



From Our Vicar

Rev. Wayne Walters

Happy Birthday Council of Nicaea

This month is the 1700th birthday of the Council of Nicaea, from which comes the Nicene Creed that we affirm most Sundays (although the definitive wording was settled in 451 at the Council of Chalcedon). This was the first Ecumenical Council of the Christian Church, though sadly many Eastern churches were not represented. It was also a turning point in church-state relations as the Council was called by the Roman Emperor Constantine.

The emperor's concern was to overcome division within the church and empire, as the church was undergoing a dispute over how to understand the relationship of Jesus' humanity with his divinity. The followers of Arius (who had lost the election for Bishop of Alexandria) took literally the phrase, 'first-born over all creation', claiming that there was a time when Jesus 'was not'. This effectively made Jesus a part of God's creation, and therefore less than God. It was Athanasius who later clarified that 'only God can save', so for our salvation through Jesus to be effective, Jesus must be fully God as well as fully man. John's gospel (consistent with the rest of scripture) is definitive – 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.' 1:1. John concludes with Thomas' exclamation – 'My Lord and my God!' 20:28.

Hence our creed affirms: 'We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father; through him all things were made.'

The views of Arius were anathematised – meaning that those who held and taught them were to be excommunicated. Arius was, however, a very eloquent preacher, popular and well connected, so it was many decades before this matter was finally put to rest. In fact, his views have re-emerged in the Jehovah's Witness sect.

Arius has however, done the Church a service in forcing it to clarify its belief in and understanding of the Trinity. While the word 'Trinity' does not appear in the Bible, what it conveys about God is held across the Christian Church today as the best description of what the Scriptures comprehensively teach: that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are co-equal and co-eternal; one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity. For this we give thanks to God. Happy Birthday Nicene Creed!

God bless you, *Wayne*