

Creeds of the Kehillah ~ Part 23

The Nicene Creed ~ Part 9

In our last post, we continued to explore the **Nicene Creed**. This post digs a little deeper into the actual articles of faith in the **Nicene Creed**.

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.

BEGOTTEN, NOT MADE

The insistence on the **Son** as *begotten, not made* is another particular aspect of the fourth-century **Arian** controversy that breaks its way into the creed text at this point. Insofar as the more powerful biblical analogy of the **Son of God's** birth from the **Father** could be used to designate a wide range of modes of secretion from **God** (angels and saints could be in a sense spoken of as born of **God**), the Nicene Fathers were concerned with this additional clause to specify that the **Son's** process of being begotten from the **Father** is uniquely different from all others. Adding on the qualification "begotten before all ages" is specifically meant to attack the central Arian premises that the **Son** was a creature whom **God the Father** brought into being at a specific time in the plan of salvation. The creedal affirmation elevates against such notion the twin insistence that the **Son** was born of **God** (not made or created or emitted in any less than personal sense) and that the birth of the **Son** takes place within eternity, that is, within the divine being, not as something irrelevant or alien to it. Both images of a natural birth and eternal birth describe and define the full divine status of the **Son's** being as necessary additions to the ancient baptismal creed to meet the **Arian** problem head-on.

Several **Arian** theologians had begun to argue in the fourth century that the divine **Sonship** of **Yeshua** was an analogy for the sanctification of a creature and, therefore, the biblical references to the heavenly **Son of God** ought to be taken as references to **God's** creation of His angelic helpers. They argued that this applied especially to the great angel, the Logos, who thought He was heavily involved in the salvation of the world, was still, nonetheless, the firstborn (that is, first created) of the supreme Monad ¹ of the divinity and was a **Son of God** on the same terms as the rest of creation, only perhaps more impressively so. To teach the doctrine that **Yeshua** was the earthly **Son of God**, precisely because he was the incarnation of the eternal

¹ Supreme Being ~ "Monad | philosophy | Britannica.

Son of God and that in His case alone birth means the antithesis of creation, this clause in the creed, *begotten, not made*, was added. Aren't we glad the Nicene Fathers added that phrase?

OF ONE BEING WITH THE FATHER

By the time of the **Council of Nicaea** in 325 CE, it had become apparent to many who had been debating the issues over the last few decades that the **Arian** party could use many biblical terms and concepts in a radically different sense from what they seemed to mean to the orthodox. The **Son's** birth from the **Father**, for example, was read by **Arians** as a synonym for *"being made."* The Word's issuing from "before the creation" was read as meaning "as the first act of creation." So, at the council of 325, the Nicene fathers were determined to make a statement within the series of clauses that could not be interpreted in a vague sense.

Into the series of descriptions of how the **Son** was born of **God**, as **true God from true God**, and as eternal from eternal and as **Son** from **Father**, they inserted this explanatory clause: **born of the being of the Father**. This affirmation of the **Son's** birth from the very being of **God** was a highly abstract and shorthand way of summing up the generic biblical doctrine of the **Son's** birth from the **Father**. The use of the philosophical concept of *"birth from out of the divine essence"* was meant to emphasize and underscore the potency of other biblical metaphors about the divine **Sonship**, rather than replace or supersede them.

Yeshua was to be confessed as truly **God**, without equivocation, and without mental reservation. To that extent, it has often been regarded as the epitome of the **Nicene** confession of orthodoxy. In its time, it was meant to be a brief synopsis of what the biblical confessions meant in condensed and straightforward form, not a replacement of them.²

In my next post, we continue to dig into the second article of the **Nicene Creed: We Believe in One Lord Jesus Christ**.

² McGuckin, J. A., & Oden, T. C. (Eds.). (2009). **We Believe in One Lord Jesus Christ** (Vol. 2, pp. 53–54).