous tradition has a more general meaning. It probably would have been more appropriate to use the more specific and accepted verbs like

<sup>10</sup> In Hahn, *Bibliothek der Symbole* instead of καθηλωμένον we read παθηλωμένον (a word, which does not occur in the dictionaries). This is probably the result of a typographical error. The right among others could be found in Kirsopp Lake (ed.), *The Apostolic Fathers*, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/lake/fathers2.html> (opened on 20 February 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Justin, venerated as martyr and philosopher died around 165 in Rome. His most important writings are the two *Apologies*, and the *Dialogue with Trypho*.

<sup>12</sup> I mention only as a matter of curiosity that the term 'nation' is expressed by the word λαός, which in the usage of the Septuagint and of the New Testament denotes the elected Israel. With its application here the author accentuates that Jesus was rejected by his own nation.

σταυρώ – crucifigo, or διώκω – persecutor, or even *crucio* (= to inflict torture upon, to torment, to rack)<sup>13</sup> when referring specifically to the events of Good Friday.

In North-Africa, Tertullian (he died around 220), who was the younger contemporary of Irenaeus, denoted the suffering of the Lord under Pontius Pilate with the words mentioned above:

Credendi [...] et filium ejus Jesum Christum, natum ex virgine Maria, crucifixum sub Pontio Pilato – to believe in His Son, Jesus Christ, who was born by the virgin Mary, and under Pontius Pilate he was crucified” (De virgin vel 1).

Furthermore, in his work *Adversus Praxeam*, whilst speaking about the ‘passion’ of the Lord, i.e. referring to His whole human life, Tertullian uses the verb ‘patior’:

Hunc missum a patre in virginem ex ea natum, hominem et deum, filium hominis et filium dei, et cognominatum Jesum Christum; hunc passum, hunc mortuum et sepultum, secundum scripturas... – He was sent by the Father into the Virgin, He was born from Her, He is man and God, son of man and Son of God, the above named Jesus Christ. He suffered and died, [after that] He was buried according to the Scriptures” (*Adv. Praxeam* 2).

In the first book of his *De principiis* Origen uses the verb *patior* in the same sense, although by him the accent falls on the fact that the passion of the Lord was real, and not an illusion or phantasy: ‘[...] passus est in veritate, et non per phantasiam – He suffered truly, and not by appearance’ (*De principiis* I, *Praefatio*, 4).

Speaking about the final passion of the Lord in the creeds of Adamantius and Alexander of Alexandria<sup>14</sup> we can find the verb σταυρώ:

ἐπὶ συντελείᾳ τῶν αἰώνων εἰς ἀθέτησιν ἁμαρτίας ἐπιδημήσας τῷ γένει τῶν ἀνθρώπων, σταυρωθεὶς καὶ ἀποθανών – in the fullness of times He arrived to the human race in order to abolish sin, He was crucified, and died...” (from the creed of Alexander of Alexandria).<sup>15</sup>

In the following I shall present the different versions of the Apostolic Creed and the credal statements which are analogous to it, and assort them according to the usage concerning the Passion of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us begin with “Das Symbolum Apostolicum des Abendlandes”, i.e. the Apostolic Symbol of the West.<sup>16</sup> Here we can mention the version of Marcellus of Ancyra and that of Rufin concerning the creed which is to be found in the *Psaltery of King Aethelstan* and in the *Codex Laudianus*. Besides the version of Gregory the Great, and a variant from the eighth century discovered by Swainson we can range here the creeds which were used in the Churches of Turin, Ravenna, Aquileia and Florence. The common property of these Creeds is that all of them speak about the Passion of Lord with the following words:

<sup>13</sup> For the meanings of the verb *crucio* see *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1968, 461.

<sup>14</sup> Alexander of Antioch died around the year 326, during the outbreak of the Arian controversy after Nicaea. Nonetheless, at a local council held in 317 he rejected the heresy of Arius for the first time.

<sup>15</sup> Hahn, *Bibliothek der Symbole*, 20.

<sup>16</sup> Hahn, *Bibliothek der Symbole*, 22–36.

πιστεύω εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν, τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ τὸν μονογενῆ, [...] τὸν ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου σταυροθέντα καὶ ταφέντα<sup>17</sup> – credo in Christum Jesum, Filium ejus unicum, [...] qui sub Pontio Pilato crucifixus est et sepultus<sup>18</sup> – I believe in Jesus Christ, in His only-begotten Son, who under Pontius Pilate was crucified and buried.

In the second group we have to mention the creed from the Greek-Latin Psalter of Pope Gregory and the version from the *Ordo Romanus*. The creeds of the Spanish Churches (the creed of Priscillian and Martinus of Bacara) belong to this group.<sup>19</sup> In the seventh and eighth centuries this version of the creed became most common in the German Churches and in the ninth and tenth centuries, as a result of their mission, on the British Isles as well. Following this version, the so-called Apostolic Creed was composed, which later became accepted in the western Christian world. In the Creeds belonging to this group, we read the following words concerning the Passion of the Lord:

πιστεύω εἰς Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν, [...] παθόντα ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου, σταυροθέντα, θανόντα καὶ ταφέντα – credo in Jesum Christum, qui conceptus est de Spiritu Sancto, natus ex Maria virgine, passus sub Pontio Pilato, crucifixus mortuus et sepultus...<sup>20</sup> – I believe in Jesus Christ, who [...] suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

Here we encounter the same terminological imprecision which we have seen by Irenaeus.

Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, and Augustine used both versions. It seems likely that Augustine learned of the version in which the passion of the Lord is expressed by 'passus sub Pontio Pilato' in Milan. Nevertheless, in Hippo Regius, presumably according to the local practice, he followed the version which says: 'qui crucifixus sub Pontio Pilato, et sepultus est.' All the Churches of North-Africa (see the creeds of Tertullian,<sup>21</sup> Fulgentius of Ruspe,<sup>22</sup> Facundus of Hermianae<sup>23</sup>) confessed their faith concerning the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ with the following words: 'crucifixus est sub Pontio Pilato'.

In the tradition of the Gallic Churches we can find both versions. The Creed of Phoebianus of Aginum from the 4<sup>th</sup> century and the creed of Caesarius of Arles uses the expression 'passus sub Pontio Pilato', and in a creed found in Paris dating from either the sixth or the seventh century we can read 'crucifixus sub Pontio Pilato'. We have to mention also the creed of Gregory of Tours, which omits reference to the passion entirely:

<sup>17</sup> From the Creed of Marcellus of Ancyra. In: Hahn, *Bibliothek der Symbole*, 23.

<sup>18</sup> The version of Rufin (Hahn, *Bibliothek der Symbole*, 24.). Pope Gregory the Great has used the same words for describing the events of Good Friday, only the introduction differs: confiteor unigenitum filium, qui [...] sub Pontio Pilato crucifixus est et sepultus – I confess the Only-begotten Son, who in time of Pontius Pilate was crucified and buried (Hahn, *Bibliothek der Symbole*, 28).

<sup>19</sup> In the Spanish Churches the other confessional tradition appeared only in the seventh century, through the mediation of Ildefonsus of Toledo.

<sup>20</sup> According to the Greek-Latin Psalter of Pope Gregory (Hahn, *Bibliothek der Symbole*, 30).

<sup>21</sup> Hahn, *Bibliothek der Symbole*, 54.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 61.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 63.

Credo in Jesum Christum, Filium ejus unicum, dominum deum nostrum. Credo eum die tertia resurrexisse... – I believe in Jesus Christ, in His only Son, our Lord and God. I believe that He resurrected on the third day...<sup>24</sup>

The Creed of Victricius of Rotomagus<sup>25</sup> enumerates the events of Jesus' life without dating: 'passus est, crucifixus, sepultus (He suffered, died and was buried)'. Through this he follows the tradition according to which the verb *pator* denotes the passion of Jesus Christ from his birth to his death.

All the creeds of the Oriental Churches are using the expression *σταυρωθέντα ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου* or its synonyms in order to express the passion of the Lord. Here we can enumerate the creed of Eusebius of Caesarea,<sup>26</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem,<sup>27</sup> Epiphanius of Salamis,<sup>28</sup> the creeds of the Syrian Churches (Laodicea, Antioch),<sup>29</sup> the creeds of the Churches from Asia Minor,<sup>30</sup> the creed of the Nestorians<sup>31</sup> and the Armenian<sup>32</sup> and Coptic<sup>33</sup> creeds. In these creeds the name of Pilate does not occur with the verb *πάσχω*, but always with *σταυρόω*. In the Nestorian creed the verbs *πάσχω* and *σταυρόω* occur side by side, and the verb *σταυρόω* may refer to the events which happened under the procuratorship of Pontius Pilate, and the word *πάσχω* could denote all sufferings, which the Lord has endured in his whole life. In his *Bibliothek der Symbole*, under §138 Hahn publishes an Armenian Creed probably from the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, in which we read: "hernach kam er willig zur Marter, gekreuzigt... – thereafter he was anguished of his own accord, and [he was] crucified." In this creed the expression "zur Marter kam" refers to the events of Good Friday.

Finally, let us proceed to the analysis of the passages concerning the passion of the Lord in the Creeds of the Ecumenical Councils. In the Nicene Creed the word *παθόντα* probably does not refer only to the events of Good Friday, but rather expresses his passions in a more general sense. The text of the so-called Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum, however, is more problematic, since it reads: *σταυροθέντα τε ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου καὶ παθόντα καὶ ταφέντα* – He was crucified for us in the time of Pontius Pilate, He suffered and was buried... The Latin translation omits the verb *παθόντα*, and we read the following: 'crucifixus est pro nobis sub Pontio Pilato, et sepultus est – He was crucified for us in the time of Pontius Pilate, and He was buried...' The Hungarian Ecumenical translation of this Creed renders the meaning of the text with the construction of a 'hidden object': 'He was crucified for us in the time of Pontius Pilate, He suffered [death] and was buried...' The fact that the verb *πάσχω* is used after the verb *σταυρόω* suggests that in this situation '*πάσχω*' has a different meaning: it refers neither to the events from Jesus' birth to his death, nor to the events of Good Friday, but rather to the precise

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 73.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 70.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 131–132.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 132.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 135.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 141–144.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 146–151.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 144.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 153.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 157.



moment of His death. The *Formula of Reunion* accepted after the Council of Ephesus (in 433) does not specify the passion of Jesus Christ, since the main question under debate between the bishops was entirely different.

Based on the evidence above one might say that the creedal formula accepted in the bigger part of Europe ('passus sub Pontio Pilato') is theologically inexact. We have seen that the passion of the Lord did not begin with the events of Good Friday, but with His birth. In spite of this – perhaps due to Roman influence<sup>34</sup> – the Apostolic Creed was accepted in the European area in this form. The other version, which in a theological sense is more accurate, did not become so well known or accepted in Europe. Yet if the Creed is (or rather should be) like a map of the Holy Scripture, the more accurate wording is an indispensable necessity.

According to the historical and theological evidence presented above, I recommended the Synod of the Hungarian Reformed Church in Romania to modify the Christological passage of the Apostle's Creed to be recited in our churches in the following manner:

“I believe in Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary; He suffered; He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, died, and was buried ...”

I deem this correction to be necessary, since the Apostle's Creed can thus remain in the line of those creeds, which are theologically accurate.

## Résumé

In this short paper I present a problematic question concerning the Christological passage of the Apostolic Confession. According to the biblical teaching, the passion of the Lord could not be summarised in this sentence: 'he suffered under Pontius Pilate', because the Lord did not suffer only under Pontius Pilate, but in his whole life, as we read it in the Epistle of Paul to the Philippians: 'but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men' (Phil 2,7). So, the passion of Christ begins with his *κενόσις*, and His whole life can be summarised by this word: 'he suffered'. After a biblical introduction followed by a historical analysis of Early Christian confessions I attempted to show that the theologically correct form of the Christological passage of the Apostolic Confession would be the following: '[I believe] in Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary; He suffered; He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, died, and was buried...'

---

<sup>34</sup> See the Greek and Latin Psalter of Pope Gregory (Hahn, *Bibliothek der Symbole*, 29–30 – §24).