An exposition of the creed

Pearson John
AN

EXPOSITION

OF THE

CREED.

BY JOHN PEARSON, D.D

LATE LORD BISHOP OF CHESTER.

WITH

AN APPENDIX,

CONTAINING

THE PRINCIPAL GREEK AND LATIN CREEDS.

REVISED BY THE

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M DCCC L.
TO THE

RIGHT WORSHIPFUL AND WELL-BELOVED

THE PARISHIONERS OF ST. CLEMENTS

EAST-CHEAP.

Mercy unto you, and peace and love be multiplied.

I will be at any time mindful of your commands, you might will esteem me unworthy of your esteemed favours; and there is some reason to suspect I have incurred the interpretation of forsgateness, having been so backward in the performance of my promise. Some years have passed since I promised you upon such texts of Scripture as were on purpose selected in relation to the Creed, and we are moved by you to make those meditations publick. But you were pleased then to grant what my inclinations rather led me to, that they might be turned into an Exposition of the Creed itself, which, partly by the difficulty of the work undertaken, partly by the intervention of some other employments, hath taken me up too long, for which I desire your pardon. And yet a happy excuse may be pleaded for delay, meeting with a very great facility, that as faith triumpheth in good works, so my Exposition of the Creed should be contemporary with the re-edsing of your Church. For though I can have little temptation to believe that my book should last so long as that fabric, yet I am exceedingly pleased that they should begin together; that the publishing of the one should so agree with the opening of the other. Thus, I hope, may persuade you to forget my slowness, considering ye were not ready to your own expectation; your experience tells you the excuse of church-work will be accepted in building, I beseech you let it not be denied to printing.

That blessed Saint, by whose name your Parish is known, was a fellow-labourer with St. Paul, and a successor of St. Peter; he had the honour to be numbered in the Scripture with them "whose names are written in the book of life," and when he had sealed the Gospel with his blood, he was one of the first whose memory was perpetuated by the building a Church to bear his name. Thus was St. Clement's Church famous in Rome, where Rome was famous for the faith spoken of throughout the whole world." He wrote an epistle to the Corinthians infested with a schism, in imitation of St. Paul, which obtained so great authority in the primitive times, that it was frequently read in their public congregations, and yet had for many hundred years been lost, till it was at last restored out of the library of the late king.

Now as, by the providence of God, the memory of that primitive Saint hath been restored in our age, so my design aimeth at nothing else but that the primitive faith may be revived. And therefore in this edition of the Creed I shall speak to you but what St. Jude hath already spoken to the whole Church: "Beloved, when I give all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints." If it were so needful for him then to write, and for them to whom he wrote to contend for the first faith, it will appear as needful for me now to follow his writing, and for you to imitate their earnestness, because the reason which he renders, as the cause of that necessity, is now more prevalent than it was at that time, or ever since. "For (saith he) there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation; ungodly men, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, desiring the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ." The principles of Christianity are now as freely questioned as the most doubtful and controverted points; the grounds of faith are as safely denied as the most unnecessary speculations; that religion hath the greater advantage which appears in the newest dress, as if we looked for another faith to be delivered to the saints: whereas in Christianity there can be no concerning truth which is not ancient; and whatsoever is truly new, is certainly false. Look then for purity in the fountain, and strive to embrace the first faith, to which you cannot have a more probable guide than the Creed, received in all ages of the Church: and to this I refer you, as it lends you to the Scriptures, from whence it was at first deduced, that while "those which are unskilful and unstable, wrest" the words of God himself "unto their own damnation:" ye may receive so much instruction as may set you beyond the imputation of unskilfulness, and so much of confirmation as may place you out of the danger of instability; which as it hath been the constant endeavour, so shall it ever be the prayer of him, who after so many encouragements of his labours amongst you, doth still desire to be known as Your most faithful Servant in the Lord,

JOHN PEARSON.
TO THE READER.

I have in this book undertaken an exposition of the Creed, and think it necessary in this Preface to give a brief account of the work, lest any should either expect to find that here which was never intended, or conceive that which they meet with such as they expected not.

The Creed, without controversy, is a brief comprehension of the objects of our Christian faith, and is generally taken to contain all things necessary to be believed. Now whether all things necessary be contained there, concerneth not an Expositor to dispute, who is obliged to take notice of what is in it, but not to inquire into what is not: whether all truths comprehended in the same be of equal and absolute necessity, we are no way forced to declare; it being sufficient, as to the design of an Exposition, to interpret the words, and so deliver the sense, to demonstrate the truth of the sense delivered, and to manifest the proper necessity of each truth, how far, and in what degree, and to what purposes, it is necessary.

This therefore is the method which I proposed to myself, and have prosecuted in every Article. First, to settle the words of each Article according to their antiquity and generality of reception in the Creed. Secondly, to explicate and unfold the terms, and to endeavour a right notion and conception of them as they are to be understood in the same. Thirdly, to show what are those truths which are naturally contained in those terms so explicated, and to make it appear that they are truths indeed, by such arguments and reasons as are respectively proper to evidence the verity of them. Fourthly, to declare what is the necessity of believing those truths, what efficacy and influence they have in the soul, and upon the life of a believer. Lastly, by a recollection of all, briefly to deliver the sum of every particular truth, so that every one, when he pronounceth the Creed, may know what he ought to intend, and what he is understood to profess, when he so pronounceth it.

In the prosecution of the whole, according to this method, I have considered, that a work of so general a concernment must be exposed to two kinds of readers, which, though they may agree in judgment, yet must differ much in their capacities. Some there are who understand the original languages of the Holy Scriptures, the discourses and treatises of the ancient Fathers, the determinations of the Councils, and history of the Church of God, the constant profession of settled truths, the rise and increase of schisms and heresies. Others there are unacquainted with such conceptions, and incapable of such instructions; who understand the Scriptures as they are translated; who are capable of the knowledge of the truths themselves, and of the proofs drawn from thence; who can apprehend the nature of the Christian faith, with the power and efficacy of the same, when it is delivered unto them out of the Word of God, and in a language which they know. When I make this difference and distinction of readers, I do not intend thereby, that because one of these is learned, the other is ignorant; for he which hath no skill of the learned languages, may notwithstanding be very knowing in the principles of Christian Religion, and the reason and efficacy of them.

According to this distinction I have contrived my Exposition, so that the body of it containeth fully what can be delivered and made intelligible in the English tongue, without inserting the least sentence or phrase of any learned language; by which he who is not acquainted with it might be disturbed in his reading, or interrupted in his understanding. Not that I have selected only such notions as are common, easy and familiar of themselves, but have endeavoured to deliver the most material conceptions in the most plain and perspicuous manner; as desirous to comprise the whole strength of the work, as far as it is possible, in the body of it. The other part I have placed in the margin* but so as oftentimes it taketh up more room, and yet

The marginal notes are, in this edition, placed at the bottom of the page.
TO THE READER.

is never mingled or confounded with the rest, in which is contained whatsoever is necessary for the illustration of any part of the Creed, as to them which have any knowledge of the Latin, Greek, and original languages, of the writings of the ancient Fathers, the doctrines of the Jews, and the history of the Church; those great advantages towards a right conception of the Christian Religion.

Now being the Creed comprehended the principles of our religion, it must contain those truths which belong unto it as it is a religion, and those which concern it as it is ours. As it is a religion, it delivereth such principles as are to be acknowledged in natural theology, such as no man which worshippeth a God can deny; and therefore in the proof of these, I have made use of such arguments and reasons as are most proper to oppose the atheists, who deny there is a God to be worshipped, a religion to be professed. As it is our religion, it is Christian and Catholic. As Christian, it containeth such truths as were delivered by Christ and his apostles, and those especially concerning Christ himself, which I have prosecuted constantly with an eye to the Jews, who obstinately deny them, expecting still another Messiah to come; whereas I shew out of the Law and the Prophets, which they acknowledge, what was foretold in every particular concerning the Messias, and prove all those to be completed by that Christ in whom we believe. As our religion is Catholic, it holdeth fast that “faith which was once delivered to the saints,” and since preserved in the Church; and therefore I expound such verities, in opposition to the heretics arising in all ages, especially against the Photinians, who of all the rest have most perverted the Articles of our Creed, and found out followers in these latter ages, who have erected a new body of divinity in opposition to the Catholic theology. Against these I proceed upon such principles as they themselves allow, that is, upon the Word of God delivered in the Old and New Testament, alleged according to the true sense, and applied by right reason; not urging the authority of the Church which they reject, but only giving in the margin the sense of the primitive fathers, for the satisfaction of such as have any respect left for antiquity, and are persuaded that Christ had a true Church on the earth before these times.

In that part, which, after the demonstration of each truth, teacheth the necessity of the believing it, and the peculiar efficacy which it hath upon the life of a Christian, I have not thought fit to expatiate or enlarge myself, but only to mention such effects as flow naturally and immediately from the doctrine; especially such as are delivered in the Scriptures; which I have endeavoured to set forth with all possible plainness and perspicuity. And indeed in the whole work, as I have laid the foundation upon the written Word of God, so I have with much diligence collected such places of Scripture as are pertinent to each doctrine, and with great faithfulness delivered them as they lie in the writings of those holy men; not referring the reader to places named in the margin (which too often I find in many books multiplied to little purpose), but producing and interwearing the sentences of Scripture into the body of my Exposition, so that the reader may understand the strength of all my reason without any farther inquiry or consultation. For if those words which I have produced, prove not what I have intended, I desire not any to think there is more in the places named to maintain it.

At the conclusion of every distinct and several notion, I have recollected briefly and plainly the sum of what hath been delivered in the explication of it and put it, as it were, into the mouth of every Christian, thereby to express more fully his faith, and to declare his profession. So that if the reader please to put those collections together, he may at once see and perceive what he is in the whole obliged to believe, and what he is by the Church of God understood to profess, when he maketh this public, ancient, and orthodox confession of faith.

I have nothing more to add; but only to pray, that the Lord would give you and me a good understanding in all things.

J. PEARSON.
ADVERTISEMENT.

Of this Edition, imbodyed in one octavo volume, and, it is trusted, in the most convenient form, the following may be stated as the proper advantages. First, great care has been taken to correct the numerous errors, in the references to the Texts of Scripture, which had crept in by reason of the repeated editions through which this admirable Work has passed; and many references, as will be seen on turning to the Index of Texts, have been added. Secondly, the Quotations in the Notes have been almost universally identified, and the references to them adjoined; a great desideratum to the learned (who alone can fully appreciate the labour attending such researches), and a satisfaction at least to the general reader. Lastly, the principal Symbola or Creeds, of which the particular Articles have been cited by the most learned and ever to be revered Author of this Exposition, have been annexed; and, wherever the original writers have given the Symbola in a scattered and disjoined manner, the detached parts have been brought into a successive and connected point of view—These have been added, in chronological order, in the form of an Appendix.

W. S. DOBSON, M. A.
THE

CREED.

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth: And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord: Which was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary: Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried: He descended into Hell, the third day he rose again from the dead: He ascended into Heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty: From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead: I believe in the Holy Ghost; The Holy Catholick Church; The Communion of Saints; The Forgiveness of Sins; The Resurrection of the Body; And the Life everlasting.