

Liturgical Formation & Footprints of God

Why do Anglicans Say the Creeds?

Newcomers to the Church are curious to know Anglican beliefs. Sometimes, they need to be more apprehensive of the Anglican use of the Creeds and leave out the creeds in worship because it takes too much time. How can we explain the creed so they can appreciate and build their faith? How do we prepare the Church to teach the new Christians who will become members due to the efforts of Church planting? What is the value of Creeds in Anglican worship and Christian witness? Once explained, they will realise the importance of the Creeds.

What, then, are the Creeds in Anglican teaching? The two most common are the Apostle Creed, said at Mattins and Evensong, and the Nicene Creed, which is always said during the Sunday Holy Communion service and on major Feast Days. The Athanasian Creed, a long creed that explains the understanding of the triune God, is said on Trinity Sunday.

The Apostle's Creed Latin *Symbolum Apostolorum*), sometimes titled the Apostolic Creed or the Symbol of the Apostles, became the Christian creed or "symbol of Faith." According to Rufinus of Aquileia(345-411), it was supposed to be written by the Apostle with the key points of their preaching and teaching, and as such, it has been used for centuries by the mainline churches. The creed contains the Anglican beliefs and teachings, which include the Old and New Testament, which the early churches (kerygma and catechesis) used to teach the Apostolic creed, *Methodus est Arbitraria*, which the early Churches taught a procedure which outlined Christian thought on God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

A Council of Nicaea (325) was convened to resolve the dispute in the Church caused by Arius's teaching (heresy), which threatened the teachings of the Christian world. The bishops expanded on the Apostles' Creed. They made

unconditionally clear "that the Son of God is just as truly God as God the Father, equal to him in divinity, equal in eternity, equally omnipotent, and equally the creator of all things." The council addressed the issue of the triune God, which the whole Church accepted as a dogma of the church. The uniqueness of this statement of faith is ecumenical because it is received by the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican and principal Protestant Churches. In the end, this creed became a benchmark for the unity of Christian teaching, and those who recited this creed were included in the Church, while those who did not were excluded.

Athanasian Creed

The Anglican teaching upholds that whoever wants to be saved should hold the universal faith and that "we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the Substance, for there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and the Holy Spirit, is all one, the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit." It was supposed to make it more transparent and straightforward, but it has become confusing for some. The main reason for this creed was to combat the trinitarian heresies common during the early church. The creed is included in the Book of Common Prayer but is rarely used. Eventually, the Apostle and Athanasian creeds were accepted by some but not all churches.

The question that arises is: why do we say the creed? Some are wary of creeds as somehow a product of "human tradition" as opposed to God-given scriptures. "No creed but the Bible" is the slogan of this trend in Christianity. The opposite is true; all humans live according to some creed formulated by

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themselves or imposed by others. So creeds (whatever we have devised) are inescapable.

In his book *The Making of Creed*, Frances Young notes, "Christianity is the only major religion to set such store by creeds and doctrines." While other religions have their sacred scriptures, prayers, religious practices, art forms, or codes of ethics, Christianity is unique in its high valuation of doctrinal Truth. It places a strong emphasis on orthodoxy as opposed to heresy—that is, correct belief or praise (*orthodoxa*) as opposed to "personal choice" ("heresy" coming from a Greek word for "choice" or "preference").

So where did concern for Truth come from, and what relevance does creed have for us today? Christianity is a credal faith for the following reasons.

- a. Because of its understanding of monotheism or belief in one God.
- b. Because of the way creeds function as a bond for the Church community.
- c. because of the close link between creeds and salvation

One God, one Truth

How do they understand the nature of God? In a country surrounded by people of other faiths professing many gods, it seems prevalent to accept many different teachings by different gods. New Christians want to know what the Christian teaching says. The Christian belief teaches of one God. This means that there is one God and no others. This God is a good, merciful, loving source of wisdom and Truth who hears our prayers blesses us, and heals and makes us whole. In contrast, other faiths present their teaching of many gods that produced different theories about the world and how to live in it. One reason the Christian faith expresses its identity in creeds is to bring clarity to the presentation of the gospel.

Second, Anglicans are known as credal Christians because creeds are a bond among those who profess the same faith. That is how the ecumenical leaders gathered together in Nicaea in 325 C and 381 C and affirmed that we are part of a long-standing tradition of faith, thought, and doctrine. Professing the same creed creates a bond of unity and oneness in fellowship to all ages to the unchanging truth of God's revelation. Augustine says creeds are a symbol because "it is something by which Christians can recognise each other" (*Sermon* 213.2). Therefore, the creed can bring about a sense of unity the churches long to form. The creed is relevant today as it serves as a rule of faith and a guide to understanding the Scripture.

Third, it has a significant link with creeds and salvation. The creed shapes and voices our understanding of God, who saves us. Francis Young again writes, "At the heart of the Church's life was the belief that salvation was being realised, and at the heart of early theology was a sense of the sacramental and spiritual reality of salvation. Like the Bible, doctrine serves the purpose of articulating the saving Word" and this becomes more apparent when using creeds in the context of catechesis and baptism. For a new Christian, salvation comes from God through the redeeming act of Jesus and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to be his disciple.

Next year, 2025, the Universal Church will celebrate the Great Ecumenical Meeting, the 1700 anniversary of the Ecumenical gathering of bishops in Nicaea. Bishops gathered to discuss doctrinal questions to ensure God's people's unity and the gospel's faithful proclamation, which resulted in the formulation of the Nicene Creed. The Church Council Fathers chose to begin the Nicene Creed by using the expression "We believe" for the first

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time to signify that all Churches were in communion and that all Christians professed the same faith.

With this in-store, what can we look forward to in the coming year? Next year will be another milestone in witnessing God's presence through the Christian Community, where the Church should demonstrate the oneness of the Christian faith. Communities, Churches, and Ecumenical groups within our context should make every effort to meet and recite the Nicene Creed as a sign of reaffirming the doctrine truths, strengthening the bonds of fellowship, and encouraging one another in our discipleship to be one in Christ.

Again, Anglicans are creedal because they perceive a more profound mystery in the creeds than what first meets the eye. We believe that in the creeds, we profess what we believe is passed down through the Apostles. In a sense, it is our evangelism of the Gospel when we say it loudly. Furthermore, a collective response to the Gospel proclaims unity of faith. Therefore, the Church should be encouraged to recite the Creeds at our Sunday services as part of our celebration. This will ensure that we do not preach the gospel within our understanding of God, limiting our Christian identity, but rather that we proclaim the triune God, which is the centre of the gospel of salvation.

Finally, in all our catechesis and preparation of new Christians, the creeds formed the framework of our dogma in building a community anchored on the teachings of scripture and the early Church to uphold and promote the unity of faith. So, we must ensure that our baptism and Confirmation classes are taught the creed as part of Christian maturity.

Written by
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References

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