



## The Decline of Evil

In part four of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, the main character, finally convinced of the utter depravity of his own species, desires only the society of a population of rational horses called Houyhnhnms, whose name translates "the Perfection of Nature". Gulliver sets the Houyhnhnms up as an ideal: if it were possible, he would be just like them. His mistake, of course, is precisely that it is not possible: by his nature, he is radically imperfect. His folly — an aspect of this imperfection common to all men — is perhaps even greater because he wants to be something that he is not.

I bring this up because there seem to be a lot of Lemuel Gullivers among us today, attempting to make people something they are not. Aside from those who maintain (as Gulliver does) that human beings are totally depraved and therefore incapable of moral discrimination, there are many more who think that they can eradicate evil altogether — not by improving themselves, but simply by denying moral categories. Among these are psychologists and psychiatrists who, rather than encouraging "amendment of one's life" (as confessors used to do), try merely to eliminate the sense of guilt and help their patients to enjoy their "sins"; clergymen who tell us reassuringly that "there is no such thing as hell" (even metaphorically); and politicians who claim that our problems are no one's fault — we are merely the victims of "trends".

Philosophically, the decline of evil is a corollary of determinism: persons have the power neither of initiative nor of choice: they do not act; they react. Since they are not, in their actions, making conscious choices, they cannot be said to be evil. Nor, incidentally, can they be said to be good. (They can, presumably, be said to feel pleasure or pain, but even these can be conditioned.) At the same time, they cannot be said to be responsible: the environment is responsible, and the environment is beyond human control.

The consequences of all this are multiform. One is the annihilation of the moral category: we cannot make value judgements any more. Another is the dissociation of effects from decisions: we may be suffering intolerable inflation, but we cannot trace that effect to a policy, to a conscious decision made by a person who can be identified and held responsible. "It just happened," said the little boy standing beside the broken cookie-jar. An even more serious consequence — in fact a combination of the others — is the destruction of human beings as conscious creatures. Deprived of moral categories, deprived of a sense of responsibility, they have lost the power of moral self-realization.

"The denial of evil," C. H. Douglas has said, "is an affirmation of equality — having no quality." Or, as T. S. Eliot has observed, "a Hell altogether without dignity implies a Heaven without dignity also". The denial that we can be significantly evil implies as well the denial that we can be significantly good.

In a sense, Gulliver is even less foolish than we: he at least had experience of a race whom he could estimate as morally good; the Houyhnhnms cannot even conceive of evil. We do not have that experience; nevertheless, to deaden the sense of our own imperfections, we pretend that we can fashion a paradise from a pulpy and aromatic Limbo.

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## Our Policy

SEED aspires to fulfil a unique role transcending the functions of other magazines and journals.

Our purpose is neither to propagandize in the sense of promoting some fixed point of view or body of thought nor merely to comment on current events.

Our partisanship does not extend beyond two considerations. Firstly, we believe that reality does exist: it is not a matter of opinion and will assert its authority over all opinions that contradict it. All sanctions reside in reality; opinion has none. Secondly, we believe in the desirability of extending human freedom. Genuine freedom is contingent upon our comprehension of reality, since to the extent that men disregard reality, they court personal and social disaster.

In other words, far from conforming to the modern view that value judgments are to be avoided, SEED will intentionally consist of a succession of value judgments, which will constitute the principal criterion of its success. Man cannot approach truth without rigorous formation of value judgments and perfecting of definitions. Discovery and refinement of the correct principles for human action and association will be the focus of our attention within the field of reality. If we carry our investigation of the nature of reality far enough, we shall illuminate the way to the formulation of sound policy.

We have no delusions about the facility of the course on which we are embarking. It is possibly the most difficult course open to us. However, its value should be proportional to the efforts it requires. If the distractions to intelligence and will which characterize contemporary society are, as we believe them to be, fundamentally unsatisfying, we are confident that some seekers of truth will involve themselves in the experiment that SEED represents. Such persons are the only ones capable of responding to such an experiment.

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If our project is conducted correctly, it will at the least generate a new conceptual vigour among a segment of the community — and perhaps even result in the formation of new men.



## The Degeneration of Words

Modifications in the meanings of words may reflect changes in society or they may actually foster changes. Words are tools, but they are tools capable of working strong effects upon those using them. What they mean is never apparent in itself: they carry with them all sorts of implications and trigger a variety of mental associations. The connotations that words acquire in a particular context tend to preserve the context, as they reinforce thinking habits appropriate to it.

Hence, transitions in the meanings of words are very instructive as indicators of the values of the people who use them. Indeed, nothing else teaches more about developments in human ideation.

It is not uncommon for a word to come to mean something different from (if not contrary to) what it meant during some earlier period. In this way, a language accumulates much of its dead wood — words once useful, perhaps, but later worn into a hopeless condition of vagueness or redundancy.

Consider, for example, the word "form" and its various derivatives. Nowadays, if we are told that someone acts "for the sake of form", we assume that there is no real significance in what he does. A "formal" gesture is an unmeant gesture; a "formality" a superfluous procedure. "Form" connotes that which is vacuous—even fictitious. It is the part of the thing or act most easily dispensed with.

The situation of the word is the reverse of what it was several centuries ago. When a medieval philosopher used the term "form", the thoughts conjured up travelled in exactly the opposite direction. Form was what made a thing a thing, what made it identifiable in the field of amorphous matter. In other words, it was *the* determining quality of existence: nothing could be more fundamentally important or real. Therefore, to describe an action as "formal" implied not that it was negligible, but that it was the most significant of actions—entailing the responsibility of making it the truest possible representative of its kind.

The word "ordinary" has been similarly eviscerated. It has become a standard term of opprobrium, so that to call a play, for instance, "ordinary" would suggest that it is unimaginative and tedious. However, before modern times and the appetite for the bizarre which has flour-

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## “Orthodoxy”

The realistic implications of the “mysteries” of religion are a subject studiously avoided by the clergy, who, however ‘pious’ they may be, are as likely to express their social concern in terms of Marxist atheism as in terms of Christian doctrine. Thus, it is refreshing to encounter an article by a distinguished man of letters which discusses contemporary “social order” in terms of the “heresies” defined by the Athanasian Creed. The following is an examination of W. H. Auden’s observations on this subject.

In his “Theological Orations”, Gregory of Nazianzus makes the following provocative observation:

The three most ancient opinions about God are atheism (or anarchy), polytheism (or polyarchy), and monotheism (or monarchy). The children of Greece played with the first two; let us leave them to their games. For anarchy is disorder: and polyarchy implies factious division, and therefore anarchy and disorder. Both these lead in the same direction—to disorder; and disorder leads to disintegration; for disorder is the prelude to disintegration.<sup>1</sup>

Gregory favours “monotheism”, but does not “believe in a God who is one in the narrow, jealous, impotent sense” (like the God of the Old Testament). “What we honour,” he declares, “is monarchy: but not a monarchy confined to a single person; for a single entity may be divided against itself and become many.” The implications of this last comment will be discussed presently: for the moment, we should notice the analogies which Gregory perceives between theological doctrines and the nature of political order.

### Heresy and Politics

That this approach is more than a matter of academic curiosity is perhaps suggested by the fact that W.H. Auden, in an article entitled “A Note on Order” (*The Nation*, February 1, 1941), examines the problem of political order with reference to a similar theological framework. Relating his discussion to the Athanasian Creed, he identifies three “heresies” (one of which is a “modification” of one of the others), corresponding to which there are three undesirable forms of political order (or, more accurately, disorder).

The first of these heresies Auden calls “dualism”, or “dividing the substance”. Dualism implies the co-existence of two separate principles of reality, and thus corresponds to the “polytheism” of which Gregory speaks. This is in fact a disintegrative principle because it allows us to behave as if reality is self-contradictory: our allegiance to one “God” implies our antagonism towards another. Auden’s technical definition of “dualism” is “the denial of any relation be-

tween the universal and the particular, that is, that the particular laws are modifications of the general law” (131). This leads to the notion that reality consists in discontinuity and opposition.

Auden’s examples make this point clear: he speaks of Stoicism, which pits human reason and will against an essentially disastrous universe, and of Manicheism, which (among other things) postulates an irreconcilable antagonism between spirit and matter. Auden suggests two social results arising from this particular heresy. One of these is “an other-worldliness which regards all attempts to establish social order as vain”: this is the attitude that, since reality is primarily ‘spiritual’, temporal and material injustice can be disregarded. Another social result of dualism is the converse of “otherworldliness”, “a secularism which regards progress as inevitable”. This is the division of the “religious” from the “secular” to the extent that piety in the first is not seen to be contradicted by short-sighted “pragmatism” in the second.

Another heresy which Auden discusses, and which (he observes) is a modification of dualism, is “an empiricism which denies the necessity of any metaphysics”. This implies the concentration on the particular, and the isolation of particulars (or individuals) from each other: the denial of any unifying general law results in the tendency to regard reality as merely an agglomeration of unrelated instances. The social aspect of this belief (Auden notes) is “the atomic view of society as a multiplicity of unrelated special individuals pursuing special unrelated occupations”: “individualism”. Other aspects of this particular heresy are, for example, technical specialization and the encyclopedist approach to knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

This heresy corresponds, ultimately, to Gregory’s “atheism” (the denial of metaphysics) and leads to what he calls “anarchy” or disorder. The attractiveness of both dualism and this other heresy, its offshoot, lies in the fact that they both seem to allow differentia-

tion of persons: however, one allows this differentiation at the expense of conflict with the general law; the other allows differentiation at the expense of denying the existence of a general law. Both, therefore, tend toward disintegration or disorder, and are thus self-destructive.

A third heresy identified by Auden is what he calls "monism" or "confounding the persons": "the assumption that the peculiar laws of one of the peculiar realms are the universal laws from which all the others are derivative". Monism is analogous to monotheism in its cruder forms as rejected by Gregory (what, for example, is a "God" who is in fact universal likely to be jealous of?). In other words, monism results from the attempt to take one particular system and impose it as a universal system—thus repressing other particular expressions. As Auden notes, monism leads either to tyranny (the forced restriction of personal differentiation) or to violent revolution (the reaction of another particular system against the tyrannical system). Perhaps this is what Gregory means when he rejects "monarchy confined to a single person" because "a single entity may be divided against itself and become many".

## The Cycle of Heresies

Interesting here is the fact that monism tends to result from dualism and atomism. We have seen already that the latter two foster political disintegration or confusion. The psychological effect of this confusion on a population is the desire for "order" and the willingness to give up "freedom" (the possibility of differentiation) to secure that order. A society plagued by disorder is ripe for increasing centralization of power. Thus, for example, in times of 'crisis', governments assume "emergency powers". The logical extension of this process is the seizure of absolute power by some kind of dictator or '*junta*'. As Auden observes: "Fascism is what happens to an industrial society when disorder is accepted as inevitable but has reached a point where it is felt as intolerable".

Conversely, of course, monism tends to issue in dualism or atomism. Monism—expressed politically as totalitarianism—encourages revolutionary reaction. Thus, for example, Czarism in Russia was opposed by anarchism and Bolshevism: the first unabashedly advocating disintegration, the second proposing alternative social order with the distant promise of something not unlike

the objectives of the first. The point is, of course, that revolution, practically, involves the displacement of one version of monism by another: thus, Cromwell replaces Charles I, Napoleon replaces Louis XVI, and Lenin (or Stalin) replaces Nicholas II. In fact, these "heresies" which Auden points to are mutually-dependent and self-perpetuating. They are antithetical only on the surface: in reality, they are two sides of the one coin.

## Social Disorder

Corresponding to the tendencies implied in the various heresies he describes, Auden sees, therefore, two kinds of "social orders". One of these is the "primitive or low-grade" order, which "displays a massive and uniform vagueness which masks contrast and in which requiredness consists of immediate responses to unrelated objective stimuli—for example, conditioned reflexes". What he is referring to when he speaks of "contrast" and "requiredness" is, presumably, "differentiation" and the locus of motivation or compulsion, respectively. The relation of these to political freedom is, I think, clear: one associates "freedom" with the possibility of self-realization and the minimizing of external compulsion. The low-grade social order corresponding to monism fosters similarity or uniformity of persons and limitation of behaviour by the impositions of external necessity.

On the other hand, corresponding to the heresies of dualism and, even more, atomism, Auden sees the "degenerate social order", which "displays a trivial multiplicity in which contrast is dismissed into incompatibility and requiredness disappears". Here, once more, we have the notion of "unrelated special individuals" entirely dissociated from each other and from any universal unifying principle. At the same time, "requiredness disappears": in this type of social order, subjectivism is taken to such extremes that the notion of responsibility is obviated. The logical upshot of this kind of atomism-relativism is the notion that each individual comprises his own "reality": thus, presumably, a person who repudiates the law of gravity should not be expected to plummet to earth should he step off the Eiffel Tower!

Auden feels that the latter condition is generally true of contemporary society: "Modern society is a dif-

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## Homogenized Religion

In our society there seems to be no escaping the propaganda that the best way of resolving the troubles of the world is to abolish differences — or, failing this, to deny their existence. Such thinking lies behind the conversion of the word "discrimination" from an admirable trait to a social offense of the most sordid variety. Differences, we are told, generate conflict. Hence, if we could reduce all human qualities and beliefs to some lowest common denominator, we would presumably at last achieve peace on earth. The question concerning an increasing number of persons is, "How low will we have to go before we attain this common ground?" Which brings us to a recent newspaper article by Rev. A.C. Forrest, the editor of the *United Church Observer*. Let the reader be forewarned, however, that what follows will be of no interest to persons whose response to the most fundamental perplexities of human existence is (either respectful or contemptuous) avoidance.

Rev. Forrest adverted to a question put to one of his superiors in the church hierarchy as to whether his God is the same as Allah. "Yes," was the reply, "I believe in one God." To which Rev. Forrest added: "Sure He is the same God. So is Jahweh, Jehovah, Dieu, Gott and Our Father which art in Heaven." Dispensing as it does with the need for any precision of thinking, this comment is at best facile. Coming from a professed Christian, it is remarkable for its neglect of one item—namely, Christ.

### Words and Facts

Whatever Rev. Forrest might think, God is not merely the word "God"—no matter in how many tongues it may be rendered. What God is apparently cannot, in the nature of things, be fully comprehended by his creatures. Therefore, for a man to say that God is such and such really means that his conception of God is such and such. The conception may contain more or less truth.

So the real question is whether the Christian concept of God, the Moslem concept of Allah, and the Jewish concept of Jehovah are identical. Clearly, they are not. And this fact has profound practical implications. All sorts of disreputable people have professed Judaism, Mohammedanism, and Christianity; but the important matter to consider is what constitutes the essential

differences among their best representatives.

If we may be allowed to introduce a rather trivial analogy into the discussion, the actions of a person who adheres to the dictates of another purely out of the conviction that the latter will generously reward him some day will differ from those of a person who wants to be near another to enjoy the privilege of drawing on his exceptional goodness and health. A man who reckons he can wheedle his way onto God's "good side" will act differently from one who lives in fear of transgressing the least of a million obscure regulations supposedly having divine sanction; and both of these will act differently from one aspiring to live a life charged with divine Grace. Inevitably, our behaviour is a function of our perception of man's relationship to Deity. It is no accident that Christianity has not produced a *Talmud*—or that a Moslem society is distinguishable from a Buddhist one.

### Eclectic Enervation

Now, perhaps Rev. Forrest actually does worship Allah or Jehovah. But, if so, Christ's coming is evidently irrelevant to his concept of God. It did not constitute a new departure in our understanding about Him; and, by implication, it did not give us access to a whole new relationship to Deity. With a phrase, Rev. Forrest has effaced the most fundamental changes Christ's appearance was formerly held to have effected. Gone is the revelation that God is Love. Gone the mystery of His being three persons in one substance, as well as the staggering drama of the incarnation of one of these persons as a man. If the outcome of all this is that Christians start worshipping Allah or Jehovah, everything Christ did was simply a waste of time: He would have saved Himself a great deal of unnecessary inconvenience by staying in Heaven.

Such "Christianity-and-water" (utterly inconsistent, we might add, with the character Christ manifested while on earth) is reminiscent of the sentimental view that, after all, everybody is really working for the same ends. It has led to all kinds of nonsense, and will certainly lead to more. We can expect eventually to hear (indeed, in some instances we have already heard) clergy replying affirmatively to such questions as, "Is dialectical

materialism the same as the Christian God?" The last thing one can do is disturb another's complacency by questioning the validity of his thinking. This would, it seems, be positively un-Christian!

This sickly eclecticism, this fear of discomfiting anyone, is the bane of the churches in our time. Presumably, they act as they do in the hope of retaining a modicum of respect and influence. Yet this course is in fact their greatest weakness. The temptations of power have the same concomitants for religious establishments as for any others. They are merely preparing their demise (as the poet says) "not with a bang but a whimper".

### Proper Sphere of Competence

Another quotation from Rev. Forrest's article indicates where this attitude is taking the clergy: "Once when faced by three journalists in Edmonton and prepared for probing questions on Vietnam, the Middle East and the state of United Church finance, I was asked a simple question about God. It threw me." Getting caught up in thinking about what everybody else is thinking about is probably inseparable from the eclectic approach; and this, in turn, involves a loss of mental independence and philosophical autonomy. Unfortunately, a church whose representatives lack these qualities cannot have any virtue whatever.

Of course, there is nothing wrong in Rev. Forrest's knowing about Vietnam or the politics of big business or differential calculus or rabbit-breeding. But these are not the kinds of things about which we would normally apply to him for information. We already have a surfeit of political scientists and economists—without clerics getting the notion that their principal function is to regurgitate professorial theories in front of television cameras. This is not to say that the issues involved do not concern the clergy. A Christian, at least, must insist that in all creation there are no such issues. However, to bring religious insights to bear on a problem is one thing; to become so preoccupied by the problem that you forget your religious ground, quite another.

### The Task of the Clergy

By this process the clergy have lost their traditional potency in criticism and exposition. And, until they can demonstrate the relevance of their *doctrine*, their traditional functions will continue to move toward

ultimate extinction. Paradoxically, they seem convinced that they are becoming more and more "relevant" when in fact they are becoming less and less. After all, how relevant can one find reference to the numbing repetitions being sloshed at us day in and day out by the mass communications media? Clerical pronouncements in such a context end up affecting us no more than the announcement of the overthrow of a government or the outcome of a football game.

The clergy would do well to understand that, far from being some embarrassing encumbrance of their profession, the beliefs incorporated in their doctrines must either be at the very heart of things, or of no significance whatever.

If the Creator of all things visible and invisible has a Trinitarian structure, is this fact merely stuff for the intellectual diversion of theologians—or has it tremendous implications for the structure of everything deriving its existence from this Source? Showing the bearing of this, and dozens of other fundamental doctrinal questions, on our lives is the proper task of the clergy; and we can only lament their failure to attend to it.

R.E.K.

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("Words", continued from p. 2)

ished therein, virtually everybody did believe, as a first principle of their thinking, in the existence of a consistent, discoverable order in the universe. Then, the term was used in an approbatory sense: "ordinary" meant "respectful of this underlying order". That it was "ordinary" would not have implied that a play was a crashing failure, but that it satisfied the rules of dramatic craftsmanship (such as Aristotle's "Rule of the Three Unities").

The condition of such words in the vocabularies of most modern men indicates their lack of conviction that there is any definite basis to the universe. A society which respects neither form nor order is a society without any moorings in reality — a circumstance that places its very survival in question.

("Orthodoxy", continued from p. 4)

ferentiated society in disorder, the result of our ignoring the relations between its different elements." Thus, he maintains, as long as we continue to ignore the real nature of these relations, we will continue to attribute disorder "to the social differentiation itself instead of to our false conception of it". In turn, the only remedy to this situation must appear to be some kind of repudiation of social differentiation - "a return to primitive uniformity and multiple objective requiredness- a theirs-not-to-reason-why obedience to unrelated military orders". However, as we have seen (and as Auden points out), this merely results in another kind of "disorder".

**"High-grade Order"**

Our failure to move in the direction of cultural regeneration can, then, be related to our tendency to regard our only options as consisting in two heretical notions which appear to be mutually-contradictory but which in fact perpetuate each other and lead to the same thing: disintegration. Auden suggests that this false antithesis can be superseded only when we recognize the real nature of "order".

What this is is suggested in his discussion of "civilization" or a "high-grade social order", which, he claims, "makes two presuppositions":

- (a) that throughout this universe there is one set of laws according to which all movements and events in spite of all differences agree in happening;
- (b) that, nevertheless, there are in this universe many different realms or societies, each composed of a class of things peculiar to itself to which events of a peculiar kind happen (one important peculiarity is position in time), and that the peculiar laws of these several realms are modifications of the universal law mentioned in (a).<sup>3</sup>

Thus, there is an underlying principle of order or unity in the universe; however, particular entities (or persons) manifest this principle in individual ways: their particularity (or individuality) is modified by responsibility to the universal "law".

It is to these two notions that Auden relates his discussion of the two categories of heresy. Dualism, "dividing the substance", implies a denial of the universality of law; monism, "confounding the persons", implies that manifestations of the law peculiar to a

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The publication of SEED is an enterprise which we feel is of cardinal importance to the revitalization of our culture. This endeavour represents the concern of a few individuals sensible of their responsibility to reverse, where possible, what they perceive to be the deterioration of the ideological and practical bases of this culture, and prepared to make personal sacrifices in the accomplishment of this objective.

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## Capitalist Cartwheels

An editorial in the February 15th issue of *The Canadian Distributor* ("a trade magazine published by the National Association of Tobacco and Confectionery distributors") should do much to lay to rest the myth that an indivisible nexus exists between the activities of businessmen and opposition to collectivism. As the piece explains:—

Our rapidly changing world and our gravitation toward socialism force us all, reluctantly, to submit to group action and away from those ethereal freedoms we once so eagerly sought.

The French version calls for adaptation to "*l'action collective*".

Clearly, the conventional economic dichotomies in which we have been conditioned to think (capitalism-socialism, business-labour, etc.) will not bear the test of experience. We can see how readily those who are presumed among the staunchest defenders of independence will dismiss their freedoms as "ethereal". An awareness of this tendency should cause us to be more rigorous in distinguishing between persons of genuine principle and incipient Gadarene swine.

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particular instance can be applied to all other particular instances. "One law for the lion and the lamb is oppression": lions and lambs both participate in the law of nature, but to force a lion to behave like a lamb would be tyranny.

## The Integrative Principle

What is required, therefore, is an account of reality which permits diversity of particulars within the unity of "law". Auden implies where such an account (at least in theological terms) might be found: although he does not say so explicitly, his reference to the Athanasian Creed as the standard against which "heresy" can be evaluated suggests that "orthodoxy" is the trinitarian account of the Godhead.<sup>4</sup> Which brings us back to Gregory of Nazianzus.

As we have seen, Gregory dismisses atheism, polytheism, and monotheism in its cruder forms as all fostering disorder or disintegration. He finds in the trinitarian concept an account which accommodates both integration (or integrity) of nature and diversity (or differentiation) of persons. A question of perhaps fundamental importance that comes to mind is this: if the problem of 'social disorder' can be explained in terms of heretical deviations from the trinitarian doctrine, can "high-grade social order" be defined in terms of trinitarian orthodoxy? What are the positive political implications of the Athanasian Creed?

For the moment, we leave the matter there.

D.R.K.

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<sup>1</sup>See Henry Bettenson, ed., *The Later Christian Fathers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 116.

<sup>2</sup>See "The Encyclopedist Heresy", *Seed*, I:6 (July, 1974).

<sup>3</sup>Auden refers in a footnote to "H.G. Collingwood: 'Metaphysics.'"

<sup>4</sup>C.H. Douglas has similarly noticed the importance of the Athanasian Creed as a political document. See, for example, *The Social Creditor*, August 9, 1947: "...if we are going to allow policy in this country, and the manipulation of the majority to implement it, to be monotheistic, it must in the nature of things be the incarnation of a function./That is to say, there is no escape, in these circumstances, from tool-power politics./'But the right faith is this, that we worship...Trinity in Unity...And in this Trinity, none is afore or after other, none is greater or less than another.'"