

**Question: Where did the Apostle's or Nicene Creed come from?**

**Answer:** Up to the year 314AD, Christianity was an outlawed religion in the Roman Empire. During this period of time, if you were accused of being a Christian and professed this publicly your life was potentially forfeit. In the few years leading up to 314 under the reign of the emperor Diocletian, the "Great Persecution" took place in which thousands of Christians were put to death because of their faith. After the reign of Diocletian, the new emperor Constantine while attempting to bring the entire empire under his own control experienced a conversion to Christianity at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312. Following this conversion experience Constantine (d. 337) issued the Edict of Milan which allowed Christians to finally profess their faith publicly without the fear of being put to death. With free reign to worship Constantine quickly discovered that different understandings amongst Christians regarding the divinity of Christ caused divisions in a religion he had hoped would become the unifying factor for the empire. The division in the churches regarded the relationship between the Father and Son. Arius of Alexandria (d. 338) and his followers believed that only the Father was God. Arius also believed that the Son was made or created, meaning that there was a point in time when the "Son was not." The orthodox church on the other hand stated that the Father and Son were "co-equals" and that they were "one in being." To try to unify the Church, Constantine called bishops from around the empire to attend the Council of Nicea in the year 325. Over three-hundred bishops were present to put the issue to rest. After all sides were heard, Constantine pressured the bishops to come up with one unifying statement or creed. Under penalty of exile Arius and his followers were forced to sign off on the creed and to teach what it declared. The Nicene Creed was constructed to debunk the entire Arian point of view. It taught that the Son was, "begotten not made, of one substance with the Father." This meant that the Father and the Son were of one substance, consubstantial (one Being), and coequal, and yet they were also distinct, unconfused, and mutually related. The creed went on more specifically to correct the error of Arius by saying, "And those that say, 'There was when he (Christ) was not,' and, 'Before he (Christ) was begotten he was not,' and that, 'He came into being from what is not,'" were condemned and exiled unless they conformed to the true teaching of the Church and the decision of the council.

The creed that we profess today does have its roots in Nicea. In its present form our profession of faith comes from a modified Nicene Creed expanded at the Council of Constantinople which took place in the year 381AD. The creed that is professed today renounces the heresy of Arius and proclaims the unique relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

One of the intentions of the creed that has continued through to the present day is for a synthesis of faith. This synthesis is not made according to human opinions but gathered from all Scripture. This summary of our faith is particularly intended for candidates of Baptism. On our baptism day, our lives were entrusted to the "standard of teaching." To say the creed is to enter into communion with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is the "spiritual seal, our heart's meditation and an ever-present guardian; it is unquestionably, the treasure of our soul." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 185-197)