

EXPLANATION: “ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC CHURCH”

The phrase mentioned in this creed: “one, holy, catholic Church”, often raises questions and therefore we offer this explanation.

The creed comes from the Nicene Creed. The Nicene Creed is one of the two confessions of faith that all Christians confess (including evangelical Churches and reformed Churches). This creed (the Nicene creed) comes from the council of Nicea where leaders of all of the world’s Christians at the time got together and made a basic Biblical statement of faith. So, they took what we read about the Church and the Christian faith from the Bible and wrote a simple declaration that all Christians could adhere to.

Cyprian (the Bishop of Carthage) in 258 AD was the one who introduced the notion of the ‘Catholic church’. You will see below that it means Universal (or across the whole world). The reason why Cyprian wanted this adopted was because at that point the Christian faith was strong in 3 areas of the world. Rome (Europe), Constantinople (Asia / Europe – basically modern day Turkey) and Africa (Carthage and Alexandria). He wanted to ensure that there was a worldwide recognition of the work of God’s Spirit in the Church.

Now this is an important bit to realize – the word “catholic”, when used in the creeds, does not refer to the Catholic Church (also known as the Roman Catholic Church). Rather, it comes from the original Greek word that was used in the Nicene creed καθολικὴν (katholiken).

The Greek word means 'Universal'. In other words, when we confess that we believe in the one, Holy catholic Church we're confessing that the true Church of Jesus is not just lots of individual congregations that are not connected to one another, but rather that they are united across the whole world by the Spirit of God. The Church is Universal.

The Roman Catholic Church only adopted this phrase to refer to themselves as a 'denomination' after the Reformation, and they did so in an attempt to prove that they were the only true Church. The second Vatican Council (1963) repented of this, and now the Roman Catholic Church recognizes the work of God's Spirit in many different groupings and Churches.

Here's the original phrase from the creed:

One, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. μία, ἁγία, καθολικὴν
καὶ ἀποστολικὴν Ἐκκλησίαν

If you would like to read more of the history of how this phrase came to be used among Christians all over the world you can go here: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Church#Universal_church

So, in short, the Creed came into being long before the Roman Catholic Church existed as a denomination, and when we confess it (as all Christians do across the world), we've confessing that ultimately the Church across the whole world is united in Christ's universal love.