**The Apostles’ Creed**

Donald E. Knebel

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Slide 1

1. This is the first in a series of four presentations looking at the history and meaning of important Christian creeds.

2. I will make the first two presentations and John Franke will make the last two.

3. Today, I will talk about the Apostles’ Creed, which one author describes as **“the Creed of creeds.”** Schaff, *Creeds of Chistendom* at 14.

Slide 2

1. According to an early tradition, the Apostles’ Creed came directly from Jesus’ 12 Apostles.

2. Because of that tradition, many congregations recite it every Sunday as a statement of their beliefs.

3. Members of Second Pres often recite the Apostles’ Creed in response to the question, “Christian, what do you believe?”

4. An important nineteenth century author wrote that the Apostles’ Creed **“contains all the fundamental articles of the Christian faith necessary to salvation.”** Schaff, *Creeds of Chistendom* at 14.

Slide 3

1. But a recent author rejected reliance on the Apostles’ Creed as a statement of Christian beliefs**.**

2.He writes: **“The Apostles’ Creed does not perform the requisite functions of a creed: It does not accurately summarize the content of Christian belief, it omits essential Christian doctrines; it does not distinguish heterodoxy from orthodoxy; and it is ambiguous rather than clear. Because of these defects, it cannot unify the hearts of God’s people for, as an ecumenical creed, it allows many who do not hold to the Gospel revealed by God to profess to be Christians.”**

http://www.trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=108

3. So what is the Apostles’ Creed – statements articulated by Jesus’ Apostles and containing all Christian beliefs necessary to salvation or a statement so ambiguous that it can be recited by people who are not Christians?

4. As we will see, it is neither of these.

5. What became known as the Apostles’ Creed includes an item-by-item refutation of beliefs of some early Christians that other Christians at the time saw as heresies.

6. As a result, **“[t]here are many essential elements to [the Christian faith] that have no place in the [Creed].”** McGiffert, *The Apostles’ Creed* at 12.

7. To better understand the origins of what became known as the Apostles’ Creed, we need to look at the beliefs of some early Christians that are now seen as heretics.

Slide 4

1. As one author notes: **“Christianity in the opening decades of the second century was a movement beset with debate and conflict.”** Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* at 43.

2. Elaine Pagels writes: **“[D]iverse forms of Christianity flourished in the early years of the Christian movement. Hundreds of rival teachers all claimed to teach the ‘true doctrine of Christ’ and denounced one another as frauds.”** Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* at 7.

Slide 5

1. By the beginning of the second century, groups of Greek-speaking Christians were located in Antioch, Syria, throughout Asia Minor, and in Alexandria, Egypt.

2. Bishops were located in the cities with the red dots.

3. None of these Christians was, in any sense, under the authority of the Latin-speaking Christians in Rome.

4. However, because Rome was the capital of the Empire, Christians from around the Empire came to Rome, bringing with them their often-conflicting ideas.

Slide 6

1. One of the first to come to Rome was Marcion, a wealthy shipbuilder who had grown up in a church in Sinope, a port city on the southern edge of the Black Sea.

2. Marcion was **“by all counts one of the most significant Christian thinkers and writers of the early centuries.”** Ehrman, *Lost Christianities* at 103.

Slide 7

1. Marcion had become familiar with at least some of the letters of Paul, including the one to the Galatians: **“I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing.”** *Galatians* 2:21.

2. Marcion had read also about the God of Moses in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures: **“I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of their fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.”**  *Exodus* 20:5-6.

3. Marcion did not believe the God of grace described in Paul’s letters could be reconciled with the God of judgement and vengeance described in the Hebrew Scriptures, who required adherence to his commandments or else.

Slide 8

1. In *Antitheses,* Marcion pointed to what he thought were other irreconcilable contradictions between the God described in the Hebrew Scriptures and God the Father described in the *Gospel of Luke,* with which he was also familiar.

2. For example, in *Genesis*, Adam and Eve **“hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.”** *Genesis* 3:8.

3. However, in *Luke*, Jesus even **“knew what [people] were thinking.”** *Luke* 5:22.

4. So Marcion concluded **“[t]here were, in fact, two different Gods: the God of the Jews, who created the world, called Israel to be his people, and gave them his harsh law; and the God of Jesus, who sent Christ into the world to save people from the wrathful vengeance of the Jewish creator God.”** Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus* at 33-34.

5. Marcion denied that God described by Jesus **“had anything to do with making and governing the material universe.”** McGiffert, *The Apostles’ Creed* at 13.

Slide 9

1. Because Marcion believed that the God of Jesus, whom Jesus referred to as “Father,” was not the same as the God described in the Hebrew Scriptures, he denied that Jesus or his God would ever judge human beings.

2. As one author writes: **“Marcion conceived of the Christian God, the God of redemption revealed by Christ, as pure love and mercy, and denied that he or his son, Jesus Christ, would judge anyone.”** McGiffert, *The Apostles’ Creed* at 18.

Slide 10

1. Because of his beliefs, Marcion was asked to leave his church in Sinope.

2. He traveled to Rome in 139 A.D., where he donated 200,000 sesterces to the local church for use in its charitable work.

3. Marcion presented his conclusion that there were two Gods to church leaders in Rome, who rejected Marcion’s views in 144 A.D.

4. The church in Rome excommunicated him and returned his money.

5. Then Marcion did what thousands of people have done when they disagreed with the teachings of their church – he started his own church.

6. This inscription is from a Marcionite church in Syria.

Slide 11

1. Within six years, the number of Marcionites was about equal to the total in all other Christian groups combined and Marcionism became the main form of Christianity practiced in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, where Paul was especially popular.

2. The cities named in blue are those in which the views of Marcion prevailed in the second and third centuries.

Slide 12

1. Marcion did not think Jesus, the Christ, had ever been human.

2. He believed Jesus had simply arrived on earth, without having been born.

3. The views of Marcion that Jesus the Christ had never been born were similar to those of other early Christians known as “Docetists.”

4. Relying on Gospel teachings about the baptism of Jesus, they believed that **“at the time of the baptism, . . . the heavenly Christ came down upon the man Jesus to abide with him during his public ministry, and to leave him again just before his crucifixion.”** McGiffert, *The Apostles’ Creed* at 16.

5. In other words, the Docetists believed that although Jesus was a man, the son of God known as the Christ had never been born and never died.

Slide 13

1. Valentinus was a contemporary of Marcion and a very influential Christian teacher and thinker.

2. Valentinus was born in about 100 A.D. and was educated in Alexandria, Egypt, where he learned of both Christian teachings and the teachings of the Greek philosophers.

3. Like Marcion, Valentinus went to Rome where, as a result of **“his charismatic presence and rhetorical power, he acquired a large following among Christians there.”** Ehrman, *Lost Christianities* at 127.

Slide 14

1. Like Marcion, Valentinus taught that the material world was created by **“an inferior and ignorant deity who erroneously imagined he was God Almighty.”** Ehrman, *Lost Christianities* at 114.

2. The *Gospel of Truth,* named for its first few words, was written either by Valentinus or one of his immediate followers and sets out his basic beliefs.

3. The *Gospel of Truth* claims that the **“anguish and terror”** of the material world came about because of **“ignorance of [the existence of] the Father,”** by which **“error became powerful.”**  *Gospel of Truth* 17 in *The Nag Hammadi Library* at 40.

4. As a result, the key to overcoming this error is through **“truth [which] is immutable, imperturbable, perfect in beauty.”** *Id.*

Slide 15

1. According to the *Gospel of Truth,* Jesus and his death on the cross provide that perfect truth: **“Jesus, the Christ, enlightened those who were in darkness through oblivion. He enlightened them; he showed them the way; and the way is the truth which he taught them. For this reason error grew angry at him, persecuted him, was distressed at him (and) was brought to naught. He was nailed to a tree (and) he became a fruit of the knowledge of the Father.”** *Gospel of Truth* 17 in *The Nag Hammadi Library* at40-41.

2. For Valentinus and his legions of followers, the death of Jesus **“brought salvation by delivering the truth that could set the soul free.”** Ehrman, *Lost Christianities* at 128.

Slide 16

1. The teachings of Valentinus about the meaning of the resurrection of Jesus drew upon Greek ideas of a perfect and immortal soul trapped in a perishable and corrupt body, with death with the correct knowledge allowing the soul to be liberated from the body.

2. The *Gospel of Truth* reflects this idea in its description of Jesus’ death: **“Having stripped himself of the perishable rags, he put on imperishability, which no one can possibly take from him.”** *Gospel of Truth* 20 in *The Nag Hammadi Library* at 42.

3. Valentinus and his followers rejected as impossible the claim that Jesus’ dead flesh had been resurrected.

4. For support of their view that resurrection is a spiritual and not bodily event, they relied on the letters of Paul.

5. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul used the term **spiritual body”** to explain **“how the dead are raised.”** *1 Corinthians* 15:44.

6. Paul also wrote: **“I declare to you brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.”**  *1 Corinthians* 15:50.

Slide 17

1. Valentinus is the most famous and influential of a group of second and third century teachers later called “Gnostics” after the Greek word for knowledge who wrote a large number of documents based on their ideas.

2. Gnostics, not all of whom were Christians, believed **“that somehow the pure light of heaven in the soul of man had become involved in this unpleasant business of matter and had to be redeemed.”** Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* at 51.

3. Gnostics believed if they could obtain the right knowledge, their souls would be liberated from their bodies and their bodies would then be useless.

Slide 18

1. Scholars have long known about Valentinus and the Gnostics from the writings of their second and third century opponents, who tried to destroy Gnostic writings.

2. An extraordinary twentieth century discovery revealed many of the original Gnostic writings, some not seen for more than a thousand years.

3. This is an area near Nag Hammadi, along the Nile River in the middle of Egypt.

4. In 1945, farmers digging here found a jar containing 13 leather bound books containing more than 50 different Gnostic writings*.*

Slide 19

1. A previously unknown Gnostic text found at Nag Hammadi usually called *“A Treatise on the Resurrection”* reflects the Gnostic idea that the soul is captured in a flawed material body, yearning to be set free.

2. Whether Valentinus wrote this short document is not clear, but most scholars believe it reflects his ideas.

3. According to *A Treatise on the Resurrection,* at death **“[w]e are drawn to heaven by [Jesus], like beams by the sun, not being restrained by anything.”** *A Treatise on the Resurrection* 45 in *The Nag Hammadi Library* at 55.

4. Reflecting the Gnostic belief that the body is corrupt and weighs down the soul, *A Treatise of the Resurrection* teachesthat **“the afterbirth of the body is old age, and you exist in corruption. You have absence as a gain. For you will not give up what is better if you depart.”** *Id.*

Slide 20

1. The *Gospel of Judas*, found in Egypt in the 1970s, reflects Gnostic thinking.

2. Jesus tells Judas he will exceed all the disciples because he **“will sacrifice the man that clothes me.”** *The Gospel of Judas* at 43.

3. Jesus asks Judas to betray him so his immortal spirit can be liberated from his worthless material body.

Slide 21

1. In the *Gnostic Apocalypse of Peter,* found at Nag Hammadi, Peter reports talking with a laughing Jesus as nails were driven into **“his fleshy part.”** *Apocalypse of Peter* 81 in *The Nag Hammadi Library* at 377.

2. The laughing came from **“the living Jesus,”** now separated from his dying body. *Id.*

Slide 22

1. The beliefs of Marcion and the Gnostics are part of the story that led to the Apostles’ Creed.

2. The other part of the story lies with the organized church that eventually succeeded in suppressing their views.

3. By the middle of the second century, much of **“Christianity had become an institution headed by a three-rank hierarchy of bishops, priests, and deacons, who understood themselves to be guardians of the only ‘true faith.’”** Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* at xxiii.

4. **“The majority of the churches, among which the church of Rome took a leading role, rejected all other viewpoints as heresy.”** *Id.*

5. The teachings of Marcion and the Gnostics were the primary heresies that the church of Rome undertook to suppress.

6. Because Gnostics taught that salvation comes from having a personal understanding of the divine, Gnosticism **“offer[ed] nothing less than a theological justification for refusing to obey the bishops and the priests!”** Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* at 38.

7. As a result, the church in Rome saw the teachings of the Marcionites and Gnostics as a threat to its survival and began vigorously attacking those beliefs.

8. The writers who attacked the views of Marcionites and Gnostics are now considered “Church Fathers.”

9. The writings of two of them are reflected in what eventually became known as the “Apostles’ Creed.”

Slide 23

1. Irenaeus was the Bishop of Lyon in what is now France.

2. **“Bishop Irenaeus and his followers insisted that there could be only one church, and outside of that church, he declared, ‘there is no salvation.**’” Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* at xxiii.

3. In about 180 A.D. Bishop Irenaeus wrote *Against Heresies,* attacking the views of Marcion and Valentinus and their followers, as well as others he considered heretics.

4. Irenaeus rejected the Gnostic view of the resurrection, saying it would be much easier for God to recreate a human being from his or her once-living bones than to have created Adam from dirt. *Against Heresies* 5, 3, 2in *The Faith of the Early Fathers* at 99.

Slide 24

1. To counter the various beliefs he deemed heresies, Irenaeus wrote: **“For the Church . . . has received from the Apostles and from their disciples the faith in one God, Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth and sea and all that is in them; and in one Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became flesh for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who announced through the prophets the dispensations and the comings, and the birth from a Virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the bodily ascension into heaven of the beloved Jesus Christ our Lord.”** *Against Heresies* 1, 10, 1in *The Faith of the Early Fathers* at 84-85.

2. As you can see, many of the statements in the Apostles’ Creed find support in this writing.

Slide 25

1. Tertullian was born in North Africa in about 155 A.D.

2. He traveled to Rome, where he became a lawyer and converted to Christianity in about 190.

3. For Tertullian, the resurrection promised by Jesus meant that **“what might be buried and rise again [is] this flesh, suffused with blood, built up over bones, interwoven with nerves, entwined with veins.”** *The Flesh of Christ* 5 in *The Faith of the Early Fathers* at 144.

4. Writing in Latin, he rejected the Gnostic claim of the immortality of the soul as an idea that **“even almost all heretics accept.”** Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* at 4.

5. He argued **“that anyone who denies the resurrection of the flesh is a heretic, not a Christian.”** *Id.* at 5.

Slide 26

1. Early in the third century, Tertullian wrote a five-volume treatise against what he considered the heresies of Marcion.

2. In response to Marcion’s claim that the Creator God of the Hebrew Scriptures was not the God of the Gospels, Tertullian wrote: **“Christian truth, however, has distinctly declared, ‘If God be not one, He does not exist.’”** *Against Marcion* 1, 3, 1, in *The Faith of the Early Fathers* at 138.

3. In about 200 A.D., Tertullian wrote what is called in English *The Demurrer Against the Heretics.*

4. It was specifically directed against the teachings of Marcion and Valentinus.

5. *The Demurrer* included the following statements.

a. **“There is only one God, and none other besides Him; the Creator of the world who brought forth all things through His Word, first of all sent forth.”**

b. **“[A]t last He was brought down from the Spirit and Power of the Father into the Virgin Mary, and was made flesh in her womb.”**

c. **“Thenceforth He . . . was crucified, rose again on the third day; and having ascended into heaven, sat at the right of the Father.”**

d. **“[He] is going to come in glory to take the saints into the enjoyment of eternal life and of the heavenly promises, and to condemn the godless to eternal fire, after the resurrection of both classes and the restoration of their flesh.”**

Jergens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers* at 120.

Slide 27

1. By the fourth century, writers began referring to a document in Latin they called the “Old Roman Symbol.”

2. **“[A]ll candidates for baptism in Rome were required to learn it by heart and repeat it in the most solemn manner at the time of their baptism.”** McGiffert, *The Apostles’ Creed* at 11.

3. Because of the similar language in the statements of belief written by Tertullian and Irenaeus to the Old Roman Symbol, some scholars believe both were basing their statements on an earlier version of the Old Roman Symbol.  
  
4. As one author states: **“Irenaeus and Tertullian are our earliest witnesses to the existence of this symbol.”** *Id.* at 7.

5. As a result, one scholar concludes that it **“must have originated between 150 and 175, a time when there was every reason for the formation of some creedal statement to guard against the misconceptions of Christianity which were widely prevalent and were causing serious trouble.”** *Id.* at 9.

6. Of course, it is also possible that what became known as the Old Roman Symbol was instead based on the writings of Irenaeus and Tertullian and was developed in the third century or later.

7. No matter which came first, based on the statements by Tertullian and Irenaeus, most scholars believe the Old Roman Symbol read something like this: **“I believe in God the Father almighty and in Christ Jesus his son, who was born of Mary the Virgin, was crucified under Pontius Pilate and buried, on the third day rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, sitteth on the right hand of the Father, from whence he cometh to judge quick and dead, and in Holy Spirit, resurrection of flesh.”** McGiffert, *The Apostle’s Creed* at 7.

8. You can easily see that the Old Roman Symbol contains the core of what eventually became known as the Apostles’ Creed.

9. It is organized broadly into three parts – the first referring to God the Father, the second to Jesus the son and third to the Holy Spirit.

10. That division is also reflected in the Apostles’ Creed.

11. As we will see, all but one of these statements was directed against a specific teaching of Marcion, Valentinus and others considered heretics by the organized church.

12. So let’s take those statements one at a time and consider them in the context of the beliefs they were intended to repudiate.

Slide 28

1. “I believe in God the Father Almighty.”

2. When early Christians recited this statement, they were affirming belief **“in God the creator and ruler of the universe.”** McGiffert, *The Apostles’ Creed* at 14.

3. They were therefore rejecting the claims of Marcion and the Gnostics that God the Father, as taught by Jesus, was not the ruler of the universe as taught in the Hebrew Scriptures.

4. As Elaine Pagels writes, this statement **“was originally formulated to exclude followers of the heretic Marcion . . . from orthodox churches.”** Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* at 28.

5. Today, Christians see in this statement the claim that God is totally in control of everything that happens in the universe.

6. That is consistent with its original meaning.

7. The Latin in the Old Roman Symbol literally means that God is **“all governing.”** McGiffert, *The Apostles’ Creed* at 13.

Slide 29

1. “I believe in Christ Jesus his son, who was born of Mary the Virgin.”

2. This statement was directed at claims that the son of God had not been born, but had entered the human Jesus as the time of his baptism.

3. As one author writes: **“[This statement is] primarily intended as an assertion of the reality of Christ’s earthly life. He was born of a woman – the Virgin Mary – a birth which Marcion absolutely denied.”** McGiffert, *The Apostles’ Creed* at 16.

4. Christians today, usually not knowing of Marcion and the Gnostics and their views that the Christ had not been born, take this as affirming that Jesus was born of a virgin and see that as an important aspect of Christian belief.

5. But its original intent was simply to assert that Jesus the Christ had been born along with Jesus the man.

6. At the time of the adoption of the Old Roman Symbol, no one doubted that Jesus the man had been born of a virgin and Christians placed no special significance on that fact.

7. The only question was whether the Christ, the son of God, had also been born of a virgin.

8. This statement answered that question with a resounding “yes.”

Slide 30

1. “I believe in Christ Jesus his son, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate and buried, on the third day rose from the dead, ascended into heaven.”

2. Christians today see in this statement a belief that Jesus rose from the dead, probably the most important of all Christian teachings.

3. But this statement was not added only to affirm that the Christ had survived death – all early Christians believed that.

4. The dispute was over whether the divine Christ had suffered and died.

5. As we saw earlier, Marcion and the Gnostics taught that the divine Christ and the man Jesus **“were two distinct beings, so that it could not be said that Christ himself was crucified and buried and rose again.”** McGiffert, *The Apostles’ Creed* at 16.

6. The statement that the divine Christ did die, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven **“repudiates in the most explicit terms the whole docetic conception”** that the divine Christ who went to heaven to be with God could not also die and then rise again. *Id.*

Slide 31

1. “I believe in Christ Jesus his son, who sitteth on the right hand of the Father, from whence he cometh to judge quick and dead.”

2. As we saw earlier, Marcion taught the God the Father as taught by Jesus was not a God of judgment, but a God of love and mercy.

3. In this statement in the Old Roman Symbol that Christ Jesus would judge humanity and do so with the authority of God the Father, **“the Marcionite position is repudiated in the most emphatic way.”** McGiffert, *The Apostles’ Creed* at 18.

4. This statement also rejects the Gnostic idea that the soul leaves the body at death, at which point it was judged and sent to its final reward.

5. This statement therefore supports the orthodox conclusion that with the return of Jesus, both the living and resurrected dead would be judged and sent to their rewards.

6. As Tertullian wrote: **“[Jesus] is going to come in glory to take the saints into the enjoyment of eternal life and of the heavenly promises, and to condemn the godless to eternal fire, after the resurrection of both classes and the restoration of their flesh.”** Jergens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers* at 120.

7. For Christians today, the statement that Jesus will return to judge the quick and the dead raises questions about when the final judgment occurs, many believing that the judgment occurs immediately at death.

8. We will revisit that question at the end of this presentation.

Slide 32

1. “I believe in Holy Spirit.”

2. Unlike all the other statements of belief in the Old Roman Symbol, this one is not directed at heretics, none of whom denied the existence of a Holy Spirit.

3. Instead, because the Symbol was used at baptisms, the statement was probably added to be consistent with *Matthew* 28:19, in which baptisms are to be **“in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”**

4. The Old Roman Symbol, like the Apostles’ Creed, does not define the relationship between God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

5. That relationship had not yet become an issue in the church in Rome.

6. As we will see next week, that became an issue in the Eastern Church, headquartered in Constantinople, that was eventually resolved in the Nicene Creed.

Slide 33

1. What is also missing from Old Roman Symbol is any mention of the baptism of Jesus, one of the key events in his life along with his birth, death and resurrection.

2. That omission is even more noticeable because the Symbol was originally used at baptisms.

3. The Gnostics used the Gospel descriptions of Jesus’ baptism, with the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove and God proclaiming **“You are my son”** (*Mark* 1:10-11), to prove that the divine Christ was not born but entered the human Jesus at his baptism.

4. One author speculates that the baptism of Jesus was omitted from the Old Roman Symbol and all later creeds because its use by the Gnostics and other heretics, resulting **“in the tendency [of the early church] to minimize the baptism.”** McGiffert, *The Apostles’ Creed* at 16.

Slide 34

1. “I believe in resurrection of the flesh.”

2. In this statement, **“the fleshy character of the resurrection was asserted and even emphasized.”** McGiffert, *The Apostles’ Creed* at 21.

3. Consequently, this statement expressly repudiated the teachings of Marcion and the Gnostics that the flesh was corrupt and could not be resurrected.

4. As we saw earlier, Tertullian taught that the resurrection promised by Jesus meant that **“what might be buried and rise again [is] this flesh, suffused with blood, built up over bones, interwoven with nerves, entwined with veins.”** *The Flesh of Christ* 5 in *The Faith of the Early Fathers* at 144.

5. This statement therefore affirmed the literal resurrection of the flesh taught by Tertullian and other leaders in the Roman Church.

Slide 35

1. Some scholars believe the oldest version of the Old Roman Symbol contained a reference to belief in the “Holy Church.” Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom* at 22.

2. If so, **“it may possibly have been intended as a protest against the Gnostics’ denial of the holiness of the church at large and their assertion that only they themselves, an elect few within the church, are really holy and really saved.”** McGiffert, *The Apostles’ Creed* at 22.

3. In any event, it was a statement that teachings of the Church of Rome were essential to Christians.

Slide 36

1. A Greek translation of the Old Roman Symbol adds at the end a belief in “life everlasting.”

2. This was presumably added to make clear that the resurrection of the flesh described in the Latin version of the Old Roman Symbol results in a body that no longer faces death.

3. That was not originally clear, so **“the present creed is far more satisfactory and expresses far more adequately the Christian hope.”** McGiffert, *The Apostles’ Creed* at 33.

Slide 37

1. Another early addition to the original Old Roman Symbol was belief in the forgiveness of sins.

2. The reference to the forgiveness of sins was probably intended to resolve a dispute about whether a person who committed sins after his or her baptism could still be saved.

3. The orthodox position, which eventually became very important to the Roman Catholic Church, was that the Church could always forgive sinners, even those who many have been excommunicated.

4. As a result, the **“holy church”** is **“composed of sinners as well as saints.”** McGiffert, *The Apostles’ Creed* at 22.

5. This rejected the Gnostic position that only the saved are legitimately part of the church and that those who are baptized but fall away are forever barred from salvation.

Slide 38

1. By no later than the eighth century, the Apostles’ Creed existed in the form we know it today.

2. A few provisions had been added to the Old Roman Symbol.

3. The words “maker of heaven and earth” had been added after “God Almighty” to make perfectly clear that the God of Jesus and the God that created the universe were the same, a conclusion only suggested in the original language.

Slide 39

1. The recitation that Jesus “descended into Hades” originally meant only that Jesus the Christ was really dead after his crucifixion and had entered the underground realm of the dead, known to the Greeks as Hades.

2. Jesus himself said he would spend the time between his death and resurrection “**in the heart of the earth.”**  *Matthew* 12:40.

3. Hades originally had no connection with punishment or Jesus rescuing sinners.

4. But because of the later association of Hades with hell and punishment, some versions of the Apostles’ Creed, including that used by Second Pres, eliminates that statement.

Slide 40

1. The recitation of belief in a “catholic” church originated in about the fourth century.

2. It was intended to mean the orthodox church in Rome, now known as the Roman Catholic Church.

3. As a result, **“[t]he common Protestant interpretation of the article in the creed, which makes it refer to the holy church universal, is therefore historically incorrect.”** McGiffert, *The Apostles’ Creed* at 32.

Slide 41

1. The original purpose of the recitation of belief in the **“communion of saints is very obscure.”** McGiffert, *The Apostles’ Creed* at 33.

2. Even its original meaning is not clear, so today’s believers can give it whatever meaning makes the most sense to them.

3. One common assertion is that **“[t]he communion of the saints refers to believers in the past, believers in the present, and believers in the years to come sharing a common salvation in our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who have passed from this world into the presence of Christ at the death of their body have the same salvation as believers who are alive today. Those who will come after us will have the same salvation we have.”** https://www.gotquestions.org/communion-of-the-saints.html

4. It is therefore common on All Saints Day, now celebrated on November 1, to recite the names of deceased members of the congregation.

Slide 42

1. By the fifth century, the origins and purpose of the Old Roman Symbol had been forgotten and its modified version became known as the Apostles’ Creed.

2. Stories grew up that the words had been chosen by Jesus’ 12 Apostles as they gathered together after he had ascended to heaven.

3. To prove its origins with the 12 Apostles, the Church pointed to the twelve clauses, made short so they could be remembered easily.

4. Because it was thought to have originated with the Apostles, the Apostles’ Creed became known as a complete statement of Christian belief, in which not single word could be added or subtracted.\

Slide 43

1. By the Middle Ages, the story of the origins of the Apostles’ Creed had become even more dramatic.

2. Each of the 12 clauses had been contributed by one of the Apostles, not including Judas.

3. This story was not finally rejected by the Catholic Church until the nineteenth century, when an important author wrote: **“[T]he apostolic origin . . . has been so clearly discredited . . . that it ought never to be asserted seriously again.”** Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom* at 23.

Slide 44

1. Despite the now universally accepted view that the Apostles’ Creed did not originate with the Apostles, it still plays a unique role as a statement of Christian beliefs.

2. But today’s interpretations are not always consistent with the original intent of the language in the Old Roman Symbol that found its way into the Apostles’ Creed.

3. For example, many Christians today probably don’t take literally the idea of a resurrection of the flesh.

4. According to one survey, at least 80 percent of all Christians today say they believe that when they die their souls will leave their earthly bodies and travel instantly to heaven, where they will join the souls of other Christians and live forever in the presence of God.

5. So, when most Christians recite the claim of the resurrection of the body in the Apostles’ Creed, they probably have in mind Paul’s description of the resurrection in terms of a **“spiritual body”** and his declaration “**that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God**.” *1 Corinthians* 15:44, 50.

6. But the Old Roman Symbol was specifically directed against these teachings of Paul, which had been relied upon by the Gnostics to reject the views of a literal resurrection of the body.

7. As one author notes: **“The church at large was not satisfied with Paul’s doctrine of a spiritual body, which the Marcionites and many of the Gnostics made their own, but insisted upon the resurrection of this very flesh, with all of its particles intact and unchanged, in order to prepare the believer for the earthly millennial kingdom which Christ was to return and establish.”** McGiffert, *The Apostles’ Creed* at 21.

8. As a result, the statement about resurrection of the flesh **“had a distinctly . . . anti-Pauline meaning.”** *Id.* at 21.

9. But many Christians today interpret the Apostles’ Creed in light of Paul’s teachings, which the language was originally intended to reject.

Slide 45

1. What should Christians today make of the fact that their interpretation of the language of the Apostles’ Creed may differ significantly from its original intent in the Old Roman Symbol from which it was derived?

2. One author essentially says, “not to worry”: **“[W]hile we of to-day can repeat parts of [the Apostles’ Creed], probably not one of us can repeat the whole of it in the sense it was originally intended. The interpretation of creeds inevitably changes with time and the changed interpretation must be recognized as legitimate, or the historic creeds must be repudiated altogether.”** McGiffert, *The Apostles’ Creed* at 35.

Slide 46

1. Next week we will look at the history of the Nicene Creed and the related Creed of Chalcedon.

2. At least for a time, the Nicene Creed supplanted the use of the Apostles’ Creed, particularly in the Greek Church, which ultimately split from the Church in Rome over a single word in the Nicene Creed.

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