

The Post-Apostolic Creeds

Explanation

Beginning around the third century, Christians began to espouse and require of each other adherence to particular creeds demonstrating and propagating their belief in Jesus Christ. Such creeds were needed because many people were teaching a wide range of doctrines about Jesus. Some of these heretical groups, indeed, were way off the center mark. The creedal cure, however, went too far in the opposite direction, taking the liberty of the pure and simple spirit that had prevailed in the apostolic era (see chart 18-7) and prescribing extensive definitions and boundaries on the faithful. As chart 18-8 shows, this difficulty became increasingly severe. What began as fairly straightforward, biblically based declarations in the Old Roman, Apostles', and Caesarean Creeds, became more and more arcane, philosophical, and delimiting as the fourth and fifth centuries played themselves out. This process of accretion, adding phrase on phrase, from creed to creed, is traced on chart 18-8. Most problematic, ornate, and obscure, the so-called Athanasian Creed is of unknown authorship, was never adopted by a church council, and probably dates to the seventh or eighth century.

References

- J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (New York: McKay, 1972).
Gary P. Gillum, "Creeds," *EM*, 1:343.
Bijan Nasser-Faili, "Early Christian Creeds and LDS Doctrine," *Journal of Latter Day Saint History* 12 (2000): 12–23.

The Post-Apostolic Creeds

THE EARLIER CREEDS COMMENCE
ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES
(2nd–5th centuries)

THE ATHANASIAN CREED

(date uncertain, c. 7th century)

Whosoever will be saved: before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith: Which Faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled: without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.

And the Catholic Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons: nor dividing the Substance [Essence].

For there is one Person of the Father: another of the Son: and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal.

Such as the Father is: such is the Son: and such is the Holy Ghost.

The Father uncreate [uncreated]:

the Son uncreate [uncreated]:

and the Holy Ghost uncreate [uncreated].

The Father incomprehensible [unlimited]:

the Son incomprehensible [unlimited]:

and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible [unlimited, or infinite].

The Father eternal: the Son eternal: and the Holy Ghost eternal.

And yet they are not three eternals, but one eternal.

As also there are not three uncreated: nor three incomprehensibles [infinities], but one uncreated: and one incomprehensible [infinite].

So likewise the Father is Almighty: the Son Almighty: and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighties: but one Almighty.

So the Father is God: the Son is God: and the Holy Ghost is God.

And yet they are not three Gods: but one God.

So likewise the Father is Lord: the Son Lord: and the Holy Ghost Lord.

And yet not three Lords: but one Lord.

For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity: to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord: So are we forbidden by the Catholic Religion: to say, There be [are] three Gods, or three Lords.

The Father is made of none: neither created, nor begotten.

The Son is of the Father alone: not made, nor created: but begotten.

The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son:

neither made, nor created, nor begotten: but proceeding.

So there is one Father, not three Fathers:

one Son, not three Sons:

one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts.

And in this Trinity none is afore, or after another:

none is greater, or less than another

[there is nothing before, or after: nothing greater or less].

But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and coequal.

So that in all things, as aforesaid:

the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshiped.

He therefore that will be saved, must [let him] thus think of the Trinity.

Furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation: that he also believe rightly [faithfully] the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[continued on 18-8 (3)]

OLD ROMAN AND AFRICAN FORM OF THE APOSTLES' CREED (2nd or 3rd century)

I believe in God the Father Almighty.

And in Jesus Christ his only begotten Son our Lord,

who was born of the Holy Ghost and the Virgin Mary;

crucified under Pontius Pilate, and buried; the third day he rose from the dead;

he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of the Father; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

And in the Holy Ghost;

the holy Church;

the forgiveness of sins;

the resurrection of the body; [the life everlasting].

THE APOSTLES' CREED

(2nd or 3rd century)

I believe in God the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ his only [begotten] Son our Lord;

who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary;

suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell [Hades, spirit-world]; the third day he rose from the dead;

he ascended into heaven; and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost;

the holy Catholic Church; the communion of saints;

the forgiveness of sins;

the resurrection of the body [flesh]; and the life everlasting. Amen.

THE CAESAREAN CREED according to Eusebius,

(A.D. 325)

We believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,

the Word of God, God of God, Light of Light, Life of Life, the only-begotten Son, the first-born of every creature, begotten of God the Father before all ages, by whom also all things were made; who for our salvation was made flesh and made his home among men;

and suffered; and rose on the third day;

and ascended to the Father;

and will come again in glory, to judge the quick and the dead.

We believe also in one Holy Ghost.

AN OLD ITALIAN FORM OF THE APOSTLES' CREED

(about A.D. 350)

We believe in God the Father Almighty, Ruler and Creator of all ages and creatures.

And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord;

who was born of the Holy Ghost and from the Virgin Mary;

who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and buried; on the third day he rose from the dead;

ascended into the heavens; sitteth on the right hand of God the Father; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

And in the Holy Ghost;

and the holy Catholic Church;

the remission of sins;

the resurrection of the flesh.

THE NICEAN CREED
(As received from the
Protestant Churches)

(A.D. 325/381)

I believe in one God the
Father Almighty;
Maker of heaven and earth,
and of all things
visible and invisible.
And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only-begotten Son of God,

begotten of the Father before
all worlds [God of God],
Light of Light, very God of
very God, begotten, not
made, being of one sub-
stance [essence] with the
Father; by whom all things
were made; who, for us men
and for our salvation, came
down from heaven,

and was incarnate by the
Holy Ghost of the Virgin
Mary, and was made man;

and was crucified also for us
under Pontius Pilate; he suf-
fered and was buried; and
the third day he rose again,
according to the Scriptures;

and ascended into heaven,
and sitteth on the right hand
of the Father;

and he shall come again,
with glory, to judge both the
quick and the dead; whose
kingdom shall have no end.

And [I believe] in the Holy
Ghost, the Lord and Giver of
Life; who proceedeth from
the Father [and the Son]; who
with the Father and the Son
together is worshiped and
glorified; who spake by the
Prophets.

And [I believe] one Holy
Catholic and Apostolic
Church.

I acknowledge one Baptism
for the remission of sins;
and I look for the resurrection
of the dead, and the life of
the world to come. Amen.

THE SYMBOL OF
CHALCEDON

(A.D. 451)

We, then, following the holy
Fathers, all with one consent,
teach men to confess one and
the same Son, our Lord Jesus
Christ, the same perfect in
Godhead and also perfect in
manhood; truly God and truly
man, of a reasonable [rational]
soul and body; consubstantial
[coessential] with the Father
according to the Godhead,
and consubstantial with us
according to the Manhood; in
all things like unto us, without
sin; begotten before all ages of
the Father according to the
Godhead, and in these latter
days, for us and for our salva-
tion,

born of the Virgin Mary, the
Mother of God, according to
the Manhood;

one and the same Christ, Son,
Lord, Only-begotten, to be
acknowledged in two natures,
inconfusedly, unchangeably,
indivisibly, inseparably; the
distinction of natures being by
no means taken away by the
union, but rather the property
of each nature being preserved,
and concurring in one Person
and one Subsistence, not parted
or divided into two persons,
but one and the same Son, and
only begotten, God the Word,
the Lord Jesus Christ; as the
prophets from the beginning
[have declared] concerning
him, and the Lord Jesus Christ
himself has taught us, and the
Creed of the holy Fathers has
handed down to us.

THE ATHANANASIAN CREED

[continued from 18-8 (1)]

(date uncertain, c. 7th century)

For the right Faith is, that we believe and con-
fess: that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God,
is God and Man;

God, of the Substance [Essence] of the Father:
begotten before the worlds: and
Man, of the Substance [Essence] of his Mother,
born in the world.

Perfect God: and perfect Man, of a reasonable
soul and human flesh subsisting.

Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead:
and inferior to the Father as touching his
Manhood.

Who although he be [is] God and Man; yet he is
not two, but one Christ.

One; not by conversion of the Godhead into
flesh: but by taking [assumption] of the
Manhood into God.

One altogether; not by confusion of Substance
[Essence]: but by unity of Person.

For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man:
so God and Man is one Christ;

Who suffered for our salvation: descended into
hell [Hades, spirit-world]: rose again the third
day from the dead.

He ascended into heaven, he sitteth on the right
hand of the Father God [God the Father]
Almighty.

From whence [thence] he shall come to judge
the quick and the dead.

At whose coming all men shall rise again with
their bodies;

And shall give account for their own works.

And they that have done good shall go into life
everlasting: and they that have done evil, into
everlasting fire.

This is the Catholic Faith: which except a man
believe faithfully [truly and firmly], he can not
be saved.