

Day 122 (Saturday, July 18)

This article can be found at

<https://www.liguori.org/the-creed-gateway-to-grace.html>

Development of doctrine

Our creeds emerged from those simplest and most ancient forms, but they developed over time. As the Church faced misunderstandings, dissensions and threats, it became necessary to respond with ever-clearer teaching. The Church's doctrine did not (and does not) supersede the words of Scripture. Dogma is, rather, the Church's authoritative interpretation of Scripture. For the Bible is not a self-interpreting text, as the Bible itself declares. Think of the time, in the Acts of the Apostles, when St. Philip sees the Ethiopian man reading Isaiah the Prophet. Philip asks him, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And the man says, "How can I, unless someone instructs me?" Philip responds by preaching the Rule of Faith. As Acts tells us, Philip "proclaimed Jesus to him" (see [Acts 8:26-38](#)).

Two thousand years later, we are not so technologically advanced that we no longer need such assistance.

Christians certainly needed it in the fourth century, when a teacher named Arius arose who claimed that Jesus was not truly God, but rather an exalted creature, neither eternal nor equal to God. Thus, Arius reduced God's fatherhood to a mere figure of speech. If the Son was not eternal, then neither was God's fatherhood. The Arian heresy spread rapidly. A few decades later, another movement threatened the traditional Christian faith in the divinity of the Holy Spirit.

To counter such opposition, the Church's bishops gathered in Councils and forged the more detailed creeds. They had to do it, for the stakes were high. What was under attack was the truth about God, and the truth about our salvation. And the heretics always appealed to the Bible, as they interpreted it, to prove their false doctrine. History was making it clear that there were true and false ways of reading the Bible. The Arians and the Church held doctrines that were mutually exclusive. One had to be right and the other wrong.

The Councils pointed out that the heretics could not square their interpretation with the way Christians had always understood the Bible—the way that had been proclaimed throughout the world in the Rule of Faith, the Liturgy of Baptism and the Mass, and the earliest Creeds.

Two stories on how heresy's start

THE FORMULA

The mystic was back from the desert.

"Tell us," they said, "what God is like."

But how could he ever tell them what he had experienced in his heart? Can God be put into words?

He finally gave them a formula — inaccurate, inadequate — in the hope that some might be tempted to experience it for themselves.

They seized upon the formula. They made it a sacred text. They imposed it on others as a holy belief. They went to great pains to spread it in foreign lands. Some even gave their lives for it.

The mystic was sad. It might have been better if he had said nothing.

THE EXPLORER

The explorer returned to his people, who were eager to know about the Amazon. But how could he ever put into words the feelings that flooded his heart when he saw exotic flowers and heard the night-sounds of the forests; when he sensed the danger of wild beasts or paddled his canoe over treacherous rapids?

He said, "Go and find out for yourselves." To guide them he drew a map of the river.

They pounced upon the map. They framed it in their Town Hall. They made copies of it for themselves. And all who had a copy considered themselves experts on the river, for did they not know its every turn and bend, how broad it was, how deep, where the rapids were and where the falls ?

It is said that Buddha obdurately refused to be drawn into talking of God.

He was obviously familiar with the dangers of drawing maps for armchair explorers.

In the light of eternity, we're here for a very short time, really. We're here for one thing, ultimately: to learn how to love, because God is love. - James Finley

Sincerely,
Fr. Jim Kaptein