The Sentence of the Synod

Council of Constantinople (AD 553) (AD 553)

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(From the Acts. Collation VIII., L. and C., Conc., Tom. V., col. 562.) Our Great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, as we learn from the parable in the Gospel, distributes talents to each man according to his ability, and at the fitting time demands an account of the work done by every man. And if he to whom but one talent has been committed is condemned because he has not worked with it but only kept it without loss, to how much greater and more horrible judgment must he be subject who not only is negligent concerning himself, but even places a stumbling-block and cause of offence in the way of others? Since it is manifest to all the faithful that whenever any question arises concerning the faith, not only the impious man himself is condemned, but also he who when he has the power to correct impiety in others, neglects to do so.

We therefore, to whom it has been committed to rule the church of the Lord, fearing the curse which hangs over those who negligently perform the Lord's work, hasten to preserve the good seed of faith pure from the tares of impiety which are being sown by the enemy. When, therefore, we saw that the followers of Nestorius were attempting to introduce their impiety into the church of God through the impious Theodore, who was bishop of Mopsuestia, and through his impious writings; and moreover through those things which Theodoret impiously wrote, and through the wicked epistle which is said to have been written by Ibas to Maris the Persian, moved by all these sights we rose up for the correction of what was going on, and assembled in this royal city called thither by the will of God and the bidding of the most religious Emperor.

And because it happened that the most religious Vigilius stopping in this royal city, was present at all the discussions with regard to the Three Chapters, and had often condemned them orally and in writing, nevertheless afterwards he gave his consent in writing to be present at the Council and examine together with us the Three Chapters, that a suitable definition of the right faith might be set forth by us all. Moreover the most pious Emperor, according to what had seemed good between us, exhorted both him and us to meet together, because it is comely that the priesthood should after common discussion impose a common faith. On this account we besought his reverence to fulfil his written promises; for it was not right that tile scandal with regard to these Three Chapters should go any further, and the Church of God be disturbed thereby. And to this end we brought to his remembrance

the great examples left us by the Apostles, and the traditions of the Fathers. For although the grace of the Holy Spirit abounded in each one of the Apostles, so that no one of them needed the counsel of another in the execution of his work, yet they were not willing to define on the question then raised touching the circumcision of the Gentiles, until being gathered together they had confirmed their own several sayings by the testimony of the divine Scriptures.

And thus they arrived unanimously at this sentence, which they wrote to the Gentiles: "It has seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us, to lay upon you no other burden than these necessary things, that ye abstain from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication." But also the Holy Fathers, who from time to time have met in the four holy councils, following the example of tile ancients, have by a common discussion, disposed of by a fixed decree the heresies and questions which had sprung up, as it was certainly known, that by common discussion when the matter in dispute was presented by each side, the light of truth expels the darkness of falsehood. Nor is there any other way in which the truth can be made manifest when there are discussions concerning the faith, since each one needs the help of his neighbour, as we read in the Proverbs of Solomon: "A brother helping his brother shall be exalted like a walled city; and he shall be strong as a well-founded kingdom;" and again in Ecclesiastes he says: "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour."

So also the Lord himself says: "Verily I say unto you that if two of you shall agree upon earth as touching anything they shall seek for, they shall have it from my Father which is in heaven. For wheresoever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." But when often he had been invited by us all, and when the most glorious judges had been sent to him by the most religious Emperor, he promised to give sentence himself on the Three Chapters (sententiam proferre): And when we heard this answer, having the Apostle's admonition in mind, that "each one must, give an account of himself to God" and fearing the judgment that hangs over those who scandalize one, even of the least important, and knowing how much sorer it must be to give offence to so entirely Christian an Emperor, and to the people, and to all the Churches; and further recalling what was said by God to Paul: "Fear not, but speak, and be not silent, for I am with thee, and no one can harm thee." Therefore, being gathered together, before all things we have briefly confessed that we hold that faith which our Lord Jesus Christ, the true God, delivered to his holy Apostles, and through them to the holy churches, and which they who after thorn were holy fathers and doctors, handed down to the people credited to them.

We confessed that we hold, preserve, and declare to the holy churches that confession of faith which the 318 holy Fathers more at length set forth, who were gathered together at Nice, who handed down the holy mathema or creed. Moreover, the 150 gathered together at Constantinople set forth our faith, who followed that same confession of faith and explained it. And the consent of fire 200 holy fathers gathered for the same faith in the first Council of Ephesus. And what things were defined by the 630 gathered at Chalcedon for the one

and the same faith, which they both followed and taught. And all those wile from time to time have been condemned or anathematized by the Catholic Church, and by the aforesaid four Councils, we confessed that we hold them condemned and anathematized. And when we had thus made profession of our faith we began the examination of the Three Chapters, and first we brought into review the matter of Theodore of Mopsuestia; and when all the blasphemies contained in his writings were made manifest, we marvelled at the long-suffering of God, that the tongue and mind which had framed such blasphemies were not immediately consumed by the divine fire; and we never would have suffered the reader of the aforenamed blasphemies to proceed, fearing [as we did] the indignation of God for their record alone (as each blasphemy surpassed its predecessor in the magnitude of its impiety and moved from its foundation the mind of the hearer) had it not been that we saw they who gloried in such blasphemies stood in need of the confusion which would come upon them through their manifestation. So that all of us, moved with indignation by these blasphemies against God, both during and after the reading, broke forth into denunciations and anathematisms against Theodore, as if he had been living and present. O Lord be merciful, we cried, not even devils have dared to utter such things against thee.

O intolerable tongue! O the depravity of the man! O that high hand he lifted up against his Creator! For the wretched man who had promised to know the Scriptures, had no recollection of the words of the Prophet Hosea, "Woe unto them! for they have fled from me: they are become famous because they were impious as touching me; they spake iniquities against me, and when they had thought them out, they spake the violent things against me. Therefore shall they fall in the snare by reason of the wickedness of their own tongues. Their contempt shall turn into their own bosom: because they have transgressed my covenant and have acted impiously against my laws." To these curses the impious Theodore is justly subject. For the prophecies concerning Christ he rejected and hastened to destroy, so far as he had the power, the great mystery of the dispensation for our salvation; attempting in many ways to show the divine words to be nothing but fables, for the mirth of the gentiles, and spurned the other prophetic announcements made against the impious, especially that which the divine Habacuc said of those who teach falsely, "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that puttest thy bottle to him and makest him drunken that thou mayest look on their nakedness," that is, their doctrines full of darkness and altogether foreign to the light.

And why should we add anything further? For anyone can take in his hands the writings of the impious Theodore or the impious chapters which from his impious writings were inserted by us in our acts, and find the incredible foolishness and the detestable things which he said. For we are afraid to proceed further and again to remember these infamies. There was also read to us what had been written by the holy Fathers against him, and his foolishness which exceeded that of all heretics, and moreover the histories and the imperial laws, setting forth his impiety from the beginning, and since after all these things the defenders of his impiety, glorying in the injuries uttered by him against his Creator, said that it was not right to anathematize him after death, although we knew the ecclesiastical tradition

concerning the impious, that even after death, heretics are anathematized; nevertheless we thought it necessary concerning this also to make examination, and there were found in the acts how divers heretics had been anathematized after death; and in many ways it was manifest to us that those who were saying this cared nothing for the judgment of God, nor for the Apostolic announcements, nor for the tradition of the Fathers. And we would like to ask them what they have to say to the Lord's having said of himself: "Whosoever should have believed in him, is not judged: but who should not have believed in him is judged already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God," and of that exclamation of the Apostle: Although we or an angel from heaven were to preach to you another gospel than that we have preached unto you, let him be anathema: as we have said, so now I say again, If anyone preach to you another gospel than that you have received, let him be anathema."

For when the Lord says: "he is judged already," and when the Apostle anathematizes even angels, if they teach anything different from what we have preached, how can even those who dare all things, presume to say that these words refer only to the living? or are they ignorant, or is it not rather that they feign to be ignorant, that the judgment of anathema is nothing else than that of separation from God? For the impious person, although he may not have been verbally anathematized by anyone, nevertheless he really is anathematized, having separated himself from the true life by his impiety. For what have they to answer to the Apostle again when he says, "A man that is an heretic reject after the first and second corrections. Knowing that such a man is perverse, and sins, and is condemned by himself."

In accordance with which words Cyril of blessed memory, in the books which he wrote against Theodore, says as follows: They are to be avoided who are in the grasp of such awful crimes whether they be among the quick or not. For it is necessary always to flee from that which is hurtful, and not to have respect of persons, but to consider what is pleasing to God. And again the same Cyril of holy memory, writing to John, bishop of Antioch, and to the synod assembled in that city concerning Theodore who was anathematized together with Nestorius, says thus: It was therefore necessary to keep a brilliant festival, since every voice which agreed with the blasphemies of Nestorius had been cast out no matter whose. For it proceeded against all those who held these same opinions or had at one time held them, which is exactly what we and your holiness have said: We anathematize those who say that there are two Sons and two Christs. For one is he who is preached by us and you, as we have said, Christ, the Son and Lord, only begotten as man, according to the saying of the most learned Paul. And also in his letter to Alexander and Martinian and John and Paregorius and Maximus, presbyters and monastic fathers, and those who with them were leading the solitary life, he so says:

The holy synod of Ephesus, gathered together according to the will of God against the Nestorian perfidy with a just and keen sentence condemned together with him the empty words of those who afterwards should embrace or who had in time past embraced the same opinions with him, and who presumed to say or write any such thing, laying upon them an equal

condemnation. For it fol- lowed naturally that when one was condemned for such profane emptiness of speech, the sentence should not come against one only, but (so to speak) against every one of their heresies or calumnies, which they utter against the pious doctrines of the Christ, worshipping two Sons, and dividing the indivisible, and bringing in the crime of man-worship (anthropolatry), both into heaven and earth. For with us the holy multitude of the supernal spirits adore one Lord Jesus Christ. Moreover several letters of Augustine, of most religious memory, who shone forth resplendent among the African bishops, were read, shewing that it was quite right that heretics should be anathematized after death. And this ecclesiastical tradition, the other most reverend bishops of Africa have preserved: and the holy Roman Church as well had anathematized certain bishops after their death, although they had not been accused of any falling from the faith during their lives: and of each we have the evidence in our hands.

But since the disciples of Theodore and of his impiety, who are so manifestly enemies of the truth, have attempted to bring forward certain passages of Cyril of holy memory and of Proclus, as though they had been written in favour of Theodore, it is opportune to fit to them the words of the prophet when he says: ”The ways of the Lord are right and the just walk therein; but the wicked shall be weak in them. For these, evilly receiving the fixings which have been well and opportunely written by the holy Fathers, and making excuses in their sins, quote these words. The fathers do not appear as delivering Theodore from anathema, but rather as economically using certain expressions on account of those who defended Nestorius and his impiety, in order to draw them away from this error, and to lead them to perfection and to teach them to condemn not only Nestorius, the disciple of the impiety, but also his teacher Theodore. So in these very words of economy the Fathers shew their intention on tiffs point, that Theodore should be anathematized, as has been abundantly demonstrated by us in our acts from the writings of Cyril and Proclus of holy memory with regard to the condemnation of Theodore and his impiety. And such economy is found in divine Scripture:

and it is evident that Paul the Apostle made use of this in the beginning of his ministry, in relation to those who had been brought up as Jews, and circumcised Timothy, that by this economy and condescension he might lead them on to perfection. But afterwards he forbade circumcision, writing thus to the Galatians: ”Behold, I Paul say to you, that if ye be circumcised Christ profiteth you nothing. But we found that that which heretics were wont to do, the defenders of Theodore had done also. For cutting out certain of the things which the holy Fathers had written, and placing with them and mixing up certain false things of their own, they have tried by a letter of Cyril of holy memory as though from a testimony of the Fathers, to free from anathema the aforesaid impious Theodore: in which very passages the truth was demonstrated, when the parts which had been cut off were read in their proper order, and the falsehood was thoroughly evinced by the collation of the true. But in all these things, they who spake such vanities, ”trusted in falsehood,” as it is written, ”they trust in falsehood, and speak vanity; they conceive grief and bring forth iniquity, weaving the spider’s web. When we had thus considered Theodore and his impiety,

we took care to have re cited and inserted in our acts a few of these things which had been impiously written by Theodoret against the right faith and against the Twelve Chapters of St.

Cyril and against the First Council of Ephesus, also certain things written by him in defence of those impious ones Theodore and Nestorius, for the satisfaction of the reader; that all might know that these had been justly cast out and anathematized. In the third place the letter which is said to have been written by Ibas to Maris the Persian, was brought forward for examination, and we found that it, too, should be read. When it was read immediately its impiety was manifest to all. And it was right to make the condemnation and anathematism of the aforesaid Three Chapters, as even to this time there had been some question on the subject. But because the defenders of these impious ones, Theodore and Nestorius, were scheming in some way or other to confirm these persons and their impiety, and were saving that this impious letter, which praised and defended Theodore and Nestorius and their impiety, had been received by the holy Council of Chalcedon we thought it necessary to shew that the holy synod was free of the impiety which was contained in that letter, that it might be clear that they who say such things do not do so with the favour of this holy council, but that through its name they may confirm their own impiety. And it was shewn in the acts that in former times Ibas had been accused because of the very impiety which iscontained in this letter;

at first by Proclus, of holy memory, the bishop of Constantinople, and afterwards by Theodosius, of pious memory, and by Flavian, who was ordained bishop in succession to Proclus, who delegated the examination of the matter to Photius, bishop of Tyre, and to Eustathius, bishop of the city of Beyroot. Afterwards the same Ibas, being found guilty, was cast out of his bishopric. Such was the state of the case, how could anyone presume to say that that impious letter was received by the holy council of Chalcedon and that the holy council of Chalcedon agreed with it throughout? Nevertheless in order that they who thus calumniate the holy council of Chalcedon may have no further opportunity of doing so, we ordered to be recited the decisions of the holy Synods, to wit, of first Ephesus, and of Chalcedon, with regard to the Epistles of Cyril of blessed memory and of Leo, of pious memory, sometime Pope of Old Rome. And since we had learned from these that nothing written by anyone else ought to be received unless it had been proved to agree with the orthodox faith of the holy Fathers, we interrupted our proceedings so as to recite also the definition of the faith which was set forth by the holy council of Chalcedon, so that we might compare the things in the epistle with this decree. And when this was done it was perfectly clear that the contents of the epistle were wholly opposite to those of the definition.

For the definition agreed with the one and unchanging faith set forth as well by the 318 holy Fathers as by the 150 and by those who assembled at the first synod at Ephesus. But that impious letter, on the other hand, contained the blasphemies of the heretics Theodore and Nestorius, and defended them, and calls them doctors, while it calls the holy Fathers heretics. And this we made manifest to all, that we did not have any intention of omitting

the Fathers of the first and second interlocutions, which the followers of Theodore and Nestorius cited on their side, but these and all the others having been read and their contents examined, we found that the aforesaid Ibas was not allowed to be received without being compelled to anathematize Nestorius and his impious teachings, which were defended in that epistle. And this the rest of the religious bishops of the aforesaid holy Council did as well as those two whose interlocutions certain tried to use.

For this they observed in the case of Theodoret, and required him to anathematize those things of which he was accused. If therefore they were willing to allow the reception of Ibas in no other manner unless he condemned the impiety which was contained in his letters, and subscribed the definition of faith adopted by the Council, how can they attempt to make out that this impious letter was received by the same holy council? For we are taught, "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols."

Having thus detailed all that has been done by us, we again confess that we receive the four holy Synods, that is, the Nicene, the Constantinopolitan, the first of Ephesus, and that of Chalcedon, and we have taught, and do teach all that they defined respecting the one faith. And we account those who do not receive these things aliens from the Catholic Church. Moreover we condemn and anathematize, together with all the other heretics who have been condemned and anathematized by the before-mentioned four holy Synods, and by the holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, Theodore who was Bishop of Mopsuestia, and his impious writings, and also those things which Theodoret impiously wrote against the right faith, and against the Twelve Chapters of the holy Cyril, and against the first Synod of Ephesus, and also those which he wrote in defence of Theodore and Nestorius. In addition to these we also anathematize the impious Epistle which Ibas is said to have written to Maris, the Persian, which denies that God the Word was incarnate of the holy Mother of God, and ever Virgin Mary, and accuses Cyril of holy memory, who taught the truth, as an heretic, and of the same sentiments with Apollinaris, and blames the first Synod of Ephesus as deposing Nestorius without examination and inquiry, and calls the Twelve Chapters of the holy Cyril impious, and contrary to the right faith, and defends Theodorus and Nestorius, and their impious dogmas and writings.

We therefore anathematize the Three Chapters before-mentioned, that is, the impious Theodore of Mopsuestia, with his execrable writings, and those things which Theodoret impiously wrote, and the impious letter which is said to be of Ibas, and their defenders, and those who have written or do write in defence of them, or who dare to say that they are correct, and who have defended or attempt to defend their impiety with the names of the holy Fathers, or of the holy Council of Chalcedon. These things therefore being settled with all accuracy, we, bearing in remembrance the promises made respecting the holy Church, and who it was that said that the gates of hell should not prevail against her, that is, the deadly tongues of heretics; remembering also what was prophesied respecting it by Hosea,

saying, "I will betroth thee unto me in faithfulness, and thou shalt know the Lord," and numbering together with the devil, the father of lies, the unbridled tongues of heretics who persevered in their impiety unto death, and their most impious writings, will say to them, "Behold, all ye kindle a fire, and cause the flame of the fire to grow strong, ye shall walk in the light of your fire, and the flame which ye kindle. But we, having a commandment to exhort the people with right doctrine, and to speak to the heart of Jerusalem, that is, the Church of God, do rightly make haste to sow in righteousness, and to reap the fruit of life;

and kindling for ourselves the light of knowledge from the holy Scriptures, and the doctrine of the Fathers, we have considered it necessary to comprehend in certain Capitula, both the declaration of the truth, and the condemnation of heretics, and of their wickedness.

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.