

Article reprinted from Cross†Way Issue Summer 2004 No.93

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE THREE CREEDS

David Meager

The word Creed derives from the Latin *Credo* which means 'I believe'. There are credal statements in the Bible (eg. Deut 6:4, Acts 8:37, Rom 1: 3-4, 1 Cor 15: 3-4, Php 2: 6-11, 1 Cor 8: 6, Matt 28: 19).

The Apostle's Creed

The Apostles Creed is the creed most widely used in Christian worship in the western world.

Throughout the Middle Ages it was generally believed that this creed was composed by the Apostles on the day of Pentecost and that each of them contributed one of the twelve sections. This appears to be a legend dating back to somewhere between the 4th and 6th Centuries. However it still has good reason to be called the Apostles Creed because its content is in agreement with apostolic teaching. The earliest evidence for its present form is St Pirminius in the early 8th Century although it appears to be related to a shorter Roman Creed which had itself derived from other earlier and simpler texts such as the 'rule of faith' or the 'tradition' which were based on the Lord's baptismal command in Matthew 28:19. The Creed was widely used by Charlemagne (the first Holy Roman Emperor) and was eventually accepted at Rome where the old Roman Creed or similar forms had survived for centuries.

The Creed seems to have had three uses, first as a confession of faith for those about to be baptised, secondly as a catechism (an instruction for new Christians in the essentials of the faith), and thirdly, as a 'rule of faith' to give continuity to orthodox Christian doctrine. In the west by the early Middle Ages it was widely employed at baptism. The BCP uses it at baptism and daily Morning Prayer and Evensong except on the 13 days of the year when the Athanasian Creed is to be used instead.

The Creed is Trinitarian in form but the heart of the creed is its confession concerning Jesus Christ and the events to do with his conception, birth, suffering, death, resurrection, ascension and coming judgement.

The Nicene Creed

It is known for certain that the Nicene Creed was adopted by the Council of Calcedon in 451AD which claimed it was the faith of the Council of Constantinople of 381AD. Its origin however goes back to the Council of Nicea (in modern day Turkey) called in 325AD by the Emperor Constantine to address the Arian controversy. Eusebius submitted a Creed from his own Diocese, Caesarea, and this appears to have formed the basis of the creed propagated at Nicaea although there were other older creeds that could have been considered. The Creed affirmed the unity of God, insisted that Christ was begotten from the Father before all time, and declared that Christ is of the same essence (*homoousios*) as the Father. It had only a single brief clause on the Holy Spirit. In its present form it appears to have been used by Cyril in Jerusalem and is also mentioned by Epiphanius of Salamis around 373AD.

The original Greek texts do not have the filioque clause 'begotten of the Father *and the Son*' which was a later addition to Latin translations and has contributed to the division between East and West.

Athanasian Creed

The Athanasian Creed (also known as the *Quicumque Vult* - the first two words of the Latin) is named after the famous Bishop of Alexandria (296-373) who famously defended orthodox Christianity from Arianism.

There is no evidence that Athanasius wrote the creed and since the 17th Century work of G J Voss it has been accepted that the evidence points against his authorship. The original versions of the Creed appear to have been Latin whereas Athanasius wrote in Greek. In addition some of the theological issues apparently addressed came to the fore after the time of Athanasius - for example Nestorianism and Eutychianism both of which concern the humanity of Christ.

The first evidence for the Creed appears to be a sermon of St Caesarius of Arles and it is similar to a relatively recently discovered manuscript of St Vincent of Lérins prompting the theory that it was composed in Southern Gaul. There is also evidence that its primary liturgical use was as a hymn.

The Creed contains a clear and detailed statement of the Trinity (eg. 'The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; and yet there are not three Gods but one God.' It also upholds the full Deity and humanity of Christ, his death for sins, resurrection, ascension, second coming and final judgement.

The Book of Common Prayer requires that it be read on thirteen designated occasions during the year.

David Meager is a staff member of Church Society.