



Diocese  
in Europe

# The Nicene Creed Perspectives

Rev Canon Dr Arun John

Through the lens of  
inter-faith engagement



Nicene Creed  
Celebrations 2025

Seeing afresh the faith  
which holds us together

## The Nicene Creed Through the Lens of Interfaith Engagement

The **Nicene Creed** is a foundational document of the Christian faith. It affirms the belief in the **Trinity**—one God existing as **Father, Son, and Holy Spirit**—and proclaims the unique divinity of **Jesus Christ**. This Creed unites Christians across denominations and plays an essential role in the ongoing work of **ecumenical unity** within the Christian world.

In my ministry within an **interfaith context**, I have found the Nicene Creed to be not only a principal affirmation of Christian faith but also a valuable **starting point for dialogue** with people of other religions. **Interfaith engagement** encourages mutual respect among faith communities, allowing us to acknowledge intrinsic differences in belief without compromising our own convictions. In affirming the Nicene Creed as our core confession, Christians are invited to celebrate difference, engage in honest conversation, and contribute to a spirit of **peaceful coexistence and compassionate understanding**.

The opening line of the Creed—“*We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth...*”—offers a profound **meeting point with other faiths**. Many religions affirm belief in one divine Creator, the maker of heaven and earth, of all that is visible and invisible. This shared recognition of a Creator establishes a foundation for **mutual understanding**.

However, a **stumbling block** arises for **Judaism and Islam** in the Christian affirmation of Jesus as the **Son of God, consubstantial with the Father**, and His **suffering, death, and resurrection** for the redemption of the world. Although Judaism, Islam, and Christianity are all “*religions of the Book*,” the Nicene Creed clarifies that our **scriptures and theological frameworks differ**. Recognizing and respecting these distinctions provides an opportunity for **honest dialogue and long-lasting peace** between our communities.

During my ministry in **Blackburn (UK)**, I often took my congregation to visit the **local mosque** to deepen their religious literacy. In these encounters, Muslim scholars frequently spoke with reverence about **Jesus (‘Isā)**, who holds an honored place in Islam. The Qur'an presents Jesus as an integral part of Islamic faith: *without Jesus (‘Isā), the Qur'an is incomplete*. The scholar would also highlight **Mary (Maryam)**—the only woman mentioned by name in the Qur'an—as a figure of great honor.

The Qur'an speaks of Jesus in multiple ways:

- **Surah 3:45** calls Jesus *the Word of God (Kalimatullah)* and *the Messiah (Al-Masīḥ)*:  
“Behold, the angel said: O Mary! God gives you glad tidings of a Word from Him: His name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honor in this world and the hereafter.”
- **Surah 3:49 and 4:171–172** describe Jesus as *the Apostle of God (Rasulullah)* and a *healer* empowered by God.
- **Surah 43:61** portrays Jesus as a *sign of the Last Judgment*.
- Yet **Surah 3:59** and **4:171** emphasize God's absolute oneness, rejecting the Trinity:  
“Say not ‘Trinity’: desist; it will be better for you. For God is One God... exalted is He above having a son.”
- **Surah 4:157** denies the crucifixion, asserting that Jesus was not killed nor crucified, but that it was made to appear so.

Despite theological divergence, there are **several affirmations about Jesus** in the Qur'an that resonate with elements of the Nicene Creed:

- Jesus' birth by the power of the Holy Spirit through the Virgin Mary.
- His role as *the Word of God*.

- His return in glory at the final judgment.
- His life-giving and healing power.

In this way, the Nicene Creed provides Christians with a **framework for engaging Islam**—acknowledging that while we are all *people of the Book*, our **books and revelations are distinct**. This awareness encourages deeper religious literacy and respectful conversation.

During my **sixteen years of ministry in India** as a **Presbyter**, I also engaged deeply with **Hindu, Buddhist, and Sikh** communities. Interestingly, these faiths posed no direct objection to the Nicene Creed. For example, **Hinduism** believes in a supreme divine reality (*Brahman*) and accepts the idea of divine incarnation (*Avatar*). Yet, the crucial difference lies in exclusivity: Hinduism will not accord Jesus a solitary throne but will include Him as one among many divine manifestations. In interfaith dialogue, this understanding helps Christians articulate that, according to the Nicene Creed, **Jesus is not one incarnation among many**, but **God Himself incarnate**.

The Creed's affirmation of **Jesus' suffering and death on the cross** also resonates with **Buddhist** perspectives on compassion and suffering. The Christian concept of *kenosis*—the self-emptying of God in Christ—reveals a God who humbly identifies with human pain. This idea of a **compassionate, self-giving divinity** often finds a deep and respectful echo among followers of other faiths.

In conclusion, the **Nicene Creed**, while distinctly Christian, serves as a bridge for **interfaith understanding**. It grounds Christians firmly in their faith while inviting them to engage others with humility, respect, and openness. By knowing our own beliefs clearly, we are better equipped to **listen, learn, and love** across religious boundaries, working together for peace and the flourishing of all humanity.

## References

Council of Nicaea (325 CE) *The Nicene Creed*.  
Council of Constantinople (381 CE) *The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed*.  
D'Costa, G. (2000) *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.  
Dupuis, J. (1997) *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.  
Knitter, P. F. (2002) *Introducing Theologies of Religions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.  
Parrinder, G. (1965) *Jesus in the Qur'an*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**Written by The Rev Canon Dr. Arun John**

**The Rev Canon Dr. Arun John** is Chaplain at St Andrew's Chaplaincy in Moscow and Area Dean in the Eastern Archdeaconry in the Diocese in Europe