

The Church confronts heresy: The Creeds

January 31, 2010

1. Philosophical milieu of the first and second centuries.
 - 1.1. Zoroastrianism: The world was created as a place of combat between two uncreated spirits, one good and one evil. Neither spirit is omnipotent, and it is only through the free will choice of man that one side will prevail.
 - 1.2. Platonism: The world of the senses is not real, but rather is a reflection or shadow of the real, eternal objects, “forms.”
 - 1.3. Epicurianism: The world can only be known through human senses. There is no way to know whether a God exists beyond our world or not.
 - 1.4. “Caesarism”: The worship of earthly leaders.
2. Overview of Gnosticism: Gnosticism is self-salvation. “Perfect salvation consists in the cognition, as such, of the Ineffable Greatness. For since sin and affliction resulted from ignorance (*agnoia*), this whole system originating in ignorance is dissolved through knowledge (*gnosis*). Hence, gnosis is the salvation of the inner man. Gnosis redeems the inner, pneumatic man; he finds his satisfaction in the knowledge of the Whole. And this is the true salvation.” – Irenaeus
 - 2.1. Scriptural response: I Cor. 8:1-3, Galatians 4:9, Ephesians 3:17-19. Christian faith consists not of *knowledge* but of *being known*.
 - 2.2. Church responds: council in 2nd Century: Apostles’ Creed emphasizes “this worldliness” of the faith. God is “creator of heaven and earth.” Christ is “born,” “suffered,” “crucified,” “dead,” “buried,” and descended to hell.
3. Overview of Arianism: Arius posed the question: “Is Jesus unbegotten?” In answer, he taught that God the Father and the Son did not exist together eternally. Further, Arius taught that the pre-incarnate Jesus was a divine being created by (and possibly inferior to) the Father at some point, before which the Son did not exist. It is sometimes said that Arians believe that Jesus is or was a “creature” in the sense of a “created being.” Arius wrote based on Scriptures such as John 14:2,8 where Jesus says that the father is “greater than I.”
 - 3.1. Scriptural response: Trinitarianism - Matthew 28:19; John 1; 2 Cor. 13:14.
 - 3.2. Church responds: council of Nicaea: thoroughly Trinitarian; Jesus is the “true God”; “eternally begotten”; “not made”
4. Modern Gnosticism
 - 4.1. “Self-salvation through knowledge has its own magic, and this magic is not harmless. The structure of the order of being will not change because one finds it defective and runs away from it. The attempt at world destruction will not destroy the world, but will only increase the disorder in society. The Gnostic’s flight from a truly dreadful, confusing, and oppressive state of the world is understandable. But the order of the ancient world was renewed by that movement that strove through loving action to revive the practice of the ‘serious play’ (to use Plato’s expression)—that is, by Christianity.” - Eric Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*
 - 4.2. Gnostic temptations: *The Secret Message of Jesus*
5. Questions: Shelley writes that “Gnosticism holds an important lesson for all Christians who try to disentangle the gospel from its involvement with ‘barbaric and outmoded’ notions about God and history.” What does this mean? Are there any modern parallels to Arianism?

The Creeds

Apostle's Creed

*I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
the Maker of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, His only 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.
The third day He arose again from the dead;
He ascended into heaven,
and sitteth on 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;
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:
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.
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 and the Son.
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.*