

## CHRIST – GOD, FOR EVER AND EVER

You may not have noticed, but there was a change in the Mass recently. Since Ash Wednesday in the United States, a word has been dropped from the concluding doxology of most prayers – the word “one” before “God.” No longer does the priest conclude prayers addressed to the Father this way: “Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, **one God**, for ever and ever.” The ending is now: “... in the unity of the Holy Spirit, **God**, for ever and ever.”

Why drop the word “one” and what’s the difference?

We need to look carefully at how our words of prayer reflect – or fail to reflect – our beliefs. The prayer’s ending phrase refers to Christ. The Church introduced it in the Fourth Century to rebuke the Arian heresy that Christ became the Son of God, but didn’t always exist. The affirmation “God, for ever and ever” is part of the clause modifying Christ in the prayer (“who lives and reigns ...”). It thus declares that Christ is always God, not created by the Father, not less than the Father.

The phrase “one God” is used by the Church to affirm that the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is God. They are not three Gods, but three Persons in one God. These Persons co-exist as God from all eternity, having neither beginning nor end. When we direct our prayer to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, naming them explicitly, then it’s appropriate to continue, “... one God, for ever and ever.” That affirms the unity of the Trinity as the one and only God.

But if we refer to Christ as “one God,” we introduce the possibility of identifying him as one God among others, suggesting that the Father and the Holy Spirit are also Gods. Or that Christ alone is the one God, apart from the Father and the Holy Spirit. The purpose of the concluding doxology in the Church’s prayers is to affirm the proper action of Christ in the dynamic of the Trinity – the incarnate Son who intercedes on our behalf to the Father, united in the Holy Spirit, fulfilling his role of priestly mediator. Our prayer goes through Christ to the Father and the Father responds through Christ to us.

Our English text is a translation of the official Latin, which does not have the word *unum* (one) before *Deus* (God) in this doxology. Nor is “one” included in translations to other major languages such as French, German, Spanish, Italian or Portuguese. It appeared in English texts in the late 1960s, when translators used the principle of “dynamic equivalence,” which did not require as strict an adherence to the official language.

Is this much ado about nothing? Not at all – our Church’s prayers must reflect what we believe as a faith community, not just in the official language, but in all approved translations. We should say what we believe and believe what we say.