a man, and as you have sinned as a man so you must repent No archangel can forgive you. God alone can forgive you, and He have those who repent."

Ambrose refused the emperor Communion until he had contain. For a while Theodosius stayed away from church, but in the accepted Ambrose's terms. In front of a crowded congregation his splendid imperial robes and asked pardon for his sins. He had not several occasions until at last, on Christmas Day, Ambrose games sacrament.

It required unusual courage to humiliate a Byzantine emperor, had hit upon the weapon—the threat of excommunication—which western church would soon use again and again to humble prince the center of the Christian empire, in Constantinople, no bidge, stepped so far out of line.

Today, as Bamber Gascoigne points out, "In the Milan church after St. Ambrose, the services are Roman Catholic—recognizably from the form of worship associated with the Byzantine empens, we now know as Greek Orthodox. But orthodox merely means an catholic is a word for universal. We might equally well refer to that Greek Catholic and Roman Orthodox." It was just a case of each side and West, claiming to have the right form of Christianity. In their man attitudes toward the Christian emperors, however, we have a small their diverging destinies.

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OI

SPLITTING IMPORTANT HAIRS

OF ALL the things that Christians say about God, the most distinctive is that God is three persons. Worshipers stand and sing:

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All Thy works shall praise Thy name in earth and sky and sea;
Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty!
God in three persons, blessed Trinity.

No other major religion confesses or worships a three-in-one deity. Muslims and Jews find the doctrine offensive; Unitarians and Jehovah's Witnesses find it deplorable.

Christians themselves are hard pressed to explain what they mean when they sing of the "blessed Trinity." Most are content to treat the doctrine as a piece of sublime mystery.

It wasn't so in the early church. Fourth-century Christians felt a nagging restlessness about the doctrine, like scholars who have a piece of unfinished research. Three in One and One in Three, each identical and yet different? With such mysteries to disagree upon, it wasn't long before everyone was calling somebody else a heretic.

One bishop described Constantinople as seething with discussion: "If in this city you ask anyone for change, he will discuss with you whether God the Son is begotten or unbegotten. If you ask about the quality of bread, you will receive the answer that 'God the Father is greater, God the Son is less.' If you suggest that a bath is desirable, you will be told that 'there was nothing before God the Son was created.'"

This is the age that formulated the doctrine. But what did they mean by Trinity? What is the orthodox Christian understanding of the Triune God?

MAKING SENSE OF MYSTERY

when ure corpers to do that, the church to bring new life into the weary empire. But, to do that, the church to bring new life into the weary empire. But, to do that, the church church to bring new life into the weary empire. But, to do that, the church to bring new life into the weary empire. But, to do that, the church church to bring new life into the weary empire. But, to do that, the church church to bring new life into the weary empire. But, to do that, the church church to bring new life into the weary empire. The belief assumed major importance after Constantine's conversion. When the emperor turned to the Christian faith he counted upon the counted crumbling empire together. itself had to be united. A quarreling, divided Christianity could not bind the

differed from them on points of doctrine be suppressed or banished from lievers who, while Diocletian and Galerius ruled, had been the victims of bitterness Christians were displaying over theological issues. The same be tian subjects agree on what their own beliefs were. their churches by the power of the state. Constantine had no choice but to terrible persecution, were demanding now that their fellow Christians who intervene to stop this constant bickering, or worse, and to make his Chis That is why Constantine was troubled by reports from all quarters of the

is without beginning." capital of Nicomedia, Arius wrote, "The Son has a beginning, but...God created. In explaining his position to Eusebius, the bishop at the empires Being-the first created Being and the greatest, but nevertheless himself deity except in a sort of approximate sense. He was a lesser being or assumed flesh in Jesus Christ (John 1:14) was not the true God and that lenged teachers in Alexandria by asserting that the Word (Logos) who with his bishop, Alexander. Sometime around 318, Arius openly chalwhere Arius, pastor of the influential Baucalis Church, came into conflict half-God, not the eternal and changeless Creator. He was a created Arius, when Christians called Christ God, they did not mean that he was he had an entirely different nature, neither eternal nor omnipotent. To The most troublesome dispute in the East centered in Alexandria

more reasonable to think of Christ as a kind of divine hero: greater than an with the Father. Arius made Christianity easier to understand. It seemed Christian belief that the Word existed from all eternity, and that he is equal heaven and earth. Converts from paganism found it hard to grasp the taught that there is one supreme God, who dwells alone, and then a number of lesser beings, who do God's work and pass back and forth between like the religion of their youth. Gnosticism, for example, as we have seen, Such teaching appealed to many of the former pagans; it was so much

preaching style with a flair for public relations. In the opening stages of the ordinary human being, but of a lower rank than the eternal God. Arius views were all the more popular because he combined an eloquent

> commercial, were soon being sung by the dock-workers, the streetconflict, he put ideas into jingles, which set to simple tunes like a radio THE AGE OF THE CHRISTIAN ROMAN EMPIRE

tual capital. With the backing of his friends, Arius returned to Alexandria, in the East: Nicomedia, the political capital, and Alexandria, the intellecquarrel became a test of strength between the two most important churches teaching and excommunicated the former pastor. Arius turned to his friend, Eusebius, Bishop of Nicomedia, and won his backing. Thus, the theological Alexandria about 320, and the assembled churchmen condemned Arius hawkers, and the school children of the city. Bishop Alexander, however, would have none of it. He called a synod at

and riots erupted in the streets. Constantine recognized that the explosive issue had to be defused. So, in

as once they did. They rode in comfort to the council, all their expenses as they used to do, fearing arrest. They did not painfully walk the long miles of suffering seemed over now. The bishops did not set out for Nicea secretly, secution. Another had lost the use of his hands under torture. But the days show the scars of suffering and prison. One had lost an eye during the peror so bishops had fresh memories of the days of persecution. Many could Minor. What a vivid picture that first imperial synod made! Most of the 300 325, he called for a council to meet at Nicea not far from Nicomedia in Asia

robes, which were no longer the austere purple garment worn by the emperover the early sessions, he appeared as a glittering figure in his imperial first thought that the whole issue was a mere difference in terms. Presiding paid, the guests of the emperor. In the center of the conference hall at Nicea sat Constantine, who had at

proper to an Eastern monarch. ors in Rome but were the jewel-encrusted, multicolored brocades thought

aside, committing the resolution of the conflict into the hands of the church the church, he said, was worse than war. Having made his point, he stepped come to some agreement on the questions that divided them. Division in He spoke briefly to the churchmen, reminding them that they must

TRUE GOD OF TRUE GOD

was called in as defendant, and although he had little support, he was was whether Bishop Alexander's condemnation of Arius would stand. Arius The struggle with Arianism itself was settled quickly. The main question

THE AGE OF THE CHRISTIAN ROMAN EMPIRE

between good and evil. Blasphemy! The assembly denounced it. The Son of Government when he had no existence and he was capable of change and of alternating when he had no existence and he was capable of change and of alternating when he had no existence and he was capable of change and of alternating when he had no existence and he was capable of change and of alternating when he had no existence and he was capable of change and of alternating when he had no existence and he was capable of change and of alternating when he had no existence and he was capable of change and of alternating when he had no existence and he was capable of change and of alternating when he had no existence and he was capable of change and of alternating when he had no existence and he was capable of change and of alternating when he had no existence and he was capable of change and of alternating when he had no existence and he was capable of change and of alternating when he had no existence and he was capable of change and of alternating when he had no existence and he was capable of change and he was capable of change and he was capable of the head of the change and he was capable of change and he was capable of the c The Son of God was a created being, made from nothing; there was a time. courageous enough to state his views in the most uncompromising terms.

own creed—perhaps as evidence of his own questioned orthodoxy. the emperor and a somewhat half-hearted supporter of Arius, put forward his the church historian Eusebius of Caesarea, a personal friend and admirt of In the course of the debate that followed, the most learned bishop present

made, of one substance with the Father." extremely important series of phrases: "True God of true God, begotten not produced another creed, probably from Palestine. Into it they inserted an was needed to exclude the possibility of Arian heresy. For this purpose they Most of the pastors, however, recognized that something more specific

Eastern, Anglican, and some other churches: Creed, which to this day is the standard of orthodoxy in the Roman, to demand that this statement be adopted. Thus, there emerged that Nicene with Constantine, the imperial weight was thrown to that side of the scales After more days of inconclusive debate the impatient emperor intervened Bishop Hosius of Cordova (in today's Spain). Since he had great influence The expression bomo ousion, "one substance," was probably introduced by

and of all things visible and invisible. I believe in one GOD THE FATHER Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth

come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom cended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and he shall buried; and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures; and asman; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the virgin Mary, and was made things were made; who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all of the Father before all worlds. God of God, Light of Light, very God of very And in one LORD JESUS CHRIST, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten

remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. I acknowledge one Baptism for the gether is worshiped and glorified; who spake by the Prophets. And I believe in proceedeth from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son to shall have no end. And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who

Arius himself, were soon afterward sent into exile. Meanwhile, Constantine All but two bishops present signed the creed; and these two, along with its himself

> bishops of the church sitting together, celebrating the coming happy days event defied the Christian imagination. The head of the empire and the was joyful, thinking the issue settled. He held a great banquet. Such an

of the Church of Christ? "No bishop was absent from the table of the emperor," Eusebius of the

others rested on cushions on both sides of him. Easily one could imagine palace. At dinner some of them lay on the same couch as the emperor, while this to be the kingdom of Christ or regard it as a dream rather than reality." the men of God could walk fearlessly and enter the deepest parts of the sharp swords drawn, around the outer court of the palace, but among them Caesarea wrote enthusiastically. "Bodyguards and soldiers stood guard, with

kissed the bishop's eyeless cheek. As a sign of friendship between the empire and the church, Constantine Emperor Diocletian, was singled out for special honor by the new emperor. Bishop Paphnutius, from Egypt, who had lost one eye under the

often bringing them back again when some new group of ecclesiastical advisers got the upper hand in the palace. imperial power was forever ordering bishops into banishment and almost as court was overrun by spokesmen for some Christian party. As a result, the church offices too often depended on control of the emperor's favor. The in again and again to banish this churchman or exile that one. Control of After Nicea, however, first Constantine and then his successors stepped

against the whole empire. defiance, Athanasius Against the World. He would stand alone, if need be deserted by all his supporters. During one such hour he uttered his famous At times Athanasius was so completely out of imperial favor that he felt in the makeup of the palace ecclesiastical clique that had the emperor's ear. and return to Alexandria representing either a change in emperors or a shift decades, Athanasius was banished no less than five times, each banishment could predict who would win in the struggle with Arianism. During these bishop of the great see of Alexandria. For the next 50 years, however, no one nent, Arius. Soon after that, at the age of 33, he succeeded Alexander as Alexander, he had won a resounding victory at Nicea over his elderly oppoactual control of the church than that of Athanasius. As a young advisor to No career better illustrates the way in which imperial power took over

ot bomoios, meaning "similar," to describe the Word's relation to the Father. new interpretation to the "one substance" statement. They defended the use Semi-Arians, broke away from the strict Arians and attempted to give a long after the Council of Nicea a moderate group, sometimes called the These 50 years continued the heated debate over the Arian question. Not

other over a diphthong. Well, so it was—a diphthong. But that diphthong carried an immense meaning. Empire, passed on a sneer that, in this struggle, Christians fought each Father. Edward Gibbon, in his memorable history of the fall of the Roman homoiousios because they held that the Word was a being "like" God the nature as the account of the other party, the Semi-Arians, argued for not have fully saved us. The other party, the Semi-Arians, argued for not have fully saved us. The other party, the Semi-Arians, argued for not have fully saved us. nature as the Father. If Christ had not been fully God, they said, he could nature as the Father. The other party, the Semi-Arians Thus, two parties believed that the Word (Christ) was of the same homoousios because they believed that the Word (Christ) was of the same homoousios because they believed that the Word (Christ) was of the same homoousios because they believed that the Word (Christ) was of the same homoousios because they believed that the Word (Christ) was of the same homoousios because they believed that the Word (Christ) was of the same homoousios because they believed that the Word (Christ) was of the same homoousios because they believed that the Word (Christ) was of the same homoousios because they believed that the Word (Christ) was of the same homoousios because they believed that the Word (Christ) was of the same homoousios because they believed that the word (Christ) was of the same homoousios because they believed that the word (Christ) was of the same homoousios because they have the same homoousion that the word (Christ) was of the same homoousion that the word (Christ) was of the same homoousion that the word (Christ) was of the same homoousion that the word (Christ) was of the same homoousion that the word (Christ) was of the same homoousion that the word (Christ) was of the same homoousion that the word (Christ) was of the same homoousion that the word (Christ) was of the same homoousion that the word (Christ) was of the same homoousion that the word (Christ) was of the same homoousion that the word (Christ) was of the same homoousion that the word (Christ) was of the word Thus, two parties arose. The one led by Athanasius insisted upon using the word (Christ) was of that the Word (Christ) was of the word (Christ) was of the word that the word (Christ) was of the word (Christ) w

message, missed the signal for the comma. The woman received a message which read, "No price too high." She bought the bracelet; the husband sued the company and won. cabled back, "No, price too high." The cable operator in transmitting the Price seventy-five thousand dollars. May I buy it?" The husband promptly ing in Europe, who cabled her husband: "Have found wonderful bracelet In one of his books, William Hordern tells a story about a woman tour

essence of the doctrine of the Trinity. of the Christian faith. At stake was the full deity of Jesus Christ and the Although only an iota (in English the letter "i") divided the parties after weighed by the size of the punctuation or the number of letters used Nicea, the issues involved represented two sharply different interpretations The anecdote reminds us that the importance of a message cannot be

does one speak of three in one without spouting nonsense? pagan religions. In the Arian struggle accuracy was everything. But how removed from man. The result would have been a Christianity like a host of man. It would have meant that God himself was unapproachable and totally tian faith would have had two gods and a Jesus who was neither God nor meant that Christianity had degenerated to a form of paganism. The Christheir point of view would have become orthodox Christianity. It would have If the Semi-Arians had succeeded in getting their iota into the creed

A THREE-IN-ONE PERSON

circumstances might be useful as illustrations of the Trinity. But they miss of ice, liquid, and steam. These are all fascinating ideas, and under certain shell of an egg; the root, tree, and fruit of a plant; or water in its three forms sionally appeal to patterns of threeness in the world: the yoke, white, and In attempting to explain the doctrine of the Trinity, Christians today occa-

> House in history, entering our world as a Jewish carpenter named Jesus, dying and in history, entering our world as he arted in history. completely the personal element in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. nsing again to save. It is God as he acted in history at Pentecost, descending God as he acted in history, revealing himself to Israel. It is God as he acted In true foundation upon which the doctrine rests is God himself. It is

as the Spirit to share life with the Christian church. we to understand this? Since God is personal, any example we use to think But if God is eternally one; and God is eternally three persons, how are

options. We may think of God as three persons or we may think of God as or speak of God ought to be personal. When we search for personal analogies, we find that there are only two

may be bound together so closely that it is actually a distortion to speak of the threeness of God. Its problem is to account clearly for God's unity. theologians call it the social analogy. Its strength lies in its clarity regarding persons can become so close they may be said to share a common life. They have to account for God's unity. Theologians usually point out that three them separately. Because this analogy rests on a society of three persons, If we think of God as three persons, then God's threeness is clear, and we

distinct functions such as mind, emotions, and will. threeness. One way of doing this is to say that a person may have several If we think of God as one person, we have to try to account for his

is one person. Its problem is its vagueness about God's threeness. ithe psychological analogy. Its strength is its clarity about God's unity: He Because this analogy draws on psychological functions, theologians call

theologians like Leonard Hodgson and Karl Barth use them. Both of these analogies were used in the early church, just as modern

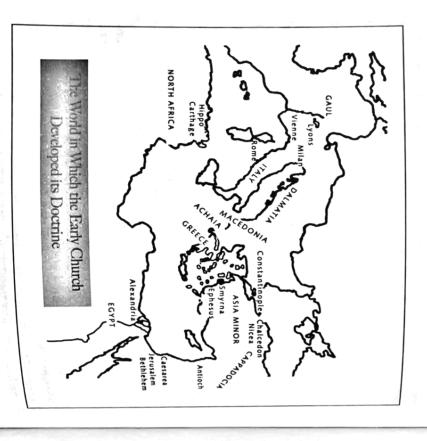
ment. The Cappadocians used the social analogy, but they saw that the council of the church met, leaders in the Arian debate slowly clarified their three carriers: one Godhead in three "persons." dwine relations. There are not three gods. God is one divine Being with distinctions between the three divine "persons" were solely in their inner use of "person." Three so-called Cappadocian Fathers—Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Basil the Great-led in this achieve-As the decades passed between 325 and 381, when the second general

But the Latin word persona originally meant a mask worn by an actor on the stage. In Trinitarian thought the "mask" is not worn by God to hide but to it means today. To us, a person means someone like Tom, Dick, or Harry. The word "person," however, did not mean to the early Christians what

reveal his true character. It is clear that when we think of the Trinity, we should not try to think of three persons in our sense of the term, but three personal disclosures of God that correspond to what he is really like.

A bit later Augustine Bishon of Hinno near Carthage.

A bit later Augustine, Bishop of Hippo near Carthage, used the psychological analogy. He believed that if man is created in the image of God, he is created in the image of the Trinity. His analogy for the Trinity, then, was from the human mind. God, said Augustine, is like the memory, intelligence, and will in the mind of a man. In short, we do not have to think of three persons when we think of God; we may think of one person. Of course, Augustine made it clear that this was only an analogy; he was far too



profound a thinker to suppose that God was a glorified man sitting in heaven. But if we speak about the mystery that is God, we must speak in analogies, and the analogy for the Trinity is not three men but one.

As it turned out, then, Athanasius was not all alone against the world. He lived to see the triumph of the cause he championed. When he died at the age of seventy-five, his death was peaceful. He had been at last secure in his office as bishop of Alexandria in the closing years, and—what mattered more to him—he could rest assured that the creed he had fought for at Nicea and ever afterward was the creed of the church. "God in three persons, blessed Trinity."

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