

Are Christian **CreeDs** Just “Finger-posts”? Is Ultimate Truth Something Else/More?

Our CreeDs, And The Whole of the Truth

I’ve recently been reading about the ‘Unitarian controversy’ that rocked Liverpool Cathedral in the years 1933-4, occasioned by the invitation to a prominent Unitarian minister to preach at a service there (Unitarians deny the Trinitarian understanding of the nature of God which arose from the Council of Nicaea (AD 325) which produced the ‘Nicene Creed’ we use today).

At the time, the Rev. Charles E. Raven (former staff member at the Cathedral) produced a book which, while not directly referring to the controversy, wrote much about the Christian adherence to specific formulae and statements of belief, as in the historic CreeDs. He referred to them as just “finger-posts” pointing to Christian truth, not “boundary-fences” (*Liverpool Cathedral. An impression of its early years*, 1933, p. 17). Raven seemed to be suggesting that Christians can believe other than, or go beyond – as he might have put it – specific beliefs and ideas that could receive definition in the form of objective statements.

Many people, of course, think that way today; indeed, it has been said that even among senior clergy, adherence to such statements as those of the Church of England’s *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion* (late-16<sup>th</sup> century) is rarely to be found. In 1933, the possibility was that some in the Church of England, leaders and flock, might have wished to move in the direction of something outside the position of their Church, towards something like Unitarianism; today, of course, this “liberal” position (as it may have been termed even in 1933) might lead Anglicans to see truth and salvation in such things as other religions or none – things have moved, since Raven’s time, into regions of belief that Raven might have been horrified by (but nonetheless, in some peoples’ view, a road he might already have set his foot on – and also many others at the time, of course). A “liberalising” position always has dangers, I would suggest; you cannot control – or even predict – where it might inevitably lead you, or your successors.

Must Christians be “bound” by historic creeDs (and does it make them “extremist” or “fundamentalist” if they do so?). Many who would answer *no* will often point to the perverting “political factors” of the time-bound decisions that were taken at such as the Council of Nicaea, and exhort us that times have changed, the social/political conditions of the fourth century have long gone, and today, with modern *mores*, and knowledge, we don’t have to be enslaved to outdated ideas – etc.

This, of course, is to take a purely-this-worldly view of the creation of Christian beliefs and ideas, and emphatically to deny that, in the fourth century and every other century, the Church was guided by the Holy Spirit. Scepticism regarding any kind of supernaturalist belief (such as belief in Jesus’s resurrection) quickly follows, and thence, the whole of Christianity as a non-this-worldly belief-system, quickly unravels and one is left, simply, with materialism of one kind or another.

So would I say, to Raven or anyone else, that the Trinitarian formula (and much else in the creeDs) is the whole of eternal truth, and can never be moved beyond, that there is no more that can ever be known or revealed – that the human mind is fully capable of knowing, and defining, everything? This might be something of an unwise thing to assert. What I would say is this: that in the fullness of

eternity, more may indeed be revealed to us and become apparent, that then, or there, our minds may be made wide open, and that now we may be seeing but as through a glass darkly; but in the meantime it is right and proper, I consider, to cling to that which God has chosen, now, to reveal to us.

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