

A DECLARATION OF FAITH

by Gregory Thaumaturgus

Gregory Thaumaturgus's early creedal statement of Christian belief, preceded by biographical material on his education in Roman law and philosophy, his encounter with the great teacher Origen, and his call to Christian ministry. One of the earliest formal declarations of Trinitarian faith from the third century.

5 Chapters

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A Declaration Of Faith

Introductory Notice.

In this volume a mass of fragmentary material [1] has been reduced to method, and so harmonized as to present an integral result. The student has before him, therefore, (1) a view of the Christian Church emerging from the ten persecutions; (2) a survey of its condition on the eve of that great event, the (nominal) conversion of the empire; (3) an introduction to the era of Athanasius; and (4) a history of events that led to the calling of the first Catholic council at Nicæa. The moral grandeur and predominance of the See of Alexandria are also here conspicuously illustrated. The mastery which its great school continued to exercise over Christian thought, hegemony in the formation of Christian literature, its guardian influence in the development of doctrinal technology, and not less the Divine Providence that created it and built it up for the noble ends which it subserved in a Clement, an Origen, and an Athanasius, will all present themselves forcibly to every reflecting reader of this book. One half of this volume presents the Alexandrian school itself in its glorious succession of doctors and pupils, and the other half in the reflected light of its universal influence. Thus Methodius has no other distinction than that which he derives from his wholesome corrections of Origen, and yet the influence of Origen upon his own mind is betrayed even in his antagonisms. He objects to the excessive allegorizing of that great doctor, yet he himself allegorizes too much in the same spirit. Finally we come to Arnobius, who carries on the line of Latin Christianity in Northern Africa; but even here we find that Clement, and not Tertullian, is his model. He gives us, in a Latin dress, not a little directly borrowed from the great Alexandrian. This volume further demonstrates -- what I have so often touched upon -- the historic fact that primitive Christianity was Greek in form and character, Greek from first to last, Greek in all its forms of dogma, worship, and polity. One idea only did it borrow from the West, and that not from the ecclesiastical, but the civil, Occident. It conformed itself to the imperial plan of exarchates, metropolises, and dioceses. Into this civil scheme it shaped itself, not by design, but by force of circumstances, just as the Anglo-American communion fell in with the national polity, and took shape in dioceses each originally conterminous with a State. Because it was the capital of the empire, therefore Rome was reckoned the first, but not the chief, of Sees, as the Council of Nicæa declared; and because Byzantium had become "New Rome," therefore it is made second on the list, but equal in dignity. Rome was the sole Apostolic See of the West, and, as such, reflected the honours of St. Paul, its founder, and of St. Peter, who also glorified it by martyrdom; but not a word of this is recognised at Nicæa as investing it even with a moral primacy. That was informally the endowment of Alexandria; unasserted because unquestioned, and unchallenged because as yet unholy ambition had not infected the Apostolic churches. It is time, then, to disabuse the West of its narrow ideas concerning ecclesiastical history. Dean Stanley rebuked this spirit in his Lectures on the Eastern Church. [2] He complained that "Eastern Christendom is comparatively an untrodden field;" he quoted the German proverb, [3] "Behind the mountains there is yet a population;" he called on us to enlarge our petty Occidental horizon; and he added words of reproach which invite us to reform the entire scheme of our ecclesiastical history by presenting the Eastern Apostolic churches as the main stem of Christendom, of which the church of Rome itself was for three hundred years a mere colony, unfelt in theology except by contributions to the Greek

literature of Christians, and wholly unconscious of those pretensions with which, in a spirit akin to that of the romances about Arthur and the Round Table, the fabulous Decretals afterwards invested a succession of primitive bishops in Rome, wholly innocent of anything of the kind. "The Greek Church," says Dean Stanley, "reminds us of the time when the tongue, not of Rome, but of Greece, was the sacred language of Christendom. It was a striking remark of the Emperor Napoleon, that the introduction of Christianity itself was, in a certain sense, the triumph of Greece over Rome; the last and most signal instance of the maxim of Horace, *Græcia capta ferum victorem cepit*. The early Roman church was but a colony of Greek Christians or Grecized Jews. The earliest Fathers of the Western Church wrote in Greek. The early popes were not Italians, but Greeks. The name of pope is not Latin, but Greek, the common and now despised name of every pastor in the Eastern Church....She is the mother, and Rome the daughter. It is her privilege to claim a direct continuity of speech with the earliest times; to boast of reading the whole code of Scripture, Old as well as New, in the language in which it was read and spoken by the Apostles. The humblest peasant who reads his Septuagint or Greek Testament in his own mother-tongue on the hills of Boeotia may proudly feel that he has access to the original oracles of divine truth which pope and cardinal reach by a barbarous and imperfect translation; that he has a key of knowledge which in the West is only to be found in the hands of the learned classes." Before entering on the study of this volume, the student will do well to read the interesting work which I have quoted; [4] but the following extract merits a place just here, and I cannot deprive even the casual reader of the benefit of such a preface from the non-ecclesiastical and purely literary pen of the Dean. He says: [5] "The See of Alexandria was then the most important in the world. [6] ...The Alexandrian church was the only great seat of Christian learning. Its episcopate was the Evangelical See, as founded by the chair of St. Mark....Its occupant, as we have seen, was the only potentate of the time who bore the name of pope. [7] After the Council of Nicæa he became the judge of the world, from his decisions respecting the celebration of Easter; and the obedience paid to his judgment in all matters of learning, secular and sacred, almost equalled that paid in later days to the ecclesiastical authority of the popes of the West. The head of the Alexandrian church,' says Gregory Nazianzen, is the head of the world." In the light of these all-important historic truths, these volumes of the Ante-Nicene Fathers have been elucidated by their American editor. [8] He begs to remind his countrymen that ecclesiastical history is yet to be written on these irrefragable positions, and the future student of history will be delivered from the most puzzling entanglement when once these idols of the market are removed from books designed for his instruction. Let American scholarship give us, at last, a Church history not written from a merely Western point of view, nor clogged with traditional phraseology perseveringly adhered to on the very pages which supply its refutation. It is the scandal of literature that the frauds of the pseudo-Decretals should be perpetuated by modern lists of "popes," beginning with St. Peter, in the very books which elaborately expose the empiricism of such a scheme, and quote the reluctant words by which this gigantic imposition has been consigned to infamy in the confessions of Jesuits and Ultramontanes themselves. [1] See the Edinburgh series. [2] See p.3, ed. of 1861. [3] "Hinter dem Berge sind auch Leute." [4] Late editions are cheap in the market. It is filled with the author's idiosyncrasies, but it is brilliant and suggestive. [5] Lect. vii. p.268. On the verse of Horace (*Ep., i. book ii.155*), see Dacier's note, vol. ix.389.[6] He adds: "Alexandria, till the rise of Constantinople, was the most powerful city in the East. The prestige of its founder still clung to it." [7] That is, of "the pope," as Wellington was called "the duke." But Cyprian was called *papa*, even by the Roman clergy.[8] He

owes his own introduction to a just view of these facts to a friend of his boyhood and youth, the late Rev. Dr. Hill of the American Mission in Athens. He was penetrated with love for Greek Christians.

Introductory Note to Gregory Thaumaturgus.

[a.d.205-240-265.] Alexandria continues to be the head of Christian learning. [9] It is delightful to trace the hand of God from generation to generation, as from father to son, interposing for the perpetuity of the faith. We have already observed the continuity of the great Alexandrian school: how it arose, and how Pantænus begat Clement, and Clement begat Origen. So Origen begat Gregory, and so the Lord has provided for the spiritual generation of the Church's teachers, age after age, from the beginning. Truly, the Lord gave to Origen a holy seed, better than natural sons and daughters; as if, for his comfort, Isaiah had written, [10] forbidding him to say, "I am a dry tree." Our Gregory has given us not a little of his personal adventures in his panegyric upon his master, and for his further history the reader need only be referred to what follows. But I am anxious to supply the dates, which are too loosely left to conjecture. As he was ordained a bishop "very young," according to Eusebius, I suppose he must have been far enough under fifty, the age prescribed by the "Apostolic Canons" (so called), though probably not younger than thirty, the earliest canonical limit for the ordination of a presbyter. If we decide upon five and thirty, as a mean reckoning, we may with some confidence set his birth at a.d.205, dating back from his episcopate, which began a.d.240. He was a native of Neo-Cæsarea, the chief city of Pontus, -- a fact that should modify what we have learned about Pontus from Tertullian. [11] He was born of heathen parentage, and lived like other Gentile boys until his fourteenth year (circa a.d.218), with the disadvantage of being more than ordinarily imbued by a mistaken father in the polytheism of Greece. At this period his father died; but his mother, carrying out the wishes of her husband, seems to have been not less zealous in furthering his education according to her pagan ideas. He was, evidently, the inheritor of moderate wealth; and, with his brother Athenodorus, he was placed under an accomplished teacher of grammar and rhetoric, from whom also he acquired a considerable knowledge of the Latin tongue. He was persuaded by the same master to use this accomplishment in acquiring some knowledge of the Roman laws. This is a very important point in his biography, and it brings us to an epoch in Christian history too little noted by any writer. I shall return to it very soon. We find him next going to Alexandria to study the New Platonism. He speaks of himself as already prepossessed with Christian ideas, which came to him even in his boyhood, about the time when his father died. But it was not at Alexandria that he began his acquaintance with Christian learning. Next he seems to have travelled into Greece, and to have studied at Athens. But the great interest of his autobiography begins with the providential incidents, devoutly narrated by himself, which engaged him in a journey to Berytus just as Origen reached Cæsarea, a.d.233, making it for a time his home and the seat of his school. His own good angel, as Gregory supposes, led him away from Berytus, where he purposed to prosecute his legal studies, and brought him to the feet of Origen, his Gamaliel; and "from the very first day of his receiving us," he says, "the true Sun began to rise upon me." This he accounts the beginning of his true life; and, if we are right as to our dates, he was now about twenty-seven years of age. If he tarried even a little while in Berytus, as seems probable, his knowledge of law was, doubtless, somewhat advanced. It was the seat of that school in which Roman law began its existence in the forms long afterward digested into the Pandects of Justinian. That emperor speaks of Berytus as "the mother and

nurse" of the civil law. Caius, whose Institutes were discovered in 1820 by the sagacity of Niebuhr, seems to have been a Syrian. So were Papinian and Ulpian: and, heathen as they were, they lived under the illumination reflected from Antioch; and, not less than the Antonines, they were examples of a philosophic regeneration which never could have existed until the Christian era had begun its triumphs. Of this sort of pagan philosophy Julian became afterwards the grand embodiment; and in Julian's grudging confessions of what he had learned from Christianity we have a key to the secret convictions of others, such as I have named; characters in whom, as in Plutarch and in many retrograde unbelievers of our day, we detect the operation of influences they are unwilling to acknowledge; of which, possibly, they are blindly unconscious themselves. Roman law, I maintain, therefore, indirectly owes its origin, as it is directly indebted for its completion in the Pandects, to the new powers and processes of thought which came from "the Light of the World." It was light from Galilee and Golgotha, answering Pilate's question in the inward convictions of many a heathen sage. It is most interesting, therefore, to find in our Gregory one who had come into contact with Berytus at this period. He describes it as already dignified by this school of law, and therefore Latinized in some degree by its influence. Most suggestive is what he says of this school: "I refer to those admirable laws of our sages, by which the affairs of all the subjects of the Roman Empire are now directed, and which are neither digested nor learnt without difficulty. They are wise and strict (if not pious) in themselves, they are manifold and admirable, and, in a word, most thoroughly Grecian, although expressed and delivered to us in the Roman tongue, which is a wonderful and magnificent sort of language, and one very aptly conformable to imperial authority, but still difficult to me." Nor is this the only noteworthy tribute of our author to Roman law while yet that sublime system was in its cradle. The rhetorician who introduced him to it and to the Latin tongue was its enthusiastic eulogist; and Gregory says he learned the laws "in a thorough way, by his help....And he said one thing to me which has proved to me the truest of all his sayings; to wit, that my education in the laws would be my greatest viaticum, -- my ephodion (for thus he phrased it);" i.e., for the journey of life. This man, one can hardly doubt, was a disciple of Caius (or Gaius); and there is little question that the digested system which Gregory eulogizes was "the Institutes" of that great father of the civil law, now recovered from a palimpsest, and made known to our own age, with no less benefit to jurisprudence than the discovery of the Philosophumena has conferred on theology. Thus Gregory's Panegyric throws light on the origin of Roman law. He claims it for "our sages," meaning men of the East, whose vernacular was the Greek tongue. Caius was probably, like the Gaius of Scripture, an Oriental who had borrowed a Latin name, as did the Apostle of the Gentiles and many others. If he was a native of Berytus, as seems probable, that accounts for the rise of the school of laws at a place comparatively inconsiderable. Hadrian, in his journey to Palestine, would naturally discover and patronize such a jurist; and that accounts for the appearance of Caius at Rome in his day. Papinian and Ulpian, both Orientals, were his pupils in all probability; and these were the "sages" with whose works the youthful Gregory became acquainted, and by which his mind was prepared for the great influence he exerted in the East, where his name is a power to this day. His credit with our times is rather impaired than heightened by the epithet Thaumaturgus, which clings to his name as a convenient specification, to distinguish him from the other [12] Gregories whose period was so nearly his own. But why make it his opprobrium? He is not responsible for the romances that sprung up after his death; which he never heard of nor imagined. Like the great Friar Bacon, who was considered a magician, or Faust, whose invention nearly cost him his life, the reputation of Gregory made him the subject of

legendary lore long after he was gone. It is not impossible that God wrought marvels by his hand, but a single instance would give rise to many fables; and this very surname is of itself a monument of the fact that miracles were now of rare occurrence, and that one possessing the gift was a wonder to his contemporaries. To like popular love of the marvellous I attribute the stupid story of a mock consecration by Phædimus. If a slight irregularity in Origen's ordination gave him such lifelong troubles, what would not have been the tumult such a sacrilege as this would have occasioned? Nothing is more probable than that Phædimus related such things as having occurred in a vision; [13] and this might have weighed with a mind like Gregory's to overcome his scruples, and to justify his acceptance of such a position at an early age. We are already acquainted with the eloquent letter of Origen that decided him to choose the sacred calling after he left the school at Cæsarea. The Panegyric, which was his valedictory, doubtless called forth that letter. Origen had seen in him the makings of a kerux, and coveted such another Timothy for the Master's work. But the Panegyric itself abounds with faults, and greatly resembles similar college performances of our day. The custom of schools alone can excuse the expression of such enthusiastic praise in the presence of its subject; but Origen doubtless bore it as philosophically as others have done since, and its evident sincerity and heartfelt gratitude redeem it from the charge of fulsome adulation. For the residue of the story I may refer my readers to the statements of the translator, as follows: -- Translator's Notice. We are in possession of a considerable body of testimonies from ancient literature bearing on the life and work of Gregory. From these, though they are largely mixed up with the marvellous, we gain a tolerably clear and satisfactory view of the main facts in his history, and the most patent features of his character. [14] From various witnesses we learn that he was also known by the name Theodorus, which may have been his original designation; that he was a native of Neo-Cæsareia, a considerable place of trade, and one of the most important towns of Pontus; that he belonged to a family of some wealth and standing; that he was born of heathen parents; that at the age of fourteen he lost his father; that he had a brother named Athenodorus; and that along with him he travelled about from city to city in the prosecution of studies that were to fit him for the profession of law, to which he had been destined. Among the various seats of learning which he thus visited we find Alexandria, Athens, Berytus, and the Palestinian Cæsareia mentioned. At this last place -- to which, as he tells us, he was led by a happy accident in the providence of God -- he was brought into connection with Origen. Under this great teacher he received lessons in logic, geometry, physics, ethics, philosophy, and ancient literature, and in due time also in biblical science and the verities of the Christian faith. Thus, having become Origen's pupil, he became also by the hand of God his convert. After a residence of some five years with the great Alexandrian, he returned to his native city. Soon, however, a letter followed him to Neo-Cæsareia, in which Origen urged him to dedicate himself to the ministry of the Church of Christ, and pressed strongly upon him his obligation to consecrate his gifts to the service of God, and in especial to devote his acquirements in heathen science and learning to the elucidation of the Scriptures. On receipt of this letter, so full of wise and faithful counsel and strong exhortation, from the teacher whom he venerated and loved above all others, he withdrew into the wilderness, seeking opportunity for solemn thought and private prayer over its contents. At this time the bishop of Amasea, a city which held apparently a first place in the province, was one named Phædimus, who, discerning the promise of great things in the convert, sought to make him bishop of Neo-Cæsareia. For a considerable period, however, Gregory, who shrank from the responsibility of the episcopal office, kept himself beyond the bishop's reach, until

Phædimus, unsuccessful in his search, had recourse to the stratagem of ordaining him in his absence, and declaring him, with all the solemnities of the usual ceremonial, bishop of his native city. [15] On receiving the report of this extraordinary step, Gregory yielded, and, coming forth from the place of his concealment, was consecrated to the bishopric with all the customary formalities; [16] and so well did he discharge the duties of his office, that while there were said to be only seventeen Christians in the whole city when he first entered it as bishop, there were said to be only seventeen pagans in it at the time of his death. The date of his studies under Origen is fixed at about 234 a.d., and that of his ordination as bishop at about 240. About the year 250 his church was involved in the sufferings of the Decian persecution, on which occasion he fled into the wilderness, with the hope of preserving his life for his people, whom he also counselled to follow in that matter his example. His flock had much to endure, again, through the incursion of the northern barbarians about 260. He took part in the council that met at Antioch in 265 for the purpose of trying Paul of Samosata; and soon after that he died, perhaps about 270, if we can adopt the conjectural reading which gives the name Aurelian instead of Julian in the account left us by Suidas. The surname Thaumaturgus, or Wonder-worker, at once admonishes us of the marvellous that so largely connected itself with the historical in the ancient records of this man's life. [17] He was believed to have been gifted with a power of working miracles, which he was constantly exercising. But into these it is profitless to enter. When all the marvellous is dissociated from the historical in the records of this bishop's career, we have still the figure of a great, good, and gifted man, deeply versed in the heathen lore and science of his time, yet more deeply imbued with the genuine spirit of another wisdom, which, under God, he learned from the illustrious thinker of Alexandria, honouring with all love, gratitude, and veneration that teacher to whom he was indebted for his knowledge of the Gospel, and exercising an earnest, enlightened, and faithful ministry of many years in an office which he had not sought, but for which he had been sought. Such is, in brief, the picture that rises up before us from a perusal of his own writings, as well as from the comparison of ancient accounts of the man and his vocation. Of his well-accredited works we have the following: A Declaration of Faith, being a creed on the doctrine of the Trinity; a Metaphrase of the Book of Ecclesiastes, a Panegyric to Origen, being an oration delivered on leaving the school of Origen, expressing eloquently, and with great tenderness of feeling, as well as polish of style, the sense of his obligations to that master; and a Canonical Epistle, in which he gives a variety of directions with respect to the penances and discipline to be exacted by the Church from Christians who had fallen back into heathenism in times of suffering, and wished to be restored. Other works have been attributed to him, which are doubtful or spurious. His writings have been often edited, -- by Gerard Voss in 1604, by the Paris editors in 1662, by Gallandi in 1788, and others, who need not be enumerated here.

A Declaration of Faith

There is one God, the Father of the living Word, who is His subsistent Wisdom and Power and Eternal Image: [19] perfect Begetter of the perfect Begotten, Father of the only-begotten Son. There is one Lord, Only of the Only, [20] God of God, Image and Likeness of Deity, Efficient Word, [21] Wisdom comprehensive [22] of the constitution of all things, and Power formative [23] of the whole creation, true Son of true Father, Invisible of Invisible, and Incorruptible of Incorruptible, and Immortal of Immortal and Eternal of Eternal. [24] And there is One Holy Spirit, having His subsistence [25] from God, and being made manifest [26] by the Son, to wit to men: [27] Image [28] of the Son, Perfect Image of the Perfect; [29] Life, the Cause of the living; Holy Fount; Sanctity, the Supplier, or Leader, [30] of Sanctification; in whom is manifested God the Father, who is above all and in all, and God the Son, who is through all. There is a perfect Trinity, in glory and eternity and sovereignty, neither divided nor estranged. [31] Wherefore there is nothing either created or in servitude [32] in the Trinity; [33] nor anything superinduced, [34] as if at some former period it was non-existent, and at some later period it was introduced. And thus neither was the Son ever wanting to the Father, nor the Spirit to the Son; [35] but without variation and without change, the same Trinity abideth ever. [36]

Elucidation.

The story of the "Revelation" is of little consequence, though, if this were Gregory's genuine work, it would be easy to account for it as originating in a beautiful dream. But it is very doubtful whether it be a genuine work; and, to my mind, it is most fairly treated by Lardner, to whose elaborate chapter concerning Gregory every scholar must refer. [37] Dr. Burton, in his edition of Bishop Bull's works, [38] almost overrules that learned prelate's inclination to think it genuine, in the following words: "Hanc formulam minime esse Gregorii authenticam...multis haud spernendis argumentis demonstrat Lardner." Lardner thinks it a fabrication of the fourth century. Cave's learned judgment is more favourable; and he gives the text [39] from Gregory of Nyssa, which he translates as follows: "There is one God, the Father of the living Word and of the subsisting Wisdom and Power, and of Him who is His Eternal Image, the perfect begetter of Him that is perfect, the Father of the only-begotten Son. There is one Lord, the only Son of the only Father, God of God, the character and image of the Godhead, the powerful Word, the comprehensive Wisdom, by which all things were made, and the Power that gave being to the whole creation, the true Son of the true Father, the Invisible of the Invisible, the Incorruptible of the Incorruptible, the Immortal of the Immortal, and the Eternal of Him that is Eternal. There is one Holy Ghost, having its subsistence of God, which appeared through the Son to mankind, the perfect Image of the perfect Son, the Life-giving Life, the holy Fountain, the Sanctity, and the Author of sanctification, by whom God the Father is made manifest, who is over all, and in all; and God the Son, who is through all. A perfect Trinity, which neither in glory, eternity, or dominion is divided, or departed from itself."

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