

At Morning Prayer

For the last of my trilogy of archaeological excavations into the deeper recesses of the *Book of Common Prayer* I have travelled further forward towards the front cover and unearthed a few pages headed, ‘At Morning Prayer’.¹ These begin with two of only a few words in Latin in the whole Prayer Book, apart, of course, from the translated opening verses of the Psalms and the Canticles.² I refer to *Quicumque vult*; ‘Whosoever will’; the first words of the creed that follows. The rubric refers to, ‘this Confession of our Christian Faith commonly called The Creed of Saint Athanasius’.

A creed, from the Latin *Credo*, (= I believe), is a formal statement of a system of religious beliefs (OED). The earliest Christian creeds are often taken to be the simple affirmations: ‘God is love’ (1 Jn 4: 8) or ‘Jesus Christ is Lord’ (Phil 2: 11). In the early nineteenth century Thomas Hartwell Horne explained that, while Holy Scripture contained ‘all things necessary to salvation’ (Article VI of the Prayer Book XXXIX Articles of Religion), it became necessary for the Church, ‘to frame a compendium of the articles of indispensable belief which might be easily learned, understood and comprehended by each of its members’.³ The short, succinct, credal phrases given above were expanded in complexity in the Apostolic age when more comprehensive baptismal formulae developed, such as, ‘I believe in God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost’. Justin Martyr (c100–c165) affirmed that Baptism was to be administered, ‘in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit’.⁴

Numerous ancient formularies of confession of the Christian faith are preserved in the writings of the Fathers of the Church, in the first five centuries. The first full statement of belief was the Apostles’ Creed (*Symbolum Apostolicum*) which is to be found in the *Book of Common Prayer* within Morning and Evening Prayer and in The Catechism. This creed was so named because it was thought to be composed, clause by clause, by each of the twelve apostles, but it is more likely that this was because it contains a brief summary of the

¹ For the first two essays, see: ‘Accession Service’, *Prayer Book Society Journal*, Michaelmas 2015; and ‘Commination Service’, *The Prayer Book Today*, Lent 2016.

² Other Latin words are *Veni, Creator Spiritus*, found in the rubrics before the singing of the hymn ‘Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire’, in the Ordering of Priests and the Consecration of Bishops.

³ Horne, Thomas Hartwell, *A Concise History and Analysis of the Athanasian Creed*, (London: T Cadwell, 1834), 3.

⁴ Justin Martyr, *Apology I*, LXI.

collective truths that they taught. It appeared for the first time in written form in a letter sent by Bishop Ambrose of Milan (339–397) to Pope Siricius (334–399) in about AD 390. In the early Church this creed seems to have played no part in corporate worship but was probably learned and recited by catechumens before their respective baptisms. It entered into the public liturgy of the Eastern Church in the fifth century. J H Maude wrote that the Apostles' Creed was introduced in Antioch by Peter the Fuller (471–488) and at Constantinople by Patriarch Timothy I († 517).⁵ It was not adopted by Rome until about AD 1015.

Although of early origin and of relatively simple format the Apostles' Creed was considered to contain the basic tenets of faith, but, despite this, it proved to be of insufficient breadth and comprehensiveness when confronted by subsequent heretics who, through their own interpretations of Biblical truths, condemned some of its precepts as suspect. These unhappy departures from the true faith eventually gave rise to the Nicene Creed, known to Anglicans from its inclusion in the Holy Communion service. That which we know as the Nicene Creed is incompletely named because its text was not fully determined by the Council of Nicaea in 325. This council, the First Ecumenical Council of the Church, was convened by the Emperor Constantine in an attempt to combat the Arian heresy which risked tearing apart the newly enfranchised Church and thus, possibly, the Roman Empire. The wording we know today, down to and including the phrase 'And I believe in the Holy Ghost' in the concluding paragraph did result from the debates at Nicaea. However, a further council was held in Constantinople (Constantine's 'New Rome') in 381, and its deliberations led to the addition of the concluding section. The controversial *Filioque* clause, which claimed that the Holy Ghost proceeded 'from the Son', as well as 'from the Father', was added in Constantinople in 447. The subsequent debate about the inclusion of these three small words would, in major part, be the cause of The Great Schism of 1054 when Eastern and Western Churches irrevocably separated.⁶

Even the more precise articulation of faith provided by the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed proved inadequate to dispel other and subsequent heresies. With the passing of time it became clear that a more precise definition, particularly of Trinitarian doctrine and Incarnational Christology, was needed.

⁵ Maude, J H, *A History of the Book of Common Prayer*, (London: Rivingtons, 1956), 21.

⁶ Their respective leaders did not communicate with each other for the next 900 years!

This brings us, after a longish preamble, which I think was necessary, to the matter in hand: ‘At Morning Prayer’; ‘The Athanasian Creed’; ‘*Quicumque vult*’. The first thing to observe is that this creed was almost certainly not written by Athanasius. Athanasius (c296–373) was consecrated Bishop of Alexandria in 328. He had attended the Council of Nicaea but was driven into exile in 336 because of his opposition to the unorthodox doctrines of Arius (c250–c336). Athanasius also resisted other fourth century heresies, especially those of Apollinarius, who denied the full humanity of Jesus, and Macedonius, who denied the full humanity of the Holy Spirit. The creed that bears his name has a style and content that is markedly more the product of a Latin than of a Greek author. Also, Athanasius would not have felt the need to formulate a new creed since he, like all the orthodox divines of his times, constantly referred to the Nicene Creed as the foundational statement of their faith.

Neither Athanasius, nor any of his contemporaries, nor any of the writers who immediately succeeded him, made any reference to the creed that bears his name. Furthermore, it was never quoted as an authority for any decisions in the disagreements relating to the procession of the Holy Spirit, between the Eastern and Western Churches, in the seventh to ninth centuries. As it was never mentioned in those controversies, and, further, as it condemns Nestorian, Photinian, and Eutychian heresies, which did not exist until long after the time of Athanasius’ death, it is manifest that this creed was not then in existence, and consequently could not have been composed by him. Various other authors have been suggested, among them Vigilius, Bishop of Thapsus (400–484), who was later considered to the first Pope of the Byzantine Papacy, but modern scholarship has discounted his authorship, mainly because the creed is written in a style different from Vigilius’s other works, and the fact that it does not address the controversies that affected the Church of his time. Other suggested authors include: Ambrose of Milan, Venantius Fortunatus (c530–c600) and Vincent of Lérins (†445), but the most likely pen was that of Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers (315–367), for use by his Gallican clergy.

By the tenth century the creed attributed to Athanasius was in liturgical use throughout most of what is now called Europe and in some parts of the Eastern or Greek Church, particularly in Russia, Serbia, Bulgaria, and at Constantinople. At the time of the Protestant Reformation it was adopted by all Protestant Churches: Martin Luther (1483–1546), John Calvin (1509–1564), and Theodore Beza (1519–1605) all made it their principal statement of faith.

The Athanasian Creed was included in Thomas Cranmer's first English Prayer Book (1549) as an extension to the text of Evening Prayer, although its rubric clearly stated that it, 'shalbe song or sayd immediately after Benedictus'. While Neil Alexander suggests that its recitation was required on six principal feasts the rubric states that its use was required at 'Christmas, Thephanie, Easter, Thascencion [and] Pentecost'.⁷ In the 1552 revision this creed was still appended to Evening Prayer but the rubric dictating its use was expanded to:

In the feastes of Christmas, the Epiphanie, Saincte Mathie, Easter, Thassencion, Pentecost, Saint John Baptist, Saint James, Saint Bartholomew, Saint Matthew, Saint Symon and Jude, Saint Andrewe, and Trinitie Sunday: shalbe song or sayd immediately after Benedictus, this confession of our Christen fayth.

In the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* the Athanasian Creed is given its own identifiable section, immediately following Evening Prayer, labelled 'At Morning Prayer'. In this book Article VIII of the XXXIX Article of Religion, titled 'Of the Creeds', states:

The Three Creeds, Nicene Creed, Athanasius's 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.

In the 1662 edition the rubric has been changed slightly, as follows:

Upon these Feasts; Christmas Day, the Epiphany, Saint Matthias, Easter Day, Ascension Day, Whitsunday, Saint John Baptist, Saint James, Saint Bartholomew, Saint Matthew, Saint Simon and Saint Jude, Saint Andrew, and upon Trinity Sunday, shall be sung or said at Morning Prayer, instead of the Apostles' Creed, this Confession of our Christian Faith, commonly called the Creed of Saint Athanasius, by the Minister and people standing.⁸

What has happened since 1662? In the 1878 Prayer Book of the Church in Ireland the Athanasian Creed was left intact but all rubrics requiring its use in worship were removed. The 1928 Deposited Prayer Book retained the Athanasian Creed but the section is headed

⁷ Alexander, J Neil, 'The Shape of the Classical Book of Common Prayer', in Hefling, C and Shattuck, C (eds), *The Oxford Guide to The Book of Common Prayer*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 70.

⁸ It should be noted that by 1662, with the inclusion of the words 'commonly called', the authorship of this creed was considered to be in doubt.

Quicumque Vult. It begins with a complicated set of rubrics which suggest that different parts of the creed may be used on different feasts and festivals. There is also a revised translation, where *Quicumque Vult* is given as ‘Whosoever would’ rather than ‘Whosoever will’. The 1929 version of The Scottish Prayer Book has the Order of Compline separating Evening Prayer from what is there called ‘A Confession of the Christian Faith’. The rubric states:

The following Canticle shall be sung or said, either in place of the Apostles’ Creed or as an Anthem, at Morning or Evening Prayer on Trinity Sunday. On other days the Canticle as a whole or from verse 3 to verse 28 (The Catholic Faith is this... let him thus think of the Trinity), or from verse 30 (The right Faith is that) to verse 41 inclusive, or from verse 3 to verse 41 inclusive, all portions with the *Gloria Patri*, may be used at Morning or Evening Prayer as an Anthem or Procession.

It is interesting to observe that this creed may now be used at both Morning and Evening Prayer and may be used as an anthem in procession (also, two more Latin words, *Gloria Patri*, appear).

The Athanasian Creed has not been without its critics and much debate about its continued inclusion within the *Book of Common Prayer* took place during discussions about Prayer Book revisions, especially in the latter half of the nineteenth century. One proposal suggested that an explanatory note be included in the rubric, to the effect that, ‘the condemnations in this Confession of Faith are to be not otherwise understood than as a solemn warning of the peril of those who wilfully reject the Catholic Faith’.⁹ The debate became so heated that two of the stalwarts of the Oxford Movement, Edward Pusey and Henry Liddon, threatened to resign their priestly orders if the Creed was degraded or mutilated in any revision of the Prayer Book.

What should twenty-first century worshippers make of this somewhat strange and maybe exaggerated statement of the Trinitarian and Christological theology? It was written to combat many of the heresies that beset the Christian Church in the early Middle Ages. The Church of our times is still beset by heresy but also by apathy, atheism and agnosticism. She is treated by many with indifference and as an irrelevance. Yet, at every turn, she is under attack from sensation-seeking journalists looking for pithy headlines, is disavowed by vociferous, telegenic, atheistic academics and is constantly wounded by those who would

⁹ *Royal Commission on Ritual, Fourth Report*, 1870

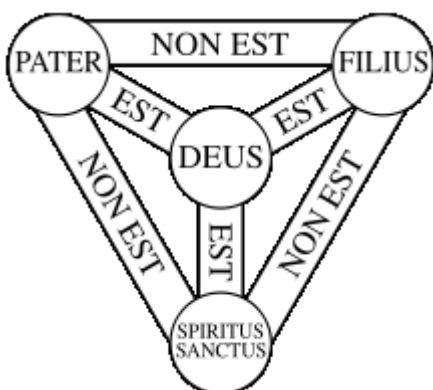
replace her beautiful and ancient liturgies with facile and hackneyed cyber-speak. Cranmer's incomparable, liturgical language has been traduced, maligned and belittled by those whose clichéd and superficial vocabularies are only fit for puerile conversations, text messaging and social networking.

It is therefore good that the Athanasian Creed, despite its complex phraseology, and its damnations and anathemas, still has its place in the *Book of Common Prayer* and thus the worshipping life of the Anglican Church, but, as I have written before, the demise of the Divine Office in favour of the ubiquitous Holy Communion service leave few if any opportunities for the Apostles' Creed to be replaced by *Quicumque Vult*. Perhaps there is a case to be made for replacing the Nicene Creed, if only on Trinity Sunday, with the words of the Athanasian Creed.¹⁰ What do you think?

David Fuller

Addendum:

One visual representation of the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity, as derived from the Athanasian Creed, is the *Scutum Fidei* (= Shield of Faith), seen below:



The Latin may be translated as: ‘The Father is God, The Son is God, The Holy Spirit is God; God is the Father, God is the Son, God is the Holy Spirit; The Father is not the Son, The Son is not the Father; The Father is not the Holy Spirit, The Holy Spirit is not the Father; The Son is not the Holy Spirit, The Holy Spirit is not the Son.’

Note to the Editor – If there are space constraints then please feel free to omit this Addendum

¹⁰ We must, of course, remember that Trinity Sunday has been replaced by Pentecost 1 in the modern scheme of things!

Biographical note:

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