

The anatomy of an Anglican service:

Why do we say things together?

Matthew Hearne May 19, 2022, Australian Church Record - edited

We often spend part of our time together saying things out loud in a communal way, whether that be creeds, confessions, thanksgivings or psalms. Perhaps this is something that you've always done in church, or maybe this is a new and unusual thing for you. Whatever your background, it's helpful to think about why we say these things together, rather than just doing it because that's what happens in our gatherings.

Firstly, it is worth considering that as human beings, **we are all creedal creatures**. Because we will worship something, every man, woman and child confesses belief in some way, shape, or form. That is, statements of belief are a foundational reality of human life and are integral to both worship and idolatry. So it is not whether or not we will confess our beliefs, it is who or what we will confess. For even those who confess to "believe in no God" or to have "no Creed but the Bible" have just stated their Credo.

Secondly, saying **things together as Christians is not a new practice**. The entire Christian church has done this

for many hundreds of years because it is a helpful tool in teaching and training us in the Christian faith. There may be some suspicion of creeds and confessions within evangelical circles because they can appear to undermine the commitment to the supreme authority of Scripture. People may make comments such as, "Why do we need 'extra-biblical' creeds in our public worship? After all, God's word is sufficient and authoritative." However, creeds and confessions have never been something to trump the Bible.

They do not replace or supplant the Bible in authority, but they give us an orthodox summary of the faith drawn from the Holy Scriptures for us to publicly confess. As concise summaries of what churches believe, both to their members and those outside, they function as teaching tools in discipleship and apologetic tools in evangelism.

Not only that, but they also help to safeguard the truth. As the saying goes: "they keep the main thing the main thing". The creeds were mostly written to combat heresies that had arisen in the early church, so by adopting and confessing the creeds, we are rejecting the same errors and holding fast to the truth. As the "pillar and buttress of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15), the church has always been a confessing church. We confess our sins, and we also confess our Saviour:

Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory (1 Tim 3:16).

Thirdly, speaking creeds and confessions and praying together reminds us that **we are members of a body**. We are not saved to be simply individual Christians; rather we are saved into a body, and as the body says things together, we express our unity and the shared identity of the community we are a part of. We are reminded not only that we are a part of the local body of believers standing and speaking with us, but also the wider body of believers who speak the same truths, both in the present as well as those who have gone before us.

As Carl Trueman helpfully says:

“In reciting the creeds, the purpose is not simply to declare a set of propositional truths. Rather, the action is somewhat richer than that: to state the obvious, in reciting the words of the creeds together, each member of the congregation publicly identifies with every other member in expressing a corporate unity of belief in a common gospel.”

Not only are we united with our church family as we say these things together, but – fourthly – we are also **given words to live by**. Lots of what we say are words directly from the Bible, or summaries of the Bible's teaching, or prayers and confessions shaped by the patterns of the Scriptures. As we say these words regularly, they become a part of our consciousness and memory. These words are used as a guide through our lives, helping us through suffering and hardship, truths to hold onto when we doubt and question who God is and what he's done.

This is one of the reasons why it is important to corporately confess our sins and receive God's assurance of forgiveness. It would be utterly strange for Christians to gather to hear God's word and never confess their sins! Conversely, it is the natural Christian reflex to ask for mercy and receive heavenly comfort in our time of gathered worship.

So, creeds, thanksgivings and confessions – they're precious parts of our gathering. Whether they are new terrain to discover or old paths you love to walk – I invite you to enjoy these aspects of our Christian community.