

Creeds of the Kehillah ~ Part 24

The Nicene Creed ~ Part 10

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.

THROUGH HIM, ALL THINGS WERE MADE

This clause of the **Creed** is predominantly concerned with reiterating the New Testament teaching that speaks of the **Word** as the divine agent of **God's** creation (Jn 1:3; Col 1:16). The vision of the **cosmic Messiah** evokes and undergirds much of the early church's understanding. As it was fundamentally the **Word** who shaped the world as **God's** creative power, so it was appropriate that the **Word** was the only one who could reshape and rescue it from its distress. The maker was thus the same as the redeemer. Early **Logos** theologians of the late second and early third century delighted in seeing the **Logos** as the underlying pattern of being within the cosmos. All intellectual and spiritual understanding, especially, was the gift of the divine **Logos** and constituted the root of the "*image of God*" within humanity.

By the middle of the third century, **Origen** had greatly amplified the systematic nature of **Logos** thought. In his extensive biblical commentaries, he had shown how the whole plan of salvation and redemption was a great story of the **Word's** human involvement with His cosmos. For most of the third-century **Logos** theologians, the **Word** was the divine force as it interacted with the world. In contrast, the **Father** was the divine being contemplated in its more transcendent glory. For these theologians, the **Father's** origination of the creation was entrusted to the **Logos** for its accomplishment. Accordingly, by the beginning of the fourth century, many **Messianic** thinkers were asking questions about the relative status of **Father** and **Logos** in the order of creation. **Arian** theorists, in particular, began to argue that the **Word** was *the firstborn of all creation* (Col 1:15) in the sense that *He was first ranked among the created beings*. **Arian** cosmology tended to see the **Logos** as the first of the angel creations of **God**, who was then used by the **Father** to bring into being the material world order. The **Nicene** Fathers reacted strongly to this teaching, countering that the supreme agent of creation could not Himself be a creature. If he were so defined, the ascription of creative power to the **Word** would be erroneous and blasphemous. **Creation**, in other words, was a wholly and strictly

a divine attribute. **If all things** (by which the **Nicene** Fathers specifically meant all the spiritual orders of angels as well as all the material orders of human and animal creation) were made through the **Word**, it was a clear affirmation, as far as they were concerned, of the **Word's** divine status. The **Nicene's** knew, however, that even the **Arians** who affirmed the creative power of the **Logos** tended to understand it in a way that dissociated creative force from divine status. This was why, throughout the fourth century, much attention was given to the notion of the eternity of the **Logos** and His unique power in initiating the created orders of spiritual and material beings from the vantage point of preexistent union with the **Father**. When they treated creative agency, they were aware that only by qualifying the term with "preexistent" or "eternal" was the anti-**Arian** argument secured.

FOR US

The significant theological controversies of the **Gnostic** era, lasting throughout the second century and into the third, had turned on an idea of the **Godhead** that was overwhelmingly important for the **Hellenistic** religious mentality, namely, that deity must not be sullied by material chaos. Thus, the **Gnostics** could not confess either that the sublime, transcendent **God** could either make this material world or be interested, let alone involved, in its variations. Much of that attitude ran on into the **Arian** movement and influenced its theology unconsciously.

In catholic (universal, not Roman) theology, on the contrary, it fell to the witness of the **Scriptures** to assert with great power that the **God** of revelation was wholly and entirely the **Creator God** who, precisely because He was the creator and fashioner, had a profound and faithful love for His creation and willed its unfolding into beatitude. It was this establishment of the catholic reading of theology over and against the **Gnostics** and **Arians** that can be seen in the later patristic theology, which instinctively explains all the mysteries of theology and the incarnate economy by reverting to the fundamentals: that the mission of the **Son of God** on earth was for no other reason than the same compassion **God** the **Father** had for the cosmos. All the apparent strangeness of the **Yeshua** story, both as a narrative of the descent of the heavenly **Logos** to earth and as a tale of the sufferings of the Messiah while on earth, can be explained, the **Fathers** consistently taught, by the fact that the sublime compassion of **God** motivated all that he did, and that the divine interest and love for creation was in Him to such a degree that humility and mercy became the only trophies of glory that interested him. Such a **Lord** was transcendent in His stooping down and powerfully great in His smallness. The altruism involved in that creedal clause **for our sake and our salvation** is far from being easily comprehended. It is more sublime and transcendent than could ever have been invoked by a **Gnostic** vision of a **Godhead** that was significant by remaining remote and sublimely indifferent. ¹

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

¹ McGuckin, J. A., & Oden, T. C. (Eds.). (2009). **We Believe in One Lord Jesus Christ** (Vol. 2, pp. 79–80).