

supereminent degree as in the fourth- and fifth-century Roman School and in early medieval Northern art; it then tends to merge into the *heroic*.

The makers were not interested in aspects but in essences, not in what our Lord may have looked like but in what he *is* yesterday, today and forever. Consequently they grip us not by appearances but with a two-fold reality, on the one hand concrete and aesthetic—the formal reality of the artifact; on the other, ideal or poetic—the conceptual reality of the idea. In other words, they present spiritual truth by *analogy*, through the material perfection of the work itself.

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## A CATECHISM FOR ADULTS

### I.—‘I believe’

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**A**T first sight there is something arid about a creed. But a Christian ignores the creed at his peril. It is fatally easy to drift along in a tide of emotional devotion, and precisely because our devotion is not disciplined by the rule of faith, to become stranded on the sands of sentiment. No individual has sufficient balance or insight to receive the full content of revelation, and each individual tends to inject some personal bias into his formulation of the faith; the tendency is to interpret in terms of our own psychological structure and interests. This is seen even in the great Saints and Doctors of the Church, but they, since they are holy, accept the correction of their bias from the Church, and receive, within the Church, a life that complements their insufficiency. This is even more markedly the case when the individual is living on his religious emotions, on unregulated devotional responses, which, since they lack the defining and purifying influence of the creeds, very easily degenerate into mere superstition.

No doubt faith can co-exist with superstition; but the thorns grow very fast, and can soon choke the good seed. It is a good rule which says that the more strongly the emotions are stirred, the more urgently credal definition is required. This is not to say that emotion, feeling and devotion do not play their part in religion. Of course they do, for Christ claims the whole person, and human feeling is used by the Holy Spirit as a way in to the furthest places of the soul. But the fact remains that the image of God—the likeness imprinted at man's creation—is not essentially found in the emotions or feelings. True, the latter can be patterned according to that reflection of the divine perfection received in the image, but since they are not the image, the vital response of man to God cannot essentially be a matter of feeling or emotion. Whenever man panders to the age-old temptation to give way to anti-intellectual forms of piety, he sins against the doctrinal traditions of the Church.

At once the objection arises: Is then the faith for intellectuals only? Can only clever people inherit the Kingdom of God? The objection is perverse. The statement was that man must not give way to *anti-intellectual* forms of piety, not that his piety must be intellectualist. Vain philosophy, empty sophistication is no vehicle of salvation, and just being clever is irrelevant to salvation. What is meant is that each man must respond to God as a rational being—in his higher self—and this has nothing to do with levels of culture or formal education. The modes of this response are, of course, innumerable, some tending towards the abstract, others predominantly affective, but each is responsible, for that is the normal condition of response. It is beside the point here to speak of children, idiots or psychotics—God has his special way of dealing with them—for our concern is with normal persons who have become adult members of the Church, and who, having put away the things of a child, have grown up in Christ. Spiritual childhood is not to be equated with a refusal to grow up in Christ.

Reliance on mere religious emotion is a sure way to doubt, for when the critical question is raised, 'What think ye of Christ?', mere emotion gives no clear answer, for the faith that it overlays is a shallow thing, insufficient to stand against the wearing action of the world.

Here the creeds are a rock, for they express the mind of Christ

ruling his people in the Spirit. They are decisions: the utterances which the Church has made in the face of attack, and under stress; on points critical for man's understanding of the revelation of God, they assert the tradition and interpret to him the Word of God.

The creeds are the rule of faith in that they express clearly what we have been taught by God, but they are not ends in themselves. They are statements, authoritative and precise, whose function it is to lead towards, and point with exactitude to, the mystery which is God. They do not remove the mystery, they focus our minds on it.

Each clause of a creed must be understood in its context, in terms of the tension it resolves, or of the error it prohibits. None the less it is not to be taken as merely relative or simply negative—it does absolutely assert a teaching, though it does so in human language which can never exhaust or comprehensively define the content of the mystery it seeks to declare and safeguard.

One doesn't believe in the creed, but what the creed signifies. From the beginnings of Christianity the creed has been there. From simple forms, such as 'Jesus is Lord', the creeds have developed into systematic declarations of the implications of his Lordship. In one form they are found in the questions and answers of the baptismal rite, in another in the summaries of teaching given to the catechumen and returned by him to the bishop before baptism. Later there are creeds for bishops expressing the living unity of the Church's teaching. The creed is the token by which, from a man's words, it is known whether he believes with the Church. In every form it is declaratory of a distinctive attitude to Christ, for it is expressive of how the Church, in all her members, thinks of Christ. Thus it sets a way for the Christian mind and regulates the Christian life. It is the statement of the pattern of the new way of life that begins at baptism and it tells of the making of the new heaven and the new earth.

The creed comes as a challenge and a release. A challenge in that it expresses no mere matter of opinion. When a man says 'I believe' before the articles of the creed, he is not saying 'It seems to me', or 'I feel that', or 'The probabilities suggest'. No, he proclaims that God has spoken, that the Holy Spirit lives in the Church, that God has revealed his purpose in Christ. It is a proclamation that his mind has been illumined and moved by Divine

Grace; that the dark certitude we call faith has raised his soul to the contemplation of the things that were hidden from the prophets and kings. It is a release, because when he says 'I believe', he says that he has begun to live by that faith which saves; and this is so because God, in giving faith, has claimed him as one of the people of God, one of the members of the Church. Thus it is the sign of his release from the rule of the world, which is man organizing his life apart from God and seeking his happiness in himself.

Is this pride or arrogance? No. There is no room for arrogance here, because all arises from the mystery of his calling by Christ. He says 'I believe' under the pressure of the Divine Love, not because he has found, but because he has been found. He cannot be proud because he believes, but only humble before the graciousness of God. So much bitterness has been generated by forgetting this, when man ceases to contemplate God's mercy and by regarding himself humanizes his faith and glories in it, as if it were his by right or by earthly inheritance. It is only in and through grace, God's free gift, that man merits and does good works. That is, good works are characterized as meritorious not because man does them, but because man does them *in grace*. By faith and grace the soul is not just helped and illumined, it is also led into a new world, in that it enters into a new relationship with God, who is no longer the remote Creator, but the loving Father, whose love transforms all man's thoughts and actions.

Faith is not a hearing of 'little voices', for God moves man in a hidden way and speaks to him through instruments—popes, bishops, councils, saints, joys and sorrow. Faith is the recognition of the working of the Spirit in these instruments; it is the conviction of a man that he can do no other than proclaim his belief.

Faith, the 'I believe', is a gift given, not because of a man's virtue, but because of the sacrifice and merits of Christ; and it is, too, a new life in which man begins to tend towards the things hoped for: the fulness of the kingdom, the breaking of the veil.

Faith is certitude, for it rests on God, but it is dark; not vision, for the veil is not yet taken away, hence it is living in expectation, because man's union with God in this life, though real, is not yet consummated. It is neither an intuition of God nor a mere instinct. It is the acceptance by the mind—and hence by the whole man—that God has addressed man, that the Word has been uttered and

recognized, though not comprehended. In this sense, faith involves the primary decision of a man's life, which tears out his worldly roots. That is why it is the scandal that shocks and numbs prudence and calculation. Not that faith is in itself absurd, but it inevitably offends man's pride, and his revolt against it has its roots in the fact that the view of faith is larger than that of man's philosophies.

Can it not be said, in view of all this, that faith is irrational? No. It is true that it has a language of its own; it must have, because its subject-matter is unique, and that this language is not that of chemistry, or psychology. It is equally true that it is human speech about God and in so far as it is human it can be discussed. Though its subject-matter is not susceptible of proof, though its proper statements cannot be investigated by the scientific method, because they escape beyond the limits of understanding, it can be considered as a total view which answers man's problems and harmonizes his various knowings.

A simple distinction is helpful. The articles of faith are beyond reason in the sense that man could not discover them without God's intervention, and even when man becomes aware of them they remain in essence mysterious. What man can do is to speak with precision about the language which God has chosen for his revelation, and with the aid of the Holy Spirit, ponder on its implications. As has been suggested, man can discuss the relevance of all this to his other forms of knowledge. More, he must be able to say honestly that it all seems reasonable in that it involves no contradiction, because no one may believe what he holds to be false.

The articles of faith should be distinguished from a different class of statements which can be shown to be plausible or to demonstrate rationally, in that their truth can be discovered apart from divine intervention. Certain of these truths have a bearing on salvation, and in cases where a man, by reason of stupidity or lack of opportunity, cannot arrive at them, then God discovers them to him. They are given with faith. This condescension is but one instance of the love of God for man, and it is in the consideration of this love that we find the clue to his dealings with man. No one knows his purpose for any man, but we are assured that so long as men do not shut their hearts and minds, so long as they seek truth, God will in his time give to those who ask, however badly fashioned their petitions may be.