

Creeds of the Kehillah ~ Part 43

The Nicene Creed ~ Part 29

In our last post, we continued to explore the **Nicene Creed**. In this post, we continue to dig into the third article of faith, keeping with the phrase **We Look for the Resurrection of the Dead** in the **Nicene Creed**.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son, He is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

We Look for the Resurrection of the Dead

Questions on the destiny of the individual are closely connected with the looming problems that concern the final things. We have already seen the results of the patristic reflection on this in the previous chapter. In fact, after the description of the end of the universe and history, questions of great anthropological import arise concerning the future and the state of human beings after death. In this regard the greater part of this section presents how the Fathers viewed the resurrection of the flesh and the immortality of the soul, themes that constitute the center of patristic eschatological ¹ reflection.

As we learned in the last post, faith in the resurrection of the flesh was simply attested and needed no particular explanation. Very soon, however, the renewed cultural circumstances in which the faith was transmitted and the problems deriving from certain deviating doctrinal trends, such as **Gnosticism**, prompted the Fathers to further investigate this theme, especially from an apologetic point of view.

Deriving from **Judaism**, millenarianism is traced back in antiquity in the Asiatic milieu to Cerinthus and Papias of Hierapolis in Phrygia, while the key representatives of the **Messianic** millenarianism appear to be **Justin**, **Irenaeus**, and **Tertullian**, who established this belief on the basis of Revelation 20:4–6. In any case, the importance of millenarianism in ancient **Messianic** eschatology was not destined to last: very soon **Origen** would radically criticize this doctrine for the excessive literalism that the millenarists attributed to the passages of Scripture that they quoted. The last set of selections related to this section of the creed is devoted to the doctrinal positions of **Origen**. In fact, if on the one hand **Origen** and his teachings were an object of admiration on the part of many, on the other they were a cause of scandal to the Fathers through nearly the entire patristic age. In particular his conception of the end of the world, namely, the final *apokatastasis* (“recapitulation”), which suggests the idea of a universal salvation and therefore does not admit the eternity of hell and its punishments, was definitively condemned together with other conceptions defined as **Origenist** by the emperor Justinian in 543. In spite of the contrasting judgments on the figure and the work of **Origen**, it was impossible to prevent, for instance, the profession of the doctrine of the *apokatastasis* by other thinkers of antiquity as well, as in the case of Gregory of Nyssa, who interpreted the final *apokatastasis* as a restoration of the original condition of the creatures, according to which all the creatures, namely, angels, human beings and demons or spirits, will harmonize one day in goodness.

¹ A branch of theology concerned with the final events in the history of the world of humankind.

In conclusion, the passages from the Fathers that are gathered in this section bring to light certain problems inherent in any discussion of eschatological questions. In this regard a modern **Messianic** eschatology cannot help but take into consideration, or at least examine, these abundant and valuable sources.²

In my next post, we continue to dig into the third article of the **Nicene Creed: AND THE LIFE OF THE WORLD TO COME ~ *Blessedness and Condemnation***

² Di Berardino, A., & Oden, T. C. (Eds.). (2010). **We Believe in One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church** (Vol. 5, pp. 139–140).