

## Important Creeds and Councils of the Christian Church

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### ***Class V: The Athanasian Creed / Augustine and the Pelagian Controversy***

Augustine's Time Period (The Church since the Second Ecumenical Council-381)

- The growth and primacy of the Papacy in Rome
- The Visigoths, Ostrogoths, Vandals and more remote Germanic tribes, such as the Burgundians and the Lombards had embraced the Arian faith and are invading the Roman empire (376). After the death of Theodosius in 395, the empire is split between his two sons and they are unable to resist the attacks of these tribes. Alaric and the Visigoths plundered to the walls of Constantinople and moved all the way to Greece. In 410, Alaric captures Rome.
- Jerome one of the ablest scholars of the ancient Western Church. Born in 340 in Dalmatia, he studied in Rome. He was overtaken with illness on a visit to Antioch where he believed Christ Himself appeared to him and reproached him for his devotion to the classics. He now turned solely to the study of the Scriptures, studying Hebrew, and living as a hermit from 373 to 379, not far from Antioch. He was ordained a presbyter in Antioch later in 379 and studied under Gregory Nazianzus in Constantinople. In 382 he was in Rome with Pope Damasus (d.384), where he preached continually on the merits of the monastic life.

He soon had a large following, but met with much trouble from the clergy because monasticism was not as yet popular in the West. He established monasteries and nunneries in Egypt and Bethlehem. He died in Bethlehem in 420. He was a translator of the Scriptures. He completed a New Testament translation under the supervision of Pope Damasus in 388. The Old Testament he translated while in Bethlehem with the aid of Jewish friends. The Vulgate was the result of his work and is still in use in the Roman Church as the official translation. He wrote in support of Augustine against the teachings of Pelagius.

#### **The Athanasian Creed**

Review: The Trinity and the Deity of Christ. The necessity of the establishment of the doctrines of grace and salvation (Notice the building of theology in the Church systematically).

#### **Ambrose (d. 397)**

Elected Bishop of Milan in 374. Strongly pro-Nicene and would make no compromise with the Arians. His moral courage caused him to direct Emperor Theodosius to manifest public repentance after he in quick temper ravaged Thessalonica because he was angry at the governor in 390; Theodosius obeyed the admonition. Ambrose was a theological writer that has been called by the Roman Church as "Doctor," or an authoritative teacher. He contributed greatly to the development of Christian hymnology in the West. "I will not glory because I am righteous, but I will glory because I am redeemed. I will not glory because I am free from sin, but because my sins are forgiven."

#### **Augustine of Hippo**

Born in Thagaste, in Numidia (Algeria) on November 13, 354. Son of a heathen father and a godly mother named Monica. He pursued the study of rhetoric in Carthage, North Africa at 17. He took a concubine for 14 years and had a son named Adeodatus in 372. He tried studying the Scriptures at 19 but found them "unworthy compared with the writings of Cicero." He turned for spiritual and intellectual comfort to the dualistic system known as Manichaeism for 9 years. He became a teacher of rhetoric in Milan in 384, the Western capital of the empire at this time. Augustine became drawn and fascinated by the teachings of Ambrose. He longed to sit under his preaching and described Ambrose as the "perfection of pulpit eloquence." He became filled with shame over his moral life and the fact that "ignorant men like monks could put away temptations which he, a man of learning, felt powerless to resist." Romans 13:13 was the verse of Scripture the Spirit of God used in his conversion in 386. In 387, he was baptized by Ambrose. He was ordained to the priesthood in 391 and became Bishop of Hippo in North Africa in 395. He died on August 28, 430, during the siege of Hippo by the Vandals.

Augustine's Doctrines of Grace- "Command what thy will; and give what thy command."

Salvation comes by God's grace, which is wholly undeserved, and wholly free. Adam's sin and subsequent fall effected all of Adam's posterity (Original Sin). Grace comes to those to whom God chooses to send it. He predestinates whom He will "to punishment and salvation." Grace is irresistible and man cannot reject God's call. Grace after conversion frees the enslaved will to choose that which is pleasing to God, "not only in order that they may know, by the manifestation of that grace, what should be done, but moreover in order that, by its enabling, they may do with love what they know." Through us, God does good works, which He rewards as if they were men's own and to which He ascribes merit. The Sacraments are signs of spiritual realities, rather than the realities themselves. They are essential; but the truths to which they witness are, whenever received, the work of divine grace.

### **Who is Pelagius?**

Pelagius was a British monk of excellent repute and much learning. He settled in Rome about 400. He was shocked at the low tone of morals in Rome and he labored earnestly to secure strict ethical standards. Won a disciple named Celestius, a Roman lawyer. In 410, he went to North Africa to visit Augustine and did not find him. He journeyed to the East and Celestius stayed in Carthage and sought ordination as a presbyter by Bishop Aurelius. A letter was sent from Paulinus, a deacon of Milan to Aurelius charging Celestius with six errors that Pelagius had taught him (see Pelagius' Doctrines below). An advisory synod in Carthage rejected his ordination and he traveled to Ephesus where he obtained it. Three synods were held by 420 condemning the teachings of Pelagius that were spreading. Pelagius disappears and dies c. 420.

### **Pelagius' Doctrines of Sin and Grace**

Pelagius believed in the power of the human will. "If I ought, I can." "As often as I have to speak of the principles of virtue and a holy life, I am accustomed first of all to call attention to the capacity and character of human nature and to show what it is able to accomplish; then from this to arouse the feelings of the hearer, then he may strive after different kinds of virtue." He denied Original Sin inherited from Adam, and affirmed that all men now have the power not to sin. Adam's sin merely set an ill example and many have been quick to follow.

Read Romans 5:12-21