

The Wording of the Nicene Creed Recommended to Ecumenical Lutherans

Various comments are made in certain circles about the changed wording to the Creed. Some comments are better than others are. For example, the revised wording uses “We believe” instead of “I believe.” Of course, each person must believe for himself, and the Creed originally had “I” because it was the confession of each person as he was baptised, answering the creedal question by “*Credo*” (“I believe”). However, if you believe something, and I believe it, too, we can, together, confess “We believe.” A creed of Antioch in a form of a baptismal creed to which additions were made as a doctrinal statement in AD 341 already used “We believe.”

“Light from Light” instead of “Light of Light” is not wrong, in fact better. The Greek word “*ek*” means “out of” or “from.” The point is that, though the Son is derived from the Father, He is in no sense inferior to Him according to His deity.

One problem is overlooked by many. One form of the revised wording is “For us [omitting “men”] and for our salvation He came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human.” Compared with the wording we are using “for us men” and “and became man”, it drops the use of the word “man” on the first occasion, and substitutes “fully human” the second time.

The original Greek word means “human being” in the generic sense. However, merely changing “man” to “human” does not satisfy the agenda of the ultra feminists, who do not want to be redeemed by Jesus Christ as a male; for He was a male, obviously. The change, “human” though not objectionable in itself, can be said to prepare the ground for more he/she talk about God the Father and the Holy Spirit, and encourage stupid statements about feminine qualities that Jesus had. Even a statement connected with the LCA pastors’ conference and synod at the Gold Coast some years ago made reference to a comparison that Jesus made between himself and a hen! (gathering chicks).

In a letter in *Logia* January 1994, p. 2 Pastor Peter Koehne commented about “human.” He was discussing an earlier article in *Logia*, April 1993. (In the following copy English has been substituted for the original Greek that he quotes):

“In Australia the churches have also studied the problem of ‘became human’ and reckoned with the suggestions of the international committees. While the Anglicans, Catholics and Uniting Church have chosen to use ‘became fully human,’ the Lutherans preferred ‘became a human being’. Admittedly, this does not overcome Weinrich’s objection that the masculinity of Christ is being overlooked, but it does go further in establishing the historical reality of the human nature of Christ.

“However, there is a more subtle reason for the ‘human being’, and this seems to have been missed by both Prange and Weinrich. It is the significance of the ‘us men! us human beings’ at the beginning of the sentence. Here the WELS Commission has followed the recommendation of the international committees, and simply omitted ‘men’: from ‘for us men and for our salvation.’ However, if the Greek is set out in strophe form... it is noticeable that we have here a significant rhetorical construction:

who for us men (Greek ‘human beings’) and for our salvation
came down from heaven
and was incarnate

from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man (Greek ‘became human’)

“The Nicene fathers are balancing ‘men’ with ‘was made man’. In other words, if we follow the recommendation of the international committees, we have a sort of incomplete chiasmus: a..., ... a instead of a...b, b...a. The writers are making the weighty point that for us ‘human beings’ He became ‘a human being,’ and they draw our attention to the fact by a trope. Greek theology has always kept Romans 5: 12 and following in sight, and the Orthodox have continually reminded us of the words of Gregory of Nazianzus: ‘What He has not assumed He has not healed’. Unfortunately, the new translation glides over the significant rhetoric of the original.

“As Professor Hartwig points out, there is good reason for abiding by a ‘common’ text. For this reason, the Lutheran Church of Australia has used ‘for us and for our salvation,’ but it has added a footnote, ‘for us human beings.’ In this way, if in only in a footnote, the balance has been kept with ‘became a human being.’

“To press the case of ‘men’ [i.e., after ‘us’] might seem like special pleading. However, two points should be kept in mind. First, scholars have argued that the earliest drafts of the Nicene Creed contained only ‘and became incarnate’, which would have been sufficient to establish the humanity of Christ if this had been the only concern of the confessors. ‘And became man’ was added in order to say something more,

and it can only be properly understood if it is kept in tandem with 'men'.

"Secondly, there is the evidence of the *Definition* of Chalcedon. In it we have [a] quotation of the Nicene Creed: 'The same for us and for our salvation'. Here the 'men' is omitted because there is no rhetorical correspondence with a following 'became man'."

Pastor Priebbenow has another comment. "My greatest problem with the new wording of the Nicene Creed is 'of one Being with the Father'. Of course He is of one Being with the Father. However, what is forgotten is what is called the 'double *'homoousios'*'. According to His deity Jesus Christ is 'of one substance with the Father.' The *Definition* of Chalcedon, AD 451, made the important additional statement that Jesus Christ is also 'of one substance with us', meaning like us in all respects (except for sin). You see my difficulty. We can say that Jesus is 'of one substance with us', but we cannot say that He is 'of one _ with us'. In other words, with this translation it becomes more difficult to present the confession of the church by using this double set of words, each containing 'of one substance'.

At Nicaea, the word 'of one substance' (or 'consubstantial') expressed generic, not specific, identity. For example, I ask, 'Did this car win the Bathurst rally?' The driver answers, 'Do you mean this model, or this machine?' The one is generic, the other is specific. At Nicaea what the 318 fathers wanted to say against Arius was: 'What the Father is, that the Son is too (except that the Father was not begotten)'. Only later did theologians draw out the implications, and affirm more explicitly that Jesus Christ is one God with the Father, though Christians always believed this. At Chalcedon, obviously, 'of one substance' was still generic. I repeat: We cannot say that Jesus Christ is of one being with us, according to His humanity."

Unlike the new form, we use "Christian" not 'catholic' in our confession about the church. If people wanted to represent what the Creed of 381 AD at Constantinople said, why not say outright, "one holy universal and apostolic church"? The word "catholic", in the minds of some ecumaniacs, undoubtedly prepares the way for "Catholic" in the denominational sense, which, by definition, is not universal.

The *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Augsburg, 1978) has the wording "by the power of the Holy Spirit He became incarnate from the Virgin Mary." The word "power" with reference to the Holy Spirit should strictly be a synonym for Holy Spirit. The angel Gabriel told Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come over you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." The Holy Spirit _ the power of the Father (the Most High). Gabriel's message is a parallelism, a double statement. Of course, the suggestion to avoid in this wording is that the Holy Spirit is just an impersonal influence, a power and nothing more, that comes from the Father. However, He is fully God Himself, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity. This is not to deny that the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit caused the birth of Jesus Christ from the Virgin Mary.