

Lecture 25: Creeds and Doctrinal Development

March 23, 2020

Nicene Creed – AD 325

Trinity – One Being, Three Persons

Heresies:

Sabellius – one being, one person (modalism) – cf. United Pentecostals

Arius – multiple beings, multiple persons – cf. Jehovah’s Witnesses

The Mystery of the Gospel (cf. 1 Timothy 3:16)

“begotten, not made”

The Father is unbegotten, but the Son is eternally begotten.

“consubstantial (*homoousios*) with the Father”

Not simply “very God from very God” but *one being* with the Father.

Definition of Chalcedon – AD 451

Incarnation – One Person, Two Natures

Heresies:

Apollinarius – one person, one (complete) nature (cf. spacesuit Christology)

Nestorius – two persons, two natures (cf. adoptionism)

Opp. Cyril of Alexandria – hypostatic union, Theotokos

The Mystery of the Gospel (*exploration with adoration*)

Four Fences – without confusion, without change, without division, without separation

What is a creed?

Latin *credo* – “I believe...”

Creed – a recitable statement of faith

Baptismal Creed – Apostles Creed – Nicene Creed (cf. 1 Corinthians 8:6)

Illus. The Pledge of Allegiance – initiation rite, expands in light of communism (“under God”)

Confession – a long statement of faith (16th century)

Not recitable → catechisms (Q&A)

An Occasional Document

A creed defines the faith (what is already believed) at the point of attack, in order to define church boundaries.

Heretics love vagueness (e.g. Arians – “according to the Scripture”).

Illus. Cornelius Woelfkin at the Northern Baptist Convention (1922)

Special vocabulary (cf. antibiotics) and increased understanding

As a result, doctrine grows—the church is being trained through trial and draws from its one Source.

Illus. Lifetime lessons learned in personal crises through asking better questions of the Text (Ps. 119).

Question of Authority

Future Generations – a functional document becomes authoritative (e.g. Declaration of Independence)

Different Kinds of Authority – derivative authority, authority of precedence

Illus. Teachers vs. Parents, Supreme Court vs. Constitution

Athanasius – *sola scriptura*

“...those should of right be our teachers, and to them **only** is it necessary to give heed” (Festal Letter II).

“...observe the traditions of the fathers, and **chiefly** the holy faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, which you have learned from the Scripture...” (Antony, p. 220; cf. Basil of Caesarea).

Creed vs. creed

Scripture – what the church must believe (Jude 3 – “the faith once for all [time] delivered”)

“Vainly do they run about with the pretext that they have demanded Councils for the faith’s sake, for divine Scripture is **sufficient** above all things” (*De Synodis* 6).

Creed – what the church *already* believes and confesses with terminology targeting a specific heresy

“...what they wrote down was no discovery of theirs, but is the same as was taught by the Apostles” (5).

“What need is there of Councils, when the Nicene is **sufficient**, as against the Arian heresy...?” (6).