

EUGEN ROSENSTOCK-HUESSY

The Christian Future
OR
The Modern Mind Outrun

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Adults and the Creed

The above triune faith is none other than that formulated in the Athanasian Creed, and therefore I believe the Creed simply true. Its three articles guarantee our trust in the unity of creation from the beginning (God the Father made *all* things in heaven and on earth), our liberty to die to our old selves (given us by God's Son, who implanted the Divine itself in human life by living as a man, and dying, yet rising again), and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit which enables us to commune with posterity and start fellowship here and now.

In our day it is the fashion to disparage creeds in religion, and even theologians speak apologetically about them. That is because an intellectually slothful ministry prefers Pacifism or the Social Gospel to the Gospel, and our theologians, forgetting Jn. 14:17,¹ treat the Creed in purely worldly manner, as if it were a theorem in pagan philosophy and not the stream which carried their own lives.

The Christian Dogma is not an intellectual formula but a record and promise of life. It does not propose ideas for our minds to master; it tells actual events which can master and transform *us* as they did the first Christians. It is not a mere topic of thought but the presupposition of sanity. It is the Christian "*a priori*," the Table of Categories under which the faithful live.

The first Christians experienced radically new processes which of course were said to be non-existent by the Arthur Brisbanes of their day. The Christians knew that the "world" in us—that part of humanity or of ourselves which lagged behind this new step in the evolution of the race—would either never acknowledge the new experiences or would forget them time and again (Heb. 5:11—6:7). So the only protection was to invite the nations of this world to admit these truths as at least lying ahead of them in

¹ "That Spirit of Truth whom the world cannot receive because it is unable to see Him or to know of Him."

experience. This was achieved by converting the Gentiles en masse. Baptism did not open the eyes of individuals, but it did orient their search in the direction which would lead them to rediscover the vital experiences of the first Christians. Each generation had, and still has, to be introduced to the whole painful process of rediscovery.

Hence the Church has acted like an immense sponge, sucking up all childish approaches toward understanding, and deterring no one who was of good faith and on the road and still alive. No pagan, native, primitive first step was rebuked as long as group or individual remained in communion with the complete truth and its guardian, the Church. As a result, rationalists—who are a large part of the “world” in our day—are able to see this sponge character of the Church, but not the central truths toward which it drew the pre-Christian approximations which it absorbed. So rationalists reduce Christianity to a mere patchwork of prior sources, and identify a literal adult belief in the Creed with this or that childish stage in its understanding.

Truth, however, is only in those experiences that can be expressed by various ages in various ways. Even in mathematics the same truth recurs in new applications and in very different forms of statement. So legends like Santa Claus are not lies when told to children that they may understand the workings of the Spirit among us—as long as the legend waits to be told again, in appropriate terms, to the adolescent, the man, the father, the community leader. *To omit the legendary form of truth is to suppress truth.* As a human being, I need the legend, the myth, the ritual, the poem, the theorem, the prophecy, the witness, the sermon, every one of them. The four Gospels give a model example of this rule that one truth must be expressed in different ways for different times of life, and that the whole truth is conveyed only on several such levels together. The Gospels express an identical truth in four different phases of the life of the Church—something that had to be true for Matthew, who tried to prove it to

the Jews; for Mark, who lived with Peter; for Luke, who taught the future generations; and for John, who wrote after the fall of Jerusalem, when the Word, the Torah, was no longer enshrined in the visible Temple of Solomon, and men could therefore understand why "the Word had to become flesh."

Now the Church has always allowed the childish to see things childishly, and has forbidden clever people to sneer at a child's belief. But it has with equal energy forbidden children to dabble with the adult understanding of the Creed. One day Woodrow Wilson's youngest daughter overheard her father say, "Hell is a state of mind." She ran downstairs and told her sisters, "Father has lost his faith." It is natural for children to think that Heaven and Hell are places in space, because they can only picture in external terms what they have not yet experienced. But Wilson's remark was strictly orthodox, and by no means an instance of modernist fudging. Jesus said both that his kingdom is not of this world, and that it is in our hearts. And Origen wrote before A.D. 250: "I have commented on this [prayer] 'Our Father who art in Heaven,' in order to abolish the low opinion of God held by those who place him locally in the heavens. Nobody is permitted to say that God dwells in a physical place."² And if "God in Heaven" does not mean something in space, neither by implication does "the Devil in Hell."

The confusion of childish and adult ways of understanding the Creed has been aggravated by the predominant emphasis given to the child in the Church since the Reformation. In the sixteenth century the Church had become so worldly, so like a secular State, that Luther threw the Catholic Church-State over to the worldly side of life and erected a realm of Christian conscience beyond the authority of either Pope or Prince. After this revolution the Church renewed herself, in both Protestant and Catholic confessions, by developing the religious education of the young, under the leadership of such men as Melanchthon and the Jesuits. From that day to this the school—Sunday School, Parochial

² Cf. Rouet de Jouvenel, *Enchiridion Patristicum*, No. 472.

School, Church College—has been the part of Church activities that really mattered, while adults have grown silent within the Church because their energies were invested outside, in politics, business, and professions.³ No wonder, then, that adults today feel dwarfed by interpretations of the Creed which were shaped historically to fit the needs of children.

Since the Living God comes to us in the midst of living, after death has come upon us, in the form of some crucial experience,⁴ let us try to orient our understanding of the Creed in terms of adult experience. Most people in middle life have known responsibility by creating life in others, as parents; defending the life of others, as mothers or soldiers; inspiring life in others, as writers, teachers, friends; or improving skills for others, as mechanics, scientists, executives. Each of these experiences involves some kind of break with "the world" as it is, followed by a new beginning. A man has to leave his parents to cleave to the wife of his choice. An administrator has to scrap standard routines and revered rules of business practice when he makes an important innovation in his work—as we see amply illustrated in the war effort today. A good parent or teacher has to discard much mental lumber and reshape his perspectives under the stress of having to select what is vitally important for the new generation in his care. And at times every parent or leader has to forget himself and fight for his flock as a lioness fights for her cubs.

The Christian Dogma simply generalizes these experiences of maturity into principles which apply not only to the way an individual reaches his climax in life but to all climaxes in the universe. Since we know new beginnings in our own lives, we can understand that God made heaven and earth in the beginning, that the whole universe had one creative origin rather than coming about by chaotic accident or from opposing deities as Sun-worshippers would have us believe. Knowing struggle for

³ Cf. the author's *Politische Reden*, Berlin, 1929, pp. 44 ff.

⁴ Eros is, as the Greeks knew, our first meeting with death. A man who loves begins to die.

the life of others, we can understand how God loves us. Because our own soul has had to escape the prison of convention and precedent, we realize that a soul can survive any of its social embodiments. Having had to forget and to select in order to teach, we know that the Word has power to give life and take life in our students. And we can believe in the Last Judgment because we have seen last judgments passed on Proust's France, Rasputin's Russia, Wilhelm II's Germany, and President Harding's America. The belief required of a Christian, in sum, is that his manhood knows more than his childhood about the fundamental processes of living. Philosophy may overlook beginning and end. A man who has planted a tree, won a battle, begotten a child, must posit the fact of a new creation in the center. To him, it is as certain as $2 + 2 = 4$. He knows that the question "Why?" for a creative or heroic act is a childish question.

The Divinity of Christ

Perhaps a personal confession is permissible here. I had always hoped to be a Christian. But twenty years ago I felt that I was undergoing a real crucifixion. I was deprived of all my powers, virtually paralyzed, yet I came to life again, a changed man. What saved me was that I could look back to the supreme event of Jesus' life and recognize my small eclipse in his great suffering. That enabled me to wait in complete faith for resurrection to follow crucifixion in my own experience. Ever since then it has seemed foolish to doubt the historical reality of the original Crucifixion and Resurrection.

The Crucifixion is the fountainhead of all my values, the great divide whence flow the processes most real to my inner life, and my primary response to our tradition is one of gratitude to the source of my own frame of reference in everyday life. Hence our chronology of B.C. and A.D. makes sense to me. Something new came into being then, not a man as part of the world but The Man who gives meaning to the world, to heaven and hell, bodies