

The Creed: What We Believe and Why It Matters

1. Introduction. Origin and Development

**Sunday, January 9, 2005
10 to 10:50 am, in the Parlor.**

Everyone is welcome!

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Amen.

THE CREED



WHAT CHRISTIANS BELIEVE
AND WHY IT MATTERS

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and Why It
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Why Study the Creed?

Why Study the Creed?

The Challenge of Modernity

- The modern world in the West since the Enlightenment has looked down on a “Creed.”
According to Modernity:
 - The only truth is that which can be empirically tested.
 - Creeds make statements about reality that can't be tested. They are therefore structures of fantasy, signs of intellectual failure.

Why Study the Creed?

The Challenge of Modernity

- Nietzsche: “In the Christian world of ideas there is nothing that has the least contact with reality – and it is in the instinctive hatred of reality that we have recognized the only motivating force at the root of Christianity.” (*The Antichrist* 39)

Why Study the Creed?

The Challenge of Modernity

- As we study the Creed as Christians, we must keep the Modern critics in mind because:
 - 1. We live in a secular culture impregnated with the worldview of Modernity.
 - 2. Many Christians, indoctrinated by the secular culture around them, have accepted the worldview of Modernity without being aware of it

Why Study the Creed?

A Radical and Offensive View of Reality

- Our aim in studying the Creed:
 - “... to make the creed controversial for those Christians who say it but do not understand it and therefore do not grasp what a radical and offensive act they perform when they declare these words every week in a public assembly”

- Luke Timothy Johnson, p. 7

Why Study the Creed?

A Radical and Offensive View of Reality

“I think that the Christian creed enunciates a powerful and provocative understanding of the world, one that ought to scandalize a world that runs on the accepted truths of Modernity. There is something in the creed to offend virtually every contemporary sensibility.”

- Luke Timothy Johnson, p. 7

Why Study the Creed?

A Radical and Offensive View of Reality

“At the same time, it communicates a compelling vision of the world’s destiny and humanity’s role that challenges the accustomed idolatries and the weary platitudes of current worldly wisdom. Christians who say these words should know what they are doing when they say them and what they are saying when they mean them...”

- Luke Timothy Johnson, p. 7

Origins

Origins

Overview

- Why does Christianity even have a Creed?
- Most religions emphasize **orthopraxy** (= right practice) rather than **orthodoxy** (= right opinion or belief).
 - Judaism and Islam have extensive laws to guide practice / behavior, but allow an astonishing range of belief.
 - Buddhism and Hinduism focus on practices of ritual and transformation rather than belief.

Origins

Overview

- We will try to show:
 - The Creed was not a late imposition upon the Gospel story, but was rather a natural development of early Christianity.
 - It formed in response to three needs within the crucible of early Christianity:
 - 1. To define where the experience of Jesus fit in with the story of Israel.
 - 2. To clarify the understanding of God embedded in the “**Resurrection Experience.**”
 - 3. To correct misunderstandings that rose in the story about Jesus (the “Christian Narrative”).

Origins

The *Shema*

- Deuteronomy 6:4 is a short confession of belief called the *Shema* (= “hear”):

“Hear O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your might.”

Origins

The *Shema*

- Three features to note about the *Shema*:
 - 1. **Communal.** Calls for a *communal* commitment (“Hear O Israel...”)
 - 2. **Exclusive.** Israel owes *exclusive* allegiance to the One God.
 - 3. **Personal.** *Each Israelite* must love God “with all your heart and all your soul and all your might.”

Origins

The *Shema*

- The *Shema* does not replace the Story of Israel, the story of God at work with God's people, but can be thought of as *the most compressed expression of that story*.
- The Christian Creed grew out of the *Shema*.
 - Like the *Shema*, The Christian Creed can also be thought of as *the most compressed expression of the Christian story*, the Good News of Jesus.

Origins

The Resurrection Experience

- Christianity (and its Creed) had to become distinct from Judaism because of the **“Resurrection Experience”** of many of Jesus’ followers:
 - Many followers of Jesus **“experienced him after his crucifixion and death as more powerfully alive than before, as sharing, indeed, the very life of God, a life that he in turn made available to them through the gift of the Holy Spirit.”** (p. 12)

Origins

The Resurrection Experience

- **This Resurrection Experience:**
 - Was not confined to the single day we call Easter, but was continuous after Easter.
 - Consisted of the experience among Jesus' followers of:
 - the presence of a resurrected and powerfully alive Jesus, and
 - the possession of the Holy Spirit of God given to them by Jesus.

Origins

The Resurrection Experience

- From the **Resurrection Experience**, the followers of Jesus became convinced that the Resurrection of Jesus was:
 - Not the mere resuscitation of his physical body, but rather
 - *A new form of existence* that transformed the very structures of human existence.
 - The resurrected Jesus was a “**life-giving Spirit**” (1 Cor. 15:45) who could touch and transform others.
 - The resurrected Jesus was called a **new Adam** (1 Cor 16:45, Rom 5:12-31, the **firstborn of a new humanity** (Rom. 8:29, Col. 3:11)).

Origins

The Resurrection Experience

- From the **Resurrection Experience**, the followers of Jesus also became convinced that “Jesus is Lord,” (1 Cor. 12:5) that **“he now shares the life of God and is the source of the Spirit by which they now live.”** (p. 15)

Origins

Three Designations for Jesus

- Three Designations for Jesus are found in the New Testament and in the Creed:
 - 1. Jesus is the Christ
 - 2. Jesus is LORD
 - 3. Jesus is Son of God

Origins

Jesus is the Christ

- Name “Christianity” comes from the claim “Jesus is the Christ” (*Christos* = the anointed one or the Messiah).
- The claim Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, would *not* have ruptured relations with the Jews. Many Jews believed in the coming of a Messiah.

Origins

Jesus is the Christ

- However, Christians claimed “Jesus is the Christ” (= the Messiah) because he had been *resurrected* (Peter in Acts 2:36). This was a problem for Judaism because:
 - Jews believed a *general* resurrection would inaugurate the age to come, God’s triumphant reign on earth. But *only* Jesus had been resurrected.
 - Resurrection would be a triumph of the *righteous*. But Jesus’ life had *not* been righteous in the definition of first century Judaism (Jesus did not properly observe the Sabbath, associated with sinners, and died a death – crucifixion – cursed by God).

Origins

Jesus is the Christ

- Paul summarizes the Good News of Jesus the Christ in 1 Cor 15:3b-8:
- **That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (NRSV)**

Origins

Jesus is LORD

- “Jesus is LORD” (1 Cor 12:3; Rom. 10:9; Phil 2:11) is the proclamation most closely associated with the **Resurrection Experience**, and decisively separated early Christians from Jews.
- “Jesus is LORD” = applied to Jesus the *sacred name* Jews reserved only for God.

Origins

Jesus is LORD

- Early Christians sensed a very close connection between Jesus as LORD and the Holy Spirit of God:
 - **No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit** (1 Cor. 12:3)
 - The Resurrected Jesus had become **“life-giving Spirit”** (1 Cor. 15:45)
 - **“The grace of the LORD Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all”** (2 Cor. 13:14)

Origins

Jesus is LORD

- In proclaiming “Jesus is LORD,” early Christians were going beyond the *Shema*:
 - Paul: “...there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one LORD, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.” (1 Cor. 8:6)

Origins

Jesus is Son of God

- By itself, “Son of God” did *not* imply *divinity* for first-century Jews. It was used in scripture for *any* human being who had a special relationship with God.
- Thus, by itself, the declaration “Jesus is Son of God” would not have ruptured the relationship between the followers of Jesus and the Jews.

Origins

Jesus is Son of God

- The designation “Son of God” had special weight for Jesus because of the belief in his resurrection:
 - In Acts 13:33, Paul uses Psalm 2:7 to describe Jesus’ resurrection: **“You are my son; this day I have begotten you.”**
 - In Romans 1:3-4: **“the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our LORD.”** (NRSV)

Origins

Jesus is Son of God

- In the gospels, Matthew's version of Peter's confession is an explicit statement of belief in Jesus as Son of God:
 - **“You are the Christ, the son of the living God.”** (Matt. 16:16)

Origins

Baptism in NT Times

- Baptism among the first generation of Christians likely included a confession of faith. Paul describes it in Gal. 4:4-7:
 - ... God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father.” So you are no longer slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

Origins

Baptism in NT Times

- *In other words:* at baptism, the first generation of Christians professed:
 - Jesus is the Son of God.
 - Jesus was sent by God as redeemer.
 - Jesus provides them with the Holy Spirit.
 - By possessing God's Holy Spirit, they become adopted children of God.
 - As adopted children of God, they can address God as "Abba, Father."
- The baptized, possibly at baptism itself, signaled their adoption as children of God by crying out "Abba!"

Origins

Baptism in NT Times

- **“When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit (of God) bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ...”**
(NRSV, Romans 8:15-16)

Origins

Conclusions

- The main elements of the Creed were already present in New Testament times.
- **“The creed develops implications of the experience, the convictions, and the language present in Christianity from its birth.”** (p. 21)

Second and Third Century Developments

2nd and 3rd Century

Introduction

- In the second and third centuries, we see a movement towards an increasingly standard Creed, pushed by:
 - Desire to develop more coherence in a Christianity that had grown into a worldwide Church.
 - Need to defend Christianity against heresies.
- We will sample five examples of “creedal writings” during this period.

2nd and 3rd Century

Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch

- Ignatius, bishop of Antioch (died as a martyr in Rome 115) wrote (*Letter to the Trallians 9:1-12*):
 - **Be deaf, therefore, whenever anyone speaks to you apart from Jesus Christ,**
 - who is of the stock of David,
 - who is of Mary,
 - who was truly born, ate and drank,
 - was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate,
 - was truly crucified
 - and died in the sight of beings of heaven, of earth and the underworld,
 - who was also truly raised from the dead...

2nd and 3rd Century

Epistula Apostolorum

- Apocryphal writing *Epistula Apostolorum* (about 150 AD) describes an interpretation of the five loaves:
 - **They are a picture of our faith concerning the great Christianity; and that is in**
 - (1) the Father, the ruler of the entire world, and in
 - (2) Jesus Christ our Savior, and in
 - (3) the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, and in
 - (4) the Holy Church, and in
 - (5) the forgiveness of sins.

2nd and 3rd Century

Justin Martyr's *First Apology*

- Justin Martyr (martyred about 165) in his book *First Apology* describes baptism in the mid 2nd century:
 - The Baptism is received **“In the name of the God, the Father and ruler of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit.”**
 - As the baptismal candidate is led to the bath, **“the name of God the Father and Lord of universe”** is invoked
 - The washing is done: **“in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and in the name of the Holy Spirit, who through the prophets foretold all things about Jesus.”**

2nd and 3rd Century

Acts of the Martyrs

- In *Acts of the Martyrs*, Justin Martyr is asked during his interrogation what he believes. He answers:

2nd and 3rd Century

Acts of the Martyrs

- “...we worship the God of the Christians,
- whom we reckon to be one from the beginning,
- the maker and fashioner of the whole creation, visible and invisible,
- and the LORD Jesus Christ,
- the Son of God,
- who had also been preached beforehand by the prophets as about to be present with the race the men,
- the herald of salvation
- and teacher of good disciples.”

2nd and 3rd Century

Hippolytus of Rome

- In Hippolytus of Rome's treatise against the heresy of Noetus, written between 200-236 AD, the Elders of church say to Noetus:
 - **“We too know in truth one God.**
 - **We know Christ.**
 - **We know that the son suffered even as he suffered,**
 - **and died even as he died,**
 - **and rose again on the third day,**
 - **and is at the right hand of the Father,**
 - **and cometh to judge the living and dead.”**

The Roman Symbol and Apostles' Creed

The Apostle's Creed

The Roman Symbol, ~215 AD

- A standard profession of faith eventually developed in the West in what is now known as the **Apostle's Creed**.
- An early version is found in the book *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus (215 AD), termed the **Roman Symbol**. It was used during baptism in Rome:

The Apostle's Creed

The Roman Symbol, ~215 AD

- Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty?
- Do you believe in Jesus Christ, Son of God,
- Who was born by the Holy Spirit out of Mary the Virgin, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate and died and was buried, and rose on the third day alive from among the dead, and ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father, to come to judge the living and the dead?
- Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Church, and the resurrection of the flesh?

The Apostle's Creed

The Roman Symbol, ~215 AD

- Over the 4th and 5th century, This **Roman Symbol** (with minor variations) appeared in multiple places.
- **404 AD:** Rufinus of Aquileia *Commentary on the Apostles Creed*, documented the addition of the clause “descended into hell”
 - Jesus was “**crucified under Pontius Pilate and buried, he descended into hell, rose from the dead on the third day...**”

The Apostle's Creed

Final Version Apostle's Creed

- Final version of the Apostle's Creed appeared in the 7th century:
- I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
- I believe in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
- I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Nicene Creed

Nicene Creed

- In the Greek speaking Eastern empire, local creeds were also developing.
- **325 AD:** Roman emperor Constantine called the **Council of Nicea**, in part to try to unify the newly Christian empire against the teachings of a priest in Alexandria, **Arius** (256-336), who taught that Jesus was not God, but rather the highest being in the created order.

Nicene Creed

- After months of work, on June 19, in 325 AD the 318 bishops at the Council issued the “Nicene Creed, written in Greek.
- Among its innovations was the use of philosophical language in trying to articulate the message of the Creed.

Nicene Creed

- **We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible;**
- **And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Begotten of the Father as only-begotten, that is, out of the being of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God, begotten not made, one in being with the Father, through whom all things are made, things in heaven and things on earth, who, for us humans and for our salvation came down and became flesh, becoming human, he suffered and he rose on the third day, and having gone into the heavens, is coming to judge the living and the dead.**

Nicene Creed

- **And in the Holy Spirit.**
- **Those who say, “There was a time when he was not” and “before he was begotten he was not” and that he was made from what was not, or that he was of another being or substance or a creature... let the universal church consider them anathema.**

Nicene Creed

- Note:
 - Communal dimension of the Creed (**We believe...**)
 - Most of this Creed deals with the Son.
 - The statement **“for us humans and for our salvation came down and became flesh.”**
 - For the orthodox, if God was not incarnate, then humans are not really saved.

Constantinopolitan Creed

Constantinopolitan Creed

- After a long period of instability, Emperor **Theodosius I** restored order and called a synod to meet in Constantinople in May 381.
- 150 bishops attended, all from the Eastern empire, all “orthodox” (not followers of Arius) and came up with a revised creed, the **Constantinopolitan Creed**, or the **Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed**:

Constantinopolitan Creed

- We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.
- We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.

Constantinopolitan Creed

- On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.
- We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Constantinopolitan Creed

- This is the Creed we recite each Sunday (and call the “Nicene Creed”), with one difference:
- 589 AD the Western Church at the Council of Toledo added the *filioque* clause (“and the son”), so the creed we profess has this Western addition: **We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son**
- The Eastern Church never agreed to this addition.

Conclusion

Conclusion

- **The creed does not appear suddenly in history as an imposition from on high. It has been there from the first moments of self-definition, from the first impulse to articulate experience, from the first effort to defend against distortion, from the first attempt to summarize the story by which this new thing in the world claimed at once to be the people of the one God, yet touched more profoundly and intimately by God than humans had ever before imagined, in the flesh of Jesus, in the Spirit of the risen Lord. (p. 39)**