

A Confession of the Catholic Faith, Sent to Bishop Paulinus

Pope Damasus I

Early Church (pre-Nicene) · Nicene & Post-Nicene · Confession

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INTRODUCTION

A short, sharp creedal document: Pope Damasus I's confession of faith, sent to Bishop Paulinus of Antioch in the years after the Council of Nicaea, as the Trinitarian and Christological controversies that the council had not fully settled kept resurfacing in new forms. It proceeds almost entirely by anathema, a list of positions on the Trinity and the person of Christ that the Roman church rejected, each one naming a heresy or a heretic. Read together, the anathemas sketch the boundaries the early church was still actively drawing around orthodox belief. It's a document built for reference and precision rather than devotional reading, useful for seeing exactly what was at stake in the decades after Nicaea.

A Confession of the Catholic Faith which Pope Damasus Sent to Bishop Paulinus in Macedonia when He was at Thessalonica.

After the Council of Nicæa there sprung up this error. Certain men ventured with profane mouths to say that the Holy Spirit is made through the Son. We, therefore, anathematize those who do not with all freedom preach that the Holy Spirit is of one and the same substance and power with the Father and the Son. In like manner, we anathematize them that follow the error of Sabellius and say that the Father and the Son are the same. We anathematize Arius and Eunomius who with equal impiety, though with differences of phrase, maintain the Son and the Holy Spirit to be a creature. We anathematize the Macedonians who, produced from the root of Arius, have changed the name but not the impiety. We anathematize Photinus who, renewing the heresy of Ebion, confessed that our Lord Jesus Christ was only of Mary. We anathematize them that maintain that there are two sons -- one before the ages and another after the assumption of the flesh from Mary. We anathematize also all who maintain that the Word of God moved in human flesh instead of a reasonable soul. For this Word of God Himself was not in His own body instead of a reasonable and intellectual soul, but assumed and saved our soul, both reasonable and intellectual, without sin. We anathematize also them that say that the Word of God is separated from the Father by extension and contraction, and blasphemously affirm that He is without essential being or is destined to die.

Them that have gone from churches to other churches we so far hold alien from our communion till they shall have returned to those cities in which they were first ordained.

If anyone, when another has gone from place to place, has been ordained in his stead, let him who abandoned his own city be held deprived of his episcopal rank until such time as his successor shall rest in the Lord. If anyone denies that the Father is eternal and the Son eternal and the Holy Ghost eternal, let him be anathema.

If anyone denies that the Son was begotten of the Father, that is of His divine substance, let him be anathema.

If anyone denies that the Son of God is very God, omnipotent and omniscient, and equal to the Father, let him be anathema.

If anyone says that the Son of God, living in the flesh when he was on the earth, was not in heaven and with the Father, let him be anathema. (John 3:13) If anyone says that in the Passion of the Cross the Son of God sustained its pain by Godhead, and not by reasonable soul and flesh which He had assumed in the form of a servant, (Philippians 2:7) as saith the Holy Scripture, let him be anathema.

If anyone denies that the Word of God suffered in the flesh and tasted death in the flesh, and was the first-born of the dead, (Colossians 1:18, Revelation 1:5) as the Son is life and giver of life, let him be anathema.

If anyone denies that He sits on the right hand of the Father in the flesh which He assumed, and in which He shall come to judge quick and dead, let him be anathema.

If anyone deny that the Holy Spirit is truly and absolutely of the Father and that the Son is of the divine substance and very God of God, let him be anathema.

If anyone deny that the Holy Spirit is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, as also the Son of the Father, let him be anathema.

If anyone say that the Holy Spirit is a created being or was made through the Son, let him be anathema.

If anyone denies that the Father made all things visible and invisible, through the Son who was made Flesh, and the Holy Spirit, let him be anathema.

If anyone deny one Godhead and power, one sovereignty and glory, one lordship, one kingdom, will and truth of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, let him be anathema.

If anyone deny three very persons of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, living forever, containing all things visible and invisible, omnipotent, judging all things, giving life to all things, creating all things and preserving all things, let him be anathema.

If anyone denies that the Holy Ghost is to be worshipped by all creation, as the Son, and as the Father, let him be anathema.

If anyone shall think aright about the Father and the Son but does not hold aright about the Holy Ghost, anathema, because he is a heretic, for all the heretics who do not think aright about God the Son and about the Holy Ghost are convicted of being involved in the unbelief of the Jews and the heathen; and if anyone shall divide Godhead, saying that the Father is God apart and the Son God, and the Holy Ghost God, and should persist that they are called Gods and not God, on account of the one Godhead and sovereignty which we believe and know there to be of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost -- one God in three essences, -- or withdrawing the Son and the Holy Ghost so as to suggest that the Father alone is called God and believed in as one God, let him be anathema.

For the name of gods has been bestowed by God upon angels and all saints, but of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost on account of their one and equal Godhead, not the names of "gods" but the name of "our God" is predicated and proclaimed, that we may believe that we are baptised in Father and Son and Holy Ghost and not in the names of archangels or angels, like the heretics or the Jews or foolish heathen.

This is the salvation of the Christians, that believing in the Trinity, that is in the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, and being baptized into the same one Godhead and power and divinity and substance, in Him we may trust. These events happened during the life of Gratianus.

Source: From the appendix to Theodoret's Ecclesiastical History, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 3. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1892.)

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