

The Creed Addendum

1. ἀγέννητος (agenetos): uncreated, unoriginated. The root of the word comes from ‘beginning to be’.

see Pl. Phdr. (Plato, Phædrus) 245 c-e: “... So it is only what moves itself that never desists from motion ... in fact, this self-mover is also the source and spring of motion in everything else that moves; and a source has no beginning ... there is no source for this, since a source that got its start from something else would no longer be the source. And since it cannot have a beginning, then necessarily it cannot be destroyed ... while a body whose motion comes from within, from itself, does have a soul, that being the nature of a soul ... then it follows necessarily that soul should have neither birth nor death.”

2. ἀγέννητος (agennetos): causeless, unbegotten, unborn. The root of the word comes from ‘to bear or beget’, i.e. causeless.

see Pl. Ti. (Timæus) 52 a-b: “... keeps its own form unchangingly, which has not been brought into being and is not destroyed, which neither receives into itself anything else from anywhere else, nor itself enters into anything else anywhere, is one thing. It is invisible – it cannot be perceived by the senses at all – and it is the role of understanding to study it. The second thing is that which shares the other’s name and resembles it. This thing can be perceived by the senses and it has been begotten (γεννητός). It is constantly borne alone, now coming to be in a certain place then perishing out of it. It is apprehended by opinion, which involves sense perception. And the third type is space, which exists always and cannot be destroyed. It provides a fixed state for all things that come to be. It is itself apprehended by a kind of bastard reasoning that does not involve sense perception, and it is hardly even an object of conviction. We look at it as in a dream when we say that everything that exists must of necessity be somewhere, in some place and occupying some space, and that which doesn’t exist somewhere, whether of earth or in heaven, doesn’t exist at all.”

Agennetos vs. Agenetos and why the Creed uses agennetos to reference God in contradistinction to Christianity, mystical and ordial societies who use agenetos:

These words come from different roots and, in principle, mean different things. Certainly, Athanasius and those of the Nicene Church argued as such and adopted that distinction when developing Church dogma just as extant today as it was in the 4th c. ‘Agennetos’ (ἀγέννητος) comes from γεννώω, to bear or beget (i.e., causeless), while ‘agenetos’ (ἀγένητος) originates from γίγνομαι, to cause to be or become (i.e., caused). Therefore, applying this to an example using biblical context, Adam could be described as agennetos because he had no father, but not as agenetos because he began to be (i.e., he would necessarily be described as genetos and not agenetos). Whereas Athanasius and the Nicenes drew a distinction between the two words as a said distinction permitted an appearance of logical validity to the rational mind, Eunomius and the non-Nicenes considered the words equivalent in context with the Divine. The reasoning behind Eunomius’ thoughts in this matter are because in much Greek thought the universe is considered to be divided into things that are caused and have no beginning (genetoi), and other things that are uncaused and do not have a beginning, things that never came into existence at all (agenetoi). Pagan authors could include among the latter not only souls as self-moving entities, but even the universe itself. Whereas Christians and Jews would restrict the use of this word to God, the unbegotten Creator of all things, the Nicenes who said the Son and Spirit were agenetos were saying that these entities were somehow connected ontologically with the agenetos (and agennetos) origin of reality. For Eunomius and non-Nicenes, this was as blasphemous as it was illogical because only a God who was ontologically simple and utterly unique could possibly be agennetos. The issue between Nicenes and non-Nicenes, therefore, was that the Nicenes needed to distinguish between the general sourcelessness of the persons in the Trinity and the unbegottenness proper to the Father. On the other hand, the non-Nicenes had to guarantee the unique causelessness of a single Divine source, and to distinguish between a general and a specific causelessness as the Nicenes did would make that impossible. Therefore, for Eunomius, ‘agennetos’ and ‘agenetos’ necessarily had to be identical.