

## Do We Need New Creeds?

The Church of England and The Episcopal Church have recently authorized a number of alternative 'affirmations of faith' for use in worship. Some of these 'affirmations' are biblical texts, and some are fresh attempts to restate the Christian faith (though they cannot claim to be 'ecumenical creeds').

So what exactly is our current need for new creeds?

We might first ask, What needs gave rise to the creeds we already have?

The Apostles' Creed evolved from the earliest baptismal confessions of faith, which expanded upon the baptismal instruction at the end of Matthew's version of the gospel. New Christians need to declare that they share in the faith of the Church; reciting the creed, together with the congregation, is an act of entrusting myself to the Creator-God whose ways are revealed in the story of Jesus and encountered in the Spirit of this holy fellowship. That is why it begins, "I believe . . ." Anglicans officially recognize it as 'the Baptismal Symbol' (according to the *Lambeth Quadrilateral*).

There is also evidence that the baptismal creed served as a 'rule of faith' — a standard against which other accounts of the Christian faith could be tested.

The Nicene Creed (although sharing the same Trinitarian shape as the baptismal creed) was developed to serve as a definitive rebuke to the flawed teaching about Jesus called Arianism. Arius insisted that Jesus was not divine in the same way that God is divine. That is why the Nicene Creed begins, "We believe . . ." Note the precise theological terminology: "eternally begotten, not made, of one being with the Father". This creed was not developed to be a liturgical act but to be a doctrinal definition. It was only some centuries later that it became a fixed element of the Sunday liturgy, to prevent Arian heretics from participating in the Church's worship. Anglicans officially recognize it as 'the sufficient statement of the Christian faith' (the *Lambeth Quadrilateral*).

Actually, the Nicene Creed is only one part of the Christological definition produced by the ancient Church; the other part is the Definition of Chalcedon. Nicea teaches that Jesus is of 'one substance (of one being) with the Father'; Chalcedon teaches that Jesus is also 'of one substance with us'. Only with both parts of this definition are we sufficiently protected against the all too common heresy that Jesus is 'really divine and only seems to be human'. And yet, we have never included the Definition of Chalcedon in the liturgy!

So then, there are a number of questions we should ask. First: Do we need a Baptismal Symbol, a way for new Christians to declare that they share the faith of the Church? The answer is certainly, yes! Should it be ecumenical? Again, the answer is yes!

Then we can ask, Has the Apostles Creed proved inadequate for this purpose? (And how would we come up with a replacement that was ecumenical?)

We might also ask, Do we need a 'rule of faith' to keep us focussed on the heart of the matter? That could be very helpful (especially if it was ecumenical).

Then we should ask, Do we still need something in the eucharistic liturgy to exclude heretics? (Is this the way we want to deal with brothers and sisters in Christ with whom we disagree?)

It has often been observed that neither the Apostles' Creed nor the Nicene Creed even mentions the teaching or the ministry of Jesus. Is that the reason we are looking for new creeds? Or is this something that is better addressed by the lectionary?

Or do we feel the need for a creed that provides a sweeping overview of how God is redeeming the world — one that is a poetic and captivating, something better than the hard-edged definition of the Council of Nicea, more like a song of praise? The Anglican *Book of Alternative Services* (BAS) and *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (ELW) both address this need, but not by offering additional creeds. "It was in the eucharistic prayer rather than in the creed that the ancient Church gave primary expression to its faith when it celebrated the eucharist", says the BAS (p. 176); thus the creed is not required except on major festivals (p 188). The Lutheran book (ELW) also responds to this felt need by calling for a hymn (the 'Hymn of the Day', described as "proclaiming the word of God in song") following scripture and sermon (p. 103/219). It also allows for saying the creed, but does not require it.

So what exactly is our need for new creeds?

— John W. B. Hill