

# “CREDO IN ARBORES<sup>1</sup>...”

by Donald C. Willeke

President Skiera and Fellow Arborphiles from Canada, the United States, Switzerland, Denmark, New Zealand, Great Britain, Germany, Italy and elsewhere in the world:

The theme of this 64th Annual Conference is “*Arbor Pacifica*.” In accord with the beautiful ambiguities of that Latin theme, I have also chosen a Latin title for my address and it is this: “*Credo In Arbores...*” Regretfully, the rest of my remarks will be in English.

The surprisingly limited vocabulary of the Latin tongue dictates that one word may have many meanings. Thus, *arbor pacifica* may mean “the trees of the Pacific” or it may mean “peaceful trees” or it may even mean “peacefulness in or among trees.” Others at this great Conference are addressing the subject of the trees of this surpassingly beautiful region of our Earth: the *arbor pacifica*, if you will. That is appropriate for them, because trees are their vocation. For me, trees are a great and consuming *avocation*. Since both conflict and the compromising which is essential to peacemaking are the mainstays of my *vocation*, the Law, I have chosen to speak with you on one of the other meanings of your ambiguous Latin theme.

## Conflicts

There are conflicts in our Urban Forests and in our Rural Forests. *Arbor pacifica* in its third meaning is sorely lacking.

There are conflicts among the various disciplines of arboriculture.

There are all kinds of disciplines and sub-disciplines dealing with trees, many of which are specifically represented here at this Conference. Many other disciplines which deal daily with trees have probably never ever had a single representative attend one of our conferences over the past sixty-four years.

Within the field of urban forestry the conflicts are many. A few examples suffice to illustrate the

wide range and nature of conflicting positions and views:

- One need only mention in the same breath the titles “municipal arborist” and “utility arborist” to conjure up a whole host of conflicting ideas.
- Nurserymen and women take a far different view of trees than do people who have to maintain the trees. For example, if this were not the case, we would see many less sugar maples marketed to the public, for they are so easy to nurse as small trees but so hard to maintain as giant specimens in our increasingly harsh, dry, hot city environments.
- Landscape architects often seem to see trees as precise mechanical ornaments which can be inserted into any sort of a box or hole and which will never change shape or size and also require neither water nor maintenance.
- Among the scientists in arboriculture there are a remarkable number of debates. Old ideas are being challenged and whole new ways of looking at trees are being presented, and as I look out and see such eminent scholars as Drs. Harris, Shigo and Neely, I know that a number of the great debaters are here with us today.
- Various separate and disunited organizations work to promote the ultimate goal of the salvation of our urban trees. The International Society of Arboriculture, the American Forestry Association and its Urban Forestry Council, the National Arbor Day Foundation, the American Society of Consulting Arborists, the National Arborists’ Association, the National Association of State Foresters, the American Association of Nurserymen (all represented here in Vancouver today) and many others just start the list, and it can go on and on. Conflicts aplenty exist between these organizations.
- Even the multiplicity of subgroups at this Conference and elsewhere is a sign that there are conflicting theories and beliefs, and conflicting approaches to trees.

1. Keynote address presented at the annual conference of the International Society of Arboriculture in Vancouver B.C. in August 1988.

In short, the conflicts within the various disciplines of arboriculture are considerable. But they pale by comparison with the conflicts between those who—whatever their particular views—love trees, and those who—for one reason or another—regard trees as either a minor or a major nuisance, or something to be ignored totally.

Divided though we may be in arboriculture, we are able to unite ourselves from time to time and from place to place to do battle with the various bands of arboricultural unbelievers who would just as soon: a) butcher our ancient virgin forests; b) ignore our regrown but often totally untended forests; c) blast out trees to widen roads, and then ban trees from roadsides in order to prevent drunks from running into the trees; and d) wound the trees with bulldozers and bobcats and then suffocate them by filling over or compacting their root zones with an efficiency that would have done justice to King Vlad the Impaler, had he hated his trees as much as he hated his human subjects.

But in our efforts to save and expand our urban and rural forests against the onslaughts of what could perjoratively but rightly be called bands of "Anti-tree Huns," the elements of our dedicated but disunited forces are faced with an even larger obstacle: the mass of the great unwashed, who not only do not see the forests for the trees, they never even look at the trees. For example, I know dozens of people in Minneapolis who have confessed to me that they have never seen a catalpa tree in bloom, though large numbers of these beautiful trees grace our City each June with their spectacular displays. Surprisingly, not one of these people is blind. But there are "none so blind as those that will not see."

### Our Cause

Let us be very candid with ourselves:

- Our cause is as just a one as ever there was on the face of the Earth. As Thornton Wilder once said, "The planting of trees is the least self-centered of all that we do. It is a purer act of faith than the procreation of children."
- Our cause promotes long term benefits of great value for all manner and classes of men and women.

- We are the leaders in doing the one thing which stands any chance of reversing the great degradation of the environment of the Earth, something which is of increasing concern to all of us during these hot dry days of the Summer of 1988. Urban trees are among the best, cheapest and most efficient means of reducing energy usage and of removing both heat and carbon dioxide from the air.

- The list of the righteous elements of our cause can go on and on.

But if we are so right, why have we not triumphed? Why is there no day of peacefulness in our urban forests. Where is the *pacem in arbores*?

Not surprisingly, those of us who long for "peacefulness among trees" or "peace among those who care about trees" often see ourselves as lonely and embattled. The forces of evil and ignorance surround us; heresies abound everywhere we look, not the least of which are the heresies propounded by so many of that sect known as "Landscape Architects." With apologies to the reformed and redeemed landscape architects in our midst (and especially to our Executive Director, Mr. Krudenier and to our President's son, the younger—and taller—Mr. Skiera), it seems to me that by the way it is practiced today, the term "landscape architecture" reminds us of what Voltaire said of the Holy Roman Empire, that it was "neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire." So much of what is called landscape architecture is often not architecture and *certainly* not landscaping.

I asked myself where was the hope for peace in arboriculture, and peace for our trees, for an end to the conflicts which make it increasingly difficult to maintain in our cities a green and leafy zone of peacefulness? Where is that *pax* which is not unlike that which the early explorers found when they first saw the great ocean that starts outside this Hall and gave it the adjective "*pacifica*" for its name.

I am a student of history as much as I am a student of arboriculture. And one of the great lessons that history has taught me is that the writer of the first Chapter of the Book of Ecclesiastes was all too often correct when he said:

*"The thing that hath been, is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which*

*shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun."*

These appear to be harsh words, but when you think about them, they are surprisingly comforting and often enlightening.

If there is no new thing under the sun, then surely the struggles of others and the solutions they found would give us some guidance in our own battles.

Surely there have been other groups of men and women who believed in a supremely just cause, even though their own forces were small, fragmented and divided. Surely there have been other true and pure quests which have been faced with vast and vicious enemies and a totally uncaring public. Who were they and what did they do to solve their problems and then go on to relative triumph and peacefulness?

My study of history has told me of some nation states who believed in righteous and true ideals and succeeded for a while. But I have also read the descriptions by Toynbee, Gibbon, Spengler and others of how those nation states fell as well as rose. And their causes were almost never universal, save perhaps for the ideals of the American, French and Russian revolutions which were all too rapidly largely subverted by greed and a hunger for power.

So I rejected the nation state model, and as I thought of the *dies pacifica*—the peaceful day—which almost all of us certainly seek, I thought instead of that great enterprise which, among other successes, preserved the very Latin language we use today to name our trees. In short, I thought there might be considerable parallels between the early Church and what we are trying to do, and I thought how we might profitably learn from the successes and failures of that enterprise. I gleaned from it one important idea which I wish to recommend to you, one great suggestion which I submit we must try.

The connection and the parallel is not so far fetched as you may at first imagine. In other speeches and at other times I have explored the complex interrelationship between trees and faith. That is not my purpose here. I am more interested today in the mechanics of victory. I want to think—and I want my fellow members of the International Society of Arboriculture to think—of what

we can do to increase the success of our efforts.

### **How to Unite?**

What did the early Church leaders do when the Church was beset by doctrinal divisions within, heresies around it, barbarian invaders at its doors, and a supremely indifferent public? They sought a way to unite their own members and the various groups of believers who were loosely associated together in one faith—under one expression of doctrine. And they sought to make that expression of doctrine serve two great purposes:

They erected a banner which would unite most of the diverse groups within their midst and they provided a common doctrinal ground upon which they could all meet; and

They created a statement of belief which was at one and the same time both profound and simple—so simple that it could be used as a very vital tool in bringing the message of the Church to the masses outside the doors.

In short they created creeds: the great creeds that have lasted for the larger part of two millenia and survive even to this day and just yesterday were recited by thousands upon thousands of people in this City.

The word "Creed," like so many of the key words I have used in this address, comes to us almost directly from the Latin antecedent: "*Credo*," meaning simply: "I believe."

Thus I suggest to you that what I have lacked in my work, what this ancient and worthy Society lacks, and indeed what all of us who labor for the good of our urban trees and forests lack, is a truly great creed of and for trees. "*Credo in arbores...*"

I am sure that to some of you the idea of spending time to develop a complete, simple yet profound creed seems like a silly anachronism—the very thing that some lawyer who plants trees on Saturday would prescribe for a whole convention of professional arboriculturists. But to those who would argue that point I would submit in return the words of Professor John H. Leith, perhaps the leading authority on creeds (to whom I owe much in this address). Professor Leith wrote:

*Once creeds have come into being, they begin to shape history also. The Nicene creed, for example, influenced the piety, worship and cultural involvement of subse-*

quent generations of Christians. *The theological reflections that are embodied in creeds become part of the theological memory of the Church and are the source and context for future theological discussions. None of the great creeds of the Church was produced independently of what the Church thought and said in previous generations.* Leith, **Creeds and Their Role in the Church**, John Knox Press, Atlanta (3rd Ed. 1982), p.3.

### Creeds

Now a creed cannot be imposed by a simple fiat. It needs not only an historical basis, but also it needs the judgment of history. Creed writers are like tree planters. They must look far into the future, and try to craft something that will not only live now but will slowly grow in beauty and strength, and will be a blessing and a benefit to those who come long after the creed writers have reaped their heavenly reward and turned into "food" for trees (with apologies to Dr. Shigo who does not believe in "tree food").

Creeds must be reviewed, revised, corrected finally confirmed by history. They may be adopted by some group such as the Council of Nicaea or even by the International Society of Arboriculture meeting in Convention. But they cannot be confirmed by some great assembly nearly so much as they can be confirmed by the common-sense wisdom of the entire community. This, like growing oaks, takes time.

Not only must creeds be smoothed on the stone of history, but they must be marked with catholicity. A creed which is too sectarian is like a tree with a limited growing range. It may hang on here and there, but it will be largely forgotten, while a species with more catholic attributes will spread and prosper over a wide region.

A creed must be inclusive rather than exclusive. And in order to be inclusive and to possess catholicity, a creed must be limited to very basic principles. In some measure, the attribute of catholicity is produced by the basic and fundamental nature of a creed. Departures from that basic and fundamental character foster exclusivity.

Successful creeds must be communal in

character. The best are perhaps wholly anonymous, such as the Apostle's Creed. Indeed, other creeds which were specifically drafted, such as that of Nicaea, were, in the words of Professor Leith, "not so much produced as they were amended or collected from the credal store of the Church."

To those of you who are now looking not at the hands of your watches, but at the day and date windows of those watches and are wondering if they are reading correctly or if this is in fact Sunday, I ask your patience, for properly drafted creeds have a number of highly important uses that we who love trees should understand fully: Here are some of the uses I see for a *Credo in Arbores*:

First and foremost a creed is simply an organization's basic understanding of its own scriptures—its own basic texts. The whole history of creeds is the history of the interpretation of basic writings. In arboriculture, our basic writings are obscure at best. A Talmudic scholar might find them fairly easy to understand. But your basic young Sunday School-variety of tree planter cannot understand what we are talking about. The information which is so badly needed by the members of the public to enable them to better care for their trees is usually presented in a way which even a highly-informed non-professional such as myself has trouble understanding. We need a creed to simplify our basic arboricultural scriptures.

Secondly, creeds can be used to combat heresies. I have already mentioned the "landscape architecture heresy." Here are a few more: In my community our trees (and many citizens' faith in them) are succumbing in many cases to the "bulldozer heresy." The principal doctrine of that heresy (like most heresies) is rooted in a few correct facts, but then it goes totally wrong. The bulldozer heresy holds that tree roots grow in firm earth. So if some firm earth is good for trees, a lot of it (say, up to about 4ft. on the trunk of the trees) would be much better. Then we have the "dirt is dirt" heresy. That particular misbelief is found most often among construction types. They believe that since trees can at times survive in very tough places there is thus absolutely no difference between types of soil, and they believe

that soil and dirt are one and the same thing. A tenet of that heresy is that any tree you stick in the dirt should grow because trees grown in dirt, and "dirt is dirt." A third group of heretics marches under the slogan: "God made 'em, so God will take care of 'em." The high priests of this heresy are most often found in temples called "City Halls." The list of heresies can go on and on, but the point is that they must be fought. When we create our creed, we must be acutely aware of all these heresies. As Prof. Leith says "Creeds are not due simply to the heretics, but they would be much poorer creeds without the heretics."

Finally "Creeds are also a standard, a battle cry, a testimony and witness to the world." The creed is a marching song—indeed, in this fact resides some of the truth in the assertion that creeds are to be sung. We have come close to what I am speaking of here in Joyce Kilmer's famous poem, which is often sung. It says most of what needs to be said, but it fails because its language is poetic and not creedal. What our urban trees need now more than anything is the raising of that bright standard, the calling of that clear battle cry, the giving of that precise testimony and witness to the average citizen, in order that John Q. and Mary Public come to understand their roles in preserving and renewing our urban forests.

### ***Crede In Arbore***

I think the time has come for us to think seriously about a "Creed of Trees." Yes, "trees!" Let's forget the fancy Latin work "arboriculture," because only you tree scholars understand it. Most of the members of the public think that "arboriculture" has something to do with a nasty means of birth control.

Let us write a Creed of Trees that the experts can agree is technically correct, but which can be understood by an average sixth grader.

Let us write a Creed of Trees which rings with an affirmation of our faith in the value of trees to the physical and mental well-being of humankind and of our fragile planet Earth.

Let us write a Creed of Trees which explains to the great ignorant mass of mankind that trees are tender, thin, delicate layers of living tissue over great masses of dead tissue, and that the small living part of a tree needs loving care if it is to survive

in our cities.

Let us write a Creed of Trees which is a resounding battle cry for the protection of those parts of trees most people never see: namely the root systems and the tiny hair roots seeking oxygen as much as water.

Let us write a Creed of Trees which damns the heresies of architects, bulldozers, planters-in-rubble and no-maintenance budgets.

Let us not try to write the Creed alone; let us solicit the help and guidance of the people who work in the National Arbor Day Foundation and the American Forestry Association and all the other branches of this tree faith which is at the heart of our efforts. In short, let us be ecumenical in our creed-writing, and let us produce a statement which has sufficient catholicity that all who care about our urban trees can adopt it and use it. Let us not be sectarian.

Finally, let our Creed of Trees be surpassingly brief or it will be forgotten as surely as Luther's long Augsburg Confession and Thomas Cranmer's Thirty Nine Anglican Articles or the Decrees of the Council of Trent are now largely forgotten while the 222 words of the Nicene Creed have lasted over 1600 years and are recited weekly by many of us.

Having made all these prescriptions for a Creed of Trees, I am now reluctant to try to prescribe even the first tentative draft, for such is certainly doomed to failure in and of itself, just like the first soldier over the hill is all but certain to get shot down. But I would be remiss if I dropped the standard now. So as a good soldier for trees, I will unfold my banner and hold it high if only for a brief moment. My only hope is that others will follow with their thoughts, and that eventually we will have an ecumenical statement that will be proudly hailed as the Creed of Trees:

*Crede in Arbore: We Believe in Trees.*

*We believe in trees.*

*We believe it is necessary and wise to plant and nurture trees near homes, factories and other human works, for trees are not only beautiful but greatly modify our environment, conserve energy and shelter humans and wildlife.*

*We believe we must study how trees grow, and why they flourish, or suffer and die.*

*We believe roots are trees' most important parts, especially tiny roots we can hardly see. Roots go far out from trees, lie near the surface, and must have oxygen, water and uncompacted, fertile soil. Building, excavating, trenching or filling under or near trees kills roots quickly and causes trees to die in months or years.*

*We believe trees are grand structures, but are not like people or animals. They are really only thin layers of living cells spread on non-living frames, which grow larger yearly as living layers are replaced and die.*

*We believe only God can make a tree, but the Almighty is too busy with human troubles to care for urban trees so we must do God's work; that this maintenance takes time and money; that young trees need watering and that most trees need pruning to grow tall and beautiful.*

*We believe that how we care for our trees reflects how we care for our fragile and endangered Planet.*

***WE believe in Trees!***

There it is: a first draft, and it is not one word longer than the 222 words of the Nicene Creed. There is no magic in that number, save that it is probably the longest written statement which has been memorized by hundreds of millions of people. We should not exceed that length if we hope any version of our creed to last. So take this first draft, improve it and revise it in many, many ways, but do not make it even one word longer! I give it to you as a challenge: now *you* must take the banner and carry it forth. I have carried it as far as I can. Together you can create the Creed.

Once we get our Creed, what do we do with it? First we will solicit its wide adoption and use by all who love trees. We will not try to claim it or hold it as our exclusive possession. We will encourage other groups to claim it and use it. We will modestly but earnestly seek a broad and fervent following of the Creed not for the benefit such a following would give to us, but for the good which the widespread adoption and understanding of our Creed can produce. We will promulgate the Creed at every opportunity. We will recite it at our meetings, even though some may think it "hokey" and childish to do it, because we realize that no Creed was written for one who is wholly and com-

pletely "saved" but instead is written for the unbelievers and the backsliders to, as the old hymn goes "turn their hearts..." We will use the elements of our Creed as the themes and focuses for our own Conferences and our elements of outreach to others. In short, by the uses we make or *our* Creed, we give to the creeds of the Church that most sincere flattery which is found in imitation.

Success is not assured. Many fervent past attempts at creed writing are today found only in history books, and obscure ones at that. But where the cause is just, and the need is great and the proponents of the cause are men and women of both learning and common sense who are strongly dedicated to their cause, then the chances of success are great.

And what will be the results of such success? I see the *Credo In Arborea* as giving a grand new meaning to the Latin phrase *Arbor Pacifica*.

**Epilogue**

I was amazed at the reception the foregoing address received, not only when I delivered it but afterwards, as literally hundreds of people spoke to me about what I had said. Among the people who spoke with me about the concept of a Creed for Trees was Dr. Francis Holmes of the Shade Tree Laboratories in Amherst, Massachusetts. He pointed out that my first draft had lots of many-syllabled "lawyerly" words. I responded that "When the only tool you have is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail," and that I had done the best I could with the tool I had. He volunteered to try his hand. He produced a greatly improved draft. No word in it has more than two syllables, and the length is still 222 words. Gary Moll, Vice President of the American Forestry Association, made a few additional changes but did not exceed 222-word length. Here is the most recent draft, and I am happy to endorse it with the words: "I wish I had said that!"

*Creed For Trees*

*We believe in trees.*

*We believe that we must plant and care for trees near where we live and work. We know this is wise since beauty of trees brings peace to our souls. Trees save our fuel, improve our air, shelter*

*us and make homes for the wild.*

*We believe we must study how trees grow and why they die.*

*We believe that tiny roots, too small to see, are the parts that trees need most. Roots grow far out from trunks, near the surface. They must have air, water and loose fertile soil. To build, or dig, or trench or fill near trees will kill those roots. Such trees soon die.*

*We believe trees need our respect and love. They are not at all like us. The tree is a thin layer of live cells spread on dead frames which enlarges each year as last year's layer dies.*

*We believe that only God can make a tree, but it remains for us to care for trees and make space*

*for them to grow well. To do God's work takes time and money. We must water young trees each week, and shape them to grow tall with grace.*

*We believe that how we care for our trees shows how much we love our fragile Earth, and each other.*

I hope that these words and the response they have invoked are but the start of an effort which leads to a far greater understanding of and love for the trees which mean so much to me.

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## Abstracts

HALL, R.W., A.M. TOWNSEND and J.H. BARGER. 1988. **Resistance of 13 species of elm leaf beetle.** *Am. Nurseryman* 168(5):93-94.

Elm leaf beetle has become a major defoliator of elms in cities. We tested 13 tree species to determine their suitability as host for this pest. We found that European species were generally better hosts to the beetle than Asian and American species. Susceptibility by species, with regions of origin, are: Relatively low: *parvifolia* and *Zelkova serrata*, Asia, Moderate: *U. davidiana japonica*, *U. pumila* and *U. wilsoniana*, Asia; *U. americana*, *U. rubra* and *U. thomasi*, America, *U. laevis*, Europe; and *U. '204'*, a cross between *U. carpinifolia* and *U. parvifolia*, High: *U. laciniata*, Asia; *U. carpinifolia* and *U. glabra*, Europe.

HAMILTON, W.D. 1988. **Tree stress in the urban environment.** *Arbor Age* 8(8): 40, 42.

I have studied stresses from the effects of mechanical damage to trees; from pruning methods, pests, weeds, soil salt, and air pollutants, as well as the effects of comparatively warm winters on subsequent growth. I want to discuss how climate-induced stresses have affected the trees' resistance to diseases and insects. Trees endure many different kinds of stresses in the urban environment, but the influence of central California climatic extremes since 1971 has been particularly noteworthy. It is no surprise that several insect and disease problems erupted after consecutive years of drought and warm, wet winters. The long series of climatic extremes in our recent past does not preclude a more normal weather pattern in the future. But this year many states have been afflicted by one of the most severe droughts of the century. The essential lesson for landscape installers and managers seems clear: Provide optimum conditions for root growth and avoid extremes of management. This along with the appropriate use of intelligent management and new research information to maintain vigor, offers the best opportunity for acceptable results in the future.