

The Nicene Creed

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The early fourth century was a period of major change in the Roman Empire. As the Empire disintegrated, confusion and political unrest became more intense and widespread. The glory of the Empire had paled; the age of Augustus was gone forever; and pax Romana rapidly ceased to be even a meaningful goal. Confusion reigned in the Empire's religion as well, in which the influx of hundreds of Oriental cults obscured the choice of the most auspicious worship for the fate of the Empire. The traditional pantheon became sterile, and the deification of the emperor no more than a pledge of loyalty.

The young Christian Church was experiencing similar struggles of transition at this time. Christianity was a religion of faith, not of theology; there was yet no foundation of doctrine on which all could agree. The Church seemed to suffer more from internal disunity than from the extremes of persecution that plagued it from outside. Moreover it was in this century that the Church was threatened by the possibility of encroaching secular authority.

Since it was a period of confusion for both Church and State, the difficulty in reconstructing centuries later the motivations for and the intentions of various events becomes nearly insurmountable. In such a period of transition the danger of imposing arbitrary order and clarity on naturally disordered and ambiguous events is greatly increased, and, moreover,

this imposition has little validity in historical reconstruction. Furthermore, an intellectual, scientific approach to religion has never been accorded universal approval, and it may be that empiricism is irrelevant to, or even destructive of, religious truth. Yet we go blithely on, and the exercise will no doubt do us some good.

It was in this sort of transitional atmosphere that the Nicene Creed was written. The Creed was intended as a statement of orthodoxy for the whole Church, with special emphasis on the denial of Arianism. Arius, a presbyter of the church at Alexandria, was condemned for holding too extreme an interpretation of the singularity of God the Father, to the point of denying that the Son was divine at all. The theological origins and consequences of Arianism will be considered in the second section of this paper; the first part is devoted to the socio-political factors which influenced the calling of the council and the formulation of the creed.

To set the Nicene Creed within a broader framework, a section approaching it from a psychological perspective is appended. In it is treated the source of religious truth, the Trinity as a Jungian archetype, and the Nicene Creed as the resolution of a culture-wide Oedipal complex. This last topic is not intended as an expression of my own view, but as a further example of the effect of various approaches to the subject.

I

It was during the rule of the first Christian emperor that the Arian controversy took place, during, that is, the extremely difficult time of the Empire's transition from pagan to Christian in outlook, and the Church's transition from independent and persecuted to constrained and favored in status. Significant precedents in Church-State relations, a phrase absolutely meaningless with respect to Christianity before Constantine, were set during this time, and the Church began to take on a role in the Empire which it would hold for centuries.

Constantine was converted to the Christian faith, to the extent that he was 'converted', as the result of the theophany before the battle of the Milvian Bridge. Because of his easy victory there against astonishing odds, and similar subsequent victories, it was his belief that he was receiving the assistance of the Deity Who had been revealed to him -- the God of the Christians, symbolized by the cross struck across the sun. Being a practical man, Constantine was not likely to reject any sort of assistance he was offered; the territory he defended was large, and the contenders many.

Constantine then took up worship of the Christian God. His motives for doing so have been argued back and forth, with little noteworthy agreement. Some historians of the period feel that he acted purely for political gain. It was obvious

that some unifying principle was needed; the Empire was in shambles, and perhaps this new religion could pull it together. Constantine may have thought in this way, and on this hope accepted Christianity as his own faith. Other historians feel Constantine was Christian with absolute sincerity, and professed belief in God with true faith. Christianity served him in the Empire, but this was an unexpected bonus, and not a factor in his decision to adopt the faith. Both of these views, and all the intermediate ones, find supporting evidence with greater or lesser confidence; the theory I find most attractive is the following.

With the assumption that Constantine was not a particularly clever or subtle person, it is hard to conceive of his having written letters showing the extreme devotion that so many of his do, if the feelings expressed there were not genuine. The strength of emotion contained in them, the energetic appeals in the name of God, the deep concern for the welfare of the Church -- if contrived, would have been produced by a far more designing hand than Constantine's. Constantine did not have the savvy to be an opportunist. Accordingly, it would have been difficult for one such as he to have realized the advantages of Christianity at a point in its life when believers were few, when it was the object of mass civil ridicule and hatred, when the precedent set by previous emperors was to a man severe persecution, when it was seen as a treasonous political movement undercutting the already broken foundations of the Empire (Wilken, 442) -- in short, when its advantage of providing a new base for Roman unity was overwhelmed

by the impossibility of its ever being accepted as such. The foresight necessary to see through this maze of entanglements would have been as miraculous as the prosperity, even survival, of Christianity that actually occurred. To see Constantine as an opportunist, using the guise of Christianity as a rejuvenator for the Empire, attributes to him abilities far beyond what he seems to have possessed.

Moreover, the foundation of political unity could have been achieved as effectively by a policy of religious tolerance, and the ultimate step of adopting Christianity need not have been taken. If Constantine had been motivated by political goals, he would have been more likely to follow the latter route than to invite the possible dangers of initiating a new religion.

Constantine did of course see some advantages in his new belief; being the Truth, it could be expected to be advantageous in some way. Essential to his faith was a belief in divine aid. The Christian God was a benevolent God, Who prospered His believers. Constantine had already experienced God's aid in his military ventures, and he was looking forward to the renewed prosperity of the Empire which God would certainly grant. In this way, Constantine 'used' Christianity to the benefit of the Empire; he was, after all, a successful general and statesman, and the welfare of the Empire was for him a major concern. But resourcefulness is not evidence of hypocrisy.

The middle ground advocated here can be summarized -- Constantine was sincerely Christian, though as a Roman statesman he made use of his beliefs to restructure the Empire. But

one must further question what specifically Constantine believed, a more significant question than simply whether or not he was Christian. The most likely answer seems to be that Constantine believed in one Supreme God, creator and ruler of the universe, giver of prosperity to those who believed, and who was variously manifested as Hercules, Mars, Sol Invictus, and so on. Constantine's 'Christianity' was a syncretistic monotheism, though it does not follow that Constantine himself saw this. More likely is that he misunderstood Christianity, and simply did not realize that there could be some inconsistency in worshipping both Yahweh and Sol Invictus. Baynes disagrees with this estimate of Constantine's belief. He explains away Constantine's continued use of the Sol Invictus imagery on his coins, one of the strongest bits of contrary evidence, in a rather strained manner (which Baynes mentions himself), and concludes by adopting a view that does not seem far removed from the idea of philosophic monotheism which Baynes explicitly rejects (95-103). But the arguments on each side are lengthy and do not bear repetition. It is enough to state that the view of Constantine that this paper shall assume is that he was a sincere Christian in his own view, but that his understanding of Christianity was gravely insufficient.

Though perhaps not the Church's model catechumen, Constantine was an active Christian, vitally concerned with the welfare of the Church. One factor which contributed to this was the traditional role of the Roman Emperor. It had always been one of the duties of the ruler to secure the favor of the

gods, for it was believed that the Empire's prosperity depended on the gods' satisfaction with the attention they received from their worshippers. As long as the gods were pleased with their people, they would continue to grant good fortune, but should their approval be lost, it was clear that the Empire would suffer great disaster. This concept of divine assistance had a long tradition in Greek and Roman thought. The Hellenistic concept of divine monarchy asserted that it was the king's duty, with the guidance of the Divine Logos, to lead his subjects to the right knowledge of God (Dv 618). The king was qualified to interfere in spiritual affairs as the representative of the Divine on earth (Dv 637), and as such was expected to lead men in their religion. These ideas appear again later in the Roman concept of the State, in which religion had always formed an important part of government functions. Great emphasis was placed on divinations, on ascertaining the will of the gods from omens and the auspices, and on the ritualistic performance of the traditional rites. In fact, this idea of pleasing the gods became a major rationale for the persecution of the Christians -- the Roman pagans attributed the difficulties in the empire to the gods' displeasure at so many forsaking their worship (J 250-1).

Constantine followed this tradition, though substituting the Christian God for the old pantheon.* In any case, the

* That Constantine did not have any apparent difficulties in instituting this change serves as further support of montheism being his favored religion, rather than a strict and exclusive worship of the Christian God. It does not seem likely that Christianity would have been well received by the Senate, the civil service, and the pagan aristocracy. The Emperor's 'full responsibility' for maintaining divine favor probably did not extend to the point of exchanging gods.

pattern remained the same -- Constantine as emperor was responsible for obtaining God's favor for the sake of the Roman state.

This took on a special note for Constantine, as he believed that God had intervened for his own personal interest. He believed his military victories and political achievements were special gifts indicating the particular favor with which God looked upon him. The God to whom Constantine raised his standards gave success in return: "...preceded by thy sacred sign I have led thy armies to victory..." (VC II. 55, from the letter to the people of the Eastern provinces). It is likely that Constantine was driven by fear of God's anger (B 14), believing that such anger would be directed toward himself personally as well as toward the Roman State. As a specially-chosen servant, entrusted with the divine mission of leading his subjects to the proper worship of their newly recognized benefactor, he took personal responsibility for the welfare of his dominion. "...God may be moved not only against the human race but also against me myself to whose care, by His heavenly decree, He has entrusted the direction of all human affairs, and may in His wrath provide otherwise than heretofore." (from the letter to Aelafius, Vicar of Africa, NE 273). In another letter Constantine wrote of "those provinces, which Divine Providence has chosen to entrust to my Devotedness." (HE X.5.18, from the letter to Miltiades, Bishop of Rome). "I myself, then, was the instrument whose services He chose...believing...that this most, excellent service had been confided to me as a special

gift..." (VC II. 28.29, from the letter to the inhabitants of the province of Palestine).

Constantine certainly had cause to fear God's wrath -- it was clear what befell those who angered Him. In the letter to the people of Palestine, Constantine continued,

They who have cherished impious sentiments have experienced results corresponding to their evil choice... those who have either dishonorably slighted the principles of justice, or refused to acknowledge the Supreme God themselves, yet have dared to subject others who have faithfully maintained his worship to the most cruel insults and punishments..., many a time have their armies been slaughtered, many a time have they been put to flight; and their warlike preparations have ended in total ruin and defeat... hence, too, the authors of these impieties have either met a disastrous death of extreme suffering, or have dragged out an ignominious existence, and confessed it to be worse than death itself, thus receiving as it were a measure of punishment proportioned to the heinousness of their crimes.

(VC II. 24, 26, 27; see Lactantius for a similar view "On the deaths of the persecutors," 33).

Perhaps Constantine was thinking of the emperors who preceded him? Certainly Galerius comes to mind, and especially his deathbed plea for the prayers of the Christian people. In the pain of his consuming illness, Galerius came to believe, according to Eusebius (EC VIII. 16, 17), that he was being punished by the Christian God for the wrongs he had shown His people. He attributed both his own misfortunes and those of the Empire to God's displeasure, and begged the Christians to resume their practices. Constantine's view of the significance of Christian ritual was nearly identical to that of Galerius. In a letter to Anullinus, he wrote "...it appears

from many circumstances that when religion is despised, in which is preserved the chief reverence for the most holy Celestial Power, great dangers are brought upon public affairs; but that when legally adopted and observed it affords the most signal prosperity to the Roman name and remarkable felicity to all the affairs of man, through the divine beneficence;... when they [the Christian priesthood] show greatest reverence to the Deity, the greatest benefits accrue to the State." (HE X. 7).*

To Constantine the most comprehensive means of obtaining God's favor was through the unification of His Church. This was Constantine's consuming passion. "Having learned from the prosperity of the state how great is the favor of the divine power, I considered that before everything else my aim should be that among the most blessed congregations of the Catholic Church there should be observed one faith, love unalloyed, and piety towards God, the Lord of all, unsullied by discord." (from the letter to the bishops absent from the Nicene Council).

The first occasion Constantine had to exhibit this concern was in the Donatist controversy in the African Church, shortly after he had assumed control over the western half of the Empire.

* Constantine saw a mechanical efficacy in the performance of religious ritual -- in exchange for the incense and incantations God would give prosperity. Cochrane (216-7) sees this, and also fear of divine wrath as incentive, as indications of Constantine's strongly pagan mentality. These beliefs of Constantine's are based on the idea of a contractual relationship between men and God, which Cochrane sees as more suitable to paganism than mature Christian thinking. Though Christian in form, Constantine had not fully dissociated himself from the substance of paganism.

In urging tolerance there, Constantine wrote, "What can be done by me more consonant with my fixed resolve and with the duty of an emperor than ... to cause all men to present to omnipotent God true religion, unfeigned concord, and the worship which is His due." (from a letter quoted in B 15). In all his correspondence with the Africans, he returned again and again to this desire for unity and his fears were it not achieved: "...a very serious matter that... the bishops [are] at variance among themselves... it is my wish that you should leave no schism whatsoever or division in any place." (HE X.5.18). In a later correspondence Constantine referred again to his efforts to achieve harmony in Africa: "My design was to bring the diverse judgments formed by all nations respecting the Deity to a condition, as it were, of settled uniformity; ... to establish, according to my hopes, a common harmony of sentiment among all the servants of God, ... Finding, then, that the whole of Africa was persuaded by an intolerable spirit of mad folly ... I was anxious to check this disorder." (VC II.65, 66). Constantine referred to this matter as the "object which I felt to be of paramount interest and importance." (VC II.67, letter to Alexander and Arius).

This letter continued with a plea for peace in the East as well. For after Constantine won this territory from Licinius, he found that an even fiercer controversy, between the parties of Alexander and Arius, raged there. Constantine was appalled; he had felt sure that the Eastern bishops, bishops from the heartland of Christendom, would aid in settling the

African debate. But Constantine's intentions were confounded -- "O glorious providence of God! how deep a wound did not my ears only, but my very heart receive in the report that divisions existed among yourselves more grievous still than those which continued in that country [Africa]! so that you, through whose aid I had hoped to procure a remedy for the errors of others, are in a state which needs healing even more than theirs." (VC II. 68). Examples of Constantine's concern may be quoted at great length.

Constantine's idea of Church unity was an inclusionistic one. That which all Christians had in common was their belief in the One God and in salvation through Christ. For Constantine this qualification was the basis of unity; all who fell into this broad classification were to be included with equal right in the Church. Although he recognized theological differences, and had cause to condemn some who advocated unorthodox interpretations of doctrine, still all were Christian, and therefore had such an important similarity to all others of the name that minor disagreements must be put aside for the sake of a larger unity.

The Church, however, seemed to advocate 'exclusionist' unity. Heretics were to be condemned and denied participation in the Church; should they repent and renounce their impieties, they would perhaps be readmitted, but certainly not in the absence of this change of heart. To the leading bishops, particularly in the East, orthodoxy was essential to the continuation of the true tradition transmitted generation to generation from

the very mouth of the Savior.

Constantine then must have startled the Church with his ideas. In handling the Donatists, he wrote of showing the schismatics the right form of worship, and of his intention to "destroy and disperse" those who persisted in error; he saw it his duty to "dissipate errors and cut off unfounded opinions." (letter to Domitus Celsus, quoted in B 15). But these intentions seemed without substance, and in any case were not realized in the way they implied. Constantine spent the next few years attempting to entice the Donatists back into the Church. The threats were not carried out; in fact the Donatists were finally pardoned, or rather were given up to divine supervision --

Our designs must be moderated so far as to act with patience, and whatever in their insolence they attempt or carry out, in accordance with their habitual wantonness -- all this we must endure... But if you will give yourselves loyally to this cause (i.e. to endure with patience), you will speedily bring it about that, by the favour of God, on high, these men who are making themselves the standard-bearers of this most miserable strife, may all come to recognize, ... that they ought not through the persuasion of a few to give themselves over to perish in everlasting death, when they might through the grace of repentance be made whole again, having corrected their errors, for everlasting life.

(NE 280).

Constantine condemned the Donatists severely, but saw no point in persecuting them or denying them, should they seek it, communion with their Christian brothers, with whom they shared the worship of the true God.

Just so in the Arian controversy, regardless of his denunciation of Arianism, Constantine persisted in maintaining

for the heretics the option of returning to the Church, without forcing them to abandon their own particular interpretations of orthodoxy. The council at Nicaea was moved to that city from Ancyra, in part apparently because Constantine recognized the strength of the anti-Arian party there, and had no desire to prejudice the council in this way. (Ch 303). Baynes argues that Constantine saw no value in "the victory of either extreme" (20-1); Constantine sought at the council a creed which all could accept (ECC 250; J 157). Upon determining the opinion of the more influential bishops present, Constantine used his authority to persuade the rest to agree (J 164). It was perhaps this desire for agreement that led him to approve Eusebius of Caesarea's 'creed'; there was nothing to be gained by excluding so prominent a figure (ECC 225). Just as with Donatism, Constantine ~~was~~ condemned the Arians, ~~but~~, but did not deny their Christianity. Even after unity was officially achieved ⁱⁿ the Eastern Church, Constantine continued to push for the return of the few dissident bishops, as well as any who might attempt to raise some new controversy.

It is Baynes' opinion that however much Constantine threatened and condemned, his actions were for their propagandistic value, and did not imply active persecution, enforcement, or harm of any kind. (26). Baynes cites Sozomen, who wrote that the imperial decrees were meant "to terrify rather than to destroy the emperor's subjects." (Sozomen, HE ii,32). Constantine expressed the same attitude toward the pagans -- wrong though they were, and troublesome for the empire, still it was

Constantine's choice to be a missionary for their conversion (B 27) rather than a persecutor for their destruction.

With this understanding of Constantine's view of his own role and his intentions for the Church, it is easy to see why he held the Council of Nicaea, and was adamant about forcing agreement there. Backed by Roman religious tradition, and armed with fear and personal responsibility, Constantine was determined that no theological issue would be permitted to split the Church. A decision on Arianism was certainly necessary -- the dissension was becoming violent -- but for the emperor to take the initiative in an ecclesiastical affair was indeed novel. One must wonder how the Church leaders responded to Constantine's self-assumed authority. The Church had come to be more or less self-sufficient (having had little choice), and was able to manage its own affairs. Regardless, the end of persecution came as a godsend, and was welcomed everywhere with great rejoicing. Moreover it is always useful to have favor in the government. Despite the bitterness Christians must have felt toward the Empire, the miraculous good fortune erased all antagonism from their minds; Constantine was accepted with enthusiasm, regardless of the consequences. It was only later as the Church became accustomed to its new role that some bishops began to anticipate difficulties, and what was first seen as providential ^{began to} take on troublesome aspects.

During the long years of persecution the Church had sustained its believers by a strong internal structure. It had

a clear hierarchical ranking for its leaders, modeled on the civil territorial organization (J 51-52). The bishop of a province looked for guidance to the bishop of a metropolis -- the larger the city, the greater the authority. By analogy with the civil government, the bishops of the capital cities acquired special prominence, Carthage, Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome. Within the churches also the chain of authority was clear.

In addition to Church government, the means of defining doctrine were carefully set out. (J 250). Christian beliefs were based on the Holy Scriptures, the only source of true doctrine, and in the apostolic tradition which had been handed down from the time of the Savior. Only recently the regular episcopal meetings also had begun to take on authority, and the Church saw the bishops gathered there as divinely inspired and led to right decisions. Strong within itself, the Church had for years made its own way; its only parent Christ Jesus had died when it was young.

Yet with the coming of Constantine this self-reliance was apparently forgotten (J 251). The Church was able to set aside its past and become the Emperor's newest plaything. Many of the same influences which gave Constantine his own view of his role apparently eased the Church's acceptance of him in that role. Christians were equally familiar with the Hellenistic concept of divine monarchy, which gave religious authority to the secular ruler (Dv 618). Origen clearly presented an identification of the interests of Church and State

with the coming of a Christian emperor (Dv 604).

Eusebius also saw validity in Constantine's role. Taking his view from St. Paul, he conceded a full measure of legitimacy to secular authority. (C 185-6). A Christian ruler, he wrote (Paneg. 2), rules according to a divine pattern, in conformity with the monarchy of God. He is able to rule justly and correct the errors of his predecessors, for his actions are divinely guided. While other rulers are appointed by men, Constantine as a Christian emperor was uniquely appointed by God, and as such had an authority far surpassing any other ruler. Caesaropapism was a welcome change; never had there been one with more right to dictate religious beliefs than a Christian ruler. Surely this was the beginning of the promised age when peace and righteousness would reign supreme. "They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into sickles, and nation shall not take up arms against nation, neither shall they learn to war anymore."

Constantine was accepted with enthusiasm. As soon as trouble began with the Donatists in Africa, the bishops there appealed to their emperor for a solution. Apparently they saw Constantine, rather than the Roman bishop, as the one most qualified to handle the situation. In the East, however, there was some reservation. Even though Eusebius' writings sounded clear approval of the new head of the Church, Eastern bishops did not respond with the vigor of their Western brothers. Perhaps their more developed theology, and greater general sophistication led them to deny the usefulness of Constantine,

or perhaps permitted them to see sooner the certain difficulties that a single Church and State would cause. Constantine's inclusionistic Christianity may have put them off, or perhaps they saw that his Christian beliefs were far from strict orthodoxy. In *any* case, the East was wary. When the trouble with the Arians began, no one appealed to Constantine for advice; he heard of it from his own sources, and set about reconciling the two parties on his own initiative. It is the Antioch Council that provides the surest example of the East's reluctance to accept Constantine as a religious leader. But let us start from the beginning of the Arian controversy.

The traditional date for the beginning of Arianism is 318, while Arius was a presbyter under Bishop Alexander in Alexandria. Exactly how their disagreement arose is not clear; two differing versions are given by Socrates and Sozomen (Socrates, HE I.5; and Sozomen, HE I.15). In any case Alexander was disturbed by the doctrine Arius was preaching. It was not, however, until Arius began finding support in numerous Eastern churches that Alexander took steps against him. He called a council of bishops, from the churches under Alexandria, which excommunicated Arius and his adherents. But this was no end to the debates. Eusebius of Nicomedia took up the cause, and convened a council in Bithynia, in the center of Arian territory, which approved Arius' interpretation of doctrine. This precipitated a great flurry of pamphleting back and forth among the factions. The dissension became even sharper after Eusebius of Caesarea joined the schismatics, and

when his council of Palestinian bishops also approved Arianism. The East became clearly divided between Arian and anti-Arian dioceses -- Alexandria and Ancyra, ranged against Caesarea and Nicomedia, actually the whole of Palestine and Bithynia. It was at this point that Constantine entered the East and first heard of the angry division there, and shortly after this, that the council of Antioch was called.

There has been much disagreement over what the purpose of the Antioch council was. Interpretations of its significance for an understanding of the Nicene Council, and for Church-State relations, are intuitive constructions based on a single letter, with the background of the equally indefinite motives and intentions of the leading figures; numerous conflicting views can be successfully supported. The theories of the two most recent discussions of the council, those of Chadwick and Baynes, favor the idea that the intention of the Antioch bishops was to prejudge the Arian question, and force Constantine to follow their lead at the upcoming council at Nicaea. The more thoughtful Eastern bishops had reason to distrust Constantine, and they chose to circumvent his authority and decide the issue without secular intervention. Although Alexander's council in Egypt had already condemned Arianism, apparently a Church-wide agreement and a statement of orthodoxy were needed to put the schism to an end.

The Antioch bishops perhaps feared for the fate of orthodoxy if Constantine were to settle the controversy; he could be expected to arrange the return of the Arians to the Church,

Christians though unorthodox ones. The Church advocated internal unity as strongly as Constantine, and Alexander sought to reconcile Arius to orthodoxy with vigor and sincerity, but the Church remained exclusionistic. The Arians were heretics; if they did not admit their errors and reform their doctrines, they had no place in the Church. Constantine's attitude of peaceful co-existence, then, was extremely distasteful to the anti-Arians. For Eustathius, inclusionism was as heretical as Arianism itself (J 151-2, Ch302); after the Nicene Council he was thoroughly disgusted that the Emperor had not permitted an absolute condemnation of Arianism in terms that such marginally orthodox figures as Eusebius of Caesarea would not have been able to accept. (J 157-9). With these feelings among the anti-Arian leaders, they hastened to settle the issue at Antioch before Constantine had an opportunity to interfere.

One may question that the bishops were as familiar with Constantine's position and intentions for the Church as their suspicion would suggest. The East actually may have known very little of Constantine. Communications were slow; the West was cut off from the East; and it had only been a few months since Constantine had first come into the East. The most obvious source of apprehension for the Eastern bishops -- that Constantine had called a council to settle the difficulties -- may not be evidence either, for it is not generally agreed whether Constantine called the Nicene council himself or whether he merely intended to commandeer an already existing council. Still it is perfectly likely that the bishops had heard of and

were able to generalize from Constantine's handling of the Donatists, or had understood his intentions from his letter to Alexander and Arius or from his sending Hosius ^{to} ~~of~~ Alexandria to mediate. At least the leading bishops would have known what sort of policy Constantine could be expected to advocate; the first Christian Emperor was bound to be a matter of interest.

Furthermore, the very fact that the bishops at Antioch wrote a creed seems significant. It was at the beginning of the fourth century that creeds were written as tests of a suspected heretic's orthodoxy (ECC 205-7). The orthodox interpretation of the doctrine in question was set down, and the creed was 'asked' to the heretic. This was the procedure which the Council of Arles adopted in 314 -- "we have decreed that, if any heretic comes to the Church, he should be questioned concerning the Creed." (NE 274). This seems to reflect the common use of creeds at that time in the instruction of catechumens and their interrogation before baptism. (ECC Ch. 2 and 3). But the Nicene Creed (and probably the Antioch Creed) was somewhat different. There it was understood as a universal formulation of orthodoxy, the doctrine of the whole Church, and a new part of the Church's tradition, along with the Holy Scriptures and the teachings of the Fathers. As the pronouncement of a council of bishops, the Creed was divinely inspired and authoritative. That the Antioch Creed should be seen in this way also is likely, The whole tone of the letter announcing it implies that it intended to resolve the controversy and set

out "the orthodox faith concerning Father and Son" (NE 298). Furthermore the creed apparently was spread widely in the Empire, even to the West, as though to inform the whole Church of the new authority on the nature of the Trinity.

Regardless of other purposes the Antioch council may have had, the primary one seems to have been to supersede a Nicene judgment of Arianism. The bishop of Antioch Philogonius had just died,^{and} a replacement was needed. In addition, or perhaps as a result, the conflict between the Arians and the anti-Arians was extremely bitter and apparently violent in Antioch. Eastern bishops would have naturally been eager to resolve these difficulties, and anti-Arians in particular to enforce the pronouncements of Alexander. There was probably disagreement over Philogonius' successor, and the anti-Arians were determined that the head of the powerful Antioch see be one of their party. However if the replacement of Philogonius or the resolution of conflict had been Antioch's primary goal, there would have been no need to write a creed, especially not one which seems to be a declaration of Church-wide orthodoxy. The issues would have been debated, and decisions made, but it would certainly not have been necessary for the resulting policies to be formalized as a creed.

The actions of the Antioch bishops were not entirely in-subordinate. Their selection of Eustathius as the new bishop of Antioch was only provisional, and his actual consecration was postponed pending confirmation by the upcoming council. (J 149). Likewise the Antioch council condemned three bishops

whose views it deemed Arian -- Narcissus, Theodotus, and Euxbius of Caesarea -- provisionally; opportunity was given them to repent and redeem themselves at the "great and hieratic synod of Ancyra." (NE 298). Despite the authority claimed by the Antioch council, and this nod to Ancyra, in hopes that it would not seem too impertinent, the efforts there do not appear in the Nicene deliberations. The Antioch creed was never suggested for ratification at Nicaea, and Eusebius' creed, expressing doctrine far from that of Antioch, was specifically approved by Constantine, Antioch quickly became irrelevant, and the East had to bow to the Emperor's prerogative (Ch 303-4).

The Nicene agreement centered around the term homoousios. Although a Scriptural phrase was sought, the standard procedure, all those suggested were easily twisted by the Arians so that they supported Arianism as well as orthodoxy (Athan. De decret. 19, 20). Though many of the bishops present were opposed to the action, a new and non-Scriptural expression was the only clear alternative. Homoousios was suggested by Constantine; but the word was certainly not of his own devising. It probably can be attributed to Ossius, the Spanish bishop whom Constantine had adopted as his religious advisor. Athanasius apparently saw Ossius as the source when he wrote, "When was there a council held when he [Ossius] did not take the lead and win all over by his sound words!" (De fug. 5); and again, "It was he [Ossius] who put forth the faith accepted at Nicaea" (Hist. Ar. 42). A story in Philostorgius offers further support, telling how Alexander and Ossius met before the council

and agreed on homoousios as the key term, should a non-Scriptural word be needed (Phil. HE 1,7). It does seem unlikely, however, that the need for departure from Scripture would be foreseen. In any case, homoousios was of Western origin (J 162, ECC 250-2). Jones writes that homoousios had been approved in the West for over a century (162), and Kelly agrees (251) saying that although it may not have been as accepted part of Western theology (did the West have a 'theology'?), the concept of divine monarchy which it suggested was popular in the West. The numerous precedents of the term are considered in depth below; here it is enough to know that they were indeed numerous and ambiguous.

As to the selection of the word homoousios, there can be only speculation. It is possible that its very ambiguity was seen by Osius to be an advantage. What is not understood is hard to refute. Homoousios was the badge of no specific party, and could not be seen as an endorsement of specific doctrine. It could be interpreted as one pleased, and for those with little interest in theological intricacies anyway, as was the case for most of the bishops present, its meaning was irrelevant. Constantine was careful to minimize the significance of homoousios, denying any quasi-physical implications, or suggestions of the segmentation of the Father's nature -- "the Son is consubstantial not according to bodily affections; ... the Son subsisted from the Father neither according to division nor severance" (from the letter of Eusebius to his home church, NE 301). Furthermore, it quickly became clear that Constantine's

object was unity rather than orthodoxy, and that he was asking for signatures rather than for understanding and commitment. It might also be the case that Osius was genuinely ignorant of the precedents of homoousios in the East, and suggested the word only because it was the one most familiar to him and his own church.

The theological influence of the Nicene council was neither wide spread nor long-lived. The creed written there was never used in baptismal rites, nor was it substituted for the existing local creeds. (ECC256). In the East the Nicene creed existed side by side with the older creeds, to which were sometimes added crucial phrases from the new orthodoxy. The West remained almost totally ignorant of the creed. (ECC 261). All the background of the Arian controversy was written in Greek, and no one probably saw any pressing reason for its translation. Besides, the West was having no difficulties with these issues, and it had no interest in their details. The consensus at the council was only apparent, and in large measure because of Constantine's presence, and for his benefit. Sozomen wrote that open opposition to the Nicene orthodoxy did not begin until May 22, 337, the day of Constantine's death; even before this there had never been universal approval (Soz. HE 3.1.1). If Constantine wanted agreement, that could be given him, and when the bishops returned to their churches, they continued to teach as they always had, regardless of this official formulation of doctrine. (Pel 302). This creed was only for the theologians, not the congregations, and the unity it fostered for the Church

was temporary and insubstantial.

Yet in the development of Church-State relations the council was of more significance. Whether or not it was Constantine himself who called the Nicene council, there is no doubting the extent of the civil influence there. Constantine clearly intended to take charge of effecting a settlement in this ecclesiastical controversy, and did not hesitate to use his authority as secular ruler and patron in influencing the way of the decision. The council itself was organized on the model of the Roman senate meetings (B88), and great numbers of government officials attended. Regardless of the Eastern hesitation, a large measure of authority over the Church was granted to Constantine. At this early stage of bartering between Church and State, the young Church seemed to be a consistent loser, but it was not to be long before it began to exercise a strong control over imperial policy. (C 190). The bishops were concerned with ecclesiastical affairs, the Emperor with the right way to worship God for His good will toward the Empire (Dv 640); it could not be long before the Church was able to take charge of determining this and from it determining the course of the Empire.

Quid est imperatori cum ecclesia? Tertullian could never have imagined.

II

The issue which faced the Nicene fathers, and which had faced the Church to some extent for three hundred years, was how to reconcile the fundamental Christian belief in the oneness of God with the equally strong belief in the divinity and personhood of Christ. Before a final resolution was reached at the Council of Constantinople in 381, various attempts with varying degrees of success were made.

For the earliest Christian thinkers the two ideas -- God is one and the Son is God -- were not seen as a contradiction. Theology was expected to be a mystery; how could man ever have insight into the realms of the divine? The Apostolic fathers did not frequently indulge in speculation, and made little reference to the nature of the Godhead or the relationship of its parts. (ECD 91-95). Ignatius implied a distinction between the Father and Son, as did Hermas; beyond this there is little evidence.

The Apologists were more interested in the issue. Justin Martyr made a clear division within the Godhead, ranking the parts God, Christ, and the Spirit, and the apologists seemed to agree that the Godhead was in some sense plural. While the Word and the Spirit are in essential unity with the Father, and share His divine nature, nevertheless they could be manifested in the world of space and time. (ECD 103-4). The question was certainly not resolved.

Likewise Irenaeus was not bothered by the contradiction when he wrote "by the very essence and nature of His being there is but one God" (Dem. 47) and "according to the economy of our redemption there are both Father and Son" (Dem. 47). Irenaeus held that God the Father is one, manifested in creation and redemption through the Word and the Wisdom, which God **has** contained in Himself from all eternity (ECD 104-8). Though the Word and the Spirit are co-existent with the Father, they are not co-equal Persons. Irenaeus did not advocate separate beings; he tended more toward the identity of the three parts of the Godhead. "The Father is God, and the Son is God, for whatever is begotten of God is God" (Dem. 6). Like most of the thinkers of his time, Irenaeus was ultimately concerned with monotheism, and for this end he obscured the individuality of the Son and Spirit.

The clearest expression of differentiation among the parts of the Godhead, into the third century, took the form of the Triad as manifested in creation and redemption, the economy of the Father through the Son and the Spirit, as separate from the Father. This doctrine, economic Trinitarianism, was in fact so successful that it brought about a reactionary return to a narrower sort of monotheism. There were several theories, as a group called monarchianism, because of their similar intention of safeguarding the singularity of God. One form monarchianism took is known more specifically as dynamic monarchianism, or adoptionism. It eliminated the danger of ditheism by subordinating the Son to the level of a divinely

inspired man, with little claim to divinity. Paul of Samosata explained the doctrine most characteristically, advocating unitarianism with a rationalizing trace of a Triad -- God the Father; the Son, a man; and the Spirit, the grace of the apostles.

The other fundamental type of monarchianism, similar to adoptionism only in its extreme monotheism, is modalist monarchianism, or modalism. Holding both the oneness of God and the full divinity of the Son, modalism took its only clear option, the absolute identification of the parts of the God-head. The first formulation of this doctrine, by Noetus of Smyrna fell far short of ecclesiastical acceptance by allowing God the Father, identical with His incarnate Son, to undergo human experiences on earth. Sabellius reworked the theory to avoid patripassianism, and defined his God as a monad expressed in three operations or modes, likening the Triad to the sun, which as a single object radiates both warmth and light.

Contemporary with the beginning of monarchianism were Tertullian and Hippolytus, who did not find it necessary to hold such extreme views. Both were strong monotheists, like their predecessors the Apologists, but both were able to allow the Son and the Spirit greater individuality. "Though alone, He was multiple, for He was not without His Word and His Wisdom, His Power and His Counsel" (Hippolytus, C. Noet. 10). Again -- "when I speak of 'another', I do not mean two Gods, but as it were light from light, water from its source, a ray from the sun." (ibid). Tertullian also held that the Son and

Spirit were Persons, that is, distinct in some sense from the Father, though he was careful to explain that this distinction did not imply any sort of division within the Godhead; all three were of the same divine essence.

It was Origen who finally made some clear progress in reconciling the divinity of the Son with the oneness of God. Showing a strong influence of the currently fashionable 'middle' platonism, Origen expressed the Son as a divine but somewhat subordinate being, having the role of intermediary between the transcendence of God the Father and the created order. The Son and the Spirit were for Origen Persons, distinct hypostases existing from eternity. This was the doctrine of eternal generation, that the Son was not begotten at a specific time, but was an eternal and continuous generation. In this way the Son is still a begotten being, but is not denied his co-eternality with the Father. To counterbalance this strong move toward polytheism, Origen professed the union of the three in identity of will, and community of substance and essential nature. The Son is eternally distinct, but His essence is derived from the being of the Father.

Origen's solution was still not entirely satisfactory; it was somewhat ambiguous in parts, and did not fully explain how it was that the contradiction was not a contradiction. He did not hesitate to assert that the hypostatically distinct Son was truly God, but his argument for how this could be fell short of conclusiveness. The issue continued into the fourth century unresolved, and it was then that the division within

the Church over possible solutions became so severe that it was necessary to force some sort of agreement. The calling of the Council of Nicaea has already been discussed; what is important here is the meaning for the Nicene bishops of the creed they adopted.

The bishops attending the Nicene Council were greatly divided in their views and intentions. Their common background of pagan philosophy and patristic theology had developed in startlingly different ways. Diversity was to be expected, as the young Church had not yet turned her attention to formulating a philosophic foundation, a universal orthodoxy covering all the issues thinking Christians were beginning to submit to her.

On the questions Arianism raised, most of the bishops took a moderate position (whether by rational choice or by ignorance and apathy no one can know). Their traditionally Eastern viewpoint was the product of a Judaic inheritance tempered by Greek philosophy and with a liberal dose of anti-paganism, in addition to the Christian sources -- the New Testament, the Church fathers, the early apologists, and so on. They shared a number of fundamental beliefs with all Christians, most importantly, the indisputable first premise: a belief in one God, Father and creator. This legacy from Judaism served as the best possible defense against paganism, and was given first priority among Christians universally. In the same way the moderate Nicene bishops believed that salvation was the work of the Supreme Lord; the Savior could be none other than

the Creator Himself. Jesus Christ was God; "we ought so to think of Jesus Christ as of God" urges an old sermon (2 Clement 1.1-2). Even docetism was preferable to compromising the full divinity of the 'man' Jesus (Pel 174).

With the assumptions that 1). the Son is divine, 2). the Godhead is one, and 3). God did not suffer as the man Jesus, Christians were forced to emphasize one or the other of the Son's attributes -- His divinity or His separateness; Eastern Christians followed the lead of Origen. Motivated by extreme opposition to monarchianism, fast gaining in popularity, the third century theologian developed a strongly Neo-platonic concept of three distinct hypostases. Though maintaining the full divinity of the Son, Origen did not see his formulation as polytheistic. Perhaps he, and the Easterners who followed him, thought as Tertullian did -- that distinctio does not require separatio.

The moderates then had a characteristic background of anti-Monarchianism, and of divine plurality within the unitary Godhead. Their theology lay somewhere between the extremes of Arius and Alexander. Undoubtedly somewhat disinterested in the subtleties of the disagreement at Nicaea, they wanted nothing more than to be assured of their orthodoxy, and to be able to hand on to those who followed them the faith they had been given by their predecessors, and which could be traced in this way back to the teachings of the Savior Himself (Rob xviii).

Those bishops who followed Alexander, comparatively few,

were more concerned with theology per se, and were more committed to their own position. Like his Eastern brothers, Alexander's thought was a product of Origenism, from which it took a belief in the distinct persons of the Godhead. The Son, he said, is a unique nature (ousia), an individual being complete in Himself. Also from Origen, the Son mediates between God and the created order. Furthermore, the Son is completely divine. Christ must belong to the realm of God and not to the world, because the concept of redemption requires a fully divine being, to be meaningful or effective at all; the Savior must be God to be the Savior. In this way there is an essential, inseparable unity between the Father and Son; though not identical beings, They share a perfect likeness. Also, Christ is the only source of knowledge men have about God. If He was not an accurate reflection of the Father, ~~is~~ divine, then God remains totally mysterious to man.

How these three ideas could be valid at the same time was not a matter of importance for Alexander. Faith was the foundation. It was here that Alexander rejected Origenism, in the tradition of his predecessor Peter of Alexandria, and turned to belief in opposition to Origen's 'scientific' theology. Alexander adopted the way of Irenaeus, holding that these questions were not to be asked. He did not choose to speculate on such matters; rather his belief in the divinity of the Son and His distinction from the Father was a judgment of faith and beyond speculative doubt. The nature of the Godhead was a mystery for man, and was intended to be so.

When Alexander was forced by the growing support for the schismatics to counteract Arianism, he had much difficulty in devising an orthodox formula. The case was clear -- Arianism was obviously wrong, but what then was right? This of course was also the problem of the Nicene Council; even after the issue was clear there was still creed -- some sort of positive theology -- to formulate. As a result of Alexander's difficult position, his writings against Arius seem vague and contradictory (Har 22). His theology contrasts unfavorably with the clarity, definiteness, and logical consistency of Arius' statements. That Alexander offered no security against dualism, Gnostic emanationism, Sabellianism, or the corporeality of God, was a valid criticism, and one which his opponents did not fail to make (Har 25).

Origen and his tradition of Neoplatonism formed the root of Eastern thinking; both the moderates and the followers of Alexander on the right made use of it. But the legacy of Origen was an ambiguous one; two lines of thought can be clearly derived from it: one emphasizing the divinity of the Son and distinct hypostases, and the other emphasizing the derivative and thus secondary nature of the Son's divinity. It was on the latter trend that Arius based his doctrines.

Arius' first premise was the absolute uniqueness and transcendence of God -- the Neoplatonic Monad (C 233), to whom no equal could be imagined. "We acknowledge One God, alone unbegotten, alone everlasting, alone unbegun, alone true, ..." (NE 294). Important here is the term ingenerate -- agennetos --

by which the Arians understood 'self-existent.' Whatever must be sacrificed, there was nothing that could compromise the oneness of God.

The essence (ousia) of God is then unique and transcendent, and as such can not exist in any but the one God. It can not be shared with or belong ~~to~~ any other being. To share His essence would be to divide or change Him, which is of course impossible; as the One He is immutable. Likewise the possession of God's essence by another being would require a duality of divine beings. Whatever else exists must be of a different essence -- created ex nihilo by God's free action. If God alone is agennetos, all else must be contingent. This bit of logic was carried off through the ambiguousness of the term agennetos; ^{it could mean both:} ~~agennetos~~, the technical term applied only to the Father by both Alexander and Arius; and uncreated, which Arius chose to apply only to the Father as well. If the Father alone is uncreated, then all other existence must be created, and contingent on Him.

The Word is then among these ~~these~~ created beings; His existence is dependent on a ~~specific~~ act of God. By 'begotten' the Arians meant 'made'; by 'only-begotten,' 'first-born'. The Son is not an emanation* or a consubstantial (homoousios) portion, as either of these would imply that the Godhead is in some way corporeal. Certainly the Son is a perfect creature and not like other creatures, but is nonetheless contingent.

* Neoplatonists postulated emanations without changing the Godhead, as radiation of light from the sun. Arius chose to disregard this. (ECD 16).

The Son, if created, must have had a beginning. Arius agreed that He was the agent of the rest of creation -- since it was ontologically impossible that the transcendent God have contact with the created order -- and so He was created "before the times and the ages"; but still prior to His generation He did not exist. "There was when He was not", the most familiar Arian slogan. A result of the Son's beginning is that God has not always been a Father. Eusebius realized that the change in God from not-Father to Father was not admissible and avoided it, but Arius apparently was not aware of the difficulties it created.

Another of Arius' contentions was that the Son was susceptible to change and even sin. This was far too severe a doctrine to offer to the orthodox community, so it was modified to claim only that the Son's righteousness was the result of His own will, and God knowing this would be so, bestowed grace on Him in advance. Even this was not particularly well received. **

Arius' motive in so constructing his theology was to oppose the Sabellian concept that the Son was a power or function of the Father, that is, that there were no hypostatic distinctions within the Godhead. Sabellianism was devised to avoid tritheism, but fell prey to the same failure, expressing the divine nature numerically, that is, the unity, or identity of several different beings (C 233). Sabellianism, as all forms

** Thanks to Kelly for this organization of Arius' doctrines (ECD 227-8); documentation of most of the ideas here presented may be found there also.

of monarchianism, was emphatically rejected by Eastern Christians, but Arius carried his opposition to the other extreme. While maintaining distinct hypostases, Arius lost the accompanying Neoplatonic concept of the same reality existing at different levels (ECD 231); to hold the Father absolutely unique, he was forced to deny the Son's divinity. If the Son is not identical to God, (Sabellianism), then He must be different in hypostasis and ousia from Him, and not of divine essence.

The question which should be asked at this point is how the Word could have been called 'God.' The title was for the Arians given by the grace of God, as a courtesy, and was only nominally significant. "Even if He is called God, He is not God truly, but by participation in grace ... He too is called God in name only" (Athanasius, c. Ar. 1,6).* Arius could then retain the Holy Triad, though his three persons were in no way similar to each other.

Arius did not claim originality for his views. He was a student of Lucian, the founder of the adoptionist school at Antioch, whose life was checkered with alternating episcopal favor and disfavor; it was through him that Arius probably first considered the relationship of the Father and the Son. Arius saw his continuation of Lucian's line of thinking as the valid continuation of the patristic tradition, exemplified especially in Origen's student Dionysius of Alexandria (ECD 230). Arius

* The Arians made matters difficult for themselves by continuing to worship the Son; their theology and liturgy were incompatible. This was vigorously attacked by the orthodox as polytheistic, and rightly so.

supported his conclusions with a vast collection of Scriptural texts, showing that the Son was a creature -- "The Lord created me.." (Prov. 8.22), "the firstborn of all creation" (Col. 1.15), "God has made Him Lord and Christ" (Acts 2.36), among others; that God the Father was the only God -- "...that they should know Thee the only true God..." (John 17.3); that the Son was a secondary being -- "the Father is greater than I" (John 14.28), and that the Son changes, develops, has weaknesses, and so on. Such Scriptural verification was essential if a doctrine was to be judged orthodox; it was indeed the strongest test.

These were the parties at Nicaea -- a large one of rather disinterested conservatives, though committed with typically Eastern bias to distinct hypostases within the Godhead; a much smaller one of more theologically alert bishops following Arius in an effort to protect the absoluteness of God the Father; and the third group of Alexander's colleagues who saw a great danger in Arianism and were determined to put an end to it. These were the parties that Constantine expected to come to agreement at the Nicene Council, and which miraculously did just that. Part of the story was told in the previous section; the remainder, dealing with the Creed itself begins below.

The creed that was ratified by the council is as follows:

We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of all things, visible and invisible;
 And in 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 with the Father, through Whom all things

came into being, things in heaven and things on earth, who because of us 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.

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 from a different hypostasis or substance, or is created, or is subject to alteration or change -- these the Catholic Church anathematizes.

(Kelly's translation, ECD 232.)

To understand its meaning for the Nicene fathers is not a simple matter, There is no doubt that it was intended as a condemnation of Arianism -- all the Arian phrases are repudiated in it. The Son is true God; begotten not made; of eternal generation; of the same hypostasis or ousia as the Father; and not created, alterable or mutable.

Beyond this negative theology, the way is much more difficult. One of the few sources of contemporary interpretation is a letter written by the leftist Eusebius of Caesarea to his home church explaining what was adopted at Nicaea and how he understood it. Since he was rather suspicious of the creed presented to him, he took great pains to examine it carefully and to reassure himself of its consistency with his own beliefs. This he was able to do, but it is doubtful therefore that his interpretations are the same as those the orthodox intended. The key to this understanding of the creed is the term homousios.

Homousios was a word of widespread and various usage, and of numerous and ambiguous meanings. It had gone through

several stages of acceptance and rejection by the Church leaders, which made it even more difficult to use or understand. Its root ousia was often equated with hypostasis, though some writers intended them to differ. Origen tried to make some distinction, unsuccessfully. He used homoousios with regard to the relations of the Persons of the Trinity to suggest several distinct entities belonging to one class and sharing the same sort of substance -- communio substantiae, eg. steam and water. The Father and the Son were for him consubstantial (homoousios) because an emanation is homoousios with the being from which it emanated. On the other hand, hypostasis referred to individual characteristics of the Persons, the Son as Son, the Father as Father. It was not until the Council of Constantinople in 381 that these distinctions were officially made. For Arius and Alexander ousia and hypostasis were interchangeable.

Origen had no difficulties using homoousios, but when Paul of Samosata tried to use it, he was deposed by the Synod of Antioch in 268. The adoptionist bishop probably intended homoousios as a protest against the sharp distinctions between the Father and Son (ECD 118), and his fellow bishops were not about to tolerate the monarchianism he supported. But in the same decade Dionysius of Alexandria was rebuked for denying the consubstantiality of the Father and Son. Dionysius had occasion to oppose Sabellianism, as it had become increasingly popular in his see, and in his effort went too far in the direction of tritheism. The Sabellians did not hesitate to appeal to Rome, from which the bishop, also called Dionysius gave formal

recognition to the idea of the Son as homoousios with the Father, supporting the Western tendency toward some form of monarchianism.

Furthermore homoousios was rejected by the Arians, who understood it in a materialistic sense, as was generally the case into the fourth century. For them homoousios meant "of one stuff," (C 209-10), so that to call the Father and Son homoousios implied that the Father's being was material. Arius, who had branded homoousios as Manichaeism (NE 294), was explicit in his rejection of the term -- "... the Father is alien to the Son in substance (ousia)" (Athan. De syn. 15 from the Thalia); "... has nothing in common with the Father's substance." (Athan. C. Ar. 1.9).

In 325 then, homoousios had been rejected by Dionysius of Alexandria and the Arians, and approved by Origen, the heretic Paul of Samosata, and the Sabellians. That such a word would be accepted by the council as the basis of orthodoxy for the whole Church seems outrageous; many of the bishops present certainly agreed. Homoousios' background -- of association with the detested Sabellianism, and perhaps with Manichaeism, of its condemnation in Antioch, and of its traditionally materialistic sense -- was only one objection. Along with the implication of some physical existence for the Godhead, homoousios suggested that the Father and Son were both made of some prior-existent substance, that there was something before there was God -- absurd! (rob xxxi). Equally disturbing was that homoousios was not Scriptural. The primary test of orthodoxy in the young Church was Scripture, and its tradition carried from

Jesus Himself to apostle to apologist to father to bishop, generation to generation, was held in sacred esteem. All religious truth was to be found there, and "woe betide him who accepts doctrines not discoverable in it." (Tertullian). Furthermore the use of homoousios here as equivalent to hypostasis denied the traditional Eastern belief in three distinct hypostases. It was the Sabellians who would have this sort of unity; Eastern Christianity had long ago decided to risk the Son's divinity for the sake of His individuality. The East and West were for the most part theologically independent of each other. The West, less influenced by Origen's thought, had never accepted the concept of distinctions within the Godhead, valuing far more the unity of God. Although by the generic interpretation (see below) of homoousios, which was understood by those of theological expertise, it was clear that no unconditional unity was intended, the majority of the bishops present must have seen the apparent denial of hypostatic distinctions as a very dangerous step. The choice for the Nicene bishops, between this distressingly suspect word homoousios and the extremity of Arianism, must have been an enormously difficult one; one must have even more respect for the strength of Constantine's influence.

It is clear that those who used homoousios before Nicaea intended different meanings for it. An important question, then, is what was meant by it in the Nicene Creed. Kelly presents a convincing argument (ECD 233-6), distinguishing between two classes of meaning, termed 'numeric' and 'generic'; I will

adopt his reasoning here.

Most scholars of this field, Kelly writes, have assumed that what the Nicene bishops meant by homoousios is more or less the same as what was meant by later Catholic theology, i.e., that the Persons of the Godhead share the same substance numerically, are one identical substance. This is after all what one would expect of the term. But Kelly feels that those responsible for the inclusion of homoousios in the creed had another concept in mind. The strongest support of his theory is found in the previous use of the word. Origen for one intended by homoousios not this numeric unity, but unity in a generic sense -- a quality common to several members of a class, homogeneity. His analogies make this perfectly clear -- steam and water, light and its brightness, etc. Dionysius of Alexandria seems to have understood it similarly. As for Paul of Samosata, it is likely that the meaning of homoousios that was denied at the Synod of Antioch was numeric; Paul's adoptionism led him to postulate the identity of substance of the parts of the Godhead. (Rob xxxii). Certainly the Sabellians used homoousios numerically. (Pr 210). The interpretation accepted in the East was without doubt generic. It would be rather unusual at this point, and in as official a situation as the devising of a Church-wide creed, to shift the meaning of the key term.

If it is true that homoousios meant for the Nicene fathers a sharing of the same substance among members of a class, then the issue at Nicaea was not the unity of a tripartite Godhead,

but more narrowly the divinity of the Son, a Christological question rather than a Trinitarian one. That this was actually the case Kelly supports with the following evidence. When Arius had previously denied homoousios, his intention was not to deny the Son's substantial unity with the Father but His alleged Divinity. The difficulty was that by granting unity of essence, the singularity of the Father was compromised; on these grounds did substantial unity have to be denied.

Furthermore, if Eusebius and his allies had any suspicion that a numeric unity, that is, a Sabellian unity, was being forced upon them, they would never have let it go quietly by. Many times previously the Arians had accused the orthodox of Sabellian leaning on less evidence than this; they would surely have leaped at the chance to attach such a label to their opponents. And if one may judge by analogy, the usage of homoousios in the following decades was almost exclusively a generic one.

If Kelly's analysis is correct, the Nicene Council had a somewhat more limited intent than is sometimes assumed. The primary concern there was to refute a specific heresy -- to safeguard the Son's divinity and full equality with the Father. The issues of divine unity or unity of substance did not engage them, though perhaps the more far-sighted of those present saw some of the implications for these matters of the formulation which they adopted.

One implication of Arianism which more than likely disturbed Alexander was its strong reliance on classical philosophy rather than on pure faith. Arianism was a systematic and rational

deduction from a few fundamental concepts -- God is one and utterly transcendent. This was in part the appeal of Arianism to the clarity-starved Christian community; at the time it arose there was nothing which came near its definiteness, or its firm basis in Scripture, as well as in logic. But this was in part also its failure -- Arianism was a doctrine with no understanding of the essence of religion (Har 49). It was another philosophy; in attempting to secure truth, it failed to capture belief. The strength of Christianity found in the psychological support given the believer by a personal God of love, Who revealed Himself to His people and Who intervened for their salvation, was lost in an impersonal eternal essence which could not be known in any sense, and whose only manifestation was through no divine being but through a man, who achieved perfect humanity. Origen had been able to unite revealed religion with a theory of the universe, of man, of God, and so on, and to consider the whole range of faith and philosophy (Rob xxv). But Arius in his enthusiasm for perfect rationality forgot that religion of faith had never survived in that environment.

The formula adopted by the Nicene Council was not bound by logic. What was said there was strictly de fide, and its authority depended ultimately on scriptural and not rational authority. The Nicene fathers did not deny reason; rather they were supplied with another means of understanding problems that reason had not been overly successful at solving. Alexander in opposing the scientific theology of Origen had opened the door to the authority of faith, and the Nicene fathers were not

about to see it close.

It becomes increasingly clear as one examines the Nicene Creed that it was a peculiarly inconclusive document. It does little more than state again that God is One and that the Son is God, without explaining how this can occur. The Nicene council was no more successful in reaching a final solution to the issue than Tertullean or Origen had been. Nevertheless the Nicene Creed has great significance as the first instance of authority granted to a theology, beyond the traditional paraphrases of Scriptural truths. In addition, the creed while deciding nothing itself, forced the Church to consider further the issues to which it asserted an unsupported answer. Eastern bishops had no choice but to continue to puzzle over the implications of the single ousia/hypostasis formula, and the meanings of the words expressing it, until they were able to define their understanding of the Godhead -- the triadic Monad -- with assurance.

The Nicene Creed was a document of extreme importance to the bishops who formulated it, for it was an expression of divine Truth, set forth in the most accurate terms they could muster. Not of their own invention, this Truth came from outside of them and was 'revealed' to them by some Other. The bishops believed that the God they worshipped inspired those who sought His guidance, and that through this divine grace they would be led to the right decision. Truth was known only to God, Who revealed it to man. In other doctrinal decisions Truth might be obtained from the Holy Scripture -- the Word of God -- or from inspired interpretations of it; but in all cases God was its ultimate source.

Should one approach religious dogma from a psychological perspective, a different sort of understanding of its origins might be reached. C.G. Jung understood religious dogma not as revealed from some supernatural source, but as arising from man himself, from his collective unconscious. The collective unconscious is a storehouse of latent memory traces inherited from one's ancestral past. The contents of the collective unconscious are not specific memories but primordial forms, spontaneous psychic phenomena. Jung found that all men share the same symbolism in dreams, visions, trances, and so on, and the most commonly recurring of these motifs he called archetypes. They are cross-cultural, and found in primitive and 'civilized'

man alike.

Religious expression, and especially religious symbolism is based in the collective unconscious and these archetypes. "The central figures in all religions are archetypal in character" writes Frieda Fordham in her interpretation of Jungian psychology (27). Religious dogma is the expression of religious experience in terms of archetypal symbolism. As archetype, it is invested with a strongly emotional character -- the irrational and the unconscious, as opposed to scientific theory which is the rational and the conscious.* In these terms then, the Nicene Council was attempting to define more specifically the common understanding of the nature of the Godhead which was revealed

*Jung here opposes two quite common approaches to religion, that of belief and that of logical analysis. He gives dogma a far greater value, as it is an expression of the unconscious and the soul (PsR 56-7). This is quite similar to the opposition that existed between Arius and Alexander, though not stated in these terms. Arius set out his theories rationally and logically, carefully deriving each point from the previous one, and saturating the whole system with an air of irrefutable clarity. One of Alexander's chief objections to Arianism was just this rationality. He preferred to approach his religion in the spirit of faith in the ineffable. Logical analysis destroyed the essence of religion, and for the sake of this essence, he disregarded rationality (see above, p. 31).

This dichotomy has appeared again and again in the history of religion. Schleiermacher, for example, supported the idea that religion and the study of religion are incompatible. He claimed that by studying religion, religion is denatured. His choice of faith and experience was in opposition to the German intellectuals at the end of the eighteenth century who, following the lead of Kant, chose to approach religion in a purely rationalistic way. Schleiermacher characterized this perspective as dogma, and claimed that dogma or knowledge and morals or conduct were not the totality of religion. Piety and the experience of 'integration' were for Schleiermacher the essence of religion.

It is interesting that Schleiermacher described the position of rationality as 'dogma', while Jung used 'dogma' for the opposite side. This difference should perhaps be investigated. Nevertheless, in spite of differing terminology, the positions taken by Jung, Alexander, and Schleiermacher seem to be the same.

to each one of those present from within his collective unconscious.

Jung also explored the Trinity as an archetypal symbol. His first concept was the oneness of the Father, from which he saw that all men begin with a monotheistic view of the supernatural, and an understanding of the world as totally good. As man became more sophisticated in his outlook and began to think more analytically, he perceived his separation from the Father and the imperfection of his world. Cut off from the good, man needed redemption, and to this end the Godhead became two-part, the Father and the Son. In addition to these two, there is also within the collective unconscious an archetype of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit cannot be logically derived from the two previous parts, as the Son can be derived from the Father, but is rather contained in both, or a hypostasized quality of both. It is this third element which "rounds out the Three and restores the One." (DT 135); Without the Holy Spirit the Godhead would remain dual and divided. The Trinity was for Jung a higher form of the archetypal God-concept than mere unity, since it requires a higher level of reflection and consciousness in those who perceive it.

Regardless of the centrality of the Trinity symbolism in Christianity, Jung claims the Quaternity as the most natural and most frequent archetype of God. Jung complains that the orthodox Christian expression omits "the dogmatic aspect of the evil principle" (PsR 73). The quaternary symbolism implies for Jung the identity of God and man, which would be understandably

difficult for the Church. What Jung seems to mean by this is that the fourth element implies the addition of man to the Trinity, and as a part of the Trinity, man becomes part of the One. "It would be considered as blasphemy or as madness to stress Christ's dogmatic humanity to such a degree that man could identify himself with Christ and his homoousia. But this is precisely the inference of the quaternity." (PsR 74). What is this fourth element which threatened the Church?

According to the medieval philosophers of nature, the fourth was the earth or the body, a feminine element as contrasted with the exclusively masculine Trinity. They expressed this element through the Virgin Mary, the Mater Dei, and in this way included in the Godhead both woman and matter or evil. Since Mary ascended into Heaven with her body, she carried into the Trinity the earth, flesh, worldly materiality. With this addition, the Godhead is complete and consistent with the primordial archetype.*

The addition of the fourth principle presents a system of dualities. There is the Father as related to the 'light' Son, and the Father as related to the 'dark' Son; also the relationships between the two Sons, light and dark. These dualities

*This formulation of the Godhead sheds light also on the question of the origin of evil. With evil, or the devil, within the Godhead, he would seem to be on the same level as Christ, that is, he would be God's other Son. Evil could then be attributed to the Father -- another reason for the Church to avoid the quaternary formulation. God was seen to have created the origin of all evil -- the binarius -- on the third day of creation; it was on that day that He did not say 'it was good.' (DT 174).

are seen to be united in the last principle, the Holy Spirit, which is the synthesis of the original One, and brings about the renewed unity of the Godhead.

Jung's understanding of the Trinity and its symbolic value has little bearing on the Nicene Creed. While Jung deals with the Trinity on a global level, across culture and time, in terms of universal imagery, the Nicene bishops confined themselves to a much narrower scope; doubtless they were not even aware of the possibility of a Jung-like perspective. While Jung's theories may be true, they do not seem to assist in understanding the intent of the Nicene bishops.

Erich Fromm presents a psychological interpretation of the Nicene Creed itself. His approach is strongly Freudian, representing his early views, and he comments in the foreword of The Dogma of Christ that there would be a number of changes were he to rewrite the essay. (viii). Nevertheless, it is a good example of how the psychologist might approach a religious text.

Fromm argues that early Christians suffered from a mass Oedipal complex. They hated the State and the government officials -- as father figures -- and in the same way must have hated God the Father. This hatred could not of course be expressed directly, so they "satisfied their wishes in a fantasy" (DC 46). This fantasy was the story of Jesus Christ, the man-hero who became God. Since he was a man, the Christians could identify with him, and share the victory of his having reached the level of the Father, and thus deprived the Father of his

authoritarian position. This attitude is characteristic of the adoptionist view of the Godhead, which Fromm assumes was the prevalent one among early Christians.

But with the Nicene Creed came a new doctrine -- the descent of God to become man rather than the ascent of man to become God. If the Son was from the beginning divine, then there is no victory in His becoming God. For Fromm this indicates the changed composition of the group of believers -- from the revolutionary lower class* to the prominent and ruling classes of the Empire. These people did not share the Oedipal complex of the masses, and had no need to fantasize the elevation of a man to god-status. Fromm explains that with the Nicene council and the adoption of the Creed, the hopes of the lower classes for a revolutionary overthrow of both civil and ecclesiastical authority had essentially ended. Their hopes were impossible; better to submit to this God and receive love from Him. Fromm sees Arianism as one of the final attempts by the early Christian movement, which was defeated with finality by the success of the Alexandrian party.

The primary, and obvious, difference between a Christian interpretation of the Nicene Creed and a psychological one is that the latter treats the Creed from the outside, 'objectively', and analyzes it as one expression of a universal phenomenon, while a believer more likely sees it from the inside as true.

* Fromm does not mention how the advent of a Christian emperor might have changed the attitude toward authority figures on the part of the lower class early Christians.

And here we encounter the same issue once again -- knowledge versus belief. The psychologist remaining strictly within the bounds of scientific inquiry seeks an empirical and rational explanation of religion and religious behavior, free from any contamination by subjective truth. He seeks human needs, motivations, and weaknesses that incline man toward some religious expression, regardless of the specific form this expression takes. The believer cannot logically prove to the psychologist that what he believes is the Truth, but neither can the psychologist find a way to analyze, categorize or label religious experience. Each attempt at confining religion within rationalistic bounds serves only to distort it, according to Schleiermacher's understanding. Is the only valid approach to religion experiential? and if so, can anything be known of religion? Is orthodoxy itself, as an attempt to define the Church's faith, a violation of the faith's essence? If so, religion defies intellectual pursuit; it is this 'mysterium' which is, after all, perhaps the fascination of religion.

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