

Moot Exploration of Doctrine 1: The ‘catholic Creeds’

Why are the Creeds important to us trying to be church on the 21st century?

1. Anglican Declaration of Assent

As Moot is a ‘*fresh expression of church*’ in the Anglican tradition – Ian is serving a title as Deacon to Moot in the Diocese of London and the Church of England who swore an oath to uphold:

*“The Church of England...professes the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the **catholic creeds**, which faith the church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation.”*
(Church of England Ordinal)

So even though we are new and experimental, it is important to understand how what we do relates to the ancient creeds founded in the early church, which hold ‘true’ to this day.

2. What are the catholic Creeds

Note: catholic with a small ‘c’ means the world church not Roman Catholic which is denoted with a large ‘C’.

Well there are basically 3, the most important and the last to be agreed was the Nicene Creed, which was a reformulation but basically the same as the Creed of Athanasius. Both of these relate to a much earlier one called the ‘Apostles Creed’.

So in summary in historical formulation:

- (a) The Apostles Creed
- (b) The Athanasian Creed
- (c) The Nicene Creed

(3) Why did they come about

The creeds came about for two main reasons:

- (a) Clear teaching for those wanting to become Christian and baptised as adults/teenagers. Even though the faith at its beginning was persecuted, the need for a ‘catechumen’ was very important for a way of becoming an authentic Christian in difficult times.
- (b) Dealing with non-truth about the nature of God formed out of heresies from ancient Greek and eastern thought.

(4) Centres of Early Christian Thought & Heresies concerning the nature of Christ

In the early Church, there were quickly established several important Christian schools of thought. These were all sited in significant parts of the Roman Mediterranean world, two particular schools over time started to hate each other. Many scholars attribute the problem of the Christological formula concerning the nature of Christ to the controversy between the Alexandrian and the Antiochene theology. While the Alexandrian School adopted the "hypostatic union" or "natural union" of the Godhead and manhood to assert the oneness of Jesus Christ, the Antiochene School accepted the "indwelling theology," that is the Godhead dwell in Manhood, as if Jesus Christ were two persons in one, to assert that no confusion had occurred between the Godhead and manhood and to avoid attributing human weakness to His divinity. The basis of the point of view to the Alexandrian School was John 1:14 "And the Word became flesh," while that of the Antiochenes was Colossians 2:9 "For in Him dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily."

Much of the early arguments about what was authentic Christianity centred on dialogue with philosophy, and the struggle of understanding Christ as in the incarnation as fully human and fully God. This led to many bust-ups and unfortunately deaths. These thoughts tried to establish a middle ground as authentic - where those who denied that Christ was God but fully human or fully God but not human as heresy. So we inherit some thought and reasoning which established authentic Christian thought to this day.

It is always interesting to review the various forms of church you have experienced - as often there is some degree of 'heretical-ness' with the more extreme churches.

5. Dodgy Times

The Creeds were not born out of loving debate. We must remember that the times were violent and not very pleasant. Many people died in their formulation as the Church struggled to exist in a very volatile and violent world. Even though the words are tarnished with blood, they still stand as authentic to this day, but with each generation we do need to reinterpret them in the context of the world we live. As much of the Creeds are centred on the nature of God, they remain the subject of mystery but key to the faith.

6. The Apostles Creed

(a) The Creed

1. I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth,
2. And in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord,
3. Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,
4. Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell.
5. The third day he rose again from the dead;
6. He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
7. From there he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
8. I believe in the Holy Spirit,
9. I believe in the holy catholic church, the communion of saints,
10. The forgiveness of sins,
11. The resurrection of the body,
12. And the life everlasting. Amen.

(b) Its context

The Apostles' Creed is one of the oldest creeds of Christianity, dating in an early form to at least the middle second century with roots in the biblical traditions of the Gospels. Some phrases were added for clarity as late as the fourth century, but the basic creed remained intact. The clearly Trinitarian structure was likely intended **to counter the teachings of Marcion** who denied that the God of the Old Testament was the same God revealed in Jesus the Christ. This Trinitarian formulation would remain the basic structure of all the early creeds. The Apostles' Creed has often been divided into 12 sections for catechesis, instruction for new converts or children.

(c) its significance

Gave a uniform standard expectation of faith to be baptised - used throughout the Christian world at the time.

(d) its shortcomings

It remained a very simplified formula that did not inform the debate about the nature of Christ particularly to explore some of the philosophical thinking at the time.

7. The Nicene Creed

(a) The Creed

We believe in one God the Father, the Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, and of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]. With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets.

We believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen

(b) The Context

The Nicene Creed was developed by the early Church largely in response to the teachings of **Arius**. Arianism taught that Jesus was not truly divine and of a different "substance" than God, which challenged the developing doctrine of the Trinity in the early church. The emperor Constantine, newly converted to Christianity, called a Church Council at Nicæa in AD 325 to bring some unity to the church amid developing controversies and false teachings. The Council at Nicæa adopted an early form of the creed, although the basic present form emerged from the Council of Constantinople in AD 381. It was officially adopted by the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451.

A major controversy in the church has swirled around one phrase of the creed, the so-called *filioque* clause. In the phrase, "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son" the debate concerned whether the Holy Spirit proceeded from only the Father, or from the Father **and the Son** [*filioque* in Latin]. The phrase "and the Son" was not in the original Greek version of the Creed accepted at Nicæa and Constantinople. It was added in the Latin versions used in the Western (Roman) church in AD 589 as an attempt to clarify the relationship of the three persons of the Trinity. The concern was that the original wording made Jesus the Christ subordinate to the Father, a view that the Western church felt endangered the doctrine of the Trinity.

However, the Eastern tradition was committed to the earlier Greek version of the Creed and resisted any change. This highlighted the growing rift between the Eastern and Western traditions that would eventually lead to a permanent break in AD 1054. As a result, the Eastern Church has never used the version with the *filioque* clause, while most churches that derive from the Western tradition use the creed with the *filioque* clause. However, the Episcopal Church has recently approved omission of the *filioque* clause in new editions of the *Book of Common Prayer*.

The Church has widely used the Nicene Creed since the fifth century. In some liturgical churches, for example the Episcopal/Anglican Churches, it is recited every Sunday. In others, the Nicene Creed is alternated with the Apostles' Creed for Sunday worship, although the Apostles' Creed is more often

used at Baptismal services. The Eastern Orthodox tradition uses only the Nicene Creed. While most non-liturgical Protestant churches prefer the shorter Apostles' Creed, none would object to the doctrines the Nicene Creed summarizes. It is the only creed accepted by all three major branches of Christendom: Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox.

(c) Its significance

Enabled clarification, which then led to the split in the west from the east later on.

8. Athanasian Creed (Chalcedon)

(a) The Creed

Whoever wishes to be saved must, above all else, hold to the true Christian Faith. Whoever does not keep this faith pure in all points will certainly perish forever.

Now this is the true Christian faith: We worship one God in three persons and three persons in one God, without mixing the persons or dividing the divine being. For each person -- the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit -- is distinct, but the deity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, equal in glory and coeternal in majesty. What the Father is, so is the Son, and so is the Holy Spirit.

The Father is uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated; The Father is eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet they are not three who are eternal, but there is one who is eternal, just as they are not three who are uncreated, nor three who are infinite, but there is one who is uncreated and one who is infinite.

In the same way the Father is almighty, the Son is almighty, and the Holy Spirit is almighty. And yet they are not three who are almighty, but there is one who is almighty. So the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God. And yet they are not three Gods, but one God. So the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Spirit is Lord; yet they are not three Lords, but one Lord.

For just as Christian truth compels us to confess each person individually to be God and Lord, so the true Christian faith forbids us to speak of three Gods or three Lords. The Father is neither made nor created, nor begotten of anyone. The Son is neither made nor created, but is begotten of the Father alone. The Holy Spirit is neither made nor created nor begotten, but proceeds from the Father and the Son. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits.

And within this Trinity none comes before or after; none is greater or inferior, but all three persons are coequal and coeternal, so that in every way, as stated before, all three persons are to be worshiped as one God and one God worshiped as three persons. Whoever wishes to be saved must have this conviction of the Trinity.

It is furthermore necessary for eternal salvation truly to believe that our Lord Jesus Christ also took on human flesh. Now this is the true Christian faith: We believe and confess, that our Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, is both God and Man. He is God, eternally begotten from the nature of the Father, and he is man, born in time from the nature of his mother, fully God, fully man, with rational soul and human flesh, equal to the Father, as to his deity, less than the Father, as to his humanity; and though he is both God and Man, Christ is not two persons but one, one, not by changing the deity into flesh, but by taking the humanity into God; one, indeed, not by mixture of the natures, but by unity in one person.

For just as the reasonable soul and flesh are one human being, so God and man are one Christ, who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose the third day from the dead. He ascended into

heaven, is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty, and from there he will come to judge the living and the dead. At his coming all people will rise again with their own bodies to answer for their personal deeds. Those who have done good will enter eternal life, but those who have done evil will go into everlasting fire.

This is the true Christian Faith. Whoever does not faithfully and firmly believe this cannot be saved.

(b) its context

While the Athanasian Creed is one of the three most important Creeds of the early Church, its author and origin remains a mystery. It is named after the well known fourth-century apologist and theologian Anathasius who played an important role in defining and defending the orthodox doctrines of the Trinity and the person of Christ, which are central features of this creed. However, Anathasius died in AD 373 and the Athanasian Creed closely reflects wording of the Nicene Creed adopted by the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451, suggesting that it was written sometime after that. It is not mentioned in historical documents until the later seventh century, and was likely written in the Western Church sometime in the sixth or early seventh century. However, since the first work on the Nicene Creed began at the Council of Nicæa in AD 325, it is likely that Anathasius helped shaped much of the Trinitarian language that the fourth and fifth century church used in both creeds.

(c) its significance

Clarified the nature of God, pointed out that the extreme positions about the Godhead were not compatible with the New Testament, and gave a middle way where difference that still saw Christ as fully human and fully God were authentic.

Why is all this relevant for today

1. Forms of church:-

Some conservative evangelicals put the emphasis on Jesus – with a poor understanding of the trinity, and the role of the Church to follow an incarnational calling. In danger of seeing Jesus as God but not fully human.

Some Charismatic churches – where it is all about worshipping a God who is upstairs walking around in a white sheet – are in danger of seeing Jesus as fully God but not human.

Some forms of liberation catholic communities put an emphasis on Jesus as social liberator – are in danger of seeing Jesus as fully human but not fully God.

2. A corrective for us being fresh expressions of church – statement to help us keep our theology authentic.

Moot 2: Scriptural Exploration concerning 2 texts behind the Creeds

For the scripture space we will be looking at Philippians 2:6-11 and 1 Corinthians 8:6.

So we will need to divide up the questions – I am keen to major on the Philippians text, and if we have time to then go onto the 1 Corinthians 8:6.

We need people to volunteer for questions

Questions 1 - 3

Question 4 -

Question 5 -

Question 6 -

Question 7 -

Questions 8 & 9 -

Question 10 -

To do this research the best way of finding info quick is to put questions into google or put 'exegesis Philippians 2' into google and see what happens, you tend to find relevant stuff.

Copy of the tool to follow

1. How is the pericope divided

- Look to see sections of how it flows.

2. Translations

- Look for English word variances to indicated differences in translation of Greek/Aramaic/Hebrew.
- Analyse these as being complementary unless it is just a more elegant use.

3. Limits of the pericope & Literary Context

- Do you agree with the limits of the pericope? Does it make sense?
- Be clear about the boundaries of the text.

Context

- Consider how the text fits into – what comes before and after – what is the actual context.
- What is the thrust of the writing e.g. psalm gospel letter as a whole.
- What is its structure, its argument, its sense?
- You may find intro sections in commentaries or introductions to OT/NT valuable here.
- Other criticisms (if appropriate not expected yet)

4. The Literary Genre & form of writing

Genre

- What kind of genre? (larger forms of literature e.g. a historical book from a passion book funeral notice v recipe book.
- Is it a gospel, a letter, a psalm, they are written for different purposes?
- Is it part of wisdom literature?
- How does this affect the purpose of the text?
- If a NT letter – is it a real letter or simply cast in that form for stylistic purposes?
- It may be possible to include narrative criticism (if text is a narrative) or rhetorical criticism (if an epistle)

Form

- What form (smaller units e.g. a parable – form criticism) Is it a story? Is it a saying, a statement? An argument in a letter? Does it show elements of exaggeration, irony, metaphor etc?
- How does this affect our reading of the text?
- You may find commentaries helpful here.

5. Sources, Inter-textual allusions, and their use

Inter-textual allusions

- Why are these allusions made?
- What are the sources in a broad sense?
- In NT look for allusions or quotations to OT
- BE careful with more indirect references/allusions as this is vague
- Are there inter-textual allusions in the OT text?

Inter-textual quotes

- Why are these connections used and made – is it to back an argument or what thrust?

Sources (source criticism)

- From commentaries are there evidence of sources or hypotheses of sources such Y P etc?
- What is the history of the text?

Application of these

- How are these sources used? What is the author/final editor of the passage using this source here? To what aim is this done (redaction criticism – editing process and intentions)
- E.G. 2 source theory of Mathew and Luke make use of Mark etc.
- If unable to detect sources then this section is irrelevant.

6. The Historical Context

- Who is writing for/to/whom and when? - political, social, economic, religious and so on.
- Why was this text written? What is the history of the content of the text?
- Are there historical key elements in the text that need exploration? E.g who are the... what does the monarchy mean in concrete social and political practice?
- What was the reality of X e.g. slavery, church, house, as envisaged in

7. Social Criticism

- What gender roles were expected or transgressed in x what is the cosmology assumed?
- What were the social/cultural assumptions of the text?
- What social patterns considerations – e.g. Malina & Rohbaugh's social-scientific commentary – maybe applicable – if not then irrelevant.

8. Key terms

- Chose not more than 5/6 key terms crucial to the meaning of the passage to grasp the text's import.

9. Broader Biblical Context

- What is the biblical canonical context in which the passage is situated. E.g. Is 40:3 2 contexts – a – historical OT context & b – Mark 1 – prophetic proof text for Jesus as the Christ.
- Explore biblical canonical issues raised in the text by biblical terms such as Sabbath, prayer, divorce.

10. History of Interpretation and Effect (particularly Paul & Gospels)

- May be needed but not essential.
- For major texts such as sermon on the mount
- History of interpretation and corresponding historical effects.