

Council of Nicaea: Letter of Eusebius of Caesarea to the people of his Diocese [413] .

1. What was transacted concerning ecclesiastical faith at the Great Council assembled at Nicaea, you have probably learned, Beloved, from other sources, rumour being wont to precede the accurate account of what is doing. But lest in such reports the circumstances of the case have been misrepresented, we have been obliged to transmit to you, first, the formula of faith presented by ourselves, and next, the second, which [the Fathers] put forth with some additions to our words. Our own paper, then, which was read in the presence of our most pious [414] Emperor, and declared to be good and unexceptionable, ran thus:--

2. "As we have received from the Bishops who preceded us, and in our first catechisings, and when we received the Holy Laver, and as we have learned from the divine Scriptures, and as we believed and taught in the presbytery, and in the Episcopate itself, so believing also at the time present, we report to you our faith, and it is this [415] :"--

3. "We believe in One God, the Father Almighty, the Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in One Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, God from God, Light from Light, Life from Life, Son Only-begotten, first-born of every creature, before all the ages, begotten from the Father, by Whom also all things were made; Who for our salvation was made flesh, and lived among men, and suffered, and rose again the third day, and ascended to the Father, and will come again in glory to judge the quick and dead. And we believe also in One Holy Ghost:" "believing each of these to be and to exist, the Father truly Father, and the Son truly Son, and the Holy Ghost truly Holy Ghost, as also our Lord, sending forth His disciples for the preaching, said, "Go teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost [416] ." Concerning Whom we confidently affirm that so we hold, and so we think, and so we have held aforetime, and we maintain this faith unto the death, anathematizing every godless heresy. That this we have ever thought from our heart and soul, from the time we recollect ourselves, and now think and say in truth, before God Almighty and our Lord Jesus Christ do we witness, being able by proofs to shew and to convince you, that, even in times past, such has been our belief and preaching."

4. On this faith being publicly put forth by us, no room for contradiction appeared; but our most pious Emperor, before any one else, testified that it comprised most orthodox statements. He confessed moreover that such were his own sentiments, and he advised all present to agree to it, and to subscribe its articles and to assent to them, with the insertion of the single word, One-in-essence, which moreover he interpreted as not in the sense of the affections of bodies, nor as if the Son subsisted from the Father in the way of division, or any severance; for that the immaterial, and intellectual, and incorporeal nature could not be the subject of any corporeal

affection, but that it became us to conceive of such things in a divine and ineffable manner. And such were the theological remarks of our most wise and most religious Emperor; but they, with a view [417] to the addition of One in essence, drew up the following formula:-- The Faith dictated in the Council. "We believe in One God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible:"-- "And in One Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, Only-begotten, that is, from the essence of the Father; God from God, Light from Light, Very God from Very God, begotten not made, One in essence with the Father, by Whom all things were made, both things in heaven and things in earth; Who for us men and for our salvation came down and was made flesh, was made man, suffered, and rose again the third day, ascended into heaven, and cometh to judge quick and dead." "And in the Holy Ghost." "And those who say, Once He was not,' and Before His generation He was not,' and He came to be from nothing,' or those who pretend that the Son of God is Of other subsistence or essence [418] , ' or created' or alterable,' or mutable,' the Catholic Church anathematizes."

5. On their dictating this formula, we did not let it pass without inquiry in what sense they introduced "of the essence of the Father," and "one in essence with the Father." Accordingly questions and explanations took place, and the meaning of the words underwent the scrutiny of reason. And they professed, that the phrase "of the essence" was indicative of the Son's being indeed from the Father, yet without being as if a part of Him. And with this understanding we thought good to assent to the sense of such religious doctrine, teaching, as it did, that the Son was from the Father, not however a part of His essence [419] . On this account we assented to the sense ourselves, without declining even the term "One in essence," peace being the object which we set before us, and steadfastness in the orthodox view.

6. In the same way we also admitted "begotten, not made;" since the Council alleged that "made" was an appellative common to the other creatures which came to be through the Son, to whom the Son had no likeness. Wherefore, say they, He was not a work resembling the things which through Him came to be [420] , but was of an essence which is too high for the level of any work; and which the Divine oracles teach to have been generated from the Father [421] , the mode of generation being inscrutable and incalculable to every originated nature.

7. And so too on examination there are grounds for saying that the Son is "one in essence" with the Father; not in the way of bodies, nor like mortal beings, for He is not such by division of essence, or by severance, no, nor by any affection, or alteration, or changing of the Father's essence and power [422] (since from all such the unoriginate nature of the Father is alien), but because "one in essence with the Father" suggests that the Son of God bears no resemblance to the originated creatures, but that to His Father alone Who begat Him is He in every way assimilated, and that He is not of any other subsistence and essence, but from the Father [423] . To which term also, thus interpreted, it appeared well to assent; since

we were aware that even among the ancients, some learned and illustrious Bishops and writers [424] have used the term "one in essence," in their theological teaching concerning the Father and Son.

8. So much then be said concerning the faith which was published; to which all of us assented, not without inquiry, but according to the specified senses, mentioned before the most religious Emperor himself, and justified by the forementioned considerations. And as to the anathematism published by them at the end of the Faith, it did not pain us, because it forbade to use words not in Scripture, from which almost all the confusion and disorder of the Church have come. Since then no divinely inspired Scripture has used the phrases, "out of nothing," and "once He was not," and the rest which follow, there appeared no ground for using or teaching them; to which also we assented as a good decision, since it had not been our custom hitherto to use these terms.

9. Moreover to anathematize "Before His generation He was not," did not seem preposterous, in that it is confessed by all, that the Son of God was before the generation according to the flesh [425]. 10. Nay, our most religious Emperor did at the time prove, in a speech, that He was in being even according to His divine generation which is before all ages, since even before He was generated in energy, He was in virtue [426] with the Father ingenerately, the Father being always Father, as King always, and Saviour always, being all things in virtue, and being always in the same respects and in the same way. 11. This we have been forced to transmit to you, Beloved, as making clear to you the deliberation of our inquiry and assent, and how reasonably we resisted even to the last minute as long as we were offended at statements which differed from our own, but received without contention what no longer pained us, as soon as, on a candid examination of the sense of the words, they appeared to us to coincide with what we ourselves have professed in the faith which we have already published.

[413] This Letter is also found in Socr. H. E. i. 8. Theod. H. E. i. Gelas. Hist. Nic. ii. 34. p. 442. Niceph. Hist. viii. 22.

[414] And so *infr.* "most pious," S:4. "most wise and most religious," *ibid.* "most religious," S:8. S:10. Eusebius observes in his *Vit. Const.* the same tone concerning Constantine, and assigns to him the same office in determining the faith (being as yet unbaptized). E.g. "When there were differences between persons of different countries, as if some common bishop appointed by God, he convened Councils of God's ministers; and not disdaining to be present and to sit amid their conferences," &c. i. 44. When he came into the Nicene Council, "it was," says Eusebius, "as some heavenly Angel of God," iii. 10. alluding to the brilliancy of the imperial purple. He confesses, however, he did not sit down until the Bishops bade him. Again at the

same Council, "with pleasant eyes looking serenity itself into them all, collecting himself, and in a quiet and gentle voice" he made an oration to the Fathers upon peace. Constantine had been an instrument in conferring such vast benefits, humanly speaking, on the Christian Body, that it is not wonderful that other writers of the day besides Eusebius should praise him. Hilary speaks of him as "of sacred memory," *Fragm. v. init.* Athanasius calls him "most pious," *Apol. contr. Arian. 9*; "of blessed memory," *ad Ep. AEg. 18. 19.* Epiphanius "most religious and of ever-blessed memory," *Haer. 70. 9.* Posterity, as was natural, was still more grateful.

[415] "The children of the Church have received from their holy Fathers, that is, the holy Apostles, to guard the faith; and withal to deliver and preach it to their own children....Cease not, faithful and orthodox men, thus to speak, and to teach the like from the divine Scriptures, and to walk, and to catechise, to the confirmation of yourselves and those who hear you; namely, that holy faith of the Catholic Church, as the holy and only Virgin of God received its custody from the holy Apostles of the Lord; and thus, in the case of each of those who are under catechising, who are to approach the Holy Laver, ye ought not only to preach faith to your children in the Lord, but also to teach them expressly, as your common mother teaches, to say: We believe in One God," &c. *Epiph. Ancor. 119 fin.*, who thereupon proceeds to give at length the [so-called] Constantinopolitan Creed. And so Athan. speaks of the orthodox faith, as "issuing from Apostolical teaching and the Fathers' traditions, and confirmed by New and Old Testament." *Letter 60. 6. init.* Cyril Hier. too as "declared by the Church and established from all Scripture." *Cat. v. 12.* "Let us guard with vigilance what we have received...What then have we received from the Scriptures but altogether this? that God made the world by the Word," &c., &c. *Procl. ad Armen. p. 612.* "That God, the Word, after the union remained such as He was, &c., so clearly hath divine Scripture, and moreover the doctors of the Churches, and the lights of the world taught us." *Theodor. Dial. 3 init.* "That it is the tradition of the Fathers is not the whole of our case; for they too followed the meaning of Scripture, starting from the testimonies, which just now we laid before you from Scripture." *Basil de Sp. S:16. vid.* also a remarkable passage in *de Synod. S:6 fin. infra.*

[416] *Matt. xxviii. 19.*

[417] [Or, taking the addition as their pretext.]

[418] The only clauses of the Creed which admit of any question in their explanation, are the "He was not before His generation," and "of other subsistence or essence." Of these the former shall be reserved for a later part of the volume; the latter is treated of in a note at the end of this Treatise [see *Excursus A.*].

[419] Eusebius does not commit himself to any positive sense in which the formula "of the essence" is to be interpreted, but only says what it does not mean. His comment on it is "of the Father, but not as a part;" where, what is not negative,

instead of being an explanation, is but a recurrence to the original words of Scripture, of which ex ousias itself is the explanation; a curious inversion. Indeed it is very doubtful whether he admitted the ex ousias at all. He says, that the Son is not like the radiance of light so far as this, that the radiance is an inseparable accident of substance, whereas the Son is by the Father's will, *kata gnomen kai proairesin*, Demonstr. Ev. iv. 3. And though he insists on our Lord being alone, *ek theou*, yet he means in the sense which Athan. refutes, *supr. S:6*, viz. that He alone was created immediately from God, *vid. next note 6*. It is true that he plainly condemns with the Nicene Creed the *ex ouk onton* of the Arians, "out of nothing," but an evasion was at hand here also; for he not only adds, according to Arian custom, "as others" (*vid. note following*) but he has a theory that no being whatever is out of nothing, for non-existence cannot be the cause of existence. God, he says, "proposed His own will and power as a sort of matter and substance' of the production and constitution of the universe, so that it is not reasonably said, that any thing is out of nothing. For what is from nothing cannot be at all. How indeed can nothing be to any thing a cause of being? but all that is, takes its being from One who only is, and was, who also said I am that I am." Demonstr. Ev. iv. 1. Again, speaking of our Lord, "He who was from nothing would not truly be Son of God, as neither is any other of things generate." Eccl. Theol. i. 9 fin. [see, however, D.C.B. ii. p. 347].

[420] Eusebius distinctly asserts, Dem. Ev. iv. 2, that our Lord is a creature. "This offspring," he says, "did He first produce Himself from Himself as a foundation of those things which should succeed, the perfect handy-work, *demiourgema*, of the Perfect, and the wise structure, *architektonema*, of the Wise," &c. Accordingly his avowal in the text is but the ordinary Arian evasion of "an offspring, not as the offsprings." E.g. "It is not without peril to say recklessly that the Son is originate out of nothing similarly to the other things originate." Dem. Ev. v. 1. *vid. also Eccl. Theol. i. 9. iii. 2*. And he considers our Lord the only Son by a divine provision similar to that by which there is only one sun in the firmament, as a centre of light and heat. "Such an Only-begotten Son, the excellent artificer of His will and operator, did the supreme God and Father of that operator Himself first of all beget, through Him and in Him giving subsistence to the operative words (ideas or causes) of things which were to be, and casting in Him the seeds of the constitution and governance of the universe;...Therefore the Father being One, it behoved the Son to be one also; but should any one object that He constituted not more, it is fitting for such a one to complain that He constituted not more suns, and moons, and worlds, and ten thousand other things." Dem. Ev. iv. 5 fin. *vid. also iv. 6*.

[421] Eusebius does not say that our Lord is "from the essence of" the Father, but has "an essence from" the Father. This is the Semi-arian doctrine, which, whether confessing the Son from the essence of the Father or not, implied that His essence was not the Father's essence, but a second essence. The same doctrine is found in the Semi-arians of Ancyra, though they seem to have confessed "of the essence." And this is one object of the *homousion*, to hinder the confession "of the essence" from

implying a second essence, which was not obviated or was even encouraged by the homoiousion. The Council of Ancyra, quoting the text "As the Father hath life in Himself so," &c., says, "since the life which is in the Father means essence, and the life of the Only-begotten which is begotten from the Father means essence, the word so' implies a likeness of essence to essence." Haer. 73. 10 fin. Hence Eusebius does not scruple to speak of "two essences," and other writers of three essences, contr. Marc. i. 4. p. 25. He calls our Lord "a second essence." Dem. Ev. vi. Praef. Praep. Ev. vii. 12. p. 320, and the Holy Spirit a third essence, *ibid.* 15. p. 325. This it was that made the Latins so suspicious of three hypostases, because the Semi-arians, as well as they, understood hypostasis to mean essence [but this is dubious]. Eusebius in like manner [after Origen] calls our Lord "another God," "a second God." Dem. Ev. v. 4. p. 226. v. fin. "second Lord." *ibid.* 3 init. 6. fin. "second cause." Dem. Ev. v. Praef. vid. also heteron echousa to kat' ousian hupokeimenon, Dem. Ev. v. 1. p. 215. kath' heauton ousiomenos. *ibid.* iv. 3. And so heteros para ton patera. Eccl. Theol. i. 60. p. 90. and zoen idian echon. *ibid.* and zon kai huphestos kai tou patros huparchon ektos. *ibid.* Hence Athan. insists so much, as in de Decr., on our Lord not being external to the Father. Once admit that He is in the Father, and we may call the Father, the only God, for He is included. And so again as to the Ingenerate, the term does not exclude the Son, for He is generate in the Ingenerate.

[422] This was the point on which the Semi-arians made their principal stand against the "one in essence," though they also objected to it as being of a Sabellian character. E.g. Euseb. Demonstr. iv. 3. p. 148. d.p. 149. a, b. v. 1. pp. 213-215. contr. Marcell. i. 4. p. 20. Eccl. Theol. i. 12. p. 73. in laud. Const. p. 525. de Fide i. ap. Sirmond. tom. i. p. 7. de Fide ii. p. 16, and apparently his de Incorporali. And so the Semi-arians at Ancyra Epiph. Haer. 73. 11. p. 858. a, b. And so Meletius *ibid.* p. 878 fin. and Cyril Hier. Catech. vii. 5. xi. 18. though of course Catholics would speak as strongly on this point as their opponents.

[423] Here again Eusebius does not say "from the Father's essence," but "not from other essence, but from the Father." According to note 5, *supr.* he considered the will of God a certain matter or substance. Montfaucon in loc. and Collect. Nov. Praef. p. xxvi. translates without warrant "ex Patris hypostasi et substantia." As to the Son's perfect likeness to the Father which he seems here to grant, it has been already shewn, de Decr. 20, note 9, how the admission was evaded. The likeness was but a likeness after its own kind, as a picture is of the original. "Though our Saviour Himself teaches," he says, "that the Father is the only true God,' still let me not be backward to confess Him also the true God, as in an image,' and that possessed; so that the addition of only' may belong to the Father alone as archetype of the image....As, supposing one king held sway, and his image was carried about into every quarter, no one in his right mind would say that those who held sway were two, but one who was honoured through his image; in like manner," &c. de Eccles. Theol. ii. 23, vid. *ibid.* 7.

[424] Athanasius in like manner, ad Afros. 6. speaks of "testimony of ancient Bishops about 130 years since;" and in de Syn. S:43. of "long before" the Council of Antioch, a.d. 269. viz. the Dionysii, &c. vid. note on de Decr. 20.

[425] Socrates, who advocates the orthodoxy of Eusebius, leaves out this heterodox paragraph [S:S:9, 10] altogether. Bull, however, Defens. F. N. iii. 9. n. 3. thinks it an interpolation. Athanasius alludes to the early part of the clause, supr. S:4. and de Syn. S:13. where he says, that Eusebius implied that the Arians denied even our Lord's existence before His incarnation. As to Constantine, he seems to have been used on these occasions by the court Bishops who were his instructors, and who made him the organ of their own heresy. Upon the first rise of the Arian controversy he addressed a sort of pastoral letter to Alexander and Arius, telling them that they were disputing about a question of words, and recommending them to drop it and live together peaceably. Euseb. vit. C. ii. 69. 72.

[426] [Rather potentially' both here and three lines below.] Theognis, [one] of the Nicene Arians, says the same, according to Philostorgius; viz. "that God even before He begat the Son was a Father, as having the power, dunamis, of begetting." Hist. ii. 15. Though Bull pronounces such doctrine to be heretical, as of course it is, still he considers that it expresses what otherwise stated may be orthodox, viz. the doctrine that our Lord was called the Word from eternity, and the Son upon His descent to create the worlds. And he acutely and ingeniously interprets the Arian formula, "Before His generation He was not," to support this view. Another opportunity will occur of giving an opinion upon this question; meanwhile, the parallel on which the heretical doctrine is supported in the text is answered by many writers, on the ground that Father and Son are words of nature, but Creator, King, Saviour, are external, or what may be called accidental to Him. Thus Athanasius observes, that Father actually implies Son, but Creator only the power to create, as expressing a dunamis; "a maker is before his works, but he who says Father, forthwith in Father implies the existence of the Son." Orat. iii. S:6. vid. Cyril too, Dial. ii. p. 459. Pseudo-Basil, contr. Eun. iv. 1. fin. On the other hand Origen argues the reverse way, that since God is eternally a Father, therefore eternally Creator also: "As one cannot be father without a son, nor lord without possession, so neither can God be called All-powerful, without subjects of His power;" de Princ. i. 2. n. 10. hence he argued for the eternity of matter.