

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Ancient Christian Doctrine is a five-volume collection of doctrinal definitions organized around the key phrases of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (commonly called simply the Nicene Creed) as viewed by the foremost ancient Christian writers. The patristic period (c. A.D. 95-750) extends from Clement of Rome to John of Damascus. Geographically it stretches from Ethiopia to the Alps and from Spain to the Indus Valley. Classic Christian exegesis and doctrinal definition took decisive shape in this period. From the end of the New Testament to the Venerable Bede, biblical texts were intensely studied and their doctrine debated and defined.

In this series we are mining the prized ore of these early Christian intellectual labors. Here Christianity's rich doctrinal treasures are gathered, examined and organized as a commentary on the most respected doctrinal confession of the early church. The ancient Nicene text is the most convenient and reliable basis for holding together the whole fabric of early Christian teaching. Under each creedal phrase we present the most crucial doctrinal passages of key consensual interpreters of the early Christian centuries. A wide range of major issues of early Christian theology may be set forth as a phrase-by-phrase commentary on the Nicene Creed (The Creed of Nicaea, A.D. 325, The Constantinopolitan Creed of the 150 Fathers, 381).

The importance of the Creed and our purposes for the series can set forth under nine headings:

- explaining why early Christian teaching (*catechesis*) was so firmly linked with baptism
- recalling the terrible risks of saying "credo" under violent conditions of *persecution* during the perilous times when the creedal affirmations were being tested and refined
- showing why the Nicene Creed remains the most *authoritative* common confession of worldwide Christianity
- setting forth the *triune* order of all basic Christian teaching
- elucidating the basic *unity* of Christian teaching of one Lord, one faith, one baptism during this period of exponential growth
- showing how the *new* ecumenism is today being nourished and renewed by the *ancient* ecumenical consensus
- accounting for the widespread *readiness* of ordinary believers today to be reintroduced to basic Christian teaching
- clarifying the criteria for editorial *selection* and dynamic equivalency translation
- showing how nonprofessional readers might best *benefit* from this ancient wisdom

The Earliest Prebaptismal Teaching

The earliest summaries of Christian theology were lectures to prepare people for baptism. Our organization of key themes of Christian teaching will depend heavily on the thought sequence of those most influential early summaries by Cyril of Jerusalem (*Catechetical Lectures*), Gregory of Nyssa (*The Great Catechism*), John Chrysostom (*Baptismal Instructions*), Rufinus (*Commentary on the Apostles' Creed*) and Augustine (*Catechizing of the Uninstructed* and *On Faith and the Creed*).

This series brings together the earliest postbiblical, classic arguments about what each of these confessed points meant and how they are rightly grounded in sacred Scripture. It serves as a practical teaching guide to the earliest layers of classic Christian doctrine.

The roots of the Nicene Creed were scriptural summaries that were used in the earliest baptismal confessions. The Fathers of Nicaea and Constantinople said: This is what we have always believed! This is the baptism into which we were baptized.

The orderly teaching of early Christian doctrine arose out of a concrete and practical need: instructing those seeking Christian baptism in the basics of Christian doctrine. This teaching sought to express the commonly shared understanding of the unified meaning of the whole gist of Scripture. The purpose of the catechist was to draw the whole course of Christian teaching into a clear and simple statement. The early creeds offered a convenient way of putting together the entire narrative meaning of Old and New Testament Scripture into a simple, easily memorized affirmation of faith.

When Cyril of Jerusalem taught candidates the meaning of their baptism, he used the creed then commonly used in Jerusalem (A.D. 350) to organize and hold the lectures together. The teacher was expected to clarify and explain each phrase or article of the rule of faith and to defend it against false interpretations contrary to apostolic teaching.

This is why Christians all over the world still appeal to the early creeds, and especially to the most ecumenical of all ancient creeds, the Nicene Creed, as the most reliable confession of that one faith confessed throughout the world. Today we employ this same means to bring together the best thinking of early Christian teachers.

When Saying *Credo* Meant Life or Death

The Creed begins with a decisive Latin word: *credo*, “I believe” (or in the Greek, *pisteuomen*, “we believe”). Second and third century Christians who first said *credo* did not do so thoughtlessly. At times they uttered this word at the risk of their lives under threat of possible persecution, torture and death. Those prepared to suffer for and sacrifice their lives for their belief in God’s good news are worthy of our careful attention.

To say *credo* in this way was to speak from the heart in direct defiance of the powers that be, precisely when those powers required direct denial of Christian faith. To say “I believe” is to reveal who one most deeply *is*, to confess one’s essential belief, to state openly the truth that makes life worth living despite perilous consequences. One who says *credo* without willingness

to suffer and, if necessary, die for the faith has not genuinely said *credo* in its deepest Christian sense as baptism: to die and rise again (Rom 6).

During times of persecution the baptismal confession typically was memorized, not only because it was unsafe to write it down, but also because written texts made other innocent people more susceptible to charges under civil authorities. More reliable was the quiet tradition faithfully passed on verbally through the *episkopoi* from the apostles. The bishops' primary task was to maintain accurate apostolic teaching without addition or subtraction. They, and the elders under their guidance, were charged with carefully guarding and defending the apostolic rule of faith for the eternal destiny and spiritual benefit of believers.

Christians have a right and a responsibility to know the meaning of their baptism. The purpose of this series is to clarify the ancient ecumenical faith into which Christians of all times and places are baptized. It is expected that all who are faithfully baptized will accurately understand what it means to believe in God the Father Almighty, in God the Son, and in God the Spirit.

Why Nicaea?

The Nicene Creed is the most authoritative common confession of worldwide Christianity. Hence this ancient confession serves as the most fitting framework for this whole series. It is commonly shared by very different cultures and languages: Christians of Coptic and Syriac and Armenian and Chinese and Roman and Greek language traditions, as well as modern languages. Like all ancient baptismal confessions, it is presented in three phases or articles corresponding with the three Persons of the one God attested in Scripture.

The first article confesses trust in "God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen." Explaining the scriptural grounding of this affirmation is the subject of this first volume of the series.

It is followed by confession of God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, in the overarching order in which God's self-disclosure unfolds in Scripture: *The Father sends the Son whose incarnate Word is made real in believers by the Spirit*. The whole revelation of God is summed up and brought into a unified biblical confession by this triune affirmation rightly understood. All other early ecumenical confessions, such as the Apostles' Creed and the Athanasian Creed (*Quicumque vult*) were organized in the same threefold way, to teach inquirers the significance of baptism in the name of God the Father, Son and Spirit.

There are two centuries of confessional prototypes before Nicaea. Their christological core is found in Philippians 2:6-11 which confesses one "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him."

This same core confession appears repeatedly in the rule of faith we find in Ignatius (A.D. 107), the *Epistula Apostolorum* (c. 150), Justin Martyr (c. 165), the Presbyters of Smyrna (c. 180), *Der Balyzeh Papyrus* (c. 200), Tertullian (c. 200) and Hippolytus (c. 215), all in use and

scrupulously committed to memory more than a century before Nicaea (325). All early creedal prototypes follow this same sequence of confession. Scripture itself provides the structural basis for the organization of baptismal teaching, and of this series.

As early as about 190, Irenaeus of Lyons summarized the faith of Christians in this memorable way, which anticipates the trajectory of this series: “The Church, though dispersed throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles, and their disciples, this faith: [She believes] in one God,

- the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and
- in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and
- in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God.”

This core outline of Christian teaching had already appeared prototypically in Matthew 28:19-20 in the formula for baptism, where the resurrected Lord concluded his earthly teaching with this summary charge to all subsequent believers: “Go therefore and *make disciples* of all nations, *baptizing* them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching* them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (emphasis added). In this way, Jesus forever linked three crucial actions: baptizing and teaching and discipling. In all subsequent periods of Christian history these have remained intimately interwoven. Implicitly included in the command to baptize is the charge to teach its significance and to make disciples of all nations.

Today’s Christian teaching still stems from early baptismal teaching. Christian theology came into being to explain Christian baptism. It was because the Creed first had a *baptismal* teaching function that it later came to have a *doctrinal* teaching function—for defense of the faith, for liturgical life, for scholastic and systematic theology, and for the training of persons charged with teaching the faith.

This series then is not a systematic theology by typical modern standards, but rather a compilation of authoritative patristic texts on the Nicene Creed. These texts form much of the doctrinal basis of virtually all subsequent systematic theology.

There remains a great deal of room for voluntary private opinion among believing Christians, provided those opinions are not blatantly opposed to the core confession of faith commonly held by all believers. Nothing is required of any believer other than that which is revealed by God through Scripture as necessary for salvation, as it has been affirmed generation after generation by common ecumenical consent. Since faith is voluntarily chosen, there can be no coercion in any genuine article of faith.

The Right Order of Classic Christian Teaching

Here is the short outline of the five volumes of Ancient Christian Doctrine:

Volume One: *We Believe in One God*—the knowledge of God the Father—the triune God

revealed in creation, providence and human history (Gerald L. Bray, The Latimer Trust and Samford University).

Volume Two: *We Believe in One Lord Jesus Christ*—the coming of God the Son—the incarnate God, one person in two natures, truly God, truly human (John Anthony McGuckin, Union Theological Seminary and Columbia University).

Volume Three: *We Believe in the Crucified and Risen Lord*—the revelation of divine love—the reconciling work of Jesus Christ, his earthly ministry, death and resurrection (Mark J. Edwards, University of Oxford)

Volume Four: *We Believe in the Holy Spirit*—the ministry of God the Spirit—the person and work of the Holy Spirit in justification, salvation and the holy life (Joel C. Elowsky, Drew University)

Volume Five: *We Believe in One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church*—the Triune God in the church and in history—the glory of God in the church and the fulfillment of history (Angelo Di Berardino, Augustinian Patristic Institute of Rome)

These topics of Christian teaching are not to be taken up in a haphazard, nonsequential way: “The teaching of all doctrine has a certain order, and there are some things which must be delivered first, others in the second place, and others in the third, and so all in their order; and if these things be delivered in their order, they become plain,” for “he who enters rightly upon the road, will observe the second place in due order, and from the second will more easily find the third” (*Recognitions of Clement* 3.34). The best way to “enter the road” is by dealing first with the confession of “one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.”

This series allows readers to crawl through the phrases of the Creed, as John McGuckin says, “in slow motion,” to carefully show their biblical grounding, to challenge distortions of scriptural teaching, and to provide a plausible cohesion for the worshiping life of the baptized community. It offers readers direct access to the patristic teachers in their own straightforward language. It brings these great historic mentors into direct contact with the minds of believers today. Let all believers decide for themselves whether these mentors are telling the truth, but do not prevent them from speaking.

In these five volumes we are condensing their most durable thoughts and reasons on the core phrases of the ancient Creed. This is not just a casual exercise for theological voyeurs or for dilettantes. Rather it is a window into the earliest Christian reflection on the most decisive points of saving faith. The triune God, the saving work of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit in church and ministry are not optional but essential points of classic teaching commonly assumed among these living communities of Christian worship stretching out into vastly different cultures and centuries.

These arguments demand some intellectual sweat to grasp. They are worth the effort. What is worth doing is worth doing well, and what is consummately worth doing is worth doing incomparably well. So do not be afraid to think. With these mentors you are invited to think both on a cosmic scale and at the most personal and inward level.

How the Creed Teaches the Heart of Faith

The Creed offers the most reliable way to learn by heart the heart of faith. In teaching the catechetical creed used in Jerusalem in A.D. 350, Cyril of Jerusalem explained that believers are helped by the concise confession to keep closely to the center of faith as delivered by the apostles,

which has been built up strongly out of all the Scriptures. For since all cannot read the Scriptures, some being hindered from the knowledge of them by lack of learning, and others because they lack leisure to study, in order that the soul should not be starved in ignorance, the church has condensed the whole teaching of the faith in a few lines. This summary I wish you both to commit to memory when I recite it, and to rehearse it with all diligence among yourselves, not writing it out on paper, but engraving it by the memory upon your heart, taking care while you rehearse it that no catechumen may happen to overhear the things which have been delivered to you. I wish you also to keep this as a provision through the whole course of your life, and beside this to receive no alternative teaching, even if we ourselves should change and contradict our present teaching. (*Catechetical Lectures* 5.12)

Memorize it for life. It is not too hard for anyone to grasp, if properly taught.

The Creed, says Rufinus, serves as a “short word” summarizing the whole of biblical faith, providing “standard teaching to converts,” “a badge for distinguishing” those who preach Christ according to apostolic rule, constructed “out of living stones and pearls supplied by the Lord” (*Commentary on the Apostles’ Creed*). Rufinus (345-410) was among the earliest of many classic commentators on the rule of faith. He shared the common assumption that the Holy Spirit had superintended its transmission in order that it “contain nothing ambiguous, obscure or inconsistent.” Poignantly, he explained, “The reason why the Creed is not written down on paper or parchment, but is retained in the believers’ hearts, is to ensure that it has been learned from the tradition handed down from the Apostles, and not from written texts, which occasionally fall into the hands of unbelievers.” Rufinus based his commentary on the personally remembered “text to which I pledged myself when I was baptized in the church of Aquileia.”

In vastly different cultural settings around the world today, ordinary lay readers are asking how they might once again grasp the vital core of authentic baptismal teaching under the direct instruction of the greatest minds of the ancient church. This five-volume collection is a classic review of the most basic Christian arguments on those doctrines that have always been regarded as necessary for faithful baptism and discipleship.

Long before the early baptismal confessions became formal tests of faith, they were jubilant expressions of baptismal praise. They only became tests of faith as they became tested by false teaching or challenged by heresy. So first came doxology, the language of praise glorifying God, and only gradually in due time the *doxa* (praise) became *orthodoxa* (right praise, correct teaching). Later the *catechesis* (basic baptismal education) would be refined and extended into full scale theological reflection as an academic discipline.

This is why we now appeal to the Creed as the basis of our inquiry into the cohesion of early Christian teaching. It is a gathering up of the whole gist of scriptural teaching. The Creed is at

heart a confession of the cumulative meaning of the prayers, liturgy and common acts of confession of the one, whole, united, embodied Christian community of all times and places. The Creed expresses the common sense of the faithful about what the scriptural revelation of God narrates and proclaims. It does so in a short form that seekers and youthful initiates may understand, and which all believers everywhere may confidently confirm as reliable biblical teaching.

As new ideas were tested, they were tested by this rule of baptismal faith. Arguments from Scripture were proposed both by heretics and orthodox and compared with the received consensus of the faithful. All voices appealed to canonical Scripture—some received consensually, others not. That is what the Nicene Creed symbolizes for the whole of ecumenical Christianity: It is the decisive *symbol* of faith in the classic sense that it *draws together* (*syn+ballō*) the essential elements of faith. This is why the study of classic Christian teaching was often called symbolics before it was called systematic theology.

Understandably, controversies arose over what should or should not be included in or implied from the rule of faith, the baptismal confession. Differences were reconciled by a collective attempt (through regional and general councils) to discern the common meaning of the whole of Scripture as viewed by the worldwide confessing community. These debates did not ask primarily about what the surrounding culture was likely to find congenial in Christian truth, but rather about how the Scriptures teach the revealed truth to all cultures in all languages and social contexts. Hence there is a catholic or universal claim embedded in each phrase of the Creed.

The consensus proved durable. It has survived for seventeen centuries through awesome challenges. The fact that we return to it as our centerpiece for these five volumes is proof that it has survived. It has made it easy to spot what is historically agreed as central for baptismal faith, as opposed to forms of speculation that by contrast are classified as “other than” (*haeresis*, heresy) the venerable multicultural consensus. The consensual orthodox faith definitions outlived the speculative attempts to “improve” upon them, such as those of Gnosticism and Arianism. The earliest documents of the New Testament (such as the Thessalonian and Corinthian letters) contain sharp distinctions between true and false belief and assume that true belief must be defended against false claims of disbelief.

This consensus set modest boundaries for the shared confession of the worldwide faithful. Many ideas were able to be freely examined within these boundaries. Many were permitted; some were considered out of bounds. When advocates of these nonconsensual views turned up purported texts by alleged apostles, they were judged and rejected in relation to the firm accord that had emerged confidently from the earliest communities of faith as expressed in their baptismal teaching. These became the rule of faith (*regula fidei*) for the worshiping community, the trustworthy rule by which the boundaries of scriptural teaching could be marked out.

The gradual clarification of the New Testament canon (list of books to be read in church) was needed as a defense against other floating documents that were contrary to the liturgy and hymns and catechetics stemming from the apostolic tradition. It closed the door against later documents falsely claiming apostolic authorship. It sharply marked those documents most

widely acknowledged as fit always and everywhere for reading in Christian worship and fully trustable as doctrine. The four Gospels and the letters of Paul were from the outset widely agreed upon apostolic texts. All others were carefully examined as to apostolic claims. As this list of books became clearly defined, the basis became clearer upon which both consensual (orthodox) and nonconsensual (heretical) readings of the written Word could be assessed. Out of this canonical concord flowed continuing productions of liturgical expression, scriptural commentary, early theological treatises and moral discourse.

When each discrete Scripture text is clarified in relation to other texts, and all together by the whole flow and gist of the history of revelation, dogma becomes then historically and textually grounded. So we find in patristic comments on a given creedal phrase many other scriptural subtexts interwoven in order to illumine that text. These multiple references express the principle of thinking by analogy of faith—comparing text with text. The premise is that Scripture is explained by Scripture (*scripturam ex scriptura explicandam esse*).

Today we live amid a flurry of well-publicized efforts to revive ancient heresies. Some are desperate attempts to give even the weirdest ideas some faint aroma of legitimacy: DaVinci decoding, the grail as bloodline, the sexual relations of the Messiah, the insertion of ideological claims into Messianic interpretation, the new Gnostic elitism. Doting press attention has been given to these highly speculative forms of advocacy that promote long rejected documents and ideas. It has become a profitable media game to defend the poor heretics against the oppressive winners and elitists who wrote the rules of orthodoxy. The truth is the opposite: the most extreme elitism of all false claimants to Christian truth came from the Gnostics who were contemptuous of the naive consensus of uninformed believers, and who were never even interested in gaining the hearts of ordinary believers. Yet ordinary believers then and now could easily recognize that these later speculations did not match the authenticity, beauty and clarity of the original apostolic witnesses.

The New Ecumenism Nourished by the Old

To the extent that Christians today ignore the ancient rule of faith, they remain all the more vulnerable to these distortions. These ancient texts bring us back to the true meaning of ecumenism, following a century of often dubious modern ecumenical experimentation. They remind us of what believers universally believe and have believed from the beginning about the central affirmations of faith. This ancient faith is the rightful patrimony of all global Christians today, whether Protestant, Orthodox, Catholic or charismatic. Its wholeness rings true because it radiates the light of the Spirit and the warmth of divine grace.

The central task of the emerging new ecumenism is to listen clearly once again to the ancient consensus of apostolic faith throughout the world. What is being rediscovered is the time-tested faith of the one holy catholic apostolic community of worship in plain language without dying the death of a thousand qualifications.

There is a dawning awareness among Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox laity that vital ecu-

menical orthodox teaching stands in urgent need of deep grounding in its most consensual classic Christian sources. These ancient texts were written centuries before the plague of buzzwords that have so invaded the worshipping communities of our time. Today's communities of prayer, praise and service are steadily drawn toward these earliest Christian ecumenical sources for spiritual formation.

This collection itself reflects a lively ecumenical happening. Under this classic textual umbrella, it brings together Christians who have long distanced themselves from each other by competing historical memories. These texts welcome the gathering together of traditional Catholics with Protestant evangelicals and Eastern Orthodox with Pentecostals. How could it be so that such varied Christian traditions are able to find common inspiration in these classic sources? Why are these texts and studies so intrinsically ecumenical, so broadly *catholic* in their cultural range? Because all of these disparate modern communities have an equal right to appeal to the earliest apostolic traditions of teaching. All of these communions can, without a sacrifice of intellect, draw humbly together to listen to the same texts common to them all: Scripture and the earliest interpreters of Scripture. These classic texts have decisively shaped every contour of the subsequent history of doctrine in global Christianity.

Hence Protestants are recognizing the scriptural integrity of the pre-Lutheran fathers, while charismatics are being reawakened by the same Spirit who moved the ancient witnesses. Roman Catholics are once again beholding and owning their pre-Vatican II sources, while Orthodox are rejoicing in gracious awareness of all these unexpected recognitions. Cyril is not owned by Alexandria nor Leo by Rome. All believers have a right to the most faithful consensual teachers of God's revelation. These influential minds are the common possession of the whole church: African, Asian and European.

The international team of editors, translators and consultants for this series reflect the wide breadth of these ecumenical teaching traditions. They have searched insofar as possible for those texts that are most widely received generally by the whole church of all generations, East and West.

The future of dialogue between Protestants and Catholics and Orthodox on issues that have plagued them for centuries is now newly opened by the fathers on sticky questions such as justification, authority, Christology, holy living and the future of history. Evangelicals are finding in pre-Reformation believers a common faith to which Bible-believing Christians can appeal. Catholics and Orthodox are finding in the fathers a new birth of evangelization and mission.

Surprisingly, the most extensive new audience for patristic exegesis is found among the expanding worldwide audience of evangelical readers who are now mushrooming out of a history that has often been lacking in historical awareness. This is a tradition that has often been caricatured as literarily challenged and critically backward. We are now encountering well-educated Baptist and Pentecostal laity who are rediscovering that the Holy Spirit has a history. Both evangelicals and Catholics are recognizing their need for doctrinal resources that go far beyond those that have been made available to them either in their traditions of piety or scholarship.

As a theologian of a North American mainline denomination, this exercise has been for me like an ongoing seminar in learning to empathize simultaneously with the despair and hunger of both evangelical and catholic audiences. But why just now at this historical moment is this need for patristic wisdom felt particularly by both Catholic and evangelical communities? The evangelical tradition is far more famished for these sources, having been longer denied vital sustenance from them. While the Catholic tradition has been attending actively to its recent modern magisterial tradition, it has until recently lost sight of much of the ancient magisterial (patristic) tradition. So the doctrinal definitions here presented are equally pertinent to the needs of both Catholics and Protestants.

The new ecumenism is now being powerfully nurtured by the oldest ecumenical wisdom because the modern ecumenical experiments have left behind them a smoldering path of moral devastation, because time-tested wisdom is still true and ripe for rediscovery, and because God the Spirit has promised not to allow the faithful to forget altogether the core of scriptural truth.

Why This Rediscovery Is Occurring Today

It has been a long time since any deliberate attempt has been made to produce this sort of standard doctrinal benchmark. Our editors are aware of their responsibility in undertaking the first ecumenical endeavor in recent literature to present the teachings of the church fathers as a phrase-by-phrase commentary on the Creed.

Three forces are at work to draw our global lay Christian readers once again toward careful reexamination of these arguments and texts:

- a growing recognition of the social relevance of classic Christian teaching and the hazards of ignoring it
- deepening demoralization about the practical moral outcomes of supposedly scientific biblical criticism
- a dawning recognition that the ancient doctrinal consensus is already shared inwardly and actively by Christians of all continents and of vastly different times and places

These converging recognitions are found among the growing worldwide lay and clerical readers of Roman, Eastern, Protestant and charismatic traditions.

The predecessor of this collection, the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (ACCS), has spawned numerous other projects. That twenty-nine volume commentary has elicited many requests that it be followed by a doctrinal series organized around key points of classic Christian teaching. The ACCS has provided much of the method and inspiration for attempting this demanding series on Ancient Christian Doctrine (ACD). Our editors have benefited greatly from the huge searchable digital data base created by the ACCS research team. These two projects are quite different but entirely complementary and resonant—the one focusing on patristic exegesis and the other on patristic doctrinal reflection.

An extensive project such as this requires a well-focused objective that has served constantly

as its organizing principle. Its center informs each step along the way, to wisely manage the tensions inherent in its complexity.

The varied audiences of this collection (lay, clergy and academic) are a much broader vineyard than the highly technical and specialized scholarly field of patristic studies as conceived in the academy. They are not limited to the Western university scholars concentrating on the study of the history of the transmission of the text or to those with highly focused interests in textual stemma or historical critical issues or comparative cultural studies. Though these remain crucial concerns for specialists, they are not the burning interest of Ancient Christian Doctrine. The editors welcome all who want to think with the early church about the plain sense, theological wisdom, and moral and spiritual meaning of the central Christian doctrines based on those texts most widely honored as authoritative by believers of all times, cultures and places. These texts have fed the fertile imagination of the global faithful for most of two millennia.

Only in an ancillary way do we have in mind as our particular audience the esteemed guild of Western patristic academics, who we expect carefully to assess our translations and methods utilizing rigorous standards, which we welcome. If these brilliant texts are rendered clearly enough to find their way to the useful hearing of ordinary lay readers to serve them practically, we expect they also will be found useful by academics and courses in Scripture studies, church history, historical theology and Christian education. This exercise does not pit theology against critical theory or history against faith. Instead, it employs critical methods and brings them into the service of clear classic statements of faith.

The editors have chosen and ordered these selections primarily for a combined pastoral and general lay reading audience that is seeking plainly to rediscover the vital truth and meaning contained in the texts of classic Christianity. Most lay readers are students of Scripture far more than of technical theology or history as such. The faithful regularly ponder the written Word seeking to make cohesive sense out of the whole testimony of the prophets and apostles. Our editors' text selections intend to serve this audience of lay students of Scripture in addition to working pastors who seek to instruct and look after the spiritual lives of their parishioners. We are at the same time determined to work according to rigorous requirements of academic readers who will find uses of these volumes in curricula in theology and history. These students and teachers have to date had access to many of these texts only in dated or inadequate translations.

The texts of Scripture and tradition resist capture by modern ideological interests. A series dedicated to allowing ancient Christian teachers to speak for themselves in their own idioms will resist becoming fixated on the narrower world of contemporary criticism, however well intentioned. We are determined to make available to our present-day pastoral and lay audience the multicultural, transgenerational, multilingual resources of the ancient ecumenical Christian tradition.

This is not to imply that all patristic writers agree in detail on all points. Even casual readers will immediately see that within the wide and ranging boundaries of common orthodoxy, excluding outright denials of ecumenical teaching, there are many legitimate ways of expressing

the truth of Christianity. These are often strongly affected by wide varieties of social environments and contexts.

Selection and Translation Criteria

It is fitting here to add some notes on editorial selection and translation philosophy. Our volume editors have sought to understand the historical, social, economic and political contexts of the selections excerpted from these ancient texts and, where necessary, to comment on them. Our mission, however, is not primarily to discuss these contexts extensively or to display them in the references. Nor are we primarily interested in the social location of the text or the philological history of particular words or on their potential political implications, however interesting or evocative these may be. Those texts that stand on their own easily and brilliantly without the need of extensive contextualization are the texts we have most preferred in this study.

Whenever possible we have opted for metaphors and terms that are normally used by unpretentious communicators today. Linguistic experts are free to disagree with our translations, but it should be remembered that the purpose of this collection is to allow the ancient Christian writers to speak for themselves to ordinary readers in the present generation. It is not necessary to have a classical Greek or Latin education in order to grasp their intent or experience their benefit. We have sought out editors who are sympathetic to the needs of lay persons, and who are deeply familiar with the patristic literature in its full range, and who intuitively understand the dilemma of communicating the gospel today in cross-cultural settings.

In keeping with these translation principles, we have chosen to use ICET version for the English rendering of the Creed. ICET was the International Consultation on English Texts, convened in 1969 by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy and whose task was completed in 1975 with the publication of *Prayers We Have in Common*. It has since been superseded by the English Language Liturgical Consultation (ELLC) convened in 1985. Though the ELLC and other groups have produced other English versions of the Nicene Creed, we have chosen to use the ICET version in this series since it is not only contemporary but also in wide use through its adoption in the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer and the Lutheran Book of Worship in current use.

In the commentary, we have tended to edit out those passages that do not have enduring relevance, penetrating significance, cross-cultural applicability and practical relevance. We hope they will also have rhetorical strength and self-evident persuasive power, so as not to require extensive explanation. In addition to seeking substantive intellectual argument, we have sought out selections that are pungent, memorable, brief and quotable, rather than extensive technical analyses or detailed editorial opinions.

We seek the most representative comments that best reflect the mind of the believing church of all times and cultures. We are less interested in odd tributaries or fantastic interpretations of a given idea than in those texts that fairly represent the central flow of the great ecumenical doctrinal stream. The focus here is on the unembellished texts of the ancient Christian writers

themselves, not mediated by modern commentators' views or opinions. Those who insist on limiting the definition of theology to what recent theologians have opined are hardly intending to become key players in the textual definitions of classic ecumenical teaching. Our purpose is not to engage in critical speculations on textual variants or cultural contexts, however useful those exercises may be, but to present the most discerning comments of the ancient Christian writers with a minimum of distraction from modern commentators.

The editors of this collection have been meticulous about commissioning translators and consultants who have a record of honoring this consensual tradition. They have sought out worldclass scholars who are preeminent in international theological and patristic scholarship, and at the same time wise to the heart of the classic teaching consensus. The editing of this series has been viewed not only as an academic exercise with legitimate peer review in the academic community, but also as a solemn vocation, a task primarily undertaken before God and not only before human critics.

Some skeptical critics imagine they have a right to exercise a kind of curial censorship over ancient texts based on entirely speculative critical premises. They imagine they have the right to stamp their personal imprimatur on any sacred text as if it were their own property. This reminds the faithful of the third century African maxim to not follow the *traditors* in turning over Scripture to its secular and persecuting critics. Open season is over for frivolous revisionary redefinitions of classic dogma. The killing fields are being reclaimed and the graves marked.

The era of nineteenth- and twentieth-century systematic theology has been skewed by an increasing philosophical bias toward moral relativism. Historical knowledge is sometimes presumed to be limited to reductionist premises and pseudo-scientific methods. The editors of this series have lived through dozens of cycles of literary and historical criticism that view the ancient texts out of ever-narrowing secularist premises. Trendy preachers have desperately sought to advance these approaches, yet often found the hearers' hearts unmoved. There is often left only a residue of dismal awareness of the speculative excesses and spiritual limitations and hubris of much recent academic theology.

The clearest evidence of the prevailing modern neglect of classic ecumenical teaching is that so many of the fathers' most authoritative sources have remained untranslated into modern languages at a time when heretical sources are more widely available than ever and actively promoted. Even in supposedly religionless China such deep neglect has not befallen the classic Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian textual sources.

How to Benefit from These Texts

Please remember the self-imposed limitations of these volumes: (1) the focus is on primary sources, not secondary historical or literary comments; (2) the audience includes lay readers and not professionals alone; and (3) the purpose is core doctrinal instruction based on patristic consensus.

These extracts were either translated by the volume editor or quoted or adapted from various

published sources. In each case we have tended to prefer a translation that presents the text in plain English, using a dynamic equivalency method that translates phrase-by-phrase and meaning by meaning rather than word by word. If a single asterisk (*) accompanies a reference, that means that a previous translation has been slightly amended by the editor, while a double asterisk (**) indicates that a translation has been substantially amended.

Each set of excerpts is preceded by two overviews. First is a section designed to put the excerpts within their *historical context*. Where wording of the Creed reflects the culmination of discussions of highly controverted issues, readers are offered a brief summary of the controversy and the issues at stake in order that they can make more sense of the selections set forth. Where doctrine developed harmoniously without much controversy, that fact is noted and a brief description of the development of the doctrine is supplied. Following the historical context is an overview of the excerpts, designed to provide a brief précis of the ensuing section's arguments. Readers are given a concise glimpse into the cumulative argument of the patristic comment on a particular phrase of the Nicene text. The overview attempts to state the gist of patristic reasoning on a cluster of related questions, looking for a natural way of unifying the flow of the overall argument.

Readers may wish to pursue biographical background as needed from other sources such as the definitive *Encyclopedia of the Early Church* (originally published by Oxford University Press and now available from James Clarke, Ltd.). A significantly expanded Italian version, *Nuovo dizionario patristico e di antichità cristiane*, is now available and will be issued in English as the *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity* in 2012. These wonderful volumes have been edited by one of our distinguished volume editors, Angelo Di Berardino. Since biographical information on each ancient Christian writer is in abundant supply in many general reference works, patrologies, dictionaries and encyclopedias, there is no reason for the Ancient Christian Doctrine series to duplicate these efforts. Nevertheless, readers will find in the last volume a timeline of all the writers or anonymous texts quoted in the series, with brief identification of time, place and office.

At times the notes will point to problems in the transmission of the text or anomalies or conflicts among the source texts. No literature is ever transmitted over centuries by handwritten manuscripts without the risk of some text variations intruding. Because we are working with very ancient texts, we employ those methods of inquiry appropriate to the study of such texts. The work of textual critics in these fields has been invaluable in providing us with the most authoritative and reliable versions of ancient texts currently available. In the annotations the editors have identified many of the Scripture allusions and historical references embedded within the texts.

Some may wonder if or when this collection will be available in digital form. We hope these five volumes will follow the twenty-nine volumes of the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture into a digital CD-ROM or similar format and become available in searchable form.

Keep in mind that much that the fathers say runs counter to our familiar modern assumptions

about physics, cosmology, psychology and social process. Modernity is fiercely antitraditional. So if modern readers are to benefit from historic wisdom, they must find in their hearts some capacity for compassionate imagination to reach back into the thought and language worlds of the early Christian writers. A little tolerance for premodern concepts is required for them to have a chance to be heard and perhaps to correct some of the absurdities and exaggerations of modern consciousness.

Thus we commend to readers this patristic commentary on an ecumenical understanding of the Nicene Creed. Our editors have provided a model for the study of the history of doctrine as creedal commentary. We are grateful to our experienced volume editors who come from widely different Christian traditions of interpretation: Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant. Our board of reference includes leading scholars from major teaching traditions: Metropolitan Kallistos Ware (Orthodox), Fr. Augustine di Noia of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (Catholic), Principal Stephen Sykes of Durham (former Anglican bishop of Ely), and Dr. James I. Packer of Vancouver (Anglican evangelical). We are indebted to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew and Avery Cardinal Dulles of New York for their wise counsel on the needs and requirements of the Ancient Christian Doctrine series.

The reason the consensual interpreters of canonical Scripture were called fathers is that they were widely regarded by believers as trustworthy protectors and engenderers of apostolic faith. They did not promote their own private inventive speculations but the truth of the apostolic testimony as consensually received. By the seventh century their views were being taught from Britain to Persia and from the equatorial headwaters of the Nile to the Rhine Valley. In its journey through history, Christianity has honored those consensual ecumenical teachers who by common consent were reliable transmitters of apostolic teaching.

Thomas C. Oden
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