

**THE ATHANASIAN
CREED, SIX EXPOSITORY
ADDRESSES**

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The Athanasian creed, six expository addresses by J. Hamer Rawdon

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J. HAMER RAWDON

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SIX EXPOSITORY ADDRESSES

BY THE

REV. J. HAMER RAWDON, M.A.

VICAR OF PRESTON, AND RURAL DEAN.

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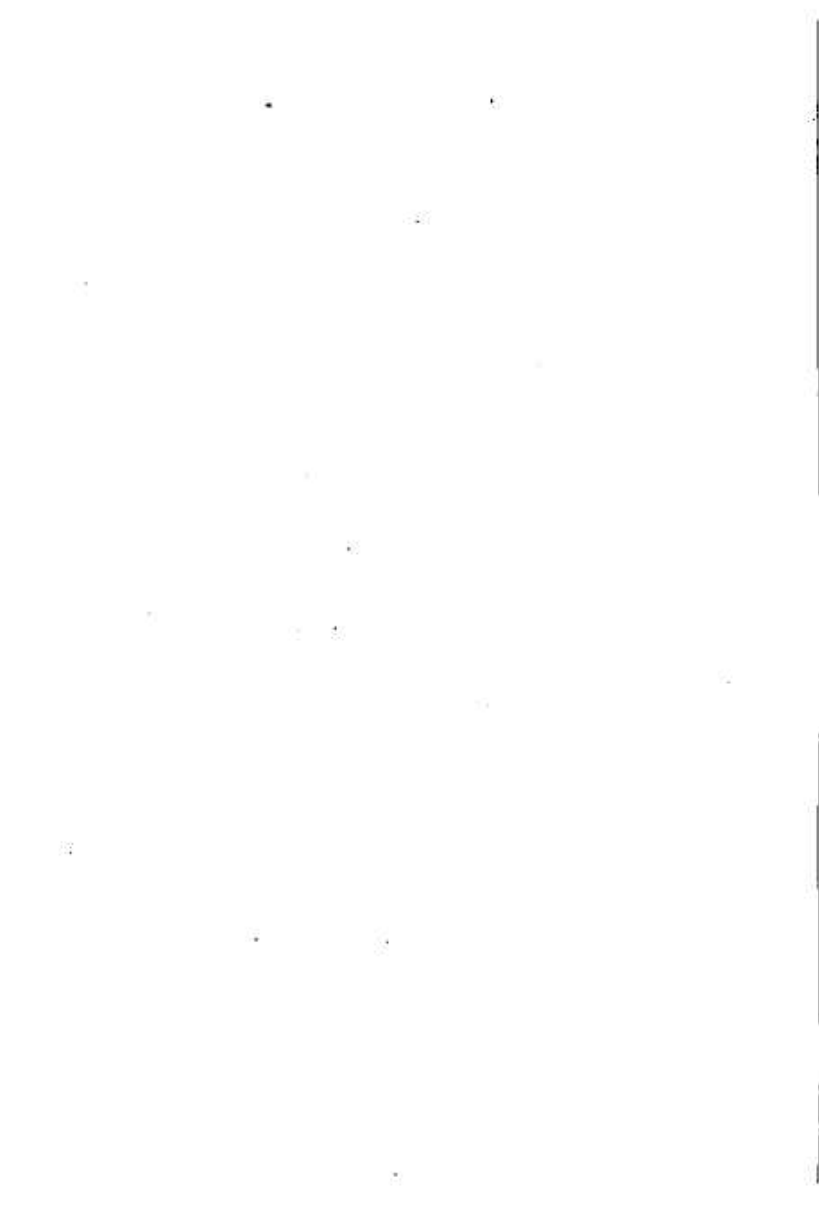


ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following Addresses were given in 1883 to my own Church Workers and others on the Fridays in Lent, and were afterwards repeated on the following Sundays on the conclusion of the Evening Service. It will be seen that their aim is practical, and that they make no claim to original research. They are published in the hope that they may be found more generally useful.

J. H. R.

November, 1884.



THE ATHANASIAN CREED.

ADDRESS I.

THE subject of the Athanasian Creed is a difficult one, but believing, as I do, that this Creed, no less than the Apostles' and the Nicene, "ought"—in the language of the eighth Article of the Church of England,—“thoroughly to be received and believed,” I wish during this Lent to give a course of brief Addresses upon it, which I trust may be practically useful. In this Address I shall confine myself to two chief points:

I. The origin of the Creed, i.e. its date, authorship, and the place where it was most probably written.

II. The great practical difficulty, which it presents to many minds, in the strong language of its condemning clauses.

I. You will observe in the Rubric before the Creed that its authorship is not assigned by our Church to St. Athanasius; it is described as the “Confession of our Christian faith, commonly called the Creed of St. Athanasius,” and we shall presently see good reason to conclude that it was called Athanasian only in the same sense as the Apostles' Creed was called after the Apostles: viz. as containing and enforcing the great doctrines, of which Athanasius was the chief exponent and defender.

A careful examination of the language of the

Creed, and a comparison of it with the known course of Church History, more especially as regards the development of the various heresies, by which the existence of the Catholic faith was from time to time imperilled, enables us to fix the date within a few years.

In the 32nd verse of the Creed the language used respecting our Lord's manhood, "of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting," clearly refers to the heresy of Apollinaris, Bishop of Laodicea, a friend of St. Athanasius, who, after doing good service against the Arian impugners of our Lord's divinity, afterwards went off into an opposite error, and taught that our Lord had not a "reasonable" human soul, but only the affections and body of a man, His Godhead supplying in Him the place of a "reasonable and intellectual soul." This error came to a head about A.D. 376, when Apollinaris founded a sect of his own, setting up rival Bishops, and embodying his doctrines in hymns and popular songs.

Again, there are expressions in the Creed which are evidently drawn from the writings of St. Augustine, the great Bishop of Hippo, in North Africa, and other signs of the influence of his teaching, which make it unlikely that it was written before A.D. 420. This gives us the limit in one direction.

Then it has been observed that there is no distinct and direct condemnation of two very serious heresies of a later time, of which we shall have to speak in future Addresses, though it is true that both are excluded by the language of the Creed, and guarded against by anticipation. I mean, first, the heresy of Nestorius, Archbishop of Constantinople, who, in denying that the blessed Virgin was in any

sense "the Mother of God¹," virtually taught that in our Lord there were two Persons, one the eternal Word, the Son of God, and the other the Son of man, thus making Him in effect to be two Christs. And secondly, the heresy of Eutyches, the abbot of a monastery near Constantinople, who from his opposition to Nestorius was led into an opposite error, and taught that our Lord's human soul was absorbed into His Divine nature, and that so He had but one nature, that of God, instead of two natures, that of God and that of Man.

Now these two last-named heresies were respectively condemned by the Council of Ephesus in 431, and that of Chalcedon in 451—the third and fourth General Councils, as they are called.

Hence the Creed can hardly be later than A.D. 431 or 451. These dates give us the other limit. It may therefore be concluded that it was written² between A.D. 420 and 431 or 451, but St. Athanasius died in 373, and the Creed is not found amongst his writings.

Again, its form and general cast show that it must have been written originally in Latin, and that it belonged to the Western and not the Eastern Church. Moreover it was first used in France, where at a very early period it was sung with the Psalms for

¹ "Mother of God" does not convey to English ears what was meant by *Theotokos*. "Mother of Him Who is God" would express its meaning more exactly. What the Fathers intended by calling the blessed Virgin *Theotokos* was that the Word was born of her, inasmuch as He took flesh of her, and became her child in virtue of His Manhood. See Address V.

² Mr. Ommaney concludes that it was drawn up not later than the first half of the fifth century: *Early History of the Athanasian Creed*, p. 282. So Bp. Harold Browne on the Thirty-nine Articles, whom I have chiefly followed. Profs. Swainson and Lumby adopt a later date.

the day, where also the greatest number of MSS. of it, and those the oldest, have been found, and where it was held in the greatest esteem, and commented upon by many learned divines.

If then it was written in France between A.D. 420 and 451, the next question is who could have written it. There were two great men then living, one a Bishop the other a Priest, to each of whom it has been ascribed; and it is remarkable that both were at one time inmates together of the monastery of Lerins, in the south of France¹. Our great English writer on the Creed, Waterland, assigned it to the former, Hilary, Bishop of Arles, who was thought to have set it forth on taking charge of his Diocese in 429², but in the ground on which he went he is now known to have been mistaken; and it is more probable that the latter, Vincentius Lirinensis, or St. Vincent of Lerins, was its author. This cannot however be considered certain, although the language of one of St. Vincent's undoubted works³ bears the closest resemblance to that of the Creed. It is plain therefore that the Athanasian Creed was so called, as upholding the doctrine of Athanasius and his followers against their Arian opponents, and not because Athanasius was thought to have written it⁴.

II. Next let me turn to the other point of which I spoke, the condemning clauses, to which so many feel an objection, and which were once, I confess, a great difficulty to myself.

¹ Now the Island of St. Honorat, off Cannes.

² See Mr. Ommaney's *Early History of the Athanasian Creed*, p. 282.

³ The *Commonitorium*. Ommaney, p. 286.

⁴ Yet this mistake appears to have been current as early as the sixth century. Ommaney, p. 295.