



# The Origin of the Creed

BY FR. LARRY RICE

If you ask most people what the longest prayer is that they pray at a Catholic Mass, most will probably respond with the Creed. The only problem with that answer is that the Creed isn't really a prayer.

The Creed, after all, isn't addressed to God. It's a statement of beliefs which we recite together as an expression of our unity in the faith. It may be spoken reverently or even prayerfully, but that doesn't in itself make it a prayer.

So: where does the Creed come from? As a summary of the most central Christian doctrines, it arose from times when those beliefs were in question-- when various factions held different theological positions. The older version of the Creed is the Apostle's Creed, which traces its origin to the 4th Century. Although legend says that the Apostle's Creed was penned by the Apostles themselves, the earliest evidence we have is a letter from St. Ambrose, after the Council of Milan.

The creed we use most frequently at Mass is the Nicene Creed. Although its origins at the Council of Nicea in 325 place it in the same century as the Apostle's creed, the Nicene creed

is longer, and more explicitly defines what we believe about the human and divine natures of Jesus Christ. This was in reaction to the Arian heresy, which denied Christ's divinity. The version of the Nicene Creed we use today includes additions made at the Council of Constantinople in the year 381.

The Creed was further revised based on other theological controversies. In the late sixth Century, the Latin-speaking Churches of the west, under the banner of Rome, added the words "and the Son" to the phrase explaining the giving of the Holy Spirit. The Orthodox Churches of the East believe that the Holy Spirit is sent only from the Father. While this may seem like a minor point to most of us today, literal battles were fought over this "filioque" controversy,

When we recite the Creed at mass, we're part of the Church's long theological Tradition, re-affirming the results of centuries of theological study and debate that has helped us understand with ever-greater precision who God is, and what He has done for us.