

The Nicene Creed: Old and New, Changed and Unchanged

Last Sunday Trinity Parish started using again the revised version of the Nicene Creed from the Episcopal Church's *Enriching Our Worship One* (EOW 1), a supplementary liturgical resource that has been in use for a number of years.

The version of the Nicene Creed in the Prayer Book, the version we have used since 1976, was produced in the early 1970's by the International Consultation on English Texts (ICET), a cooperative venture of Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, and some other churches. It was a good translation for its time, most notably in returning to the ancient form of "We believe" rather than the old, inaccurate version that said, "I believe."

One important change in the revised Creed we are using concerns the phrase, "[he] was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human." The older, less accurate version of the Creed stated, "And was made man." That was a translation of the Latin phrase, "Et homo factus est." However, the Creed was originally written in Greek and there states, "καὶ ἐνανθρώπησαντα" which means "and took on human form" or, as we now more correctly translate it, "and became truly human."

There is one other notable change that is easy to overlook because we are so familiar with the old version. It concerns a phrase known to theologians as the "Filioque" which means "and (from) the Son." First, a bit of history. The Nicene Creed was written and issued by the Council of Nicea in the year 325 C.E. Nicea, or Nicaea, was a town in what is now modern-day Turkey. This was the first Church's first worldwide Council to which bishops from the known world were invited by the Emperor Constantine who, about ten years before, legalized the Christian religion in the Roman Empire. The Council was called to deal with a heresy, and did so by producing the Nicene Creed. Because it was a statement of faith by the whole group, it started with the words "**We believe.**"

The original creed was somewhat shorter than what we use now, and needed some expansion and clarification, and that was done at the next worldwide Council, the Council of Constantinople of 381 C.E. The creed from their meeting is what we use today, except for the Filioque.

The original wording of the creed in the third paragraph concerning the Holy Spirit stated, "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, . . ." Theologians in the 300's discussed whether the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father AND the Son (the so-called "double procession of the Holy Spirit"). It was decided that the power of God was best acknowledged by saying the Spirit proceeds from the Father alone.

However, a regional church council, not a worldwide Council, met in Toledo, Spain in 681, and the version of the Nicene Creed they issued added the unfortunate Filioque clause. The Eastern Orthodox Church was most unhappy with making ANY change in the Creed, and that along with other issues led to the break between the Eastern and Western Churches 1054 C.E.

Perhaps we in the Episcopal Church can contribute to better relations between the Eastern and Western Churches by using the revised, more correct Nicene Creed, and appreciate that we are reading and saying the Creed as the Councils of 325 and 381 C.E. meant us to have and understand it.

The Rev. Peter E. Van Horne