

THE APOSTLE'S CREED (Trinitarian division)

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth 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 Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

65-01-01-The Apostle's Creed

Trinity, faith, belief, Gnosticism, body, earth, heaven

Jude 1:3

The Creed helps us keep our feet on earth and our hearts in Heaven.

INTRODUCTION: (The Apostle's Creed for the Reading, in unison)

–In Lent of 2008, our pastoral team preached 6 sermons describing the *what* of the Apostle's Creed. This sermon is about the *why*. Back then we expounded the *theology* of the Creed. This message is to explain its *history* and one of its important practical *purposes*: **HOM.idea.**

–The *historical need for the Creed is introduced* very well by v.3 of Jude. *Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. We should be eager to share the Gospel's salvation, but Jude first urged us to guard the Gospel beliefs entrusted to us!*

–The early church had “*to contend for the faith*” against *falsehoods* called *heresies*, which undermined the truth of the Gospel. One of these was *Gnosticism*—a deception as old as the Fall of Man. It was widespread during the early church. The Apostle's Creed became a *baptismal confession* to keep Gnostics out of the church. Before looking at the Creed's *place in baptism*, let's examine the *heresy* it fought against:

I. The False Teaching of Gnosticism

- A. [ISBE]: “Gnosticism was a heresy far more subtle and dangerous than any that had appeared during the early years of the church. It became so widespread that by the beginning of the 3rd cent. A.D. most of the intellectual Christian congregations throughout the Roman empire were to some degree infected by it.” (It had roots in Greek, Persian, and Buddhist *dualism* [the idea of *spirit* vs. *matter*] but became fully developed in the Christian era.)
- B. It basically exalted the *soul* or *spirit*, despised *matter* and the *body*, and called *salvation a liberation of the spiritual from the material* by an enlightenment with special “*knowledge*” [*gnosis*]. **It taught:**
 1. that an *evil being* made *matter* and bound us to *bodies*, and that *Lucifer* helped us gain the *gnosis* that would liberate our spirits.
 2. that *Jesus was only a man* with a “Christ spirit” that left him just before the Cross (His body was *not raised* but *spiritualized*.)
- C. *If we look carefully at Gen 3, we see where this heresy began:*
 1. Satan maligned God for withholding *special knowledge* from us.

2. After feeding on this *gnosis*, we became “open” to an alienation from our naked bodies, which God had pronounced “very good.”
3. On finding Adam “afraid” of his nakedness, God asked, “*Who told you that you were naked?*” (Most avoid what God’s question implies. We even treat the fear of nakedness as a cultural *virtue* today.)

TRANS: This is where history is important. Early church leaders had no fear of nakedness. In fact, they put the Apostle’s Creed right into a *nude baptism* ritual, repudiating the falsehood of Gnosticism [from Ch. 21 of *The Apostolic Traditions* by Hippolytus of Rome in 215 AD: “At the hour in which the cock crows, they shall first pray over the water. When they come to the water, the water shall be pure and flowing, that is, the water of a spring or a flowing body of water. Then they shall take off all their clothes. The children shall be baptized first.... After this, the men will be baptized. Finally, the women, after they have unbound their hair, and removed their jewelry. No one shall take any foreign object with themselves down into the water. // At the time determined for baptism, the bishop shall give thanks over some oil, which he puts in a vessel. It is called the Oil of Thanksgiving. He shall take some more oil and exorcise it. It is called the Oil of Exorcism. A deacon shall hold the Oil of Exorcism and stand on the left. Another deacon shall hold the Oil of Thanksgiving and stand on the right. // When the elder takes hold of each of them who are to receive baptism, he shall tell each of them to renounce, saying, “I renounce you Satan, all your service, and all your works.” After he has said this, he shall anoint each with the Oil of Exorcism, saying, “Let every evil spirit depart from you.” Then, after these things, the bishop passes each of them on nude to the elder who stands at the water. They shall stand in the water naked. A deacon, likewise, will go down with them into the water. When each of them to be baptized has gone down into the water, the one baptizing shall lay hands on each of them, asking, “Do you believe in God the Father Almighty?” And the one being baptized shall answer, “I believe.” He shall then baptize each of them once, laying his hand upon each of their heads. Then he shall ask, “Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and died, and rose on the third day living from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of the Father, the one coming to judge the living and the dead?” When each has answered, “I believe,” he shall baptize a second time. Then he shall ask, “Do you believe in the Holy Spirit and the Holy Church and the resurrection of the flesh?” Then each being baptized shall answer, “I believe.” And thus let him baptize the third time. // Afterward, when they have come up out of the water, they shall be anointed by the elder with the Oil of Thanksgiving, saying, “I anoint you with holy oil in the name of Jesus Christ.” Then, drying themselves, they shall dress and afterwards gather in the church.] **Try visualizing this:** a nude baptism in public, where believers renounced Satan, got anointed for exorcism, were immersed in water 3 times, confessing the

3 Trinitarian sections of the Creed, and finally being anointed again “in the name of Jesus Christ” before putting on clothes. Not quite what we see today, but this ancient form of baptism kept the believers’ **feet on earth and hearts in Heaven** and confronted the false beliefs of Gnosticism [Theologian M. E. Wittmer: “Since Gnosticism was the largest threat to the early church’s survival, the leaders of the church carefully inserted statements into their baptismal creeds to weed out the heretics.] The Creed openly proclaimed....

II. The Truth about the Creator’s Original Plan and Purpose

- A. “I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth” (Gnostics deny this, but true Christian faith is cosmos-friendly, validating the world of matter as well as the *spiritual realm*. God created both.)
- B. “I believe in Jesus Christ ” (one Person, not a man with Christ’s spirit.)
 1. “conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary” (Incarnation is down-to-earth: a nude baby pushed out of a lady’s birth canal.)
 2. “suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried” (By their *knowledge*, Gnostics hoped to flee the pain of a material world, but God “became flesh” to know that bodily pain by experience!)
 3. “he rose again from the dead” (Gnostics cringed at the idea of coming back into a fleshly body. But the eager longing of all creation is restoration, and the believer’s hope is “the resurrection of the body”!)

CONCLUSION:

–God, “Maker of heaven and earth,” called the *world of matter* “good,” and called our naked bodies of flesh “very good.” The spiritual angelic world and the physical animal world are **one creation**, and God intended us humans to be a mixture of both those worlds. That’s why **the Creed helps us keep our feet on earth and our hearts in Heaven**.

–We need this ancient Creed today more than ever. An *occult* and *New Age revival of Gnostic ideas*, extolls the *spiritual realm* as supreme, like a ghost that’s left its body behind. On the other hand, *materialistic atheism* reduces human life to *mere chemical reactions*, like a corpse without its soul. Both these teachings are false. *Ghosts* and *corpses* aren’t *human-friendly*. God created them to stick together. Only sin and death divide them. But the *God of the Creed*, the God of resurrection, plans to put the *body* and the *spirit* back together again! Do you believe that? Then stand, and we’ll confess this ancient, human-friendly Creed in unison.