

LET US SING THE CREDAL SONG IN LITURGY

Nicene Creed and The Response of Young Christian in Sumba, Indonesia

Abstract:

This paper aims to describe the response of young Christians in Sumba, Indonesia, on the Nicene Creed. As one of the ecumenical confessions accepted by churches worldwide, the Nicene Creed is also an important part of the liturgy of the Protestant church in Sumba (GKS). The Nicene Creed, along with two other confessions of faith, namely the Apostles' Creed and the Athanasian Creed, are accepted by the GKS to be recited during Sunday worship. However, in liturgical practice, compared to the formulation of the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed is rarely recited by the congregation. The congregation is more familiar with the Apostles' Creed. The practical reason often given is that the Nicene Creed formula is considered longer and contains complex theological ideas, causing the congregation to become passive and less engaged with the meaning of the creed. The author uses a qualitative descriptive research method to collect the data and information needed for writing this article. Respondents in the field, namely the church youth group, proposed that the Nicene Creed be adapted into a hymn that can be practically sung by the congregation, easy to remember, and meaningful to contemplate. As an important part of the contemporary church community, the aspirations and hopes of the youth regarding the Nicene Creed need to be addressed to shape the church's liturgical service. The confession of faith sung in the liturgy has the purpose of acclamation and proclamation. By acclamation, the congregation sings the creed to respond in faith to the salvation that God has accomplished in Jesus Christ. By proclamation, the congregation sings the creed to bear witness to others around them about the Almighty God who saves the world.

Keywords:

Liturgy, Nicene Creed, Credal Song, Young Christian, Sumba

Introduction

The confession of faith is part of the liturgy of the Protestant Church in Sumba, Indonesia. There are three accepted creeds, namely the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, and the Athanasian Creed.

In the author's observation, the confession of faith that is often recited or sung by the congregation during Sunday worship is the Apostles' Creed. Most church members, both older and younger, can recite the Apostles' Creed well and fluently without a written text. They can memorize and internalize its meaning. Whereas the Nicene Creed is rarely, if ever, recited by the congregation. The focus of this writing is the Nicene Creed as an ecumenical confession and its position in the liturgy. Through this writing, the author intends to address two questions: First, why is the Nicene Creed

rarely recited by the congregation during Sunday worship in Sumba, Indonesia? Second, what is the perspective of the youth group on the Nicene Creed?

The author uses a qualitative descriptive research method to collect the data and information needed for writing this article. The author uses a number of liturgical theology literature as secondary sources, while the primary sources come from respondents in the field. The author met with the respondents, a group of church youth who actively participate in Sunday services. Some of the respondents are also liturgical practitioners. They are actively involved in worship services as musicians, singers, dancers, Bible readers, and preachers. The author conducted a Focus Group Discussion with a number of young people to listen to their stories, experiences, and reflections on the Nicene Creed in the church liturgy in Sumba. The thesis statement of this article is that the liturgical experiences and understanding of the youth regarding the Nicene Creed are important aspects in realizing an inclusive and meaningful church worship service for everyone.

This writing is organized as follows. The first part is the introduction. Here, the author explains the background of the issues related to the Nicene Creed and liturgy, as well as the two questions the author intends to explore and find answers to, the methodology the author uses to gather the necessary information, and the structure of this paper. Next, the author discusses the credo as an element of liturgy. Here, the author describes the credo as a permanent element of the church's liturgy from the early church period to the present. The next section is where the author explains the Nicene Creed in the context of church liturgy in Sumba, Indonesia. After that, the author describes the respondents' views on the Nicene Creed. The final section is reflection and conclusion.

Credo as an Element of Liturgy

The confession of faith is an element of the liturgy. The worship of the congregation since the Early Church has been marked by the act of professing faith. The congregation recites a short and simple statement of faith, namely that Jesus is Lord. This statement of faith is spoken by the baptismal candidate during the baptism service. That brief confession of faith was then developed by the church into a longer formulation, mentioning various aspects of Christ's person, including His life, death, and resurrection. Also, the formulation of the Trinitarian Creed by mentioning God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.¹

Furthermore, throughout history, churches have recognized and used the trinitarian creed in their liturgy. At least there are three ecumenical creeds, namely the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. The Apostles' Creed is known as a brief creed, with some of its verses dating back to the second century. This confession of faith is used in the Baptism liturgy and the Eucharistic liturgy. Whereas the Nicene Creed, as a creed produced by the Council of Nicaea in 325 and refined by the Council of Constantinople in 381, is known as a lengthy confession of faith and is used in the celebration of the Eucharist.²

¹ Ralph. P. Martin, *Worship in The Early Church*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981),

² J. G. Davies, ed. *The Westminster Dictionary of Worship* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 156.

In addition to these two creeds, the church also recognizes the Athanasian Creed, which is a concise catechetical explanation of the church's teachings on the Trinity and the Incarnation. Now this creed is not used in the liturgy.³

The confession of faith has been an important part of the church liturgy to this day. The congregation that gathers for worship simultaneously is the congregation that collectively professes their faith. The confession of faith becomes a communal act of the church members. That is why churches from various traditions proclaim the confession of faith, both the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, in Sunday worship. Besides being spoken, the confession of faith is also sung by the congregation. Even in the 16th century, the Nicene Creed was composed by Christian composers into choral music. The congregation and the choir sang the credo in the liturgy.⁴

Reciting or singing the creed in the liturgy aims to respond to the proclamation of God's word. After the congregation hears the proclamation about God in Jesus Christ, the congregation liturgically has the opportunity to respond by reciting or singing the creed together. The confession of faith is seen as a corresponding response that can be shown by the congregation after listening to the sermon.⁵

Furthermore, the confession of faith in the liturgy is also an expression of the unity of the church throughout the ages and in all places. By reciting or singing the credo, the congregation collectively declares to the world the nature of the church as a single fellowship, even though it exists in many places and in different times.⁶

The confession of faith in the liturgy also aims to remind the congregation of the baptism they have received. The credo is a form of recollection or re-experiencing the baptismal event of the past and the faith that leads the congregation to the conviction to receive that baptism.⁷

The confession of faith in the liturgy also aims to express the unity of the church's faith. That the church, existing in different places and times, acknowledges and accepts the same and one faith that is affirmed in the holy communion.⁸

Nicene Creed in the context of Sunday Worship in Sumba, Indonesia

Nicene creed as a Christian statement of faith is accepted by the churches in Indonesia⁹ include GKS. GKS agrees with the statement contained in the document of the Joint Declaration of the Christian Faith published by the Communion Churches in Indonesia. In the document, it is stated that churches in Indonesia profess the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed. These two creeds are seen as a credo that has emerged from the struggles of faith in the early Church and as a true and complete testimony of faith based on the testimony of the Bible. These two creeds are also seen as symbols of the unity of the Church in all places and throughout all ages.¹⁰

As part of the church communion in Indonesia, GKS accepts the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. Both ecumenical creeds are included in the GKS liturgical book. This book is used by GKS members to conduct Sunday worship. In

³ Ernest Maryanto, *Kamus Liturgi Sederhana* (Jogjakarta: Kanisius),

⁴ J. G. Davies, ed. *The Westminster* 156.

⁵ *The Worship Sourcebook*, 151.

⁶ *The Worship Sourcebook*, 151.

⁷ *The Worship Sourcebook*, 151.

⁸ *The Worship Sourcebook*, 151.

⁹ It should also be noted that charismatic Pentecostal churches in Indonesia do not include the confession of faith as a fixed liturgical element in every Sunday service.

¹⁰ *Dokumen Keesaan Gereja PGI*

the ecclesiastical formula for the implementation of the Holy Communion, GKS includes an explanation that after the ministry of the Word (sermon), the congregation can continue by proclaiming the Nicene Creed. The Nicene Creed is placed as an important part of the Holy Communion liturgy conducted in GKS.¹¹

However, in worship practice, GKS members predominantly profess the Apostolic Creed every week, as well as during communion, baptism, and other church services. In addition to reciting it, the Apostles' Creed is also sung based on the lyrics of the song listed in the *Kidung Jemaat* hymnbook¹² number 280. This song is a shortened version of the Apostles' Creed.¹³ Because it is often sung, this credo song is very familiar to the members of GKS.

Church members in Sumba rarely recite the Nicene Creed during Sunday services, church holiday celebrations, and other general worship services. Liturgical ministers rarely invite the congregation to recite the Nicene Creed, including during the celebration of the Eucharist. Although institutionally, the GKS accepts the Nicene Creed, in practice, church members rarely, if ever, recite the Nicene Creed. Liturgically, this condition raises questions. Why is the Nicene Creed rarely recited in worship services in Sumba?

The Sumba Christian Church is one of the Calvinist churches in Indonesia. GKS was formed as a result of the evangelization by missionaries who came from the Netherlands. These missionaries were sent by the Evangelical Mission Agency of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands, which adheres to the Reformed Confession of Faith, and they sought to maintain the Calvinist tradition of the 17th and 18th centuries.¹⁴ The Reformed characteristics that still remain in GKS include a worship pattern that follows the Calvinist tradition introduced by missionaries from the church in the Netherlands.

GKS, on one hand, inherits the ecumenical credo, but on the other hand, follows the Calvinist tradition that emphasizes teaching faith to church members through catechism. The formulation of the Apostles' Creed in the context of the GKS is seen as a source of church teachings. That is why, just like the church in the Netherlands, GKS uses a summary of the main teachings of the Christian faith in the Heidelberg Catechism and the formulation of the Apostles' Creed as materials for catechism, especially for the church's youth and young adults.¹⁵

Furthermore, GKS seems to follow the worship pattern implemented by John Calvin in the Straszburg Church in the past. GKS follows the Calvinist church pattern that always uses the Apostolic Creed formulation in the liturgy. GKS is also influenced by Calvin's criticism of the Nicene Creed, which considers the formulation of the Nicene Creed to be long and excessive.¹⁶

Regarding the place of the credo in the liturgy, GKS places it after the sermon. Theologically, the confession of faith is seen as part of the congregation's response after listening to the sermon. GKS believes that the sermon aims to build the faith of the congregation, so the confession of faith is placed after the sermon. The confession

¹¹ GKS, *Tata Cara Kebaktian GKS*, p. 56.

¹² The book contains a collection of spiritual songs published by the Church Music Foundation and used by churches in Indonesia during worship.

¹³ *Alkitab dengan Kidung Jemaat* (Jakarta: Lembaga Alkitab Indonesia, 2007).

¹⁴ Th. Van den End, *Sumber-sumber Zending* (Jakarta, BPK Gunung Mulia, 2004), p. 3-8; H. Berkhof dan I.H. Enklaar, *Sejarah Gereja* (Jakarta, BPK Gunung Mulia, 1993), p. 312.

¹⁵ Christian de Jonge, *Apa itu Calvinisme?* (Jakarta, BPK Gunung Mulia, 1988), p. 84, 174-175.

¹⁶ J. L. Ch. Abineno, *Unsur-unsur Liturgia yang Dipakai oleh Gereja-gereja di Indonesia* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1986), 81-82

of faith in the liturgy is seen as an act of the congregation expressing faith in God (acclamation) and an act of witnessing to the world (proclamation).

In its liturgical book, GKS emphasizes the importance of the congregation confessing their faith with an ecumenical awareness that the believers currently in Sumba are connected to the people of God everywhere and at all times. The liturgical sentence that precedes the confession of faith is the invitation from the liturgical minister: "Beloved brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, let us unite with the churches of all ages and in all places by together professing the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (reciting together while standing)".¹⁷

The Church Youth's View on the Nicene Creed in the Liturgy

The 9 respondents are church youth aged 20-24 years. They are GKS members who diligently attend Sunday services at the church. They are also actively involved in church service as singers, dancers, musicians, collectors, Bible readers, and preachers. They even participated in designing the worship services in their respective churches in collaboration with the pastor and the local church council. They serve in a church that is mostly located in the village area on Sumba Island, Indonesia.

The author knows these church youths because the author has previously collaborated with them in preparing and conducting worship services at the church. Methodologically, the author sees that these young people meet the criteria to participate in the focus group discussion and express their thoughts and ideas related to the Nicene Creed. Here are the results of the conversation with them.

The Nicene Creed is Rarely Recited by the Congregation.

The church youth admit that the Nicene Creed is hardly ever recited in the Sunday services at their respective churches. Different from the Apostles' Creed, which is recited or sung by the congregation every week. They expressed their views on the reasons why the Nicene Creed is rarely recited in the liturgy. That the Nicene Creed formula is quite long and contains theological ideas that are difficult for the congregation to remember and understand. Respondents acknowledge that reciting a long formulation of the creed can be boring. As part of the church community, they often feel bored, reluctant, and insincere when reciting the Nicene Creed. According to them, this condition needs to be improved. They propose that the church, through the liturgical team, think about and design creative worship where the Nicene Creed remains an important element in the worship. They believe that creative liturgy using media effectively and efficiently can attract the attention of the congregation.

They see that the local language can also be an effective medium in the liturgy. The use of the local language of the Sumba community can make worship more vibrant and the confession of faith more meaningful for the congregation. Therefore, they proposed that the Nicene Creed, in addition to being composed into simple song lyrics, should also be translated into local languages.

The Nicene Creed is Important for the Faithful

¹⁷ GKS, *Tata Cara Kebaktian GKS*, p. 56

The church youth understand that the Nicene Creed is an important ecumenical confession for church members, just like the Apostles' Creed. Because it is important, this creed needs to be taught to the congregation repeatedly, among other ways, through singing. The Nicene Creed, as an ecumenical confession of faith, needs to be sung in the liturgy by Christians in Sumba. Worship leaders should also focus on the Nicene Creed. The Nicene Creed, which is already included in the GKS liturgical book and established as part of the Holy Communion liturgy, needs to be adhered to so that the congregation can recite or sing the Nicene Creed. According to the respondents, through the singing of the Nicene Creed, Christians can express their confession about the all-powerful Trinity God who created everything and who saves the world. For the respondents, when church members proclaim their faith through singing, they are not only expressing their faith to the local community but also to the global society in a broader context. Therefore, it is important for Christians to proclaim their confession of faith with awareness and sincerity. Liturgically, the congregation needs to stand and proclaim or sing the confession of faith clearly. The standing posture is a sign of the congregation ready to profess their faith and full of conviction in what is spoken or sung. The clear voice of confession serves as evidence that the congregation is confident in their faith and remains enthusiastic about witnessing to the Christian faith.

The Nicene Creed needs to be set to Credal Song

The church youth proposed that the Nicene Creed be composed into simple song lyrics so that it can be easily understood, remembered, and sung by the congregation during worship. The hymn of the creed must be created as the hymn of the congregation. They believe that the Nicene Creed in the form of a congregational hymn can help the congregation to fully grasp its meaning. They stated that the profession of faith through congregational singing is much more helpful for them as young people in living out their faith. According to them, the melody of music and singing brings them to a state where they can better experience their faith in God than when they simply recite the creed.

The Nicene Creed should be Used as Material for Catechetical Teaching

Besides being set to music for the congregation, according to the respondents, the Nicene Creed must be taught to all church members. This ecumenical confession needs to be made a central teaching point in catechesis for church members of all age groups. The teaching must be conducted for church members from an early age so that they remain steadfast in their Christian faith. The respondents see the confession of faith as a strong fortress for Christians in facing misleading teachings. With the confession of faith, the congregation continues to uphold the purity of the Christian faith.

According to the respondents, it is important for church leaders to help church members better understand and internalize the content of the Nicene Creed. Church members need to be assisted in understanding what the Nicene Creed is and why they should recite or sing it in the liturgy. They also emphasized the importance of regular discussions between leaders and church members that delve deeply into the formulation of the ecumenical confession of faith.

The Nicene Creed Must Have Ethical Implications

Another important point conveyed by the respondents is the ethical implications of the Nicene Creed. The respondents emphasized the ethical implications of reciting or singing the Nicene Creed in the liturgy. The confession of faith is the congregation's response to the Word of God. Even in the GKS liturgy, the confession of faith is recited or sung just before the congregation receives the sending and blessing. That reminds the congregation that the confession of faith is not only to be understood but also to be acted upon. The confession of faith culminates in real actions or concrete deeds that bring about social transformation. Community change begins with the understanding and appreciation of the faithful towards the formula of the creed.

Theological Reflection

The Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed are both important aspects for church members. Therefore, this ecumenical credo needs to be taught repeatedly to the church members so that they can understand the essence of the confession of faith. Through repeated teaching, church members can internalize the credo within themselves and further strengthen their faith.

One form of teaching the credo to church members is through liturgy. In and through the liturgy, church members can learn to focus on the content of the creed. Church members can learn to know the God they believe in and understand the formulation of the creed as a response to the God who speaks. Through the liturgy, church members can learn to confess their faith in the God who has saved humanity and all of creation. In the liturgy, church members learn to confess with their mouths and believe with all their hearts and minds.

To reduce the boredom of the congregation in reciting the credo, the liturgical ministers need to design the liturgy creatively. The Creed is not only spoken but also sung with appropriate musical accompaniment. Music has the power to help church members to be calm and focused. Music has a great influence on the congregation, helping them to internalize the lyrics of the songs. If the Nicene Creed is set to music, it greatly assists the congregation in enjoying it and reaping significant benefits. With music, the congregation sings while also contemplating the Nicene Creed.

In addition, the formulation of the credal song can be made shorter and simpler so that it is easy to remember and understand. The Nicene Creed is not only for intellectuals and theologians but also for church members as laypeople. Therefore, it is important to ground the Nicene Creed so that it is easily accessible to church members, becoming an integral part of their spirituality. The views of the youth on this matter are important to receive the attention of church leaders. The youth in Sumba propose that the local language and terminology of the tribal community be used as a medium for church members to proclaim and understand the Nicene Creed. Of course, this requires keen insight and smart work in choosing the right language and theological terms.

Conclusion

Based on the explanation above, it can be understood that the Nicene Creed is rarely recited by the congregation during Sunday worship in Sumba for several reasons. The Nicene Creed is considered longer than the Apostles' Creed. For the youth, this creed also contains theological ideas that are difficult for the congregation to remember and understand. Furthermore, the historical background of the church shows that Calvin's theological views in the past have also influenced the liturgical practices of Calvinist churches today, which consider the formulation of the Apostles' Creed to be more suitable for recitation in liturgy.

Church services, including liturgical services, need to be designed from the perspective and needs of the youth, who see the importance of the credo song as the congregation's song in the liturgy.

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