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The Age of Athanasius: The Church of England and the Athanasian Creed, 1870-1873

Abstract

The publication of the Fourth Report of the Ritual Commission in 1870 occasioned intense debate over the position of the Athanasian Creed in the liturgy of the Church of England. This article reconstructs the course of that controversy, focusing particularly on the centrality of historical argument to the speeches, letters, and pamphlets in which critics and defenders of the formulary sought to stabilise Christian orthodoxy and define Anglican identity in a progressive environment. The episode draws attention, first, to the continuing and underestimated centrality of patristic scholarship to questions of church reform in Victorian England, whilst also pointing towards the eventual decline of the textual and antiquarian approach to apologetics that had characterised Anglicanism since the Reformation. Post-Reformation Anglican history, secondly, was itself integral to participants' articulation of religious division, suggesting that conventional understandings of "church parties" in the Victorian Church of England should accordingly be revised.

Keywords: Victorian England; Church of England; church fathers; historiography; Book of Common Prayer; nineteenth century; church parties; Oxford Movement

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1. Introduction

Charles Kingsley, in a letter read out to a London meeting in January 1873, declared that "I have long held that the general use and understanding of the Athanasian Creed by the Church of England would exercise hereafter (as it has exercised already) a most potent and salutary influence, not only on the theology, but on the ethics, and on the science, physical and metaphysical, of all English-speaking nations."[1] Kingsley's audience had gathered at St James's Hall in order to help bring an end to a period of sustained attacks on the position of the Athanasian Creed in the liturgy of the Church of England. The fact that Kingsley, a clergyman and popular novelist associated then and since with F. D. Maurice and the Anglican "broad church" movement, should have written so highly of a lengthy doctrinal formulary betrays the extent to which contemporaries invested the creed with a complex significance which its more recent obscurity has worked to conceal from historical perspective. Commanded to be read in churches on thirteen feast days in the year by the Book of Common Prayer, the creed – also known as the *Quicunque vult* after the opening words of the Latin text – had been a source of periodic unrest in the Church of England since the first shoots of rational theology began to push against its minute dogmatism in the seventeenth century.[2] But it was during the Victorian period that debates over its status attained their broadest ever scholarly and public reach, before dwindling into a deep silence early in the next century. This article asks why the Athanasian Creed drew such energetic engagement from Victorian critics, in order to re-examine the interconnections between historical thought,

[1] *Guardian*, 5 Feb. 1873, [169].

[2] According to the uncertain lights of modern scholarship, the Athanasian Creed probably took shape in southern Gaul (in Latin) around or somewhat earlier than the year 500; the identity of its author remains unknown: J. N. D. Kelly, *The Athanasian Creed. The Paddock Lectures for 1962-3* (London, 1964), 109-124.

"party" divisions, and theological transformation in the Church of England in the nineteenth century.

In particular, the essay reconstructs the dynamics and wider implications of the period between the publication of the Fourth Report of the royal commission on ritual in September 1870, and the eventual defeat of reforming initiatives concerning the Athanasian Creed in 1872 and 1873. In an environment where the constitutional position of the established church and the intellectual credibility of Christian orthodoxy already seemed insecure, the unfolding struggle reanimated centuries-old divisions in English religion hinging on the formulary's "damnatory clauses". These declared at the beginning and the end of its 42 verses that those who did not "hold the Catholick faith" would "without doubt … perish everlastingly" and "cannot be saved".[3] Whilst the creed also provoked unease in other churches at different times, a focus on its ramifications for the Church of England in a period of particular stress enables a larger challenge to be posed to modern students of nineteenth-century religious history.[4] The fact that the latter have generally passed over the prolific contemporary commentary to which the episode gave rise, suggests that the analytical frameworks they commonly employ do not adequately take account of important features of Victorian culture, and are in need of wider revision. An intense debate over the content and status of dogmatic

[3] The full text of the creed according to the 1662 Book of Common Prayer may be found in *The Book of Common Prayer. The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, ed. Brian Cummings (Oxford, 2011), 257-259.

[4] The fact that the creed should have become divisive in England, especially, was in part a function of the earlier history of its reception. Never used in Orthodox offices, the creed became part of the Latin office of Prime across Europe from the ninth century, although twentieth-century popes reduced the regularity of its recitation. Lutherans and Calvinists accorded recognition to the creed at the Reformation. But amongst reformed denominations it was only in the Church of England, and its several branches, that the *Quicunque* remained in liturgical and increasingly contentious use, its presence in Edward VI's first Prayer Book (1549) and subsequent revisions possibly deriving from its earlier usage in the Sarum rite: Kelly, *Athanasian Creed* (see above, n. 2), 35-51; A. E. Burn, 'Quicunque vult', in George Harford and Morley Stevenson (eds), *The Prayer Book Dictionary* (London, 1925), 637-641. The American Episcopal Church decided to remove the creed from its liturgy in 1786, whilst in 1876 the Synod of the newly disestablished Church of Ireland voted to delete the rubric enjoining its use from its version of the Prayer Book: William Stevens Perry, *The History of the American Episcopal Church 1587-1883*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1885), 2:70; C. D. Webster, 'The Reconstruction of the Church', in Walter Alison Phillips (ed.), *History of the Church of Ireland from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, 3 vols. (London, 1933), 3:383. But these episodes, together with the changing position of the creed in Roman Catholic liturgy, lie beyond the scope of this article.

theology, issuing in a late if ambiguous victory for doctrinal conservatives, is hard to reconcile with standard accounts of religious change in nineteenth-century Britain, which typically emphasise growing acceptance of critical understandings of the bible; the spread of incarnationalist collectivism; or gathering secularisation.[5] But if it is important to seek to read Victorian religious and intellectual history forwards from contemporaries' own experience, rather than backwards from vantage points that can appear too sweepingly retrospective, it becomes necessary to consider whether the argument over the Athanasian Creed (as with comparable episodes) amounted to more than a forgettable artefact of a lost world of ecclesiastical politics.

This article contends that it did, by focusing on the distinctively historical shape a controversy over an urgently practical and politicised question of liturgical reform assumed. The Victorian clergy, in common with their contemporaries, widely believed that in historical enquiry, and reflection on the moral status of inherited tradition, lay the keys to the solution of modern theological difficulties.[6] The contentions over the Athanasian Creed reveal that ideas of historical identity were integral to nineteenth-century Anglican representations of orthodoxy, and that historical debate – no less than anxieties surrounding natural science – correspondingly drove fundamental changes in how Victorians articulated and justified

[5] Bernard M. G. Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Victorian Age: a Survey from Coleridge to Gore*, 2nd ed. (London, 1995); Peter Hinchliff, *God and History: Aspects of British Theology, 1875-1914* (Oxford, 1992); David Thompson, *Cambridge Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Enquiry, Controversy and Truth* (Aldershot, 2008); Daniel Inman, *The Making of Modern English Theology: God and the Academy at Oxford, 1833-1945* (Minneapolis, 2014); Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: the Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford, 1988); Dominic Erdozain, *The Problem of Pleasure: Sport, Recreation and the Crisis of Victorian Religion* (Woodbridge, 2010).

[6] On the relationship between historical and religious debate in the period, see David Gange and Michael Ledger-Lomas (eds), *Cities of God: the Bible and Archaeology in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 2013); Peter Nockles and Vivienne Westbrook (eds), *Reinventing the Reformation in the Nineteenth Century: a Cultural History*, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 90 (2014); J. M. R. Bennett, "The British Luther Commemoration of 1883-1884 in European context", *Historical Journal* 58 (2015), 543-564. On historical study and the Church of England specifically, see James Kirby, *Historians and the Church of England: Religion and Historical Scholarship, 1870-1920* (Oxford, 2016); J. M. R. Bennett, *The Victorian High Church and the Era of the Great Rebellion* (Oxford, 2011); Duncan Forbes, *The Liberal Anglican Idea of History* (Cambridge, 1952) has not staled.

religious belief. The past here in question was not primarily the biblical record, but ecclesiastical history. In particular, the Anglican tradition of patristic scholarship, and competing conceptions of the historical identity of the Church of England since the Reformation, shaped a practical debate over credal reform in ways that should significantly modify historians' broader understanding of the lines of intellectual division over religious questions in Victorian England.

First, the pre-eminently patristic nature of the controversy calls attention to the vital yet neglected significance of the church fathers in nineteenth-century religious debate. In one respect, the importance commentators attached to textual analysis of the creed represented a late manifestation of the early modern Anglican scholarly tradition recently recaptured by Jean-Louis Quantin. In another, patristic inquiry was also a notable source of intellectual dynamism. For clerics' attempts, in a newer procedure, also to *historicise* the creed disclose that the way in which the fathers' relevance was construed was changing in ways premonitory of its twentieth-century erosion. Church of England clergy in the age of Darwin still widely assumed, as they had done since the Reformation, that doctrinal discussion must involve careful examination of the texts of Christian antiquity. But those who drew the conclusion from such analysis that there was no such thing as an authoritative patristic "tradition", now attacked the creed with a historicist vehemence and systematism previously unknown within Anglican clerical culture, seeking to classify it not as a faithful and patristic but as an immoral and "medieval" text. High churchmen, inclined to uphold such a tradition, defended the creed's claim to express the mind of the ancient church. But they did so in terms that made an appeal to tradition dependent on the connected, but distinct, witness of conscience and poetics. The fact that the debate over the creed was never subsequently repeated suggests that the ingredients of the later relative decline of patristic debate in Anglican apologetics may have been present even at the moment of the creed's greatest

public interest. In this respect, an episode that must be situated within the particularities of the Victorian period should also be placed in a larger perspective. For it also belonged to a longer-term process stretching back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, whereby the centrality of patristic tradition to claims to doctrinal authority in Anglican theology first gradually solidified, becoming almost a point of consensus at the Restoration, but which after several distinctive attempts to defend or renew it – latterly in the Oxford Movement's *Tracts for the Times* – slowly moved to the margins.[7]

Victorian clerics entering the lists around 1870 were keenly aware of the positions their predecessors had adopted concerning the Athanasian Creed in the context of those larger arguments about the relationship between patristic authority and Anglican orthodoxy. In the Reformation period, when its high status had become enshrined in the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Book of Common Prayer, the creed became a badge of the Church of England's primitive orthodoxy in the face of Roman Catholic and puritan assaults. But in the seventeenth century, anti-Calvinist theologians such as Jeremy Taylor and William Chillingworth, seeking to end violent disputes over alleged doctrinal inessentials, had been among the first in England publicly to doubt the authority – and in Taylor's case Athanasius's own authorship – of this paradigmatically exclusivist text, positions taken further during the Enlightenment.[8] The close connection between nineteenth-century Anglican identities, and invocations of these post-Reformation precedents, constituted the second significant historical dimension of the controversy.

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[7] Jean-Louis Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian Antiquity. The Construction of a Confessional Identity in the 17th Century* (Oxford, 2009), [1]-21. Quantin points out that Anglican (and especially Anglo-Catholic) writers still commonly maintain that the theological principle of an appeal to the fathers is integral to an Anglican *via media*; but it should be noted that the authors typically held up as instantiating that principle wrote before the twentieth century: see for example Andrew McGowan, "Anglicanism and the fathers", in Mark Chapman, Sathianathan Clarke and Martyn Percy (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Anglican Studies* (Oxford, 2016), [107]-124.

[8] Quantin, *Church of England* (see above, n. 7), esp. 44-47, 227-228, 242-246, 288-290.

This bears significantly on the problem of how "church parties" should be understood. Adopting a usage that became popular in religious journalism from the 1850s onwards, historians regard the nineteenth-century Church of England as having been divided between "high", "broad", and "low" church parties.[9] Viewed in these simplistic terms, the debate over the creed played itself out chiefly as a conflict between "broad" churchmen who sought to make the national church more comprehensive and intellectually progressive, and "high" churchmen who sought to maintain traditional usages; whilst "low"-church evangelicals were more divided on the question. Whilst such terms remain indispensable for operational purposes of summary description, it is important to recognise that competing ideas of historical tradition were notably more important than party labels in shaping how churchmen defined their own ecclesiastical identities, in this as in other Victorian ecclesiastical controversies. "Broad" and "high" churchmen preferred to think of themselves in terms, not of party, but of precedent; whilst differences among "broad" churchmen essentially consisted in divergent understandings of the relationship between doctrine, history, and Anglican comprehensiveness. Adherents of conflicting ecclesiastical tendencies sought to claim, in mutually incompatible ways, that they represented an historic Anglican tradition that was in reality unitary and normative, whilst using party designations in a largely negative sense to stress the alleged aberrations of others from that imagined inheritance. Whereas high churchmen identified with the orthodox labours of Richard Hooker (1554-1600) and Daniel Waterland (1683-1740), more radical broad churchmen such as A. P. Stanley stressed the continuity of their case with that put forward by seventeenth-century rational theologians.

Stanley's historically-articulated emphasis on the need for an externally comprehensive church, distinguished his own conception of Anglican tradition from the more

[9] On the origins of "church parties", see Arthur Burns, "Introduction" to idem (ed.), "W. J. Conybeare: 'Church Parties'", in Stephen Taylor (ed.), *From Cranmer to Davidson. A Church of England Miscellany* (Woodbridge, 1999), [215]-252.

inwardly doctrinal one held by a different kind of broad churchman, F. D. Maurice. The argument put forward by Maurice and other, more cautious reformists that the Athanasian Creed represented the divine voice in history, and that its positive doctrinal content might be distanced from astringent readings of its damnatory clauses in an environment where belief in eternal punishment was generally waning, brought them closer in places to the Tractarians' successors than they were to Stanley.[10] Divisions within, as well as differences between, church parties over the creed primarily expressed deeper conflicts over the authority of church tradition for a present that increasingly privileged conscience and subjective experience over textualism alone. Related signs that conflict within theological culture might, in the face of secularising dangers, be giving way to intellectual convergence across church parties were also embedded in the texture of the controversy.

2. The Ritual Commission and the creed

In the 1860s the Athanasian Creed resumed its position at the centre of English ecclesiastical debate which it had intermittently occupied since the seventeenth century. Gathering theological doubts over the text had first found practical expression in 1689, when a church reform commission – concerned to render the national church more welcoming to dissenters following the Glorious Revolution – had attempted to insert a rubric into the Prayer Book explaining that the creed's "condemning clauses are to be understood as relating only to those, who obstinately deny the substance of the Christian faith".[11] In a remarkable

[10] The distinction made here within the broad church supports the analysis of Jeremy Morris, "The Spirit of Comprehension: Examining the Broad Church Synthesis in England", *Anglican and Episcopal History* 75 (2006), 423-443. On the decline of hell, see Michael Wheeler, *Heaven, Hell, and the Victorians* (Cambridge, 1994); Geoffrey Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians: a Study of Nineteenth-Century Controversies Concerning Eternal Punishment and the Future Life* (Oxford, 1974).

[11] Quoted in George Miller, *Observations on the Doctrines of Christianity, in Reference to Arianism, Illustrating the Moderation of the Established Church* (London, 1825), 163-164.

anticipation of what was to take place nearly two centuries later, the proposal failed in the face of opposition from the lower house of the Church of England's clerical assembly, Convocation, which was dominated by provincial clergy of high church, high Tory sympathies. During the age of Enlightenment, the creed's Trinitarianism presented a large target to Arians and deists, prompting the orthodox Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, Daniel Waterland, to compose a study vindicating the creed's scriptural and patristic character. He ascribed its authorship to the saintly Hilary of Arles, a prelate with commendably Augustinian credentials, thereby dating its emergence to an early period of between AD 426 and 430.[12] The nineteenth century ignited the lingering, and still combustible residues of those conflicts.

The age of evangelicalism, inclining those touched by it to force rather than avoid difficult questions, provided the climate in which the status of the Athanasian Creed steadily became both an intrinsically contentious theological issue once again, and the symbol of wider anxieties. Tractarians – concerned to assert the authority of the Church of England's rubrics and the fathers against a "march of mind" that had caused the creed to fall out of fashion in the eighteenth century – promoted its greater use from the 1830s.[13] The Oxford Movement's assertion of the apostolicity of the church, and the sacredness of orthodoxy, whilst nonconformity on the one hand and open unbelief on the other grew in respectability, fed doubts over the political and intellectual viability of the national church which had grown acute by the final third of the century. These trends focused attention on the creed to a newly intense degree. Liberal and some evangelical Anglicans, especially once political nonconformity came into its own after the Reform Act of 1867, looked to the lay voice of

[12] Daniel Waterland, *A Critical History of the Athanasian Creed* (Cambridge, 1724), 118-119, 125-133; Brian Young, "Waterland, Daniel (1683-1740)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004) [hereafter "*ODNB*"].

[13] John Hunt to [Benjamin Harrison], 15 Sep. 1884, Lambeth Palace Library, London [hereafter "LPL"], Benson papers, MS 37, fols. 16-17; [Thomas Keble], 'Richard Nelson. II.', *Tracts for the Times*, 6 vols. (London, 1833-1841), 1:no. 22.

Parliament to broaden the Church of England and so stave off disestablishment. High churchmen, however, saw the revival of Convocation at Canterbury in 1851 and York in 1860 as creating a clerical jurisdiction capable of protecting the spiritual independence of the church from such "Erastian" control.[14] On an international plane, the opening of the First Vatican Council in 1869 – issuing in the promulgation of the doctrine of papal infallibility in 1870 – caused English churchmen to reflect anew on their own identity in the context of what often appeared to them to be the aggressive and irrationalist character of the European Roman Catholic revival.[15] The future of English religious life and the shape of its church were thus once again coming to seem deeply uncertain.

The convening of the Royal Commission on ritual by Lord Derby's third ministry in June 1867 triggered the gravitation of constitutional and theological unrest towards the simmering question of the Athanasian Creed. Although the commission's origins lay in pressure applied to the government by opponents of Anglican ritualism, its wide-ranging brief to investigate "the rubrics, orders, and directions for regulating the course and conduct of public worship" brought one of the most potent symbols of the national church's doctrinal exclusivity within its remit. Derby hoped that the commission, whose members included lawyers and politicians as well as clerics, would fairly represent different shades of Anglican opinion.[16] The result was that its recommendations on the Athanasian Creed were ambiguous when they appeared in September 1870. Much like their predecessors of 1689, the commissioners formally endorsed the retention of the Prayer Book rubric enjoining use of the creed. At the same time, they added that an explanatory note should be introduced into the Prayer Book to the effect "that the condemnations in this Confession of Faith are to be no otherwise understood than as a solemn warning of the peril of those who wilfully reject the

[14] Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 2 vols. (London, 1966-1970), 2:359-365.
[15] Michael Wheeler, *The Old Enemies. Catholic and Protestant in Nineteenth-Century English Culture* (Cambridge, 2006), 245-272.
[16] R. C. D. Jasper, *Prayer Book Revision in England 1800-1900* (London, 1954), 92-102.

Catholic Faith".[17] The proposal for such an amendment had first been moved by the Tractarian sympathiser, Frederick Lygon, Earl Beauchamp, as a relatively conservative compromise measure.[18] But seventeen of the 27 signatories registered their objections to their own report's conclusions on the matter, citing several grounds, in a lengthy appendix. The Anglo-Irish lawyer and evangelical, Joseph Napier, suggested that the commission had acted *ultra vires* in seeking to explain the meaning of the creed: a position pointing to divisions over the competence of the secular authorities in spiritual questions that were soon to become acute.[19] Clerical dissentients were bolder. The ancient historian, translator of Schleiermacher, and bishop of St David's, Connop Thirlwall, and the new archbishop of Canterbury, Archibald Campbell Tait, proposed that the creed should no longer be used in public services.[20] Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, a popular historian, dean of Westminster from 1864 to 1881, and a tireless advocate of reducing doctrinal barriers to membership of the Church of England, called for the use of the creed to be made optional, a step he appears to have thought would have the effect of ending its public use.[21] By forcing the question of the creed on to public notice, whilst disagreeing among themselves over how to answer it, the commissioners both sparked a major public controversy and encouraged reformists to seek other means of shaping its outcome.

3. History and criticism

Although the commission is naturally most often remembered for its treatment of ritualism, its recommendations respecting the Athanasian Creed overshadowed the ritual question in

[17] *Fourth Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Rubrics, Orders, and Directions for Regulating the Course and Conduct of Public Worship, & c.* (London, 1870), 13.
[18] *Fourth Report* (see above, n. 17), 118-122.
[19] Ibid., xiii; D. Hogan, 'Napier, Joseph (1804-1882)', *ODNB*.
[20] *Fourth Report* (see above, n. 17), viii-xxviii.
[21] See John Witheridge, *Excellent Dr Stanley: the Life of Dean Stanley of Westminster* (Norwich, 2013), 114-115, 277-279.

public controversy for the next two years. Just as Protestant dissatisfaction over the commission's stipulations regarding ritual fed into the campaign for what became the Public Worship Regulation Act of 1874, the body's provocatively opaque conclusions respecting the Athanasian Creed spurred reformists to appeal to Parliament and the wider nation so as to mobilise support for more far-reaching change.[22] As the commission deliberated, and in the aftermath of the publication of its recommendations, an unstable coalescence of Anglican clerics and interested writers began to ascribe pivotal importance to securing the alteration of the creed's status.

A watching journalist wrote of a gathering conflict between the initiatives of "the Broad Church party" and resistance from "the High and Low Church parties".[23] Such summary descriptions, however, tended to erase significant disagreements between reform-minded clergy, none of whom affirmatively identified with a party. Central to most reformist argument was the proposition that the creed's damnatory clauses circumscribed God's mercy, and effected an unchristian elevation of precisionist theology over ethics and Christian charity which unjustifiably narrowed the ends and breadth of Christ's church. This construal of the creed, circulating since the seventeenth century, was given a peculiarly Victorian inflection by the emphatic stress radical critics, pre-eminently A. P. Stanley, placed on its questionable historical origins. They connectedly emphasised the disharmony between the authority of conscience and the corrupting dishonesty of forcing clergy to say, and congregations to endorse, words which the progress of opinion had exposed as untrue. But alternative readings of history, which assumed a less problematic if still distinctly strained relationship between ecclesiastical tradition and the witness of conscience, appealed to those

[22] G. J. Cuming, *A History of Anglican Liturgy*, 2nd ed. (London, 1984), 151-160; James Bentley, *Ritualism and Politics in Victorian Britain: the Attempt to Legislate for Belief* (Oxford, 1978).
[23] *Examiner*, 6 Jan. 1872, 3.

who stopped short of joining Stanley's calls for outright disuse of the creed – the vehemence of which made more cautious reformists uneasy.

Timed to coincide with the report to which he contributed, though from which he in this crucial respect dissented, Stanley published a signed assault on the creed along these lines in the August 1870 number of the liberal Protestant *Contemporary Review*. Stanley would insist that the ornaments rubric, so offensive to Protestant campaigners, paled in significance when set against the issues raised by the Athanasian Creed.[24] His antipathy centred, as was traditional among clerics who sought greater latitude in the church, on the damnatory clauses. Their effect was to "exalt correct belief into the first of virtues, and to consider erroneous belief as the worst of crimes".[25] In a way that also characterised his writings on other subjects, Stanley advanced an ethical critique by means of historical analysis.[26] The creed was no production of Athanasius, he wrote, but occupied the lesser status of a later psalm or hymn – a demotion common among the text's critics. Its elevation to the level of a catholic creed had been an imposture of the Middle Ages, directly analogous to "the false Decretals of the early Popes, or early Emperors, which formed the basis of the Pontifical power".[27] Stanley reserved judgement as to the precise attribution of the creed, reflecting the fact that the rising controversy had encouraged other scholars to reopen a question largely closed since Waterland's day. If Waterland had been correct, then the reception of the creed by the church was a monument to the Frankish king Clovis's victory over the Arian Visigoths, he wrote. But Stanley was also intrigued by a theory recently sketched out, and soon to be more fully developed, by a former fellow of Jesus College, Oxford, Edmund Ffoulkes. Ffoulkes, who had converted to Roman Catholicism in 1855 only

[24] A. P. Stanley, *The Athanasian Creed. With a Preface on the General Recommendations of the Ritual Commission* (London, 1871), vii (Pusey House, Oxford, pamphlet collection [hereafter "PHP"], 3798).
[25] Idem, "The Athanasian Creed", *Contemporary Review* 15 (1870), [133]-166, there 158.
[26] Cf. idem, *Lectures on the History of the Church of Scotland* (London, 1872).
[27] Idem, "The Athanasian Creed" (see above, n. 25), [133]-134.

to join the Church of England once again on the eve of the proclamation of papal infallibility in 1870, argued that the creed had been the product of collusion between Charlemagne and the popes with a view to entrenching the growing Latin despotism over the universal church. It did so by asserting on pain of perdition the truth of the western doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit.[28] Ffoulkes drew the conclusion that it was a specimen of political religion, akin to the self-aggrandising machinations of present-day popes, of which the church had to be purified. In either case, held Stanley, the damnatory clauses recorded the creed's character as a relic of "the old days of fierce haters and plain speakers".[29]

Stanley assumed that few now accepted these sentences in their literal signification. Their presence in public services therefore undermined religious truthfulness, by compelling Anglican ministers to recite medieval words which they did not believe, and which they too often explained away by converting in their own minds an invocation of eternal punishment into a mere warning. This phenomenon tended to divorce clerical thinking from that of the laity, who were not comparably schooled in the qualifications and evasions which their ministers were wont to apply to the clauses.[30] Stanley hoped that by removing "the first and foremost stumbling-block" in English church services to young men considering ordination, an important source of friction between the progressive Christian intellect of the wider nation and church tradition would be removed.[31] Whilst Stanley was most exercised by the creed's exclusivist scaffolding, he also hinted at dissatisfaction with its exposition of the Trinity, which lacked "humility and hesitancy" in laying down an exact phraseology concerning "the

[28] Ibid., 148. Stanley did not give the title of the work to which he referred, but the theory can be seen in germ in Edmund S. Ffoulkes, *The Church's Creed or the Crown's Creed? A Letter to the Most Rev. Archbishop Manning, etc., etc.* (London, 1868), [1]-20. It received its full statement in idem, *The Athanasian Creed: by whom Written and by whom Published* (London, 1871), 250-276, 373-375. See also "Ffoulkes, Edmund Salusbury", in F. Boase, *Modern English Biography Containing Many Thousand Concise Memoirs of Persons who Have Died between the Years 1851-1900*, 6 vols. (London, 1965), 5:290.
[29] Stanley, "The Athanasian Creed" (see above, n. 25), 157.
[30] Ibid., 152-161.
[31] Ibid., 161-166.

Three Hypostases and the One Substance of the Divine Being".[32] It was intimations of this kind that raised the possibility that some of the creed's detractors were disputing not solely the propriety of laying down the conditions of salvation in a creed, but also the necessity of Trinitarian belief to the church. This perception was to unsettle not solely the creed's forthright defenders but also other critics of its public usage.

Advocates of disuse did not set the Athanasian Creed alone in the perspective of history, but also their own attempt to remove it, for which they claimed a liberal descent from the Church of England's historic character.[33] Stanley disclaimed present-day "party warfare", and instead placed himself in the tradition of those "best and wisest" seventeenth-century divines such as Jeremy Taylor and William Chillingworth who had recognised the creed's failings, as had their nineteenth-century successor and Stanley's beloved teacher, Thomas Arnold. England's sixteenth-century reformers, under pressure to vindicate their orthodoxy, had regrettably not been able to see the creed for what it was, Stanley reflected.[34] Thomas Fowler, a fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford, and pseudonymous author of an 1867 essay calling for the creed's excision from the Articles and liturgy which Stanley commended in his own, similarly invoked "the saintly Jeremy Taylor", who had maintained that the Apostles' Creed alone was a sufficient bond of church union in his 1647 *Liberty of Prophesying*.[35] The Church of England faced a choice between either allying herself with the "intelligence of the times" by reanimating the reforming instincts she had foregone in 1689, Fowler continued in an 1869 companion piece, or else imitating the Roman Catholic hierarchy's continuing

[32] Ibid., 139.

[33] Anglican historians were here comparable to the Whigs discussed in J. W. Burrow, *A Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past* (Cambridge, 1981).

[34] Stanley, "The Athanasian Creed" (see above, n. 25), 149, 160.

[35] Ibid., 135 n.; [Thomas Fowler], "The Athanasian Creed", *Macmillan's Magazine* 17 (1867), 20-34, there 32. For the identity of "Presbyter Academicus", under which name the article was published, see Thomas Fowler to [C. W.] Sandford, 4 Feb. 1872, LPL, Tait papers, MS 91, fols. 106-107.

determination to rely "on the ignorance of the uneducated and half-educated masses".[36] Connop Thirlwall also felt the weight of the seventeenth century. Although he praised Edmund Ffoulkes in correspondence, he quoted extensively from *The Liberty of Prophesying* when he took his own public case for disuse of the creed to Convocation in February 1872.[37] "Nothing there but damnation and perishing everlastingly", Taylor had said of the preface and conclusion to the creed, in words Thirlwall trenchantly conveyed to his episcopal colleagues.[38] Supporters of reform tended not to identify themselves as "broad churchmen", though they were often labelled as such, but rather as belonging to an older, normatively Anglican tradition that aimed to restore universal and national Christianity to their true historical types.

Not every commentator who believed that the present usage of the Athanasian Creed stood as an obstacle to that work of restoration viewed it as a relic of medieval barbarism from which a more reasonable age might escape. More moderate or reluctant approaches to reform were inflected by alternative assessments of the creed's place in church history. The credal historian and Norrisian professor of divinity at Cambridge, Charles Swainson, applied his earlier Coleridgean criticisms of the "absolute fixity of a prolonged formula" to the controversy over the Athanasian Creed in a series of pamphlets and letters to the moderately high church *Guardian* newspaper – itself a symbolic choice of platform.[39] Swainson hesitantly formed the view that the *Quicunque vult* was in fact a clerical "sermon" or "hymn" composed in the ninth century. It joined innovating, soteriologically severe clauses to earlier, admirably Augustinian passages (such as Waterland had previously identified) testifying to the primitive doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity. He concluded that the Church of

[36] [Thomas Fowler], "A Few More Words on the Athanasian Creed", *Macmillan's Magazine*, 21 (1869), 38-42, there 42.
[37] Connop Thirlwall to Archibald Campbell Tait, 16 Jan. 1872, LPL, MS Tait 91, fols. 101-102.
[38] *Chronicle of Convocation*, 9 Feb. 1872, 75.
[39] Charles Anthony Swainson, *The Creeds of the Church, in their Relations to the Word of God and to the Conscience of the Christian* (Cambridge, 1858), 55-56, 89 n.

England might legitimately meet scruples by excising the damnatory clauses, whilst leaving its Trinitarian kernel in place.

F. D. Maurice, by this time Knightbridge Professor of Moral Philosophy at Cambridge, praised the creed in more fulsome terms even as he endorsed the gathering campaign to retire it from public use. Maurice's Coleridgean preference for the truths of reason over conventional understanding, and his confidence in God's redemptive purpose for humanity, led him to argue in the *Contemporary Review* – in an essay prompted by Stanley's – that the popular conception of eternal punishment which had attached itself to the damnatory clauses in the public mind rendered the creed inappropriate for public worship. The desire for ecclesiastical comprehensiveness, in an external and institutional sense, thus led Maurice to an argumentative position he had earlier resisted. But he went on to maintain that, in its internal and doctrinal aspect, the theology of the Athanasian Creed was already comprehensive enough.[40] He stressed that the creed proclaimed, in accordance with scripture and our "deepest experience", that "belief in a God who redeemed mankind by his Son, who unites them by his spirit, *is* salvation". The damnatory clauses, correctly understood, declared that to be cut off from God, was "to be absent from the Perfect Charity".[41] Whilst Maurice insisted that his conscience mandated him to read the creed in terms of his ethical conception of relations within the Trinity, he also maintained that his was a truly historical understanding of the creed. Just as Christ was present in all mankind and in all eras, so "the interest of ecclesiastical history consists … in its revelation to us of hidden passages in our own intellects and hearts". The creed was thus no "antiquarian document", insincerely recited, as

[40] On Maurice's theology, see Jeremy Morris, *F. D. Maurice and the Crisis of Christian Authority* (Oxford, 2005), [30]-54, 112-121.
[41] F. D. Maurice, "A few more words on the Athanasian Creed", *Contemporary Review* 15 (1870), [479]-494, there 486.

the Dean of Westminster claimed. Rather, Maurice found all its "opinions and states of mind in myself".[42] It was living history.

Maurice's essay, stressing the immediacy of the past in the present in ways partly redolent of high church defences of the creed, elicited a further reply in the pages of the *Contemporary* from Stanley. To Stanley's mind the states of opinion preserved in the creed were, though picturesque, ultimately remote. He insisted that the esoteric construction Maurice placed upon the creed's words, however "spiritual and exalted", was at variance with their "ordinary and historical sense". The ideas to which they gave expression had become extinct, in much the same way as the Solemn League and Covenant in Scotland and the commemorations of the Stuart monarchs in the Prayer Book – epitaphs to the "ancient party rancour" of the seventeenth century – had ceased to have a living meaning.[43] Differences over the future of the creed among those who hoped for a broader church, were the external symbols of deeper and more general rifts over what it meant to think historically about religion.

At stake in that historical debate was the question of how doctrinally inclusive the national church ought to become. Although Stanley, Swainson and Maurice held, in significantly different ways, that disuse of the creed would have the effect of removing a major obstacle to Trinitarian belief,[44] it was often difficult for others to disentangle arguments against the necessity of damnatory clauses from the suggestion that orthodoxy was itself unnecessary to the Church. A number of evangelical Anglicans such as John Ryle, future bishop of Liverpool, and his supporters in the *Record* newspaper, endorsed calls for the creed's optional recitation, on the grounds that it would remove a human obstacle to

[42] Ibid., 490; cf. F. D. Maurice, *Lectures on the Ecclesiastical History of the First and Second Centuries* (Cambridge, 1854).
[43] A. P. Stanley, "The Athanasian Creed. Postscript to the Article in the 'Contemporary Review' of August, 1870", *Contemporary Review* xv (1870), [524]-542, there 525-528, 530.
[44] For Stanley stating this explicitly, see *Chronicle of Convocation*, 26 Apr. 1872, 449-450.

cooperation between nonconformists and churchmen on the basis of the unmediated bible; but writers in the *Record* simultaneously voiced disquiet over the tendencies represented by the text's loudest critics.[45] Its leader-writers carefully distinguished their own position, rooted in an objection to the supposedly popish and anti-dissenting implications of the damnatory clauses, from the dislike of dogma they identified in "Broad Church" figures, namely Stanley.[46] The paper found Maurice simply obscure.[47] The *Record*'s concern to distinguish a distinctively Protestant comprehensiveness in the national church from an intellectual kind drew energy from an atmosphere in which more radical figures than Stanley or Maurice, beyond the Church of England's clergy, were using the controversy to pronounce the death-knell of all dogmatic religion. Charles Voysey – a theistic preacher sensationally deprived of his Anglican living in 1871 for teaching doctrines radically at variance with the Thirty-Nine Articles – stated in a published sermon of 1872 that the real issue was not the Athanasian Creed considered by itself, but the authority of dogma.[48] At the point where advanced theism shaded into fertile literary sentiment lay Matthew Arnold, poet of the sea of faith's withdrawing roar. He followed the debate as he wrote *Literature and Dogma*, where he denounced the creed as "a notion-work, of which the fault is that its basis is a chimaera".[49] Against this background, opponents of change often identified the different shades of reformist opinion with a general attack on the historical and dogmatic basis of Christianity.

4. The dynamics of conservatism

[45] *Record*, 17 Oct. 1870, 19 Sep. 1870, 26 Apr. 1872. The *Record* countenanced simply removing the damnatory clauses, but ultimately endorsed the optional use of the unaltered text.
[46] *Record*, 22 Apr. 1872.
[47] *Record*, 14 Oct. 1870.
[48] Charles Voysey, *The Influence of Dogma upon Religion* (London, 1872) (PHP 4571).
[49] Matthew Arnold, *Literature and Dogma. An Essay towards a Better Apprehension of the Bible* (London, 1873), 346.

The equivocal conclusions of the Fourth Report, and the vociferous yet inharmonious swell of reformist opinion it triggered, presented a difficult problem to the church authorities. No one approach to reform commanded the general assent of the creed's critics. As has been noted, some prominent dissentients from the report's findings hoped to end its use. But others, such as Bishop Charles John Ellicott of Gloucester and Bristol, preferred to remove the damnatory clauses from the creed as given in the Prayer Book, whilst leaving its positive doctrinal statements in place.[50] Privately, Ellicott told Tait of his belief that "temperate action" on the creed was imperative, for the rising strength of what he called "the extreme high church party" among younger clerics would eventually close off the possibility of reform.[51] More conservative figures such as the evangelical Bishop Alfred Ollivant of Llandaff mooted a retranslation, hoping thereby to soften the edges of the creed's warnings.[52] To these divisions was added considerable uncertainty as to whether reform should be pursued through Parliament or Convocation. The view that Parliament, as the voice of the Protestant laity, was in fact better qualified than Convocation to govern the church was especially strong amongst those broad churchmen and evangelicals who saw the creed as problematic. But it was especially offensive to those who interpreted criticism of the creed as an assault on Christianity: a view ominously popular among the orthodox and conservative provincial clergy who, as their opponents were well aware, dominated Convocation's lower house.

In this unpromising climate, Tait applied a considerable portion of his archiepiscopal energies to the complex task of finding a solution to the credal problem.[53] A Scottish Presbyterian by origin, Tait's conception of the Church of England as the expression of Protestant national religion – more than theological liberalism – rendered him amenable to

[50] Charles John Ellicott to Archibald Campbell Tait, 21 Oct. 1871, LPL, MS Tait 91, fols. 41-42.
[51] Charles John Ellicott to Archibald Campbell Tait, 16 Oct. [1871], LPL, Tait papers, MS 89, fols. 288-291.
[52] *Chronicle of Convocation*, 14 Jun. 1871, 340-341.
[53] Randall Thomas Davidson and William Benham, *Life of Archibald Campbell Tait Archbishop of Canterbury*, 2 vols. (London, 1891), 2:125-162.

parliamentary intervention in church affairs with a view to broadening its popular appeal.[54] But the Prime Minister, William Gladstone, as a high churchman committed to the spiritual independence of the Church of England, and as a Liberal dependent on the support of anti-Erastian nonconformists in the House of Commons, in January 1871 declined Tait's request to commit the government to legislate on the creed. The government, he wrote, would only do so where the course it pursued would be likely to secure the general adhesion of the clergy.[55] After investigating his options, in May Tait resolved to refer the question to Convocation.[56]

Aided by Ellicott, one of his allies on the bench, Tait also sought opinions on the future of the creed from the ancient universities, which in the age of reform were still treated as important organs of church opinion.[57] Cambridge was amenable to moderate amendments. There the Regius Professor of Divinity, Brooke Foss Westcott, the Hulsean Professor of Divinity, J. B. Lightfoot, and Charles Swainson developed the view, which took its published form in a report of February 1872, that the damnatory clauses could and ought to be omitted from the recited version.[58] (This was on the grounds, most fully developed by Swainson, that these parts of the creed represented late intrusions into the text.) Oxford's new theology faculty, however, spoke with the disconcertingly Tractarian voice typical of its earlier years

[54] Peter T. Marsh, "Tait, Archibald Campbell (1811-1882)", *ODNB*.
[55] William Ewart Gladstone to Archibald Campbell Tait, 21 Oct. 1871, LPL, MS Tait 91, fols. 10-12. On Gladstone's religious politics at this time, see Peter T. Marsh, *The Victorian Church in Decline: Archbishop Tait and the Church of England* (London, 1969), 94-110.
[56] Charles John Ellicott to Archibald Campbell Tait, 20 May 1871, LPL, MS Tait 91, fols. 17-20; Archibald Campbell Tait to Thomas Chambers, 23 May 1871, LPL, MS Tait 91, fol. 22. A provision of the 1872 Act of Uniformity Amendment Act, which gave effect to the ritual commission's recommendations that shorter forms of morning and evening prayer be made available on week days, replaced the Athanasian Creed with the Apostles' Creed on days when the shorter form of Morning Prayer was used. But the provision was ambiguous, and generated little contemporary comment: Marsh, *Victorian Church in Decline* (see above, n. 55), 50; George Anthony Denison to Archibald Campbell Tait, 31 Jul. 1872, LPL, MS Tait 91, fols. 176-177.
[57] Charles John Ellicott to Archibald Campbell Tait, 16 Oct. [1871], LPL, MS Tait 89, fols. 288-291; Charles John Ellicott to Archibald Campbell Tait, 13 Nov. 1871, LPL, MS Tait 89, fols. 310-311.
[58] *Report of the Committee of Bishops on the Revision of the Text and Translation of the Athanasian Creed* (London, 1872), 36 (PHP 3780).

in an unpromising report dated 30 November 1871.[59] Signed by among others the staunch Tractarians E. B. Pusey, the Regius Professor of Hebrew; William Bright, the Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History; and H. P. Liddon, Dean Ireland's Professor of Exegesis, it deprecated any change to the established usage. If reform were to be insisted upon, they proposed several minor changes to the currently authoritative translation, along with a rubrical note explaining the clauses "improperly called 'damnatory'". It would declare "that nothing in this Creed is to be understood as condemning those who, by involuntary ignorance or invincible prejudice, are hindered from accepting the Faith therein declared."[60] This was similar to the solution proposed in the Fourth Report, which stronger reformists had found so inadequate.

The Oxford proposal was an early manifestation of what was swiftly to become a ferocious high church reaction to the initiatives of Tait and his allies. In a move without precedent in the history of Anglican controversy, Liddon shocked Archbishop Tait at Christmas 1871 by threatening to resign from the ministry should the creed be degraded or altered. Even a change that would do no more than remove the damnatory clauses would, to Liddon, have the effect of making the Catholic faith optional for members of the national church.[61] Still more alarmingly, Liddon added in January that Pusey had assured him that he would do the same.[62] Their ultimatums soon became widely known, and were the most prominent instances of a torrent of denunciatory sermons, pamphlets, and public letters that gathered force in 1872. Other Tractarian sympathisers sent their own threats of impending schism to the editor of the *Guardian*.[63] "On our faithfulness hang issues for England's

[59] On the earlier history of the Oxford theology faculty, see Inman, *The Making of Modern English Theology* (see above, n. 5), 105-161.
[60] *Report of the Committee of Bishops* (see above, n. 58), [30]-34.
[61] Henry Parry Liddon to Archibald Campbell Tait, 23 Dec. 1871, LPL, MS Tait 91, fols. 61-62; Henry Parry Liddon to Archibald Campbell Tait, 28 Dec. 1871, LPL, MS Tait 91, fols. 68-75.
[62] Henry Parry Liddon to Archibald Campbell Tait, 3 Jan. 1872, MS Tait 91, fols. 86-87.
[63] *Guardian*, 24 Apr. 1872, 549.

Church, and *for England*, which future generations will appreciate better than we can now", wrote a high church prebendary of St Paul's, William Irons, in 1872.[64]

The unexpectedly intense resistance of high churchmen stemmed from the way in which the reformist impulse seemed to belong to a broader set of rising – or reviving – dangers to English religion. Whereas reformists stressed their desire to safeguard religion and the national church, their opponents typically saw all attempts to modify or rescind the creed as a capitulation to advanced dissent and even outright agnosticism by those one pamphleteer labelled as the "Erastian or Broad Church party", and another as "the Rationalists".[65] Irons wondered whether Parliament and the archbishops would admit "that even Professors Huxley and Tyndall might officiate in the "National Temples", if *a sufficient agitation* for their views could be got up".[66] Irons's remarks linked the advance of heterodoxy to the willingness of broad churchmen to refer sacred matters to the authority of parliament and public opinion. High churchmen frequently made such a connection, even as they also used pamphlets and newspapers to mobilise resistance to reform. "I am bold enough to think that I could almost suggest at least the outline of some of the lyrical sentences in which this great anticipated triumph over Christian doctrine would assuredly be hymned in the pages of *Macmillan* or the *Edinburgh*", Liddon wrote in the *Guardian*, in one of his own numerous appeals to public opinion.[67] When it came to the individuals responsible for aiding and abetting apostasy, high churchmen were more antagonised by Stanley, who seemed to vocalise the march-of-mind, than they were by the greater caution of Maurice or the Cambridge divines. Liddon linked "Stanley & his allies" to "the unbelieving school" in a letter to Tait, in which he significantly

[64] William J. Irons, *Athanasius Contra Mundum: Being a Letter to the Most Reverend and Right Reverend the Archbishops and Bishops of both Provinces, in Convocation Assembled* (London, 1872), 70-71.
[65] S. C. Malan, *Bishop Ellicott's New Translation of the Athanasian Creed* (London, 1872), [3] (PHP 1558); F. Tilney Bassett, *The Athanasian Creed. A Brief Sketch of its History and Authorship, and the Present Controversy* (n. p., 1872), 20-23 (PHP 1545).
[66] *Guardian*, 25 Sep. 1872, 1,213-1,214.
[67] *Guardian*, 20 Mar. 1872, [385].

distanced them from Lightfoot, whom Liddon credited with sensing the dangerous implications of their stance for the authority of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.[68]

Initiatives which seemed to represent the distillation of very modern challenges to religious authority also evoked much older spectres in the minds of conservatives who, in this period, frequently sought to contain the threat presented by insurgent heterodoxy by defining it not as radically new, but as radically old. Credal reformers were not just stigmatised as "broad churchmen", but commonly also as "Socinians", a reference to the anti-Trinitarian heresy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[69] One of Tait's correspondents angrily accused him of favouring "the Socinian party in this country".[70] Whereas liberal Anglicans sought to mark out their descent from an orthodox seventeenth-century tradition, their opponents linked them to a different and more dangerous lineage.

For their own part, credal conservatives insisted that it was the text's preservation, not its modification or removal, that accorded better with the historic spirit of the Church of England. The day before Thirlwall invoked Taylor in Convocation, the old high church bishop of Lincoln, Christopher Wordsworth, had risen to defend the recitation of a document "which Richard Hooker declared to be our best preservative against Arianism".[71] "Are the labours of Hooker and Waterland" in defence of the creed "to be set aside at last", Liddon asked in a sermon before Oxford University the same year, "and in the interest of theories which until the present day have never found a home within the Church of Christ?"[72] As with their antagonists, high churchmen thought of themselves less as a party than as the custodians of a tradition which partisanship put in jeopardy.

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[68] Henry Parry Liddon to Archibald Campbell Tait, 2 Jan. 1872, LPL, MS Tait 91, fols. 84-85. It was Stanley's name that was booed at the meeting at St James's Hall: *Guardian*, 5 Feb. 1873, [169].
[69] Walter Chamberlain, *A Letter to the Ven. The Archdeacon of Manchester, on the Athanasian Creed* (Bolton, 1872), 6 (PHP 3781).
[70] W. David Chambers to Archibald Campbell Tait, 31 Jul. 1872, LPL, MS Tait 91, fols. 178-182.
[71] *Chronicle of Convocation*, Feb. 8 1872, 42.
[72] Henry Parry Liddon, *The Life of Faith and the Athanasian Creed* (London, 1872), 28-29 (PHP 3790).

The anti-reformist case, then, did not solely have the character of a negative reaction against the apparent disintegration of ecclesiastical authority, but also involved a positive assessment of the creed's place in the history of the church. There were telling signs that high churchmen, traditionally so attached to ecclesiastical-historical modes of argument, were becoming more attuned to the latent dangers of historical scholarship now that broad churchmen were colonising their own favoured metier. J. S. Brewer, breaking off from his extensive editorial work on Henrician state papers while a lecturer at King's College, London, to write against Stanley and Ffoulkes, complained that Dean Stanley thought it was enough to show "that the Athanasian Creed dates no higher than the ninth century; – that it is a dark age, dark enough for Dean Stanley's readers", without engaging seriously with the essentially separate question of the truth of the creed's doctrinal content.[73] Brewer's criticisms of a certain kind of historicism, however, hinted at the importance which he and other defenders of the creed attached to alternative characterisations of the text's origins. In preference to the medieval associations with which broad churchmen liked to tar the creed, sympathetic scholars defended as best they could its traditional connections to the glories of the patristic era. Brewer insisted that the creed could be credibly ascribed to Athanasius himself.[74] One of the evangelical clergy who came out against reform, Charles Heurtley, the Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Oxford who joined several of his fellow canons of Christ Church Cathedral in signing the Oxford letter, endorsed Waterland's conclusions.[75]

In this vein of commentary, the Trinitarian orthodoxy which the creed expounded was not taken to be a dead succession of words, but a living link to a period when the orthodox faith had grown out of Christian life by means, not of Erastian consensus, but heroic conflict.

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[73] J. S. Brewer, *The Athanasian Creed Vindicated from the Objections of Dean Stanley and Other Members of the Ritual Commission* (Cambridge, 1871), [1].
[74] J. S. Brewer, *The Athanasian Origin of the Athanasian Creed* (London, 1872).
[75] Charles A. Heurtley, *The Athanasian Creed: Reasons for Rejecting Mr. Ffoulkes's Theory as to its Age and Author* (Oxford, 1872), 27.

In common with an increasing number of doctrinal conservatives in other fields, Victorian sympathisers with the creed thus wove experiential flavour and local colour into the more traditional enterprise of textual and dogmatic vindication.[76] One preacher, accepting Waterland's attribution, maintained that the creed "grew of itself out of the minds of men who were disgusted at the heretical doctrines of Arius, and who longed for a decisive definition of those Articles of Faith which he had impugned": a definition which the churches of the Reformation had embraced.[77] In his Oxford University sermon, Liddon argued that the three catholic creeds were "not a fortuitous collection of dogmatic formularies" but rather "three answers to the three stages of the great question which is proposed to every Christian thinker". Where the Apostles' Creed explained the office of divine sonship, and the Nicene Christ's divinity, the Athanasian Creed held these truths in relation to the divine unity. To propose to discard of any of these accumulated fruits of spiritual life, "may suggest the proceedings of a statesman who should wish to reorganize English society upon the legislative basis of the Heptarchy".[78] High churchmen, at the same time as they faulted their opponents for privileging history over doctrine, commended doctrine to their Victorian audiences by means of an appeal, not primarily to metaphysics, but to the historical experience of the church.

Defenders of the creed interpreted the controversy as presenting an urgent occasion, and even a last chance, for England to choose fidelity over the seductive words of the broad church; but there were points at which their presuppositions began to resemble those of their opponents. High church appeals to history amounted to an attempt to resummon historic Christian experience to present consciousness, in terms which a generation that privileged sweetness and light over heavy scholasticism might accept. When it came to the damnatory

[76] Cf. J. M. R. Bennett, Doctrine, Progress and History: British Religious Debate 1845-1914 (DPhil diss., Oxford University, 2015), 68-126.
[77] G. I. Pellew, *A Sermon Preached at St. Mary's Church, Putney, in the Defence of the Athanasian Creed, on the First Sunday after Trinity, 1869* (London, 1869), 5-7.
[78] Henry Parry Liddon, *The Life of Faith and the Athanasian Creed* (London, 1872), 24-26 (PHP 3790).

clauses, accordingly, high churchmen typically refused to attach to them the eschatologically draconian meaning favoured by reformists – thereby revealing their comparable unease with the notion of eternal punishment. High church writers preferred, as the Oxford professors had done, to minimise the range of unbelievers to whom the clauses could be said to apply. They also emphasised that these words were valuable not for their exclusionary potential *per se*, but for how they turned the believer's growth in and defence of orthodoxy into a personal moral obligation and responsibility.[79] Charles Kingsley defended his own reluctance to see the creed disused or shorn of the "so-called Damnatory Clauses" in similar terms. As he explained in a letter of 1864 to his friend and teacher Maurice – with whose broader understanding of the creed he publicly identified – and as he reiterated in his address to the meeting at St James's Hall and privately, he took the clauses to be compatible with the "ancient Catholic doctrine" of a purifying stage after death.[80] One who had died in error might still continue the journey towards saving truth, he thought. Whilst Kingsley and other admirers of the creed defended even the claims of the damnatory clauses to primitive status, they did so by modes of exegesis and historicism that reconciled the ancient church with the requirements of their nineteenth-century consciences.

When credal conservatives interpreted the damnatory clauses in this way, they were commonly accused of a want of sincerity. Reformists took them to be searching for overly subtle ways around the cavernous gap that had supposedly opened up between harsh external language and the forgiving inward witness of conscience.[81] For their own part, however, high churchmen insisted that here the link between religious language and inward experience was in fact very close, the creed's phrases majestically turning pious imaginations towards their

[79] E. B. Pusey, *The Responsibility of the Intellect in Matters of Faith: a Sermon Preached before the University of Oxford, on Advent Sunday, 1872* (Oxford, 1873).
[80] *Guardian*, Feb. 5, 1873, [169]; Charles Kingsley to F. D. Maurice, ca. April 1864, in [Frances Elizabeth Kingsley] (ed.), *Charles Kingsley. His Letters and Memories of his Life*, 2 vols. (London, 1872), 2:207; Charles Kingsley to M. McColl, 8 Nov. 1872, ibid., 395-397.
[81] For example by Swainson: *Guardian*, 17 Apr. 1872, 519.

numinous referent. As has been noted, some critics of the creed sought to lower its status by redefining it as a hymn; but for their opponents, drawing out the poetic, affective, and hymnal qualities of the text seemed a powerful means of bolstering its position as a creed.[82] William Bright thought its "majestic rhythm" made for "a vivid memorial of the great realities of faith".[83] John Keble's embattled successors liked to quote the description of the creed which the Tractarian leader and Oxford's professor of poetry had offered in his 1836 *Lyra Apostolica*:

> The Psalm that gathers in one glorious lay,
> All chants that e'er from heaven to earth found way:
> Creed of the Saints, and Anthem of the Blest,
> And calm-breathed warning of the kindliest love,
> That ever heaved a wakeful mother's breast.[84]

John Henry Newman invoked these lines when he used the creed as a case-study in his subjectivist and intuitional *Grammar of Assent* to Catholic truth, a book he completed whilst contentions over its status were spreading through his former communion.[85] The creed was no mere set of intellectual propositions, he wrote, but pressed a great reality upon the rightly-ordered soul. It offered "a psalm or hymn of praise", "the war-song of faith" in which "we warn first ourselves, then each other, and then all those who are within its hearing … how vast our responsibility is".[86] Conservatives' attempts to give the creed an emotional and aesthetic in addition to an historical authority were not everywhere accepted. Stanley

[82] On Victorian hymnody, see J. R. Watson, *The English Hymn: a Critical and Historical Study* (Oxford, 1997); idem, "Ancient or Modern, 'Ancient and Modern': the Victorian Hymn and the Nineteenth Century", *Yearbook of English Studies* 36 (2006), 1-16; Michael Ledger-Lomas, "*Lyra Germanica*: German sacred music in mid-Victorian England", *German Historical Institute London Bulletin* 29 (Nov. 2007), 8-42. On poetry as a manifestation of romantic religious conflict, see Kirstie Blair, *Form and Faith in Victorian Poetry and Religion* (Oxford, 2012).

[83] *Guardian*, 28 Feb. 1872, 289.

[84] Quoted for example in Pusey, *Responsibility of the Intellect* (see above, n. 79), 45.

[85] Ian Ker, *John Henry Newman: a Biography* (Oxford, 1988), [618]-636.

[86] John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, 4th ed. (London, 1874), 132-133. (First edition 1870.)

appropriated Newman's characterisation of the creed as a "war-song" in his first essay on the subject; but to his mind this quality only added to its faults, for the way "the grand crash of music drowns the dissonance of the jarring words" until "their particular meaning is lost in the spirit and energy of their sound" rendered it unserviceable to religious truth.[87] As with the nature of their appeal to history, nevertheless, by discussing the text at the level of poetry, both sides nudged the standard of judgement over the creed away from textualism and dogmatic metaphysics alone, and towards the internal authority of the moral self and the Christian conscience. The contrast between critics and defenders of the formulary also involved a kind of relation.

5. Conclusion

The gathering reaction ultimately defeated the more far-reaching reform proposals when Convocation came to debate them in 1872. The archdeacon of Canterbury, Benjamin Harrison, who in his youth had contributed to the *Tracts for Times*, spoke for the majority in the lower house when he complained that the creed had been disparaged "as though it were an exhibition of all the persecuting propensities of the Middle Ages". Another of the creed's supporters invoked Maurice's arguments.[88] On 26 April, despite Stanley's insistent efforts, the house decisively passed a motion to retain the current usage of the Athanasian Creed without alteration.[89] Tait, blaming the outcome on the intimidating effect of Puseyite threats of resignation, was compelled to abandon his hopes of fundamental reform.[90] As in 1689, the strength of the high church alignment in Convocation, especially among the lower clergy, had

[87] Stanley, 'The Athanasian Creed' (see above, n. 25), 137.
[88] *Chronicle of Convocation*, 26 Apr. 1872, 433; W. H. Fremantle, rev. George Herring, "Harrison, Benjamin (1808-1887)", *ODNB*.
[89] *Chronicle of Convocation*, 26 Apr. 1872, 422-458, 30 Apr. 1872, 471-472.
[90] *Chronicle of Convocation*, 4 Jul. 1872, 701-703.

scattered its divided opponents. After taking further soundings from the opposing sides, the most Tait could secure was Convocation's agreement to a synodical declaration as to the sense in which the Church understood the creed. The two houses thrashed out the final text in May 1873. It began by affirming that the Athanasian Creed "doth not make any additions to the faith as contained in Holy Scripture". On the more controverted issue of the damnatory clauses, on which the declaration centred, it stated that "as Holy Scripture … doth promise life to them that believe and declare the condemnation of them that believe not, so doth the Church in this confession declare the necessity for all who would be in a state of salvation of holding fast the Catholic faith". The declaration avoided explicit mention of damnation, or the direct reiteration of the creed's phraseology.[91] Despite the moderate, not to say ambiguous tenor of the declaration, the decision to adopt it in place of disuse or amendment of the creed itself was widely interpreted as a victory for the high church party. Reformists were discomfited, and rounded on Tait for accepting a supposedly paltry compromise just as high churchmen had previously faulted him for his alleged preparedness to upend doctrinal truth.[92] The son and biographer of Bishop Samuel Wilberforce of Winchester hailed his father, one of the creed's foremost episcopal protectors in Convocation, for helping to steer the Church of England "through one of the greatest dangers which have beset her in modern times".[93]

The reverberations of the conflict took time to ebb away. Scholars first provoked to write on the Athanasian Creed by challenges to its authority in the early 1870s, later expanded their researches into full-length studies of its date and authorship.[94] A number of

[91] *Chronicle of Convocation*, 9 May 1873, 405-406.
[92] Davidson and Benham, *Life of Archibald Campbell Tait* (see above, n. 53), 2:161.
[93] A. R. Ashwell and R. G. Wilberforce, *Life of the Right Reverend Samuel Wilberforce, D.D.*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (London, 1881-1883), 3:392.
[94] Charles Anthony Swainson, *The Nicene and Apostles' Creeds. Their Literary History; together with an Account of the Growth and Reception of the Sermon on the Faith Commonly Called "The Creed of St Athanasius."* (London, 1875); J. Rawson Lumby, *The History of the Creeds* (Cambridge, 1873); G. D. V. Ommanney, *The Athanasian Creed. An Examination of Recent Theories Respecting its Date and Origin*

composers in the 1880s and 1890s, including John Stainer, took its supposed appropriateness for hymnody seriously, and set it to music.[95] Tait's son-in-law and a future archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Thomas Davidson, included a careful reconstruction of the debates of the 1870s in his 1891 *Life of Archibald Campbell Tait*, both on account of what he took to have been their intrinsic importance, and because he wished to clear his subject from the misrepresentations to which the latter had then been subjected.[96] But never again was the creed to excite the attention of statesmen, universities, clergy, schoolmasters and journalists across a culture in the way it had done in the aftermath of the Ritual Commission. Few who had refused to read the creed beforehand began to do so as a result of the synodical declaration. A pantheist-inclined historian of religious thought and vicar of a Kentish living, John Hunt, frankly refused to read the creed in his church in the 1880s, blaming its revival on the Oxford Movement's fetish for "obsolete & doubtful things".[97] In the twentieth century, recital of the *Quicunque* was made optional in the revised Prayer Book of 1928, and the symbol fell out of use.[98] It is a telling comment on the scale of the changes that swept over British educated society in the following years, that not only did the creed drop away from the centre of religious contention, but was almost completely forgotten.

In its time, however, the debate over the Athanasian Creed was both an illustrative instance of the patterns of nineteenth-century religious argument, and an active agent in their reconstruction. From an institutional point of view, the successful defence of the creed can be seen as a relatively unusual and ephemeral late victory for high churchmen whose attempt

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(London, 1875); idem, *Early History of the Athanasian Creed* (London, 1880); A. E. Burn, *The Athanasian Creed and its Early Commentaries* (Cambridge, 1896).

[95] J. Stainer, *The Ancient Plain-Song of the Athanasian Creed Arranged for Voices in Union with Organ Accompaniment* (London, [1887]); J. F. Lord, *The Athanasian Creed Pointed to the Seventh Tone* (London, n.d.); E. H. Birch, *Athanasian Creed (in G)* (London, 1897).

[96] As in footnote 53 above. Whilst William Benham assisted in the preparation of the *Life*, it was mainly composed by Davidson: G. K. A. Bell, *Randall Davidson. Archbishop of Canterbury*, 3rd ed. (London, 1952), 159.

[97] As in footnote 13 above.

[98] *The Book of Common Prayer with the Additions and Deviations Proposed in 1928* (Cambridge, 1928), 116-122. Curiously, the number of days on which the creed could be said was nevertheless expanded.

since the days of the Oxford Movement to make the church more dogmatic, ultimately had the unintended consequence of rendering it more comprehensive.[99] The passage through Parliament of the Public Worship Regulation Act for the curbing of ritualist innovations in 1874 – a process in which Tait took notable care to limit Convocation's involvement – returned high churchmen to the more familiar experience of defeat at the hands of the state.[100] Yet in an intellectual-historical respect, the controversy belonged to a world of historical debate, connecting Victorian religious and scholarly culture to one another, which historians have only recently begun to recapture.[101] Tractarians and their successors, who from the 1830s had elevated an authoritative conception of patristic tradition from an old high church resource for corroborating Anglican claims into a more dynamic principle of religious renewal, now extended that appeal to add a poetic and experiential vindication of a disputed creed to a dogmatic and critical one. In this they echoed the emphasis Maurice placed upon the immanence of religious experience in history. Radical reformists, on the other hand, tried to localise the creed as part of a superseded, medieval past. Participants in the controversy situated not only the creed, but also the debate itself, in historical perspective. Whilst the fourth report of the Ritual Commission prompted church parties once again to march as to war, in beholders' eyes if not their own, their adherents thought of themselves more in terms of their descent from Reformation and post-Reformation ecclesiologies than in phrases drawn from the religious journalism of their day. The ways in which Victorians did not simply use history, but thought with and through it, deserve to be more distinctly recognised.

Given the vibrancy of the dispute, why did silence thereafter fall with such relative swiftness over a subject which had occasioned intense conflict during the 1870s, and vocal unease for two centuries? The dynamics of the controversy suggest an explanation which

[99] Peter Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context: Anglican High Churchmanship 1760-1857* (Cambridge, 1994), 307-327.
[100] Bentley, *Ritualism and Politics* (see above, n. 22), 49-50; Davidson and Benham, *Life of Archibald Campbell Tait* (see above, n. 53), 2:186-235.
[101] Cf. Kirby, *Historians and the Church of England* (see above, n. 6).

may possess a broader interpretative significance. In one respect, the debate records the persistence of an early modern past into the Victorian period – something which historians, concerned as they are to explain change, sometimes underestimate. Nineteenth-century theologians were in recognisable and often self-conscious continuity with the learned divines of earlier times when they attached great weight to arguments about patristic (or supposedly patristic) texts in seeking to establish the nature and limits of orthodoxy. In another sense, they embarked on something qualitatively new when they blended a textual approach to orthodoxy with subjective and contextual ones. This disposition was not restricted to any one ecclesiastical tendency, nor to the argument concerning the Athanasian Creed. If it was a procedure deployed iconoclastically by Stanley, in high church and Mauricean hands it gave textual and antiquarian arguments for orthodoxy a new lease of life, by transmuting them into a pious form of historicism that became intellectually as well as religiously powerful in nineteenth-century conditions. But by making the authority of the past dependent on, and possibly subordinate to, its compatibility with the claims of Christian conscience and experience, it also created the conditions for the ultimate displacement of history from the pinnacle of orthodox apologetic after 1900. The ways in which nineteenth-century intellectual movements prepared the way for twentieth-century developments, in religious and secular directions, would repay further consideration.

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