

TO CREED OR NOT TO CREED THAT IS THE QUESTION

The Very Rev. Canon James Newman



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ABSTRACT:

The author is a member of THE MADRES & THE PADRES, a clergy study group in the Diocese of Los Angeles, which has been meeting monthly since the 1940's. This paper was presented at the group's November, 2011 meeting.

The shape of the liturgy has fluctuated over the centuries. Various additions have been made, often including long theological statements to be said or sung. These statements are incidental to the service and may not serve the purpose for which they were originally introduced.

The 1979 Book of Common Prayer (TEC, 1976) is built around the concept of The Baptismal Covenant. How does the weekly repetition of The Nicene Creed fit into that reality? What is its history and usage? How can the Church learn from its words while looking at both when and how it is used within the liturgy?

TO CREED OR NOT TO CREED, THAT IS THE QUESTION

A Paper for the Madres & Padres by James Newman November 29, 2011 (re-edited)

Let me introduce this paper with several scenarios involving the use of the Nicene Creed that have occurred during the years of my ministry.

1). At a meeting to talk about the services to be held after her death, a parishioner asked if the Apostles' Creed could be replaced by the Nicene Creed. I responded that the Burial Office did not require the use of either creed and asked her why she made the request. She responded that she believed in "the resurrection of the dead" (Nicene Creed) but not "the resurrection of the body" (Apostles' Creed). Part of the discussion that ensued focused on why the Creeds of the Church use different and sometimes contradictory language.

2). Twenty years ago, St. Bede's began using the materials from Supplemental Liturgical Materials (SLM)¹ for the primary Sunday and mid-week Eucharists during "ordinary time" seasons². The enabling guidelines from the General Convention suggest the use of the version of the Nicene Creed found in SLM, namely, the one prepared by the English Language Liturgical Consultation (ELLC).³ As with the texts used in the Book of Common Prayer, 1979 (BCP) that were developed by the International Consultation of English Texts (ICET),⁴ the words of the *filioque* ("and the son") were printed in brackets indicating that "each Church must decide whether or not to include the words."⁵

The BCP decided to continue the use of the *filioque*. However, in SLM, the 1991 General Convention opted for a change.

“The words in brackets ‘and the Son,’ are not part of the original Greek text. They were added to some Latin translations. Since the decision to exclude or include them rests with the particular churches involved in the Consultation, ELLC takes no position on the subject. The Episcopal Church, however, at the General Convention of 1988, placed itself on record as favoring their omission, a decision later approved by the Lambeth Conference.”⁶

During the “special time” seasons⁷, our custom at St. Bede’s was to use the ICET Nicene Creed at all Sunday eucharists and as directed in the rubrics at other Eucharists. Recently, the job of preparing the worship materials was taken over by another staff member. After Ash Wednesday, he kept using the ELLC creed at the 10 a.m. service. That congregation was not confused by the continued usage of that creed. What was a surprise, however, was the switch after the Day of Pentecost from the ICET Creed (including the *filioque*) to the ELLC Creed (without *filioque*) at the 8 a.m. Eucharist. That almost immediately provoked several questions from the early churchgoers.

To answer their questions about the changes in the Nicene Creed, I preached a sermon which looked at the creedal changes from the “traditional” Nicene Creed found in the Prayer Books of 1662, 1789, 1892 & 1928 to the ICET Creed of the 1979 BCP to the ELLC Creed of the supplemental materials (see Appendix A): You will note that the most significant changes from ICET to ELLC deal with language that is vague or difficult to translate from the Greek. Much of that is in the section on Jesus’ incarnation (lines 7-23; see Appendix B). That same section was substantially revised in the earlier ICET translation. The other changes had to do with clarity of the text, the use of the *filioque* and recasting the language to “avoid referring unnecessarily to the Holy Spirit as ‘he.’”⁸

3). At a recent General Convention, a resolution was introduced to reaffirm the Nicene Creed. This might have seemed innocuous enough, but the reaffirmation was tied to an explanation that included the author's intent to link that reaffirmation to traditionalist views on gender and sexuality with regard to ordination and marriage. I remember the late Paul Moore, one-time Bishop of New York, stating that, while he did not want to be on record as opposing the Nicene Creed, he hoped that the resolution would be defeated.

The ensuing discussion in the House of Deputies noted that items such as the Nicene Creed did not need to be reaffirmed since they were not only part of the body of materials inherited from the Church of England but also had been consciously included in all four editions of the authorized Prayer Book of the Episcopal Church in various liturgies and in the Articles of Religion.⁹ In the end, the GC either tabled the resolution or discharged it to one of the several CCABs¹⁰ that might deal with it (i.e., bury it).

4). While in Seminary, one of my classmates served as Seminarian Assistant at St. Mark's Parish (Capitol Hill) in Washington, D.C. He told our Field Work colloquy group of a recent newcomer's class at which a new parishioner – a lawyer – confronted the Rector, about the Nicene Creed. In the course of the dialogue, the lawyer had argued the Rector out of all of the main tenets of the Creed. It may have been the genesis of the Rector's eventual book *So You Think You're Not Religious? A Thinking Person's Guide to the Church*.¹¹

5). While in San Francisco on a Sunday, I worshiped at a Sunday Eucharist at the Parish of St. Gregory Nyssen. I have known the founding co-Rectors Rick Fabian and Donald Schell for a number of years and have experienced St. Gregory's worship

both at its temporary home and in its new structure on Portrero Hill. I have also heard Rick Fabian talk on a number of occasions at national and diocesan Church conferences. I have always been struck by the fact that the liturgies I have experienced there have never included the Nicene Creed, but have not questioned it.

6). Recently, while I was putting the final touches on this paper, a young professional parishioner informed me that she would be moving her membership to a U.C.C. congregation in the area. This parishioner, an active member of our church and Vestry, had come to St. Bede's nearly four years ago as she was searching for a home in which to help her develop her spirituality. However, she had begun to feel that our foci, including dogmatic statements raised in the weekly recitation of the Nicene Creed, did not resonate with the areas of her spirituality she was most interested in exploring and growing.

Now, I admit that my use of the Creeds of the Church is as a good corporate member of the Church. I was first exposed to the liturgy of the Church in the mid-1960's using the 1928 Prayer Book, formed in the late 1960's and early to mid-1970's using the trial services found in *The Liturgy of the Lord's Supper* (1967), *the Services for Trial Use* (1971) and *Authorized Services* (1973). I was in the first class at my seminary to use the "new" prayer book (1976) as the normative book of the Church and have faithfully used it for the thirty + years I have been ordained. I have also served in the councils of the Church dealing with liturgy and music at both the national level and local levels.¹²

While I have found myself in theological and emotional accord with much of the theology and structure of the BCP and its rubrics, the times seem always to be changing. For the last quarter century, the Church has been developing new services and refining old ones.

Sometimes “new occasions teach new duties, time makes ancient truth uncouth.”¹³ We are experiencing that now in the Church’s rubrics, canons and liturgies regarding marriage and the varieties of covenanted human relationships (but that is another paper).

I have always thought that both the placement and recitation of the Nicene Creed “on Sundays and other Major Feasts,”¹⁴ at all ordinations (not optional)¹⁵, and possibly at the Consecration of a Church (depending if a Baptism has been held)¹⁶ was the appropriate response to both the proclamation of the Gospel and the resulting Sermon. I have truly loved singing the Calvin Hampton setting of the Nicene Creed (Hymnal 1982, #S-105) but have only heard it sung well by one congregation.¹⁷ Recent writing seems to affirm what my understanding has been. Byron Stuhlman notes that the Nicene Creed “is part of the congregation’s response in faith to the Scriptures.”¹⁸ However, the Prayer Book revision process, which began at the 1949 General Convention (and ended in the final adoption of the “new” Prayer Book thirty years later), directed that serious liturgical study be done prior to any revisions and trial use. Prayer Book Studies IV: The Eucharistic Liturgy was an important early (1953) work that is a significant theological commentary on the history of and wording for the Nicene Creed. The authors note that “In its original Roman use, the Creed has always been a festal addition to the liturgy, not a daily essential.”¹⁹ The ongoing textual commentary is interesting, especially the comments on the *filioque* (pp. 183-184) and on the place of the sermon (pp. 187-188).

Regarding the continued placement of the sermon after the Creed, the SLC notes:

“The Sermon was originally an exposition of the liturgical Gospel: and it is represented that were it brought into immediate

conjunction with the Gospel, it might help to make some sermons less irrelevant to their occasion and setting than is the case now. If this were true, it might be an almost irresistible argument. But it seems probable that the present situation arises more from the idiosyncrasies of some preachers than from the structure of the service.”²⁰ In the end their conclusions were essentially conservative. However, the commentary on the Liturgy of the Lord’s Supper (1967) explains why the intervening fourteen years of liturgical study and reflection led the Standing Liturgical Commission to recommend exactly the opposite for the trial services of the church.

“The Sermon has been placed after the Gospel and before the Creed. This position for the Sermon is actually a return to a more ancient structure that is still preserved in the liturgies of the Eastern and Roman Churches. ... The historical reason for this more ancient structure is simply due to the early Church’s sense of appropriateness in placing the Sermon in the ‘Liturgy of the Catechumens,’ the Creed in ‘The Liturgy of the Faithful.’

But apart from this antiquarian precedent, there is practical value in relating the Sermon more closely to the lessons, and then employing the Creed as a corporate response of the Church to the whole Word of God that has been read and proclaimed.”²¹

“The dropping of the *filioque* clause in the statement of the ‘procession of the Holy Spirit’ is not done out of scruple or hesitancy, because of the long-standing controversy between the Eastern and Western Churches about the doctrinal validity of the ‘double procession’ from the Father and the Son. It is simply a recognition of the fact that it was not originally in the Creed, and is therefore not truly ecumenical.”²²

This omission of the *filioque* continued through both subsequent editions of the trial use liturgies in 1970, 1973 and in the Draft

Proposed Book of Common Prayer sent to the Deputies for consideration at the 1976 General Convention. The GC reinstated the *filioque* before approving the new prayer book.

I recall a wonderful, probably apocryphal, story from the 1970's when the new BCP was being introduced in some parishes. In a discussion, one very opinionated traditionalist parishioner responded that, while she had many reservations about the changes, that she liked the fact that the Nicene Creed now followed the sermon. The Rector was amazed and asked why. She replied, "In the old days the Gospel was proclaimed, we said 'I believe...' and then you preached your sermon. Now, we hear the Gospel and then your sermon. Following that, I can stand and say, 'Nevertheless, I believe.'"

Suffice it to say that the Creed (or Creeds) mean a variety of things to those who hear or say them. There has been much written on the Nicene Creed in the official documents of the Standing Liturgical Commission, in the commentaries on the 1928 and 1979 Prayer

Books by Massey Shepherd and Marion Hatchett, and in many devotional volumes.²³ As a modern catholic, I can argue the case for limiting the community to one central Eucharist on a Sunday when numerically realistic. I can also make the case for reserving the Nicene Creed for Ordinations²⁴ and otherwise using only the Apostles' Creed on the Baptismal Days following the first and fourth rubrics in the BCP (p. 312).²⁵ I have often noted that an Ordination is like a liturgical meeting of "The Episcopal Church, Inc." and that the Nicene Creed at those services is indeed a corporate statement of belief.

However, not so with a Sunday Parish liturgy. We are far from the time in the early Church when the Deacons led the unbaptized from the liturgy after the lessons and before the

profession of faith and the Service of the Table. Now all remain in the service – baptized or not.

If people are normatively receiving communion after baptism and, if at their baptisms (and at the subsequent periodic renewal of those vows, we say the Apostles' (i.e., Baptismal) Creed, do we need to say the Nicene Creed in order to receive at other times? In the Western Church, we obviously do not as the Prayer Book follows the Roman rites and limits its use to "Sundays and other Major Feasts."

The Nicene Creed was originally inserted into the liturgy in 473. First formulated at Nicaea in 325, it was revised and affirmed at Constantinople in 381 as the first ecumenical creed of the whole Church.²⁶ The Western, Latin version changed 'We believe' to 'I believe' [as gradually only the celebrant said the service for the entire assembly (author's note)] and added the *filioque* clause, 'and the son,' to the clause concerning the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father."²⁷

The Nicene Creed was first used in public worship in Antioch by Patriarch Peter the Fuller, a Monophysite who was attempting to attack the Creed of the Council of Chalcedon (451). Sixty years later, another Monophysite heretic, Patriarch Timothy of Constantinople, copied Peter's actions. In the West, it was added to the liturgy at the Council of Toledo (Spain, 589) to remind the newly converted Arian Visigoths of what they had converted to. It was also at this Council that the *filioque* clause was added unilaterally. Charlemagne copied the Toledo liturgy in 798 and it spread across his empire. Just over two hundred years later, in 1014, another Holy Roman Emperor, Henry III, convinced Pope Benedict VIII to add the Creed into the Roman rite.

So, the use of the Nicene Creed in the liturgy was a relatively recent invention and, after the addition of the *filioque* at the end

of the 6th century, it was no longer truly ecumenical.

Indeed, in 1054 Pope Leo IX and Patriarch Michael Cerularius of Constantinople respectively excommunicated and anathematized each other and started what is known as “The Great Schism.” While more than the *filioque* was the cause, it was certainly one of the causes and it was, at that time, a relatively recent innovation.²⁸

In the Proposed American Book of 1786, the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds were dropped much to the dismay of English Bishops and the New England Clergy and Bishop Samuel Seabury (CT). A group of English bishops wrote Church leaders, “... we saw with grief that two of the Confessions of the Christian faith, respectable for their antiquity, have been entirely laid aside; and that even in that called the Apostles’ Creed, an article is omitted ... We therefore most earnestly exhort you, that ... you restore to its integrity the Apostles’ Creed, ... we hope you ... give to the other two Creeds a place in your Book of

Common Prayer, even though the use of them be left discretionary.”²⁹ In a typical Anglican compromise, the Nicene Creed was reinstated, the Athanasian Creed was rejected (not to reappear until the Historical Documents section in the current BCP) and some compromises and alternatives were made in the language of the Apostles’ Creed.

In a 2009 letter to Bishop Marc Andrus (CA), the Rev. Richard Fabian uses such terms as “innovative”, “superfluous”, “sectarian”, “retrograde” and “non-ecumenical” to describe weekly congregational recitation of the Nicene Creed. Writing as a member of the Diocesan Commission on Liturgy and Music and a founding rector of St. Gregory Nyssen Parish in San Francisco, Fabian was answering concerns raised by clergy and laity over the fact that his parish used only the Apostles’ Creed and that only at Baptismal Days (see full text, Appendix C)³⁰

First, is Anglican/Episcopalian use of the Nicene Creed a normative tradition or is it an innovation?

“‘Nicene’ Creed recitation spread slowly westward, and was long resisted in England, a country noted for good liturgy: there it squeezed into the byzantinized Sarum use only in the 15th century—just in time for Cranmer to include it in his Prayer Book. Even so, the failure of Prayer Book worship under the Stuarts and Puritans meant that by mid- seventeenth century Anglicans had dropped the ‘Nicene’ Creed (along with the Prayer Book) from Sunday worship, like several continental Reformed churches. And it remained dropped, because the 1688 Restoration brought back the BCP but not the Sunday Eucharist. In North America only Calvinist colonists celebrated weekly Eucharists-- without that Creed; American Episcopalians did not. Outside Anglo-Catholic ritualist missions in the midwest, most Episcopalian Sundays remained non-Eucharistic for two hundred years until after World War II, and the ‘Nicene’ Creed was heard only on the three yearly feasts the Creed mentioned: Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost [*author’s note, actually four feasts, see the rubric at the conclusion of the paragraph following this quote*].

“The 20th century Liturgical Movement brought Episcopal parishes communion at the main service monthly: that’s the Episcopal Church I grew up in. This change naturally raised pressure for further reform, because under the 1928 Prayer Book Eucharistic rite the ‘Nicene’ Creed was the only thing laypeople could say without accusing themselves. (Compare people’s joyful affirmations at Morning Prayer, and contemporary Roman Catholic devotions!) Hence few objected when the 1979 BCP, making Eucharistic worship our norm, brought the ‘Nicene’ Creed into most Episcopalians’ regular weekly worship for the first time. In practice, allowing for other creeds at baptisms, weddings and when the Eucharist follows Morning Prayer, BCP

rubrics often brought ‘Nicene’ Creed recitation into the main Sunday service alone. Moreover, here was a compromise among long-held parish traditions, and as an innovation it remains properly subject to feedback.

Feedback since 1979 suggests it would better have been set forth as a norm, like some other Anglo-Catholic favorites, rather than a flat rule—something other renewed Protestant rites avoided.”³¹ The 1662 rubric after the Gospel and before the Creed states “*And the Gospel ended, shall be sung or said the Creed following, the people still standing as before.*”³² With the exception of the 1786 Proposed Book in which the Creed was omitted, the American rubrics that came after that were very similar: “*Then shall be read the Apostles’, or Nicene Creed; unless one of them hath been read immediately before in the Morning Service.*” (1789); “*Then shall be said the creed commonly called the Nicene, or else the Apostles’ Creed; but the Creed may be omitted, if it hath been said immediately before in Morning Prayer; Provided, That the Nicene Creed shall be said on Christmas-day, Easter-day, Ascension-day, Whitsunday, and Trinity-Sunday.*” (1892 & 1928). However, if most people experienced Episcopal worship in Morning Prayer, they never even got to the communion rubrics.

The “Order for the Administration of the Lord’s Supper, or, The Holy Communion” was included in all of the editions of the Prayer Book from 1549. In 1549 only, the title added “commonly called the Masse.”³³ Except for one instance in the rubrics of the first three American Prayer Books³⁴, the word “Eucharist” was not used until 1967 when the service was entitled “The Liturgy of the Lord’s Supper: The Celebration of Holy Eucharist and Ministration of Holy Communion.”³⁵ Prayer Book Studies IV (1953) first re-named the rite based on the usage of the Episcopal Church of Scotland, “The Scottish Liturgy for the Celebration of the Holy Eucharist and Administration of the Holy Communion.”³⁶ Used since 1912, this title drew on the ancient

term “Eucharist” which was found in the *Didaché* and in Holy Scripture itself.³⁷ It also used the term “Liturgy” which the PB Study noted: “It is entirely neutral in its implications since its original and etymological meaning is literally ‘Public Service.’ All branches of the Eastern Churches employ it exclusively to designate this service.”³⁸ Furthermore, the Liturgy of the Lord’s Supper was published in the ecumenical glow of the Second Vatican Council, which had concluded at the end of 1965.

Fabian has written that the normative Anglican worship after the Stuart restoration was non-Eucharistic. That remained the case until the liturgical revival of the 1960's/70's that shaped and informed the trial services and the 1979 BCP. The opening rubric of the 1979 book was in and of itself both startling and earth-shaking to many Episcopalians, “*The Holy Eucharist, the principal act of Christian worship on the Lord’s Day and other major Feasts, ...*”³⁹

Moreover, Holy Communion was not normatively used as part of the other Rites of the Church until the mid-20th century. While we now understand and expect the Eucharist to be a part of baptisms, confirmations, marriages, burials, ordinations, institutions, etc., that was simply not the situation with earlier books. The exception to that was in the Anglo-Catholic ritualist wing of the Church, which while numerically weak nonetheless continued to influence the development of the Church liturgy. Through the publication of their own “wee-bookies” for special occasions (Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Holy Saturday, the Easter Vigil) and the establishment of groups such as Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission, the liturgical wing of the Church slowly gained strength.

Through this liturgical renewal and the movement toward Prayer Book revision in the years after the Second World War, the focus of Episcopal worship moved from the Offices to the Eucharist

and, with that, the increasingly frequent use of the Nicene Creed.

Thus, Fabian says, this weekly use of the Nicene Creed is an innovation of the mid-20th century. His argument counters both my feeling and Stuhlman's statement that the Nicene Creed is "part of the congregation's response in faith to the Scriptures." - "Those are worthy actions; but both those actions now happen in our growing body of Great Thanksgiving Prayers, where they naturally belong, and where they speak more understandably. Anglican prayer books made this conscious change in concert with Roman Catholic and Protestant liturgists of the Vatican 2 era, who chose Syrian prayer models retelling the story of salvation, above the Roman Canon model mentioning only Jesus' Last Supper and death, or Reformation reforms refining sacramental theory." ⁴⁰

This is already implicitly stated in the BCP rubric for Palm Sunday, which notes: "*When the Liturgy of the Palms has preceded, the Nicene Creed and the Confession of Sin may be omitted at this service.*"⁴¹ Marion Hatchett writes, "In a liturgy of this content and weight the use of the Nicene Creed and the confession of sin seems unnecessary if not redundant..." ⁴²

Fabian suggests that we should instead look at our Eucharistic prayers.

"Several modern Great Thanksgiving prayers explicitly quote language from ancient creeds in addition to the so-called 'Nicene.' There is no need to do this job twice; and relying on the Great Thanksgiving prayers for this job has advantages..." ⁴³

"Since we adopted the 1979 BCP, Anglican provinces like New Zealand have bypassed this problem by offering alternative creeds for use at eucharists, baptisms, and various other services. Ignoring their work now would leave the Episcopal Church

lagging behind, even while we still lead our communion in other areas: gender, ordinations, electoral choice, etc. That is one reason the New Zealand Prayer Book has won widespread usage in our church—(we Americans continue to print and use it, though the New Zealanders have stopped printing pending another reform)—and subsequent Anglican national revisions have some use here also.”⁴⁴

Just as the adoption of the Canon of Scripture did not close down the work of the Holy Spirit or Divine Inspiration, so the adoption of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer and the Hymnal 1982 did not close down the work of the Holy Spirit in the areas of liturgical scholarship, development or inspiration. Since 1979 just in the official materials of the Church, we have seen the publication of Supplemental Liturgical Materials, Enriching Our Worship (several volumes), Enriching Our Music (several volumes), Wonder, Love and Praise, With One Voice , El Himnario, Lift Every Voice and Sing , The Book of Occasional Services , Lesser Feasts and Fasts and Holy Women, Holy Men . Fabian writes,

“These revisions proceed in ongoing dialog among Anglican provinces that includes our own Episcopalian scholars and commissions, so we may expect to see more shared liturgical usage strengthening our common worldwide Anglican identity. Moreover, as other provinces make unity concordats with Lutheran and other liturgical bodies, our resources will expand beyond the Greek, Syrian and Roman models, which almost entirely informed our current BCP. General Conventions will necessarily find ways to participate while upholding our own priorities.”⁴⁵

Finally, our ecumenical context has changed. At the end of the 19th century, the ecumenical vision of Church leaders such as

William Reed Huntington led to the adoption of the Chicago - Lambeth Quadrilateral. The Introduction and Resolution #1(b) of the Lambeth Conference of 1888 reads:

“That, in the opinion of this Conference, the following Articles supply a basis on which approach may be by God's blessing made towards Home Reunion:

“(b) The Apostles' Creed, as the Baptismal Symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith.⁴⁶”
” Where are we ecumenically? With whom are we linked?

“Our BCP took shape in a fresh and hopeful ecumenical context, centered at the Vatican II Council where Eastern Orthodox, Anglican and other Protestant scholars advised as *periti*. For example, our BCP's Prayer D was published in four overlapping denominational versions so that every church could use one shared Great Thanksgiving prayer; and the Vatican II lectionary was embraced widely with minor denominational adjustments. These first steps consciously prepared for fuller union. The fact that several traditional churches recited the ‘Nicene’ Creed at Sunday Eucharists implied it might be another shared text, and hence a further step toward Eucharistic sharing: this potential motivated our BCP reformers to guarantee the Creed's weekly repetition despite its schismatic beginnings, despite its sectarian feel, and despite longstanding contrary Sunday practice in most Episcopal parishes. Since 1979, however, that formal ecumenical promise has dimmed.

Two reactionary Roman popes have raised ever-higher barriers to Eucharistic sharing. The Eastern churches remain divided among themselves, and the resurgent Russian Orthodox Church has undermined decades of collaboration within the World Council of Churches.

At the same time, formal Eucharistic sharing among Anglicans, Lutherans and other Protestants has grown based on theological alignment rather than identical rites.⁴⁷ And some Roman Catholic liturgists already argue against using the ‘Nicene’ Creed at Sunday masses everywhere. Reciting the ‘Nicene’ Creed every Sunday has thus lost its overriding ecumenical value.”⁴⁸

The major ecumenical work during the years of my ordained ministry has been the work of the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches in its publication of Faith and Order Paper No. 111, Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry (1982). In this paper, the WCC manages to speak for their membership in terms of doing rather than in creedal belief. It is not unlike Jim Adams’ take on the Creed as “I place my heart.”

Our goal today is to welcome people into a fellowship of faith and, possibly, our fellowship of faith. We do not check credentials or pedigrees as people enter. The font is there for initiating and defining community, the table is there for feeding and the other sacramental rites of the Church flow through the vocation and ministry of all – ordained and non-ordained.

In his commentary on the current BCP, Marion Hatchett writes: “During the first centuries of the Church’s existence it was clearly understood, in keeping with the tradition of Jewish mealtime prayers, that the creed of the Eucharist was the Eucharistic prayer. People heard the faith proclaimed over the bread and wine and gave their assent in acclamation and Amen.”⁴⁹ Fabian states that Eucharistic prayers focus on God’s actions and our response.

“The Cappadocians established as an orthodox theological principle, in the late Richard Norris’s words: ‘We don’t know anything about God; we only know what God does.’

The Great Thanksgiving Prayers are wholly doxological, focused on God's actions and our faithful response to those, rather than on our thoughts. By contrast the 'Nicene' Creed speaks rhetorically about us: even though God may be the subject of most verbs, each paragraph opens setting us believers on top. That rhetoric may suit catechesis and doctrinal arbitration, where creeds properly arose, but it hardly suits worship."⁵⁰ Earlier, I pointed out how the Nicene Creed was inserted into the Eucharist for sectarian or "party" purposes. I would go so far as to assert that it represents the type of intentional division that Paul condemns in 1 Corinthians.⁵¹ Fabian comments that: "Ancient councils wrote creeds for harmonizing teaching, never for liturgy. So far from proclaiming an Orthodox identity, reciting Creeds at Eucharists began as a deliberate schismatic shibboleth to defy orthodoxy."⁵² So, what am I recommending? I began with six examples of issues regarding the Nicene Creed:

1. Different Creeds...different terms
2. The Creed as re-translated and re-interpreted over the years
3. The continuing use of the Creed for sectarian purposes
4. Affirming what we believe vs. what God does
5. My reactions to finding a Church, which does not use the Creed
6. Doctrinal language that some may find inappropriate in a worship service.

I am convinced of several points made earlier:

1. The Holy Eucharist is the principal act of worship on the Lord's Day and other Major Feasts – at least the Principal Feasts (All Saints' Day, Christmas Day and the Feast of the Epiphany)

and probably the Feasts of the Lord (the Holy Name, the Presentation, the Annunciation, the Visitation, St. John the Baptist, the Transfiguration, and Holy Cross Day) and perhaps (only perhaps) the other Major Feasts (all apostles, all evangelists, St. Stephen, the Holy Innocents, St. Joseph, St. Mary Magdalene, St. Mary the Virgin, St. Michael and All Angels, St. James of Jerusalem, Independence Day and Thanksgiving Day – talk about culturally defined worship with the final two!).

2. I know that we should offer the Eucharist at times other than Sunday morning for convenience to parishioners and others who cannot attend on a Sunday morning.

Hence, many of the occasions I have just listed would be appropriate, as would a fixed mid-week Eucharist (or Eucharists) to both honor those appointed days or days that honor others that the Church may deem worthy. For many of those occasions, the Church does not require the Creed. If the Creed is therefore optional at some times, it is obviously not a required stop on the path toward receiving Communion. As the SLC noted in 1953, “In its original Roman use, the Creed has always been a festal addition to the Liturgy, not a daily essential. And Cranmer’s First Prayer Book allowed the Creed to be omitted ‘on the workedaye’ – i.e., on weekdays which were not holidays. This precedent has been followed in all recent British revisions, except the Indian. There seems to be every reason for providing weekday celebrations, which if desired, may be in the briefest possible form, especially for the benefit of city churches where such services can be attended by people on their way to work – but only if they do not last too long.”⁵³

3. Where possible, a congregation should have one parish Eucharist on a Sunday. In the Diocese of Los Angeles, there are a mere handful of congregations that need more than one

Eucharist. A new congregation should never be started with more than one Sunday Eucharist (unless for linguistic or cultural reasons).

4. A structural option would be to follow the Anglo-Catholic practice (also the rubrical requirement for Prayer Books until 1892 and an option until 1979) of having a brief service of Morning Prayer preceding the Sunday Eucharist. That service (with or without music) could be structured:

Sentence of Scripture (optional)

Penitential rite (optional)

Invitatory & Psalm (from the Sunday Eucharistic proper)

Lesson: The first Lesson (from the Sunday Eucharistic proper)

Canticle (for Rite 2, #'s 16, 11, 14 or 8, as seasonally appropriate)

Apostles Creed (optional, said or sung)

Collects for Sunday and Mission

Closing Versicle Another possibility would be to use Morning Prayer as the Service of the Word as outlined in the BCP rubrics on p. 142.⁵⁴

5. Keeping the Church's four Baptismal days (along with the Bishop's visitation)⁵⁵ is an essential catechetical and liturgical principle. When there are no candidates for baptism, the Baptismal service should be amended to provide for the Renewal of Baptismal Vows. These four days might be made into major event days at the congregation (pot-lucks, speakers, parties, etc.) to encourage greater attendance. That would lead me to suggest that it is not appropriate to renew Baptismal Vows at other services in some misguided attempt to include everyone's ministry in an otherwise focused event. Ordinations are a good

example. The renewing of baptismal vows is not part of that rite and its inclusion immediately changes the service's focus. Moreover, in the Los Angeles Diocese, due to the fact that we ordain priests on the Saturday after Epiphany, its addition is unnecessary and duplicates the rubrical expectation that on the next day worshipers will renew their baptismal vows in their home congregations.

Creatively keeping the four Baptismal Days might well lead the Church to focus and reflect on its liturgical theology and practice of the Sacrament of Baptism. Perhaps we could use Prayer D and omit the Nicene Creed. Perhaps we could look at other statements of belief from other related traditions (e.g., two "Affirmations of Faith," one in the New Zealand Prayer Book⁵⁶ and one in an unofficial book of supplemental prayers written by and for women,⁵⁷ either of which might be used as a sermon topic, a class lesson, or as part of a series on statements of faith). In Eastertide, for example, we already omit the Penitential Rite. In fact, whenever the service is altered due to the nature of a season or event, the alteration or omission allows for a teaching opportunity about both the nature of the specific event or season, in general, and the difference between required and optional parts of the service, in particular.

Another way to experience our statements of faith is to sing them. Jim Adams writes, "Churches that sing instead of say the Nicene Creed may be wise. Set to music, the creed seems more obviously to be an expression of the heart rather than of the intellect."⁵⁸ There are several sung versions of the Creed:

in the Hymnal 1982 (S-103, 105 & 105),

in Songs for Celebration (Church Hymnal Series IV), #H-264
tune: Betty Pulkingham, 1974,

in *Wonder, Love and Praise*, #'s 768 & 769⁵⁹ are metrical settings of the Apostles' Creed, in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* #411⁶⁰ (by Martin Luther), and of course at a pinch it could be sung in a monotone.

Early in his letter Fabian cites two eminent liturgical scholars with whom I want to summarize:

“During Prayer Book revision, Charles Guilbert, Custodian of the BCP and a permanent member of the Standing Liturgical Commission, as well as Chair of our California Diocesan Liturgy Commission, insisted the new BCP was intended to end rubrical warfare and give the lead to scholarship and pastoral experience, both for implementation and for ongoing reform. Before and after adoption, Charles insisted that the new BCP rubrics were ‘meant not as rules but as guidelines’ — a flexibility which some opponents of reform ignored, unhappily choosing schism instead.

“Recently, Louis Weil made the same point more strongly. ‘What I pleaded for to the Commission shortly before I ended my second term, is that it is very important for the Episcopal Church NOT to move toward complete Prayer Book revision at this time, but rather to address the need for the development of a range of experimental rites which will enable us to address the larger issues of inclusion without being under the gun to produce a complete book. We need a process of local development, critical evaluation, and appropriate revision so that, in due course, the cream will rise to the top and the poor experiments, having been tested and found wanting, may drop off our plate.’”⁶¹

ENDNOTES

- 1: Supplemental Liturgical Materials, Expanded Edition, 1991,1996, Church Hymnal Corp., NYC, NY.
- 2: The Seasons after Epiphany and Pentecost.
- 3: Praying Together, 1988, English Language Liturgical Consultation. Electronic edition, 2007 www.englishtexts.org .
- 4: Prayers We Have in Common, 1970, International Consultation on English Texts.
- 5: Praying Together, p. 21.
- 6: Supplemental Liturgical Materials, p. 52 .
- 7: Advent 1 through the Feast of the Epiphany and Ash Wednesday through Pentecost.
- 8: Praying Together, p. 21.
- 9: Book of Common Prayer , 1977, The Church Hymnal Corporation & the Seabury Press; p. 871: “*VIII. Of the Creeds. The Nicene Creed, and that which is commonly called the Apostles' Creed, ought thoroughly to be received and believed: for they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture.*”
- 10: Committees, Commissions, Agencies & Boards
- 11: James Adams, So You Think You're Not Religious? A Thinking Person's Guide to the Church , 1989, Cowley Press. Actually, his chapter “The Nicene Creed – An Expression of Human Longing” pp. 61-79 is well worth reading, especially where he notes that “...CreDo, a verb based on the noun CaRDia, which means heart. Because heart has no verb form in English, and because the literal translation ‘I place my heart’ seemed wordy and awkward, credo turned up in English as ‘I believe in’. ‘I believe in’ had a clearly different meaning from the similar phrase ‘I believe that’, which translated the Latin *opinor* . ‘I believe in’, means to have trust or confidence. *Opinor* , ‘I believe that’, means to hold an intellectual proposition that may or may not be in accord with the facts.” (P. 61)
- 12: I served as a board member and president of the Association of Diocesan Liturgy & Music Commissions in the 1990's and on Diocesan Liturgy Commissions (Minnesota 1978-88 & Los Angeles 1989-2008).

13: From a poem by James Russell Lowell, 1845 and used as part of Hymn 519 in The Hymnal 1940, The Church Pension Fund, New York.

14: BCP, pp. 326, 358.

15: BCP, pp 519, 529, 541.

16: BCP, p. 572.

17: Church of the Holy Apostles', New York City (Chelsea).

18: Prayer Book Rubrics Expanded, Byron Stuhlman, 1987, Church Hymnal Corporation, p. 71.

19: Prayer Book Studies IV: The Eucharistic Liturgy, Standing Liturgical Commission of the PECUSA, The Church Pension Fund, 1953, p. 180

20: Id., p. 188.

21: Prayer Book Studies XVII: The Liturgy of the Lord's Supper, Standing Liturgical Commission of the PECUSA, The Church Pension Fund, 1966, p. 32.

22: Id., p. 33.

23: One of my favorites is The Nicene Creed: Illumined by Modern Thought by Geddes MacGregor (Eerdmans, 1980).

24: The Nicene Creed at Ordinations is essential. The rubrics of the BCP (all of which are constitutional) clearly state what should happen at these services: "The celebration of the Holy Eucharist may be according to Rite One or Rite Two. In either case, the rubrics of the service of ordination are followed. The Summary of the Law, the Gloria in excelsis, the Prayers of the People after the Creed, the General Confession, and the usual post-communion prayer are not used." BCP p. 552.

25: Holy Baptism is especially appropriate at the Easter Vigil, on the Day of Pentecost, on All Saints' Day or the Sunday after All Saints' Day, and on the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord (the First Sunday after the Epiphany). It is recommended that, as far as possible, Baptisms be reserved for these occasions or when a bishop is present. If on the four days listed above there are no candidates for Baptism, the Renewal of Baptismal Vows, page 292, may take the place of the Nicene Creed at the Eucharist.

26: The Apostles' Creed is used only in the West and, hence, is not an Ecumenical Creed.

27: Massey Hamilton Shepherd, Jr., The Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary, 1950, Oxford University Press, p. 71 commentary.

28: A unilateral 2011 revision of the Nicene Creed by the Roman Catholic Church again changed the creed: “When reciting the Nicene Creed, the statement of faith, [Roman] Catholics now say that Jesus is ‘one in being with the Father.’ Soon, they will say that Jesus is ‘consubstantial with the Father.’ Also, Jesus will no longer be ‘born of the Virgin Mary,’ but ‘incarnate of the Virgin Mary.’” Huffington Post, Aug. 22, 2011.

29: Quoted in Marion J. Hatchett, The Making of the First American Book of Common Prayer, 1982, The Seabury Press, p. 95 .

30: I was serendipitously seated immediately in front of Fr. Fabian at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival’s July 23 performance of *Henry IV, Part Two*. I am indebted to him for sending me a copy of his May 4, 2009 letter to California Bishop Marc Andrus, hereinafter cited as “Fabian Letter.” The complete rationale of worship at St. Gregory’s was earlier printed in Worship at St. Gregory’s, Richard Fabian, 1995, All Saints’ Company.

31: Richard Fabian letter to Bishop Marc Andrus (CA), May 4, 2009, section 6 .

32: Paul Marshall, Prayer Book Parallels, 1989, Church Hymnal Corporation, pp. 326-327; This and the rubrics in this paragraph all come from this extremely helpful resource.

33: The First & Second Prayer Books of Edward VI, Everyman’s Library, J. M. Dent & Sons, 1910, p. 212.

34: *“Then shall follow the Sermon. And after that, if there be a Communion, the Instituted Minister shall proceed to that Service, and to administer the holy Eucharist to his Congregation; and after the Benediction, (which he shall always pronounce,) the Wardens, Vestry, and others, shall salute and welcome him, bidding him God-speed.”* Book of Common Prayer, 1928, p.574 (also found in the 1892 and 1789 eds.; added 1804); In The Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary (pp. 569-574 commentary), Massey Shepherd notes: “In this Office are used certain terms not found elsewhere in the Prayer Book, many of them reflecting the ‘high church’ tradition and outlook of Bishop Seabury and his fellow clergy of Connecticut: such as ‘altar’ (though used here as a synonym for ‘sanctuary’ as well as for ‘Holy Table’); ‘the Ministers of Apostolic Succession’, ‘the holy Eucharist; and Senior Warden’ (the Prayer Book and Canons speak only of ‘Churchwardens’). According to the late Dean Samuel Hart of the Berkeley Divinity School this last-named distinction of Senior and Junior Wardens is a usage borrowed from the Masonic Order.”

- 35: The Liturgy of the Lord's Supper, The Church Pension Fund, 1967, p. 3.
- 36: PB Studies IV, p. 1 47.
- 37: Id., p. 147: Matt 26.27; Mark 14.23; Luke 23.17,19; 1 Cor 11.24 & 14.17; Phil 4.6 & 1 Tim 2.1
- 38: Id., p. 146.
- 39: BCP, p. 13.
- 40: Fabian, section 4 (part).
- 41: BCP, p. 273.
- 42: Marion J. Hatchett, Commentary on the American Prayer Book, 1995, Harper Collins, p. 228.
- 43: Fabian, section 4 (part).
- 44: Fabian, section 7 (part).
- 45: Fabian, section 7 (part).
- 46: BCP, p. 877.
- 47: The ELCA with whom we are in full communion suggests, but does not require, either Creed in their ten Eucharistic rites in Evangelical Lutheran Worship, 2006, Augsburg Fortress; the United Methodist Church in its four Eucharistic rites (The United Methodist Hymnal, 1989, U. M. Pub. House) suggests, but does not require, the use of the Apostles' Creed "or another creed" and includes ten options including the Nicene Creed, two versions of the Apostles' Creed, several modern Affirmations of Faith, and three based on New Testament verses (Rom. 8.35,37-39; 1 Cor. 15.1-6 & Col. 1.15-20; and 1 Tim. 2.5-6, 1.15 & 3.16); the Movavian Church suggests the use of the Apostles' Creed.
- 48: Fabian, section 8.
- 49: Hatchett, p. 333.
- 50: Fabian, section 9 (part).
- 51:1 Corinthians 1.10-17.
- 52: Fabian, point #5.

53: Prayer Book Studies IV, p. 180.

54: Parenthetically, I would advocate that when there is no priest or bishop present, the service used would be full Morning Prayer (led by a trained Lay Person) followed by a Hymn with the Breaking of the Bread and distribution of the elements either by a Deacon or a licensed Lay Eucharistic Minister. I do not believe in the (mis-named) “Deacon’s Mass” as those licensed to officiate at services in the Episcopal Church are Lay People, Bishops and Priests. Diaconal ministry is an assisting, serving ministry. It was not conceived as a presiding ministry.

55: BCP, p. 312.

56: A New Zealand Prayer Book, 1988, Collins Liturgical Publications, p. 481.

***An Affirmation of Faith:** “You, O God, are supreme and holy. You create our world and give us life. Your purpose overarches everything we do. You have always been with us. You are God. You, O God, are infinitely generous, good beyond all measure. You came to us before we came to you. You have revealed and proved your love for us in Jesus Christ who lived and died and rose again. You are with us now. You are God. You, O God, are Holy Spirit. You empower us to be your gospel in the world. You reconcile and heal; you overcome death. You are our God. We worship you.”*

57: Elizabeth Geitz, et. al., eds, Women’s Uncommon Prayers: Our Lives Revealed, Nurtured, Celebrated; 2000, Morehouse Publishing, p. 325 .

*“**An Affirmation of Faith:** We believe in the God of Life, who creates and loves people, who acts in history and who promises never to leave us alone. We believe in Jesus of Nazareth, who is our brother, who wants not to be idolized but to be followed. We believe that we dwell in the presence of the Holy Spirit; without her we are nothing; filled with her we are able to become creative, lively, and free. We believe in the Church of Jesus Christ, a community where we find companions and courage for the struggles of life, where we grow in our understanding of the faith, through worship, prayer, nurture, and service. We believe that God has a use for us in this time and place, that though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we are called to be instruments of God's presence. We believe in living, hoping, laughing, and enjoying the good of the earth; We believe that people can change, and God keeps pulling us to life and to a new world of joy and peace. Amen.”*

58: James Adams, p. 62.

59: #768, Tune: *Domhnach Trionoide*; #769, Tune: *Arfon* (Major).

60: Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Augsburg Fortress, 2006, #411 (Text: Martin Luther; Music: *Wir Glauben all*, Latin Credo, c. 1300)

“We all believe in one true God, / Who created earth and Heaven, / The Father, who to us in love/ Hath the right of children given./ He both soul and body feedeth, / All we need He doth provide us; / He thro’ snares and perils leadeth, / Watching that no harm betide us. / He careth for us day and night,/ All things are governed by His might.

“We all believe in Jesus Christ, / His own Son, our Lord, possessing / An equal Godhead, throne, and might, / Source of every grace and blessing. / Born of Mary, virgin mother, / By the power of the Spirit,/ Made true man, our elder Brother, / That the lost might life inherit. / Was crucified for sinful men/ And raised by God to life again.

“We all confess the Holy Ghost, / Who sweet grace and comfort giveth / And with the Father and the Son/ In eternal glory liveth; / Who the Church, His own creation, / Keeps in unity of Spirit. / Here forgiveness and salvation/ Daily come thro’ Jesus’ merit. / All flesh shall rise, and we shall be / In bliss with God eternally.”

61: Fabian, section 1.