Tome or Synodal Letter to the People of Antioch

Athanasius of Alexandria (c. AD 296–373)

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To our beloved and much-desired fellow-ministers Eusebius , Lucifer , Asterius , Kymatius, and Anatolius, Athanasius and the bishops present in Alexandria from Italy and Arabia, Egypt and Libya; Eusebius, Asterius, Gains, Agathus, Ammonius, Agathodaemon, Dracontius, Adelphius, Hermaeon, Marcus, Theodorus, Andreas, Paphnutius, another Marcus, Zoilus, Menas, George, Lucius, Macarius and the rest, all greeting in Christ. We are persuaded that being ministers of God and good stewards ye are sufficient to order the affairs of the Church in every respect. But since it has come to us, that many who were formerly separated from us by jealousy now wish for peace, while many also having severed their connection with the Arian madmen are desiring our communion, we think it well to write to your courtesy what ourselves and the beloved Eusebius and Asterius have drawn up: yourselves being our beloved and truly most-desired fellow-ministers. We rejoice at the said tidings, and pray that even if any be left still far from us, and if any appear to be in agreement with the Arians, he may promptly leave their madness, so that for the future all men everywhere may say, 'One Lord, one faith .' For as the psalmist says, what is so good or pleasant as for brethren to dwell in unity . But our dwelling is the Church, and our mind ought to be the same. For thus we believe that the Lord also will dwell with us, who says, 'I will dwell with them and walk in them ' and 'Here will I dwell for I have a delight therein .' But by 'here' what is meant but there where one faith and religion is preached?

2. Mission of Eusebius and Asterius.

We then of Egypt truly wished to go to you along with our beloved Eusebius and Asterius, for many reasons, but chiefly that we might embrace your affection and together enjoy the said peace and concord. But since, as we declared in our other letters, and as ye may learn from our fellow-ministers, the needs of the church detain us, with much regret we begged the same fellow-ministers of ours, Eusebius and Asterius, to go to you in our stead. And we thank their piety in that although they might have gone at once to their dioceses, they preferred to go to you at all costs, on account of the pressing need of the Church. They therefore having consented, we consoled ourselves with the consideration that you and they being there, we all were present with you in mind.

3. The 'Meletians' To Be Acknowledged, and All Who Renounce Heresy, Especially as to the Holy Spirit.

As many then as desire peace with us, and specially those who assemble in the Old [Church] and those again who are seceding from the Arians, do ye call to yourselves, and receive them as parents their sons, and welcome them as tutors and guardians; and unite them to our beloved Paulinus and his people, without requiring more from them than to anathematise the Arian heresy and confess the faith confessed by the holy fathers at Nicaea, and to anathematise also those who say that the Holy Spirit is a Creature and separate from the Essence of Christ. For this is in truth a complete renunciation of the abominable heresy of the Arians, to refuse to divide the Holy Trinity, or to say that any part of it is a creature. For those who, while pretending to cite the faith confessed at Nicaea, venture to blaspheme the Holy Spirit, do nothing more than in words deny the Arian heresy while they retain it in thought. But let the impiety of Sabellius and of Paul of Samosata also be anathematised by all, and the madness of Valentinian and Basilides, and the folly of the Munichaens. For if this be done, all evil suspicion will be removed on all hands, and the faith of the Catholic Church alone be exhibited in purity.

4. The Parties at Antioch to Unite.

But that we, and they who have ever remained in communion with us, hold this faith we think no one of yourselves nor any one else is ignorant. But since we rejoice with all those who desire re-union, but especially with those that assemble in the Old [church], and as we glorify the Lord exceedingly, as for all things so especially for the good purpose of these men, we exhort you that concord be established with them on these terms, and, as we said above, without further conditions, without namely any further demand upon yourselves on the part of those who assemble in the Old [church], or Paulinus and his fellows propounding anything else, or aught beyond the Nicene definition.

5. The Creed of Sardica Not an Authorised Formula. Question of 'Hypostasis.'

And prohibit even the reading or publication of the paper, much talked of by some, as having been drawn up concerning the Faith at the synod of Sardica. For the synod made no definition of the kind. For whereas some demanded, on the ground that the Nicene synod was defective, the drafting of a creed, and in their haste even attempted it , the holy synod assembled in Sardica was indignant, and decreed that no statement of faith should be drafted, but that they should be content with the Faith confessed by the fathers at Nicaea, inasmuch as it lacked nothing but was full of piety, and that it was undesirable for a second creed to be promulged, lest that drafted at Nicaea should be deemed imperfect, and a pretext be given to those who were often wishing to draft and define a creed. So that if a man propound the above or any other paper, stop them, and persuade them rather to keep the peace. For in such men we perceive no motive save only contentiousness. For as to those whom some were blaming for speaking of three Subsistences , on the ground that the phrase is unscriptural and therefore suspicious, we thought it right indeed to require nothing beyond the confession of Nicaea, but on account of the contention we made enquiry of them, whether they meant, like the Arian madmen, subsistences foreign and strange, and alien in essence from

one another, and that each Subsistence was divided apart by itself, as is the case with creatures in general and in particular with those begotten of men, or like different substances, such as gold, silver, or brass;-or whether, like other heretics, they meant three Beginnings and three Gods, by speaking of three Subsistences.

They assured us in reply that they neither meant this nor had ever held it. But upon our asking them 'what then do you mean by it, or why do you use such expressions?' they replied, Because they believed in a Holy Trinity, not a trinity in name only, but existing and subsisting in truth, 'both a Father truly existing and subsisting, and a Son truly substantial and subsisting, and a Holy Spirit subsisting and really existing do we acknowledge,' and that neither had they said there were three Gods or three beginnings, nor would they at all tolerate such as said or held so, but that they acknowledged a Holy Trinity but One Godhead, and one Beginning, and that the Son is coessential with the Father, as the fathers said; while the Holy Spirit is not a creature, nor external, but proper to and inseparable from the Essence of the Father and the Son.

6. The Question of One Subsistence (Hypostasis). Or Three, Not to Be Pressed.
Having accepted then these men's interpretation and defence of their language, we made enquiry of those blamed by them for speaking of One Subsistence, whether they use the expression in the sense of Sabellius, to the negation of the Son and the Holy Spirit, or as though the Son were non-substantial, or the Holy Spirit impersonal . But they in their turn assured us that they neither meant this nor had ever held it, but 'we use the word Subsistence thinking it the same thing to say Subsistence or Essence;' 'But we hold that there is One, because the Son is of the Essence of the Father, and because of the identity of nature. For we believe that there is one Godhead, and that it has one nature, and not that there is one nature of the Father, from which that of the Son and of the Holy Spirit are distinct.' Well, thereupon they who had been blamed for saying there were three Subsistences agreed with the others, while those who had spoken of One Essence, also confessed the doctrine of the former as interpreted by them. And by both sides Arius was anathematised as an adversary of Christ, and Sabellius, and Paul of Samosata, as impious men, and Valentinus and Basilides as aliens from the truth, and Manichaeus as an inventor of mischief. And all, by God's grace, and after the above explanations, agree together that the faith confessed by the fathers at Nicaea is better than the said phrases, and that for the future they would prefer to be content to use its language.

7. The Human Nature of Christ Complete, Not Body Only.
But since also certain seemed to be contending together concerning the fleshly Economy of the Saviour, we enquired of both parties. And what the one confessed, the others also agreed to, that the Word did not, as it came to the prophets, so dwell in a holy man at the consummation of the ages, but that the Word Himself was made flesh, and being in the Form of God, took the form of a servant , and from Mary after the flesh became man for us, and that thus in Him the human race is perfectly and wholly delivered from sin and quickened from the dead, and given access to the kingdom of the heavens. For they confessed also

that the Saviour had not a body without a soul, nor without sense or intelligence; for it was not possible, when the Lord had become man for us, that His body should be without intelligence: nor was the salvation effected in the Word Himself a salvation of body only, but of soul also. And being Son of God in truth, He became also Son of Man, and being God's Only-begotten Son, He became also at the same time 'firstborn among many brethren .' Wherefore neither was there one Son of God before Abraham, another after Abraham : nor was there one that raised up Lazarus, another that asked concerning him; but the same it was that said as man, 'Where does Lazarus lie ;' and as God raised him up: the same that as man and in the body spat, but divinely as Son of God opened the eyes of the man blind from his birth ; and while, as Peter says , in the flesh He suffered, as God opened the tomb and raised the dead. For which reasons, thus understanding all that is said in the Gospel, they assured us that they held the same truth about the Word's Incarnation and becoming Man.

8 Questions of Words Must Not Be Suffered to Divide Those Who Think Alike.
These things then being thus confessed, we exhort you not hastily to condemn those who so confess, and so explain the phrases they use, nor to reject them, but rather to accept them as they desire peace and defend themselves, while you check and rebuke, as of suspicious views, those who refuse so to confess and to explain their language. But while you refuse toleration to the latter, counsel the others also who explain and hold aright, not to enquire further into each other's opinions, nor to fight about words to no useful purpose, nor to go on contending with the above phrases, but to agree in the mind of piety. For they who are not thus minded, but only stir up strife with such petty phrases, and seek something beyond what was drawn up at Nicaea, do nothing except 'give their neighbour turbid confusion to drink ,' like men who grudge peace and love dissensions. But do ye, as good men and faithful servants and stewards of the Lord, stop and check what gives offence and is strange, and value above all things peace of that kind, faith being sound. Perhaps God will have pity on us, and unite what is divided, and, there being once more one flock , we shall all have one leader, even our Lord Jesus Christ.

9. The Above Terms Unanimously Agreed Upon.
These things, albeit there was no need to require anything beyond the synod of Nicaea, nor to tolerate the language of contention, yet for the sake of peace, and to prevent the rejection of men who wish to believe aright, we enquired into. And what they confessed, we put briefly into writing, we namely who are left in Alexandria, in common with our fellow-ministers, Asterius and Eusebius. For most of us had gone away to our dioceses. But do you on your part read this in public where you are wont to assemble, and be pleased to invite all to you thither. For it is fight that the letter should be there first read, and that there those who desire and strive for peace should be re-united. And then, when they are re-united, in the spot where all the laity think best, in the presence of your courtesy, the public assemblies should be held, and the Lord be glorified by all together. The brethren who are with me greet you. I pray that you may be well, and remember us to the Lord; both I, Athanasius, and likewise the other bishops assembled, sign, and those sent by Lucifer, bishop of the

island of Sardinia, two deacons, Herennius and Agapetus; and from Paulinus, Maximus and Calemerus, deacons also. And there were present certain monks of Apolinarius the bishop, sent from him for the purpose.

10. Signatures.

The names of the several bishops to whom the letter is addressed are: Eusebius of the city of Virgilli in Gaul , Lucifer of the island of Sardinia, Asterius of Petra, Arabia, Kymatius of Paltus, Coele-Syria, Anatolius of Euboea. Senders: the Pope Athanasius, and those present with him in Alexandria, viz.: Eusebius, Asterius, and the others above-mentioned, Gaius of Paratonium in Hither Libya, Agathus of Phragonis and part of Elearchia in Egypt, Ammonius of Pachnemunis and the rest of Elearchia, Agathodaemon of Schedia and Menelaitas, Dracontius of Lesser Hermupolis, Adelphius of Onuphis in Lychni, Hermion of Tanes , Marcus of Zygra , Hither Libya, Theodorus of Athribis , Andress of Arsenoe, Paphnutius of Sais, Marcus of Philae, Zoilus of Andrôs , Menas of Antiphra . Eusebius also signs the following in Latin, of which the translation is: I Eusebius, according to your exact confession made on either side by agreement concerning the Subsistences, also add my agreement; further concerning the Incarnation of our Saviour, namely that the Son of God has become Man, taking everything upon Himself without sin, like the composition of our old man, I ratify the text of the letter. And whereas the Sardican paper is ruled out, to avoid the appearance of issuing anything beyond the creed of Nicaea, I also add my consent, in order that the creed of Nicaea may not seem by it to be excluded, and [I agree] that it should not be published. I pray for your health in the Lord.

I Asterius agree to what is above written, and pray for your health in the Lord.

11. The 'Tome' Signed at Antioch.

And after this Tome was sent off from Alexandria, thus signed by the aforesaid, The recipients] in their turn signed it: I Paulinus hold thus, as I received from the fathers, that the Father perfectly exists and subsists, and that the Son perfectly subsists, and that the Holy Spirit perfectly subsists. Wherefore also I accept the above explanation concerning the Three Subsistences, and the one Subsistence, or rather Essence, and those who hold thus. For it is pious to hold and confess the Holy Trinity in one Godhead. And concerning the Word of the Father becoming Man for us, I hold as it is written, that, as John says, the Word was made Flesh, not in the sense of those most impious persons who say that He has undergone a change, but that He has become Man for us, being born of the holy Virgin Mary and of the Holy Spirit. For the Saviour had a body neither without soul, nor without sense, nor without intelligence. For it were impossible, the Lord being made Man for us, that His body should be without intelligence. Wherefore I anathematise those who set aside the Faith confessed at Nicaea, and who do not say that the Son is of the Father's Essence, and coessential with the Father. Moreover I anathematise those who say that the Holy Spirit is a Creature made through the Son. Once more I anathematise the heresy of Sabellius and of Photinus , and every heresy, walking in the Faith of Nicaea, and in all that is above written. I Karterius pray for your health.

Source. English translation: an older public-domain translation as collected in the Writings-Database (HistoricalChristianFaith), mostly from the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers and similar nineteenth-century editions. SermonIndex has only divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Square brackets, Greek or Latin words and footnote-free text are as the source file prints them, and a transcription error may remain. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.