



Bray, Gerald L., ed.

We Believe in One God

Ancient Christian Doctrine 1

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

New Jersey

Following up on the success of their popular Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture series, InterVarsity Press under the imprint of IVP Academic has put together another series of commentaries on perhaps the most important creed of the Christian tradition, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (hereafter N-C Creed). They've once again enlisted Thomas C. Oden as the general editor of the series as well as a number of qualified single volume editors from the various branches of Christianity. In this volume Gerald L. Bray takes editorial responsibility.

The front matter of this volume contains a 15 page (p. vii-xxi) general introduction to the series that appears in this volume alone (the last volume of the series will contain biographical sketches and a timeline that will appear in that volume alone). In this general introduction Thomas Oden details:

- The importance of the N-C Creed: it's one thing that Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant alike can all agree on.
- The reasons for this volume (there are 9 total which I will forego listing for the sake of brevity but can be read in the general introduction link above).

- Some notes on translation: they've taken a dynamic equivalency approach to previously untranslated material, and they've modified previously translated material where necessary.
- The intended audience: this series is intended for interested lay persons and pastors although he hopes it will be of use to scholars as well.

This is followed by a guide on how to use the commentaries in the series which gives brief descriptions and explanations of the general layout. Then of course there is an abbreviations page before moving into Bray's introduction in which he gives a brief and general history of the creed while mentioning its importance for Christian belief and doctrine.

The chapters are all phrases from the first article of the N-C Creed so they are delineated as follows:

- We Believe
- In One God
- The Father
- The Almighty
- Maker
- Of Heaven and Earth
- Of All That Is, Seen
- And Unseen

The entire article appears at the beginning of each chapter in Greek, Latin, and English with the phrase receiving the attention emboldened. Then we're treated to brief sections on the historical context of the phrase and an overview of what is to follow in the commentary. The Fathers' quotations are then organized according to topical headings. While reading through the various quotations one thing became apparent, and that was that Augustine had seemingly more to say than any other early church father! There's plenty from the great doctors of the East and West as well as some of our other favorite early Christian writers, but Augustine was a rather verbose individual if we allow this commentary to tell the tale! That being said, the quoted material seems to me best suited for devotional reading. While there are hopes that these volumes will serve academics in addition to the intended audience I think that at best it will be as an index of sorts to the writings of the Fathers related to the N-C Creed.

But this volume has all of the wonderful qualities that the volumes in the ACCS series had: beautiful binding, cover, layout, etc. If I were to level a complaint about this volume in particular

it would concern Bray's introduction. For a series that is supposed to take an ecumenical approach to the N-C Creed, Bray strays from the topic to discuss the canon of Scripture which he does from an unabashed Protestant perspective, talking about how the "Apocrypha, or deuterocanonical books... are sometimes printed between the Old and New Testaments in *our* Bibles." (xxix, italics mine).

I also have a minor gripe with a statement he makes concerning monotheism when he says: "Scholars debate whether early Israelites were monotheists in the strict sense, since there is at least a possibility that they worshipped Yahweh, the God of Israel, as one deity among many. But whatever truth there may be in that idea, it is clear that by the time of Jesus, Jews were monotheistic in the modern sense of the term." (xxxiii) The problem is that this is not as clear as Bray would have us think (see e.g., Richard Bauckham's "Biblical Theology and the Problem of Monotheism" in *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004]; reprinted as chapter 2 in Bauckham's *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008]), at least not until he defines what he means by 'modern.'

These criticisms aside, this is a terrific volume and I have benefited greatly from the insight of the Fathers on this first article of the N-C Creed (even if not all of the comments are properly in reference to the creed itself). I'm very much looking forward to diving into volume 2 of the series.