The Creed Text

Suppose we were confronted by this sort of document: perhaps we found an old rolled up scroll in an attic or at a garage sale and decided to study it. If we were wise we might locate an expert in antiquities at a museum, getting them to open the scroll for us, as well as learning how to preserve it without damage. If we were very fortunate we might also find out the age of the vellum, the age of the ink, and several other technical details. Next, we might discover something like this: yet, a lot messier and hand written, and very hard to read, so that even many of the characters were not distinct…

The Scroll

ΠΙΣΤΕΥΟΜΕΝΕΙΣΕΝΑΘΕΟΝΠΑΤΕΡΑΠΑΝΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΑΠΟΙΗΤΗΝΟΥΡΑΝΟΥΚΑΙΓΗΣΟΡΑΤΩΝΤΕΠΑΝΤΩΝΚΑΙΑΟΡΑΤΩΝΠΙΣΤΕΥΟΜΕΝΚΑΙΕΙΣΕΝΑΚΥΡΙΟΝΙΗΣΟΥΝΧΡΙΣΤΟΝΤΟΝΥΙΟΝΤΟΥΘΕΟΥΤΟΝΜΟΝΟΓΕΝΗΤΟΝΕΚΤΟΥΠΑΤΡΟΣΓΕΝΝΗΘΕΝΤΑΠΡΟΠΑΝΤΩΝΤΩΝΑΙΩΝΩΝΦΩΣΕΚΦΩΤΟΣΘΕΟΝΑΛΗΘΙΝΟΝΕΚΘΕΟΥΑΛΗΘΙΝΟΥΓΕΝΝΗΘΕΝΤΑΟΥΠΟΙΗΘΕΝΤΑΟΜΟΟΥΣΙΟΝΤΩΠΑΤΡΙΔΙΟΥΤΑΠΑΝΤΑΕΓΕΝΕΤΟΤΟΝΔΙΗΜΑΣΤΟΥΣΑΝΘΡΩΠΟΥΣΚΑΙΔΙΑΤΗΝΗΜΕΤΕΡΑΝΣΩΤΗΡΙΑΝΚΑΤΕΛΘΟΝΤΑΕΚΤΩΝΟΥΡΑΝΩΝΚΑΙΣΑΡΚΩΘΕΝΤΑΕΚΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΟΣΑΓΙΟΥΚΑΙΜΑΡΙΑΣΤΗΣΠΑΡΘΕΝΟΥΚΑΙΕΝΑΝΘΡΩΠΗΣΑΝΤΑΣΤΑΥΡΩΘΕΝΤΑΤΕΥΠΕΡΗΜΩΝΕΠΙΠΟΝΤΙΟΥΠΙΛΑΤΟΥΚΑΙΠΑΘΟΝΤΑΚΑΙΤΑΦΕΝΤΑΚΑΙΑΝΑΣΤΑΝΤΑΤΗΤΡΙΤΗΗΜΕΡΑΚΑΤΑΤΑΣΓΡΑΦΑΣΚΑΙΑΝΕΛΘΟΝΤΑΕΙΣΤΟΥΣΟΥΡΑΝΟΥΣΚΑΙΚΑΘΕΖΟΜΕΝΟΝΕΚΔΕΞΙΩΝΤΟΥΠΑΤΡΟΣΚΑΙΠΑΛΙΝΕΡΧΟΜΕΝΟΝΜΕΤΑΔΟΞΗΣΚΡΙΝΑΙΖΩΝΤΑΣΚΑΙΝΕΚΡΟΥΣΟΥΤΗΣΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΑΣΟΥΚΕΣΤΑΙΤΕΛΟΣΠΙΣΤΕΥΟΜΕΝΚΑΙΕΙΣΤΟΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΟΑΓΙΟΝΤΟΚΥΡΙΟΝΤΟΖΩΟΠΟΙΟΝΤΟΕΚΤΟΥΠΑΤΡΟΣΕΚΠΟΡΕΥΟΜΕΝΟΝΤΟΣΥΝΠΑΤΡΙΚΑΙΥΙΩΣΥΜΠΡΟΣΚΥΝΟΥΜΕΝΟΝΚΑΙΣΥΝΔΟΞΑΖΟΜΕΝΟΝΤΟΛΑΛΗΣΑΝΔΙΑΤΩΝΠΡΟΦΗΤΩΝΠΙΣΤΕΥΟΜΕΝΚΑΙΕΙΣΜΙΑΝΑΓΙΑΝΚΑΘΟΛΙΚΗΝΚΑΙΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΙΚΗΝΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑΝΟΜΟΛΟΓΟΥΜΕΝΕΝΒΑΠΤΙΣΜΑΕΙΣΑΦΕΣΙΝΑΜΑΡΤΙΩΝΠΡΟΣΔΟΚΟΥΜΕΝΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΙΝΝΕΚΡΩΝΚΑΙΖΩΗΝΤΟΥΜΕΛΛΟΝΤΟΣΑΙΩΝΟΣΑΜΗΝ

Analysis

As luck would have it, the scroll turns out to be quite old (900), and possibly very valuable (priceless): so we decide to attempt reading it on our own. In most cases such scraps turn out to be some forgotten scholar’s notes or a worthless shopping list. In reality, we would find an expert epigrapher to read it: yet, here we are pretending to play the part of epigraphers. First, we go in search of repeating patterns. It turns out that the letters ΚΑΙ occur frequently so we make copies on which to mark this discovery; since reading all capitals is tedious we decide to change to lower case και, and separate the word with spaces. The result looks like this.

ΠΙΣΤΕΥΟΜΕΝΕΙΣΕΝΑΘΕΟΝΠΑΤΕΡΑΠΑΝΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΑΠΟΙΗΤΗΝΟΥΡΑΝΟΥ kai ΓΗΣΟΡΑΤΩΝΤΕΠΑΝΤΩΝ kai ΑΟΡΑΤΩΝΠΙΣΤΕΥΟΜΕΝ kai ΕΙΣΕΝΑΚΥΡΙΟΝΙΗΣΟΥΝΧΡΙΣΤΟΝΤΟΝΥΙΟΝΤΟΥΘΕΟΥΤΟΝΜΟΝΟΓΕΝΗΤΟΝΕΚΤΟΥΠΑΤΡΟΣΓΕΝΝΗΘΕΝΤΑΠΡΟΠΑΝΤΩΝΤΩΝΑΙΩΝΩΝΦΩΣΕΚΦΩΤΟΣΘΕΟΝΑΛΗΘΙΝΟΝΕΚΘΕΟΥΑΛΗΘΙΝΟΥΓΕΝΝΗΘΕΝΤΑΟΥΠΟΙΗΘΕΝΤΑΟΜΟΟΥΣΙΟΝΤΩΠΑΤΡΙΔΙΟΥΤΑΠΑΝΤΑΕΓΕΝΕΤΟΤΟΝΔΙΗΜΑΣΤΟΥΣΑΝΘΡΩΠΟΥΣ kai ΔΙΑΤΗΝΗΜΕΤΕΡΑΝΣΩΤΗΡΙΑΝΚΑΤΕΛΘΟΝΤΑΕΚΤΩΝΟΥΡΑΝΩΝ kai ΣΑΡΚΩΘΕΝΤΑΕΚΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΟΣΑΓΙΟΥ kai ΜΑΡΙΑΣΤΗΣΠΑΡΘΕΝΟΥ kai ΕΝΑΝΘΡΩΠΗΣΑΝΤΑΣΤΑΥΡΩΘΕΝΤΑΤΕΥΠΕΡΗΜΩΝΕΠΙΠΟΝΤΙΟΥΠΙΛΑΤΟΥ kai ΠΑΘΟΝΤΑ kai ΤΑΦΕΝΤΑ kai ΑΝΑΣΤΑΝΤΑΤΗΤΡΙΤΗΗΜΕΡΑΚΑΤΑΤΑΣΓΡΑΦΑΣ kai ΑΝΕΛΘΟΝΤΑΕΙΣΤΟΥΣΟΥΡΑΝΟΥΣ kai ΚΑΘΕΖΟΜΕΝΟΝΕΚΔΕΞΙΩΝΤΟΥΠΑΤΡΟΣ kai ΠΑΛΙΝΕΡΧΟΜΕΝΟΝΜΕΤΑΔΟΞΗΣΚΡΙΝΑΙΖΩΝΤΑΣ kai ΝΕΚΡΟΥΣΟΥΤΗΣΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΑΣΟΥΚΕΣΤΑΙΤΕΛΟΣΠΙΣΤΕΥΟΜΕΝ kai ΕΙΣΤΟΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΟΑΓΙΟΝΤΟΚΥΡΙΟΝΤΟΖΩΟΠΟΙΟΝΤΟΕΚΤΟΥΠΑΤΡΟΣΕΚΠΟΡΕΥΟΜΕΝΟΝΤΟΣΥΝΠΑΤΡΙ kai ΥΙΩΣΥΜΠΡΟΣΚΥΝΟΥΜΕΝΟΝ kai ΣΥΝΔΟΞΑΖΟΜΕΝΟΝΤΟΛΑΛΗΣΑΝΔΙΑΤΩΝΠΡΟΦΗΤΩΝΠΙΣΤΕΥΟΜΕΝ kai ΕΙΣΜΙΑΝΑΓΙΑΝΚΑΘΟΛΙΚΗΝ kai ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΙΚΗΝΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑΝΟΜΟΛΟΓΟΥΜΕΝΕΝΒΑΠΤΙΣΜΑΕΙΣΑΦΕΣΙΝΑΜΑΡΤΙΩΝΠΡΟΣΔΟΚΟΥΜΕΝΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΙΝΝΕΚΡΩΝ kai ΖΩΗΝΤΟΥΜΕΛΛΟΝΤΟΣΑΙΩΝΟΣΑΜΗΝ

Progress

Even though our results seem a bit silly, we persist. Other patterns emerge, so that we make steady progress. Something that resembles words appears.

Πιστευομεν εισ ενα θεον ΠΑΤΕΡΑΠΑΝΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΑΠΟΙΗΤΗΝΟΥΡΑΝΟΥ kai ΓΗΣΟΡΑΤΩΝΤΕΠΑΝΤΩΝ kai ΑΟΡΑΤΩΝ Πιστευομεν kai εισ ενα ΚΥΡΙΟΝΙΗΣΟΥΝΧΡΙΣ τον τον ΥΙΟΝ του Θεου τον ΜΟΝΟΓΕΝΗ τον εκ του ΠΑΤΡΟΣΓΕΝΝΗΘΕΝΤΑΠΡΟΠΑΝΤΩΝΤΩΝΑΙΩΝΩΝΦΩΣ εκ ΦΩΤΟΣ θεον ΑΛΗΘΙΝΟΝ εκ Θεου ΑΛΗΘΙΝΟΥΓΕΝΝΗΘΕΝΤΑΟΥΠΟΙΗΘΕΝΤΑΟΜΟΟΥΣΙΟΝΤΩΠΑΤΡΙΔΙΟΥΤΑΠΑΝΤΑΕΓΕΝΕΤΟ τον ΔΙΗΜΑΣ του ΣΑΝΘΡΩΠΟΥΣ kai ΔΙΑΤΗΝΗΜΕΤΕΡΑΝΣΩΤΗΡΙΑΝΚΑΤΕΛΘΟΝΤΑ εκ ΤΩΝΟΥΡΑΝΩΝ kai ΣΑΡΚΩΘΕΝΤΑ εκ ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΟΣΑΓΙΟΥ kai ΜΑΡΙΑΣΤΗΣΠΑΡΘΕΝΟΥ kai ενα ΝΘΡΩΠΗΣΑΝΤΑΣΤΑΥΡΩΘΕΝΤΑΤΕΥΠΕΡΗΜΩΝΕΠΙΠΟΝΤΙΟΥΠΙΛΑ του kai ΠΑΘΟΝΤΑ kai ΤΑΦΕΝΤΑ kai ΑΝΑΣΤΑΝΤΑΤΗΤΡΙΤΗΗΜΕΡΑΚΑΤΑΤΑΣΓΡΑΦΑΣ kai ΑΝΕΛΘΟΝΤΑ εισ του ΣΟΥΡΑΝΟΥΣ kai ΚΑΘΕΖΟΜΕΝΟΝ εκ ΔΕΞΙΩΝ του ΠΑΤΡΟΣ kai ΠΑΛΙΝΕΡΧΟΜΕΝΟΝΜΕΤΑΔΟΞΗΣΚΡΙΝΑΙΖΩΝΤΑΣ kai Ν εκ ΡΟΥΣΟΥΤΗΣΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΑΣΟΥΚΕΣΤΑΙΤΕΛΟΣ Πιστευομεν kai εισ ΤΟΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΟΑΓΙΟΝΤΟΚΥΡΙΟΝΤΟΖΩΟΠΟΙΟΝΤΟ εκ του ΠΑΤΡΟΣ εκ ΠΟΡΕΥΟΜΕΝΟΝΤΟΣΥΝΠΑΤΡΙ kai ΥΙΩΣΥΜΠΡΟΣΚΥΝΟΥΜΕΝΟΝ kai ΣΥΝΔΟΞΑΖΟΜΕΝΟΝΤΟΛΑΛΗΣΑΝΔΙΑΤΩΝΠΡΟΦΗΤΩΝ Πιστευομεν kai εισ ΜΙΑΝΑΓΙΑΝΚΑΘΟΛΙΚΗΝ kai ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΙΚΗΝ εκ ΚΛΗΣΙΑΝΟΜΟΛΟΓΟΥΜΕΝΕΝΒΑΠΤΙΣΜΑ εισ ΑΦΕΣΙΝΑΜΑΡΤΙΩΝΠΡΟΣΔΟΚΟΥΜ ενα ΝΑΣΤΑΣΙΝΝ εκ ΡΩΝ kai ΖΩΗΝ του ΜΕΛΛΟΝΤΟΣΑΙΩΝΟΣΑΜΗΝ

Outcome

So the working copy of the scroll sits like a picture puzzle on our table, each time we pass by, we have a whack at it, fitting in a new piece, finding a new word. After hours, perhaps weeks or even months, of struggling we arrive at something like this.

Πιστευομεν εισ ενα θεον Πατερα Παντοκρατορα Ποιητην ουρανου kai γης ορατων τε παντων kai αορατων. Πιστευομεν kai εισ ενα Κυριον Ιησουν Χρις τον τον Υιον του Θεου τον μονογενη τον εκ του Πατρος γεννηθεντα προ παντων των αιωνων φως εκ φωτος Θεον αληθινον εκ Θεου αληθινου γεννηθεντα ου ποιηθεντα ομοουσιον τω Πατρι δι ου τα παντα εγενετο τον δι ημας του σανθρωπους kai δια την ημετεραν σωτηριαν κατελθοντα εκ των ουρανων kai σαρκωθεντα εκ Πνευματος Αγιου kai Μαριας της παρθενου kai ενα νθρωπησαντα σταυρωθεντα τε υπερ ημων επι ποντιου Πιλα του kai παθοντα kai ταφεντα kai ανασταντα τη τριτη ημερα κατα τας γραφας kai ανελθοντα εισ τους ουρανους kai καθεζομενον εκ δεξιων του Πατρος kai παλιν ερχομενον μετα δοξης κριναι ζωντας kai ν εκ ρους ου της βασιλειας ουκ εσται τελος. Πιστευομεν kai εισ το Πνευμα το Αγιον το κυριον το ζωοποιον το εκ του Πατρος εκ πορευομενον το συν Πατρι kai υιω συμπροσκυνουμενον kai συνδοξαζομενον το λαλησαν δια των προφητων. Πιστευομεν kai εισ μιαναγιανκαθολικην kai αποστολικην εκ κλησιαν ομολογουμενεν βαπτισμα εισ αφεσιν αμαρτιων προσδοκουμ ενα ναστασινν εκ ρων kai ζωην του μελλοντος αιωνος αμην.

Epigraphy

Finally, we realize we are over our heads, deciding, at last, to consult an expert epigrapher. The epigrapher corrects our errors, adds breathing, punctuation, and structure, delivering something like this.

Σύμβολον τῆς Νίκαιας

Πιστεύομεν εἰς ἕνα Θεὸν: Πατέρα, Παντοκράτορα, Ποιητὴν; οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς; ὁρατῶν τε πάντων καὶ ἀοράτων.

[Πιστεύομεν] καὶ εἰς ἕνα Κύριον: Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὸν Μονογενῆ, τὸν ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς γεννηθέντα πρὸ πάντων τῶν αἰώνων, φῶς ἐκ φωτός, Θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ, γεννηθέντα – οὐ ποιηθέντα – ὁμοούσιον τῷ Πατρί, δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο, τὸν δι’ ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν, κατελθόντα ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν, καὶ σαρκωθέντα ἐκ Πνεύματος Ἁγίου καὶ Μαρίας τῆς παρθένου, καὶ ἐνανθρωπήσαντα. Σταυρωθέντα τε ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου, καὶ παθόντα, καὶ ταφέντα, καὶ ἀναστάντα τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρα, κατὰ τὰς γραφάς, καὶ ἀνελθόντα εἰς τοὺς οὐρανούς, καὶ καθεζόμενον ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ Πατρός, καὶ πάλιν ἐρχόμενον μετὰ δόξης κρΙναι ζῶντας καὶ νεκρούς; οὗ τῆς βασιλείας οὐκ ἔσται τέλος.

[Πιστεύομεν] καὶ εἰς τὸ Πνεῦμα: τὸ Ἅγιον, τὸ Κύριον, τὸ Ζῳοποιόν, τὸ ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς ἐκπορευόμενον, τὸ σὺν Πατρὶ καὶ Υἱῷ συμπροσκυνούμενον καὶ συνδοξαζόμενον, τὸ λαλῆσαν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν.

[Πιστεύομεν] καὶ εἰς μίαν, ἁγίαν, καθολικὴν καὶ ἀποστολικὴν ἐκκλησίαν. Ὁμολογοῦμεν ἓν βάπτισμα εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν. Προσδοκοῦμεν ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν, καὶ ζωὴν τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος. Ἀμήν.

Study

Now we are ready to study the document and pray thoughtfully through its contents.

Σύμβολον τῆς Νίκαιας

Symbol of Nicaea

*The Father*

Πιστεύομεν εἰς ἕνα Θεὸν: Πατέρα, Παντοκράτορα, Ποιητὴν; οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς; ὁρατῶν τε πάντων καὶ ἀοράτων.

We believe in one God: Pre-primordial Patriarch, Prime Mover, Prime Maker; of heaven and earth; of all things both visible and invisible.[[1]](#endnote-1)

*The Son*

Πιστεύομεν καὶ εἰς ἕνα Κύριον: Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὸν Μονογενῆ, τὸν ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς γεννηθέντα πρὸ πάντων τῶν αἰώνων, φῶς ἐκ φωτός, Θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ, γεννηθέντα – οὐ ποιηθέντα – ὁμοούσιον τῷ Πατρί, δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο, τὸν δι’ ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν, κατελθόντα ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν, καὶ σαρκωθέντα ἐκ Πνεύματος Ἁγίου καὶ Μαρίας, τῆς παρθένου, καὶ ἐνανθρωπήσαντα.

We believe also, in one Lord: Jesus Christ,

* the Son of God,
* the Only-begotten,
* the One begotten of the Father before all the ages, light of light, true God of true God, begotten – not made – of the same essence as the Father, for whom all things were made,
* the One Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, was made flesh of [the Holy Ghost] and Mary, the Virgin, and was made man.[[2]](#endnote-2)

*His Works*

Σταυρωθέντα τε ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου, καὶ παθόντα, καὶ ταφέντα, καὶ ἀναστάντα τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρα, κατὰ τὰς γραφάς, καὶ ἀνελθόντα εἰς τοὺς οὐρανούς, καὶ καθεζόμενον ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ Πατρός, καὶ πάλιν ἐρχόμενον μετὰ δόξης κρῖναι ζῶντας καὶ νεκρούς; οὗ τῆς βασιλείας οὐκ ἔσται τέλος.

He was crucified on our behalf by Pontius Pilate:

* He suffered,
* He was buried,
* He raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,
* He ascended into the heavens,
* He was seated at the right hand of the Father,
* He is also coming again with Glory to judge [the] living and [the] dead; Whose kingdom shall not end.[[3]](#endnote-3)

*The Spirit*

Πιστεύομεν καὶ εἰς τὸ Πνεῦμα: τὸ Ἅγιον, τὸ Κύριον, τὸ Ζῳοποιόν, τὸ ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς ἐκπορευόμενον, τὸ σὺν Πατρὶ καὶ Υἱῷ συμπροσκυνούμενον καὶ συνδοξαζόμενον, τὸ λαλῆσαν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν.

We believe also, in the Spirit:

* the Holy,
* the Lord,
* the Life-giver,
* the One Who proceeds from the Father,[[4]](#endnote-4)
* the One Who with Father and Son is worshiped together, and Glorified together,
* the One Who was speaking through the prophets.[[5]](#endnote-5)

*The Church*

Πιστεύομεν καὶ εἰς μίαν, ἁγίαν, καθολικὴν καὶ ἀποστολικὴν ἐκκλησίαν. ὁμολογοῦμεν ἓν βάπτισμα εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν. προσδοκοῦμεν ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν, καὶ ζωὴν τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος. Ἀμήν.

We believe also, in one, holy, catholic and Apostolic Church. We confess one baptism for the remission of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and [the] life of the coming age. Amen.[[6]](#endnote-6)

Reality

The whole point of this exercise is to dramatize the difficulty of such an undertaking. New manuscripts, it seems, are being regularly found and published, usually with a gigantic flaming banner that says something like, “This proves that….” The harsh reality is that nothing of the sort has been proved. First of all, we usually have no provenance, the manuscript was found by accident: so, without knowing the document’s history, it could have been produced by some cult, enemies, heretics, or anyone else for that matter. The chain of evidence has been lost. If! If we could possibly uncover such provenance, we might be fortunate enough to find an original manuscript copy of the Nicene Creed. Secondly, all along the way, we have been dependent on experts. It is these experts who have determined everything critical about this manuscript along the way. It should be clear, especially in the case of epigraphers, that a wicked person is in excellent position to falsify the document.

Conclusion

Even our readable versions of the Greek Bible have been subject to such scrutiny and torture before they reach our hands. This is why there are so many opinions about the Greek Bible text. We ought not deceive ourselves into believing that this is a simple matter. We ought not gullibly think that the latest hot new English language translation has the plain Word of God: which is why there is such a muddled confusion with so many, far too many, English translations. At the very least we need to be challenged to learn as much Greek as we can possibly absorb.

1. We could use your help here. We tried to capture the punch (pardon the pun) of these three Greek names for God, all of which begin with the letter P: Patera = Father, Pantokratora = Almighty or All ruling, Poiêthên = Creator or Maker. We think you can come up with a better way to capture this idea of three words beginning with the same letter. Please help make the punch of the P’s pop.

The main concept is that the three P’s hang together in Greek. In English we try to make the sentence read “Creator of heaven and earth.” Still, God is just as much the Father of heaven and earth; just as much the Ruler of heaven and earth, as He is Creator of all these things.

So there is a kind of triple three dimensionality to the prayer. We see the three names of God which we do not understand. We see the heaven and earth which are also beyond our grasp. Finally, we compare the sensate world with one that cannot be measured by the five senses or by science, and now we have lost all hope of understanding. The glory, immensity, and wonder of God, are reflected in the overwhelming vastness of the universe, and the infinitesimal nature of mater is exemplified by the Higgs particles. Finally, such glory insists that beyond the majesty of nature, over and above everything around us, that another order of creation, a spirit world exists, which cannot even be felt by ordinary human means.

To what does this prayer declaration of the immensity of God call us? In 325 it called 318 pastors together to try to unify The Church against several growing heresies: they fell short of perfection, but to their credit many disputes were resolved, they did a better job than anyone since. Today, more than ever, The Christian Church needs to stand together. What prevents us from standing together with these 318 pastors to pray this prayer with them? If we could do that, we might see God change our world. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. This is all about who Jesus is as a person.

Maybe we get all hung up over the words, same essence, or sometimes the translation, same substance. The problem with same substance is that it seems to imply that God has material substance, which is untrue.

The real problem here is that in 325, no Greek words could be found to adequately name the unknowable internal nature of God, His being. At least two words were found, synonyms, these were pressed into service in spite of the difficulties, and given new technical meaning.

The trouble with this solution was that different parties preferred different words. The above solution satisfied about 2/3 of all parties concerned, which was better than none. Still, we are left with ongoing divisions today. Does Jesus have one nature (Monophysitism: one Divine nature completely absorbing the human nature, a mixture of natures), or two natures (one Divine and one human)? Does Jesus have one will (Monothelitism: one Divine-human mixture completely absorbing the human will), or two wills (one Divine and one human)? The Bible seems to teach that Jesus’ Divine nature, and human nature remain distinct; that God the Son, added to himself a complete human nature; thus, becoming both God and man without any mixture of the two natures or wills: yet, this is also a mystery.

The two Greek words selected were ousia and hypostasis. Arbitrarily, the word ousia was chosen to represent God as the Trinitarian Whole. Thus, Jesus is of the same identical ousia as the Father and the Spirit. The word hypostasis was chosen to represent the three distinct, yet inseparable, persons. So, there is only One ousia in three hypostases. Jesus’ hypostasis is different in that He adds to Himself a perfect human nature: He is God-man, Theanthropos, or Theandros.

It is not as though the words ousia and hypostasis have some real human meaning: they were chosen to name that which was not, and still is not understood: they have technical meaning. Any reality that they express is their heavenly reality, which is still beyond our grasp.

One might hope that after what is now approaching two thousand years, we might have got such word mix-ups sorted out. Alas, such is not the case. What is wrong with us that after 1,691 years, we still haven’t got this sorted out? This is just a root of bitterness. We have no good excuse for not coming together as the 318 pastors tried to come together in 325. For them there were communication barriers: it took years to get letters around the empire. Today, such communication takes place in seconds. What is wrong with us that we cannot stand together with the 318 pastors over the issue of who Jesus is? [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. This is all about what Jesus, the God-man did.

The term, “by Pontius Pilate,” does not harp on Pilate’s personal sins, which were no more terrible than Paul’s. “By” indicates the governing authority under which the crucifixion was authorized: it was under Pilate, an authorized Roman representative (fifth prefect of the Roman province of Judaea). The crucifixion of Jesus was a legal act under Roman law. The term, “by Pontius Pilate,” also fixes the date of the crucifixion to the prefecture of Pilate (26-36).

The phrase, “He descended into hell,” from the Apostles Creed, is not found here. This is not a big issue. This phrase might easily have been added, it was certainly believed, and a page or two of supporting Scripture is not difficult to find.

What is contained in these phrases that does not come directly from Scripture? What is found in these phrases about which we may still disagree? What is wrong with us that we cannot stand together with the 318 pastors over the issue of what Jesus did? [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. After the late 6th century, the Filioque controversy arose over one Latin word, “filioque”, which was added at the end of this phrase. While there are many theories about the source of this word, we believe it is best understood as a scribal copying error: a fatigued scribe simply inserted the words, “and Son” from the following phrase by mistake. Some insist that such an error can only happen in the forward direction. However, we have over five years (over 5,000 hours, over 10,000 – 8-1/2 x 11 pages, all hand lettered) experience in scribal work, and assure you that this sort of error was committed many times, both backward and forward. Those who wish to assign blame, or insert profound theologies concerning these two Greek words are not serving the peace of The Church. Because these two words have no historic basis in early manuscripts, serve no biblical necessity, and are offensive to many: we simply left them out in the interests of peace. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. By 381 AD, most or all of the original 318 pastors had fallen asleep. The Nicaean statement of faith had made its way throughout most or all of Christendom, had been ratified by the churches, and returned with suggested amendments. Constantinople had changed too, and was now the dedicated capital city of the Roman Empire. So, 150 pastors met in Constantinople at 381 AD, a few miles away from Nicaea.

The main amendment was this addition describing the person and work of the Spirit. In a secondary amendment, the word, “we believe”, was not repeated in each paragraph: in Greek, the word, “and”, is sufficient to carry the force and meaning of the opening word, “we believe”; since this is not true in English we added the original word, “we believe”, back in again, in order to make the meaning very clear. Details of these and other amendments are found in this link.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicene_Creed> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. This is a statement of faith, a prayer, from beginning to end: it has four main paragraphs concerning Christian faith, each beginning with, “we believe”. It is not, strictly speaking, a dogmatic statement: it confesses mysteries that are not understood by humans, for which no words existed in the early fourth century. Because of our familiarity with it, it seems very dogmatic: but, we have forgotten the mystery, the poetry. So, we assume differing meanings for words that have no definable meaning; thus, disagreements arise from the very confession and prayer that should bring unity. The Greek word for confession means to say the same things: first, we say the same things that God says; second, we say the same things that the rest of Christianity says. It makes no difference that these are unfathomable mysteries: it only matters that we trust God, His Word, and each other.

What remains with which we cannot all agree? Why do we continue to grieve and quench the Spirit by our divisiveness? [↑](#endnote-ref-6)