

Discovery Hour
Apostle's Creed
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The Apostle's Creed is both earlier and later than the Nicene Creed which we have recently examined. It is older in that our version is the expansion of a creed that existed in the mid-second century (the Old Roman Creed). It is later in that this expansion dates to the late 6th Century. As was the case with the Nicene Creed, the Apostle's Creed functioned in multiple ways in church life. It served as a confession of faith for those entering Christianity; for example those being baptized recited it. It was also used in teaching the faith, that is, catechism. The creed also became a rule of faith, helping the church to maintain consistency of teaching from region to region and over time. Tradition held that Peter began the creed with the first line and that each of the apostle's then added a clause or phrase.

Not surprisingly, the Apostle's Creed responds to what the church took to be a heretical teaching in the second century which was advanced by Marcion and early Gnosticism. These belief systems sought to separate the God of the Old Testament from the God of the New Testament, emphasizing that the New Testament God was loving and holy and perfect whereas the God of the Old Testament was a lesser deity who created an inferior world and was not perfect, but rather angry. In the end, this and other teachings advanced either a denial of the Trinity or of the full deity and humanity of Christ. An examination of the Creed shows how these points are emphasized.

As we discussed with the Nicene Creed it is important to consider how the learning and reciting of this creed can function in the Christian life – at the beginning of the process and in the living of the Christian life. It may also be that we can see how present day teachings or beliefs may also miss the mark by comparing them to the Apostle's Creed.

Discussion Questions:

1. We do not tend to use the Apostle's Creed or any other creed for the purpose of teaching the Christian faith either to adults or children. We tend to work our way through the Bible in one way or another. What are potential advantages to using the Apostle's Creed? Would many be resistant to such use? Why might they be?
2. Examine the Old Roman Creed and the Apostle's Creed on the back, what differences do you see?
3. Speculative question: Let us imagine that the Pope and all the Protestant leaders in the world today from denominational officials down to every pastor of every church agreed to make the Apostle's Creed THE rule of faith. They set about teaching it to every new and old Christian and then required that to be in their church (or denomination), a person had to regularly affirm their belief in the statements of the Creed. Would worldwide Christianity be better or worse as a result? How and why?

Apostles' Creed (ca. 6th Century A.D.)

1. I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth:
2. And in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord:
3. Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary:
4. Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried: He descended into hell:
5. The third day he rose again from the dead:
6. He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty:
7. From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead:
8. I believe in the Holy Ghost:
9. I believe in the holy catholic church: the communion of saints:
10. The forgiveness of sins:
11. The resurrection of the body:
12. And the life everlasting. Amen.

Old Roman Creed (ca. 150 A.D.)

1. I believe in God the Father, Almighty:
2. And in Christ Jesus, His only Son, our Lord:
3. Who was born from the Holy Ghost and the Virgin Mary:
4. Who under Pontius Pilate was crucified and buried:
5. On the third day rose again from the dead:
6. Ascended into heaven, sits at the right hand of the Father:
7. Whence He will come to judge the living and the dead:

8. And in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Church, the remission of sins, the resurrection of the flesh (the life everlasting).