

# **AGAINST THE SABELLIANS**

Dionysius

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1. Now truly it would be just to dispute against those who, by dividing and rending the monarchy, which is the most august announcement of the Church of God, into, as it were, three powers, and distinct substances (hypostases), and three deities, destroy it.(2) For I have heard that some who preach and teach the word of God among you are teachers of this opinion, who indeed diametrically, so to speak, are opposed to the opinion of Sabellius. For he blasphemes in saying that the Son Himself is the Father, and vice versa; but these in a certain manner announce three gods, in that they divide the holy unity into three different substances, absolutely separated from one another. For it is essential that the Divine Word should be united to the God of all, and that the Holy Spirit should abide and dwell in God; and thus that the Divine Trinity should be reduced and gathered into one, as if into a certain head that is, into the omnipotent God of all. For the doctrine of the foolish Marcion, which splits and divides the monarchy into three elements, is assuredly of the devil, and is not of Christ's true disciples, or of those to whom the Saviour's teaching is agreeable. For these indeed rightly know that the Trinity is declared in the divine Scripture, but that the doctrine that there are three gods is, neither taught in the Old nor in the New Testament.

2. But neither are they less to be blamed who think that the Son was a creation, and decided that the Lord was made just as one of those things which really were made; whereas the divine declarations testify that He was begotten, as is fitting and proper, but not that He was created or made. It is therefore not a trifling, but a very great impiety, to say that the Lord was in any wise made with hands. For if the Son was made, there was a time when He was not; but He always was, if, as He Himself declares,(3) He is undoubtedly in the Father. And if Christ is the Word, the Wisdom, and the Power, for the divine writings tell us that Christ is these, as ye yourselves know, assuredly these are powers of God. Wherefore, if the Son was made, there was a time when these were not in existence;(4) and thus there was a time when God was without these things, which is utterly absurd. But why should I discourse at greater length to you about these matters, since ye are men filled with the Spirit, and especially understanding what absurd results follow from the opinion which asserts that the Son was made? The leaders of this view seem to me to have given very little heed to these things, and for that reason to have strayed absolutely, by explaining the passage otherwise than as the divine and prophetic Scripture demands. "The Lord created me the beginning of His ways."(5) For, as ye know, there is more than one signification of the word "created;" and in this place "created" is the same as "set over" the works made by Himself made, I say, by the Son Himself. But this "created" is not to be understood in the same manner as "made." For to make and to create are different from one another. "Is not He Himself thy Father, that hath possessed thee and created thee?"(6) says Moses in the great song of Deuteronomy. And thus might any one reasonably convict these men. Oh reckless and rash men! was then "the first-born of every creature"(7) something made? "He who was begotten from the womb before the morningstar?"(8) He who in the person of Wisdom says, "Before all the hills He begot me?"(9) Finally, any one may read in many parts of the divine utterances that the Son is said to have been begotten, but never that He was made. From which considerations, they who dare to say that His divine and inexplicable generation was a creation, are openly convicted of thinking that which is false concerning the generation of the Lord. 3. That admirable and divine unity, therefore, must neither be separated into three divinities, nor must the dignity and eminent greatness of the Lord be diminished by having applied to it the name of creation, but we must believe on God the Father Omnipotent, and on Christ Jesus His Son, and on the Holy Spirit. Moreover, that the Word is united to the God of all, because He says, "I and the Father are one;"(1) and, "I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me."(2) Thus doubtless will be maintained in its integrity the doctrine of the divine Trinity, and the

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sacred announcement of the monarchy.

### ELUCIDATIONS. I.

THE Confession, improperly called "the Creed of Athanasius," is acknowledged to embody the (Athanasian) doctrine of the Nicene Council; and I append it here as an index to the state of theology at the period which is the limit of our series. Nothing is properly a "creed" which has never been accepted as such by the whole Church, and the Greeks knew no other creed than that called Nicene. The Anglo-American Church has ceased to recite this Confession in public worship, but does not depart from it as doctrine. The "Reformed" communion in America(1) retains it among her liturgical forms, and I suppose the same is true of the Lutherans. It is a Western Confession, and, like the Te Deum, is a hymn rather than a symbol, though breathing the spirit of the Creed.

Usher adopts A.D. 447 as its date, and Beveridge assigns it to the fourth century. Dupin gives it a later origin than Usher, and a considerable number of eminent authorities agree with him in the date A.D. 484.

What are called the anathemas are the enacting clauses (so to speak), and, like the same in the Nicene Creed, may be regarded as no part of the Confession itself. If they have disappeared from the Great Symbol itself, as unsuitable to liturgical recitation, why not apply the same rule here?