

J o h n o f D a m a s c u s

AN EXACT EXPOSITION OF THE ORTHODOX FAITH



John of Damascus

An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith

**Treatise on Dogmatic Creeds of the Early Church
Fathers**

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Contact: info@e-artnow.org

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Chapter I.

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—That the Deity is incomprehensible, and that we ought not to pry into and meddle with the things which have not been delivered to us by the holy Prophets, and Apostles, and Evangelists.

No one hath seen God at any time; the Only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him¹. The Deity, therefore, is ineffable and incomprehensible. For no one knoweth the Father, save the Son, nor the Son, save the Father². And the Holy Spirit, too, so knows the things of God as the spirit of the man knows the things that are in him³. Moreover, after the first and blessed nature no one, not of men only, but even of supramundane powers, and the Cherubim, I say, and Seraphim themselves, has ever known God, save he to whom He revealed Himself.

God, however, did not leave us in absolute ignorance. For the knowledge of God's existence has been implanted by Him in all by nature. This creation, too, and its maintenance, and its government, proclaim the majesty of the Divine nature⁴. Moreover, by the Law and the Prophets⁵ in former times and afterwards by His Only-begotten Son, our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ, He disclosed to us the knowledge of Himself as that was possible for us. All things, therefore, that have been delivered to us by Law and Prophets and Apostles and Evangelists we receive, and know, and honour⁶, seeking for nothing beyond these. For

God, being good, is the cause of all good, subject neither to envy nor to any passion⁷. For envy is far removed from the Divine nature, which is both passionless and only good. As knowing all things, therefore, and providing for what is profitable for each, He revealed that which it was to our profit to know; but what we were unable⁸ to bear He kept secret. With these things let us be satisfied, and let us abide by them, not removing everlasting boundaries, nor overpassing the divine tradition⁹.

Footnotes

¹ St. John i. 18 (R.V.).

² St. Matt. xi. 27.

³ 1 Cor. ii. 11.

⁴ Wisd. xiii. 5.

⁵ Greg. Naz., Orat. 34.

⁶ Dionys., De div. nom., c. 1.

⁷ Greg. Naz., Orat. 34.

⁸ Reading ὅπερ δε οὐκ ἐδυνάμεθα for ὅπερ δε οὖν ἐδυνάμεθα. Cod. Reg. 3379 gives καὶ ὃ οὐ δύναμεθα.

⁹ Prov. xxii. 28.

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—Concerning things utterable and things unutterable, and things knowable and thing unknowable.

It is necessary, therefore, that one who wishes to speak or to hear of God should understand clearly that alike in the doctrine of Deity and in that of the Incarnation¹, neither are all things unutterable nor all utterable; neither all unknowable nor all knowable². But the knowable belongs to one order, and the utterable to another; just as it is one thing to speak and another thing to know. Many of the things relating to God, therefore, that are dimly understood cannot be put into fitting terms, but on things above us we cannot do else than express ourselves according to our limited capacity; as, for instance, when we speak of God we use the terms sleep, and wrath, and regardlessness, hands, too, and feet, and such like expressions.

We, therefore, both know and confess that God is without beginning, without end, eternal and everlasting, uncreate, unchangeable, invariable, simple, uncompound, incorporeal, invisible, impalpable, uncircumscribed, infinite, incognisable, indefinable, incomprehensible, good, just, maker of all things created, almighty, all-ruling, all-surveying, of all overseer, sovereign, judge; and that God is One, that is to say, one essence³; and that He is known⁴, and has His being in three subsistences, in Father, I say, and Son and Holy Spirit; and that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are one in all respects, except in that of not being

begotten, that of being begotten, and that of procession; and that the Only-begotten Son and Word of God and God, in His bowels of mercy, for our salvation, by the good pleasure of God and the co-operation of the Holy Spirit, being conceived without seed, was born uncorruptedly of the Holy Virgin and Mother of God, Mary, by the Holy Spirit, and became of her perfect Man; and that the Same is at once perfect God and perfect Man, of two natures, Godhead and Manhood, and in two natures possessing intelligence, will and energy, and freedom, and, in a word, perfect according to the measure and proportion proper to each, at once to the divinity, I say, and to the humanity, yet to one composite person⁵; and that He suffered hunger and thirst and weariness, and was crucified, and for three days submitted to the experience of death and burial, and ascended to heaven, from which also He came to us, and shall come again. And the Holy Scripture is witness to this and the whole choir of the Saints.

But neither do we know, nor can we tell, what the essence⁶ of God is, or how it is in all, or how the Only-begotten Son and God, having emptied Himself, became Man of virgin blood, made by another law contrary to nature, or how He walked with dry feet upon the waters⁷. It is not within our capacity, therefore, to say anything about God or even to think of Him, beyond the things which have been divinely revealed to us, whether by word or by manifestation, by the divine oracles at once of the Old Testament and of the New⁸.

Footnotes

¹ τά τε τῆς θεολογίας, τά τε τῆς οἰκονομίας.

² Dionys., De div. nom. c. 1; Greg. Naz., Orat. 34 and 37.

³ οὐσία, substance, being.

⁴ ὑποστάσεις, hypostases, persons.

⁵ μιᾷ δὲ συνθέτῳ ὑποστάσει.

⁶ οὐσία, substance, being.

⁷ Dionys., De div. nom., c. 2.

⁸ Ibid. c. 1.

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—Proof that there is a God.

That there is a God, then, is no matter of doubt to those who receive the Holy Scriptures, the Old Testament, I mean, and the New; nor indeed to most of the Greeks. For, as we said¹, the knowledge of the existence of God is implanted in us by nature. But since the wickedness of the Evil One has prevailed so mightily against man's nature as even to drive some into denying the existence of God, that most foolish and woe-fulest pit of destruction (whose folly David, revealer of the Divine meaning, exposed when he said², The fool said in his heart, There is no God), so the disciples of the Lord and His Apostles, made wise by the Holy Spirit and working wonders in His power and grace, took them captive in the net of miracles and drew them up out of the depths of ignorance³ to the light of the knowledge of God. In like manner also their successors in grace and worth, both pastors and teachers, having received the enlightening grace of the Spirit, were wont, alike by the power of miracles and the word of grace, to enlighten those walking in darkness and to bring back the wanderers into the way. But as for us who⁴ are not recipients either of the gift of miracles or the gift of teaching (for indeed we have rendered ourselves unworthy of these by our passion for pleasure), come, let us in connection with this theme discuss a few of those things which have been delivered to

us on this subject by the expounders of grace, calling on the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

All things, that exist, are either created or uncreated. If, then, things are created, it follows that they are also wholly mutable. For things, whose existence originated in change, must also be subject to change, whether it be that they perish or that they become other than they are by act of will⁵. But if things are uncreated they must in all consistency be also wholly immutable. For things which are opposed in the nature of their existence must also be opposed in the mode of their existence, that is to say, must have opposite properties: who, then, will refuse to grant that all existing things, not only such as come within the province of the senses, but even the very angels, are subject to change and transformation and movement of various kinds? For the things appertaining to the rational world, I mean angels and spirits and demons, are subject to changes of will, whether it is a progression or a retrogression in goodness, whether a struggle or a surrender; while the others suffer changes of generation and destruction, of increase and decrease, of quality and of movement in space. Things then that are mutable are also wholly created. But things that are created must be the work of some maker, and the maker cannot have been created. For if he had been created, he also must surely have been created by some one, and so on till we arrive at something uncreated. The Creator, then, being uncreated, is also wholly immutable. And what could this be other than Deity?

And even the very continuity of the creation, and its preservation and government, teach us that there does

exist a Deity, who supports and maintains and preserves and ever provides for this universe. For how⁶ could opposite natures, such as fire and water, air and earth, have combined with each other so as to form one complete world, and continue to abide in indissoluble union, were there not some omnipotent power which bound them together and always is preserving them from dissolution?

What is it that gave order to things of heaven and things of earth, and all those things that move in the air and in the water, or rather to what was in existence before these, viz., to heaven and earth and air and the elements of fire and water? What⁷ was it that mingled and distributed these? What was it that set these in motion and keeps them in their unceasing and unhindered course⁸? Was it not the Artificer of these things, and He Who hath implanted in everything the law whereby the universe is carried on and directed? Who then is the Artificer of these things? Is it not He Who created them and brought them into existence. For we shall not attribute such a power to the spontaneous⁹. For, supposing their coming into existence was due to the spontaneous; what of the power that put all in order¹⁰? And let us grant this, if you please. What of that which has preserved and kept them in harmony with the original laws of their existence¹¹? Clearly it is something quite distinct from the spontaneous¹². And what could this be other than Deity¹³?

Footnotes

¹ Supr.c. 1; cf. Greg. Naz., Orat. 34.

² Ps. xiv. 1 (E.V.).

³ The readings vary between ἀγνωσίας and ἀγνοίας.

⁴ Greg. Naz., Orat. 34.

⁵ Reading προαίρεσιν; a variant is τροπήν.

⁶ Athan., Cont. Gent.

⁷ Various reading, Who.

⁸ Greg. Naz., Orat. 34.

⁹ The Greek is τῷ αὐτομάτῳ, to the automatic; perhaps = to the accidental, or, to chance.

¹⁰ Or, Whose was the disposing of them in order?

¹¹ Or, Whose are the preserving of them, and the keeping of them in accordance with the principles under which they were first placed?

¹² παρὰ τὸ αὐτόματον; or, quite other than the spontaneous, or, than chance.

¹³ Athan., De Incarn. Verbi, near the beginning. Greg. Naz., Orat. 34.

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—Concerning the nature of Deity: that it is incomprehensible.

It is plain, then, that there is a God. But what He is in His essence and nature is absolutely incomprehensible and unknowable. For it is evident that He is incorporeal¹. For how could that possess body which is infinite, and boundless, and formless, and intangible and invisible, in short, simple and not compound? How could that be immutable² which is circumscribed and subject to passion? And how could that be passionless which is composed of elements and is resolved again into them? For combination³ is the beginning of conflict, and conflict of separation, and separation of dissolution, and dissolution is altogether foreign to God⁴.

Again, how will it also be maintained⁵ that God permeates and fills the universe? as the Scriptures say, Do not I fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord⁶? For it is an impossibility⁷ that one body should permeate other bodies without dividing and being divided, and without being enveloped and contrasted, in the same way as all fluids mix and commingle.

But if some say that the body is immaterial, in the same way as the fifth body⁸ of which the Greek philosophers speak (which body is an impossibility), it will be wholly subject to motion like the heaven. For that is what they mean by the fifth body. Who then is it that moves it? For

everything that is moved is moved by another thing. And who again is it that moves that? and so on to infinity till we at length arrive at something motionless. For the first mover is motionless, and that is the Deity. And must not that which is moved be circumscribed in space? The Deity, then, alone is motionless, moving the universe by immobility⁹. So then it must be assumed that the Deity is incorporeal.

But even this gives no true idea of His essence, to say that He is unbegotten, and without beginning, changeless and imperishable, and possessed of such other qualities as we are wont to ascribe to God and His environment¹⁰. For these do not indicate what He is, but what He is not¹¹. But when we would explain what the essence of anything is, we must not speak only negatively. In the case of God, however, it is impossible to explain what He is in His essence, and it befits us the rather to hold discourse about His absolute separation from all things¹². For He does not belong to the class of existing things: not that He has no existence¹³, but that He is above all existing things, nay even above existence itself. For if all forms of knowledge have to do with what exists, assuredly that which is above knowledge must certainly be also above essence¹⁴: and, conversely, that which is above essence¹⁵ will also be above knowledge.

God then is infinite and incomprehensible and all that is comprehensible about Him is His infinity and incomprehensibility. But all that we can affirm concerning God does not shew forth God's nature, but only the qualities of His nature¹⁶. For when you speak of Him as good, and just, and wise, and so forth, you do not tell God's nature but

only the qualities of His nature¹⁷. Further there are some affirmations which we make concerning God which have the force of absolute negation: for example, when we use the term darkness, in reference to God, we do not mean darkness itself, but that He is not light but above light: and when we speak of Him as light, we mean that He is not darkness.

Footnotes

¹ Various reading, It is evident that the divine (τὸ Θεῖον) is incorporeal.

² Text ἄτρεπτον. Most mss. read σεπτόν. So, too, Greg. Naz., Orat. 34, from which these words are taken. An old interpretation is 'venerabile est.' But in the opinion of Combefis, Gregory's text is corrupt, and ἄτρεπτον should be read, which reading is also supported by various authorities, including three Cod. Reg.: cf. also De Trinit. in Cyril.

³ σύνθεσις.

⁴ Greg. Naz., Orat. 32, 34.

⁵ Text, σωθήσεται: various reading, συνθήσεται.

⁶ Jer. xxiii. 24.

⁷ Greg. Naz. ut supr.

⁸ The reference is to the Pythagorean and Aristotelian ideas of the heavens as being like the body of Deity, something uncorrupt, different from the four elements, and therefore called a fifth body, or element (στοιχεῖον). In his Meteor. i. 3, De Cœlo i. 3, &c., Aristotle speaks of the Ether as extending from the heaven of the fixed stars down to the moon, as of a nature specially adapted for circular motion, as the first element in rank, but as the fifth, "if we enumerate beginning with the elements directly known by the senses....the subsequently so-called πέμπτον στοιχεῖον, quinta essentia." The other elements, he taught, had the upward motion, or the downward: the earth having the attribute of heaviness, and its natural place in the world being the lowest; fire being the light element, and "its place the sphere next adjoining the sphere of the ether." See Ueberweg's History of Philosophy, Vol. I. p. 167,

Morris's translation, and the chapter on the De Cœlo in Grote's Aristotle, Vol. II. pp. 389, &c.

⁹ Greg. Naz. ut supr.

¹⁰ Or, such as are said to exist in the case of God, or in relation to God. The Greek is, ὅσα περὶ Θεοῦ, ἢ περὶ Θεὸν εἶναι λέγεται.

¹¹ Greg. Naz. ut supr.

¹² Greg. Naz., Orat. 32, 34. The Greek is, οἰκειότερον δὲ μᾶλλον ἐκ τῆς ἀπάντων ἀφαιρέσεως ποιεῖσθαι τὸν λόγον. It may be given thus:—It is more in accordance with the nature of the case rather to discourse of Him in the way of abstracting from him all that belongs to us.

¹³ Dionys., De Myst. Theolog.

¹⁴ Or, above being; ὑπὲρ οὐσίαν.

¹⁵ Or, above being; ὑπὲρ οὐσίαν.

¹⁶ Or, but only the things which relate to His nature. The Greek is, ὅσα δὲ λέγομεν ἐπὶ Θεοῦ καταφαντικῶς, οὐ τὴν φύσιν, ἀλλὰ τὰ περὶ τὴν φύσιν δηλοῖ.

¹⁷ Or, the things that relate to his nature.

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—Proof that God is one and not many.

We have, then, adequately demonstrated that there is a God, and that His essence is incomprehensible. But that God is one¹ and not many is no matter of doubt to those who believe in the Holy Scriptures. For the Lord says in the beginning of the Law: I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt. Thou shalt have no other Gods before Me². And again He says, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord³. And in Isaiah the prophet we read, For I am the first God and I am the last, and beside Me there is no God. Before Me there was not any God, nor after Me will there be any God, and beside Me there is no God⁴. And the Lord, too, in the holy gospels speaketh these words to His Father, And this is life eternal, that they may know Thee the only true God⁵. But with those that do not believe in the Holy Scriptures we will reason thus.

The Deity is perfect⁶, and without blemish in goodness, and wisdom, and power, without beginning, without end, everlasting, uncircumscribed⁷, and in short, perfect in all things. Should we say, then, that there are many Gods, we must recognise difference among the many. For if there is no difference among them, they are one rather than many. But if there is difference among them, what becomes of the perfectness? For that which comes short of perfection, whether it be in goodness, or power, or wisdom, or time, or

place, could not be God. But it is this very identity in all respects that shews that the Deity is one and not many⁸.

Again, if there are many Gods, how can one maintain that God is uncircumscribed? For where the one would be, the other could not be⁹.

Further, how could the world be governed by many and saved from dissolution and destruction, while strife is seen to rage between the rulers? For difference introduces strife¹⁰. And if any one should say that each rules over a part, what of that which established this order and gave to each his particular realm? For this would be rather God. Therefore, God is one, perfect, uncircumscribed, maker of the universe, and its preserver and governor, exceeding and preceding all perfection.

Moreover, it is a natural necessity that duality should originate in unity¹¹.

Footnotes

¹ Various reading, but that He is one.

² Exod. xx. 2, 3.

³ Deut. vi. 4.

⁴ Isai. xliii. 10.

⁵ St. John xvii. 3.

⁶ See Thomas Aquin. I. quæst. 11, Art. 4; also cf. Book iv., c. 21 beneath. The question of the unity of the Deity is similarly dealt with by those of the Fathers who wrote against the Marcionites and the Manichæans, and by Athenagoras.

⁷ Or, infinite; ἀπερίγραπτον.

⁸ Infr. lib. iv. c. 21.

⁹ Greg. Nyss., Prol. Catech.

¹⁰ Greg. Naz., Orat. 35.

¹¹ Cf. Dionys., *De div. nom.*, c. 5, 13.

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—Concerning the Word and the Son of God: a reasoned proof.

So then this one and only God is not Wordless¹. And possessing the Word, He will have it not as without a subsistence, nor as having had a beginning, nor as destined to cease to be. For there never was a time when God was not Word: but He ever possesses His own Word, begotten of Himself, not, as our word is, without a subsistence and dissolving into air, but having a subsistence in Him and life and perfection, not proceeding out of Himself but ever existing within Himself². For where could it be, if it were to go outside Him? For inasmuch as our nature is perishable and easily dissolved, our word is also without subsistence. But since God is everlasting and perfect, He will have His Word subsistent in Him, and everlasting and living, and possessed of all the attributes of the Begetter. For just as our word, proceeding as it does out of the mind, is neither wholly identical with the mind nor utterly diverse from it (for so far as it proceeds out of the mind it is different from it, while so far as it reveals the mind, it is no longer absolutely diverse from the mind, but being one in nature with the mind, it is yet to the subject diverse from it), so in the same manner also the Word of God³ in its independent subsistence is differentiated⁴ from Him from Whom it derives its subsistence⁵: but inasmuch as it displays in itself the same attributes as are seen in God, it is of the same

nature as God. For just as absolute perfection is contemplated in the Father, so also is it contemplated in the Word that is begotten of Him.

Footnotes

¹ ἄλογον; without Word, or, without Reason.

² Greg. Nyss., Catech., c. 1.

³ In R. 2427 is added, 'Who is the Son.'

⁴ διήρηται, i.e. distinguished from the Father. Objection is taken to the use of such a verb as suggestive of division. It is often employed, however, by Greg. Naz. (e.g. Orat. 34) to express the distinction of persons. In many passages of Gregory and other Fathers the noun διαίρεσις is used to express the distinction of persons. In many passages of Gregory and other Fathers the noun διαίρεσις is used to express the distinction of one thing from another: and in this sense it is opposed both to the Sabellian confusion and the Arian division.

⁵ Reading ὑπόστασιν. Various reading, ὑπαρξιν, existence.

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—Concerning the Holy Spirit, a reasoned proof.

Moreover the Word must also possess Spirit¹. For in fact even our word is not destitute of spirit; but in our case the spirit is something different from our essence². For there is an attraction and movement of the air which is drawn in and poured forth that the body may be sustained. And it is this which in the moment of utterance becomes the articulate word, revealing in itself the force of the word³.⁴ But in the case of the divine nature, which is simple and uncompound, we must confess in all piety that there exists a Spirit of God, for the Word is not more imperfect than our own word. Now we cannot, in piety, consider the Spirit to be something foreign that gains admission into God from without, as is the case with compound natures like us. Nay, just as, when we heard⁵ of the Word of God, we considered it to be not without subsistence, nor the product of learning, nor the mere utterance of voice, nor as passing into the air and perishing, but as being essentially subsisting, endowed with free volition, and energy, and omnipotence: so also, when we have learnt about the Spirit of God, we contemplate it as the companion of the Word and the revealer of His energy, and not as mere breath without subsistence. For to conceive of the Spirit that dwells in God as after the likeness of our own spirit, would be to drag down the greatness of the divine nature to the lowest depths of degradation. But we must contemplate it as an essential power, existing in its

own proper and peculiar subsistence, proceeding from the Father and resting in the Word⁶, and shewing forth the Word, neither capable of disjunction from God in Whom it exists, and the Word Whose companion it is, nor poured forth to vanish into nothingness⁷, but being in subsistence in the likeness of the Word, endowed with life, free volition, independent movement, energy, ever willing that which is good, and having power to keep pace with the will in all its decrees⁸, having no beginning and no end. For never was the Father at any time lacking in the Word, nor the Word in the Spirit.

Thus because of the unity in nature, the error of the Greeks in holding that God is many, is utterly destroyed: and again by our acceptance of the Word and the Spirit, the dogma of the Jews is overthrown: and there remains of each party⁹ only what is profitable¹⁰. On the one hand of the Jewish idea we have the unity of God's nature, and on the other, of the Greek, we have the distinction in subsistences and that only¹¹.

But should the Jew refuse to accept the Word and the Spirit, let the divine Scripture confute him and curb his tongue. For concerning the Word, the divine David says, For ever, O Lord, Thy Word is settled in heaven¹². And again, He sent His Word and healed them¹³. But the word that is uttered is not sent, nor is it for ever settled¹⁴. And concerning the Spirit, the same David says, Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, they are created¹⁵. And again, By the word of the Lord were the heavens made: and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth¹⁶. Job, too, says, The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath

given me life¹⁷. Now the Spirit which is sent and makes and establishes and conserves, is not mere breath that dissolves, any more than the mouth of God is a bodily member. For the conception of both must be such as harmonizes with the Divine nature¹⁸.

Footnotes

¹ The Greek theologians, founding on the primary sense of the Greek term Πνεῦμα, and on certain passages of Scripture in which the word seemed to retain that sense more or less (especially Psalm xxxiii. 6. in the Vulgate rendering, *verbo Dei cœli formati sunt: et spiritu oris ejus omnis virtus eorum*), spoke of the Holy Ghost as proceeding from the Father like the breath of His mouth in the utterance or emission of His Word. See ch. 15 of this Book, where we have the sentence, οὐδεμία γὰρ ὁρμὴ ἄνευ πνεύματος. Compare also such passages as these—Greg. Naz., Orat. i. 3: Cyril. Alex., Thes., assert. 34, De Trin. dial. 2, p. 425, and 7, pp. 634, 640; Basil, Contra Eunom., B.V., and De Spiritu Sancto, ch. 18; Greg. Scholar., Contra Latin., de process. Spiritus Sancti, i. 4, where we have the statement οὕτω καὶ τὸ ἅγιον Πνεῦμα ὥσπερ ὁρμὴ καὶ κίνησις, ἐνδοτέρα τῆς ὑπερφυσικῆς ἐκείνης οὐσίας, so the Holy Spirit is like an impulse and movement within that supernatural essence.

² Or, substance; οὐσία.

³ Text, φανεροῦσα: various reading, φέρουσα (cf. Cyril, De Trinitate).

⁴ Greg. Nyss., Catech., c. 2.

⁵ Text, ἀκούσαντες: variant, ἀκούοντες (so in Cyril).

⁶ So Cyril speaks frequently of the Holy Spirit as proceeding from the Father and being (εἶναι) and abiding (μένειν) in the Son; as also of the Spirit as being of the Son and having His nature in Him (ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐμπεφυκῶς αὐτῷ). The idea seems to have been that as the Son is in the bosom of the Father so the Spirit is in the bosom of the Son. The Spirit was compared again to the energy, the natural, living energy, of the Son (ἐνέργεια φυσικὴ καὶ ζωσα, τὸ ἐνεργὲς τοῦ υἱοῦ), Cyril, Dial 7 ad Hermiam. Such terms as προβολεὺς ἐκφαντορικοῦ πνεύματος, the Producer, or, Emitter of the revealing Spirit, and the ἐκφανσις or ἔλλαμψις, the revealing, the forth-shewing, were also used to express the procession of the one eternal Person from the Other as like the emission or forth-shewing of light from light.

⁷ Greg. Naz., Orat. 37, 44.

⁸ Text, πρὸς πᾶσαν πρόθεσιν: variant θέλησιν in almost all the codices.

⁹ αἵρεσις.

¹⁰ Greg. Orat. 38, and elsewhere.

¹¹ Greg. Nyss., Catech., c. 3.

¹² Ps. cxix. 89.

¹³ Ib. cvii. 30.

¹⁴ Text, διαμένει: variant, μένει.

¹⁵ Ps. civ. 30.

¹⁶ Ib. xxxiii. 6.

¹⁷ Job xxxiii. 4.

¹⁸ Basil, De Spir. Sancto, ad Amphil. c. 18.

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—Concerning the Holy Trinity.

We believe, then, in One God, one beginning¹, having no beginning, uncreate, unbegotten, imperishable and immortal, everlasting, infinite, uncircumscribed, boundless, of infinite power, simple, uncompound, incorporeal, without flux, passionless, unchangeable, unalterable, unseen, the fountain of goodness and justice, the light of the mind, inaccessible; a power known by no measure, measurable only by His own will alone (for all things that He wills He can²), creator of all created things, seen or unseen, of all the maintainer and preserver, for all the provider, master and lord and king over all, with an endless and immortal kingdom: having no contrary, filling all, by nothing encompassed, but rather Himself the encompasser and maintainer and original possessor of the universe, occupying³ all essences intact⁴ and extending beyond all things, and being separate from all essence as being super-essential⁵ and above all things and absolute God, absolute goodness, and absolute fulness⁶: determining all sovereignties and ranks, being placed above all sovereignty and rank, above essence and life and word and thought: being Himself very light and goodness and life and essence, inasmuch as He does not derive His being from another, that is to say, of those things that exist: but being Himself the fountain of being to all that is, of life to the living, of reason to those that have reason; to all the cause of all

good: perceiving all things even before they have become: one essence, one divinity, one power, one will, one energy, one beginning, one authority, one dominion, one sovereignty, made known in three perfect subsistences and adored with one adoration, believed in and ministered to by all rational creation⁷, united without confusion and divided without separation (which indeed transcends thought). (We believe) in Father and Son and Holy Spirit whereinto also we have been baptized⁸. For so our Lord commanded the Apostles to baptize, saying, Baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit⁹.

(We believe) in one Father, the beginning¹⁰, and cause of all: begotten of no one: without cause or generation, alone subsisting: creator of all: but Father of one only by nature, His Only-begotten Son and our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ, and Producer¹¹ of the most Holy Spirit. And in one Son of God, the Only-begotten, our Lord, Jesus Christ: begotten of the Father, before all the ages: Light of Light, true God of true God: begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father, through Whom all things are made: and when we say He was before all the ages we shew that His birth is without time or beginning: for the Son of God was not brought into being out of nothing¹², He that is the effulgence of the glory, the impress of the Father's subsistence¹³, the living wisdom and power¹⁴, the Word possessing interior subsistence¹⁵, the essential and perfect and living image¹⁶ of the unseen God. But always He was with the Father and in Him¹⁷, everlastingly and without beginning begotten of Him. For there never was a time when the Father was and the Son was not, but always the

Father and always the Son, Who was begotten of Him, existed together. For He could not have received the name Father apart from the Son: for if He were without the Son¹⁸, He could not be the Father: and if He thereafter had the Son, thereafter He became the Father, not having been the Father prior to this, and He was changed from that which was not the Father and became the Father. This is the worst form of blasphemy¹⁹. For we may not speak of God as destitute of natural generative power: and generative power means, the power of producing from one's self, that is to say, from one's own proper essence, that which is like in nature to one's self²⁰.

In treating, then, of the generation of the Son, it is an act of impiety²¹ to say that time comes into play and that the existence of the Son is of later origin than the Father. For we hold that it is from Him, that is, from the Father's nature, that the Son is generated. And unless we grant that the Son co-existed from the beginning with the Father, by Whom He was begotten, we introduce change into the Father's subsistence, because, not being the Father, He subsequently became the Father²². For the creation, even though it originated later, is nevertheless not derived from the essence of God, but is brought into existence out of nothing by His will and power, and change does not touch God's nature. For generation means that the begetter produces out of his essence offspring similar in essence. But creation and making mean that the creator and maker produces from that which is external, and not out of his own essence, a creation of an absolutely dissimilar nature²³.

Wherefore in God, Who alone is passionless and unalterable, and immutable, and ever so continueth, both begetting and creating are passionless²⁴. For being by nature passionless and not liable to flux, since He is simple and uncompound, He is not subject to passion or flux either in begetting or in creating, nor has He need of any co-operation. But generation in Him is without beginning and everlasting, being the work of nature and producing out of His own essence, that the Begetter may not undergo change, and that He may not be God first and God last, nor receive any accession: while creation in the case of God²⁵, being the work of will, is not co-eternal with God. For it is not natural that that which is brought into existence out of nothing should be co-eternal with what is without beginning and everlasting. There is this difference in fact between man's making and God's. Man can bring nothing into existence out of nothing²⁶, but all that he makes requires pre-existing matter for its basis²⁷, and he does not create it by will only, but thinks out first what it is to be and pictures it in his mind, and only then fashions it with his hands, undergoing labour and trouble²⁸, and often missing the mark and failing to produce to his satisfaction that after which he strives. But God, through the exercise of will alone, has brought all things into existence out of nothing. Now there is the same difference between God and man in begetting and generating. For in God, Who is without time and beginning, passionless, not liable to flux, incorporeal, alone and without end²⁹, generation is without time and beginning, passionless and not liable to flux, nor dependent on the union of two³⁰: nor has His own incomprehensible