



## Tracts for Our Times

### *I Believe in One God*

A Short Commentary on the Creed: Parts 1-3

Tract 6

3/4 July  
2010

In the early Church catechumens received instruction about their faith both before and after baptism. During Lent they were prepared for the Easter Vigil at which they were initiated into the Church through the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist.

The full meaning and effect of this initiation was explained to them in a post-Easter catechesis, sometimes called '*mystagogical catechesis*'.

At the heart of Christian initiation was the confession of faith through a baptismal creed. The earliest forms of these are found in the New Testament itself and later they took on the function of ensuring that people knew what the orthodox (correct) faith required (as compared with heresies such as Arianism).

The Nicene creed, which we still use in our liturgies, developed from such baptismal creeds, expanded and developed through the teaching of the great councils of the Church.

We offer you now such a '*mystagogical catechesis*', reflecting in detail on the mysteries of faith as expressed in the Creed, phrase by phrase. This Short Commentary on the Creed that will take us systematically through this summary or 'symbol' of our faith.

#### ***1: "I believe ..."***

The Creed is a love song. In it we praise the One we love for his qualities and for the things he has done.

The Creed is a love song particularly and expressly in praise of the Trinity as we recall in turn the attributes and actions that we appropriate to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Everything done by God is done by the whole Trinity: yet there is something appropriate in assigning the work of creation to the Father, the work of salvation to the Son, and the work of sanctification to the Holy Spirit.



---

Most of what we know, we believe. There is little enough that any of us knows ‘scientifically’, (i.e. through personal experience and experiment). For the most part we accept the word of reliable experts and authorities and we do it in all areas of life.

There is nothing unreasonable about this: in fact it seems perfectly reasonable that we should accept the word of trustworthy authorities.

“Faith” in the theological sense has something in common with belief in this more ordinary sense, but it is also distinctively different. This is because the trustworthy authority in question is God Himself.

This makes our theological faith at once more mysterious (because God and everything to do with God is mysterious) and more certain (for what authority is more trustworthy than God).

The great theologians were well aware of this two-sided character of faith, that it is at once fragile, because it is a kind of dark knowledge, and strong, because although it is a feeble hold on truth (from our point of view) the truth on which it is a feeble hold is God who is Truth Himself.

So we believe people. I believe my friend when she tells me that something has happened, because she is a sane and reliable person and I have no reason to doubt her word.

We also believe things. I believe that there is a God, for example, and that Jesus Christ has, through His death, saved all humanity. These are not just opinions: to believe such things means to commit ourselves to their being true even though we don’t have the clinching evidence for this that our minds would prefer to have.

And we believe IN people. St Augustine makes much of this sense of faith and St Thomas Aquinas follows him. We can break up the Latin word *credere* (to believe) to mean *cor dare*, (to give one’s heart). When people marry this is the kind of faith that enables them to make the commitment involved. It is faith in this sense that allows us to recite the Creed as a love song.

*To say ‘we believe’ then means ‘we give our hearts to God the Father, Creator .... To God the Son, Redeemer ... to God the Holy Spirit, giver of life ....’*

Can we know that we have faith, or more specifically “the” faith? NO—it is part of faith itself, part of the same mystery: you can only believe that you believe.

“ The Creed is  
a love song.  
In it we praise the  
one we love for his  
qualities and for the  
things He  
has done. ”

---

To claim anything more would be idolatrous. Indeed it is why ‘fundamentalist’ believing unsettles people (and is in fact destructive to faith), because it forgets that faith is not so much my hold on God’s Truth, as it is the hold of God’s Truth on me—humanly fragile, infinitely powerful.

2: (I believe) ... in one God...

The profession of faith in one God—that God is unique and there is no other—stands not only as the first affirmation of the Creed, but also as the most important. This is because all the other things that we believe as Christians flow from this first radical assertion of monotheism.

The belief in one God (as opposed to many gods) represents a point of important continuity between the faith of the Old Testament and the faith of Christians. It is in the Old Testament that we glimpse a people coming to recognise over time that their God is not merely a localised God, (i.e. a God only for Israel or a God only for Egypt), but rather THE God for all humanity and of all creation.

We see this in the book of the prophet Isaiah when God proclaims, ‘Turn to me and you will be saved, all you ends of the earth, for I am God and there is no other’ (Isaiah 45:22) This invitation to turn to the one God requires of humanity a refusal to idolize or to deify all other forces, for example, water and the sun, or more dangerous today: sex, power and money, which we can so readily begin to turn into little gods and to worship slavishly.

In fact, the biblical confession in the one God has been described as a moment of extreme significance in the liberation of humanity from all those forces which if not seen in their proper context can easily engulf us.

“ **Belief in one God requires us to recognize that all that is comes**

The early Church was characterised to a large extent by the refusal of many Christians to worship any power that was not the one God. *Belief in one God requires us to recognise that all that is comes from Him.*

” Many of the great Christian thinkers of the past, such as St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas, argued that the order and unity of nature point to the unity of the Creator.

Acknowledging in this way that all creation has its origin in the One Source lets us perceive not only the essential unity of humanity, but also allows us to regard the everyday things around us as somehow pointing to God. And just as importantly, accepting that all we have comes from the one saving God means that our Christian lives ought to be characterised by an attitude of praise, thanksgiving and trust.

### 3: (I believe in) ...the Father...

There are three senses in which God may be said to be 'Father'. Each one revealing a deeper reality of the life of God.

The first references we find of God as Father in Scripture come in the Pentateuch at the beginning of the Old Testament. Here we find references to God as Father, where 'Father' seems to convey a sense that God is the origin of all creation, without whom nothing can have existence. In the Book of Deuteronomy we read how Moses saw the Father's act of creation as an act which sets up a relationship between God and creation (32:6-9)

The second sense in which God is Father, is an extension of the first, and is revealed to Moses in the giving of the Law. The special bond between the Father and the people of Israel is thus revealed by the covenant which God has with His people, a people considered by God as His 'first born Son' (Exodus 4:22) Thus we have a deeper sense of God's love, and learn something of God as a God who calls His people into communion with Him.

However, it is Christ that we find the third, most profound, and perhaps most surprising revelation of God as Father. In the Gospels, perhaps especially in the Gospel of John, we see how often Jesus refers to God as Father: He prays to the Father, and He gives us the Prayer which expresses all that prayer should be: 'Our Father'.

So it is clear that God's Fatherhood is key to what is revealed by Jesus.

Then what kind of Fatherhood is this? From what is revealed by Jesus of the Father, we may see that 'Father' expresses a relationship, a love shared between the Father and the Son.

But, astonishingly, as sons of God through Christ, we too are brought into this relationship—we too are called to intimacy with the Father. It is through this intimacy that we are drawn into prayer to the Father, a prayer which dares to call Him 'ABBA', yet a prayer which stands in awe of whom it is we address—the Creator of all that is, the God who spoke to Moses and to Abraham, the God who sent His Son to die for us, that we might have life in Him.✠



*"The following Tracts were published with the object of contributing something towards the practical revival of doctrines held by the great divines of our faith."*

This was the intention of Cardinal Newman and his companions  
(known as the Oxford Tractarians) when they began publishing their *Tracts for the Times*.

The Port Elizabeth Oratory, faithful to the Magisterium of the Catholic Church  
and the spirit of Saint Philip Neri, hope to contribute something to the  
faith and understanding of the People of God in Port Elizabeth,  
conforming their hearts and minds ever more closely to the Person of Jesus Christ.