



Methodism as part of the Worldwide church

A.1 I Believe...

The Methodist Church as part of the worldwide church shares those core beliefs passed down from the time of the Apostles. Those beliefs are founded on the Bible and are summed up in the creeds, which are regularly used in Christian services of all denominations. The word “creed” comes from the Latin “credo” meaning “I believe.” The two better-known creeds are the 4th century Nicene Creed and this, the simpler Apostles' Creed:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

*I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.*

A.2 I believe in God, the Father almighty

This is not simply an affirmation of the existence of God against those who deny his existence. When Christians say, “I believe” they are not simply making a statement of what they think is true. They are making a statement of trust in God as Father, and a pledge of obedience to him.

We can only speak about God in the limited language of human experience. The Bible uses such experience to speak of God as creator, king, judge, lover, husband, mother and father. There is a sense in which he is the Father, or origin, of all people, and his love extends to all people, not just to those who call him “Father.” Through Jesus, however, we can also know him in a more personal way, as “Abba” an Aramaic word reflecting an intimate relationship, like our word “Daddy.” (Aramaic was Jesus’ everyday language.) That is why in the Lord’s Prayer we address God as “Our Father.”

However, the creed also reminds us that “Our Father” is the “almighty” or all-powerful God who made the universe and everything in it.

A.3 I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit born of the Virgin Mary.

It is through trust in Jesus that we are accepted as God's children. Paul in his writings however, clearly distinguishes between our relationship with God as 'sons' by adoption, and Jesus as the unique Son of God, sent to earth by his Father:

“When the time had fully come God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law... so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying ‘Abba! Father!’” (Galatians 4:4-6)

That is why both John in his gospel, and the creed itself are able to describe Jesus as the “only” Son of God.

Jesus was not only uniquely the Son of God, and hence divine, he was also fully human, born of a woman, Mary. According to two of the gospels, Matthew and Luke, this birth was unique also in that Mary was still a virgin at the time of Jesus’ birth.

A.4 Was crucified, died, and was buried

The reality of the death of Jesus by crucifixion is emphasised by adding that he was buried. There was no pretence about the reality of his human life and there was no pretence about his death. Jesus shared fully the human experience of death.

A.5 On the third day he rose again

If there had been no resurrection there would have been no Church. The distinctive feature of Christianity is that Jesus was raised from death by God on the third day. The New Testament



repeatedly affirms that if we put our faith in Jesus we are joined with him in his death and will share in his resurrection. As the ancient hymn of praise to God 'Te Deum' puts it 'You overcame the sting of death: and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers' (Hymns and Psalms 833, verse 10).

A.6 He will come again to judge the living and the dead

We do not know when Christ will return; indeed Jesus himself did not know this (Matthew 24: 36), but the essence of this part of the creed is a belief that Christ will return and that everyone will be judged by him. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 5: 10, writes: "We must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ." But this judgement is not solely an event in the future; it is exercised now, in the light of Jesus' life and teaching. This judgement will ultimately be completed at a time and in a manner, which God alone knows. Unlike human justice it will be exercised perfectly, with the same love and mercy revealed in Jesus. So for those who trust in Jesus there is no need to fear this judgement. As the beginning of all things was in his hand, so also are the present and the end.

A.7 I believe in the Holy Spirit

This statement is expanded in the longer Nicene Creed where we say together, "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."

Most of the writers of the New Testament were Jews and as such believed that God is one. This is still the belief of the Christian church. But when Jesus Christ was worshipped as God and his followers experienced the power and love of the Spirit of God working in them, they began to think of God as Father, as Son, and as Holy Spirit: the Trinity. Legend has it that St. Patrick, when he came to Ireland, illustrated the Trinity by referring to the shamrock. Each leaf has three parts, yet it is one leaf. The Spirit is the breath of life, but was also seen as the inspiration of the prophets and psalmists in the Old Testament, who were said to be speaking the word of God. Eventually the whole of scripture came to be regarded as inspired by God. The Spirit still speaks to us through scripture, and we need the guidance of the Spirit to interpret scripture correctly. Indeed we believe that the Spirit, is available to all believers, to guide, empower and equip them for service, and is not just the life breath of the individual, but of the Church as a whole.

A.8 The holy catholic church

The word 'holy' means 'set apart for God.' Although the whole world belongs to God because he made it and still loves it, there are particular things and people separated for God's special use and service within the world. This is true of the church, which is not primarily a building or an institution but is a body of people, the people of God.

The word 'catholic' means universal, the worldwide church of all ages. This one, universal church is expressed in local congregations, and each local congregation expresses this universal nature in a variety of ways. This may be through the range of their mission and prayer, which should be concerned with the worldwide church of all denominations and cultures; through their worship, which will often draw on the prayers and songs of different traditions, nations and ages.

Believing in this catholic nature of the church, the Methodist Church in Ireland is committed to working in partnership with the worldwide church of all denominations for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to seeking ways of strengthening relationships between different denominations.

A.9 The communion of saints

Members of the church of the New Testament are frequently referred to as saints. They were saints, not because they excelled in virtue but because they belonged to God. The words 'saint' and 'holy' translate related Greek words, meaning "to be set apart for God." The Church is God's people just because he has called us, not because of anything in us.

To speak of the communion of saints is another way of speaking of the loving fellowship of all those who belong to God through Christ. This communion is not limited to those who attend our local church or worship our way: it embraces the holy catholic church, all members of the church, not only on earth at present ('the church militant') but those already in heaven ('the church triumphant'). It is not just a fellowship between people, but with God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This fellowship is experienced and expressed in the whole life of the church: in prayer, preaching, reading the scriptures, sacraments, music, witness and service.

A.10 The forgiveness of sins

The word most frequently used in the New Testament and translated 'sin' originally meant 'missing the target' at which one aimed. It implies that in sinning we fail to be what we should be: we do not realize



our God-given potential. Sins may be wrongdoings, offences against what we know to be right, but sin is more than actions or even thoughts that we know to be wrong. It is, essentially, deep-seated selfishness. It may take the form of arrogant disregard for the welfare of others, or it may masquerade as humility. Our real offence is not against others or ourselves, it is against God our creator. The Psalmist cries, "Against you, you only, have I sinned" (Ps. 51: 4). And only the one who is offended can forgive. We receive God's forgiveness when we repent and trust in Christ, whose sinless life, death and resurrection made possible our acceptance by God.

A.11 The resurrection of the body

Christianity believes in life after death, not in the reincarnation of our spirits into physical bodies, but in a rising into a "spiritual" body. Although our physical bodies will be destroyed by death, the New Testament teaches that there will also be continuity of our identity, and that this will have some kind of bodily expression. Paul writes: "So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable ... it is sown as a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians. 15: 42-44).

A.12 And the life everlasting

The life everlasting does not only begin after death. Neither is it simply life that goes on forever. It is the new or eternal life, which is ours through faith in Christ and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Eternity is not only a measure of quantity of life, but also of quality. It is life in union with the ever-living God, a life of love and service. Life of this quality is God's gift to those who believe in Jesus Christ.