

Views from the Pews - The Creeds.

In the major services in the *Book of Common Prayer* (the basis of the *New Zealand Prayer Book - He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa*) the congregation recites one of the creeds as a statement of our faith. The Apostles' Creed is set for the daily offices of Matins and Evensong. At the Eucharist the Creed recited is the Nicene Creed. The third is the Athanasian Creed, ordered to be said on the great festivals and a number of the major Saints days. Its Latin title *Quicumque Vult* is a translation of its opening words "Whoever will be saved...". For a long time, the wording was ascribed to St Athanasius, but is now thought to date from the sixth century. If so, it could not be from the pen of Athanasius.

The Apostles' Creed is thought to date from 314, when the Council of Arles (France) settled questions of doctrine in favour of those held by the Church in Rome. It is probably a development of the recital of Christian belief required of candidates for baptism from the earliest times. The Apostles' Creed is a relatively comprehensive statement of the faith, but divergent views remained, on such questions as the humanity and divinity of Jesus. These disagreements were of such concern that an even more definitive statement of faith was required. This was achieved, to some extent, in the Nicene Creed.

The Council of Nicaea (325) was called by the emperor Constantine I, who was a recent convert to Christianity. He addressed the opening session of the conference. Some 300 bishops were present to discuss and agree on the fundamental doctrines of the Church, including those relating to the nature of God. The Nicene Creed is placed to follow the readings from Scripture and their exposition in the sermon, giving the community the chance to assent to what it has just heard. The Creeds are central to the continuity of the faith, and we stand to recite them as an act of faith. For Christians over the centuries, this simple act has sometimes been costly in the extreme.

Scholars have critically re-examined the Creeds, and while some might disagree about the true meaning of the words, we still use them to stand in community to declare the fundamentals of our belief. Individual differences in interpretation or understanding of the traditional texts are less important than our common faith in God who stands behind them.

Bryan Bang