

On the **plus** side that church's worship made some sense:

- It gave thanks for the world given by the creator
- It promoted order and stability in life and society
- It strongly supported human society, affirming joint humanitarian efforts
- Its hymns spoke of God's power and changelessness eg. "O God our help", "Immortal, invisible, God only wise", "O worship the King, all glorious above". Psalm 23 and the Lord's Prayer may be regular words of worship and most prayers addressed God as "God the Almighty" or "God the Father", rarely directly to Jesus, and with a footnote-like reference to the Holy Spirit.
- The sanctity of family may be an important feature, where children could grow up in the faith of the church.

On the **down** side, this church that emphasizes God as Father:

- May be weak on defining salvation; rarely challenging, choosing to support all and not confront the personal allegiance of its members to a distinctive faith and life.
- Repentance and conversion are hardly present, in word at baptisms.
- The disturbing and provocative change that the Spirit sometimes brings may be seen as an enemy, not a friend.
- Leadership may be clergy-centred in this setting (the gifts of the spirit not encouraged to empower all to participate)
- It's strength of inviting anyone to be included for any reason is at the same time a weakness when change, reconciliation, and hope is needed.

Similarly, a church that over-emphasizes its acknowledgement of God the Son at the expense of the Father and the Spirit will bring its own inadequacies. So too, the Church that emphasizes the Spirit above all else will lead to a distortion of Christian living and worship in its own ways. These situations will be explored in the next 2 studies.

In your own worship consider what your personal emphasis of person or persons of the Holy Trinity may be:

Favourite bible passages:

- Matt. 5-7; James; Parables; Gospel of John
- Acts 2, Mark 14-16, Colossians, Revelation
- John 7, John 14-16, Acts, Romans 12

In your prayers:

- To the "Father", through the "Son", in the power of the "Spirit"

Your favourite songs of praise

- Your style of ministry to others

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# What we believe

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# The Nicene Creed



## Our view of God

The Christian Church has made a common confession clearly and purposefully as to what God is like according to the revelation of the Holy Bible for almost 2000 years now. By and large, Australians have drifted far from any acknowledgement of the yardstick our ancestors of faith struggled for. In the general community there is doubt about the claim of Christians that God is exclusively and uniquely known through the Holy Scriptures. Inside the church there is also confusion about who God is today. What do we mean when we say, "**We Believe**"?

Article 1 of the Anglican Church's 39 articles of faith, written during the English Reformation over 400 years ago, begins: "*There is but one living and true God...*", echoing the very discovery the descendants of Abraham made many more centuries ago. Let's become clearer about what the bible urges us to be clear about for the sake of our generation and for the sake of our church.

## The Nicene Creed

With the conversion to Christ of Emperor Constantine in 312AD the Holy Roman Empire was in for a big change. The persecution of Christians was finally brought to an end. What followed was an even bigger battle for Christians, the battle against heresy; false teaching- views of God at odds with the revelation of God in the Holy Bible.

## The Arian Controversy

For example, a teacher named Arius from North Africa had a growing following. He denied that Jesus was both fully God and fully man. Rather, he saw Christ as a creature superior to humans, yet only an intermediary. Arius claimed controversially, in opposition to



the witness of Scripture: “There was a time when the Son [of God] was not”. Like many sects today, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses for instance, Arius taught that Jesus Christ is not eternal, not divine, and certainly not God- to be respected; not obeyed. Arius’s views attracted many followers.



In an unprecedented move, Emperor Constantine called a general council of the church throughout the empire in a small town called **Nicea**. 1800 bishops were invited to attend and each was allowed to bring two other church leaders and other servants. But traveling was difficult and the ravages of persecution had left many unable to make the journey. Fewer than 400 bishops met for this council, most from the eastern realm of the empire. Some were scholars. Some were shepherds.

It was reported that Constantine entered this gathering wearing high-heeled scarlet boots, a purple robe, long hair, and a short beard. Arius was allowed to present his views. Then key



characters named Alexander and Athanasius, like a council for the prosecution, brought forth orthodox teaching to refute the Arian claims. Finally, a man called Hosius, a bishop from Cordova, suggested that a creed, or statement of faith, should be formed. Ever since, it has remained an important part of our worship.

## Development of Creeds

Several statements of faith were developed through the councils that were held before and right up to the formation of the Nicene Creed. However, the council of Nicea determined that Eusebius’ work did not go far enough to distinguish the orthodox biblical view of God the Trinity. To even more clearly refute the claims of Arius, a number of important clauses were added. Finally, the council arrived at a statement that could be said by the churches to show their unity in agreement with the biblical witness to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The theological necessity was to somehow state that the God made known through Jesus Christ in the Bible is three and yet one; eternal and exclusive; like no other. The goal was to express the oneness of substance and divinity uniting God the Father, the Son and the Spirit, and yet not present any sense

that there might be three Gods or any other ways that God might be known.

## Grappling with the concept of the trinity

For those who affirm that there is but one living God, the New Testament can appear to present some confusion. Is there in fact one God that loves us, or three gods? In our context today we may ask, “Is there one God but many different appearances and forms of God. Arius claimed that there can’t be three gods, therefore the Son and the Spirit must indeed be subordinate and less than divine.

In struggling with the texts of the New Testament, the Church Fathers had long been discussing the Godhead in a different way. They commonly taught that the New Testament shows a common divinity and a powerful love between God the Father, Son and Spirit. Furthermore, they claimed it is the work of all three in unity that presents us with the mercy of God that draws us into this new life of salvation. One writer has said (E. Stanley Jones): Talk about *what* you believe in and you have disunity. Talk about *who* you believe in and you have unity.



When we turn to the testimony of Jesus of Nazareth in the texts of the New Testament, we see not a hard and factual treatise explaining all the intricacies of God as three in one. Rather, we are convinced that he reveals to us a relationship of real, living, loving Persons, who share in one divine goal. For example read John chapter 14:10-17.

Emerging from the English reformation Article 1 of the Anglican statement of faith, translated from the latin of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, emphasizes the distinctives of the Christian view of God as we say in the Nicene Creed: “There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead, there be three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.”

In the marketplace of spirituality and faith, a biblical and apostolic faith in God will not shrink from these historical truths. This will place us in a position of difference and distinctive beliefs about God, Humanity, Salvation, and the future compared to what our friends and neighbours might believe. At the same time, the Nicene Creed helps us to diagnose how true to the Biblical witness our own church is when we say, “we believe in God”.

## A Church that majors on God (the Father)

Some churches tend to major on one of the 3 persons of the Trinity in their beliefs and practices. This week we can think of a church of God the Father: