

What Is the Nicene Creed?

Rev. Terry G. Cornett, 1997

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The original Nicene Creed came out of the first worldwide gathering of Christian leaders at Nicaea in Bithynia (what is now Isnik, Turkey) in the year 325. It was called to deal with a heresy called Arianism which denied that Jesus was God and taught that he was instead the greatest created being. The council at Nicaea hammered out language that bishops could use to teach their churches who Jesus was.

A little over 50 years later, new challenges were being faced. A modified form of the Arian heresy was making a comeback, and a new problem had also emerged. Some bishops and pastors had begun teaching that the Holy Spirit was not God (was not of the same substance as the Father) and was not really even a creature. He was thought of as a kind of power but not as a person of the Godhead.

To resolve this problem, a council of 150 bishops of the Eastern Church were gathered in 381 at Constantinople (modern day Istanbul, Turkey). This council reaffirmed the fact that Jesus was fully God and then turned their attention to the question of the Holy Spirit which the Nicene Council had left untouched. (The original Nicene Creed read simply, “We believe in the Holy Spirit.”) The council turned this simple statement into a paragraph which explained more fully the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

This expanded version of the original Nicene Creed is what is most commonly known as “The Nicene Creed” today (although it is more technically correct to call it the “Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed” or the “Creed of the 150 Fathers”). It is universally acknowledged by Christians of all denominations.¹ It is used as a part of the worship service in many traditions, as well.



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¹ Although the Eastern
Orthodox churches do
not accept the addition
of the words “and the
Son” in the section on
the Holy Spirit.

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