

# **OBSERVATIONS ON HERESY AND ORTHODOXY**

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Observations on Heresy and Orthodoxy by Joseph Blanco White

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BY  
JOSEPH BLANCO WHITE, M.A.

Nunquam autem invenietur (quod queritur) si contenti fuerimus inventia. Præterea qui alium sequitur, nihil invenit, immo nec querit. Quid ergo? non ibo per priorum vestigia? ego vero utar via veteri: sed si propioreni planioreque invenero, hanc muniam. Qui ante nos ista moverunt, non domini nostri, sed duces sunt. Patet omnibus veritas, nondum est occupata: multum ex illa etiam futuris relictum est.—SENECA, Ep. 33.

*Reprinted from the Second Edition,*

WITH A SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR'S LIFE,

From the Christian Teacher, 1841,

BY JOHN HAMILTON THOM;

THE FUNERAL ADDRESS, BY JAMES MARTINEAU:

AND

PART OF A LETTER FROM MR. BLANCO WHITE ON  
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O  
OUTLINES  
OF THE  
LIFE OF JOSEPH BLANCO WHITE.

FROM THE CHRISTIAN TEACHER, 1841.

THE love of Truth is the highest form of the love of God. The religious affections may mislead, or they may arise from causes of a physical nature; but a pure devotion to Truth is the submission of all that is in Man to the eternal Source of Thought,—the sublime reliance of the Soul, unbribed by interest or passion, upon whatever it believes to have proceeded from that infinite Intelligence who is the Fountain of our spirits. There is no surrender to God so complete as that which is made by him who worships the Father in spirit and in truth,—whose God is Reality,—who uses no artificial means to keep up fluctuating and fluttering feelings that have no basis in his Reason, but casts all idols out of his heart, and, like Abraham stripped of his household gods, goes forth in faith to meet the untried future, knowing only that the great God has shewn him of his spirit, and that to trust in Truth is to take refuge with the Father of Lights.

The love of God in the form of the love of Truth

ensures the most genuine products of the devotional spirit;—the hope of progress, which is the root of all true humility; the practical fidelity of the conscience; and, what results from these, the trusting and childlike quiet of the heart. Christ himself has connected the sentiment of Immortality, of indefinite progress for the soul, with the worship that identifies God with Truth: "Whosoever shall drink of this water, it shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Immortality necessarily suggests ideas of Progress; and to love and obey the Truth are the only means by which our feeble Reason can approach to the Thoughts of God. These, too, are the sources of fidelity in temptation, of sublime peace in life and death. Who steers his course so direct towards arduous Duty as he who believes that he has no safe guide but Principle,—and, when this is clear, puts away from him, as false and unfilial, all deceitful reasonings about uncertain consequences,—and feels that in following a moral Truth he is committing himself to the Love of an All-wise God? Who in the hour of agitation or death is so free from alarm of *soul*, as he whose peace with Heaven depends not on the vehemence of his belief in abstract propositions, or the chance temperature of unstable feelings, but on the sincerity with which his inward being cleaves to a spiritual God? Our Lord Jesus Christ, whose Comforter and God was the Spirit of Truth, and who described it as his mission in the world, "to bear witness to the Truth that he knew," is the one example of perfect fidelity in diffi-

cult duty, and of heavenly peace of soul in all times of trial. In the midst of a religion of prescription, and of authority, and of ritual, and of enthusiasm, and of all other substitutes for the inner communion of the soul with God, he alone, who trusted to the Truth to make him free, was established on the Rock, and could meet every crisis of his life with the strength of one supported by God—"Not my will, but thine, be done,"—and close his martyr death with the childlike trust, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

Whosoever has not the spirit of Christ is none of his. And there is no spirit so worthy to be called "the spirit of Christ" as this practical trust, this committal of ourselves to the convictions of our Reason and the monitions of our Conscience, identifying them with God who is their Source. There are causes connected with the individual mind, and altogether independent of the undue influences of society, that render unfailing devotion to Truth the most arduous form of the true worship of God,—causes arising out of the infirmities and even the tenderness of our nature,—the surrender of the mind to the prejudices of education; the natural sloth of the intellect; and the lingering residency of the affections amid the sentiments and images where faith first found a home. And society—which, alas! is but collective man, with all the faults of the individual reduced to system and sanctioned by numbers—society lashes us in the direction of the very tendencies which it ought to restrain, and adds the whole weight of its bribes and terrors to

the difficulties which our own souls present in the spiritual work of seeking and worshipping God under the form of Truth. That tyranny of the imagination which in spiritual things fastens upon the mature mind the images of childhood; that sloth of the intellect which falls away from the toil of conceiving God, and forfeits its filial inheritance of growing access to the Parent Light; and that contraction of the affections which clings to the familiar and the known without inquiring whether it is the true, and the pure, and the holy, and the lovely,—these, which are in reality the infirmities of our nature, society has exalted into religious virtues of the highest order, and lent itself to the pernicious work of consecrating our weaknesses before God, by punishing as impiety, to the utmost of its power, every attempt to gain new light on the subject of Religion, to draw deeper water from the wells of Christ, and to think freshly of the Almighty. So totally has that portion of society which deems itself eminently Christian given up all thoughts of improvement in the knowledge of Religion, that the very supposition that there *is* anything to be added to their knowledge of God and of Christ is, in their eyes, a heresy. This is the radical evil of all dogmatic systems, that they sanctify the natural sloth and stagnation of our spiritual powers, and that they designedly excite the persecution of society against the man who reverently lifts his soul to the infinite God, and professes a faith in the possibility of new communications from His unexhausted Truth.

It is indeed most painfully descriptive of the state of Religion in this country, that an act so simple as the honest expression of opinion should, by artificial difficulties, be elevated into a rare virtue,—that in this respect it should still be with the servant as with his Lord,—and that fidelity to conscience, though not actually led to the cross, should yet have its more refined and lingering martyrdom. It would seem to be the most natural of moral occurrences, and certainly not marked with any extraordinary merit, that a man should speak as he felt, and having in simplicity sought the Truth, should in simplicity declare what he had found. But the sectarian spirit in society, the spirit of Churches under every form, has subjected to the severest temptations that simple honesty which would otherwise be a matter of course, the unprompted expression of the soul; so that the reverence for Truth which meets unmoved the frowns and seductions of that spirit, and pays its single obedience to inward conviction, deserves to be signalized, for it is rare indeed. Christians, while they profess a great regard for the truth of Christianity, have shewn very little regard for the only Christian truth a man can know anything of—*truth to himself*; and while they pray that he may be led into the Truth, they surround his path with every temptation to become a deceiver. Why was that venerable Confessor—for no less he was—whose worn remains were lately committed to the peaceful grave in Liverpool, in the presence of a few, who came to honour Truth in a Christian man, and to supply, as far