

Early Creeds

Forerunner of the Apostles' Creed — Old Roman Symbol:

R. Dean Peterson, *A Concise History of Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Toronto, Canada: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1999), 80.

The early creeds developed from a series of questions asked of persons who were being baptized. One of the most important of these is the Apostles' Creed, which legend says was written by the apostles themselves. In reality, it is a variation of a baptismal confession used by the Roman church called the Old Roman Symbol (Creed). Here is an early version:

I believe in God almighty
And in Christ Jesus, his son, our Lord
Who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
Who was crucified under Pontius Pilate and was buried
And the third day rose from the dead
Who ascended into heaven
And sits on the right hand of the Father
Whence he comes to judge the living and the dead
And in the Holy Spirit
The holy church
The remission of sins
The resurrection of the flesh
The life everlasting.

This creed was later expanded into the Apostles' Creed, which is used by the Roman Catholic church at baptisms but was never widely accepted in the Eastern Orthodox church.

A comparison of this creed with the Nicene Creed (p. 86) gives us some idea how controversies led to the development of Christian theology.

Nicene Creed (A.D. 451):

R. Dean Peterson, *A Concise History of Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Toronto, Canada: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1999), 86.

The Nicene Creed is actually not the creed presented at Nicaea in 325 (which was called the Creed of Nicaea). Rather, it is a version of the **Creed of Nicaea** that was updated to deal with ongoing issues. The **Nicene Creed** was given its final form at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, and relates the basic understanding of church doctrine and the Trinity for both Western and Eastern Christianity.

We believe in one God the Father All-sovereign, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, Begotten of the Father before all the ages, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made; who for us men and our salvation came down from the heavens, and was made flesh of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man, and as crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried, and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures, and ascended into the heavens, and sits on the right hand of the Father, and comes again with glory to judge living and dead, of whose kingdom there shall be no end.

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Life-giver, that proceeds from the Father, who with Father and Son is worshipped together and glorified together, who spoke through the prophets.

In one holy catholic and apostolic church:

We acknowledge one baptism unto remission of sins. We look for a resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come.

Athanasian Creed (c. A.D. 500)

<http://www.ccel.org/creeds/athanasian.creed.html>

1. Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith;
2. Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.
3. And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity;
4. Neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance.
5. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit.
6. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty coeternal.
7. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit.
8. The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated.
9. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible.
10. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal.
11. And yet they are not three eternal but one eternal.
12. As also there are not three uncreated nor three incomprehensible, but one uncreated and one incomprehensible.
13. So likewise the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Spirit almighty.
14. And yet they are not three almighties, but one almighty.
15. So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God;
16. And yet they are not three Gods, but one God.
17. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Spirit Lord;
18. And yet they are not three Lords but one Lord.
19. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord;
20. So are we forbidden by the catholic religion to say; There are three Gods or three Lords.
21. The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten.
22. The Son is of the Father alone; not made nor created, but begotten.
23. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.
24. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits.
25. And in this Trinity none is afore or after another; none is greater or less than another.
26. But the whole three persons are coeternal, and coequal.
27. So that in all things, as aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.
28. He therefore that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity.
29. Furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.
30. For the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man.
31. God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and man of substance of His mother, born in the world.
32. Perfect God and perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting.

33. Equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching His manhood.
34. Who, although He is God and man, yet He is not two, but one Christ.
35. One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of that manhood into God.
36. One altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person.
37. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ;
38. Who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead;
39. He ascended into heaven, He sits on the right hand of the Father, God, Almighty;
40. From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
41. At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies;
42. and shall give account of their own works.
43. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting and they that have done evil into everlasting fire.
44. This is the catholic faith, which except a man believe faithfully he cannot be saved.

Most of today's historians agree that the Athanasian Creed originated in Gaul around A.D. **500**. Its theology is closely akin to that found in the writing of Western theologians, especially Ss. Ambrose of Milan, Augustine of Hippo, and Vincent of Lérins. J.N.D. Kelly, a contemporary patristics scholar, believes that St. Vincent of Lérin may have been its author.