

## THE CREED



The Creed we say in the Mass is properly called the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, and stems from those two church councils (325 and 381, respectively).

The reason for these creeds or symbols of the faith as they are known in some missals is the debate on who and what exactly was Jesus. Was he God, human, more God than human, more human than God? Was he adopted, possessed and not in control of his will? These are the questions that raged around what was called the Arian Heresy.

Deacon Arius was an eloquent and charismatic figure, who had theological and philosophical sophistication. He, along with many leaders of the church, (Church Fathers and Bishops) were struggling with these because the prevalent philosophical lens through which all reality was understood was Platonism.

At the root of Platonism was the search for pure truth, truth that was objective and apart from emotional content or change. Thus, they would argue that if God is God, God was Pure Truth, Unchangeable and unhampered in His being by feelings, or any material thing. He is One, indivisible and unchangeable. And this is where the problem arises. If Jesus was God, he couldn't be human. And if God appeared as a human (as the Christian Faith presents) the godhead in Jesus would have to be independent, and separate from the human being Jesus. This is the root of the heresy.

The Nicene Creed was the result of the debates on the person of Christ that used and re-defined a word to mean that the Son of God was of the same nature as the Father God. This word is rendered in English as *Consubstantial*—meaning that they are the same stuff. Thus the Son of God is *begotten* by the Father—*not made* or created. He is *God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God*. Additionally, the creed affirms that Jesus of Nazareth, being both God and Man was *incarnate of the Holy Spirit* (literally enfleshed) as a union of two natures of God (in the person of the Son) and human Jesus son of Mary. The ideas describing how God was in Jesus is expressed in the statements about the Son are that *I believe in Jesus Christ our Lord. Who was incarnate of the Holy Spirit* (the new translation of the Missal will give us this language to be more accurate to the Latin expression of the Faith in the Creed, rather than the current *conceived by the Holy Spirit*. So, look for the changes: 1) *one in being with the Father* will become *consubstantial with the Father*, and 2) He was *incarnate of the Holy Spirit* will replace *conceived by the Holy Spirit*.

## The Creed Part I

I believe, We Believe. In Latin the non-English sacramentaries published since Vatican II, the language of the personal pronoun has been in the singular. It was deemed a worthy change by ICEL and approved by the Holy See to be a dynamically equivalent statement in English to be in the first person plural, because it emphasized the theology of being a united people in the body of Christ. By saying “we” we were identifying ourselves as part of the church assembled and the church throughout time. It was thought that this reinforcement was needed because of the perceived individualistic piety of our forebears that “MY” religion was between “me and God” and that the others didn’t matter. This value of being a corporate body of Christ, was enshrined in the architecture of newer churches being built. The ceilings were lowered, and seating re-arranged to draw the eye to those gathered as the worshipping body of Christ. These are all laudable reasons for what was done with the Creed. However...

It has long been the tradition of the church that we all say the same thing throughout the world, whether in Greek or Latin, and most particularly when articulating the True Faith. The Creed as the pre-eminent Symbol of the Faith was always articulated rather literally, and not dynamically. One such attempt at dynamic equivalence wrought the Great Schism of the East from the West when the language of procession was translated from the very clear Greek (From the Father through the Son) to the Latin (From the Father and the Son). From this perspective it could be argued that the English speaking Church no longer was professing the same faith when we began to use the “We believe” instead of the “I believe. The Latin offers *Credo in Unum Deum*, which literally translated says “I believe in One God.” To say what the English speaking Church was saying, the Latin would have to be changed to *Credimus in Unum Deum*.

In the new Roman Missal, or Sacramentary, the Creed will have the restored “I believe” for us to say. With that said, it is important that we not lose the idea of being the people of God gathered around the one table of Christ’s ultimate sacrifice. Saying together “I believe in One God” will require us to remember that with the force of the gathered voices, proclaiming the one Faith in the Holy Trinity through the Creed, we are one Body, one Spirit in Christ.

## The Creed Part II

The Creed is broken into four major statements. The first three address the definition of the Faith in the Blessed Trinity, the final is a summary of other doctrines that the professing Catholic must believe. This first will begin to address the statements regarding the first person of the blessed Trinity.

The new translation begins: I believe in One God. The Jewish philosopher Maimonides said that 'Christianity is a peculiarly Monotheistic religion.' It is peculiar because we believe in three Persons in One God. For the Jew, Monotheism meant that there was Only one indivisible God. The main force of this proclamation was against the "other gods" or daemons of the areas where the Hebrews would take up residence. The Hebrews had their own "only god" (*adonai echad*) and did not admit of the validity of worshipping any other Gods even if they did exist. They were alien gods and the God of the Hebrews was God above all other Gods.

Maimonides says in his work, *Laws Concerning Idolatry and its Customs*:

*It is not enough to say: "G-d revealed Himself to us at Sinai and told us that there are no other deities or forces that are partner to His being and His rulership of the universe. So I know that it is so. If He said so, that's enough for me: the logic of this truth is irrelevant." No, says Maimonides. The Second Commandment obligates the Jew that his mind, not only his convictions, should negate the possibility of other gods. He must not only accept that this is so, but also comprehend that, rationally, it cannot be otherwise.*

Still there is this insistent problem that keeps cropping up in the Hebrew scriptures: That God, or God's messengers, show up and have discourse with humans. In these passages, they are addressed often by the human as God would be addressed. Also, God's spirit inspired the prophets, and fell on the prophets, endowing them with a 'portion' of God's Spirit. This God, then could be "on His holy mountain, and at the same time, appearing to 'possess' a prophet in a trance-like state called the 'prophetic state.' Thus, the ever and universally present God became part of some aspect of the Jewish Faith.

The many presences as we see in the Hebrew scriptures makes room for the Christian belief in the Trinity, which is more explicitly spelled out in the various statements of Jesus in the Gospels and in the writings of the Apostles and sub-apostolic writers. About this we will see much more in the weeks to come.

## The Creed Part III

“I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of Heaven and Earth.” In this terse statement, we have revealed to us, first and foremost a person, not a thing. God is radically personal in that God chose to be expressed as Father, by the mouth of his most definitive revelation, Jesus, the Son, the Incarnate Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. Jesus used *Abba*, (or ‘Papa’) as his name for His Father, with whom He was One. In just about all personally generated utterances of Jesus to His Father, he uses the relational word Father (or *Abba*, it could be arguably stated). One has to ask, “Why?” Why would the Son of God do this? What is He trying to say to us about God? He is saying that God wants a personal relationship with each of us. There is a principle of biblical exegesis that says Jesus teaches by what he does, by what he says, and what he commands. This use of ‘Father’ (and not God) by Jesus means that Jesus wants us to know that the Father wants communion with us in a similar way that Jesus has communion with the Father. If we are one with Jesus in Baptism, as St. Paul asserts in Romans 6, then the relationship that Jesus has with the Father is also to be our relationship with the Father.

But at the same time, we have to balance this familiarity with the fact that Jesus recited the Psalms and other prayers as they were written in sacred scripture (see his cries on the cross). It is also our tradition, and the tradition of the Jews, that we men and women and children have adopted another name for the Father. It is the descriptive and somewhat less relational word: God, *Deus* in Latin, *Theos* in Greek or, *Adonai* in Hebrew. One also has to ask, “What is the reason for changing the name of Father/*Abba* to God? Or put another way, why do we keep distancing ourselves from *Abba*? Is it important that we retain this tradition? Let us look at the scriptural record. Jesus’ religion, Judaism, while expressing the relation of Israel as God’s children, also expressed the transcendence, the holiness, the totally otherness of God from humans by using a title when speaking to the Father. This title, *Adonai*, which we translate as LORD was used anytime the four letters YHWH was expressed in the texts of the Pentateuch or prophets and other literature of the Hebrew scriptures. The Rabbis and other leaders of the Jewish people wanted to not lose the idea that God appeared to Moses as a fearsome experience of a burning bush that defied understanding.

The dichotomous relationship of children going to Daddy and the ineffable, inexpressible, incomprehensible, HOLY GOD is hard to express in one word. Therefore, sometimes we say Father, and other times God, depending on the context. This has some echo in our human relationships, sometimes we say our beloved’s name, other times nicknames, other times titles, depending on what we are intending to do. The new Sacramentary will have far fewer Father references, since almost all the prayers for the day begin with *Deus*. It is hoped that the nonchalance of this age might be corrected and awe and reverence be returned to the Church’s worship. So let’s go back to the example of Jesus as our guide.

## The Creed Part IV

In the Creed we say God is the Father Almighty or in Latin *Patrem omnipotentem*, from *omnipotentia*, from *omnia* [all] and *potens*, [able to do all things]).

Omnipotence is the power of God to effect whatever is not **intrinsically impossible**.

These last words of the definition do not imply any imperfection, since a power that extends to every possibility must be perfect. The universality of the object of the Divine power is not merely relative but absolute, so that the true nature of omnipotence is not clearly expressed by saying that God can do all things that are possible to Him; it requires the further statement that all things are possible to God.

The intrinsically impossible is the self-contradictory, and its mutually exclusive elements could result only in nothingness. "Hence," says Thomas (Summa I, Q. xxv, a. 3), "it is more exact to say that the intrinsically impossible is incapable of production, than to say that God cannot produce it." To include the contradictory within the range of omnipotence, as does the Calvinist Vorstius, is to acknowledge the absurd as an object (*or goal*) of the Divine intellect, and nothingness as an object of the Divine will and power. "God can do all things the accomplishment of which is a manifestation of power," says Hugh of St. Victor, "and He is almighty because He cannot be powerless" (*De sacram.*, I, ii, 22).

As intrinsically impossible must be classed:

- Any action on the part of God which would be out of harmony with His nature and attributes;
- Any action that would simultaneously connote mutually exclusive elements, e.g. a square circle, an infinite creature, etc.

Therefore, such things as the following are contradictory of either God's nature of perfect consistency within God's self or simultaneous opposites:

- It is impossible for God to sin.
- The decrees of God cannot be reversed.
- It is impossible to exhaust God's ability, therefore creating the absolute best class of any creature is not possible.

Omnipotence is perfect power, free from all mere potentiality. This means that there is no possibility in growth of ability for God. God is complete, fulfilled, fully and infinitely able to do all things without limitation which could be improved at a 'later time' The only limits God has is those things which God wills not to do. Thus we can say that there is no other God than our God, because there is nothing greater (potentially or actually) than our God.

*Note: Much of this article was taken from the Catholic Encyclopedia at [www.newadvent.com](http://www.newadvent.com).*

## The Creed Part V

The Father of Almighty maker of Heaven and Earth. There are many creation myths that have circulated throughout the cultures of the world. The faith of the Hebrew people, and therefore us who are descendents of Judaism, is that the God of Gods, the Lord of Lords is the owner of “the earth and all it holds.” (Ps 24:1). As maker, He sets the laws of the cosmos in place and they govern all of the universe (Job 38-40). The word ‘maker’ is an interesting change from the one we have recently been using. It has a sense of “hands on” work to it that is not readily in mind in the word ‘creator.’ Creators can be people who set things in motion, and others fill out the actual making of the concept created by the creator. A maker emphasizes the immediate connection between the thing being made, and the one making it.

There is a story about a group of scientists that were trying to create life in the laboratory. These scientists finally were able to put the right compounds together and with chemical reactions and some electricity caused cell formation to begin. So they called God up on the phone and said, “Hey God! We don’t need you anymore, because we were able to create life in the laboratory.” “Very well,” said God, “How did you do it?” They began by saying, “First you get some dirt...” when god cut them off saying, “No, you go get your own dirt!” You see, God created all of the universe from nothing. God jealously guards His role as maker of creation. The punishment of the Tower of Babel is one such instance where God asserted his place as maker, when the people in their arrogance sought to be equal to God. The speeches of God to Job are another example of God’s assertion that there is none like God in the universe, most certainly not man.

As we live our lives, it would behoove us to meditate regularly on the beauty and wonder of God’s creation and our relation to God our Maker. This is hard for us in such a wealthy country, where we are so individualistic and so dependent on our own abilities to achieve and get whatever we want if we just work for it. The poor have a lot easier time with this because they are so much more dependent on the graciousness of others, and are perched so precariously on the edge of death and life. Because of this, they depend more on God to help them, to protect them, to realize their creaturely relationship to God, the Maker and Sustainer of all life.

## The Creed Part VI

In the Creed we say that God is the creator of heaven and earth, **of all that is visible and invisible**. Part of our Catholic Faith is that we believe in an invisible spiritual realm that is as real as the visible realm where we can see touch and sense in every way the world around us.

The invisible or spiritual realm includes many things that we take for granted: the whole spectrum of emotions, ideas. It also includes spiritual beings such as the seven choirs of angels. Some of those angels fell from the good graces of God when they rebelled along with one of the Archangels, Lucifer, who is also called Satan. The Church sometimes explains the “other gods” as the fallen angels inhabiting or possessing an area and working their devilish deceits on the unwitting humans of that region.

As recent as the late 1990's, the Church released a new Rite of Exorcism, the fact of which gives testimony to the Church's belief in the spiritual battle between good and evil as personified in Satan, the enemy of our souls.

Furthermore, the Church has always taught that the soul of each human being is made by God and that it is integral to the person brought into being by God through the cooperation of that person's human parents in conjugal love. The soul is finite in that it has a beginning, but it is eternal in that it will never cease to exist from the moment of the soul's being made by God for that person. The soul is the spiritual identity of the human organism, and is where the personality of each human exists. The soul is also the abode of the Blessed Trinity in those who are Baptized.

Because Satan wants to expunge the image of God from the created order, he focuses his energies on extinguishing the God-presence in each human being, and each of the baptized. Thus the soul is the primary battleground for the spiritual warfare being waged until the end of time. The modern world, which is dominated by Satan and his demons also wants modern man to turn his back on the reality of the spiritual world. If Satan can succeed in doing this, he will have a free hand in gaining more and more followers for his infernal kingdom. This is why it is imperative that we teach our children and the adults around us to accept the reality of the spiritual realm of God's cosmos.

## The Creed Part VII

“And in one Lord Jesus Christ” is the new way we will introduce and articulate our belief in the Son of God in the Missal. We now move to the series of statements of belief regarding the second person of the Trinity in the new translation of the Missal. Why do we seemingly begin this series of affirmations with a conjunction? The Latin text begins this way, is the first and most obvious reason. But what is behind this syntax (sentence structure) in the Creed?

Perhaps the key is in the actual wording which refers to “one Lord.” The Creed is not so much a bundle of individual beliefs. Rather, it is a statement of The Belief of the Church regarding her God. The repetition that will continue on throughout the different assertions is the use of the phrase “*And in...*” It makes the Creed a series of bullet points that all point to our belief in the One God and in the One Church. The Nicene Creed arose because of a division in the church over the question of the identity and *make-up* of the person of Jesus Christ. This division was called the Arian Heresy, after Arius, the deacon/theologian who departed from the orthodox faith of the Universal Church, and had much persuasion among the bishops of the day.

At that time, the church had no question about the person of the Father. The Father was God, the same God as the God of the Jews, who is called *Adonai* or Lord. Arius asserted that the man Jesus Christ was not God, but a God-possessed man. This was contrary to the true Faith. At the Council of Nicea, when the framers of this creed moved to formulating the statement of the Faith regarding the person of Jesus, they made sure to include that word “Lord” so as to bridge between the Father and the Son as Lord.

Similarly, the so-called “bullet points” structure of the Creed, with the persistent use of the “*And in...*” structure, points to the unity of the Father and the Son in substance. We will get to the definition of substance in a following article. But suffice it for now to say that God the Father and God the Son are both the One Lord, the One God of the Jews, and subsequently of the Christians.

That having been said we now can begin our discussion of the term “One Lord Jesus Christ.” The assertion of the term “One God” in the first portion regarding the First Person of the Blessed Trinity is echoed in the term “One Lord” for the Second Person—One God, and One Lord. When we add the name Jesus Christ, we see the progression of the revelation from the One Lord and God to the incarnation of the Second Person in the man, Jesus Christ. The word “Christ” is from the Greek word for the Hebrew “*Messiah*,” or Anointed One. So this little statement “And in one Lord Jesus Christ” we are saying that I believe in one God, the Father and The Son, the Second Person of the unity of the Father and the Son, who is incarnate as Jesus the anointed one.

There is still a lot of work to do as we explore the Creed, and especially this four word term One Lord Jesus Christ, that is so **packed** with meaning.

## The Creed Part VIII

We believe in One Lord, Jesus Christ. We proclaim the truth of the incarnate Son of God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity in this article of the Nicene Creed. The “Name above all names”, Jesus, before whom “every knee must bend and every tongue must confess”. This person, “taking flesh” from the Blessed Virgin Mary who was Immaculately conceived so as to be the unblemished Ark of the Son of God, is delivered to us as the “Second Adam”, the one who in his living life as one of us will carry out God’s original intention and vision for humanity as blameless of any sin and untouched by sin. Thus He restores the full stature of humanity to humanity. At the same time, he would “become sin” and “put sin to death on the cross,” thus destroying the power of Sin over humanity. With the destruction of the power of Sin, He would redeem human nature that had fallen into the grip of sin and Satan through the “disobedience of the first Adam”. By the ultimately obedient one, Jesus, Son of Mary and Son of God our path to life eternal has been restored.

The name of Jesus Y’shua, means God Saves, and this is the basic message of the one named, the kernel of the history of salvation, which is born out, time and time again through the Hebrew Scriptures and the focus of the Christian Scriptures.

We believe in an Eternal God who became finite in space and time for the express purpose of restoring our ability to have a relationship “through Him, with Him and in Him.”

We enter into this mystery of redemption through baptism into His Name, in the Trinitarian formula of Baptism. However, this is only an “entry”. Once inside, it is our task over the duration of our individual lives on earth to bring that redemption into every corner, every crevice of the complexity of our human nature, our minds, our bodies and our souls, so that every tendency of selfishness and self-will are brought into subjugation, and submission of the one we call LORD, Jesus Christ. This would be a daunting task, were it not for the gift of the Holy Spirit, who has likewise worked to help those we call the saints to do the same and be the “non-divine” examples of how it can be done to sufficiency. This would be a daunting task, were not the power and grip of sin destroyed in the spiritual realm. The Lordship of Jesus Christ is the model that we must put onto our lives so that God is loved, worshiped and glorified in each of us.

## The Creed Part IX

“The only begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through Him all things were made” is the description in the article of the Nicene Creed which gets at the mystery of the Trinity. The Creed states that God did not create the Son. Rather, the Son was eternally begotten. We understand that to be begotten, that there was a time when the thing begotten did not exist. But the Creed says *eternally begotten* which seems to be a contradiction in terms. How does something that is begotten not have a beginning? This is a mystery that has not been revealed to us. The Son is “born of the Father before all ages,” that is, the Son exists outside of time, born from the Father, before time began. The word “before” always implies time, yet time didn’t exist “when” the Son was born of the Father. The revelation contained in the Creed merely states what happened: that the Son, begotten, not created, was born of the Father, before there was time. How this happened, too, is a mystery that has not been revealed—it has only been put forth as required belief.

Another area for consideration is the question: If the persons of God are One then what is the difference between the Son and the Father? Why does there exist a difference of persons while at the same time there is One God? Jesus is the one who tried to reveal this mystery to us in his priestly prayer and Last Supper farewell discourse. He simply said “I and the Father are One.” By saying this he revealed something of the nature of the Trinity. In his priestly prayer of John 17 Jesus prayed that we “would be one as He and the Father were one.” He never said *how* he was one with the Father, he simply said that he and the Father *were* “One.” He revealed also by this means that He and the Father were different while still being One, because he used different names for himself and the Father. We have to stand in stupefied awe of this mystery, because there is really no way to fully grasp what it means—the contradictories are so strong: How can something be One and yet different? All we can do is assert what we know to be true from the revelation of Jesus.

Moving on in the article about Jesus we affirm that God is One when we say that the Son is “God from God”. This means that the nature of the Son of God is the same as the nature of God. We say that the Son is Light from Light, indistinguishable as light from the same source cannot be distinguished from any other ‘part’ of that light—it derives its essence from the same light source. We say that the Son is “True God from True God. This means that the Son is as thoroughly (truly) God as is the Father, who is known to be God by who He is and by his attributes—attributes that are shared between the Father and the Son. If God the Father is God, so is the Son.

Sometimes we just have to be satisfied with what is, when we cannot understand, or express in our finite minds and terms what the truth is. We sometimes have to simply accept the mystery.

## The Creed Part X

“For us men and for our salvation He came down from Heaven. and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.”

As was presented earlier, the Nicene Creed is a formulation of the orthodox faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The formulation was necessary because there was erroneous teaching (the Arian Heresy) being circulated in the Church that was causing the faithful to be confused. It became necessary for the Bishops of the church to come together in council to determine the answer to the question “but you, who do you say that I am?”

The heretic Arius (*sic*) argued that Jesus was a created being, and therefore could not be God. He taught, along with other heretics of an earlier age that the man Jesus was inhabited or possessed by God. Arius went further to say that Jesus’ human nature was overcome by the Divine Nature living in and through the man Jesus, who is “a son of God.”

What got in the way for Arius to be able to accept the orthodox teaching of Jesus were the old platonic philosophical categories of matter vs. spirit. In the platonic system of ontology (also called the philosophy of being), the category of “spirit” or “universals” are the perfect, unchangeable essences of things. Matter, on the other hand, because it is subject to decay and is other kinds of change, is imperfect. Anything that is less than perfect, the Platonist would say, participates in evil, because evil is the privation (denial) of good. The Platonist would argue that to the degree that the universals are realized in matter that is the degree that they participate in evil. Thus Arius argued that because Jesus was born in the flesh (matter which is imperfect and therefore evil), he could not be divine because the divine is perfect and flesh denies the perfect.

The Church has answered that though philosophy was a good way to explain the orthodox faith, the content of Doctrine of the Church takes precedence. Even so, the Doctrine of the church must adhere to reason and its patterns so that it could be understood to the degree that mankind can understand the things of God. Hence, though the platonic categories could be used to explain the Faith, they *weren't the Faith*. The Faith stands, to some degree, apart from the logic used to explain it. Jesus, as a man, affirms in John 17 that he and the Father are One, thereby intimating that Jesus as a Man is also God. When Jesus says “**I** and the Father are One”, he is speaking from the person that he is, but with the knowledge of being God, also. Jews have a word, *Nefesh* which describes the dirt creature (human) created by God with God-breath animating it. *Nefesh* is one thing: a human, indivisible; though for humanity’s finite ways of understanding the human can be imagined as having ‘aspects’. But there is no division in Him. He is One in His humanity and He is One in His Divinity—and One with the Father.