Cyril of Alexandria, Third epistle to Nestorius, including the twelve anathemas



Written by Cyril of Alexandria

Approved by the Council of Ephesus, AD 431.

To the most reverend and God-loving fellow-minister Nestorius, Cyril and the synod assembled in Alexandria, of the Egyptian Province, Greeting in the Lord.

When our Saviour says clearly: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me," what is to become of us, from whom your Holiness requires that we love you more than Christ the Saviour of us all? Who can help us in the day of judgment, or what kind of excuse shall we find for thus keeping silence so long, with regard to the blasphemies made by you against him? If you injured yourself alone, by teaching and holding such things, perhaps it would be less matter; but you have greatly scandalized the whole Church, and have cast among the people the leaven of a strange and new heresy. And not to those there [i.e. at Constantinople] on]y; but also to those everywhere [the books of your explanation were sent]. How can we any longer, under these circumstances, make a defence for our silence, or how shall we not be forced to remember that Christ said: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother." For if faith be injured, let there be lost the honour due to parents, as stale and tottering, let even the law of tender love towards children and brothers be silenced, let death be better to the pious than living; "that they might obtain a better resurrection," as it is written.

Behold, therefore, how we, together with the holy synod which met in great Rome, presided over by the most holy and most reverend brother and fellow-minister, Celestine the Bishop, also testify by this third letter to you, and counsel you to abstain from these mischievous and distorted dogmas, which you hold arid teach, and to receive the right faith, handed down to the churches from the beginning through the holy Apostles and Evangelists, who "were eye-witnesses, and ministers of the Word." And if your holiness have not a mind to this according to the limits defined in the writings of our brother of blessed memory and most reverend fellow-minister Celestine,

Bishop of the Church of Rome, be well assured then that you have no lot with us, nor place or standing (logon) among the priests and bishops of God. For it is not possible for us to overlook the churches thus troubled, and the people scandalized, and the right faith set aside, and the sheep scattered by you, who ought to save them, if indeed we are ourselves adherents of the right faith, and followers of the devotion of the holy fathers. And we are in communion with all those laymen and clergymen cast out or deposed by your holiness on account of the faith; for it is not right that those, who resolved to believe rightly, should suffer by your choice; for they do well in opposing you. This very thing you have mentioned in your epistle written to our most holy and fellow-bishop Celestine of great Rome.

But it would not be sufficient for your reverence to confess with us only tile symol of the faith set out some time ago by the Holy Ghost at the great and holy synod convened in Nice: for you have not held and interpreted it rightly, but rather perversely; even though you confess with your voice the form of words. But in addition, in writing and by oath, you must confess that you also anathematize those polluted and unholy dogmas of yours, and that you will hold and teach that which we all, bishops, teachers, and leaders of the people both East and West, hold. The holy synod of Rome and we all agreed on the epistle written to your Holiness from the Alexandrian Church as being right and blameless. We have added to these our own letters and that which it is necessary for you to hold and teach, and what you should be careful to avoid. Now this is the Faith of the Catholic and Apostolic Church to which all Orthodox Bishops, both East and West, agree:

"We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father, that is, of the substance of the Father; God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made, both those in heaven and those in the earth. Who for us men and for our salvation, came down, and was incarnate, and was made man. He suffered, and rose again the third day. He ascended into the heavens, from thence he shall come to judge both the quick and tile dead. And in the Holy Ghost: But those that say, There was a time when he was not, and, before he was begotten he was not, and that he was made of that which previously was not, or that he was of some other substance or essence; and that the Son of God was capable of change or alteration; those the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes."

Following in all points the confessions of the Holy Fathers which they made (the Holy Ghost speaking in them), and following the scope of their opinions, and going, as it were, in the royal way, we confess that the Only begotten Word of God, begotten of the same substance of the Father, True God from True God, Light from Light, through Whom all things were made,

the things in heaven and the things in the earth, coming down for our salvation, making himself of no reputation (kaqeij eauton eij kenwsin), was incarnate and made man; that is, taking flesh of the holy Virgin, and having made it his own from the womb, he subjected himself to birth for us, and came forth man from a woman, without casting off that which he was; but although he assumed flesh and blood, he remained what he was, God in essence and in truth. Neither do we say that his flesh was changed into the nature of divinity, nor that the ineffable nature of the Word of God has laid aside for the nature of flesh; for he is unchanged and absolutely unchangeable, being the same always, according to the Scriptures. For although visible and a child in swaddling clothes, and even in the bosom of his Virgin Mother, he filled all creation as God, and was a fellow-ruler with him who begat him, for the Godhead is without quantity and dimension, and cannot have limits.

Confessing the Word to be made one with the flesh according to substance, we adore one Son and Lord Jesus Christ: we do not divide the God from the man, nor separate him into parts, as though the two natures were mutually united in him only through a sharing of dignity and authority (for that is a novelty and nothing else), neither do we give separately to the Word of God the name Christ and the same name separately to a different one born of a woman; but we know only one Christ, the Word from God the Father with his own Flesh. For as man he was anointed with us, although it is he himself who gives the Spirit to those who are worthy and not in measure, according to the saying of the blessed Evangelist John.

But we do not say that the Word of God dwelt in him as in a common man born of the holy Virgin, lest Christ be thought of as a God-bearing man; for although the Word tabernacled among us, it is also said that in Christ "dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"; but we understand that be became flesh, not just as he is said to dwell in the saints, but we define that that tabernacling in him was according to equality (kata ton ison en autw tropou). But being made one kata fusin, and not converted into flesh, he made his indwelling in such a way, as we may say that the soul of man does in his own body.

One therefore is Christ both Son and Lord, not as if a man had attained only such a conjunction with God as consists in a unity(1) of dignity alone or of authority. For it is not equality of honour which unites natures; for then Peter and John, who were of equal honour with each other, being both Apostles and holy disciples [would have been one, and], yet the two are not one. Neither do we understand the manner of conjunction to be apposition, for this does not suffice for natural oneness (proj enwson Fusikhn). Nor yet according to relative participation, as we are also joined to the Lord, as it is written "we are one Spirit in him." Rather we deprecate the term of "junction" (sunafeiaj) as not having sufficiently signified the oneness. But we

do not call the Word of God the Father, the God nor the Lord of Christ, lest we openly cut in two the one Christ, the Son and Lord, and fall under the charge of blasphemy, making him the God and Lord of himself. For the Word of God, as we have said already, was made hypostatically one in flesh, yet he is God of all and he rules all; but he is not the slave of himself, nor his own Lord. For it is foolish, or rather impious, to think or teach thus. For he said that God was his Father, although he was God by nature, and of his substance. Yet we are not ignorant that while he remained God, he also became man and subject to God, according to the law suitable to the nature of the manhood. But how could he become the God or Lord of himself? Consequently as man, and with regard to the measure of his humiliation, it is said that he is equally with us subject to God; thus he became under the Law, although as God he spake the Law and was the Law-giver.

We are careful also how we say about Christ: "I worship the One clothed on account of the One clothing him, and on account of the Unseen, I worship the Seen." It is horrible to say in this connexion as follows: "The assumed as well as the assuming have the name of God."

For the saying of this divides again Christ into two, and puts the man separately by himself and God also by himself. For this saying denies openly the Unity according to which one is not worshipped in the other, nor does God exist together with the other; but Jesus Christ is considered as One, the Only-begotten Son, to be honoured with one adoration together with his own flesh.

We confess that he is the Son, begotten of God the Father, and Only-begotten God; and although according to his own nature he was not subject to suffering, yet he suffered for us in the flesh according to the Scriptures, and although impassible, yet in his Crucified Body he made his own the sufferings of his own flesh; and by the grace of God he tasted death for all: he gave his own Body thereto, although he was by nature himself the life and the resurrection, in order that, having trodden down death by his unspeakable power, first in his own flesh, he might become the first born from the dead, and the first-fruits of them that slept. And that he might make a way for the nature of man to attain incorruption, by the grace of God (as we just now said), he tasted death for every man, and after three days rose again, having despoiled hell. So although it is said that the resurrection of the dead was through man, yet we understand that man to have been the Word of God, and the power of death was loosed through him, and he shall come in the fulness of time as the One Son and Lord, in the glory of the Father, in order to judge the world in righteousness, as it is written.

We will necessarily add this also. Proclaiming the death, according to the flesh, of the Only-begotten Son of God, that is Jesus Christ, confessing his

resurrection from the dead, and his ascension into heaven, we offer the Unbloody Sacrifice in the churches, and so go on to the mystical thanksgivings, and are sanctified, having received his Holy Flesh and the Precious Blood of Christ the Saviour of us all. And not as common flesh do we receive it; God forbid: nor as of a man sanctified and as sociated with the Word according to the unity of worth, or as having a divine indwelling, but as truly the Life-giving and very flesh of the Word himself. For he is the Life according to his nature as God, and when he became united to his Flesh, he made it also to be Life-giving, as also he said to us: Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his Blood. For we must not think that it is flesh of a man like us (for how can the flesh of man be life-giving by its own nature?) but as having become truly the very own of him who for us both became and was called Son of Man. Besides, what the Gospels say our Saviour said of himself, we do not divide between two hypostases or persons. For neither is he, the one and only Christ, to be thought of as double, although of two (ek duo) and they diverse, yet he has joined them in an indivisible union, just as everyone knows a man is not double although made up of soul and body, but is one of both. Wherefore when thinking rightly, we transfer the human and the divine to the same person (par' enoj eirhsqai).

For when as God he speaks about himself: "He who hath seen me hath seen the Father," and "I and my Father are one," we consider his ineffable divine nature according to which he is One with his Father through the identity of essence--"The image and impress and brightness of his glory." But when not scorning the measure of his humanity, he said to the Jews: "But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth." Again no less than before we recognize that he is the Word of God from his identity and likeness to the Father and from the circumstances of his humanity. For if it is necessary to believe that being by nature God, he became flesh, that is, a man endowed with a reasonable soul, what reason can certain ones have to be ashamed of this language about him, which is suitable to him as man? For if he should reject the words suitable to him as man, who compelled him to become man like us? And as he humbled himself to a voluntary abasement (kenwsin) for us, for what cause can any one reject the words suitable to such abasement? Therefore all the words which are read in the Gospels are to be applied to One Person, to One hypostasis of the Word Incarnate. For the Lord Jesus Christ is One, according to the Scriptures, although he is called "the Apostle and High Priest of our profession," as offering to God and the Father the confession of faith which we make to him, and through him to God even the Father and also to the Holy Spirit; yet we say he is, according to nature, the Only-begotten of God. And not to any man different from him do we assign the name of priesthood, and the thing, for be became "the Mediator between God and men," and a Reconciler unto peace, having offered himself as a sweet smelling savour to God and the Father. Therefore also he said: "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not; but a body hast thou

prepared me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God." For on account of us he offered his body as a sweet smelling savour, and not for himself; for what offering or sacrifice was needed for himself, who as God existed above all sins? For "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," so that we became prone to fall, and the nature of man has fallen into sin, yet not so he (and therefore we fall short of his glory). How then can there be further doubt that the true Lamb died for us and on our account? And to say that he offered himself for himself and us, could in no way escape the charge of impiety. For he never committed a fault at all, neither did he sin. What offering then did he need, not having sin for which sacrifices are rightly offered? But when he spoke about the Spirit, he said: "He shall glorify me." If we think rightly, we do not say that the One Christ and Son as needing glory from another received glory from the Holy Spirit; for neither greater than he nor above him is his Spirit, but because he used the Holy Spirit to show forth Iris own divinity in his mighty works, therefore he is said to have been glorified by him just as if any one of us should say concerning his inherent strength for example, or Iris knowledge of anything, "They glorified me."For although the Spirit is the same essence, yet we think of him by himself, as he is the Spirit and not the Son; but he is not different from him; for he is called the Spirit of truth and Christ is the Truth, and he is sent by him, just as, moreover, he is from God and the Father. When then the Spirit worked miracles through the hands of the holy apostles after the Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ into heaven, he glorified him. For it is believed that he who works through his own Spirit is God according to nature. Therefore he said: "He shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you." But we do not say this as if the Spirit is wise and powerful through some sharing with another; for he is all perfect and in need of no good thing. Since, therefore, he is the Spirit of the Power and Wisdom of the Father (that is, of the Son), he is evidently Wisdom and Power.

And since the holy Virgin brought forth corporally God made one with flesh according to nature, for this reason we also call her Mother of God, not as if the nature of the Word had the beginning of its existence from the flesh.

For "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God, and the Word was with God," and he is the Maker of the ages, coeternal with the Father, and Creator of all; but, as we have already said, since he united to himself hypostatically human nature from her womb, also he subjected himself to birth as man, not as needing necessarily in his own nature birth in time and in these last times of the world, but in order that he might bless the beginning of our existence, and that that which sent the earthly bodies of our whole race to death, might lose its power for the future by his being born of a woman in the flesh. And this: "In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children," being removed through him, he showed the truth of that spoken

by the prophet," Strong death swallowed them up, and again God hath wiped away every tear from off all faces." For this cause also we say that he attended, having been called, and also blessed, the marriage in Cana of Galilee, with his holy Apostles in accordance with the economy. We have been taught to hold these things by the holy Apostles and Evangelists, and all the God-inspired Scriptures, and in the true confessions of the blessed Fathers.

To all these your reverence also should agree, and give heed, without any guile. And what it is necessary your reverence should anathematize we have subjoined to our epistle:

The 12 Anathemas, Proposed by Cyril and accepted by the Council of Ephesus:

1. If anyone does not confess that Emmanuel is God in truth, and therefore that the holy virgin is the mother of God (for she bore in a fleshly way the Word of God become flesh, let him be anathema.

2. If anyone does not confess that the Word from God the Father has been united by hypostasis with the flesh and is one Christ with his own flesh, and is therefore God and man together, let him be anathema.

3. If anyone divides in the one Christ the hypostases after the union, joining them only by a conjunction of dignity or authority or power, and not rather by a coming together in a union by nature, let him be anathema.

4. If anyone distributes between the two persons or hypostases the expressions used either in the gospels or in the apostolic writings, whether they are used by the holy writers of Christ or by him about himself, and ascribes some to him as to a man, thought of separately from the Word from God, and others, as befitting God, to him as to the Word from God the Father, let him be anathema.

5. If anyone dares to say that Christ was a God-bearing man and not rather God in truth, being by nature one Son, even as "the Word became flesh", and is made partaker of blood and flesh precisely like us, let him be anathema.

6. If anyone says that the Word from God the Father was the God or master of Christ, and does not rather confess the same both God and man, the Word having become flesh, according to the scriptures, let him be anathema.

7. If anyone says that as man Jesus was activated by the Word of God and was clothed with the glory of the Only-begotten, as a being separate from him, let him be anathema.

8. If anyone dares to say that the man who was assumed ought to be worshipped and glorified together with the divine Word and be called God along with him, while being separate from him, (for the addition of "with" must always compel us to think in this way), and will not rather worship Emmanuel with one veneration and send up to him one doxology, even as "the Word became flesh", let him be anathema.

9. If anyone says that the one Lord Jesus Christ was glorified by the Spirit, as making use of an alien power that worked through him and as having received from him the power to master unclean spirits and to work divine wonders among people, and does not rather say that it was his own proper Spirit through whom he worked the divine wonders, let him be anathema.

10. The divine scripture says Christ became "the high priest and apostle of our confession"; he offered himself to God the Father in an odour of sweetness for our sake. If anyone, therefore, says that it was not the very Word from God who became our high priest and apostle, when he became flesh and a man like us, but as it were another who was separate from him, in particular a man from a woman, or if anyone says that he offered the sacrifice also for himself and not rather for us alone (for he who knew no sin needed no offering), let him be anathema.

11. If anyone does not confess that the flesh of the Lord is life-giving and belongs to the Word from God the Father, but maintains that it belongs to another besides him, united with him in dignity or as enjoying a mere divine indwelling, and is not rather life-giving, as we said, since it became the flesh belonging to the Word who has power to bring all things to life, let him be anathema.

12. If anyone does not confess that the Word of God suffered in the flesh and was crucified in the flesh and tasted death in the flesh and became the first born of the dead, although as God he is life and life-giving, let him be anathema.

NOTE: The counter-anathemas of Nestorius to the above, as well as notes on the Twelve Anathemas and Nestorius' response, can be found online at the Wheaton CCEL Library of the Early Church Fathers

Text found in Labbe and Cossart, *Concilia*, Tom. III., col. 395; Migne, *Patr. Groec.*, Tom. LXXVII. [Cyril, Opera, Tom. X.], col. 105 *et seqq.*