



THE BOOK OF CONCORD: A SOURCE OF HARMONY

The Nicene Creed

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The Nicene Creed, the second confession of the three ecumenical creeds, is more accurately called the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. The latter term was first used in the 17th century with a view to fixing the key dates in the development of the creed. The text we now have is a revision made at the Council of Constantinople (AD381). It confesses the one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, protecting the full divinity of the Son, Jesus Christ, addressing the Christological controversy between orthodoxy theologians and the heretic Arians. The relationship between Father and Son within the Trinity is left within the framework of the economy of salvation, by confessing that Jesus Christ is the true Son of the Father, not a new creation.

The Creed's original Greek Creed begins with "We believe," reflecting the council context, but it was later changed in the Latin translation to "I believe," reflecting the liturgical usage. This Latin reading is adopted in the Japanese translation of our liturgy book.

In the fourth century, the Church experienced an important turning point in her history: a new relationship with the Roman Empire and an unavoidable confrontation between Christian faith and Hellenistic culture, especially its philosophy.

While the Christian church was free from outside persecution after Emperor Constantine established Christianity as the imperial religion, it struggled internally



for the integrity of the faith against efforts to distort the nature of Christian faith. The Arians denied the full divinity of the Son Jesus Christ, persisting in their own theory of Subordinationism—the Son, Jesus Christ, is subordinate to the Father. Responding to Arianism, Athanasius and other orthodox theologians saw that it was threatening the essence of the Christian truth and defended that the Son must be of “one substance with the Father.”

In 325 Constantine called the first ecumenical council at Nicea to formulate the creed of Christian faith. The council formulated and published its statement. The Council of Constantinople (381) found in the Nicene Council a standard of orthodoxy and confirmed its creed with some expansion. Chalcedon validated both decisions in 451.

The Nicene Creed follows the basic outline of the so-called Old Roman Confession familiar to us as the Apostles’ Creed. Adapting a baptismal creed, similar either to one presented by Eusebius of Caesarea or to a creed of Jerusalem (according to Kolb and Wengert), the Council added some anti-Arian phrases such as: begotten, not made and the so-called *homoousios* (of one being with the Father), because the Arians denied that the Son is eternal. The chief concern of the Nicene Council was protecting the divinity of the Son, Jesus Christ. This was made clear by a series of such additional statements.

In AD 381 the Council of Constantinople expanded the third article (on the Holy Spirit), confessing that the Holy Spirit is to be worshipped and glorified together with the Father and the Son.

Concerning the proceeding of the Holy Spirit, the so-called *filioque* (and from the Son) was later added by the Western church to the third article against the continued influence of Arianism. This addition triggered a Trinitarian controversy between Western and Eastern theology. While the former insisted that the addition clearly reflected the true unity of the Trinity, the latter insisted on its omission. The controversy caused the Great Schism in the 11th century.

The Nicene Creed is a climax in the process of the confrontation between Christian faith and Hellenistic philosophy. It overcame a Hellenization that might have distorted Christianity. Behind any formulations of Christian dogma are influences from its contemporary thought and historical conditions. We have to see through the tradition to truth behind them. The Nicene Creed is significant today because it established the divinity of the Son, Jesus Christ, rather than him simply being a historic figure, or great man, or prophet or charismatic leader as humanists would view Him. But however great Jesus is, He cannot save us if He were only a human being. He is the unique Saviour because He is the true God and true man as the Chalcedonian Definition specifies.



As the Nicene Creed proclaims that Jesus Christ is one being with the Father, we believe in the one God. The one God speaks to us in Jesus Christ. God revealed Himself through the divine Word, Jesus Christ, once for all, in a way never to be surpassed. The Nicene Creed is accepted today as the essence of Christian faith, proclaiming the unity of the Trinitarian God and the reliable uniqueness of the Saviour.

The mission of the **Japan Lutheran Church** began in September 1948, with the official installation of the first missionary by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod World Mission. In 1968, the self-governing Japan Lutheran Church was established and it became self-supporting in 1976. JLC maintains a close relationship with LCMS through joint projects. The church has almost 3,000 baptized members.

