

Canon, Creeds, & Revivals

How the Church Preserved our Christian Beliefs

Class 5 - Early Creeds: Apostle's and Nicene

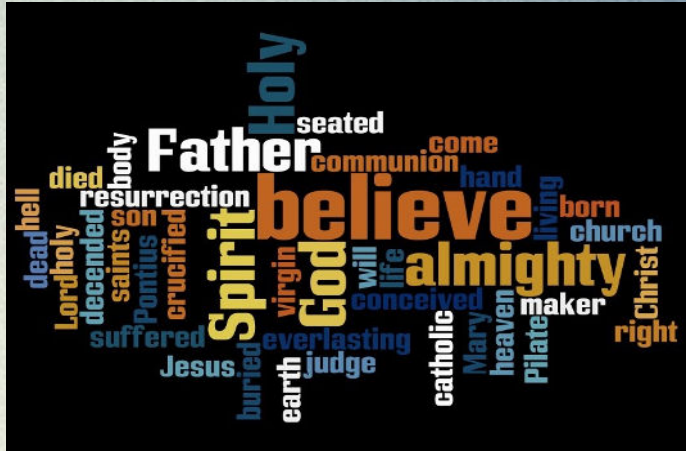
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The Role of Creeds

- Creeds are a summary/clarification of orthodox Christian beliefs with the Bible as the source data. They are not perfect but helpful to understand what are major vs. minor beliefs
- Each creed has a history behind its creation...Church was struggling with competing beliefs (internal threat). If the other beliefs prevailed, the Church would have floundered or died.
- Awe of God’s care of the Church throughout history and profound respect for the early church fathers

Apostles Creed
(100-200AD)



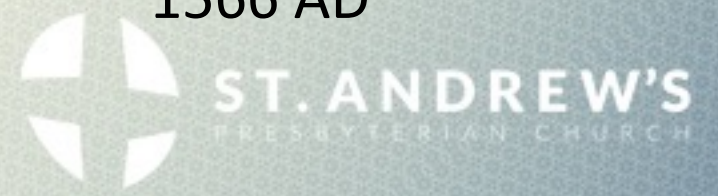
Nicene Creed
325 AD



Chalcedon Creed
451 AD



Second Helvetic Confession
1566 AD



Authority of Scripture (*Sola scriptura*)

- ***Sola scriptura*** (Latin "by scripture alone") is the doctrine that the Bible is the only infallible authority for Christian faith, and that it contains all knowledge necessary for salvation and holiness.
- Consequently, *Sola Scriptura* demands that no doctrine is to be admitted or confessed that is not found directly or logically within Scripture.
- *Sola Scriptura* is not a denial of other authorities governing Christian life and devotion. Rather, it simply demands that all other authorities are subordinate to, and are to be corrected by, the written word of God.
- *Sola scriptura* was a foundational doctrinal principle of the Protestant Reformation held by the Reformers and is a formal principle of Protestantism today.
- ECO Tenets/Book of Confessions are subordinate documents to the Bible

"Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience." - Martin Luther



Luther at the diet of Worms, by von Werner, 1877

First look at
the
Apostle's
Creed
(100-200 AD?)

Apostle's Creed

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

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended into hell.

On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come 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

Apostle's Creed Background - Marcion (85-160CE)

- **Popularity** - Marcion was a shipowner from Sinope (85-160CE)
 - “During the second half of the second century, the Marcionite church was a noteworthy rival to orthodox Christianity.” - Jaroslav Pelikan
 - “Marcion’s heretical tradition has filled the whole world.” - Tertullian
- **Two Gods (OT and NT)** - Marcion believed Jesus was the savior sent by God and Paul was his chief apostle.
 - The Christian God is merciful and good and not to be feared. Salvation through faith not knowledge and available to all.
 - He rejected the **Hebrew Bible** and the God of Israel who was cruel and warlike. Marcion believed that the wrathful Hebrew God was a separate and lower entity than the all-forgiving God of the New Testament
- **Canon** - Marcion’s **canon** included the Gospel of Luke and 10 “dismembered” Pauline epistles
- **Material World is Evil** - Christ did not have a material body (a spiritual entity) and therefore did not physically resurrect. Instead, his exegesis of Luke 20:36 (“They shall be like the angels”) amounted to the belief that humans assumed angelic bodies in heaven.



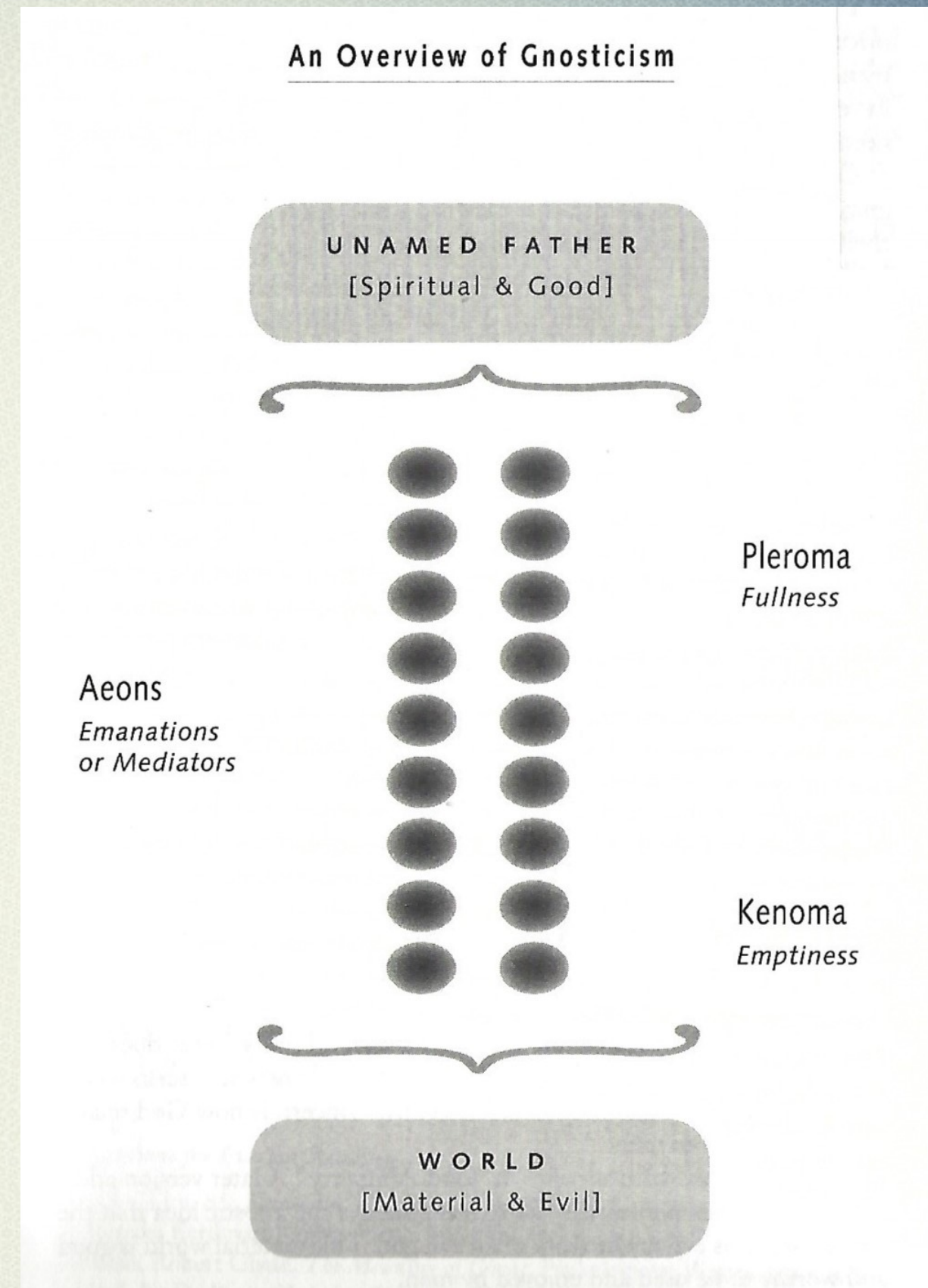
Apostle John (left) and Marcion of Sinope (right), from Morgan Library MS 748, 11th century

What if the Marcionites prevailed?

Apostle's Creed Background - Gnostics (100-200 AD and later)

- Gnostics accepted idea of salvation, supreme deity, and heavenly beings except...
- **Material world** is evil, therefore Creator God is wicked
- The God who created the world (God of the Jews) is a lesser God emanated from Ultimate God
- Ultimate God sent subordinate powers (Christ) to free us from the chains of matter
- At baptism, Christ entered into Jesus and withdrew at the arrest of Jesus or Jesus did not have a body at all, it was a clever hallucination
- Salvation is through a **secret knowledge** by which individuals come to know themselves, their origin and destiny transcending simple faith
- Since the material world is evil, we must live an ascetic life e.g. mortification of the body, prohibition of marriage

What if the Gnostics prevailed?



Deeper Dive into the Apostle's Creed

Apostle's Creed

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creator of heaven and earth.

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

- Trinity – “I believe” in God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit
 - Community and Love
- God Almighty, creator of heaven and earth
- Jesus – Lord, born of Holy Spirit and Mary
- Jesus was born, suffered, was crucified and died and was buried
- Jesus rose again
- Resurrection of the body
- Not secret knowledge, but an event
- Salvation through forgiveness of sins
- Holy Spirit

Early Church Growth (100-312 AD)

Why did the early Church survive?

- Better message - grace available to all
- Burning conviction (different), even a willingness to be martyrs
- Christian charity - poor, widows, orphans, prison, mines, famine, earthquakes, war.

External Threats

- Before 200 AD, Rome was tolerant
- Persecutions - refusal to worship pagan gods, gladiator events, slavery, infants, sex and marriage, Caesar worship

Nero
(65 AD)



Decius
(250 AD)



Diocletian
(300 AD)



Constantine (312 AD) - Church becomes favored after a dream that helped him defeat his rival for power



Society/Rome
(external threat)

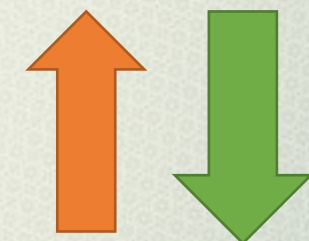
Persecution



Courage

Church

Heresy



Creeds

Members
(internal threat)



Arian Heresy & the Council of Nicea

- Arius was a pastor of influential Baucalis Church in Alexandria. Very eloquent with a flair for public relations putting ideas into jingles. Friend of Eusebius, Bishop of Nicomedia
- In 318 AD, he argued that Jesus Christ was not the true God. He was a lesser being or half-God, not the eternal or changeless Creator. He was a created Being. He stated, “The Son has a beginning, but...God is without beginning.”
- Appealed to Gnostics and converted pagans. Opposed by Bishop of Alexandria, Alexander.
- Constantine called a council in Nicea (325 AD) to resolve the issue. 300 bishops met & wrote the Nicene Creed rejecting the Arian heresy with overwhelming support (only two bishops opposed)
 - Athanasius (advisor to Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria) argued, “If Jesus is a creature, how can he save us? Only God can save humankind...”



16th-century fresco depicting the Council of Nicea

Some Scriptures concerning the nature of Christ

- **John 1:1-3** - “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.”
- **John 8:58-59** - “Very truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!” At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.
- **John 10: 29-30** - “My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”
- **John 14:10-11** - The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.
- **Phil 2:7-10** - Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.
- **Col 1:15-17** - The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.
- **Hebrews 1:3** - The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

Nicene 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, was incarnated of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became **truly human.**

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in **accordance with the Scripture;** 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 and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who 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.

Apostle's Creed

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

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,

who was **conceived** by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,

suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; **he descended into hell.**

On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come 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

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, was incarnated of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scripture; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father

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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.

- “One” God - monotheistic
- Jesus' divinity
 - Eternally begotten
 - God from God, Light from Light
 - True God from true God
 - Begotten, Not made
 - of one Being (“homoousias” or substance) with the Father
- Jesus' humanity - truly human
- For us and for our salvation, For our sake
- Holy Spirit
 - proceeds from Father and Son
 - is worshipped and glorified
- Conclusion - Only someone who is fully God can do for humans what needs to be done in restoring us to right relationship with God
- Most universal of creeds - Most Protestants, Presbyterian, Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic

Why is this important?

- **Salvation** - It is important that Jesus Christ is God...for our salvation.
 - If Jesus is a creature, he cannot save fully us and inevitably more has to be done...works
 - If Jesus is a creature, why worship him? Wouldn't you prefer to worship the Father instead?
- **History** - The Church relied on its collective witness and Scripture to refine the nature of Christ against internal challenge
- **Lesson from History** - Denying the deity of Christ has reoccurred to the present...

References

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