



■ On the Occasion of the Commemoration of St. Gregory the Theologian (25 January)

How a Simple Priest Saved “Consubstantiality”*

WE ALL surely know about the heresy of Arius (†336), which was condemned by the First Ecumenical Synod in Nicea, in 325.

Arius taught, concerning the Holy Trinity, that the Son was not consubstantial with the Father, but rather His first and perfect creation.

The synodal condemnation of Arius did not put an end to the dissemination of his heresy. Two factors contributed to this. The first was that the successors of Constantine the Great (306-337) directly or indirectly supported Arianism, up until the time that Theodosius the Great (373-395) ascended the imperial throne. The second factor was that there existed Arianizing theologians who, with the aid and support of like-minded emperors, continued to occupy high ecclesiastical positions.

Amongst those Arianizers, there were also theologians of great learning and equal powers of reasoning, such as Eusebius. The last Arian Emperor, Valens (364-378), together with the Arian Archbishop Eudoxius of Constantinople (360-370), made Eusebius Bishop of Kyzikos. Their objective was for Eusebius, using his natural talents, to influence and lure the entire Orthodox Episcopacy into Arianism. At first, the new Bishop did, indeed, make a striking impression on the people with the power of his oratory. When, however, he began to promote his Arian beliefs, the people reacted, because they understood in a timely manner that he was an Arian. In the end,



they expelled him from their city. Eynomios departed and settled on property that he owned in Chalcedon near Constantinople. There, he continued to teach his views in his sermons.

His renown as a preacher was so great that many from Constantinople and the nearby regions went to his estate to hear him. Not all of the people who went to Eynomios were followers of his heresy, but evidently they were moved by curiosity to hear his words. In any event, Eynomios' activities and fame caused the Orthodox anxiety and fear.

In the meantime, the Orthodox Emperor Theodosios the Great (379-395) had ascended the imperial throne. Eynomios' fame reached all the way to the new Emperor, who expressed his intention to meet him. He would have brought about this meeting had he not been impeded by his wife, Placilla, who was a "guardian of the doctrine of the Synod in Nicea." Her fear was that perhaps, as the Emperor conversed with Eynomios, her "husband be beguiled" into changing his Faith.

In the end, the Emperor remained loyal to the Orthodox Faith, also because of an unexpected incident.

At that time, there were in Constantinople many Bishops of various dogmatic inclinations who had gathered for the purpose of convoking a new Synod, which was realized in 381. This Synod was subsequently called the Second Ecumenical Synod.

One day, the Bishops who had gathered in Constantinople presented themselves at the imperial palace to greet the Emperor, as was the custom. Among them was a Priest from some insignificant city who was simple and inexperienced in the ways of society, but, at the same time, "wise in the things of God." According to protocol, all of the Bishops greeted the Emperor, as well as his small son sitting next to him, with great respect. When it came the turn of the Priest, he also greeted the Emperor, but did not show the same honor to his son. He greeted him as one does a child, saying "hello" and simply waving to him with his fingers. The Priest's behavior incensed the Emperor, who thought that it was out of disdain for his son that the same honor was not accorded to him as to his father.

The infuriated Emperor immediately ordered the Priest to be seized and thrown out of the palace. As the guards were thrusting him out, he turned around and said to the Emperor: "Understand, O Emperor,

that in the same manner is the Heavenly Father indignant with the Anomeans [the heretical faction to which Eynomios belonged—Ed.] who do not honor His Son as they do Him, but consider the Son to be beneath Him.” The Emperor was pleased with this explanation. He had the Priest come back, asked his forgiveness, and told him that he agreed with all that he had said.

*Thus, by this simple event, the Emperor was more fully assured of the truth of the Orthodox, with whom alone he would from now on be in accord. Indeed, he forbade such discussions to be held in the marketplace and decreed fitting punishments in the event that his injunctions should be disregarded.***

* Source: Elias Boulgarakis, *Καθημερινὲς Ἰστορίες Ἅγιων καὶ ἀμαρτωλῶν στὸ Βυζάντιο* [Everyday Stories of Saints and Sinners in Byzantium] (Athens: “Maistros,” 2002), 2nd ed., pp. 24-27.

** See Sozomen, *Church History*, Book VII, ch. 6, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. LXVII, cols. 1428B-1429A.