

History of Heretics

Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it....

I. Ante-Nicene & Nicene (70–451 A.D.)

A. Early Councils

1. Circumcision Question (Acts 15)

2. 167–326 A.D.: Much ado about Easter

3. Divinity of the Holy Spirit

a. Scripture References: John 3:5; Rom. 1:4, 8:11; 1Cor 6:11; Ti 3:5–7; Eph 5:17,19; 1Cor 2:11-12; Ps 139:7; Acts 5:3-4, Mt 12:31; Mt 28:19; 2Cor 13:13

B. Early Heresies

1. Docetism

a. Christ's human body was a phantasm & his suffering & death mere appearance

b. "If he suffered, he was not God; if He was God, he did not suffer"

c. "If he suffered in mere appearance (being themselves mere appearances), why am I in bonds?"

d. Christian Science

e. Scripture References: John 1:14; Lu 18: 32-33, 24:26

2. Gnosticism (Acts 8:9-24)

a. Judaizing (Ebionites) (180)

i. Jesus was son of Joseph & Mary, joined with Christ at baptism

ii. Use Matthew, reject Paul

b. Syrian (c. 120)

i. Jesus vs. Yahweh

c. Egyptian (c. 130)

i. Father begat mind (Jesus) begat reason begat prudence begat wisdom & power begat virtues, princes, & angels (including Yahweh)

ii. Simon of Cyrene was crucified instead of Jesus

d. Pontic (Marcion) (c. 160)

i. Yahweh is warmongering father of evil

ii. Mutilated Luke's Gospel

iii. Body can't partake in salvation

e. New Age Movement

f. Scripture References: John 18:5-6, 20:27-28, 21:7; Phil 2:11; Luke 3:49

3. Monarchianism

a. Adoptionism ("Dynamic")(190, condemned 268)

i. Scripture References: Mt 1:20; Lu 1:35, 2:49

b. Sabellianism/Patrispassionism ("Modal") (215)

i. Scripture References: Lu 23:34, 46; Mk 9:7, 15:34

4. Montanism (mid-100s into early 200's)

a. Emphasis on prophesy & spiritual gifts, asceticism, strict penance

b. Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches

c. Scripture References:

1Cor 12:10ff, 1John 4:1, Mt 7:21-23

5. Chiliasm (Millennialism) (Present in 1st Century, Condemned early 300s)

a. Condemned by Eusebius of Caesarea & Augustine

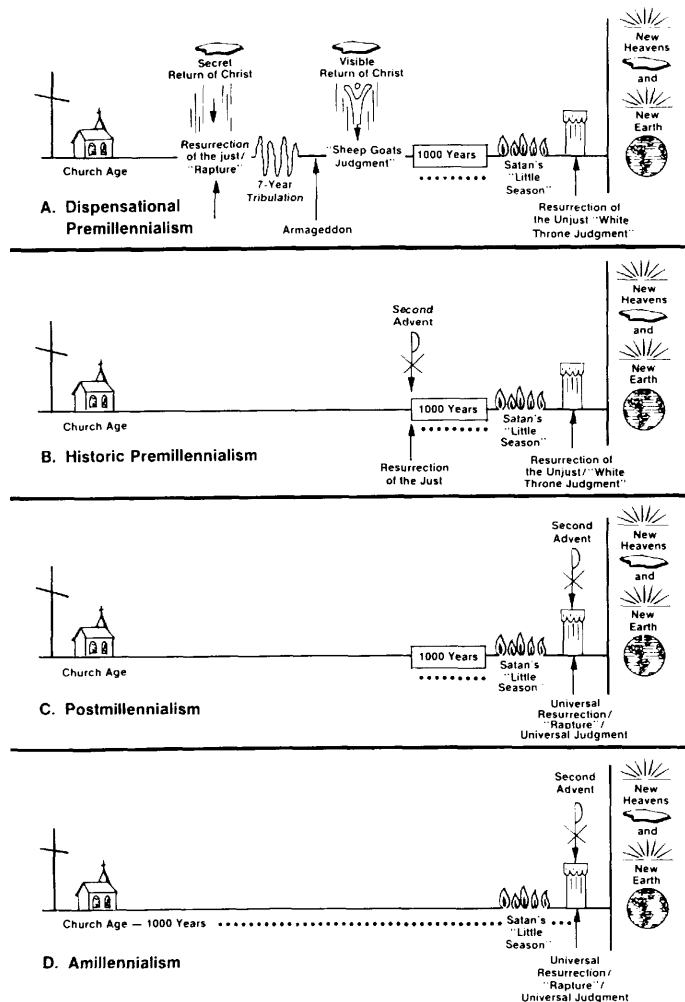
“Certain strange teachings...that there will be a certain period of a thousand years after the resurrection from the dead, when the kingdom of Christ will be set up in a material order on earth. I imagine that he got these ideas through a misrepresentation of the apostolic accounts...he is a man of exceeding small intelligence, but very many churchmen after him have adopted like opinion.”

—Eusebius

Augustine's amillennialism is an outworking of this general theme. He reinterpreted the millennium to refer to the church and equated the thousand year reign of Christ and his saints with the “whole duration of this world.” Thus, Revelation 20 is to be interpreted as follows:

- Jesus bound Satan and restrained him from seducing the nations at Calvary.
- The saints currently reign with Christ in the millennial kingdom of God, which presently exists.
- Satan will be loosed for a three and a half year period of time, during which the church will be severely persecuted.

Diagrams of Millennial Views



•After this, Christ will return. ⁷⁹

Interestingly, Augustine stated that the literal view of the scope of the millennium (one-thousand year reign) “would not be objectionable” if the nature of the millennial kingdom was a “spiritual one” rather than a physical one. However, he strongly objected to the view that “those who then rise again shall enjoy the leisure of immoderate carnal banquets, furnished with an amount of meat and drink such as not only to shock the feeling of the temperate, but even to surpass the measure of credulity itself. Such a view was to “be believed only by the carnal.” ⁸⁰

Augustinian amillennialism was the dominant eschatology for centuries. Premillennialism, with few exceptions, soon became the view only of outcasts and heretics. ⁸¹ The paradigm shift was complete. The marginalization of the premillennialism of the Bible and the early church fathers was so successful that even the reformers dismissed it as a “fable of Jewish dotage.” ⁸²

⁷⁹Augustine, *City of God*, Great Books of the Western World ed. (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 535-543.

⁸⁰Augustine, *City of God*, 535.

⁸¹At the council of Ephesus in 431, belief in the millennium was condemned as superstitious. See Robert G. Clouse, “Introduction” in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, Robert Clouse, ed. (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 9.

⁸²The Forty-First of the Anglican Articles drawn up by Cramner described the millennium in this fashion. See Schaff, 619, n.4. Similarly, the Augsburg Confession, Art. XVII., condemned those “who now scatter Jewish opinions that, before the resurrection of the dead, the godly shall occupy the kingdom of the world, the wicked being everywhere suppressed.” See Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (Harper and Row, 1931, reprinted, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), III: 18. ¹

b. Scripture References:

Rev 20, Ro 11:25-27; Ro 2:28-29, 9:27, 11:14

6. Donatism (313)

a. Scripture References:

7. Arianism (325)

a. Arius vs. Athanasius

b. Scripture References:

¹D. Matthew Allen, *Theology Adrift* (A paper supporting pre-millennialism)

8. Appolinarianism (Condemned 362, 380)

a. Opposed Arianism

b. Overemphasized Divine at expense of human nature

- i. Logos took place of the Human Soul
- ii. “That which He did not assume was not healed.” —Gregory of Nazianzus, Archbishop of Constantinople

9. Manichaeism (c. 370s)

Founded by Mani (c. 216–c. 277)

Syncretist:

Dualist: Light & darkness in conflict from eternity

Gnostic: (See above)

Ascetic:

No free will:

Satan & his hosts, born of darkness, imprisoned elements of light, later called “Jesus capable of suffering”. God formed the world in order to free the imprisoned light. “Jesus incapable of suffering” came to lead his followers into asceticism & separate light from darkness. Souls of the saved reach final blessedness in light, and men’s bodies & the souls of the damned fall victim to darkness. World destroyed by fire.

What’s the biggest problem with Manichaeism?

Have good & evil always been at war? Will they be? Isa 14:12; 1Jo 3:8, Mal 4:1, Re 20:10

Do the souls of the saved reach final blessedness & the bodies destroyed?

Is asceticism good or bad? Mt 11:18-19

Are our material bodies good or bad?

T/F: Human nature is evil. Jesus has a full human nature. Jesus is evil.

Is it possible for God to become man? Mr 10:27, 14:36

10. Nestorianism (A.D. 428–431)

“While most of the heresies of antiquity, Arianism not excepted, have been utterly obliterated from history, and only raise their heads from time to time as individual opinions under peculiar modifications, the Christological heresies of the fifth century, Nestorianism and Monophysitism, continue in organized sects to this day. These schismatic churches of the East are the petrified remains or ruins of important chapters in the history of the ancient church. They are sunk in ignorance and superstition; but they are more accessible to Western Christianity than the orthodox Greek church, and offer to the Roman and Protestant churches an interesting field of missions, especially among the Nestorians and the Armenians.”²

Is Mary the mother of God or the mother of Christ? Mt 1:20, Lu 1:35

Was Jesus Son of God while in Mary’s womb?

Does God have a mother?

Is God the Father of Jesus’ human nature?

Are God and man in Christ 1 or 2? 1Co 8:6, Eph 4:5

Explain how to fit God into a human womb. Lu 1:37

Did God die on the cross? Ac 2:36

Council of Ephesus (431): If anyone pretends that this union exists only so far as likeness of name is concerned, as the Nestorians understand, who call also the Word of God Jesus and Christ, and even accord to the man the names of Christ and of Son, speaking thus clearly of two persons, and only designating disingenuously one Person and one Christ when the reference is to his honor, or his dignity, or his worship; if anyone shall not acknowledge as the Holy Fathers teach, that the union of God the Word is made with the flesh animated by a reasonable and living soul, and that such union is made synthetically and hypostatically, and that therefore there is only one Person, to wit: our Lord Jesus Christ, one of the Holy Trinity: let him be anathema.³

²Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*

³*Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers*

11. Monophysitism/Eutychianism (433–460, Condemned 451 at Chalcedon)

Monophysitism: (“Single nature”) Belief that Jesus’ human nature was absorbed by His divine nature.

How many natures did Jesus have in the Old Testament?

How many did He have in the Womb? During His ministry? On the cross?

How many does He have now?

Is He man?

Called Man: 1Tim 2:5, John 8:40

Human Nature: Gen 22:18, Luke 1:42, 2:7

Human Body: Luke 23:46, 24:39, Matt 26:38, Heb 2:14

Union of Persons or Personal Union? John 1:14

a. Eutyches

The heresy of Eutyches, as was the case with so many other heresies, sprang from the reaction against a counter heresy. Most of the controversies which have again and again imperilled the cause of Christianity, have been due to human frailty, which has been unable to keep the proportion of the Faith. Over-statement on the one side leads to over-statement on the other, and thus the golden mean is lost sight of. Eutyches, an archimandrite (or head of a monastery) at Constantinople, had distinguished himself for zeal during the years of 428 to 431 in combating the heresy of Nestorius, who had denied the perfect union of the Godhead and the Manhood in the one Person, Christ Jesus. He had objected to the Virgin being called Theotokos (God-bearing), and said that Christokos (Christ-bearing) would be more correct. This position, as involving two persons as well as two natures in our Lord, was condemned by the 3rd General Council, which met at Ephesus in 431, S. Cyril being its chief opponent. But Eutyches in his eagerness to proclaim the Unity of the Person of Christ fell into the opposite extreme, and asserted that though the two natures of Christ were originally distinct, yet after the union they became but one nature, the human being changed into the Divine. Eutyches appears to have been a highly virtuous person, but possessed of a dull, narrow mind, unfit for the subtleties of theological discussions, and therefore unable to grasp the conception of two Natures in one Person: and nothing worse than stupidity and obstinacy is brought against him by his stern but clear-headed opponent Leo.⁴

b. Leo

“Following the holy fathers, we unanimously teach one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, complete as to his Godhead, and complete as to his manhood; truly God, and truly man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting; consubstantial with the Father as to his Godhead, and consubstantial also with us as to his manhood; like unto us in all things, yet without sin; as to his Godhead begotten of the Father before all worlds, but as to his manhood, in these last days born, for us men and for our salvation, of the Virgin Mary, the mother of God; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, known in (of) two natures, without confusion, without conversion, without severance, and without division; the distinction of the natures being in no wise abolished by their union, but the peculiarity of each nature being maintained, and both concurring in one person and hypostasis. We confess not a Son divided and sundered into two

⁴Fathers, Nicene & Post-Nicene, s.2, v.12 (36)

persons, but one and the same Son, and Only-begotten, and God-Logos, our Lord Jesus Christ, even as the prophets had before proclaimed concerning him, and he himself hath taught us, and the symbol of the fathers hath handed down to us.”

c. Modern Examples

**Coptic
Armenian
Jacobite**

12. Pelagianism & Semi-Pelagianism

a. Pelagianism (400, condemned 431)

i. Pelagius

1. Adam would have died even had he not sinned.
2. His sin affected only himself, not his offspring.
3. Newborn Children are in the same state as Adam before the fall.
4. Not true that all men die in Adam & rise in Christ.
5. Law leads to salvation as much as the Gospel.
6. Before Jesus' coming, there were people without sin.

ii. Augustine

Erred too far against (cf. Calvinism)

b. Semi-Pelagianism (428-529)

Free Will only partially impaired by the fall & needs the help of grace.

Why are not all saved?

Orange (529)

These transactions terminated at length in the triumph of a moderate Augustinianism, or of what might be called Semi-Augustinianism, in distinction from Semi-Pelagianism. At the synod of Orange (Arausio) in the year 529, at which Caesarius of Arles was leader, the Semi-Pelagian system, yet without mention of its adherents, was condemned in twenty-five chapters or canons, and the Augustinian doctrine of sin and grace was approved, without the doctrine of absolute or particularistic predestination.⁵

⁵Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*

1. The sin of Adam has not injured the body only, but also the soul of man.
2. The sin of Adam has brought sin and death upon all mankind.
3. Grace is not merely bestowed when we pray for it, but grace itself causes us to pray for it.
5. Even the beginning of faith, the disposition to believe, is effected by grace.
9. All good thoughts and works are God's gift.
10. Even the regenerate and the saints need continually the divine help.
12. What God loves in us, is not our merit, but his own gift.
13. The free will weakened in Adam, can only be restored through the grace of baptism.
16. All good that we possess is God's gift, and therefore no one should boast.
18. Unmerited grace precedes meritorious works.
19. Even had man not fallen, he would have needed divine grace for salvation.
23. When man sins, he does his own will; when he does good, he executes the will of God, yet voluntarily.
25. The love of God is itself a gift of God.

To these chapters the synod added a Creed of anthropology and soteriology, which, in opposition to Semi-Pelagianism, contains the following five propositions:

1. Through the fall free will has been so weakened, that without prevenient grace no one can love God, believe on Him, or do good for God's sake, as he ought (sicut oportuit, implying that he may in a certain measure).
2. Through the grace of God all may, by the co-operation of God, perform what is necessary for their soul's salvation.
3. It is by no means our faith, that any have been predestinated by God to sin (ad malum), but rather: if there are people who believe so vile a thing, we condemn them with utter abhorrence (cum omni detestatione).
4. In every good work the beginning proceeds not, from us, but God inspires in us faith and love to Him without merit precedent on our part, so that we desire baptism, and after baptism can, with His help, fulfil His will.

Bible Passages:

John 1:12-13, Eph 2:8-9, Ps 51:5

election of individuals to eternal life: 2Th 2:13, Eph 1:4, 1Pe 1:2, Joh 13:18

1. The ground of this election to salvation is the good pleasure of God Eph 1:5,11 Mt 11:25,26 Joh 15:16,19
2. God claims the right so to do Ro 9:16,21 It is not conditioned on faith or repentance, but is of sovereign grace Ro 11:4-6 Eph 1:3-6
3. All that pertain to salvation, the means Eph 2:8 2Th 2:13 as well as the end, are of God Ac 5:31 2Ti 2:25 1Co 1:30 Eph 2:5,10
4. Faith and repentance and all other graces are the exercises of a regenerated soul; and regeneration is God's work, a "new creature." Men are elected "to salvation," "to the adoption of sons," "to be holy and without blame before him in love" 2Th 2:13 Ga 4:4,5 Eph 1:4
5. The ultimate end of election is the praise of God's grace Eph 1:6,12

II. Creeds

A. THE APOSTLES' CREED VERSUS GNOSTICISM⁶

A creed generally emphasizes the beliefs opposing those errors that the compilers of the creed think most dangerous at the time. The Creed of the Council of Trent, which was drawn up by the Roman Catholics in the 1500's, emphasized those beliefs that Roman Catholics and Protestants were arguing about most furiously at the time. The Nicene Creed, drawn up in the fourth century, is emphatic in affirming the Deity of Christ, since it is directed against the Arians, who denied that Christ was fully God. The Apostles' Creed, drawn up in the first or second century, emphasizes the true Humanity, including the material body, of Jesus, since that is the point that the heretics of the time (Gnostics, Marcionites, and later Manicheans) denied. (See 1 John 4:1-3)

Thus the Apostles' Creed is as follows:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth,

[The Gnostics held that the physical universe is evil and that God did not make it.]
**And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, Our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
Born of the Virgin Mary,**

[The Gnostics were agreed that the orthodox Christians were wrong in supposing that God had taken human nature or a human body. Some of them distinguished between Christ, whom they acknowledged to be in some sense divine, and the man Jesus, who was at most an instrument through whom the Christ spoke. They held that the man Jesus did not become the bearer or instrument of the Christ until the Spirit descended upon him at his baptism, and that the Spirit left him before the crucifixion, so that the Spirit had only a brief and tenuous association with matter and humanity. Others affirmed that there was never a man Jesus at all, but only the appearance of a man, through which appearance wise teachings were given to the first disciples. Against this the orthodox Christians affirmed that Jesus was conceived through the action of the Holy Spirit (thus denying the Gnostic position that the Spirit had nothing to do with Jesus until his Baptism), that he was born (which meant that he had a real physical body, and not just an appearance) of a virgin (which implied that he had been special from the first moment of his life, and not just from the baptism on].

Suffered under Pontius Pilate,

[There were many stories then current about gods who died and were resurrected, but they were offered quite frankly as myths, as non-historical stories symbolic of the renewal of the vegetation every spring after the seeming death of winter. If you asked, "When did Adonis die, you would be told either, "Long ago and far away," or else, "His death is not an event in earthly time." Jesus, on the other hand, died at a particular time and place in history, under the jurisdiction of Pontius Pilate, Procurator of Judea from 26 to 36 CE, or during the last ten years of the reign of the Emperor Tiberius.]

was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into Hades.

[Here the creed hammers home the point that he was really dead. He was not an illusion. He was nailed to a post. He died. He had a real body, a corpse, that was placed in a tomb. He was not merely unconscious -- his spirit left his body and went to the realm of the dead. It is a common belief among Christians that on this occasion he took the souls of those who had died trusting in the promises made under the Old Covenant -- Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah, Isaiah, and many

⁶Posted by: James E. Kiefer Source: CHRISTIA File Archives (for more info send INDEX CHRISTIA to listserv@asuvm.inre.asu.edu) jab/15-Mar-94

others -- and brought them out of the realm of the dead and into heavenly glory. But the creed is not concerned with this point. The reference to the descent into Hades (or Hell, or Sheol) is here to make it clear that the death of Jesus was not just a swoon or a coma, but death in every sense of the word.]

The third day he rose from the dead, he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy catholic church,

[The Gnostics believed that the most important Christian doctrines were reserved for a select few. The orthodox belief was that the fullness of the Gospel was to be preached to the entire human race. Hence the term “catholic,” or universal, which distinguished them from the Gnostics.]

the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,

[The Gnostics considered that what men needed was not forgiveness, but enlightenment. Ignorance, not sin, was the problem. Some of them, believing the body to be a snare and delusion, led lives of great asceticism. Others, believing the body to be quite separate from the soul, held that it did not matter what the body did, since it was completely foul anyway, and its actions had no effect on the soul. They accordingly led lives that were not ascetic at all. Either way, the notion of forgiveness was alien to them.]

the resurrection of the body,

[The chief goal of the Gnostics was to become free forever from the taint of matter and the shackles of the body, and to return to the heavenly realm as Pure Spirit. They totally rejected any idea of the resurrection of the body.]

and the life everlasting. AMEN

B. THE NICENE CREED⁷

The Nicene Creed is the most widely accepted and used brief statements of the Christian Faith. In liturgical churches, it is said every Sunday as part of the Liturgy. It is Common Ground to East Orthodox, Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, Calvinists, and many other Christian groups. Many groups that do not have a tradition of using it in their services nevertheless are committed to the doctrines it teaches.

(Someone may ask, “What about the Apostles’ Creed?” Traditionally, in the West, the Apostles’ Creed is used at Baptisms, and the Nicene Creed at the Eucharist (aka the Mass, the Liturgy, the Lord’s Supper, or the Holy Communion). The East uses only the Nicene Creed.)

When the Nicene Creed was drawn up, the chief enemy was Arianism, which denied that Jesus was fully God. Arius was a presbyter (=priest = elder) in Alexandria in Egypt, in the early 300’s. He taught that the Father, in the beginning, created (or begot) the Son, and that the Son, in conjunction with the Father, then proceeded to create the world. The result of this was to make the Son a created being, and hence not God in any meaningful sense. It was also suspiciously like the theories of those Gnostics and pagans who held that God was too perfect to create something like a material world, and so introduced one or more intermediate beings between God and the world. God created A, who created B, who created C... who created Z, who created the world. Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria, sent for Arius and questioned him. Arius stuck to his position, and was finally excommunicated by a council of Egyptian bishops. He went to Nicomedia in Asia, where he wrote letters defending his position to various bishops. Finally, the Emperor

⁷Ibid

Constantine summoned a council of Bishops in Nicea (across the straits from modern Istanbul), and there in 325 the Bishops of the Church, by a decided majority, repudiated Arius and produced the first draft of what is now called the Nicene Creed. A chief spokesman for the full deity of Christ was Athanasius, deacon of Alexandria, assistant (and later successor) to the aging Alexander. The Arian position has been revived in our own day by the Watchtower Society (the JW's), who explicitly hail Arius as a great witness to the truth.

I here print the Creed (modern wording), with notes inserted.

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,

Here and elsewhere (such as John 1:14) where the Greek has MONOGENETOS HUIOS, an English translation may read either "only Son" or "only begotten Son." The Greek is ambiguous. The root GEN is found in words like "genital, genetics, generation," and suggests begetting. However, it is also found in words like "genus" and suggests family or sort or kind. Accordingly, we may take MONOGENETOS to mean either "only begotten" or "one-of-a-kind, only, sole, unique".

eternally begotten of the Father,

Here the older translation has "begotten of the Father before all worlds." One might suppose that this means, "before the galaxies were formed," or something of the kind. But in fact the English word "world" used to mean something a little different. It is related to "were" (pronounced "weer"), an old word for "man," as in "werewolf" or "weregild." (Compare with Latin VIR.) Hence a "world" was originally a span of time equal to the normal lifespan of a man. Often in the KJV Bible, one finds "world" translating the Greek AION ("eon"), and a better translation today would be "age." (Thus, for example, in Matthew 24:3, the question is one of "the end of the age," which makes it possible to understand what follows as a description of the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70, and of the end of an era in the spiritual history of mankind. But I digress.) So here we have "begotten of the Father before all times, before all ages." Arius was fond of saying, "The Logos is not eternal. God begat him, and before he was begotten, he did not exist." The Athanasians replied that the begetting of the Logos was not an event in time, but an eternal relationship.

God from God, Light from Light,

A favorite analogy of the Athanasians was the following: Light is continuously streaming forth from the sun. (In those days, it was generally assumed that light was instantaneous, so that there was no delay at all between the time that a ray of light left the sun and the time it struck the earth.) The rays of light are derived from the sun, and not vice versa. But it is not the case that first the sun existed and afterwards the Light. It is possible to imagine that the sun has always existed, and always emitted light. The Light, then, is derived from the sun, but the Light and the sun exist simultaneously throughout eternity. They are co-eternal. Just so, the Son exists because the Father exists, but there was never a time before the Father produced the Son. The analogy is further appropriate because we can know the sun only through the rays of light that it emits. To see the sunlight is to see the sun. Just so, Jesus says, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9)

true God from true God, begotten, not made,

This line was inserted by way of repudiating Arius's teaching that the Son was the first thing that the Father created, and that to say that the Father begets the Son is simply another way of saying that the Father has created the Son.

Arius said that if the Father has begotten the Son, then the Son must be inferior to the Father, as a prince is inferior to a king. Athanasius replied that a son is precisely the same sort of being as his father, and that the only son of a king is destined himself to be a king. It is true that an earthly son is younger than his father, and that there is a time when he is not yet what he will be. But God is not in time. Time, like distance, is a relation between physical events, and has meaning only in the context of the physical universe. When we say that the Son is begotten of the Father, we do not refer to an event in the remote past, but to an eternal and timeless relation between the Persons of the Godhead. Thus, while we say of an earthly prince that he may some day hope to become what his father is now, we say of God the Son that He is eternally what God the Father is eternally.

of one being with the Father.

This line: "of one essence with the Father, of one substance with the Father, consubstantial with the Father," (in Greek, HOMO-OUSIOS TW PATRI) was the crucial one, the acid test. It was the one formula that the Arians could not interpret as meaning what they believed. Without it, they would have continued to teach that the Son is good, and glorious, and holy, and a Mighty Power, and God's chief agent in creating the world, and the means by which God chiefly reveals Himself to us, and therefore deserving in some sense to be called divine. But they would have continued to deny that the Son was God in the same sense in which the Father is God. And they would have pointed out that, since the Council of Nicea had not issued any declaration that they could not accept, it followed that there was room for their position inside the tent of Christian doctrine, as that tent had been defined at Nicea. Arius and his immediate followers would have denied that they were reducing the Son to the position of a high-ranking angel. But their doctrine left no safeguard against it, and if they had triumphed at Nicea, even in the negative sense of having their position acknowledged as a permissible one within the limits of Christian orthodoxy, the damage to the Christian witness to Christ as God made flesh would have been irreparable.

Incidentally, HOMOOUSIOS is generally written without the hyphen. The OU (in Greek as in French) is pronounced as in "soup", "group", and so on, and the word has five syllables HO-mo-OU-si-os, with accents on first and third, as shown. The Greek root HOMO, meaning "same," is found in English words like "homosexual" and "homogenized", and is not to be confused with the Latin word HOMO, meaning "man, human".

The language finally adopted in the East was that the Trinity consists of three HYPOSTASES (singular HYPOSTASIS) united in one OUSIA. The formula used in the West, and going back at least to Tertullian (who wrote around 200, and whose writings are the oldest surviving Christian treatises written in Latin), is that the Trinity consists of three PERSONAE (singular PERSONA) united in one SUBSTANTIA. In English, we say "Three Persons in one Substance." Unfortunately, the Greek HYPO-STASIS and the Latin SUB-STANTIA each consists of an element meaning "under, below" (as in "hypodermic", "hypothermia", etc) followed by an element meaning "stand". Thus it was natural for a Greek-speaker, reading a Latin document that referred to One SUBSTANTIA to substitute mentally a reference to One HYPOSTASIS, and to be very uncomfortable, while a Latin-speaker would have the same problem in reverse. Thus the seeds were sown for a breakdown of communication.

Through him all things were made.

This is a direct quote from John 1:3. Before the insertion of the HOMO-OUSIOS clause, this line immediately followed “begotten, not made.” The two lines go naturally together. The Son is not a created thing. Rather, He is the agent through Whom all created things come to be. Inserting the HOMO-OUSIOS at this point breaks up the flow, and if I had been present at the Council of Nicea, I would have urged the bishops to insert it one line further down instead. In the older translation, in particular, someone reading the Creed is likely to understand it as referring to “The Father by whom all things were made.” The newer translation, by revising the English wording, makes this misreading less likely.

For us and for our salvation

The older translation has, “for us men.” Now, while English has in common current usage the one word “man” to do duty both for gender-inclusive (“human”) and for gender-specific (“male”), Latin has “homo, homin-” for gender-inclusive and “vir” for gender-specific, while Greek has “anthropos” for gender-inclusive and “aner, andro-” for gender-specific. (Given the demand for a similar distinction in English, I have been arguing for a gender-inclusive use of “man”, and the revival of the older word “were” (as in “werewolf” and “weregild”) in the gender-specific sense. But so far I have had but scant success.) Where the older translation of the Creed is used, with its “for us men” at this point, a feminist might consider complaining of sexist language. But the Greek and Latin wording here are both gender-inclusive, and so a feminist, reading the Creed in either of those languages, ought to find nothing that will upset him.

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.

You will note that the older translation has here simply, “He suffered and was buried” (Latin, “passus et sepultus est”). Apparently by the time of Nicea, it was no longer necessary to emphasize, to spell out unmistakably, that Christ had really died at Calvary, as it had been spelled out in the Apostles’ Creed. And indeed, I have never heard anyone try to argue that the Creed here leaves a loophole for those who want to believe that Jesus merely swooned on the Cross. So apparently the Nicene Fathers were right in supposing that their language would not be misunderstood. However, the framers of the new translation decided to make the meaning unmistakable and to close this particular loophole. And I for one am not sorry.

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;

The wording here is borrowed from 1 Corinthians 15:4. The older translation has “according to the Scriptures,” which in terms of modern language is misleading. Today, when we say, “It will rain tomorrow, according to the weatherman,” we mean, “The weatherman says that it will rain, but whether he is right is another question.” And this is clearly not what either St. Paul or the Nicene Fathers had in mind. The newer translation is an improvement. I would have suggested, “in fulfilment of the Scriptures,” which is clearly what is meant.

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].

The words shown in brackets, “and from the Son,” are a Western addition to the Creed as it was originally agreed on by a Council representing the whole Church, East and West. They correspond to the Latin word FILIOQUE (FILI = Son, -O = from, -QUE = and; pronounced with accent on the O), and the controversy about them is accordingly known as the Filioque controversy.

If we are looking for a statement that can be taken as common ground by all Christians, East and West alike, it clearly cannot include the FILIOQUE. On the other hand, Western Christians will be unwilling to have it supposed that they are repudiating the statement that the Spirit proceeds jointly from Father and Son. I accordingly suggest that we print the Creed with the FILIOQUE either in brackets or omitted altogether, but with the understanding that, while assenting to the resulting statement does not commit anyone to belief in the Dual Procession of the Spirit, neither does it commit anyone to disbelief in the Dual Procession.

I reserve extensive comments on the Dual Procession, the history of the belief, and the reasons for and against believing in it, for a separate essay, called CREED FILIOQUE.

With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets.

This line was directed against the view that the Holy Spirit did not exist, or was not active, before Pentecost.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

Since many Christians from various backgrounds will want to know, "Precisely what would I be agreeing to if I signed this?" I have commented extensively on the wording in a separate file, called CREED 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.

C. Athanasian

This creed is named after Athanasius (A.D. 293-373), the champion of orthodoxy against Arian attacks on the doctrine of the trinity. Although Athanasius did not write this creed and it is improperly named after him, the name persists because until the seventeenth century it was commonly ascribed to him.

It is not from Greek (Eastern), but from Latin (Western) origin, and is not recognized by the Eastern Orthodox Church today. Apart from the opening and closing sentences, this creed consists of two parts, the first setting forth the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, and the second dealing chiefly with the incarnation and the two-natures doctrine.

BIBLE CREEDS

Deuteronomy 6:4

1 Kings 18:39

Matthew 16:16

Matthew 28:19

John 1:49

John 6:68-69

John 20:28

Acts 8:36-37

Acts 16:31

1 Corinthians 8:6

1 Corinthians 12:3

1 Corinthians 15:3-7

Philippians 2:6-11

1 Timothy 3:16

Hebrews 6:1-2

1 John 4:2