



Before the Gospels, there was already faith: the forgotten power of oral formulas that sustained Christianity | 1

## Introduction: when faith is passed from mouth to mouth

Before the Gospels were written, even before the first Christian communities had organized texts, something already existed—alive, vibrant, and deeply transformative: **oral formulas**.

They were not mere phrases. They were **confessions of faith, liturgical proclamations, theological syntheses** that condensed into a few words the very core of Christianity: that Jesus Christ died and rose again.

Today, in a world saturated with information but lacking depth, rediscovering these formulas is not an archaeological exercise. It is a return to the living root of faith.

---

## What are oral formulas?

Oral formulas are **brief, memorable, and repeatable expressions** that early Christians used to:

- Transmit the faith
- Teach new believers
- Pray and celebrate the liturgy
- Defend the truth of the Gospel

Classic examples include:

- “Jesus is Lord” (cf. Romans 10:9)
- “Christ died for our sins” (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:3)
- “Maranatha!” — “Come, Lord!” (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:22)

These formulas were **catechesis in its purest form**.

---



Before the Gospels, there was already faith: the forgotten power of oral formulas that sustained Christianity | 2

## The context: a Church without books... yet full of faith

After the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the disciples did not rush to write books. They went out to **preach**.

Most of the first Christians could neither read nor write. The transmission of faith was **oral**, living, communal. And in that context, these formulas were born.

They arose from three urgent needs:

1. **To faithfully remember what had happened**
2. **To transmit it without distortion**
3. **To confess it publicly, even under persecution**

---

## Oral formulas as historical evidence of the Resurrection

Here we reach a key point, both theological and academic.

One of the most important texts in the New Testament states:

*“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received:  
that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures;  
that he was buried;  
that he was raised on the third day...”  
(1 Corinthians 15:3-4)*

The apostle Saint Paul uses technical language here:  
**“received” and “delivered.”**

This clearly indicates that he is quoting an **earlier tradition**, an already established oral formula.



Before the Gospels, there was already faith: the forgotten power of oral formulas that sustained Christianity | 3

## Why is this so important?

Scholars agree that this formula:

- Dates to **just a few years after the Resurrection**
- Likely originated in the Jerusalem community
- Was learned by Paul after his conversion (around the 30s A.D.)

This means:

- ☐ **Faith in the Resurrection is not a late legend**
- ☐ **It was already fully formulated from the very beginning**

There was no time to mythologize.

There was no slow evolution.

There was **immediate testimony**.

---

## Other oral formulas in the New Testament

Scripture is filled with these hidden treasures. Some of the most relevant include:

---

### 1. Romans 10:9

| *“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord...”*

Here we see a brief, powerful, and dangerous formula in its time: to say “Jesus is Lord” meant denying that Caesar was.

---

### 2. Philippians 2:6-11

This passage, also attributed to Saint Paul, contains what many consider a **primitive**



Before the Gospels, there was already faith: the forgotten power of oral formulas that sustained Christianity | 4

### Christological hymn:

*“He emptied himself...  
and humbled himself...  
therefore God exalted him...”*

It was likely recited in the liturgy.

---

### 3. 1 Timothy 3:16

*“He was manifested in the flesh,  
vindicated in the Spirit...”*

Another rhythmic, almost poetic formula, clearly designed to be memorized.

---

### 4. Revelation 22:20

*“Come, Lord Jesus!”*

A brief, burning, deeply eschatological prayer.

---

**Theological dimension: faith that is proclaimed, not**



Before the Gospels, there was already faith: the forgotten power of oral formulas that sustained Christianity | 5

## only thought

Oral formulas teach us something essential:

□ **Christian faith is not only intellectual—it is confessional**

It is not enough to believe in the heart. One must **proclaim with the mouth**.

As Scripture says:

▮ *“I believed; therefore I have spoken” (2 Corinthians 4:13)*

Words have power.

Confession transforms.

Proclamation evangelizes.

---

## The liturgy: the natural home of these formulas

These formulas were not only teaching tools—they were **living prayer**.

In fact, many of them survive today in the liturgy:

- The **Creed** is an evolution of these formulas
- The **“Amen,” “Alleluia,” “Kyrie eleison”**
- Eucharistic acclamations

The Church did not invent its language from nothing.

It received it... preserved it... developed it.

---

## Practical application: what does this mean for you



Before the Gospels, there was already faith: the forgotten power of oral formulas that sustained Christianity | 6

## today?

In a world where everything is constantly changing, oral formulas offer:

### 1. An anchor in truth

Repeating “Jesus is Lord” is not automatic. It is **remembering who rules your life.**

---

### 2. Simple yet profound prayer

You do not need complicated words.  
A well-prayed formula can transform your soul.

---

### 3. Defense of the faith

In moments of doubt, these formulas act like **firm pillars.**

---

### 4. Direct evangelization

A single phrase can touch a heart more than an entire speech.

---

## A final call: return to what is essential

The first Christian communities had no grand temples, no libraries, no complex structures.

They had something far more powerful:

□ **A living faith, proclaimed with simple and burning words**

Today, you can do the same.



Before the Gospels, there was already faith: the forgotten power of oral formulas that sustained Christianity | 7

Start with something simple:

- “Jesus is Lord”
- “Lord, have mercy”
- “Come, Lord Jesus”

Repeat it. Believe it. Live it.

Because, just as at the beginning of Christianity,  
**faith still enters through the ear... but is set ablaze in the heart.**