



MAKING SENSE OF THE CREED WITH THE CHURCH FATHERS

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Adult Faith Education
Introducing the Creed
Greek Orthodox Parish and Community of
Sts Constantine and Helen
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A CONTEXT FOR THE MAKING OF THE CREED

- The inextricable connection between dogma and life
 - **St Cyril of Jerusalem:** “the manner of [our] godly way consists of these two things, reverent doctrines and good practices.” (*Catechisms for Those about to Be Enlightened*, 4.2)
 - **St John Chrysostom** maintained that we should conduct ourselves in such a way “that [our] life is in an accord with the dogmas and that dogmas proclaim the [manner of] life.” (*Homilies on Genesis*, 2.14)
- The structure of the Creed and its patristic interpretations illustrate this principle
 - Structurally, the Creed deals with statements on faith (the identity and activity of the three divine persons) and life (Church, baptism, hope)
 - The early Church Fathers adopted similar approaches

A CONTEXT FOR THE MAKING OF THE CREED

- Tradition and novelty
 - The Creed is a new expression of the initial apostolic teaching
 - The synods have not reached compromises; they discerned what was apostolic and ecclesial against what was foreign to tradition
- My aims
 - To point out the mixture of old and new in the Creed
 - To point out the tight link between faith and life

ON THE SON OF GOD: THE FAITH OF NICAEA

- Articulating the divinity of the Son, against the Arians
- The ὁμοούσιος (“of one essence”) initiative
 - A solution meant to counteract Arius’ term ἑτερούσιος (“of a different essence”)
 - A third century theological term, utilised both in Alexandria (Clement, Origen) and Antioch (Paul of Samosata)
 - Proposed by the Alexandrians – but who did it? Whilst the synod canonised “of one essence,” the Alexandrine preferences were...
 - St Alexander (“proper to the Father”)
 - St Athanasius (“of the essence of the Father”)

ON THE SON OF GOD: THE FAITH OF NICAEA

- A typical Nicene defence of Christ's divinity
- **St Athanasius:** "[Christ] is true Son of the Father, natural and genuine, proper to his essence, Wisdom Only-begotten, the true and only Logos of God; neither made nor a creature, but offspring proper to the essence of the Father. Thus, he is true God, being of one essence with the true Father." (*Orations against the Arians*, 1.9)

ON THE SON OF GOD: THE FAITH OF NICAEA

- A sample of non-technical Nicene orthodoxy.
- **St Alexander of Alexandria:** “[W]e thus believe, as the apostolic Church believes. In one Father unbegotten [...]. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God; not begotten of things that are not, but of the Father [...]. We have learnt that he is equally with the Father unchangeable and immutable, [...] perfect Son and like to the Father [...]. He is the exact image of the Father, and in nothing differing from him. [...] Whilst ascribing to him [...] a generation from the Father without beginning, we offer him adoration [...], by no means rejecting his divinity. [...] And [...] we confess one Holy Spirit [...]. Furthermore, [we confess] one catholic and apostolic Church [...]. After this we know of the resurrection of the dead, the first-fruits of which was our Lord Jesus Christ, who [...] carried a body of Mary the Theotokos; who in the fullness of time came to the human race to put away sin, was crucified and died, [...] being risen from the dead, taken up into heaven, seated at the right hand of majesty.” (Letter to Alexander of Constantinople, 12)

ON THE SON OF GOD: THE FAITH OF NICAEA

- Another sample of non-technical Nicene orthodoxy.
- **St Cyril of Jerusalem:** “Believe that this Only-begotten Son of God for our sins came down from heaven upon earth, and took upon him this human nature of like passions with us, and was begotten of the Holy Virgin and the Holy Spirit, and was made man, not in appearance [...] but in truth; nor yet by passing through the Virgin as through a channel, but was of her made truly flesh, and did truly eat as we do, and truly drink as we do. For if the incarnation was an illusion, salvation is an illusion also. Christ was of two natures, man in what was seen, but God in what was not seen...” (*Catechisms for Those about to Be Enlightened*, 4.9)

ON THE SON OF GOD: THE FAITH OF NICAEA

- The soteriological criterion of Nicene Christology
- **St Athanasius:** “if the Son were a creature, humanity had remained no less than mortal, not being joined to God.” (*Orations against the Arians*, 2.69)
- **St Antony the Great:** “The Logos of God was not changed, but remaining the same he assumed a human body for the salvation and benefit of humankind – so that sharing in the human birth he might enable humankind to share in the divine and spiritual nature.” (St Athanasius, *Life of St Antony*, 69)

ON THE HOLY SPIRIT: THE FAITH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

- Defending the divinity of the Holy Spirit, against the Macedonians or *pneumatomachoi* (those that fight the Spirit)
- Pre-synodical reactions
 - St Athanasius the Great (*Letters to Serapion*)
 - St Gregory the Theologian (*Fifth Theological Oration*)
 - St Basil the Great (*On the Holy Spirit*)
- No controversial terminology was utilised by the synod, which preferred the language of the liturgy: “worshiped and glorified together with the Father and the Son.”

ON THE HOLY SPIRIT: THE FAITH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

- The Spirit is true God
- **St Athanasius**
 - The Spirit is “truly proper to the one God and of one essence [with Him]” (*Letters to Serapion*, 1.27)
 - “the Spirit belongs to the Father in the same way as it is said about the Son [to belong]” (*Letters to Serapion*, 2.10)
 - The Spirit is “from God” (*Letters to Serapion*, 2.11)
 - “the Son is in Him and He in the Son” (*Letters to Serapion*, 2.12)
 - “the Spirit is not a creation” (*Letters to Serapion*, 3.4)

ON THE HOLY SPIRIT: THE FAITH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

- A soteriological perspective in pneumatology
- **St Athanasius:** “the given grace and gift are communicated [to us] by the Trinity, from the Father through the Son and in the Holy Spirit.” (*Letters to Serapion*, 2.11)
- Confessing the Holy Trinity is not merely an article of faith; it is the revelation of the mystery of both existence and holiness, without which nothing can be and thrive

ON THE HOLY SPIRIT: THE FAITH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

- Teaching about the Spirit in the pre-Constantinople era
- **St Cyril of Jerusalem:** “Believe also in the Holy Spirit, and hold the same opinion concerning Him, which you received to hold concerning the Father and the Son [...]. [...] Learn that this Holy Spirit is one, indivisible, of manifold power; active in many ways yet not himself divided [...]. Who descended upon the Lord Jesus Christ in form of a dove; who worked in the Law and through the Prophets; who now also at the season of baptism seals your soul; of whose holiness also every spiritual nature has need [...]. Who with the Father and the Son together is honoured with the glory of the Godhead. [...] Who spoke in the Law and in the Prophets, in the Old and in the New Testament.” (*Catechisms for Those about to Be Enlightened*, 4.16)

ON THE HOLY SPIRIT: THE FAITH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

- Teaching about the Spirit in the pre-Constantinople era
- **St Basil:** “To him turn all things needing sanctification, after him reach all things that live in virtue, as being watered by his inspiration and helped on toward their natural and proper end; perfecting all other things but himself lacking in nothing; he gives life to all things and is never depleted; [...] present everywhere, origin of sanctification, light perceptible to the mind, supplying, as it were, through himself, illumination to every faculty in the search for truth; by nature unapproachable, apprehended through goodness, filling all things with his power yet participated in only by the worthy ones.” (*On the Holy Spirit*, 9.22)

INTERPRETING THE CREED WITH THE FATHERS

- The Creed represents a summary expression of the otherwise complex and broad theological efforts of the Holy Fathers
- The Creed cannot be properly considered outside the patristic context of its formulation; since it reminds us of the teachings of the Fathers, it cannot stand on its own, without those broader teachings
- Given the difficulties entailed by the interpretation of the Creed (thinking e.g. of St Cyril of Alexandria vs. Nestorius of Constantinople, or the *Filioque* debates) we need to turn to the Fathers for guidance

INTERPRETING THE CREED WITH THE FATHERS

- The spirit in which we have to receive the Creed
- **St Cyril of Jerusalem:** “attend closely to the teachings, and [...] do not let your mind be wearied out. [...] Study our teachings and keep them forever. [...] For we deliver to you a mystery and a hope of the life to come. [...] [And so,] may the gate of Paradise be opened to every man and every woman among you.” (*Catechisms for Those about to Be Enlightened; Procatechesis*, 10-12, 15)