

# PREPARING FOR THE NEW TRANSLATION THE NICENE CREED (PT. II)



This week we continue our look at the New Translation of the Nicene Creed.

clauses in one sentence. Perhaps it's a result of modern man's reduced attention span.

Current Translation	New Translation
<p>We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the <b>only</b> Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, <b>one in Being</b> with the Father. Through him all things were made.</p>	<p>I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the <b>Only Begotten</b> Son of God, <b>born of the Father before all ages</b>. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, <b>consubstantial</b> with the Father; through him all things were made.</p>

## FURTHER COMMENTARY: WE/I BELIEVE

The Nicene Creed in both its liturgical Greek and Latin forms mentions the word(s) "I believe" only once, at the beginning. The rest of the Profession of Faith is mostly one very long sentence. Grammatically, the second of the three sentences that compose the Creed begins only where we translate "We acknowledge one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins." In Greek and Latin mentioning "I believe" only once at the beginning of the Creed, is a reminder of our belief in One God in three Divine Persons. Mention of each Person in the Blessed Trinity, in Latin and Greek, is preceded by the word "in"—we are united intellectually to Divine Person. Only God, one in three Divine Persons, can ever be the proper object of our faith. Faith, in the theological sense or the most profound sense of belief, is worthy only of God, and no human person no matter how holy he or she may be is worthy of this type of belief. By stating "I believe" (in Greek and Latin) only once also reminds us of the unity of our faith. It is not something that can legitimately be pulled apart only partially believed.

You will notice that both our Current Translation and the forthcoming New Translation repeat the phrase "We/I believe" before mention of the Son, the Holy Spirit, and the Church. This is one of the occasions where the translators deemed that it was too cumbersome and grammatically clumsy to maintain the theologically masterful Greek (and Latin) sentence as a single unit, and so they broke it into parts. Modern English is unaccustomed to so many relative

## COMMENTARY ON THE PHRASE:

### "ONLY BEGOTTEN SON OF GOD, BORN OF THE FATHER BEFORE ALL AGES"

Our Current Translation essentially condenses "Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages" into "the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father." The phrase *born of the Father before all ages* is an allusion to Col. 1:15: *He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation*. All verbs of action (e.g. to beget or to bear) take place *within* time and *within* the created order. The procession of the Son of God from the Father is *not* part of the created order and exists outside of all space and time. Yet the use of the words "begotten" and "born before all ages" carry with them the sense of origin and prefigurement. The Son proceeds strictly from the Father in a logical relation of priority and succession (Father and Son) although not in terms of time. The Son is the perfect reflection of the Father. When we profess that He was *born before all ages*, we are not speaking of a physical birth or anything of this kind. Instead it is the Son's existence that is the prefigurement for all creation, and in the Son all creation will find its perfection. St. Gregory of Nazianzus, a fourth century doctor of the Church, says the following, "The Father is Father and without beginning, for he is underived. The Son is Son, and not without beginning, in the sense that he derives from the Father. But if one is thinking of a temporal beginning, then the Son is indeed without beginning, for the author of time, is not subject to time" (*Oration 39.12*). The creation of all things is Father's response of love to the eternally begotten Son, through whom all things were made. Our current translation lacks mention of "born of the Father" and thus obscures the connection between creation and the procession of the Son from the Father.

## COMMENTARY ON "CONSUBSTANTIAL"

The theological controversy that arose in the wake of the legalization of Christianity in the Roman Empire through the Edict of Milan (313) concerned the correct way to express *who* Jesus Christ is. Is He fully Divine or is He *like* God, the greatest of all God's creatures but still, in the end, a creature? The promoter of this second opinion was Arius, and his arguments persuaded many since it made Christ fully understandable to the human intellect. I can understand how God can be One and how Christ can be the greatest of

all creatures, even *like* God, but, as St. Athanasius stubbornly insisted, if Christ is not both fully God and fully man then we have not been redeemed.

**Consubstantial** here translates the Latin word *consubstantialem*, which in turn translates the Greek word *homoousion* (the same essence). To say that the controversy that led to the first Ecumenical Council at Nicaea in 325 and the tumult in the decades that followed centered entirely on this one word is not an exaggeration. Some Christians disagreed with the use of this word because they thought it expressed the notion of a physical substance that is used to make particular things, e.g. copper (substance) being used to make coins (particular things). The substance/ essence of God is completely *unlike* this or any other *created* substance. Understanding what the Church is saying when she professes these words, was not an easy task. Just as with those verbs that express action (begetting, being born) the word “consubstantial” had to be purified of all those elements improper to God, who is One, eternal, and the Creator of all things. In a sense the vocabulary had to develop to express the fullness of the Faith that had been handed down by the Apostles.

“**One in Being**” is certainly less precise than **consubstantial**. Someone might, after all, see this term and conclude that God the Father is still of a greater type of Divinity than the Son, or that “God” is composed of three divisible parts (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) that must be added together to *make* One God. **Consubstantial** means “one in essence” or “one in substance”. All of the perfections that may be said of God may be said equally of the Father and of the Son (and of the Holy Spirit), only the relations differ. This part of the Creed and its defense by the Fathers of the Church tried to preserve and express the belief that God is eternally One and yet from all eternity this one Divine essence/substance is *tri-personal* with the Father as the origin and the Son as His eternal image/Word/Son proceeding from Him from all eternity.

Current Translation	New Translation
For us men and our salvation he came down from heaven:	For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven,
[ <i>All bow during these two lines.</i> ]	[ <i>At the words that follow up to and including and <b>became man</b>, all bow.</i> ]
by the <b>power</b> of the Holy Spirit he was <b>born</b> of the Virgin Mary, and became man.	and by the Holy Spirit was <b>incarnate</b> of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

### COMMENTARY: INCARNATE VS. BORN

The mysteries professed here regards Christ’s human origin and the relationship between Christ’s mission and that of the Holy Spirit. To say that Jesus had a miraculous birth is not a denial of the faith. After all, as part of our faith we profess the Blessed Mother’s perpetual virginity including during the birth of Christ, but this article of the Creed regards his human origins and the relationship between the Son’s being sent (his mission) and the Holy Spirit.

The origins of Jesus’ humanity and His mission lie in both the “Fiat” (Let it be done) of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the power of the Holy Spirit, not in the actions of a human father. The Holy Spirit initiates this action whereby the Son of God *emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men* (Phil. 2:7). This mission of self-emptying on the part of the Son of God culminates and reaches its fulfillment in His death on the cross. It has its origin in time in the Incarnation (the mystery of the Annunciation). To show reverence for the self-emptying action of the Word of God, we **bow** during these words (or genuflect on Christmas and the feast of the Annunciation).

Unlike any of the Old Testament prophets, Jesus Christ is not simply the recipient of the Holy Spirit; He is the giver of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is also not alien to Christ; the Spirit is Christ’s own Spirit through whom He works all His miracles and proclaims all truth. Jesus’ possession of the Holy Spirit is the sign that he is the Father’s own Word.

