

Three Different Names for the Same Person

Hilary in commenting on the second creed, says:ⁱ “First of all we must bear in mind, that the Council of Antioch convened not against the heresy, which dared to assert that the Father and Son were of a different substance, but against the heresy, which after the Council of Nice, belched forth the doctrine that the three names are to be ascribed to the Father” (that is, not against Arianism, but against Sabellianism, revived in the person of Marcellus of Ancyra).

Hilary continues: “Therefore the assembled synod of holy men, in their desire to destroy such impiety, which tried to escape the dogma (veritatem) of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost expressed by the number of names, and which subtracted the personality from each name, thereby falsely joining the three names, so that the Father alone might have the name of the Holy Spirit and the Son ; therefore this holy synod said that there were three substances, meaning three persons by substances, and not intending to separate the substance of the Father and the Son by a difference of nature.”

The words of Hilary indicate that the Council of Antioch was directed against Sabellianism, which claimed that Father, Son and Holy Ghost were three different names for the same person. This becomes clearer from the last sentence of the third creed approved at the same Council: “And whosoever sides with Marcellus of Ancyra, or Sabellius, or Paul of Samosata, may he be anathema, and all those who communicate with him.”ⁱⁱ

(The Lord’s Command to Baptize: An Historico-Critical Investigation with Special References to the Works of Eusebius of Caesarea by Bernard Henry Cuneo, Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1923, 66, Text and Paragraph Structure Modified)

ⁱ De Synod. 32, ML, 10, 504.

ⁱⁱ Athanasius de Synod. 24, MG, 26, 725 A.