

### (3) THE HOLY TRINITY

#### 108. Richard Hooker

[From *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book V, Chapter li, § 1. *Works*, ed. J. Keble, Vol. II, pp. 220 f. Cp. note on No. 148.]

*The Lord our God is but one God.* In which indivisible unity, notwithstanding we adore the Father as being altogether of Himself, we glorify that Consubstantial Word which is the Son, we bless and magnify that co-essential Spirit eternally proceeding from Both, which is the Holy Ghost. Seeing therefore the Father is of none, the Son is of the Father, and the Spirit is of Both, they are by these their several properties readily distinguishable each from other. For the substance of God with this property *to be of none* doth make the Person of the Father; the very selfsame substance in number with this property *to be of the Father* maketh the Person of the Son; the same substance having added unto it the property of *proceeding from the other Two* maketh the Person of the Holy Ghost. So that in every Person there is implied both the substance of God which is one, and also that property which causeth the same Person really and truly to differ from the other two. Every Person hath His own subsistence which no other besides hath, although there be others besides that are of the same substance. As no man but Peter can be the person which Peter is, yet Paul hath the selfsame nature which Peter hath. Again, Angels have every of them the nature of pure and invisible spirits, but every Angel is not that Angel which appeared in a dream to Joseph.

#### 109. George Bull

[From *Defensio Fidei Nicaenae*. The extract which follows is reprinted from the "Index of the Propositions demonstrated in this Work," which was affixed to Bull's *Defensio*. The treatise, which was first published in 1685, is deservedly a classic. The circumstances which led to its composition are noteworthy. In his earlier writings (cp. note on No. 129), Bull had made some incisive criticisms of the Lutheran doctrine of Justification and was accused in consequence of Socinianism; this was a charge currently made against those who held "Arminian" views on Justification. It was in order to repel the suspicions thus raised as to his orthodoxy that Bull conceived and wrote the *Defensio*. This work took the form of an analysis of the theology of the Church Fathers prior to the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325), in which he sought to prove the conformity of their teaching with the Nicene Formula. The author found further grounds for doing this, because in 1643 the Jesuit theologian, Dionysius Petavius, had published the first three volumes of his *Dogmata Theologica* (these were dated actually 1644), in which he had questioned the orthodoxy of the ante-Nicene writers, judged by the standard of the teaching of the Council, and justified them on the grounds of a theory of 'development'; and Bull mockingly attacked Petavius in his *Proemium*. When the *Defensio* appeared in 1685, its merits were immediately recognized. It was supplemented later, in 1694, by the *Judicium Ecclesiae Catholicae trium primorum Seculorum de Necessitate Credendi quod Dominus Noster Jesus Christus sit verus Deus, assertum contra S. Episcopium aliosque*. A copy of the *Judicium* sent to Bossuet procured for Bull "the unfeigned congratulations of the whole clergy of France, assembled at St. Germain's, for the great service he had done to the Catholic Church." An English translation of the *Defensio* by Dr. F. Holland was published in 1725. A second version, made for the *LACT*, was published in 1851. From this translation the present and the following extracts are taken.]

#### *On the Pre-existence of the Son of God*

The Catholic Doctors of the First Three Centuries all with one accord taught that Jesus Christ, that is, He Who was afterwards called Jesus Christ (before He was made man, that is, before His birth, according to the flesh, of the most Blessed Virgin), existed in another nature

far surpassing the human; that He appeared to holy men, as a prelude to His Incarnation; that He always presided over and provided for that Church which He was afterwards to redeem with His Own Blood; and that thus from the beginning the “whole order of the Divine Administration” (as Tertullian expresses it) “had its course through Him”; and that, moreover, before the foundations of the world were laid He was present with God His Father, and that through Him this universe was created.

*On the Consubstantiality of the Son*

It was the settled and unanimous opinion of the Catholic Doctors who flourished in the First Three Centuries that the Son of God was of one substance, or consubstantial, with God the Father; that is, that He was not of any created or mutable essence, but of altogether the same Divine and unchangeable Nature with His Father, and therefore very God of very God.

*On the Co-eternity of the Son*

*The First Proposition*

The more authoritative and larger part of the Doctors, who lived before the Council of Nice, unambiguously, openly, clearly, and perspicuously taught and professed the co-eternity of the Son, that is, His co-eternal existence with God the Father.

*The Second Proposition*

There are some Catholic writers, more ancient than the Council of Nice, who seem to have attributed to the Son of God, even in that He is God, a certain nativity, which began at a certain time, and immediately preceded the creation of the world. And yet they were very far removed from the opinion of Arius. For, if their expressions be more accurately weighed, it will appear that they spoke not of a true and properly so called nativity in which, that is, the Son received the beginning of His hypostasis and subsistence, but of a figurative and metaphorical one; that is, they merely intended this, that the Word, Who before all ages (when nothing existed besides God) did exist in and with God the Father, as the co-eternal offspring of the Eternal Mind itself, went forth in operation from God the Father Himself at the time when He was about to form the world, and proceeded to create the universe, and to manifest both Himself and His Father to the creatures; and that, in consequence of this going forth and manifestation, He is called in the Scriptures the Son of God and the First-begotten.

*The Third Proposition*

Certain Catholic Doctors who lived after the rise of the Arian Controversy, and resolutely opposed themselves to the heresy of the Ariomanites, did not shrink from the view of the Primitive Fathers, whom we last mentioned, or rather the mode in which they explained their view. For they themselves also acknowledged that going forth of the Word, Who existed always with God the Father, from the Father (which some of them also called His Condescension) in order to create this universe; and confessed that, with respect of that going forth also the Word Himself was, as it were, born of God the Father, and is in the Scriptures called the first-begotten of every creature.

*The Fourth Proposition*

Tertullian, indeed, has in one passage ventured to write expressly that there was a time, when the Son of God was not. But, in the first place, it is certain, that that writer, though in other respects a man of great ability and equal learning, fell off from the Catholic Church to heresy. And it is very uncertain, which books he wrote when a Catholic, which when inclining to heresy, and which, lastly, when a decided heretic. Secondly, Tertullian appears to have used

that expression in a controversial way and in disputation with his adversary, playing on the word Son; so that, although he seems to have absolutely denied the Eternity of the Son, still he really meant no more than what those Fathers meant, whom we have cited in Chaps. 5–8 of this Book:<sup>1</sup> namely, that the Divine Person, Who is called the Son of God, although He always existed with the Father, was then first declared to be the Son, when He went forth from the Father to make the universe. Certainly the same Tertullian has in many other passages treated of the co-eternity of the Son in a clearly Catholic sense, if we regard the main drift of his doctrine. As for Lactantius, who also in one passage attributes, not obscurely, a beginning of existence to the Son of God, his estimation and authority is but of little weight in the Church of God, inasmuch as he was almost entirely uninstructed in Holy Scripture and Christian Doctrine. And secondly, it must necessarily be held, either that those passages in the writings of Lactantius which seem to make against the Eternity of the Son have been corrupted by some Manichaean heretic; or at any rate that Lactantius himself was infected with the heresy of Manes. Lastly, he has himself in other passages expressed a more sound opinion concerning the eternity of the Word.

### *On the Subordination of the Son to the Father*

#### *The First Proposition*

That Decree of the Council of Nice in which it is laid down that the Son of God is ‘God of God’ is confirmed by the voice of the Catholic Doctors, both those who wrote before and those who wrote after that Council. For they all with one accord taught that the Divine Nature and perfections belong to the Father and the Son, not collaterally or co-ordinately, but subordinately; that is to say, that the Son has indeed the same Divine Nature in common with the Father, but communicated by the Father; in such sense, that is, that the Father alone hath the Divine Nature from Himself, in other words, from no other, but the Son from the Father; consequently that the Father is the Fountain, Origin, and Principle of the Divinity which is in the Son.

#### *The Second Proposition*

The Catholic Doctors, both those who preceded and those who lived after the Council of Nice, with unanimous consent determined that God the Father, even in respect of His Divinity, is greater than the Son; that is to say, not in Nature indeed, or in any essential perfection, so that it should be in the Father, and not in the Son; but in Authorship alone, that is to say, in Origin; forasmuch as the Son is from the Father, not the Father from the Son.

#### *The Third Proposition*

This Doctrine respecting the subordination of the Son to the Father as to His Origin and Principle was regarded by the ancient Doctors as very useful and absolutely necessary to be known and believed for this reason, that by means of it especially the Divinity of the Son is so asserted, as that the Unity of God and the Divine Monarchy, is nevertheless preserved unimpaired. For although the Name and the Nature be common to the two, namely the Father and the Son of God, still, inasmuch as the One is the Principle of the Other, from Which He is propagated, and that by an internal not an external production, it follows that God is rightly said to be only one. This reason those Ancients believed to be equally applicable to the Divinity of the Holy Ghost.

1. [The Fathers referred to are Athenagoras, Tatian, Theophilus of Antioch, Hippolytus, and “Novatian, or the author of the *Treatise on the Trinity*, published among and under the name of Tertullian.”]

**110. George Bull**

[From *Defensio Fidei Nicaenae*, Introduction §§ 1, 2, 4, 7–10, 11. Ed. *LACT*, Vol. I, pp. 1–3, 5 f., 9–13, 14. Cp. note on No. 109.]

The first Oecumenical Council, which was held at Nice, has ever been regarded by all Catholics as of the highest authority and esteem, and indeed deservedly so. For never since the death of the Apostles has the Christian world beheld a synod with higher claims to be considered universal and free, or an assembly of Bishops and Prelates more august and holy. “For at that Council,” as Eusebius says, “there were assembled out of all the Churches, which had filled the whole of Europe, Asia, and Africa, the very choicest from amongst the ministers of God: and one sacred building, expanded as it were by the Divine command, embraced at once within its compass both Syrians and Cilicians, Phoenicians and Arabians, and Christians of Palestine; Egyptians too, Thebans and Libyans, and some who came out of Mesopotamia. A Bishop also from Persia was present at the Council, and even Scythia was not wanting to that company. Pontus also and Galatia, Pamphylia and Cappadocia, with Asia and Phrygia, contributed the choicest of their prelates. Moreover Thracians, Macedonians, Achaeans and Epirotes, and inhabitants of still more remote districts, were, notwithstanding their distance, present. Even from Spain itself, that most celebrated man [Hosius] took his seat along with the rest. The prelate of the imperial city” (of Rome, that is), “was indeed absent on account of his advanced age, but presbyters of his were present to supply his place. Constantine is the only Emperor from the beginning of the world, who, by convening this vast assembly, an image, as it were, of the company of the Apostles, presented to Christ His Saviour a garland such as this, twined and knit together by the bond of peace, as a sacred memorial of his gratitude for the victories which he had gained over his foreign and domestic enemies. . . . In this company more than two hundred and fifty Bishops were present,” (Athanasius, Hilary, Jerome, Rufinus, Socrates, and many others, assert that three hundred and eighteen Bishops sat in this Council), “whilst the number of the Presbyters who accompanied them, with the deacons, acolytes, and crowds of others, can scarcely be computed. Moreover of these ministers of God some were eminent for their wisdom and eloquence, others for their gravity of life and patient endurance of hardships, whilst others again were adorned with modesty and gentleness of demeanour. Some also among them were held in the highest honour from their advanced age; others were young and vigorous in body and mind,” etc.

The subject treated of in this Council concerned the chief doctrine of the Christian Religion, namely, the dignity of the Person of Jesus Christ Our Saviour, whether He is to be worshipped as true God, or to be reduced to the rank and condition of creatures and of things subject to the true God. If we imagine that in this question of the very utmost moment the whole of the rulers of the Church altogether erred and persuaded the Christian people to embrace their error, how will the promise of Christ Our Lord hold good, Who engaged to be present, even to the end of the world, with the Apostles, and consequently with their successors? For, since the promise extends to the end of the world, and yet the Apostles were not to continue alive so long, Christ must most certainly be regarded as addressing, in the persons of the Apostles, their successors also in that office. . . .

Faustus Socinus of Siena, in his Second Letter to Radecius, asserts that the knowledge of the true doctrine concerning God, namely, that the Father alone is very God, continued down to the time of the Council of Nice. “This knowledge,” he says, “without any controversy ceased not to exist even until the period of the Council of Nice and for some time afterwards, among those who professed the Name of Christ. For throughout the whole of that period, as is clear from the writings of all who then lived, the Father of Jesus Christ alone was believed to be that

one true God, of Whom the Holy Scriptures everywhere make mention.” In this passage, when he says that this was the belief of all the Ancients down to the Council of Nice “that the Father of Jesus Christ alone is the one true God,” if it be understood of that special prerogative of the Father, by which He alone is of Himself very God, then we acknowledge it to be most true. But this does not make anything in favour of Socinus; and it is certain that the knowledge of this doctrine not only “continued until the time of the Council of Nice, or some time after,” but has ever continued in the Church of Christ. But if, on the other hand, this proposition, “The Father of Jesus Christ alone is the one true God,” be taken altogether exclusively, so as to take away from Christ His true Divinity and to deny what was defined by the Nicene Council, namely, that the Son is very God of very God (and it is but too evident that this was what Socinus meant), then we contend that it is manifestly false that “all the Ancients, down to the Council of Nice, did so believe.” Nay, we shall shew that they all taught that the Son is of the same nature with the Father, and therefore is very God, equally with the Father. Accordingly even Socinus himself in another place, *i.e.* in his Third Letter to this same Matthew Radecius (contradicting himself, as he is apt to do), confesses “that almost from the very earliest period of the existence of the Church, even to our own time, so many men most distinguished for piety no less than for learning, so many most holy martyrs of Christ, as to be past numbering, have followed that error, in other respects most serious, that Christ is the one true God, Who created all things, or, at least, was begotten of His proper substance.” But surely, that the Son of God was begotten of the proper substance of God, and is, therefore, very God of very God, is the sum and substance of the doctrine, which the Nicene Fathers asserted against Arius. . . .

There is, however, one great man fully furnished with learning of every kind, Dionysius Petavius, at whom I cannot sufficiently wonder. For, whilst he professes the utmost reverence for the Nicene Council, and on all occasions declares that he receives the Faith therein affirmed against the Arians as truly Catholic and Apostolic, still he freely gives up to the Arians that which (if true) would very greatly tend to confirm their heresy and to disparage, nay rather, utterly to overthrow, the credit and authority of the Council of Nice; I mean, that almost all the Bishops and Fathers before the Council of Nice held precisely the same opinions as Arius. For thus he writes (*Of the Trinity*, I, v, 7) “Accordingly there was this settled opinion in the minds of some of the Ancients touching the Godhead and the diversity of Persons in It, viz., that there is One supreme, unbegotten, and invisible God, Who put forth, without, from Himself, as vocal and sounding, that Logos, that is, that Word which He had laid up within (ἐνδιάθετον), yet not, like a voice of sound, passing away and capable of being dissipated, but of such sort as that, as though embodied and subsisting, It might in turn afterwards create all other things. Moreover, they said that the Word was put forth by the Supreme God and Father at the time when He determined on creating this universe, in order that He might use Him as His assisting minister. This opinion some intimate more clearly, others more obscurely. But these may be specially mentioned,—Athenagoras, Tatian, Theophilus, Tertullian, and Lactantius. Both these authors, however, and the rest whom I have mentioned” (and which of the Primitive Fathers had he not before mentioned?) “thought that the Father was superior to the Word, in age, dignity, and power; and although they asserted that the Son was of the Substance or Nature of the Father (in which point alone they made His mode of existence to differ from that of all other beings, which are properly called creatures), still they conceived that He had a beginning no less than the creatures; in other words, that He had by no means been a distinct Person from eternity.” But in the Second Section of the Eighth Chapter of the same book he speaks still more plainly. “It is most clear,” he says, “that Arius was a genuine Platonist, and that he followed the opinions of

those ancient writers who, while as yet the point had not been developed and settled, had fallen into the same error. For they also taught that the Word was produced by God the Father, yet not from eternity but before He formed the world, in order that He might use Him as His assisting Minister for the accomplishment of that work. For they conceived that He had not created all things by Himself and without the intervention of anyone, a doctrine which Philo also followed in his Book *On the Creator of the World*. And therefore I take it to have been in a rhetorical and exaggerated way of expression that Alexander in his Epistle, and others of the Fathers who wrote against this heresy, complained that Arius had been the author of that opinion, the like to which had been unheard of before his time; inasmuch as we have brought forward a great number of early writers who previously taught the same doctrine as Arius."

If, therefore, reliance is to be placed on Petavius, we shall have to lay down, first, that the heresy of Arius which was condemned by the Nicene Fathers agreed, in the most important points, with the commonly received view of the ancient Catholic Doctors who preceded him. Secondly, that the doctrine concerning the true Divinity of the Son was not settled and developed before the Council of Nice. Thirdly, that Alexander and the other Catholics who accused Arius as the author of a doctrine which was new and unheard of previously in the Catholic Church, said this in a rhetorical and an exaggerated way; that is to say (if the thing is to be more plainly stated), that they uttered a notable falsehood, I suppose in the Jesuit fashion, to subserve the Catholic cause. Unlucky Arius! that Petavius was not yet born, to become the patron and advocate of his cause in the conflict at Nicaea. It is not, however, easy to say what Petavius had in view when he wrote thus. Some suspect that in his heart he cherished the Arian heresy himself, and wished craftily to pass on the cup to others. This was the opinion of Sandius, whom I have just before mentioned, who thus remarks of Petavius: "But when I recollect that Petavius asserts that the Ante-Nicene Fathers taught the same doctrines as Arius, and also that the articles of the Faith are to be proved by traditions, I think it impossible but that Petavius must have been persuaded of the truth of the conclusion, which infallibly follows from these premisses, namely, that the Trinity which the Arians hold, and not the Consubstantial Trinity, is an article of the Faith. And as to his wresting the argument to a contrary conclusion, I presume he did this with a twofold view: 1. To escape the inconveniences which commonly fall on those who secede from the Roman Catholic to the Arian party; 2. That the Arians might be able to derive a stronger proof of their doctrine from a Father of the Society of Jesus, as from an adversary; especially since it is sufficient to prove premisses, from which any person of sound mind can draw such a conclusion, as will make it plain what his opinion is about the Trinity." These are the words of Sandius. In my opinion, however, it is most clear from the writings of Petavius himself that the conjecture of this most vain writer is entirely false. If indeed it must be said that Petavius wrote thus with any sinister purpose and not merely from that bold and reckless temper which is his wont in criticizing and commenting on the Holy Fathers, I should say that, being a Jesuit, he wished to promote the Papal, rather than the Arian, interest. For, from the fact (for which Petavius contends) that almost all the Catholic doctors of the first three centuries fell into the self-same error which the Nicene Council afterwards condemned as heresy in the case of Arius, these two things will easily follow: 1. That little authority is to be assigned to the Fathers of the First Three Centuries,—to whom Reformed Catholics are wont to make their chief appeal,—as being persons to whom the principal articles of the Christian Faith were not as yet sufficiently understood and developed; 2. That Oecumenical Councils have the power of framing, or, as Petavius says, of settling and developing new articles of Faith,—by which principle it may seem that sufficient provision is made for those additions, which the Fathers of Trent patched on to the Rule of Faith and thrust



upon the Christian world; though not even in this way will the Roman Faith stand good, since the assembly at Trent is to be called any thing rather than a General Council.

But so it is. The masters of that school have no scruples in building their Pseudo-catholic Faith on the ruins of the Faith which is truly Catholic. The Divine oracles themselves must, forsooth, be found guilty of too great obscurity and the most Holy Doctors, Bishops, and Martyrs of the Primitive Church be accused of heresy in order that, by whatever means, the faith and authority of the degenerate Roman Church may be kept safe and sound. And yet these sophists (of all things) execrate us as if we are so many accursed Hams, and deriders and despisers of the venerable Fathers of the Church, whilst they continually boast that they themselves religiously follow the Faith of the ancient Doctors and reverence their writings to the utmost. That Petavius, however, wrote those passages with this wicked design, I would not venture to affirm for certain, leaving it to the judgement of that God Who knoweth the hearts. At the same time, what the Jesuit has written, as it is most pleasing to modern Arians (who on this account with one consent look up to and salute him as their patron), so we confidently pronounce it to be manifestly repugnant to the truth, and most unjust and insulting to the Holy Fathers, whether those of the Council of Nice or those who preceded it.

For this is the plan of the work which I have undertaken,—to shew clearly that what the Nicene Fathers laid down concerning the Divinity of the Son, in opposition to Arius and other heretics, was in substance (although sometimes perhaps in other words and in a different mode of expression) taught by all the approved Fathers and Doctors of the Church, without a single exception, who flourished before the period of the Council of Nice down from the very age of the Apostles.

And, O most holy Jesus, the Co-eternal Word of the Eternal Father, I, the chief of sinners and the least of Thy servants, do humbly beseech Thee that Thou wouldest vouchsafe to bless this labour of mine, undertaken (as Thou O searcher of hearts, dost know) for Thine honour and the good of Thy Holy Church; and to succour and help mine infirmity in this most weighty work, for Thine infinite mercy and most ready favour towards them that love Thee. Amen!

The Nicene Creed, as it is quoted by Eusebius in his Epistle to his own Diocese of Caesarea, by Athanasius in his Letter to Jovian *De Fide*, and by other writers, is as follows: [Here follows the text in Greek and Latin (English) of the Creed of the Council of Nicæa of A.D. 325.] . . .

The doctrine respecting the Son of God, contained in this Creed, so far as it concerns our present design, may be reduced to these heads.

The First; concerning the προὔπαρξις, or Pre-existence, of the Son of God before [His Incarnation of] the blessed Virgin Mary, nay rather, before the foundation of the world; and concerning the creation of the universe through the Son.

The Second; concerning the ὁμοούσιον (“of one substance”), or Consubstantiality, of the Son; that He is not of any such essence as is created or subject to change, but a nature altogether the same with His Father, that is, that He is very God.

The Third; concerning the συναίδιον, the Co-eternity of the Son; that is, His existence co-eternal with His Father.

The Fourth; concerning the subordination of the Son to the Father, as to Him Who is His Author and Principle, which is expressed by the Nicene Fathers in two ways,—in that, first, they call the Father “One God”; and then, in that they say that the Son is “God of God, Light of Light,” etc.

On all these points we shall make it manifest that the Faith of the Ante-Nicene Fathers is quite in harmony with the Nicene Creed; going through each particular in the order in which we have just proposed them.