

# John Pearson, bishop of Chester

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# JOHN PEARSON,

## BISHOP OF CHESTER.

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It has been said, and it is truly said, that any one who will read the Book of Common Prayer from the first page to the last, and supplement the information so acquired by the study of (1) Bishop Pearson's *Exposition of the Creed*, (2) the Fifth Book of Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity*, (3) Bishop Harold Browne's *Exposition of the XXXIX Articles*, will have a perfect knowledge of the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England.

The form which Bishop Pearson has given to his great work is that of an exposition of the Apostles' or Baptismal Creed. First he explains what belief is, and then he goes through each Article and each part of every Article of the Creed, shews what it contains, proves its truth, and finally declares our full acceptance and belief of it. I say our "acceptance and belief", for in our estimation these two things are by no means identical. In a Church which rests all upon authority and analyses every duty into the obligation of obedience, acceptance and belief are confounded together. A Hefele, a Strossmayer, a Dupanloup accept the Vatican dogmas, which in their hearts they repudiate. Their superiors are satisfied, nay—a much stranger thing—they themselves appear to be satisfied. Because they *accept* in obedience to an authority outside their own mind, they are said to *believe*. This is not our idea of belief. Bishop Pearson defines it as "Assent to that which is credible as credible". *Assent* he explains to be "that act or habit of the understanding by which it receives, acknowledges and embraces any thing as a truth". But there are other things

which we may receive, acknowledge and embrace as true beside those things that are properly credible. There are the things which we see and touch; these are objects not of faith but of sense; we acknowledge them as true on the evidence of the senses, they are truths of sense, not of belief. Again there are things which are demonstrated to us and therefore we cannot help acknowledging them as true; these are objects of scientific knowledge, not of belief. But those things which we receive as true not on the evidence of our senses nor because their truth is scientifically demonstrated to us, but on testimony offered to us, are objects of belief. Now testimony is of two kinds, human and divine. Human testimony is fallible and therefore the belief that rests upon it is always open to the *formido oppositi*; it may not be true. Divine testimony is infallible and therefore beliefs resting upon it are certainly true. Can we have Divine testimony to the truth of our creed? Yes, because God's testimony is given "by way of revelation, which is nothing else but the delivery or speech of God unto His creatures". But again this revelation may be of two kinds, immediate and mediate. God immediately revealed Himself to Moses, the Prophets, and the Apostles, and they believed on the immediate testimony of God. Those to whom they spoke or for whom they wrote believed on their testimony that the words that they spoke or wrote had been immediately revealed to them by God. To these hearers and students and their successors the revelation was mediate, because delivered to them through the medium of those to whom God immediately revealed Himself. "Wherefore the Faith of the Israelites in the land of Canaan was an assent unto the truths of the law, as credible upon the testimony of God delivered unto them in the writings of Moses and the Prophets." And "the true nature of the faith of a Christian, as the state of Christ's Church now stands, and shall continue to the end of the world, consists in this: that it is an assent unto truths credible upon the testimony of God, delivered unto us in the writings of the Apostles and Prophets". Out of the oral teaching of the Apostles, and the Holy Scriptures containing it, the short summary of necessary points of faith known as the Creed has been collected, and it is "thoroughly received and believed" by us, because resting upon "most certain warrants of Holy Scripture" (Art. VIII).

Having worked out the nature of faith or belief, the Bishop ends the section as follows. "Although those things which I am ready to affirm be not apparent to my sense, so that I cannot say I see them; although they be not evident to my understanding of themselves, nor appear unto me true by the virtue of any natural and necessary cause, so that I cannot say I have any proper knowledge or science of them; yet since they are certainly contained in the Scriptures, the writings of the blessed Apostles and Prophets; since those Apostles and Prophets were endued with miraculous power from above and immediately inspired with the Holy Ghost, and consequently what they delivered was not the word of man, but of God Himself: since God is of that universal knowledge and infinite wisdom that it is impossible that He should be deceived, and of that indefectible holiness, and transcendent rectitude that it is not imaginable that He should intend to deceive any man, and consequently whatsoever He hath delivered for a truth must be necessarily and infallibly true; I readily and steadfastly assent unto them as most certain truths, and am as fully and absolutely, and more concerningly, persuaded of them than of anything I see or know." Having shown what he means by belief, the Bishop takes each Article of the Creed in turn, and proves is to be in accordance with Holy Scripture and with the witness of the Primitive Church, "making it appear that they are truths indeed by such arguments and reasons as are respectively proper to evidence the verity of them". At the end of each Article, and of each clause of each Article, he summarises the conclusions to which he has arrived on that Article or clause. These summaries have been extracted from the volume and put together in a handy volume, published by Dr Charles Wordsworth, late Bishop of St. Andrews. Together they form a concise statement of the Catholic Faith, of which every Christian is bound to make profession. "If the reader please to put those collections together", says the Bishop, "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 makes this public, ancient and orthodox confession of faith." These summaries would form about 10 pages of your Review, and could I ask you to give to much space to this part of my subject you would see that the Church of England,

by the mouth of Bishop Pearson, requires its children to hold and to confess the Catholic Faith and nothing but the Catholic Faith. I do not suppose that there is one statement in the whole book which would not be accepted by a well instructed Old Catholic Churchman, as expounding and illustrating his own faith. I will quote a few of these summaries by way of example. The exposition of the Article "I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord" ends as follows:—

"I do assent unto this as a certain truth, that there was a man promised by God, foretold by the prophets to be the Messiah, the Redeemer of Israel and the expectation of the nations. I am fully assured by all those predictions that the Messiah so promised is already come. I am as certainly persuaded that the man born in the days of Herod of the virgin Mary, called Jesus by an angel from Heaven, is that true Messiah so long and so often promised; that as the Messiah He was anointed to three special offices belonging to Him as the Mediator between God and man; that He was a prophet, revealing unto us the whole will of God for the salvation of man; that He was a priest and gave Himself a sacrifice for sin, and so has made an atonement for us; that He is a king set down at the right hand of God, far above all principalities and powers, whereby, when He hath subdued all our enemies, He will confer actual, perfect and eternal happiness upon us. I believe the unction by which He became the true Messiah, was not performed by any material oil, but by the spirit of God, which He received as the head, and conveys to His members.

I do profess to be fully assured of this assertion as of a most certain, infallible and necessary truth, that Jesus Christ, the Saviour and Messiah, is the true, proper, and natural son of God, begotten of the substance of the Father; which being incapable of division or multiplication, is so really and totally communicated to Him that He is of the same essence with Him, "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God"; and as I assert Him to be the son, so do I also exclude all other persons from that kind of sonship, acknowledging none but Him to be begotten of God by that proper and natural generation, and thereby excluding all which are not begotten (since it is a generation), and all that are said to be begotten and are called sons, but are so only by adoption (since it is natural).

I do assent unto this as a certain and infallible truth, taught me by God Himself, that Jesus Christ the only son of God is the true Jehovah, which Jehovah hath that being which is originally and eternally of itself and from which all other beings do essentially depend; that by the right of emanation of all things from Him He hath an absolute, supreme, and universal dominion over all things, as God; that as the Son of Man, he is invested with all power in Heaven and earth, partly economical for the completing our redemption and the destruction of our enemies, to continue to the end of all things and then to be resigned to the Father; partly consequent upon the union, or due unto the obedience of His passion, and so eternal, as belonging to that Kingdom which shall have no end. And though He be thus Lord of all things by right of the first creation, and constant preservation of them, yet is He more peculiarly the Lord of us, who by faith are consecrated to His service; for through the work of redemption, He becomes our Lord, both by the right of conquest and of purchase; and making us the Sons of God and providing heavenly mansions for us, He acquires a further right of promotion, which, considering the covenant we all make to serve Him, is at last completed in the right of a voluntary obligation. And in this full acknowledgement, *I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord*".

The other Articles of the Creed are treated in the same full manner, the exposition being given first, and then a summary and recapitulation of the exposition, of which the above is an example. Your readers will be interested to see the statement of the Bishop's doctrine on the Holy Catholic Church. The following is the summary of it.

"I am fully persuaded and make a free confession of this as of a necessary and infallible truth, that Christ by the preaching of the Apostles did gather unto Himself a Church, consisting of thousands of believing persons and numerous congregations, to which He daily added such as should be saved, and will successively and daily add unto the same unto the end of the world; so that by the virtue of His all-sufficient promise I am assured that there was, hath been hitherto, and now is, and hereafter shall be so long as the sun and moon endure, a Church of Christ, one and the same. This Church I believe in general holy in respect of the author, end, insti-

tution and administration of it, particularly in the members *here* I acknowledge it really, and in the same *hereafter* perfectly holy. I look upon this Church, not like that of the Jews, limited to one people, confined to one nation, but by the appointment and command of Christ, and by the efficacy of His assisting power to be disseminated through all nations, to be extended to all places, to be propagated to all ages, to contain in it all truths necessary to be known, to exact absolute obedience from all men to the commands of Christ, and to furnish us with all graces necessary to make our persons acceptable and our actions will pleasing in the sight of God; and thus, *I believe the Holy Catholic Church.*”

In expounding the Article on the Holy Ghost Bishop Pearson follows the Western reading of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, but he appends to it a note which ought to interest our Eastern brethren.

“The second general Council, held at Constantinople, finding it necessary to make an addition to the Nicene Creed in the Article concerning the Holy Ghost, framed this accession, against Macedonius, *Εἰς τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, τὸ Κύριον, τὸ Ζωοποιόν, τὸ ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς ἐκπορευόμενον*, in which they spoke most warily, using the words of Scripture and the language of the Church. This Creed being received by the whole Church of God, and it being added also by the next general Council, at Ephesus, that it should not be lawful to make any addition to it; notwithstanding, the question being agitated in the West, *Utrum Spiritus Sanctus, sicut procedit a Patre, ita et procedat a Filio*; they did not only declare the doctrine to be true, but also added the same to the Constantinopolitan Creed, and sang it publicly in their Liturgy—*Credimus et in Spiritum Sanctum, Dominum et Vivificantem, ex Patre Filioque procedentem*. This being first done in Spanish and French Churches and the matter being referred to Leo III., Bishop of Rome, he absolutely concluded that no such addition ought to be tolerated, for in the acts of the Synod held at Aquisgranum we find it so determined by the Pope, upon the Conference with the legates: *Ergo, ut video, illud a vestra paternitate decernitur, ut primo illud, de quo questio agitur, de Symbolo tollatur, et tunc demum a quolibet licite ac libere, sive cantando sive tradendo, discatur et doceatur*. So one of the legates; to which Leo answered thus: *Ita procul dubio a*

*nostra parte decernitur: ita quoque ut a vestra assentiatur, a nobis, omnibus modis, suadetur.* Besides, lest the Roman Church might be accused of joining with the Spanish and French Churches in this addition, the same Pope caused the Creed publicly to be set forth in the Church, graven in silver plates, one in Latin, and another in Greek, in the same words in which the Council of Constantinople had first penned it.”

The Bishop then quotes the well known passages in which Anastasius, Peter Lombard, and Photius state this fact. He continues:

“This was the great and prudent care of Leo III. that there should be no addition made to the ancient Creed, authorized by a general Council, and received by the whole Church; and by this means he quieted all distempers for his time. But not long after, the following Popes, more in love with their own authority than desirous of the peace and unity of the Church, neglected the tables of Leo, and admitted the addition *Filioque*. This was first done in the time and by the power of Pope Nicholas I., who by the activity of Photius was condemned for it. . . . In the time of Pope John VIII in the 8<sup>th</sup> general Council, as the Greeks call it, it was declared that the addition of *Filioque* made in the Creed should be taken away.”

Having quoted Mark of Ephesus, Michael Cerularius and Theophylact to this effect, the Bishop continues:—

“Thus did the Oriental Church accuse the Occidental for adding *Filioque* to the Creed, contrary to a general Council, which had prohibited all addition and that without the least pretence of the authority of another Council; and so the schism between the Latin and the Greek Church began, and was continued—never to be ended until those words, *καὶ ἐκ τοῦ Υἱοῦ* or *Filioque*, are taken out of the Creed. The one relying upon the truth of the doctrine contained in those words and the authority of the Pope to alter anything; the other either denying or suspecting the truth of the doctrine and being very jealous for the authority of the ancient Councils. This, therefore, is much to be lamented, that the Greeks should not acknowledge the truth which was acknowledged by their ancestors, in the substance of it; and that the Latins should force the Greeks to make an addition to the Creed without as great an authority as has prohibited it, and to use that language in the expression



of this doctrine which never was used by any of the Greek Fathers.”

The Exposition of the Creed is only one among the many publications of Bishop Pearson, which numbered in all about 40. Speaking of them Dr Bentley, no mean judge, pronounced “the very dust of Bishop Pearson’s writings to be gold”. The Exposition was published in 1659. Among his other works is a series of 24 Lectures, which he delivered, as Margaret Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, in Latin. *De Deo et Attributis*, published in 1661. In 1672 he wrote a very learned and valuable *Vindiciæ Epistolarum S. Ignatii*, in which he distinguished with great acumen the interpolated and the genuine letters of Ignatius. This learned work, being written in Latin, was reprinted at Antwerp in 1698. After his death another series of his Lectures, on the Acts of the Apostles, was published, and two long Dissertations on the first Bishops of Rome, also in Latin.

The future Bishop was born in the year 1612, and educated at Eton, becoming scholar of King’s College, Cambridge, in 1632, and Fellow of the same College in 1634. In 1640 he was appointed Prebendary of Salisbury and Rector of Thorington. When the war between Charles I., and the Parliament broke out, he acted as Chaplain to the royal forces, and on the ruin of the King’s cause he withdrew to London. His first controversial writing was a preface which he contributed to Lord Falkland’s “Discourse on the Infallibility of the Church of Rome”. The Exposition of the Creed was originally delivered in the form of addresses in the Church of S. Clement’s, London, and afterwards re-written as a treatise. “It is the most perfect theological work that has ever come from an English pen”, said Alexander Knox. “It has remained without an effort made to amend or supersede it”, wrote Archdeacon Churton in 1845; “it has been continually reprinted as the storehouse and armoury of the well furnished theological student; repeatedly abridged by judicious and learned clergymen to extend its use as a manual of Christian education, and it was at an early period translated into Latin by a German scholar, Simon J. Arnold (Frankfort, 1691), whose version has been once or oftener, reprinted abroad.” On the Restoration of Charles II., Dr Pearson, having been made the Head of Jesus College, Cambridge, was selected as one of the Presbyters who should

act as representatives of any absent Bishops in the Savoy Conference between the Presbyterian and Episcopalian parties. At the same time he became Margaret Professor of Divinity in Cambridge and succeeded Dr Ferne as Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, in the next year. His *Vindiciæ Ignatianæ* was written at this time. In 1672 he was consecrated Bishop, by the Bishops of London, Rochester, Exeter and S. Asaph, and was appointed to the see of Chester. During his episcopate he still continued his literary labours while showing great activity in the government of his diocese. He died in 1685.

It remains to give a specimen or two of his Latin treatises. From one of them, headed *Ordinatio Anglicana complet totam essentiam externæ vocationis*, I select the following:

“Ad ordinationem duo spectant. Nec enim nudus ritus est sine re, nec res sola sine ritu. Ut est ritus, necessarium est symbolum gratiæ seu potestatis datæ; ut res, necessaria est collatio gratiæ seu potestatis per symbolum significatæ. Externum symbolum est impositio manuum, non quidem a Christo ipso, ut symbola duorum sacramentorum, sed ab Apostolis instituta, juxta illud S. Pauli ad Timotheum, 1 Tim. IV, 14, V, 22, et illud Act. VI, 6, de diaconis. Præter hoc symbolum ab Apostolis institutum, nullum aliud externum signum est in ordinatione necessarium. Quod observandum adversus pontificios, qui “materiam sacramenti Ordinis” statuunt esse “calicem et patinam cum pane et vino”, idque docent auctoritate Concilii Florentini, quod explicans materiam et formam ordinis sacerdotum, tantummodo facit mentionem illius traditionis calicis et illorum verborum, “Accipe potestatem offerendi etc.” Verum certum est, 1º talem ritum non fuisse ab origine institutum. 2º Eundem ritum non esse ab Ecclesia Græca usurpatum. 3º Unum ritum ab Apostolis usurpatum, esse in perpetuum sufficientem. Huic externo symbolo in ordinatione, ipsa collatio potestatis additur, idque fit his verbis conceptis, “Accipe Spiritum Sanctum, accipe potestatem ad hoc aut illud munus exsequendum in Ecclesia Dei”: juxta illud Joan. XX. *Sicut misit me Pater, ita mitto vos. Quorum peccata etc.*

Ex his duabus partibus integratur ordinatio; formula autem ordinationis Anglicanæ ex utraque constat. Continet itaque omnia quæ necessario spectant ad naturam ordinationis. Quoniam itaque forma ordinationis Anglicanæ extendat se ad omnes

ordines sacros, et contineat in se omnia quæ in unoquoque ordine necessario spectant vel ad personam ordinandam vel ad personam ordinantis vel ad naturam ordinationis; concludo ordinationem Anglicanam complere totam essentiam externæ vocationis ad ministerium.”

In an oration made before the University of Cambridge in 1669, the Bishop distinguishes and describes the Roman, the ultra-protestant or puritan, and the Anglican communions as follows:—

“Ibi (in Ecclesia Romana) ignorantia, conciliorum subinde enascentium auctoritate stipata, summæ veritatis arcem occupavit. Ibi sub veterum nomine adulterina volumina diu pro veris agnita, venerandam traditionibus ementitis ac pene Apostolicam, immo (Apocrypha sacro canoni ascripta) plane divinam, auctoritatem conciliant. Ibi in rebus minimis collocata pietas, et vana ex male conceptis formulis Deum demerendi cupiditas, et cujusdam sanctitatis ab ipsis excogitatæ inverecunda admiratio, in cultum divinum angelorum, hominum, imaginum venerationem intulerunt, et simplicissimam veræ pietatis actionem religionis accessoriæ consortio et infinita cæremoniarum mole obruerunt. Ibi exsors unius pontificis potestas reliquorum omnium antistitum jus eripuit, absorpsit; antiquorum canonum justissimam auctoritatem novitiis decretalibus minuit; et sine spe remedii saluberrimam Ecclesiæ disciplinam corrumpit.

In Ecclesiis Reformatis alia plane ac melior ratio est... Verum enimvero homines pristino corruptelarum statu exacerbat, et incredibili omnia renovandi ardore accensi, et sævissima simul adversariorum immanitate laccessiti, modum servare difficillime potuerunt. Quare, dum idololatriam extirparent, vix reverentiam, Divini Nominis cultui necessariam, retinuerunt; traditiones humanas dum ejicerent, vereor ne et apostolicas expulerint; dum cærimoniarum nimium apparatus excuterent, metuo ne Ecclesiam penitus denudarint; et dum auctoritatem hominum in fidei negotio rejicerent, SS. Patrum inconcussa dogmata et Conciliorum firmissima decreta suis placitis postposuerint.

Felix interim Anglicanæ Ecclesiæ reformatio, quæ jugi et tyrannidis non minus quam aliæ impatiens, veritatis amore non languidius fervida, errorum corruptelarumque non sequius perspicax, nullo tamen impetu temeritatis adacta, nulla novitatis libidine percita, sine tumultu, sine armis, summa auctoritate

suffulta, rei que ipsius dignitate necessitateque permota, non minus quod integrum intactumque relinqueret quam quod tolleret, quod immutaret, sollicita fuit. Sacros igitur imprimis Scripturæ codices, tanquam basin religionis instaurandæ, posuit, et omnibus propalavit. Sed ne male feriata hominum ingenia tam tremenda mysteria violarent, sapientissime præcepit “ne quis populo quicquam, tanquam ad salutem necessarium, prædicaret, quod antiquissimi Patres ex eisdem ante non collegerunt.” Tria præterea symbola, certissima antiquæ fidei criteria, admisit. Admonuit etiam “vere Generalia Concilia esse sine controversia admittenda, et quicquid iis contrarium doceretur ac pervicaciter defenderetur, pro hæresi puniendum esse”. Sacros Ordines, ab ipsis Apostolis institutos, promovit; disciplinam vetustissimam, aut adhuc obtinentem retinuit, aut ante collapsam restitutum iri exoptavit.”

*Blickling*, Nov. 1899.

F. MEYRICK.

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