

An Exposition of the Apostles' Creed

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Anglican · Post-Reformation · Exegesis

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INTRODUCTION

Composed during Taylor's enforced retirement in Wales after the Royalist defeat, when the Book of Common Prayer was outlawed and Anglican clergy scattered, this clause-by-clause unfolding of the Creed served readers cut off from public worship and catechesis. Taylor, later called the "Shakespeare of English prose" for the cadenced beauty that runs through *Holy Living* and *Holy Dying*, here works in a plainer register, paraphrasing each article into the first person so that confession becomes prayer. The text belongs to a strand of seventeenth-century Anglican devotion that refused to let doctrine and piety be separated, and it shaped the catechetical writing of Ken, Wilson, and the later Caroline divines. Read it slowly, one article at a time, as a kneeling exercise rather than a treatise.

I believe in God,

I Believe that there is a God who is one, true, supreme and alone, infinitely wise, just, good free, eternal, immense, and blessed, and in him alone we are to put our trust.

The Father Almighty,

I believe that he is (1.) The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and (2.) of all that believe in him, whom he hath begotten by his Word, and adopted to the inheritance of Sons: and because he is our Father, he will do us all that good to which we are created and designed by grace; and because he is Almighty, he is able to perform it all; and therefore we may safely believe in him, and relie upon him.

Maker of Heaven and Earth.

He made the Sun and the Moon, the Stars, and all the regions of glory; he made the Air, the Earth, and the Water, and all that live in them; he made Angels and Men, and he who made them does, and he onely can preserve them in the same beeing, and thrust them forwards to a better; he that preserves them, does also govern them, and intends they should minister to his glory: and therefore we are to do worship and obedience to him in all that we can and that he hath commanded.

And in Jesus Christ,

I also believe in Jesus Christ, who is, and is called a Saviour, and the Anointed of the Lord, promised to the Patriarchs, whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit, and with power to become the Great Prophet, and declarer of his Fathers Will to all the world, telling us how God will be worshipped and served; he is anointed to be the Mediator of the New Covenant, and our High-Priest, reconciling us to his Father by the Sacrifice of himself; and to be the Great King of all the world: and by this Article we are Christians, who serve and worship God the Father through Jesus Christ.

His onely Son

Jesus Christ is the Son of God, he alone, of him alone: for God by his holy Spirit caused him to be born of a Virgin: by his power he raised him from the Dead, and gave him a new birth, or beeing in the body: he gave him all power, and all excellency; and beyond all this, he is the express Image of his person, the brightness of his glory, equal to God, beloved before the beginning of the world, of a nature perfectly Divine; very God by essence, and very Man by assumption; as God, all one in nature with the Father; and as Man, one Person in Himself.

Our Lord.

Jesus Christ, Gods onely Son, is the Heir of all things and persons in his Fathers house: All Angels and Men are his servants, and all the Creatures obey him; we are to believe in him, and by Faith in him onely, and in his Name we shall be saved.

Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,

I believe that Jesus Christ was not begotten of a Man, nor born by natural means, but that a Divine Power from God [Gods Holy Spirit] did overshadow the Virgin-Mother of Christ, and made her in a wonderful manner to conceive Jesus in her womb; and by this his admirable manner of being conceived, he was the Son of God alone, and no man was his Father.

Born of the Virgin Mary,

Though God was his Father, and he begat him by the power of the Holy Ghost, and caused him miraculously to begin in the womb of his Mother, yet from her he also derived his humane Nature, and by his Mother he was of the Family of King David, and called the Son of Man, his Mother being a holy person, not chosen to this great honour for her wealth or beauty, but by the good will of God, and because she was of a rare exemplar modesty and humility: and she received the honour of being a Mother to the Son of God, and ever a Virgin, and all generations shall call her blessed.

Suffered under Pontius Pilate:

After that Jesus passed through the state of Infancy and Childhood, being subject to his Parents, and working in an humble Trade to serve his own and his Mothers needs, he grew to the state of a man, he began to preach at the age of Thirty years, and having for about three years and a half preached the Gospel, and taught us his Fathers will, having spoken the Gospel of his Kingdome, and revealed to us the secrets of Eternal life, and Resurrection of the Dead, Regeneration, and Renewing by the Holy Spirit, Perfect Remission of sins, and Eternal Judgement: at last, that he might reconcile the world to his

Father, he became a Sacrifice for all our sins, and suffered himself to be taken by the malicious Jews, and put to a painful and shameful death; they being envious at him for the number of his Disciples, and the reputation of his person, the innocence of his life, the mightiness of his Miracles, and the power of his Doctrine: and this death he suffered when Pontius Pilate was Governour of Judea.

Was Crucified,

Jesus Christ being taken by the Rulers of the Jews, bound, and derided, buffeted, and spit upon, accused weakly, and persecuted violently; at last, wanting matter and pretences to condemn him, they asked him of his Person and Office; and because he affirmed that great Truth, which all the world of good men long'd for, that he was the Messias, and designed to sit at the right hand of the Majesty on high, they resolved to call it Blasphemy, and delivered him over to Pilate, and by importunity and threats, forced him against his Conscience, to give him up to be scourged, and then to be Crucified. The Souldiers therefore mocking him with a robe and a reed, and pressing a Crown of Thorns upon his head, led him to the place of his death; compelling him to bear his Cross, to which they presently nail'd him; on which for hours he hang'd in extreme torture, being a sad spectacle of the most afflicted, and the most innocent person of the whole world.

Dead

When the Holy Jesus was wearie with tortures, and he knew all things were now fulfilled, and his Fathers wrath appeased towards mankind: His Father pitying his innocent Son groaning under such intolerable miseries, hastened his death; and Jesus commending his Spirit into the hands of his Father, cried with a loud voice, bowed his head, and died; and by his death sealed all the Doctrines and Revelations which he first taught the world, and then confirmed by his blood: he was consecrated our merciful High-Priest, and by a feeling of our miseries and temptations, become able to help them that are tempted: and for these his sufferings, was exalted to the highest Throne, and seat of the right hand of God; and hath shewn, that to heaven there is no surer way then suffering for his name; and hath taught us willingly to suffer for his sake, what himself hath already suffered for ours: He reconciled us to God by his death, led us to God, drew us to himself, redeemed us from all iniquity, purchased us for his Father, and for ever made us his servants and redeemed ones, that we being dead unto sin, might live unto God: And this death being so highly beneficial to us, he hath appointed means to apply to us, and to represent to God for us in the Holy Sacrament of his last Supper. And upon all these considerations, that Cross which was a smart and shame to our Lord, is honour to us, and as it turned to his glory, so also to our spiritual advantages.

And Buried.

That he might suffer every thing of humane nature, he was by the care of his friends and disciples, by the leave of Pilate, taken from the Cross, and embalmed (as the manner of the Jews was to bury) and wrapt in linnen, and buried in a new grave, hewn out of a Rock; and this was the last and lowest step of his humiliation.

He descended into Hell.

That is, He went down into the lower parts of the earth, or (as himself called it) into the heart of the earth; by which phrase the Scripture understands the state of separation, or of souls severed from their bodies: by this his descending to the land of darkness, where all things are forgotten, he sanctified the state of death and separation, that none of his servants might ever after fear the jaws of Death and Hell; whither he went, not to suffer torment (because he finished all that upon the Cross) but to triumph over the gates of hell, to verifie his death, and the event of his sufferings, and to break the iron barres of those lower Prisons, that they may open and shut hereafter onely at his command.

The third day he rose again from the Dead.

After our Lord Jesus had abode in the grave, the remaining part of the day of his Passion, and all the next day, early in the morning upon the third day, by the power of God, he was raised from death and hell, to light and life, never to return to death any more, and is become the first-born from the dead, the first-fruits of them that slept; and although he was put to death in the flesh, yet now being quickned in the Spirit, he lives for ever; and as we all die in Adam, so in Christ we all shall be made alive; but every man in his own order: Christ is the first, and we, if we follow him in the Regeneration, shall also follow him in the Resurrection.

He ascended into Heaven,

When our dearest Lord was risen from the grave, he conversed with his disciples for forty days together, often shewing himself alive by infallible proofs, and once to five hundred of his disciples, at one appearing: having spoken to them fully concerning the affairs of the Kingdome, and the Promise of the Father; leaving them some few things in charge for the present, he solemnly gave them his blessing, and in the prefence of his Apostles, was taken up into heaven, by a bright Cloud, and the ministry of Angels, being gone before us to prepare a place for us above all heavens, in the presence of his Father, and at the foot of the Throne of God; from which glorious presence we cannot be kept by the change of death, and the powers of the grave, nor the depth of hell, nor the height of heaven, but Christ being lifted up, shall draw all his servants unto him.

And sitteth at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty.

I believe that Jesus Christ sitteth in Heaven above all Principalities and powers, being exalted above every Name that is named in heaven and earth, that is, above every creature above and below; all things being put under his feet: he is alwayes in the presence of his Father, interceding for us, and governs all things in heaven and earth, that he may defend his Church, and adorn her with his Spirit, and procure and effect her eternal salvation: There he sits and reigns as King, and intercedes as our High-Priest; He is a minister of the Sanctuary, and of the true Tabernacle which God made and not man, the Author and Finisher of our Faith, the captain of our Confession, the great Apostle of our Religion, the great Bishop of our souls, the Head of the Church, and the Lord of heaven and earth: and therefore to him we are to pay Divine Worship, Service and Obedience, and we must believe in him, and in God by him, and relie entirely on the mercies of God through Jesus Christ.

From thence he shall come

In the Clouds, shining, and adorned with the glory of his Father, attended by millions of bright Angels, with the voyce of an Archangel, and a shout of all the heavenly Army, the Trump of God; and every eye shall see him, and they that pierced his hands and his feet shall behold his Majesty, his Terror, and his Glory; and all the families of the earth shall tremble at his presence; and the powers of heaven shall be shaken, and the whole earth and sea shall be broken in pieces and confusion: for then he shall come to put an end to this world, and

To judge the Quick and Dead.

For the Father judgeth no man, but hath given all judgement to the Son; and at this day of Judgement, the Lord Jesus shall sit in the Aire in a glorious Throne; and the Angels having gathered together Gods Elect from the four Corners of the world, and all the kindreds of the earth being brought before the Judgement-feat, shall have the Records of their Conscience laid open; that is, all that ever they thought, or spake, or did, shall be brought to their memory, to convince the wicked of the Justice of the Judge in passing the fearful Sentence upon them, and to glorifie the mercies of God towards his Redeemed ones: and then the righteous Judge shall condemn the wicked to the portion of Devils for ever, to a state of torments, the second, and eternal, and intolerable death; and the godly being placed on his right hand, shall hear the blessed Sentence of Absolution, and shall be led by Christ to the participation of the glories of his Fathers Kingdome for ever and ever. Amen.

I believe in the Holy Ghost [or] the Holy Spirit.

Who is the third person of the holy, undivided, everblessed Trinity, which we worship, and adore, and admire, but look upon with wonder, and am not in a capacity to understand. I believe that the Holy Spirit, into whose name, as of the Father and the Son, I was baptized, is the heavenly Author, the Captain, the Teacher, and the Witness of all the Truths of the Gospel: That as the Father sent the Son; so the Son from heaven sent the Holy Spirit to lead the Church into all Truth; to assist us in all Temptations, and to help us in the purchase of all Vertue. This Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, and our Lord Jesus received him from his Father, and sent him into the world, who receiving the things of Christ, and declaring the same excellent doctrines, speaks whatsoever he hath heard from him; and instructed the Apostles, and builds the Church, and produces Faith, and confirms our Hope, and increases Charity: and this Holy Spirit our blessed Lord hath left with his Church for ever, by which all the servants of God are enabled to do all things necessary to Salvation, which by the force of Nature they cannot do: and we speak by the Spirit, and work by the Spirit, when by his assistances any way imparted to us, we speak or do anything of our duty. He it is who inlightens our Understandings, sanctifies our Will, orders and commands our Affections; he comforts our sorrows, supports our spirits in trouble, and enables us by Promises and Confidences, and Gifts, to suffer for the Lord Jesus and the Gospel: and all these things God the Father does for us by his Son, and the Son by the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit by all means within and without, which are operative upon, and proportionable to the nature of reasonable creatures. This is he who works Miracles, gives the gifts of Prophesie and of interpretation, that teaches us what, and how to pray; that gives us Zeal and holy Desires; who sanctifies children in Baptism, and confirms them with his grace in Confirmation, and reproves the world, and consecrates Bishops, and all the Ministers of the Gospel, and absolves the penitent, & blesses the obedient, and comforts the

sick, and excommunicates the refractory, and makes intercession for the Saints, that is, the Church, and those whom he hath blessed, appointed and sanctified to these purposes, do all these Ministeries, by his Authority, and his Commandment, and his Aids. This is he that testifies to our Spirits that we are the sons of God, and that makes us to cry, Abba Father, that is, who inspires into us such humble confidences of our being accepted in our hearty and constant endeavours to please God, that we can with chearfulness and joy call God our Father, and expect and hope for the portion of sons both here and hereafter, and in the certainty of this hope, to work out our salvation with fear and reverence, with trembling and joy, with distrust of our selves, and mighty confidence in God. By this holy and ever-blessed Spirit, several persons in the Church, and every man in his proportion, receives the gifts of Wisdome, and utterance, and Knowledge, and Interpretation, and Prophecy, and Healing, and Government, and discerning of Spirits, and Faith, and Tongues, and whatsoever can be necessary for the Church in several ages and periods, for her beginning, for her continuance, for her in prosperity, and for her in persecution. This is the great Promise of the Father, and it is the gift of God which he will give to all them that ask him, and who live piously and chastely, and are persons fit to entertain so Divine a Grace. This Holy Spirit God gives to some more, to some less, according as they are capable. They who obey his Motions, and love his Presence, and improve his Gifts, shall have him yet more abundantly: but they that grieve the holy Spirit, shall lose that which they have: and they that extinguish him, belong not to Christ, but are in the state of reprobation: and they that blaspheme this holy Spirit, and call him the Spirit of the Devil, or the Spirit of Error, or folly, or do malicious despites to him, that is, they who on purpose considering and choosing, do him hurt by word or by deed (so far as lies in them) shall for ever be separated from the presence of God and of Christ, and shall never be forgiven in this world, nor in the world to come. Lastly, this holy Spirit seals us to the day of Redemption; that is, God gives us his Holy Spirit as a testimony that he will raise us again at the last day, and give us a portion in the glories of his Kingdome, in the inheritance of our Lord Jesus.

The holy Catholick Church,

I believe that there is, and ought to be a visible Company of men, professing the service and discipline, that is, the Religion of the Gospel, who agree together in the belief of all the Truths of God revealed by Jesus Christ, and in confession of the Articles of this Creed, and agree together in praying and praising God through Jesus Christ; to reade and hear the Scriptures read and expounded; to provoke each other to love and to good works; to advance the honour of Christ, and to propagate his Faith and Worship. I believe this to be a Holy Church, Spirituall, and not Civill and Secular, but sanctified by their Profession, and the solemn Rites of it, professing holiness, and separating from the evil manners of heathens and wicked persons, by their Laws and Institutions. And this Church is Catholick, that is, it is not confin'd to the Nation of the Jews, as was the old Religion; but it is gathered out of all Nations, and is not of a differing Faith in differing places, but alwayes did, doth, and ever shall profess the Faith which the Apostles preached, and which is contained in this Creed; which whosoever believes, is a Catholick and a Christian, and he that believes not, is neither. This Catholick Church I believe, that is, I believe whatsoever all good Christians in all ages, and in all places did confess to be the Catholick and Apostolick Faith.

The Communion of Saints,

That is, the Communion of all Christians: because by reason of their holy Faith, they are called Saints in Scripture; as being begotten by God into a lively Faith, and cleansed by Believing: and by this Faith, and the profession of a holy life in obedience to Jesus Christ, they are separated from the world, called to the knowledge of the truth, justified before God, and indued with the holy Spirit of Grace, foreknown from the beginning of the world, and predestinated by God to be made conformable to the image of his Son, here in holiness of life, hereafter in a life of glory; and they who are Saints in their belief and profession, must be so also in their practise and conversation, that so they may make their calling and election sure, lest they be Saints onely in name and title, in their profession and institution, and not in manners & holiness of living, that is, lest they be so before men, and not before God. I believe that all people who desire the benefit of the Gospel, are bound to have a fellowship and society with these Saints, and communicate with them in their holy things, in their Faith, and in their Hope, and in their Sacraments, and in their Prayers, and in their publick Assemblies, and in their Government: and must do to them all the acts of Charity and mutuall help which they can and are required to: and without this Communion of Saints, and a conjunction with them who believe in God through Jesus Christ, there is no salvation to be expected: which Communion must be kept in inward things alwayes, and by all persons, and testified by outward acts alwayes, when it is possible, and may be done upon just and holy conditions.

The forgiveness of sins,

I believe that all the sins I committed before I came to the knowledge of the Truth, and all the slips of humane infirmity, against which we heartily pray, and watch and labour, and all the evil habits, of which we repent so timely and effectually, that we obtain their contrary graces, and live in them, are fully remitted by the blood of Christ: which forgiveness we obtain by Faith and Repentance, and therefore are not justified by the Righteousness of Works, and by the Righteousness of Faith: and we are preserved in the state of forgiveness or justification by the fruits of a lively Faith, and a timely active Repentance.

The Resurrection of the body,

I believe that at the last day all they whose sins are forgiven, and who lived and dyed in the Communion of Saints, and in whom the holy Spirit did dwell, shall rise from their graves, their dead bones shall live, and be clothed with flesh and skin and their bodies together with their souls shall enter into the portion of a new life: and that this body shall no more see corruption, but shall rise to an excellent condition: it shall be Spiritual, Powerful, Immortal and Glorious, like unto his glorious body, who shall then be our Judge, is now our Advocate, our Saviour, and our Lord.

And the life Everlasting.

I believe that they who have their part in this Resurrection shall meet the Lord in the Air, and when the blessed Sentence is pronounc'd upon them, they shall for ever be with the Lord in joyes unspeakable, and full of glory: God shall wipe all tears from their eyes; there shall be no fear or sorrow, no mourning or death, a friend shall never go away from thence, and an enemy shall never enter; there shall be fulness

without want, light eternal brighter then the Sun; day, and no night; joy, and no weeping; difference in degree, and yet all full; there is love without dissimulation, excellency without envy, multitudes without confusion, musick without discord; there the Understandings are rich, the Will is satisfied, the Affections are all love, and all joy, and they shall reign with God and Christ for ever and ever. Amen.

This is the Catholick Faith, which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.

Tertull. de velandis Virgin.

The Rule of Faith is wholly one, unalterable, never to be mended, never changed; to wit, I believe in God, &c. This Law of Faith remaining in other things you may encrease and grow.

S. Aug. de Fide & Symb.

This is the Faith which in few words is given to Novices: These few words are known to all the faithful; that by believing they may be subject to God; by this subjection they may live well; by living well they may purifie their hearts; and with pure hearts they may relish and understand what they do believe.

Max. Taurin. de Tradit. Symb.

This Creed is the Badge or Cognisance, by which the Faithful are discerned from Unbelievers.

Leo M. ad Pulcheriam Aug.

This short and perfect Confession of this Catholick Creed, which was consigned by the Sentences of twelve Apostles, is so perfect a celestial Armour, that all the Opinions of Hereticks may by this alone, as with a sword, be cut in pieces.

Source: The Golden Grove, Jeremy Taylor. London: Printed by J.F. for R. Royston at the Angel in Ivie-lane, 1655. Text sourced from Project Canterbury (anglicanhistory.org).

Transcribed from the 1655 first edition by Project Canterbury (Anglican History Project, anglicanhistory.org). Taylor composed The Golden Grove during his years of enforced exile in Wales under the Interregnum, when Anglican worship had been suppressed and he was living under the protection of Richard Vaughan, Earl of Carbery, at the estate from which the book takes its name. The text is in the public domain; Taylor died in 1667. No translator is involved; this is Taylor's own English.

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