

Gospel and Creed – Receiving and Affirming the Proto-Orthodox Gospel in the Nicene Creed

K. Walley, Jan 2013

Intro: Myth Busting and Challenging One Stream of Scholarly Teaching in the Late 20th Century

- What Dan Brown doesn't know
Or choose to forget....(He suggests a secular political process, a late development)
Politics of 4th century didn't simply invent Creeds and Canon of Scripture – Not a Late Development ...There is a long, well-documented historical flow from the Apostles
- Blinders of Certain Contemporary Scholarship
fostered by a school of scholarship that focuses on the wide range of heterodox theologians and writings – a diversity of opinion Ex/Conspiracy Theories and Opinion
what receives far less attention in recent years has been the continuity of message across a variety of communities.
- Rather than a group of men sitting around in 325 and inventing something new we call the creed, I want to show you where they got the words and phrases and ideas, where the raw material for the creed came from, it had been around for centuries and they merely edited it down into one clear statement of faith.

I. ProtoOrthox Communities

(See Particularly Ted Campbell, *The Gospel in Christian Traditions*, Oxford University Press, 2009)

- Proto-Orthodox – before could have orthodox theology, before NT or Creed
- Communities vs. Individual Theological writings
- Oral Tradition and pre-New Testament Sources
Q, hymns, and gospel formula – the community controls the story, you
Can embellish but you can't change the central thrust of the story
Safeguards of Ancient Oral Tradition:
 1. Assembled Witnesses in Group to Verify the Telling is Correct
 2. Solemn introduction
 3. Receiving and passing on – exhorted to hold fast to the teaching
 4. Blessings and Curses
- New Testament Writings Presuppose a common Gospel Understanding:
I Corinthians 15:1,11, Gal 1:6-7 and Jude 3

II. What Was the Good News – the Core Gospel Message?

(See Harry C. Poe, *The Gospel and Its Meaning*, Zondervan 1996
and Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel*, Zondervan 2011)

- Early Evidence –
(1) C.H. Dodd studies on Kerygma and the sermons in Acts – Different yet Consistent Apostolic Gospel:
 1. The age of fulfillment has dawned. "The apostles, then, declare that the Messianic age has dawned."
 2. The fulfillment came through the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus.
 3. Jesus by virtue of His resurrection has been exalted to God's right hand.
 4. The Holy Spirit in the Church is the sign of Christ's present power and glory.
 5. The Messianic Age will shortly reach its consummation in the return of Christ.
 6. An appeal to repent accepting the offer of forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit.¹

¹ C.H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (Grand Rapids: Baker, reprinting 1980, first published in 1936), 21-23.

(2) Poe from Several Early Sources Finds this as the core Gospel Message:

1. The Creator God. Salvation came as a work of the Creator who has the right to all creation and who exercises authority over all creation.
2. The fulfillment. Jesus came to fulfill Scripture rather than to abolish the faith of Israel, and stands in continuity with all God had spoken by the prophets as the culmination point of Israel's relations with the God of Creation.
3. Son of God/ Son of David. Jesus stood uniquely related to God and humanity, which suited him alone to be the Savior, as demonstrated by his teaching and demonstrations of power.
4. Death for sins. The death of Christ came as the plan of God for salvation from sin, rather than as an unfortunate mishap.
5. Resurrection. God raised Christ from the dead as a demonstration of his Lordship and victory over sin and death, revealing his power to save.
6. Exaltation. Christ reigns at the right hand of God, providing immediate access to God for all who abide in him.
7. Gift of the Holy Spirit. Christ sends the Holy Spirit to live within all who have faith in him.
8. Return for judgment. Christ will return to bring this age to an end, judge the nations, and complete redemption.
9. Response. The good news always expected the decisive response of repentance and faith.²

(3) I Corinthians 15 nearly no scholar doubts Paul in the 50's
 Received and Passed on...as v. 11 witnesses
 And according to the Scriptures
 This is of First Importance

(4) Philippians 2 – Early Christian Hymn

(5) New Testament Books – we have manuscripts from early 100's which are copies
 And by 150 Matthew, Mark, Luke and John bound together, communities around
 Apostles, John in Ephesus, Peter/Mark in Rome, Paul

- Church Fathers – (See Cambell p. 29f)

(1) Ignatius 110's CE letter to the church in Philadelphia

"But the gospel possesses something distinctive, namely, the coming of the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, his suffering, and the resurrection. For the beloved prophets preached in anticipation of him, but the gospel is the imperishable finished work."

Also in 110's his letter to the Smyrnaeans

"[Jesus Christ] is truly of the family of David with respect to the divine will and power, truly born of a virgin, baptized by John in order that all righteousness might be fulfilled by him, truly nailed in the flesh for us under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch (from its fruit we derive our existence, that is, from the divinely blessed suffering), in order that he might raise a banner for the ages through his resurrection for his saints and faithful people, whether among Jews or among Gentiles, in the one body of his church."

(2) Appears consistently, see I Clement, other letters of Ignatius to Ephesians, Magnesians, Trallians, Romans and Smyrnaeans, the letter of Polycarp to the Philippians and letter of Barnabus.

² Poe, *Gospel and Its Meaning*, 45-6.

(3) Ireneus 180's CE in *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*

"We have received a baptism for the remission of sins in the name of God the Father and in the name of Jesus Christ the Son of God, who was incarnate, and died and was raised again and in the Holy Spirit of God."

Also in *Against Heresies*

"The church, indeed, through dissemination throughout the world, even to the ends of the earth, received from the apostles and their disciples the faith in one God, the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth and the seas and all things that are in them; and in the one Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who through the prophets preached the economies, the coming, the birth from a virgin, the passion, the resurrection from the dead, and the bodily ascension into heaven of the beloved Son, Christ Jesus our Lord, and his coming from heaven in the glory of the Father to recapitulate all things..."

(4) Tertullian early after 200 CE Writing against the heretic Praxeas

"In fact, we always, and now all the more so, believe, as instructed by the Paraclete, who leads into all truth, that there is in fact one God, but that under the dispensation which we call 'economy' there is also a Son of this one God, his own Word, who proceeded from him, through whom all things were made, and without whom nothing was made: [We believe that] this One was sent by the Father into the Virgin and was born from her, man and God, son of man and son of God, and was named Jesus Christ. [We believe that] he suffered, that he died and was buried, according to the Scriptures and was resurrected by the Father ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father, and will come to judge the living and the dead. Who from there sent out, in keeping with his promise, the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, from the Father, the Sanctifier of the faith of those who believe in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. That this rule has come down from the beginning of the Gospel, even before all former heretics, not to speak of Praxeas of yesterday, will be proved as well by the comparative lateness of all heretics as the very novelty of Praxeas of yesterday."

(5) Hypoletus from 250 - early 300's In *Apostolic Traditions*

(a similar statement is found in the writings of Origen in early 200's)

From him we get the Sursum Corda and the Trinitarian form we use of the Baptismal Covenant

- The Gospel in History – Areas of Emphasis -- Several have noticed as Poe states:
"The different elements of the gospel speak to different levels of spiritual concern in different cultures at different times. Sometimes the death of Christ speaks most meaningfully to a people, while at other times the resurrection of Christ speaks more powerfully." (page 9)

The gospel has always had differing areas of emphasis but a consistent core. The Nicene Creed has lasted 1600 years because of its strong emphasis on Proto-Orthodox Gospel – the pure kernel of Gospel message. It encapsulates the oral and written tradition of the belief of the Apostolic Church and the subsequent proto-orthodox communities.

- The Creed – Clearly Represents this proto-orthodox gospel – general and Trinitarian with emphasis on Christ as God and fully human, while at the same time God is three persons, yet One and the Same. – God created, not a sub-being, seen and unseen, spirit and material realms against gnostic notions, Virgin Birth emphasis Divinity as does God from God, Light from Light....Begotten Eternally, from before time (can't join the Arius Follower's Slogan: There was a time when he was not (referring to Christ)) Yet Jesus was a man, born, suffered, died. Didn't just seem to be a real human. Worship due Holy Spirit as well.

III. **Why it matters:**

Gospel and Creed is very general – as RSW says nothing about love -- Why does this all matter?

1. **Ideas have consequences** -- who we believe God to be affects how we live – prayer, worship of Jesus Christ, reasons for hope and so on...
2. **Gateway into larger life** – seeking Christ reality learning of and from Him, learning to relate to Him. Implications for salvation – for our sins, to triumph over death, to assure us particularly through the Holy Spirit of His Presence in the World with us here and now.
3. **Ecumenism** – suggesting here an idea that there is a core common ground for Christians, some in our day assert never was and never will be – in which case we are doomed to division. (In the past controversies and disputes over doctrine in the church have been settled on the basis of a strong confidence in common basic Christian teachings See Campbell p. 20)
4. **Assurance** – that this is not some political invention of the 4th century but the climax of a continuous oral and written tradition that documents show dates back to the time of the Apostles themselves.