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WHO WAS THAT MAN?

by

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Early in the first century there occurred, within 3 days of each other, two events which were to galvanize the Christian community. First there was the crucifixion of Jesus. Second, there was the resurrection.

From the beginning of his ministry, there was great ambivalence about Jesus and just who he was. His death on the cross at Calvary was a devastating blow to his followers. During his lifetime, his apostles had come to think of him as almost divine, a miracle worker, and the Messiah who had been anticipated for centuries by the Jewish community. Suddenly, with his ignominious execution on the cross, his whole promise seemed to have been destroyed, and his whole ministry seemed to have been shorn of its meaning. Make no mistake about it - his followers were a dispirited group who suddenly seemed to have no purpose.

But, then, miraculously, there was the resurrection. His devoted disciples, including the eleven remaining apostles saw him in his risen form, talked to him, and were revitalized by this blessed event. Again, they had a belief, and their mission was to spread the word about the risen Lord.

Although all early Christians were unanimous in their belief that Christ was a divine being, they still had a big problem in trying to define just exactly what and who he was. Was he a man? Was he a God? Was he the Son of God? Was he somehow God himself? Or, was he in some mysterious way both God and man? This paper will trace the development of early Christian dogma and will show how orthodox Catholic, Christian beliefs developed in the face of opposition of multiple heretical doctrines.

This is a story of intellect, conviction, intrigue, and politics. The men who waged this battle were, for the most part, intellectual giants and men of great conviction and

courage. The stakes were high - no less than the relationship of mankind to God and mankind's salvation. These early ecclesiastical leaders believed firmly in the doctrines they espoused, and in many cases, they sacrificed greatly for their beliefs. Their history is important because it traces the evolution of dogmas which have had a profound influence on all of history and which effect us today. It is somehow incredible to contemplate that in the first four centuries of the modern era, all of the doctrinal disputes that led to the development of orthodox Christian belief occurred, and that the conclusions which the early Church fathers reached remain the core beliefs of Christianity today as we approach the twenty-first century.

Before we examine these doctrinal disputes and their resolution in detail, it is important to study the background which led to these events. Jesus himself was a Jew, and early Christianity was very much a Jewish faith, to the point where the early Christians still followed the precepts of the Jewish law and worshiped in the Temple. The chief proponent of Jewish Christianity was none other than St. Peter himself, and through him and the other apostles, Christianity inherited Jewish monotheism, puritanism and eschatology. The Old Testament was the only Bible that first-century Christians knew, and until 70 A.D., Christianity was preached chiefly in synagogues and among Jews. Furthermore, Jesus's disciples believed that he would soon return to inaugurate the Messianic Kingdom of God on Earth. This early return was a fundamental belief of early Christians.

In the meantime, Peter's great contemporary and sometimes rival, St. Paul, was largely responsible for spreading the word of Jesus to the gentiles. Paul was, of course, also Jewish, and, in fact, he had initially been a persecutor of the Christians, even to the point

where he had participated in the stoning of the martyred St. Stephen. However, he had his well known conversion on the road to Damascus, following which he became an active proselytizer for the new faith. He believed that the powers of God should be made available to all people, Jews and gentiles alike, and he traveled and preached the gospel all over the known world. Paul was the first to preach the doctrine that Jesus had suffered and died for our sins.

The final break between the Christians and the Jews came during and after the revolt of the Jews against the Romans in the year 66. This revolt led to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70, which the Jewish Christians, who were too convinced of the imminent coming of Jesus and the end of the world to be bothered about politics, hailed as a fulfillment of Christ's prophecy. The Jews, in turn accused the Christians of treason and cowardice, and from that hour Judaism and Christianity parted, although Christianity has always retained many Jewish characteristics, including a firm and unshakable monotheism.

It is important to remember that at the end of the first century, there existed no united, homogeneous Church. Instead, scattered throughout the Roman Empire were confederated congregations of Christian believers who, for the most part, were gentile born. Although they condemned the Jewish nation and religion as apostate, they nevertheless had no compunction about appropriating the Old Testament as theirs by right. These early churches shared a belief in salvation through Christ, but there was no universal organization which established a common set of beliefs. It is therefore not surprising that, as time passed, there developed numerous sets of conflicting dogmas, most of which are now considered heretical, but all of which were sincerely held. It is also important to note that all of these

competing doctrines were based on interpretation of Holy Scriptures, specifically the collection of books which we now call the New Testament. There were several books which were considered to be included in the canon, and how this selection was made is beyond the scope of this discussion. In fact, that whole topic might be a good subject for another SPHEX paper, but not tonight!

In considering this whole subject of heresies and their battles with what has become orthodox Christianity, we should not forget the truism that history is usually written by the victors. Consequently, as the principle sources of information about the development of Christian doctrine are the writings of orthodox theologians, so most of what has been known about these heresies has come from the works of those who combatted them. We should also remember that much of the writings of the early church fathers, both heretical and orthodox, has been lost, and that frequently we are reduced to reading only fragmentary remains of their prolific writings.

The presupposition of the orthodox works was that the primitive deposit of Christian truth had been given by Christ to the apostles and by them in turn to the succession of orthodox bishops, while the heretics were those who forsook this succession and departed from this deposit. However, the heretics also had this same belief, and throughout this period of the early church and its controversies, both the heretics and the "orthodox" believers were agreed that there was only one true doctrine. Unfortunately, they did not agree as to what that one true doctrine was. In fact, in its earliest Christian use, the term "heresy" was not sharply distinguished from the term "schism". Both terms referred to factiousness, but as early as the second century, the great theologian Irenaeus, about whom

we will hear more later came to define "heresy" as the term for a deviation from the standard of sound doctrine, whereas "schism" simply meant a struggle within the confines of true doctrine.

The early church did not have an explicit, unified doctrine - that was to come later. Therefore, some heretical beliefs could claim greater antiquity than orthodox beliefs. But what did characterize primitive Christianity was a unity of life, of fidelity to the Old Testament, of devotion, and of loyalty to its Lord, as revealed in both the Old and New Testaments. Heresy was a deviation from that unity, and this paper is an attempt to describe how that unity and orthodox Christian doctrine evolved.

Because Christianity had become a largely gentile faith, it followed that most, if not all early converts, had a pagan background, as well as a background in Greek philosophy, especially the teachings of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. Educated pagans looked to philosophy rather than religion for enlightenment. Their saints were the philosophers of antiquity such as Plato and Socrates. These men were not "religious" in the sense that we understand that term, but they found that their scientific and metaphysical studies had inspired them with a vision of the glory of the universe. By the end of the first century, therefore, intelligent and thoughtful people turned to them for inspiring ideology and an explanation of the meaning of life.

Plato was certainly one of the most, if not the most, influential of the Greek philosophers, and the early Christian theologians borrowed heavily from his writings. His system used cosmology as an image of continuity and harmony. He spoke, not of God, but of The One, which existed in serene contemplation of itself beyond time and change at the

pinnacle of the great chain of being. All existence derived from The One as a necessary consequence of its pure being. The pagan gods were seen as emissaries of The One, and they transmitted the divine influence to the world of men. Furthermore, the Platonists felt that a philosopher could ascend to the divine world by means of his own efforts in a rational, ordered way.

Plato's conception of the One was certainly compatible with the Jewish or Christian idea of God, so it is not surprising that early pagan converts to Christianity would reach out to their unbelieving neighbors in an effort to show that the new religion was not a destructive breach with tradition. After all, much of what was offensive about Christianity in the eyes of Gentiles was, to a considerable extent, what it had inherited from Judaism. Celsus and other pagan critics ridiculed the claim that God had appeared in, as he put it, "some corner of Judea, somewhere." Early Gentile converts to Christianity, as well as Gentile critics of the faith questioned just how much of the Jewish tradition they were expected to retain. Early Christians, therefore, tried to address this problem, and in many ways, this struggle over the authority of the Old Testament and over the nature of the continuity between Judaism and Christianity has continued throughout Christian history.

One of the earliest of Christian theologians who tried to breach the divide between Judaism and Greek philosophy was Justin, who died a martyr's death in defense of the faith. He was born a pagan in the year 100 and he was raised in a Jewish environment. In his youth, he studied Stoic and Platonic philosophy, and he was converted to Christianity at age 35. Following his conversion, he argued that Christians were simply following Plato, who had also maintained that there was only one God. In addressing a philosophically educated

Greek and Roman audience, he argued that universal communication is required for men to reach an understanding of universal truth, and he stressed that Plato himself had intimated this philosophy in his limited realization of the Christian Trinity through Moses's Old Testament divine triad - God, Word, and Spirit. Thus, he argued that Plato was actually, along with Socrates and Abraham, "a Christian before Christ." He also argued that Jesus was the incarnation of the **logos** or divine reason, which the Stoics had seen in the order of the cosmos, although he never really explained how this could happen. His distinctive contribution to Christian theology was his conception of a divine plan in history in which he conceived that the Old Testament and Greek philosophy met to form the single stream of Christianity.

By the end of the First Century, Christianity was at a crossroads. All Christians believed in the divinity of Christ, but there were huge problems and differences. Christians believed in the impassibility of God, that is, God, by his very nature, is incapable of doubt or suffering. They also had a firm belief in monotheism or the unity of God. But, the Scriptures clearly indicated that Jesus not only had doubts, but that he also suffered. One needs only to recall his cry from the cross: "My God, My God, Why hast thou forsaken me?" to realize that Christ did indeed suffer and doubt his final role. If any further evidence is needed, think only of Jesus when he said, on the eve of his arrest: "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done." So, the problem was - how could this man, who clearly suffered and doubted, be God, when God could not suffer and doubt.

There were other concerns as well. One of the main points of contention was the

relationship of the Father with the Son. The relationship of Father to Son implies a superiority of the one to the other. Clearly, the Father has to precede the Son, and therefore, the Father is superior to the Son. Also, if the Father does, in fact, precede the Son, then the clear implication is that there was a time when the Father existed, but the Son did not. But, if one accepts that the Father and Son are both God, then if one believes that the Father preexists the Son, then one becomes dangerously close to believing in two Gods, and therefore in polytheism. The big problem, then, was how to reconcile the divinity of Christ with the monotheism of Christianity, and specifically, how could God and Christ be the same? In the Greek language, the question came down to the two words; Homoousios or Homoiousios - Homoousios meaning of the same substance, and Homoiousios meaning of like substance. In other words, were Christ and God the same, or were they merely similar? It was this key question which was to plague Christianity for centuries, and it is this struggle which I want to address in the rest of this paper.

The most important heresies in the early church have been grouped under the term of "Gnosticism", a name which is itself largely the creation of modern historical scholarship. The term generally refers to a wide variety of doctrines which taught the cosmic redemption of the spirit through knowledge. The Gnostics began with the basic Oriental religious thought that matter is essentially evil. Therefore, if matter is evil, the Supreme God (who is good) cannot have created the world, and the Redeemer (who is divine) cannot have come in the flesh. The logical conclusion is that the creator of the world, whom they call the Demiurge, must be separate and distinct from the Supreme God. Furthermore, the body of Christ was not real, but only seemed to be so - a heresy known as Docetism. In this belief,

the sufferings of Christ were only apparent, or else the Redeemer, who could not suffer, was separate from the man in whom he appeared. In this doctrine, the body of Christ was not real, although the salvation that resulted from the suffering of the body of Christ was real. Docetists had no problem with the divinity of Christ, but they could not reconcile his humanity.

Although Gnostics subsequently have been labeled as heretics, it is important to remember that they were the first to transform Christianity into a system of dogmas. They were the first to treat tradition and the Scriptures systematically. They undertook to set forth Christianity as the absolute religion in opposition to the other religions. But - the absolute religion, which they coupled with Christ, was to them identical with the philosophy of religion - thus they were very much a Hellenistic subculture of Christianity.

Basic Gnostic thought says that redemption is brought about by knowledge, and it is the function of the divine mediators to open the eyes of men to the truth. Gnosticism's complex of ideas exerted a strong fascination on many early Christians. After all, the Church professed to offer men saving knowledge, and set Christ before them as the revelation of the Father. It can finally be said that Gnosticism, which was the quest of godlike knowledge through mystic means, was not so much a heresy as it was a rival.

The greatest of these early heretics known collectively as the Gnostics was Marcion, a second century theologian who challenged Christianity by proposing the existence of two Gods: one the creator-judge of the Old Testament, the other the New Testament God as revealed by Jesus. For Marcion, the reality of the carnal world of locusts, sex, and crocodiles raised the "celebrated question" of the meaning of Luke 6:43 - "For a good tree

bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." For Marcion, the question was basically religious. If God were at one and the same time good, all-knowing, and all-powerful, how could he permit the deception and the fall of man. Since this was precisely what had happened, it followed that God could not be possessed of all three of these attributes. Because a good tree did not bear bad fruit, and because there were two kinds of fruits, it followed that there were two kinds of trees. Therefore, Marcion claimed that there were two gods, "one judicial, harsh, mighty in war; the other mild, placid, and simply good and excellent." In his mind, the first was the Creator of the world and the god of the Old Testament, while the other was the Father of Jesus Christ. In his teaching, the Old Testament God of Moses is imperfect because creation was replete with flaws: nature's conflicting elements and man's repugnant actions. On the other hand, the God of Jesus is the good God of love, forgiveness, and mercy. Marcion went so far as to proclaim his own New Testament, which was based largely on the Gospel of St. Luke and selected epistles of St. Paul. Although his theology had a wide following in the second century, his beliefs were condemned by the orthodox Church, and he was excommunicated, largely because of his belief in two Gods. Clearly, monotheistic Christianity could not embrace a doctrine which espoused the existence of two Gods. Nevertheless, in spite of his heretical views, Marcion made an important contribution to the early Church in that by his proclamation of his own list of books that belonged in the New Testament, he played an important role in the emergence of a specifically Christian canon.

Still another important second century heresy is known as Montanism, after its chief proponent Montanus, who became concerned by the increasing worldliness of Christians and

the growing autocracy of bishops in the church. Unfortunately, none of his actual writings have passed down to modern times, so that the principal sources of what we know about him stem from his orthodox catholic opponents. Montanus demanded a return to primitive Christian simplicity and austerity, as well as a restored right of prophesy, which he defined as divinely inspired speech, to members of the congregation. The Montanists believed that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand, and they therefore believed in the imminent second coming of Christ. Montanus himself was apparently an eloquent preacher, and when he proclaimed that not only was the second coming of Christ soon to be but that he himself was the Paraclete, or Holy Spirit, his followers had no trouble in convincing themselves of the truth of his assertions. Thus, although Montanists did believe in the Holy Trinity, their assertion that Montanus was the third person in that trinity as well as their strong desire for martyrdom caused the Church to ban Montanism as a heresy.

One of the greatest of the orthodox second century theologians was Irenaeus, who was the bishop of Lugdunum (modern Lyon, France) and who was later sanctified by the Church. As we have already seen, the era in which Irenaeus lived was a time of expansion and inner tensions in the Church, and in many ways he acted as a mediator between contending factions. He was, however, uncompromising in his negative attitudes toward Marcion and the Gnostics, and all his known writings are devoted to the conflict with the Gnostics. In his polemics against all heretics, he stated that the only way to prevent Christianity from disintegrating into a thousand sects was for all Christians to accept humbly one doctrinal authority - the decrees of the episcopal councils of the Church.

Irenaeus contended that the apostles first preached the Gospel, then by God's will

traditioned it in the Scriptures: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. He felt that it was from study of these scriptures that the truth could be derived, and the heretics denied the validity of this truth. He concluded that if it is the duty of the Church to teach, it is the privilege of the Bible to prove. Furthermore, while the Gnostics denied the validity of the Jewish Bible (the Old Testament), he asserted the validity of both the Old and New Testaments, although he never actually used those terms.

In his writings concerning the nature of Christ, he laid great stress on the eternal coexistence of the Logos (Son) with the Father. He rejected the idea that Jesus had been made or created, and he was firm in his refutation of the Gnostic idea that the Creator God of the Old Testament was different from the Revealed God of the New Testament. He advanced the doctrine that Jesus, as the Logos or Son, was the one great and absolute organ of all divine revelations from all time. The Incarnation was the fulfillment of the eternal purpose of God which was manifested when He created man in His image after His likeness. Irenaeus wrote that the purpose of the Incarnation was so that what mankind had lost in the fall of Adam might be recovered in Jesus. Thus in the person of Jesus, the whole human race is again united to God, and becomes capable of attaining immortality and incorruptibility. Jesus, who is both God and man, is therefore the center of history. It is through him that God has revealed himself to mankind, and through him that the sacrifice has been made so that mankind can have eternal life.

With the Son, Irenaeus also closely associated the Holy Spirit, arguing that if God was rational and therefore had His Logos, He was also spiritual and so had His Spirit. He identified the Spirit with divine Wisdom and therefore fortified his doctrine of the third

Person with a basis in Scriptures. Although Irenaeus never expressly designated the Spirit as God, he clearly ranked the Spirit as divine, for he described him as God's Spirit, ever welling up from His being. Thus, his vision of God is the most explicitly Trinitarian of the second century.

Irenaeus also made other contributions to the early development of orthodox, Catholic doctrine, particularly in the doctrine of apostolic succession. He wrote in at least one place that St. Peter had handed the episcopate of Rome to Linus, thus helping to establish the doctrine of papal continuity from St. Peter to the present occupant of the papacy, John Paul II.

One of the doughtiest fighters for Christianity in the late second and early third centuries was Quintus Septimius Tertullianus of Carthage. Tertullian, as he is generally known, is an interesting and somewhat tragic figure. He, as will be seen, was very instrumental in the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, and yet he ended his life as a Montanist heretic. In some ways, he demonstrates the saying that heresy is often a matter of timing. In his case, his poor timing consisted of living too long and thus sinking into a morose puritanism that led to his embracing the self abnegating philosophy of Montanism. His life and career also nicely demonstrate the sometimes very thin line that separated heretics from orthodox theologians. Tertullian's theology is very closely associated with that of Hippolytus of Rome, who, although he was an anti-pope, was named a saint because of his martyrdom as well as his defense of the orthodox Trinitarian doctrine against the doctrine of Modalism, which stated that the entire trinity dwells in Christ and that the names Father and Son are only different designations for the same subject. Tertullian was also an

opponent of modalism, which he understood to mean that the Father himself suffered.

Both Tertullian and Hippolytus were influential in the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, and specifically in the doctrine that God had become man in Jesus Christ and that Christ was both fully human and fully divine. At the risk of oversimplification, their teachings boiled down to the statement that God is eternal, and that therefore he is unchangeable and incapable of being transformed. To have been transformed would have been to have ceased to be God. Because the Logos (Son) is true God, it follows that He too is eternal and unchangeable. If the Logos had really become flesh by any process of transfiguration and change of substance, then Jesus would have been a new substance formed out of the two substances - flesh and spirit - a kind of mixture. But there was no kind of mixture; each substance remained distinct in its own characteristics - the Word was never anything but God, and the flesh was never anything but man. Therefore, Christ was both fully divine and fully human. This teaching is best summed up in Tertullian's quote: "God's son died: it is believable precisely because it is absurd. He was buried and rose again: it is certain because it is impossible." Although Tertullian, in spite of his subsequent fall into Montanism, is generally credited with laying the permanent foundation of the Latin doctrine of the Trinity, he has also been accused, at least by the modern theologian G.L. Prestige, of subscribing to the doctrine of Subordinationism, which basically states that the Son and Holy Spirit derive their existence from the Father, and are therefore subordinate to Him.

This brings us to a group of heresies which are collectively known as Monarchianism and which I will now briefly discuss. These second and third century heresies opposed the doctrine of an independent, personal subsistence of the Logos, affirmed the sole deity of God

the Father, and thus represented the extreme monotheistic view. Though they regarded Christ as the Redeemer, they clung to the numerical unity of the Deity. There were many currents in Monarchianism, but there were basically two types of Monarchianism: the Dynamic (or Adoptionist) and the Modalistic (or Sabellian).

Dynamic Monarchianism, which is also known as Adoptionism, was the theory that Christ was a "mere man" upon whom God's Spirit had descended. Novatian, the third century anti-pope who himself founded his own heresy, interpreted Adoptionism as a misguided attempt to salvage the unity of God, which the Adoptionists felt was threatened by the doctrine of the Trinity.

The originator of Adoptionism was Theodotus, a Byzantine leather merchant who brought it to Rome in about 190. Theodotus was in full agreement with orthodox views about the creation of the world, the divine omnipotence, and even the virgin birth, but he held that until his baptism in the River Jordan, Jesus lived the life of an ordinary man, except that he was supremely virtuous. At the time of his baptism, the Spirit descended upon him, and from that moment he worked miracles, without, however, actually becoming divine. Other Adoptionists did admit to the deification of Jesus after His resurrection. The chief object of this doctrine seems to have been to eliminate the idea of an incarnation of God, an idea which was repugnant to people imbued with Greek philosophical culture. They also seem to have believed that orthodox Christianity was virtually committed to ditheism, an idea which was refuted effectively by Hippolytus.

The most influential teacher of Adoptionism was a third century Syrian theologian known as Paul of Samosata. He argued that the Logos could never come into personal

existence; even though he might be called the Son of God, such a title was only a description of the high nature of the power of the divine Logos. A real incarnation of the Logos (or Word of God) was thus impossible. He existed in Jesus not essentially or personally, but only as a quality. The personality of Jesus was, according to Paul, entirely human; it was not that the Son of God came down from heaven, but that the Son of Man ascended up on high. The divine power in him grew greater and greater as the course of his human development proceeded, until at last he did reach divinity. When this goal was attained - at Baptism or at the Resurrection - is not really important. What is important is that the union, such as it is, between the Supreme God and Christ the Son of God is one of disposition and of will. Thus, in the teachings of Paul, Jesus Christ was from below rather than from above, and furthermore the Son was non-existent before the Nativity. These teachings were strictly unitarian and in clear conflict with trinitarian orthodoxy, and Paul of Samosata was formally condemned and excommunicated at the Synod of Antioch in 268. However, his condemnation did not dispose of his views, and in fact, he is felt to be, if not the direct ancestor of Arianism, at least a strong influence on Arius and his teachings. We are not yet at the point in our story where we will discuss Arianism, but we will certainly hear more about that doctrine later.

Modalistic Monarchianism had as its driving force the twofold conviction of the oneness of God and the full deity of Christ. The Modalists felt the oneness of God was being endangered by the new Logos doctrine and by the efforts of theologians to represent the Godhead as having revealed itself as tri-personal. Any suggestion that the Son was other than, or a distinct Person from, the Father seemed to the modalists to lead inescapably to the

blasphemous doctrine of two Gods.

The early exponents of this form of Monarchianism were two theologians known as Praxeas and Noetus. Their basic theology was that God the Father was exactly the same as God the Son, and that therefore, the Father had in fact been born and suffered, and, furthermore, it was the Father Himself who entered the Virgin's womb and became, in effect, his own son. It fell to Sabellius, a third century Roman theologian, to give this doctrine a more systematic, philosophical shape. His heresy has come to be known as Sabellianism. Sabellius regarded the Godhead as a monad which expressed itself in three operations. He used the analogy of the sun, a single object which radiates both warmth and light. Therefore God is essentially one, and the Trinity which he recognizes is a Trinity not of essence but of revelation. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are simply designations of three different phases under which the one divine essence reveals itself - three names of one and the same being. The logical conclusion of these teachings was that there was no real incarnation and that no personal indissoluble union of the Godhead with the Manhood took place in Christ. In other words, God only manifested Himself in Christ, and when the part was played and the curtain fell, there ceased to be a Christ or Son of God. In summary, modalistic monarchianism emphasized Jesus's claim in the fourth gospel that: "I and the Father are one," while at the same time it failed completely to explain how the Father and Son were ever any thing else but one, as the New Testament consistently represents them to be. Although this belief was at first favorably received at Rome, Sabellius was finally condemned and excommunicated by Pope Callistus. However, his teachings did not die with him, and, in fact, Sabellianism led in the direction of Arianism, the final great heresy which,

as we will see, was addressed in the Council of Nicea.

The last of the great pre-Nicene theologians whom I will discuss is Origen, who again illustrates the very small distinction between orthodoxy and heresy. He was a very devout Christian from the beginning, a fact that is attested by the story of his father's martyrdom, in which Origen wanted to join, only to be dissuaded by his mother, who hid all of his clothes so that he could not rush to the prison to join his father. It is also alleged that Origen castrated himself as a young man, largely because of Matthew 19:12 " ...there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven." Whether true or not, these stories certainly illustrate his enthusiasm for Christianity.

Origen emphatically believed that the Holy Scriptures were the divinely inspired word of God, and he further believed that they were to be taken as a whole. His teachings made it possible for intelligent Christians to believe the Bible, and so for intelligent people to remain Christians. He himself used the Bible as the basis for his own theology, which has led to his being described as the common father both of Arianism as well as eastern orthodoxy. On the one hand, he strongly espoused the doctrine that Christ and the Holy Spirit are fully parts of the being of God, while on the other hand, he taught that both Christ and the Holy Spirit derived from God the Father, and thus are subordinate to Him. Ultimately, although he was a great contributor to Christian thought and inaugurated the systematic treatment of theology, he was posthumously excommunicated because of his assertions that there was a time when Christ, as the son of God, did not exist, because he called Jesus the first born of all creation. In effect, his was a subordinationist theology. The main source of his theologic difficulty was that no distinction had yet been drawn between derivation and creation. This was only a

problem in trinitarian thinking, when a second and third person came to be distinguished within the divine being itself. It was only then that any problem of derivation, as distinct from creation could possibly arise.

Of heresies, both major and minor, there were seemingly no end. The Encratites abstained from meat, wine, and sex. The Abstinentes practiced self-mortification and condemned marriage as a sin. The Theodotians considered Christ only a man. The Ebionites denied altogether the divinity of Christ. Theirs was a Jewish theology which considered Jesus only a man, but the predestined Messiah, who in this capacity would return to reign on earth. But, by far the greatest heresy and the one that was the greatest threat to orthodox Christianity as we know it was the heresy known as Arianism.

Before we delve into the great Arian controversy and its ultimate resolution, it is necessary to digress for a moment and talk about Constantine the Great, the first Christian Roman Emperor. He has been called the man who saved Christianity, and while that may be an exaggeration, there is no doubt that he played a very important role in the development of Christian dogma, as well as in the spread of Christianity as the predominant religion of Europe and the Western world. The historian John Julius Norwich, the author of a very interesting three volume history of the Byzantine Empire, of which Constantine was the founder, states that no other ruler in history has ever more fully merited the title of "the Great." He bases this claim on the fact that in the brief period of just fifteen years, he made two decisions, either of which alone were enough to change the future of civilization. The first was to adopt Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire, and the second was to transfer the capital of that Empire from Rome to the new city which he was building

on the site of old Byzantium, the geographically blessed site where the Bosphorus, Golden Horn, and Sea of Marmara meet. The building of this city, which was known for the next sixteen centuries as Constantinople, is not really relevant to this discussion, so I shall not mention it further. However, his embrace of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire pertains very much to this paper, and merits some attention.

The story of Constantine's ascension to the Imperial Throne need not concern us, except as it deals with Constantine's conversion to Christianity. One of his greatest and most serious rivals for the throne was a man named Maxentius, whom Constantine defeated and eliminated at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. Prior to this pivotal and decisive battle, Constantine had a vision (or perhaps a dream) in which he saw the Cross in the sky, along with words which have been variably translated, but which said, in effect, "Conquer with this sign." Exactly what happened is not at all clear. The historian and biographer of Constantine, Eusebius, (not to be confused with the pro Arian theologian of the same name) wrote that all of Constantine's troops also saw the same vision in the sky. This is almost certainly not true, if for no other reason than there is no record of any sort that indicates that even one of these soldiers ever mentioned such a vision. It seems remarkable indeed that 98,000 men would be able to keep such a secret.

What actually happened is not really important. What is important is that Constantine believed he had such a vision, and, in an age when people believed in such things, so did his advisers and generals. Furthermore, Constantine believed that he had won the battle because of the sign and the use of Christian symbolism on the shields of his men. It is not surprising, therefore, that Constantine embraced Christianity, although the whole process was

somewhat gradual.

Constantine was not a complex theologian, and he really gave very little thought to Jesus, his life and teachings. He himself, as a ruler, was quick to anger, as is demonstrated by his brutal murders of his oldest son and first wife. He believed in a God who was equally quick to wrath, and he took quite literally the passage of Matthew 25:46 - "And these shall go away to everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal." Constantine's biographer Michael Grant feels that this fear of the wrath of God explains the otherwise odd fact that Constantine was not baptized until the day before his death. Early Christians believed that baptism was a sacrament which cleansed all of one's sins, but which could be performed only once. Therefore Constantine wanted to wait until the last possible moment to be baptized so that, in effect, he would have a free hand to do whatever he felt needed to be done.

We have now reached the point where we need to address the Arian heresy and controversy. According to the great theologian Harnack, the decisive question of the Arian controversy was: "Is the Divine, which has appeared upon the earth and reunited man with God, identical with the highest divine Being who rules heaven and earth, or is the same semi-divine?"

Arianism is named after the doctrine's chief proponent Arius, who was a presbyter of a church district in Alexandria, Egypt. According to Norwich, he was a man of immense learning and splendid physical presence. There is no doubt that he was a very skillful propagandist, and his doctrine spread widely and rapidly. It should also be remembered that Arius, like all the great heretical Church fathers, was sincere in his beliefs. His aim was to

frame a doctrine of the Person of Christ which would be free from the difficulties presented to many minds by the current conceptions. Also, his strongest interest was in the maintenance of monotheism. Therefore, a first principle with him was the singleness of God as being absolutely One and transcendent - hidden in eternal mystery and separated by an infinite chasm from mankind. This chasm was, in effect, bridged by Jesus, the Son of God, who was therefore a middle being between God and the world.

Arius's message was simple enough: that Jesus Christ was not co-eternal and of one substance with God the Father, but had been created by God at a specific time as his Instrument for the salvation of the world. Therefore, although Jesus was a perfect man, he nevertheless must always be subordinate to God the Father. Arius maintained that the Son, although created before time and superior to other creatures, was like them changeable and consequently different in essence from the Father. After all, the Gospels do represent Jesus as subject to growth and change, and, as we have already noted, subject to doubt and suffering. Arius did not deny the divinity of Christ; indeed, he called Jesus "strong God" and "full God". Nevertheless, he argued that it was blasphemous to think that Christ was divine by nature. After all, Jesus himself had specifically said that the Father was greater than he.

In presenting these arguments, Arius was, in effect, challenging the very essence of what was generally accepted at the time as standard Christianity - namely that Jesus Christ as the Son of God was fully divine. In claiming that Jesus the Son had been created by God the Father and was not co-eternal with Him, he was in reality subordinating Jesus to the Father. This was a challenge that could not be ignored by Arius's bishop, Alexander of Alexandria,

and Alexander's brilliant assistant and ultimate successor, Athanasius.

To Alexander and Athanasius, the full divinity of Christ, as well as his humanity, was crucial, and any lessening of Christ's status was dangerous. Athanasius saw humanity as inherently fragile: we had come from nothing and had fallen back into nothingness when we had sinned. It was only by participating in God, through his Logos, that man could avoid eternal damnation, because God alone is the perfect Being. If the Logos, who had been made flesh to give us salvation, were anything less than fully divine, then his sacrifice on the Cross would be insufficient to save mankind. Only he who had created the world could save it, and that meant that Christ must be of the same nature as the Father. As Athanasius himself put it, the Word became man in order that we could become divine. It came down to the difference between two Greek words that I mentioned earlier - **homoousios**, meaning of the same substance, versus **homoiousios**, meaning of like or similar substance.

These may seem like very arcane or even trivial differences to us in the twentieth century, but we must remember that the fourth century was a time in which theological arguments were of passionate interest, not only to theologians, but to lay people as well. Such seemingly abstruse questions as when Jesus came into existence or whether or to what extent he was "posterior" to God were profoundly important, and these questions excited ferocious passion. The late fourth century theologian Gregory of Nyssa, who himself was an eloquent defender of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, remarked that one could not talk to a shopkeeper in the market place, or to an attendant in the public baths, without getting involved in a theological discussion, and very often the discussion was about the very subject of the relationship of the Son to the Father. Broadsheets were distributed; rabble-rousing

speeches were made in the market place; slogans were chalked on walls. Sailors and travelers sang versions of popular ditties that proclaimed that the Father alone was true God, inaccessible and unique, but that the Son was neither co-eternal nor uncreated, since he received life and being from the Father. There are true stories of the money changer who, when asked for the exchange rate, prefaced his reply with a long discourse on the distinction between the created order and the uncreated God, and of a baker who informed his customer that the Father was greater than the Son.

Confronted with the dangerous heretical doctrine of Arianism, bishop Alexander took immediate steps to stamp it out, and in 320, he had Arius hauled before a hundred bishops from Egypt, Libya, and Tripolitania, who excommunicated him as a heretic. However, Arius would not go quietly, and although he could no longer stay in Alexandria, he traveled extensively throughout the eastern Roman Empire espousing his doctrine.

By 323, Constantine had assumed complete control of the Roman Empire, and although he was no theologian and cared not for theological niceties, he was a politician and ruler who recognized that this dispute was a real threat to the unity of his Empire. After all, one of the political motives in his making Christianity the official religion of the Empire was that he thought it would be a unifying force. Instead, much to his dismay, the schisms in Christianity threatened to divide his Empire along doctrinal lines. He felt, not unreasonably, that if Christianity were to be the official religion of the Empire, at the very least Christians should be able to agree on their beliefs.

At first, Constantine tried the approach of sweet reason. He dispatched his chief adviser on Christian affairs, Bishop Hosius of Cordova, to Egypt, with instructions to settle

the differences between Arius and Alexander in whatever way he saw fit. The actual solution of the problem was not important to Constantine, but he wanted the dispute settled once and for all. Alas, Hosius was unsuccessful, and the argument raged on.

Undaunted, the Emperor tried again in 324. This time he sent Hosius with a letter from Constantine himself, which was addressed impartially to the two protagonists. Because the letter offers keen insight into Constantine's thoughts and motives, it is worth quoting at some length:

Constantine the Victor, Supreme Augustus, to Alexander and Arius:

Having enquired faithfully into the origin and foundation of your differences, I find their cause to be of a truly insignificant nature, and quite unworthy of such fierce contention ... Now therefore must ye both exhibit an equal measure of forbearance, and accept the advice which your fellow-servant feels justly entitled to give.

What is this advice? It was wrong ever to propose such questions as these, or to reply to them when propounded. For points of discussion which are enjoined by the authority of no law, but rather suggested by a contentious spirit which is in turn the consequence of misused leisure, should be confined to our own thoughts, and neither hastily produced in public assemblies nor ill-advisedly entrusted to the public ear. For how very few are those who are able either accurately to comprehend or adequately to explain matters so sublime and abstruse.

This letter makes it clear that Constantine was much more concerned about imperial unity than theological distinctions which he personally regarded as trivial and pedantic. In addition, he was simply tired of the controversy, as a further quote from the letter clearly indicates:

Give me back peaceful nights and days without care that I too may keep some pleasure in the pure light and the joy of a tranquil life henceforth!

Again, Constantine underestimated the depth of the convictions of Alexander and Arius, and his exhortations fell on deaf ears. But, he was determined to have this dispute reach a final conclusion and to put it behind him once and for all. It was with this in mind that he called the Christian bishops to the first Council of Nicea, the first ecumenical council of the Christian Church. There would be no more synods of local bishops; instead, there would be a universal Council of the Church - a body of such authority and distinction that both parties to the dispute would be bound to accept its rulings. The calls went out, and the bishops gathered for the historic conclave in the year 325.

The intensity of the Emperor's interest in the proceedings is demonstrated by the fact that he himself opened them in person. Furthermore, he was to play a significant role in the actual deliberations of the Council.

When the Council convened, there was initially a large middle party between the two extremes of Arius and Alexander. It seemed to these bishops that the Arians were basically sound at heart and that technical details should not be pressed against them. As far as actual voting was concerned, this middle party held the key, and as the deliberations continued, they gradually moved toward the traditional view of Alexander and his allies.

The most outspoken defender of Arianism was the bishop of Nicomedia, Eusebius, who, as I have already noted is not to be confused with the historian and biographer of Constantine, Eusebius of Caesarea, who also was present at Nicea. The opponents of Arianism were, of course, Alexander and his right hand man Athanasius, but they also included, significantly, Bishop Hosius, Constantine's adviser on Christian affairs.

As the deliberations continued, it became evident that the Arians were in a minority.

However, it was not sufficient merely to issue a statement denouncing Arianism. What was required was a positive statement of Church doctrine that could be agreed upon by all. Finally, the friends of Arius produced a creed in writing that was frankly Arian, and they proposed that the Council should endorse it. This produced an angry outcry, and the document was torn in shreds. The Arians were clearly not going to prevail.

At last, Eusebius of Caesarea read what was probably the Baptismal Creed of his church in the hope that it might be sufficient and that all would accept it. Although this creed was generally received favorably, there was still a fear among the conservatives that it was not precise enough to exclude the possibility of Arian interpretation. Therefore, the emperor himself proposed the addition of the single key word **homoousios**, meaning of one substance with God. Constantine felt that the insertion of this word would lead to general agreement against the Arians, and he was right, not the least because hardly anyone had the nerve to contradict him.

Thus the final Creed which came out of the Nicene council read as follows:

We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of all things, visible and invisible: and on one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten, that is, from the substance of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God, begotten not made, of one substance (**homoousios**) with the Father, through whom all things came into existence, things in heaven and things on earth, who because of men and because of our salvation came down and became incarnate, becoming man, suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended to the heavens, and will come to judge the living and the dead; and in the Holy Spirit.

As if this were not a clear enough repudiation of the Arians, the following was appended to the Creed:

But as for those who say, There was when he was not, and Before being born he was not, and That he came into existence out of nothing, or who assert that

the Son of God is of a different hypostasis or substance, or is created, or is subject to alteration or change - these the church anathematizes.

This creed was signed by all but two of the bishops present; and when shortly afterwards an imperial decree was issued banishing Arius and those who did not accept the decision of the Council, it seemed that Arianism was finally defeated.

When I first conceived of writing this paper, I believed, like Constantine, that the Council of Nicea would bring this story to an end. Again, like Constantine, I was disappointed to discover that this is not the case. Arius himself and his doctrine did not simply crawl away never to be heard from again, and the death of Constantine in 337 also gave new life to the opponents of the Nicene doctrine, which did not achieve its final victory until the Council of Constantinople in 381. The critical role of Athanasius in refining and elaborating the doctrine of the Trinity occurred largely after the Council of Nicea, and I have not touched at all on other key issues which finally made their way into the Creed, such as the role of Mary and her final acceptance by the Church as the Mother of God. In a sense, struggles over points of doctrine, both subtle and not so subtle continue to this day. Nevertheless, it was the early Christian theologians from the Crucifixion to and including the Council of Nicea who wrestled with the complex issue of defining the relationship of Jesus to God the Father, and it was they who hammered out the doctrine that remains to this day the core of orthodox Christian belief. It is a remarkable story, and it is their story that I have attempted to tell.

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