

From the Office of Liturgy and Music

Welcoming the

English Translation of the

Roman Missal
THIRD EDITION

Part 9: Credo (Part 1)

The Nicene Creed is one of the most significantly retranslated texts of the new English translation of the *Roman Missal, Third Edition*. The translation change can immediately be seen with the first word, “We believe” being retranslated to “I believe,” which begins a repeated pattern of retranslating “We” to “I”

throughout the entire text. If we are professing faith as a community when we proclaim the Creed together at liturgy, why change “we” to “I”? We must look at both translation and theological issues to understand why “I” is a more authentic translation.

The first line of the Latin text of the Creed (keeping in mind that our English Creed is a translation of the Latin) is “Credo in unum Deum.” “Credo” comes from the Latin verb “credere” which means “to believe or profess” and is conjugated in the first-person singular. “Credo” does literally translate to “I believe.”

A great theological dualism also exists in proclaiming the Creed in the first-person singular (using “I” instead of “we”). First, the profession of faith is a personal acceptance of the faith that has been handed down to us. When we say “I believe,” we are indeed accepting this faith and affirming that it is truth. If we say “we believe” during liturgy, each individual is indeed proclaiming the faith of the whole church, but by using “we” instead of “I”, each individual is not specifically stating that he/she accepts this faith as truth.

Even though the Creed is a personal statement and acceptance of the faith of the Church, we do proclaim the Creed in the liturgy and liturgy is always communal prayer. When the Nicene Creed was codified in 325 AD and later revised in 381 AD, the phenomenon of individualism as we know it today did not exist. A person was not defined by their individual traits, but rather by those of the community. If the community was hostile, the individual would be seen as hostile. If the community was hospitable, the individual was seen as hospitable. The “I” of the individual was defined by the “we” of the community. Similarly, in the liturgy, we are not defined by our individual traits, but rather by the traits of the baptized community: the adopted children of God, the body of Christ. When I say, “I believe” during the Creed in the liturgy, I am not saying, “I, John Gaffney, a tall male, from the Midwest believes,” but rather, “I, an adopted child of God, who with my brothers and sisters has been plunged into the waters of death and new life, ‘putting on Christ,’ profess and accept this faith as truth.” In the liturgy, I am, as each of us are, defined by the traits of the baptized community: the body of Christ. And so using “I” instead of “we” better expresses our unity while allowing us each to personally profess that we accept the faith of the Church as truth.

In next week’s column, we will take a theological look at some of the other translation changes in the Creed.

Nicene Creed (2010 Translation)

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.
I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
consubstantial with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
and by the Holy Spirit
was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.
For our sake he was crucified
under Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son
is adored and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
I believe in one, holy,
catholic and apostolic Church.
I confess one baptism
for the forgiveness of sins
and I look forward to the
resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

John Gaffney

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