
A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

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Idealism and Dogma.

By the Reverend John A. Hutton, D.D., London.

Let me begin by quoting some passages from the creed of Athanasius:

> 'Whosoever will be saved: before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith.
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> Which faith, except every one do keep whole and undefiled: without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.
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> And the Catholic Faith is this: 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 Ghost.
>
> But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one: the glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal.
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> Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost.
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> So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods, but one God.
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> This is the Catholic Faith: which except a man believe faithfully he cannot be saved.'

No one can read the Creed of Athanasius, or hear it pronounced, without feeling in the depths of his soul that it is an authentic document. It simply staggers with feeling. One sign of living truth is passion; and the Creed of Athanasius throbs with passion. Its great sayings and propositions—concerning God, and Christ, and the Holy Ghost, and Man, and Life, and Destiny—do not exhaust the spirit of the man who first uttered them; and most evidently they do not go beyond the requirements of the Church which at the beginning accepted them as the basis of its outlook upon life and death and all things. No: we have the feeling, as we read the Creed in solitude, that, whatever else we are to say about it, we must say this: that it stood for something of absolute significance in the day of its promulgation. It has obviously its eye upon some danger which, it believed, was finally monstrous. It is aware of some possible treachery rising from the natural mind of men; and it shudders back from that terror and that treachery, and seeks to defend itself by certain unqualified and implacable assertions.

One feels that the man who wrote the Creed of Athanasius, and the Church which adopted it as the nearest approach in words to the great things which were believed amongst them, could have gone on along that line indefinitely; that for them this was the very truth, and that nothing else was of the slightest significance: that if this was lost all was lost.

Any man who has a sense of the value of words can detect in the very agony and excess of these great pronouncements about God and Christ and the Holy Ghost, that he is listening to a cry out of the depths; that here we have the case of the human soul protesting to itself and to the world that if this be not true, then we are all in one case; we are all lost everlastingly.

Now what is it that makes the passion and agony of that great Creed, so that we feel that in all its words a man's heart and flesh is crying out? The very core of its passion, it seems to me, is the anxiety—which no mere words can adequately embody—therefore the propositions are repeated and repeated almost monotonously—the anxiety lest Christ and the Holy Ghost and Man should be conceived of as separate from God. The real passion of all the great Creeds is there. It is their shudder and shrinking from the very possibility that the events of the New Testament are to be understood as belonging only to the secular plane, as being mere incidents in history, fortuitous, casual things which the next wave of time might bury in a sea of forgetfulness, as the waves of time have rolled over man's thoughts and plans from the beginning. And so those who adhered to those great fabrics of faith, the Creeds of the Church, are claiming, with every resource which language offered them, that the events of the New Testament had a unique significance, a cosmical value, an indestructible direct relation to the totality of things; that, in them and through them, the last and abiding reality, God Himself, became manifest to our eyes,

coming into the region in which our present faculties enable us to apprehend truth.

Whatever we make of that great Creed, and of the great hymns through which the faith of that age spread its wings, we cannot doubt that *these creeds and hymns were no burden to the minds of those men.* They were the very things they wanted to believe. They were things of such a kind that if they could conceivably have been supposed not to be true, the sun would have gone out of the heavens; the mainspring of their personal life would have broken; and, in the wild world which surrounded them, they would have acknowledged that they were lost for ever.

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We can never hope to do justice to any great fabric of faith, any creed, or hymn, or ceremony, unless we have imagination. There is also that saying of Carlyle's which is always appropriate to any discussion of life, the saying, namely, 'It was always a serious thing to live.' And what is it that makes anything great in literature, in art, in music, in philosophy, but the sense which pervades it through and through, that life, this life of ours, is a grave tragical business, intolerable as a thing in itself, and only tolerable when it can be placed in a context which ultimately involves and implicates God?

For myself, I reverence all the creeds. I recognize, indeed, that they cannot avoid expressing themselves in the phraseology of their day. I am aware that they have in view dangers arising out of the particular aspect which sensuality and worldliness had assumed at the moment; and that this aspect may not be the very one which our age presents. But I reverence them all for the sense which they share with all great literature and all lofty art and all deep music; for the sense which they share also with the blank misgivings which visit our own souls when something has happened to us that has left us alone: the sense that life beneath the surface is a grave and even tragic thing, that 'except the Lord build the city,' they labour in vain that build it.'

> To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to morrow,
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
> To the last syllable of recorded time;
> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
> Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
> And then is heard no more; it is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing.

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I do truly believe that ultimately there is no final refuge from that cold east wind which blows across our *natural* life blasting everything, except in the shelter of some such towering fabric of the spirit as faith erected in the great Christian creeds.

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I am compelled as an honest man to confess, even if I were sorry to find that it is so for other reasons—say from intellectual vanity, or from that desire to be absolutely free to think about ultimate things which has its place amongst the faculties which God has given us—that the claims made even in such an apparently ruthless document as the Athanasian Creed are to be found in fact and in substance already in the documents of the New Testament. It would be the easiest thing to open the New Testament on any page, and there to come upon some claim—for Christ, for the Holy Ghost, and even for some apparently delicate and fragile influence of the one or the other upon the soul of a man—some claim which is substantially the claim made in the Creed of Athanasius. In the New Testament the words would never be precisely the same as in those later more sophisticated days; but, on every page of the New Testament, you will find embodied and expressed the same concern, amounting at times to a positive terror, that the facts about Christ first and last shall not be understood as belonging to the merely secular plane, but shall always be interpreted as integral to and identical with the very life of God.

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In a hundred passages St. Paul frankly declares that Christ, who spake and lived and died *here*, has taken His place in God; and that all the hopes which hang upon Jesus, hang not upon Jesus—a figure who appeared upon the stage of life and passed out into the silence, the world continuing on its way; that all these hopes hang, not upon Jesus, but upon the God and Father of Jesus; that they are supported and made finally secure by a universe which itself is rooted and grounded in God.

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Nowhere in the New Testament is this anxiety—that Christ shall not be estimated apart from the everlasting Father—so persistently urged as an anxiety which we should take upon ourselves, as in the Gospel according to St. John. I cannot explain

it otherwise than on the hypothesis that about the time when St. John's Gospel was given, and this was certainly considerably later than the greater portion of the New Testament, that by that time there had come into the minds of men certain forces or fashions of thought, which, it seemed to a spiritual genius like the author of that Gospel, endangered the apostolic tradition, and through it the very existence of the Church as the pillar and ground of the truth.

What these forces were, these fashions of thought, I cannot say for certain; but I can imagine what they were, because they are forces and fashions of thought which are always recurring. The mind of man is always threatening to move away from the great insights and disclosures, as to the nature of life, which came to him in some earlier day of fundamental distress. We all begin to trifle with securities which nevertheless were won for us never otherwise than by the shedding of blood! One age dies for liberty; and a later age makes such poor use of that liberty that we could almost wish to believe that the valiant spirits who have passed into the unseen have no knowledge of what their children do. Life and thought are always tending to be more trivial; and man on every level of his life drifts away from the rigour which at an earlier stage gave him all he has.

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There is a sense of course in which this is inevitable, and we would not have it otherwise. It would never do if, when crossing the ocean, we could not lie down in our berth and sleep at nights in comparative forgetfulness of our surroundings. It would never do if we could not for one moment rid ourselves of the knowledge that only the thinness of an inch of steel was between us and some miles of solid depths of water. And God in His charity permits such leisure from ultimate fears. And yet, even a voyage at sea becomes a finer thing, and one's conversation with one's fellow-passengers becomes a gentler thing, and, if need be, more patient, if, now and then, when night comes on and all the passengers are comfortably disposed, one goes out upon the deck, and looks over the side, and sees the dark waters hurrying by, and looks up into the stars, and breathes a prayer.

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If you open the Fourth Gospel and read in it anywhere, you will encounter words and a claim made for Christ and put into the mouth of Christ, which go so far that words cannot go further. Take, for example, such words as 'I and the Father are one,' 'I am in the Father, and the Father in me.' Such words, it must be granted, are full of the same *anxiety* as we are aware of in the Catholic Creeds. And what is that anxiety? Once again, it is the anxiety lest we for a moment dissociate the testimony of Jesus and His Person from the eternal truth and disposition of God.

There is something very touching, to say no more, in our Lord's own evident concern that people should never think of Him apart from God His Father. In the language of our own time one might put it, that our Lord was concerned that people should never try to fulfil His *ethical* teaching except within the comfort, and with the strength, and with the pledge of victory, which come when we accept that teaching, not as the fruit of human wisdom, but as something which has God behind it and within it.

It was our Lord Himself who said, 'Without the Father I can do nothing.' He said, 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.' It was as though, in His beautiful self-suppression, He was prepared to say, 'I by Myself am nobody. The essential thing about Me is not Me: it is God.'

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It is not as though He were saying, 'You must never try to be good men, to do your duty in the world, until you share My views of God and of all things.' Christ would have all of us do the best we can, whether we share His faith or not. I cannot think of our Lord as having a quarrel with any really good man. But what He would have said is: 'You will never be happy, and this world will sadden you and wear you down, unless you share the belief for the sake of which I foresee that I am appointed to death at the hands of men—the belief that I am not alone, that the Father is with Me.'

Thus it seems to me that the Fourth Gospel travails with this precise message—and this with such agony that I can only suppose there was some great reason for it—the message, namely, that we shall never be happy and strong and resilient and enduring until we see Christ in the bosom of the Father, and see His mission here on earth, not as an incidental venture, to which He was urged by moods and feelings and impulses such as, in our own case, come and go. And so, once again, in this Gospel we hear Him pleading with men not to allow their

thoughts to rest upon Him alone, but always to see Him in the Father and the Father in Him.

Apart from such a faith—a faith to which the Church returns again and again, always with 'indignation and revenge' after a time of slackness and apostasy—apart from such a faith, the whole story of Jesus first and last would simply add to the pathos and sadness of our life. For it would be the story of another good man who had run His head against this hard unfeeling world. It would be the story of a nightingale which had ceased to sing because a rough hand had crushed it to death. And, as for the Holy Ghost, undefended and unsecured by that great thought that He too proceedeth from the Father and the Son and shares in an eternal Being, in course of time, all the uprisings of the good spirit in our hearts, with their tendency to sink back again and to leave us colder than we were, would but augment and deepen a certain final gloom concerning life.

And so, it is not the language of threatening, it is the language of sober fact to say: 'Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic faith.' And the Catholic faith, in this particular regard is, that 'such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost'; that 'as the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God; and yet they are not three Gods but one God.'

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Though my treatment of this subject may have been heavy and sombre and inadequate, and, it might seem, unbalanced and unfair to the wealth and gaiety of the natural life—we must not allow ourselves to conclude that the matter which I have been raising is an idle or inconsequent one. Some of the gravest voices of our time are being moved precisely and exclusively by this very concern as to the metaphysical reality of the lofty view of life.

Joseph Conrad, who died only the other day—one who perhaps more habitually than any of his contemporaries lived in the midst of those aspects of life which lie beneath the surface—Joseph Conrad has a phrase which embodies the same sense of danger as the New Testament seems everywhere to be aware of—the danger of seeing all the uprisings of our spirit, all the idealism which offers itself to us one by one at some stage of our life, of seeing all that *apart from God,* that is, as merely a passing episode in the natural life of man. Conrad's description of a *lost* man is that he is a man who has come '*to acquiesce in the insignificance of events.*' A lost man, according to Conrad, is a man who has come to have no permanent, recalling understanding of life such as survives any temporary eclipse or lapse from exaltation. He is a man for whom one thing has as much reason for its existence as another thing; for whom life is just one thing after another.

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But I recall an illustration of this same grave concern, earlier in our literature and stated with an unforgettable poignancy. In one of Robert Browning's late poems—a poem in which all the idealism of his long life of self-expression reaches its autumnal beauty, and, like the sun, goes down with a glory which is greatest at its setting—he thus articulates and celebrates that idealism of his age:

Thronging through the cloud-rift, whose are they, the faces
Faint revealed yet sure divined, the famous ones of old?
'What'—they smile—'our names, our deeds so soon erases
Time upon his tablet where Life's glory lies enrolled?

'Was it for mere fool's-play, make-believe and mumming,
So we battled it like men, not boylike sulked or whined?
Each of us heard clang God's "Come!" and each was coming:
Soldiers all, to forward-face, not sneaks to lag behind!

'How of the field's fortune? That concerned our Leader!
Led, we struck our stroke nor cared for doings left and right:
Each as on his sole head, failer or succeeder,
Lay the blame or lit the praise: no care for cowards: fight!'

Then the cloud-rift broadens, spanning earth that's under,
Wide our world displays its worth, man's strife and strife's success:
All the good and beauty, wonder crowning wonder,
Till my heart and soul applaud perfection, nothing less.

There he pauses, almost exhausted with his own enthusiasm and rhetoric; and in the pause he hears a voice, a cynical voice such as is apt to mock us in the very height and tiptoe of our being, even as it sought to mock our blessed Lord when, after the descent of the Holy Ghost, it drove Him into

the wilderness there to be tempted of the devil. He hears a voice mocking him, insinuating some low explanation of his exalted mood, suggesting, to recall our quotation from Shakespeare, that he has simply been mouthing his lines upon the stage, and that presently he will be done :

Only, at heart's utmost joy and triumph, terror
Sudden turns the blood to ice : a chill wind disencharms
All the late enchantment! What if all be error—
If the halo irised round my head were, Love, thine arms ?

Is this uplift of mine, this lofty way of looking at things, this protest against my baser self, is it but a titillation of the senses, some fondness and bravado of the flesh, which casts its light indeed like a lamp at night up into the sky, flashing over a world which meanwhile in itself remains heedless and dark ?

That is the insinuation ; *that* is the permanent enemy of our souls ; *that* is the one temptation face to face with which, unless a man be safegarded by a faith which will not stop short of God, he literally is lost, lost in sadness and in futility.

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The one point which throughout I have been trying to make is this : the Church, in contending for the doctrine of Christ's identification of Himself with the Father, will be found to have been contending for some great *human* interest. It may very well be that, in the actual day of her contending, the Church herself did not perceive the implications of the doctrine or formula in question. But there would be nothing strange in that. When we are contending for any high thing, we are contending not for that high thing alone, but for the high way of conceiving life through and through. So here : in contending that the whole movement which Christ inaugurated shall be conceived as rooted and grounded in God, the Church has been contending really, and this has been the effect, for the belief that all idealism, all protest against the tyranny of things and against the merely natural doom, is related indissolubly to that final reality and very substance of the universe which we name God.

It is only the Church which holds a high doctrine of Christ which is in a position to perceive and to announce the great conviction—a conviction which gives to even the feeblest protest against wrong, and the feeblest aspiration after good, the pledge of an everlasting career—the conviction that ' Every good gift and every perfect gift cometh down from the Father of Lights in whom is no variableness nor shadow cast by turning ' : and this because ' He is the same, yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.'

Recent Foreign Theology.

History treated Philosophically.

At the close of his *Logic,* after some critical remarks upon Hegel's method and ideal, Lotze expresses the hope ' that German philosophy will always arouse itself afresh, with more of moderation and reserve, yet with no less enthusiasm, to the endeavour, not merely to calculate the course of the world, but to *understand* it.' This latest volume [1] of Troeltsch's collected works, filled with essays in the great manner on the history of the human mind and the sociological influence of religion, may be regarded as one noteworthy fulfilment of Lotze's confident anticipation. There is, indeed, much to be said for the view that Troeltsch, though he died too early and at the summit of his powers, already stands out as the greatest philosophical writer on history that Germany has had since Hegel. More profoundly than any other for a generation he had studied both ideas and society, and striven to unite them in history as an intelligible development. He believed in thinking, in reason understood in the loftiest, richest sense ; at the heart of his labour was the conviction that God makes nothing in vain, and that in a real degree He enables those who will be His disciples to think His thoughts after Him. But also he believed in the world of concrete life ; in its

[1] *Aufsätze zur Geistesgeschichte und Religionsoziologie,* by Ernest Troeltsch (Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. iv.). Edited by Dr. Hans Baron. Tübingen : Mohr. Pp. xxviii, 872. M.21.