

The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed in the Works and Life of Arvo Pärt

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Abstract

Arvo Pärt has composed music for a variety of texts belonging to the Christian tradition. Yet there is one text that has received more emphasis in his oeuvre than any other: the Niceno-Constantinopolitan (NC) Creed, which found its way into *Missa syllabica* (1977), *Summa* (1977), *Berliner Messe* (1990/2002) and *Orient & Occident* (1999/2000).

The NC Creed, forged during alternating periods of ecclesiastical unity and conflict, fuses theological influences from both East and West and has remained for over 1600 years one of Christianity's central documents. Even so, it is far from obvious how this text found its way into the life and work of Arvo Pärt, considering the anti-religious context from which he emerged. However, a close examination of the composer's music diaries, as well as interviews conducted with Arvo and Nora Pärt, brings to light not only striking aspects of Pärt's personal relationship with the NC Creed and with credal statements in general, but also the potential role of this document in Pärt's creative compositional process.

Introduction

Arvo Pärt has composed music for a variety of texts belonging to the Christian tradition. Yet there is one text that has received more emphasis in his oeuvre than any other: the Niceno-Constantinopolitan (NC) Creed, which in its Latin version has found its way into *Summa* (1977) and in Church Slavonic into *Orient & Occident* (1999/2000). As a part of the Latin Mass the Latin NC Creed is also found in *Missa syllabica* (1977) and *Berliner Messe* (1990/2002).

Before its reception by Pärt, this doctrinal declaration of the Christian Trinitarian faith underwent a long journey during which it incorporated theological influences from both East and West, giving witness to both unity and conflict, and over the centuries it has remained one of the most fundamental documents of the Christian world.

Even though our historical sources on this matter are scarce, it is now commonly agreed that the NC Creed was most probably formulated by the fathers of the First Council of Constantinople (381). Its first clear documented appearance on the other hand

takes place only several generations later, at the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451), where the Council of Constantinople and its Creed were recognized as authoritative at an ecumenical, worldwide level. (Kelly 1972: 296–331; Hanson 2014: 1:632; Jaanson 2014: 30–32, 139) The NC Creed's initial entrance into the Christian Divine Liturgy, either sung or recited, most probably took place during the time of Peter the Fuller at the beginning of the 6th century (Kelly 1972: 348–351). During the same century, the NC Creed set in Latin started to gain dominance also in the baptismal services of Rome and of the whole Western Church, thus becoming truly the sole ecumenical creed of both the East and the West (Kelly 1972: 346–348).

Even in the 6th century, however, some Western local churches began to use in their Eucharist a delicately modified version of the NC Creed (the Latin NC Creed) with the added filioque clause.¹ With problems starting to arise between the Latin- and Greek-speaking churches, this interpolated Creed, which entered the Roman Mass for the first time in

¹ In order to better emphasize against the Arian heresy that the Son and the Holy Spirit are of equal value and honour, some of the Western Churches added the so-called filioque clause ("and from the Son") to the NC Creed, according to which the Holy Spirit proceeds not only from the Father but also from the Son. For the Eastern Christians this addition was seen as a unilateral and illegitimate interpolation of the Creed that undermines the monarchy of the Father and relativizes the reality of personal (hypostatic) existence in the Trinity (Meyendorff 1983: 92).