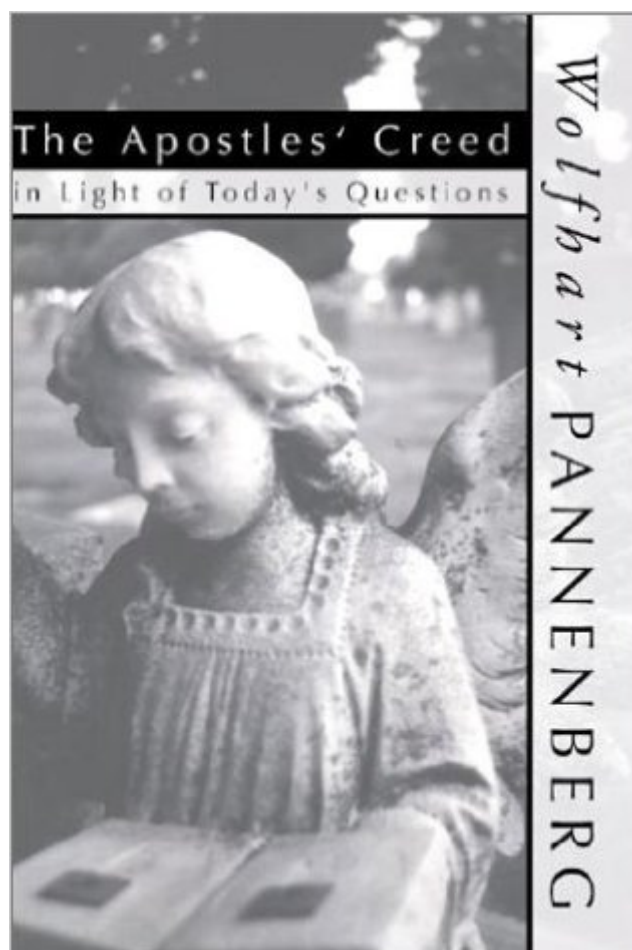


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The Apostles Creed In Light Of Today's Questions



Synopsis

In this collection of impressive lectures, Wolfhart Pannenberg expounds and interprets the Apostles' Creed "in the light of today's questions". First of all, we must find out what it meant to those who originally recited it, and then ask what it may mean for the modern Christian "in the context of the problems and convictions of the present-day understanding of reality". Everything must start from the Lord himself, and the author holds that his message of the kingdom was, without qualification, eschatological. Indeed the central theme of the whole book-and some readers will certainly find it hard to take-is that "the world's Creator is its future". Therefore its meaning is held in "God's future" or the End-time, realized already in Jesus, through his resurrection and exaltation as Lord, yet to be fulfilled in a redeemed creation. Here we have no diluted Christianity made palatable for the mass-media, but what the author presents as the thing itself, in its challenging, pristine strangeness and distinctiveness. Yet all the way it is closely related to the everyday thinking of twentieth-century men, and to Christian life in a pluralist society.

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Customer Reviews

The first paragraph of Pannenberg's (P's) Forward does a much better job of summarizing his method and aims than I am capable of. "This interpretation of the Apostles' Creed, which I am here laying before a wider circle, was originally a series of lectures for members of all faculties, which I gave several times from 1965 onwards. The purpose of this interpretation is to offer suggestions for forming a contemporary judgment about the content of the credal formulae which many Christians

still repeat Sunday by Sunday in church. If this is to be possible, three things are needed: in the first place, the basic factual information about the original meaning of the formulations; secondly, clues as to how the articles of faith mentioned in the creed can be regarded in the light of today's critical biblical scholarship; and thirdly, a consideration of the possible meaning of the substance of the creed for the Christian today in the context of the problems and convictions of the present understanding of reality."He breaks the creed up as follows: I Believe/In God/The Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth/And in Jesus Christ/God's Only Son, Our Lord/Conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary/Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was Crucified, Dead and Buried/He Descended into Hell/The Third Day He Rose Again from the Dead, He Ascended into Heaven/He sits at the Right Hand of God the Father Almighty, From thence He Shall Come to Judge the Quick and the Dead/I Believe in the Holy Spirit/The Holy Catholic Church, The Communion of Saints/The Forgiveness of Sins/The Resurrection of the Body, The Life Everlasting.It's brilliant what P is able to pull out of critical scholarship. He doesn't tiptoe around that hornet's nest, he walks right into the thick of it, and emerges with - bewilderingly - an intelligent and innovative, but usually orthodox understanding of things.If you're like me, and you've had no formal philosophical or theological training, and you want to take a bite out of P.'s Systematic Theology (ST), this is a helpful read. Read it along with his Intro_to_Systematic_Theology_ (0802805469) and the out of print Faith_and_Reality_ for a good primer before diving into the ST. It certainly doesn't go into every topic covered in his ST, but the tone of this book has a more pastoral flavor at times than that work does, which probably accounts for the omissions. For some doctrines and ideas he only traces outlines of the skeleton of his position, and that's fine given the aims and audience of this book, though it might frustrate some. I found it got a bit dull in one spot towards the middle, but it soon picks up.Many won't agree with everything P. says. I don't. His arguments are so persuasive, though, because even though they concern issues at the heart of Christian convictions, they are delivered with an almost clinical calmness, and usually quite well-reasoned. Agree or disagree with him, it's a necessary and pleasant change from listening to people who's viewpoint you're sympathetic to issue out a fountain of rhetoric, which often only obscures the issue. If you read P. (more so his ST than this work), it might be the first time you actually come to engage_ an issue or the issues surrounding a doctrine with enough clarity and thoroughness to understand_ it. And that's indispensable for discipleship, especially in a divided Church and a world that is so antagonistic to Christianity.

In this book, one is given an overview of Wolfhart Pannenberg's overall thought process, his thinking

concerning theology and its task as well as his approach to the task of Apologetics. It is a great and superb book, that is considerably lighter in style than "Jesus - God and Man", but no less weighty in substance. I highly recommend the book. Article by article Wolfhart goes through the Creed explaining its history in the church, and philosophical problems and answers regarding each proposition. He admonishes the pastors and theologians to teach this creed, to make it make sense for the lay person. It is their job as teachers of the church. And here he is quite right. I found the first few chapters of this book to be incredibly insightful, as he discusses the decline in belief in God in the west through the propositions of Fichte, Feuerbach and Freud. And how ultimately, this atheism is unsustainable. Equally intriguing is his assault on the idea of Faith as being a personal decision, a "leap of Faith" that puts its trust in no facts whatsoever. This thought is probably more dangerous to Christianity today than any single other heresy. A Faith that has no foundation is no faith at all, and invites one to treat all religions the same, basically as fictions meant to make you feel better about yourself. He argues quite effectively that the logical line to the Christian faith, is first belief in God and then in Jesus, that the two are interrelated and are not easily separated is an intriguing one. In doing apologetics I like to start and end with the historical resurrection, something that W.P. does extremely well defending, and argue that this validates Christ's claims not only to be God, but also about God. This does work, but at other times I have found some resistant to such argumentation, and W.P. has made me at least reexamine some of my underlying thoughts on all that. It may be a longer row to hoe to go his way, but perhaps needed, at least in some cases. The only real objection I have to this book, is that W.P. makes no sense whatsoever when speaking about the Virgin Birth. He is all over the map on that one, denying it, and yet trying to affirm it at the same time. I am not quite sure what his ultimate hang up is with that. In this he concedes way to readily to liberal scholarship and presuppositions. His whole argumentation seems to stand and fall though with Markan Priority, which is something I myself have never been fully convinced of. Call me traditional, or Lutheran, but Matthew was first, and Markan Priority is a Calvinist Camel with its nose in the tent.

This book is relatively brief and the table of contents shows Pannenberg simply going section by section through the Apostle's Creed. The book is merely a reprint of the book he wrote in the 1960's as a way of publishing his lectures on the topic. Nevertheless, in discussing faith, God, Christ, etc, he summarizes much of what he says elsewhere on those topics. Since Pannenberg does not really have another shorter book which summarizes his theology, this short book may be a good introduction before trying to tackle his three volumes of systematics. The book reflects P's thorough-going historical approach to revelation. Rather than simply affirming the historicity of the

virgin birth, he explains why he believes the infancy narratives likely are aetiological myth designed to explain the belief the early church maintained in the incarnation of the divine son of God. He believes that the mythic quality of the Gospel narratives are valuable for affirming the incarnation, even if they are not historical. (On the other hand, he explains why the Gospel narratives of the resurrection of Jesus are not mythic and in that case the belief in the historical event gave birth to the faith). Pannenberg, following his well-known desire to promote ecumenicism, insists that believers should affirm the virgin birth part of the Creed with the rest of the Church of all time to maintain solidarity and unity. Far from being dishonest, he believes that doing so is a symbolic way of affirming the belief in the incarnation the story points to.

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