The Arian Controversy

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THE NICENE CREED

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 of the Father, only-begotten, that is, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made, both those in heaven and those on earth: who for us men and for our salvation came down and was made flesh, and entered humanity and suffered, and rose the third day, ascended into heaven, is coming to judge the living and the dead:

And in the Holy Spirit.

But as for those who say that there was a time when He was not, and that before He was begotten He was not, and that He came into being from things that were not, or who affirm that the Son of God is of a different subsistence or essence, or created, subject to change or alteration, them the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes.

INTRODUCTION

The history of the Arian Controversy is really the climax of Ancient Church History both from historical and doctrinal points of view. The Pelagian controversy is probably equally important, but it represents in the final outcome a backward step doctrinally rather than an advance, and has nowhere near the ecumenical prominence of the history of Arianism. Also, the history of the Pelagian controversy takes one into what is really Medieval Church History.

The Arian controversy began about A.D. 318 and lasted till 381, the date of the Second Ecumenical Council at Constantinople. From a doctrinal view point we
find in this period the first official formulation of the truth of Scripture. The
down of the divinity of Jesus Christ was officially established and expressed at
the Council of Nicea in A.D. 323. This formulation and its sub. sequent
vindication represent a mighty advance in the history of the development of the
Christian truth.

The truth which was expressed at Nicea was the basis of all subsequent
developments in Christology. But this doctrine of the divinity of the Son of God is
also the foundation of the whole Christian faith. It was the substance of
Christianity which was the issue at Nicea in 325. Faith in a God Who sovereignly
saves His people by Himself making an atonement for their sins in the Person of
His own Son is the heart of the Christian religion. Take away the truth of a divine
Son of God from the Christian faith and you have nothing left.

Historically this period also marks several firsts. In this period we see, for the first
time, the Church officially recognized by the civil government. In all her previous
history the Church had been denied official status: usually she was suppressed
and persecuted. Now not only is the Church officially recognized, but Christianity
becomes the favored religion of the Empire. As a direct result of this, we also find
in this period the first instance of civil interference in the affairs of the Church.
Having given the Church a favored place, the Emperors supposed that they had
the right and obligation to guide ecclesiastical affairs and when necessary to
“help” in ending controversy and enforcing Church policies and doctrines.

The result for the Church was not always good:

What gave Arianism a vitality as well as a prominence and
importance that it never would have acquired by itself was the
accident of its civil and political power and influence. . . . It was not
Arius and his associates but Constantine and his successors that
lifted the Arian discussion into a world-wide and historical
significance that attaches to no other heresy.¹

Such prominence meant many years of chaos in the Church and much suffering
for the defenders of the truth.

Another first in this history is the Council of Nicea, the first Ecumenical Council.
All other Synods and Councils before it had been local in character. As the
Council, so also its creed is ecumenical, even today. The Creed of Nicea (with its
subsequent revisions by the Council of Constantinople) is the only creed which is
accepted by all of Christendom, Eastern and Western, Roman and Protestant.
This is not in itself important but it illustrates the importance of this history.

¹ William Du Bos, The Ecumenical Councils (Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1897), p.
105.
The history of Arianism is the history of the Roman Empire as well as the history of the Church. From layman to Pope and from lowliest slave to Emperor, all had at least an intellectual interest in the controversy. Gregory of Nyssa describes the situation very graphically:

Men of yesterday and the day before, mere mechanics, off-hand dogmatists in theology, servants, too, and slaves that have been flogged, runaways from servile work, are solemn with us, and philosophize about things incomprehensible. Ask about pence, and the tradesman will discuss the generate and ingenerate; inquire the price of bread, and he will say, "Greater is the Father, and the Son is subject"; say that a bath would suit you, and he defines, "the Son is out of nothing."2

Again, the interest shows the importance of the issue.

There have been other heresies in the church but none so prominent as Arianism. There have been other Church councils, but none so important and illustrious as Nicea.3 It is well worth our while, then, to take a close look at this history. The heresy of Arianism is still alive today and from the history of Nicea we may well learn the answer of the Church to those who deny that Jesus Christ is very God.

THE ISSUE

The issue in the Arian controversy was the divinity of Jesus Christ. The problem, however, was theological rather than Christological. The divinity of Christ as that concerns the value and significance of His person and work was not at stake, but rather the divinity of Christ as that concerns the nature of God. It is true, of course, that the two cannot be separated. In fact, the Arian controversy led into the Christological controversies because, as Athanasius clearly saw, Arianism did concern the whole work of Christ and our salvation. Nevertheless, the issue as such was trinitarian and theological.

The problem was this: the Church had always confessed belief in God the Father and in His Son, Jesus Christ. She believed that God was divine and that Jesus was divine. Baptism was administered in the name of the Father and of the Son, and in the Apostolic Creed the Church confessed, "We believe in God the Father, Almighty . . . and in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord. But on the other hand she maintained a strict monotheism over against all pagan and

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2 Quoted in: A.E. Burn, An Introduction to the Creeds and to the Te Deum (London, Methuen, 1899), p. 75.
heretical polytheism. The problem, then, was to confess both, without denying either. The Apostolic Creed proved to be inadequate, for its language (which is also the language of Scripture) was, at least for the Arians, open to misinterpretation. The Arians simply denied that "only begotten Son" meant that Jesus was God in the absolute sense.

THE PROBLEM OF TERMINOLOGY

What the Church had to do, then, was find a terminology which would adequately express the truth of Scripture and at the same time leave no room for Arian "misinterpretation." The Church at this time did not possess the terminology to explain a Trinity of Persons in a unity of essence, and so could not at first express herself positively. The Church understood from the very beginning, and correctly so, that "only begotten" meant that from eternity Christ was the natural Son of God, but to express this in clear and unequivocal language which did not conflict with the truth that God is one was the work of almost fifty years.

There was especially one word which filled all these requirements. That was the word homousios ("of the same substance"). This word clearly expressed the equality of the Father and the Son, left no room for Arianism, and allowed for the personal distinction of Father and Son. This was the word proposed and adopted by the Council of Nicea for those reasons. The trouble was that many opposed the use of this word — many even who were really opposed to Arianism. The objections were two. In the first place, the word was not Scriptural. In the second place, the word was suspected of having Sabellian overtones. Paul of Samosata had used it to deny any personal distinction in the Trinity, and he had been condemned for his error.

Compounding this confusion was the fact that in the fourth anathema, the Creed of Nicea used the word homousios synonymously with the word hypostasis. This was foreign to the thought of some who used the second word to mean "person." To speak, therefore, of one hypostasis also sounded like Sabellianism: the men from Alexandria spoke of three hypostases or "persons."

Finally, matters were complicated by the fact that the word ousios was itself ambiguous. The word could be used to indicate sameness of essence in numerical separation. It could be said, for example, that two men are homousios just because they are both men. In the Nicene Creed, however, the word was used to indicate identity of essence. Altogether, these facts led to much unnecessary fighting. But until these matters were cleared up, the controversy was not settled: when the distinction between the words was finally made clear, then the controversy was over too.

THE ROOTS OF THE CONTROVERSY
In order fully to understand this controversy, we must go back to its roots which lie in the previous period. There are two things especially which made this controversy almost inevitable. The are (a) the contradictory Christology of Origen and (b) the Monarchian tendencies of the School of Antioch.

THE CHRISTOLOGY OF ORIGEN

Throughout the Eastern Church and even in the West, Origen was regarded as the greatest theologian that the Church had produced. He was generally thought to be orthodox at all points. That he was a great theologian is true; that he was always orthodox in his views is not. His Christology is a case in point.

Origen did much work in Christology and from one point of view his work represents a tremendous advance in the history of the Christian Faith. Origen was the first to speak of the eternal generation of the Son. In connection with the divinity of Christ he recognized and pointed out the fact that the words “only begotten Son” could only mean that Jesus Christ was eternally the Son of God. If He was begotten in time He would be no different from any other creature, and then He could not be called “only begotten.”

On the other hand, however, Origen also taught that the Son is not God in the same sense as the Father. The Father is “the God” (ò theós), while the Son is only “God” (theós). The Son, he said, is “of a different essence” (heteros tās oûsias or tou hupokeiménou), “begotten out of the will of the Father.” He called the Son “a secondary God” (deúteros theós) in distinction from the Father (autotheós), and thus he made the Son subordinate to the Father. In his Commentary on John, II, 6 he says:

Thus, if all things were made, as in this passage also (John 13, RH), through the Logos, then they were not made by the Logos, but by a stronger and greater than He. And who else could this be but the Father?

We consider, therefore, that there are three hypostases, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; and at the same time we believe nothing to be uncreated but the Father. We therefore, as the more pious and the truer course, admit that all things were made by the Logos, and that the Holy Spirit is the most excellent and the first in order of all that was made by the Father through Christ.⁴

And in this connection he also speaks of the fact that the Son is begotten as an act of the Father’s will.

Now these two cannot be reconciled. If the Son is begotten in eternity then He cannot be begotten out of the will of the Father. If He is begotten of the Father’s will then He is a creature and not the natural Son of God. If He is eternal, then He must be equal and not subordinate to the Father, for only God is eternal. If He is God, but of a different essence than the Father, then there are two Gods. But Origen did not see these contradictions, although that was in part because the distinction of essence and person had not yet been made clear.

Both sides appealed to Origen’s teachings in the Arian controversy. Some held only the one side of his system and concluded that the Son was indeed not equal to God. They went a step further however and said that the Son was a creature, or at best a sort of demi-God. The orthodox in the controversy laid hold on the doctrine of eternal generation, and, abandoning the rest of Origen’s system, logically concluded that the Son was equal to the Father in all things — that He was “of the same essence” as the Father.

This, theologically, is the root of the Arian Controversy.

**ANTIOCHENE MONARCHIANISM**

Historically, Arianism arose out of the Catechetical School of Antioch and thus out of Sabellian Monarchianism. This School was one of two very important theological schools of the ancient Church in the East the other was at Alexandria. Between these two schools there was a bitter rivalry, for the school at Antioch was extremely Monarchian in its teachings, that is, it tended to maintain the unity of the Godhead at the expense of any personal distinctions.

It was out of this school that the Monarchian heresy arose in both of its forms (dynamic Monarchianism and Sabellianism). In fact, both the Bishop of Antioch, Paul of Samosata, and the head of the School, Lucian the Martyr, had been deposed around the year 270 for their teaching that Jesus, a man, was the adopted Son of God by virtue of the power of God in Him. Their views however only represented the thought current in Antioch at that time. Their teaching was carried on in the form of Sabellianism which taught that the “persons” of the Trinity were only different ways in which the One God revealed Himself.

Arianism was decidedly Monarchian in its tendencies but differed from Sabellianism:

The motive of both is Monarchian, but while Sabellianism defends the unity of the divine principle by denying any real distinction in it and makes Father, Son, and Holy Ghost one in person as well as nature, Arianism attains the same end by widening the distinction of
persons unto one of nature and so attributes real divinity and
original causation only to the Father.\(^5\)

Both Arius and Eusebius of Nicomedia, the leaders of the Arian party, were
students of Lucian and carried over his one-sided emphasis on the unity of the
Godhead.

Opposed to the whole School of Antioch and its thinking was the School of
Alexandria. There the personal distinctions in the Trinity were strictly maintained.
The Orthodox party in the Arian controversy arose out of this school. Alexander
and Athanasius (successively the bishops of Alexandria) maintained the eternal
generation of the Son. But together they carried that doctrine through to its
logical conclusion, namely, \textit{homoousion} theology.

\section*{THE THREE PARTIES}

At Nicea and subsequent to it there were three parties in the Church. On the one
side there were the Arians (also called Eusebians or Anomoeans) and the Semi-
Arians or Homoeans. On the other side was the Orthodox party. Each had a
different view of the relation between the Father and the Son.

\section*{THE ARIANS}

The Strict Arians were always a very small party. At the Council of Nicea they
numbered only about 18 persons, a very small minority. But by political intrigue
and deception they gained an unusual, though temporary success. This success
was due in large measure to imperial interference and was accomplished by
alliance with the Semi-Arians. The best Emperors vacillated in their support of
the Orthodox, and two, Constantius and Valens, were fanatically Arian

Arius and Eusebius of Nicomedia were the original leaders of the Arian party.
When they died the leadership of the party passed into the hands of such men as
Aetius of Antioch, Eunomius of Cappadocia, and Acacius of Caesarea in the East
and Valens of Rome in the West.

There were several divisions in the Arian party from the very start. There were of
course, the Semi-Arians, who used the term \textit{homoiousios}, but they were really a
separate party. There were also three groups in the Arian party itself The political
Arians cared little for the doctrine involved in the controversy and were willing to
unite with the Semi-Arians if that was to their political advantage. The other two
groups, who were seldom in agreement, differed in emphasis rather than
essentials. The Anomoeans (Aetians and Eunomians) stood in opposition to the

\(^5\) Du Bose, p. 91.
Nicene doctrine of *homoousios* as well as the Semi-Arian *homoiousios*. They spoke of the Son as being *heteroousios* (of a different substance) and *anomoios* (unlike) the Father. There were also those who disdained all use of the term *ousion*, but opposed the doctrine of eternal generation. They spoke of the Son as a creature. Alexander calls them “*oï an hôte oûk ân*” (the ones who said that “there was a time when the Son was not”). Arius really belonged to this latter group.

**ARIUS**

Arius is a strange figure. He was “an able preacher and a man of learning, ability, and piety.”⁶ Among the people he was very influential. The other side of his character is not so nice, however. Schaaf calls him “proud, artful, restless and disputatious.”⁷ As a thinker he was not very deep. But, worst of all, he was not even reverent. He translated his theories into verses “which were sung to the tunes of licentious and comic songs.”⁸ As Burn says, “A tree is known by its fruits.”⁹

He was also very devious. Athanasius several times complains of the fact that he was always changing what he said. In order that he might return from exile after Nicea, he drew up a creed, ostensibly to show conformity with Nicea, but which carefully avoids all the issues in question.¹⁰ Presenting it to the Emperor, he was restored to communion in order that he might continue his intrigues.

When he first began to propound his heresy he was the priest of Bauclis, a suburb of Alexandria. Earlier, as a deacon, he had been on the wrong side in the Meletian schism and had been excommunicated. He had been reconciled to Alexander’s predecessor, Achillas, and had been appointed presbyter of Bauclis and teacher of exegesis at one of the schools of Alexandria as a token of good faith. It was not long before he was again embroiled in controversy. He died in 336.

**EUSEBIUS OF NICOMEDIA**

Eusebius is an even more distasteful character than Arius. He was a man of few scruples, interested only in his own advancement. He was originally Bishop of Beryius, but he used his political influence (he was high in the favor of

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⁷ Schaff, p. 620.
⁸ Burn, p. 75 cf. Appendix VIII for fragments of the “Thalia.”
⁹ Burn. p. 75.
¹⁰ Cf. Appendix I; “Creed of Arius.”
Constantina, the sister of Constantine) to gain first the Bishopric of Nicomedia, the city of the Imperial Court, and later that of Constantinople for himself. He used his influence from these positions to further the cause of Arius and undermine Nicene Orthodoxy. Always the courtier, never interested in the welfare of the Church, he was the real political leader of the Arian party.

**ARIANISM**

Because both Arius and Eusebius were disciples of Lucian, the keystone of their system was:

. . . the conviction of the absolute transcendence and perfection of the Godhead. God (and it was God the Father whom he had in mind) was absolutely One: there could be no other God in the proper sense of the word. . . . This God was ungendered, uncreated, from everlasting to everlasting: Himself the source and origin of whatever else existed. The being . . . of the unique God was absolutely incommunicable. ⑪

From this it follows necessarily that the Son was subordinate to the Father, and this was Arius' heresy.

Arius taught that the name “Son” implies an act of procreation. Therefore, he said, before such an act there was not a Son, neither could God properly be called “Father”: “once God was alone, and not yet a Father, but afterwards He became a Father.” ⑫ The Son, therefore, is not co-eternal, but begotten of the will of the Father, begotten out of nothing, begotten before time. He is a creature, “created and made.” The Father is the only one without a beginning and “there was a time when the Son was not.”

Arius taught, however, a certain superiority of the Son to the rest of Creation. He was the firstborn of all creatures (the first to be created, cf. Heb. 1:6), and the agent of the Father in the work of creating the world:

God, willing to create originate nature, when he saw that it could not endure the untempered hand of the Father, and to be created by him, makes and creates first and alone one only, and calls Him

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Son and Word, that through Him as medium, all things might thereupon be brought to be.\textsuperscript{13}

The Son was as like God as it was possible to be, the highest of all creatures, the architect of the universe, but not equal to God: “One equal to the Son, the Superior is able to beget; but one more excellent, or superior, or greater, He is not able.”\textsuperscript{14}

There are several corollaries which attach to such a doctrine and Arius did not hesitate to lay hold on them. The first is that the Son, because He is finite and the Father infinite, can have no real knowledge of the Father:

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\ldots \text{even to the Son the Father is invisible,} \quad \text{and, “the Word cannot perfectly and exactly either see or know His Father”; but even what He knows and what He sees, He knows and sees “in proportion to His own measure,” as we also know according to our own power.}\textsuperscript{15}
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The second corollary is that the Son is liable to change and sin, though Arius also said that the Son never sinned by virtue of the strength of His will: “And by nature, as all others, so the Word Himself is alterable, and remains good by His own free will, while He chooseth.”\textsuperscript{16}

Finally, this doctrine of subordination affected Arius’ view of the incarnation. He taught that this created Son of God, that is, the Logos, took the place of the human reasoning spirit in the man Jesus — a sort of hybrid of Sabellianism which was later called Apollinarianism.

\section*{THE ORTHODOX}

The orthodox party was even smaller than the Arian. At times during the controversy, there were only three or four men who were professedly orthodox. One of these was always Athanasius and often it was literally true of him that he stood \textit{contra munda}. He and Alexander before him were the strength and hope of orthodoxy.

\section*{ALEXANDER}

Alexander was Bishop of Alexandria and the leaden of the African church when Arius first began to expound his heretical opinions. He was the first opponent of

\textsuperscript{13} Athanasius, \textit{Orations}, II, ii, 24.
\textsuperscript{14} Athanasius, \textit{De Synodis} ii, 24.
\textsuperscript{15} Athanasius, \textit{Orations}, I, ii, 6.
\textsuperscript{16} Athanasius, \textit{Orations}, I, ii, 5.
Arianism. It was he and not Athanasius who was the official representative of the Alexandrian Church at the Council of Nicea. It was also he who called the Council of Alexandria in 323 which deposed Arius. At that time he was already an aged man and he died soon after Nicea. He was sound in his beliefs and held to the doctrine of eternal generation.

ATHANASIUS

Athanasius succeeded Alexander as head of the Alexandrian Church. He became the great champion of the Orthodox cause. In fact, the history of the Orthodox party in the controversy is really no more than a history of Athanasius. He gave his life and energy to a defense of the Nicene Faith. Schaff says:

> It was the passion and life-work of Athanasius to vindicate the deity of Christ, which he rightly regarded as the cornerstone of the edifice of the Christian Faith, and without which he could conceive no redemption. For this truth he spent all his time and strength; for this he suffered deposition and twenty years of exile; for this he would at any moment have been glad to pour out his blood. For his vindication of this truth he was much hated, much loved, always respected or feared.\(^{17}\)

It was largely on account of his efforts that the Orthodox party finally prevailed.

His role at the Council of Nicea is not completely clear. Nominally, he was the private secretary and trusted advisor of Alexander, but what influence he had there is the subject of much discussion. Some regard him as "the controlling spirit and genius of its proceedings."\(^{18}\) That is probably an exaggeration, though he himself says that he "spoke boldly against the impiety of the Arian madmen."

Whatever his role at the Council may have been, his place in the subsequent controversy is very clear, inflexibly opposed to Arianism, he was both leader and champion of the orthodox party. His enemies, as a result, were many. Five times he was sent or forced into exile — twenty of the forty-five years of his official life were spent in exile. Never did he waver in his convictions.

Always the target of malicious charges, lies, and slander, he never returned as he received. In all the controversy he showed himself to be a man of God. Du Bose says of him: "It is an immortal honor to Athanasius that he showed the temper and spirit of Christ in dealing with men who had so bitterly opposed

\(^{17}\) Schaff, p. 890.  
\(^{18}\) Du Bose, p. 125.
him.”¹⁹ Even when victory was in sight, he continued to show a wise and godly moderation and patience.

His appeal is always Scriptural. Of his four great Orations Against the Arians, about eighty percent is exegetical explanation of various Scripture texts and this is characteristic of his writings.

It has been suggested by some “that he left the people out of account, that his appeal is always to the theologians and the professionally religious.”²⁰ This is decidedly not the case. Never did he see the controversy as a dogmatic matter among theologians. Always he appeals to the people’s own faith and hope. Again and again he sets forth as his conviction that if Jesus was not true God then He cannot be the Saviour.

He was truly a great man. Even Gibbon lays aside, as has been said, “his solemn sneer” to do honor to the memory of this champion of the faith, who never lost heart, but could make of failure “a triumph’s evidence for the fulness of days.”²¹

HOSIUS OF CORDOVA

Hosius, or Osius, was Bishop of Cordova in Spain. He lived to be over a hundred and was for half that time “the most influential bishop in Christendom.”²² He was the court bishop of Constantine as well as his official envoy. It was he whom Constantine sent to Alexandria at the beginning of the controversy with an official rebuke of Arius. He also advised and represented Constantine at Nicea.

Again, due to lack of official records we do not know much about what he did at that Council. He seems to have had much influence. Athanasius says that the Creed of Nicea was in large measure composed by him. Most historians agree that it was probably at Hosius’ behest that Constantine proposed the insertion of the word *homoousios* into the Creed. Whether or not that is true we know that he regarded the word as a bulwark against Arianism.

Athanasius invariably refers to him as “the Great,” and says of him:

> Of the great Hosius, who answers to his name, that confessor of a happy old age . . . is of all men the most illustrious and more than this. When was there a Council held in which he did not take the lead, and by right counsel convince every one? Where is there a Church that does not possess some glorious monuments of his

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¹⁹ Du Bose, p. xxxv (preface).
²⁰ Burn, p.97.
²¹ Harnack; quoted by Burn, p. 97.
patronage? Who has ever come to him in sorrow, and has not gone away rejoicing?  

To the day of his death he supported Athanasius. He was one of the three or four banished by the Council of Milan (346), the only ones in the whole empire who would not subscribe to Arianism and a condemnation of Athanasius.

THE THREE CAPPADOCIANS

When Athanasius died (373) the leadership of his party passed into the hands of three very capable men. Although they arose out of the ranks of the Semi-Arians, they were the ones who finally vindicated orthodoxy and implemented the final union of Orthodox and Semi-Arians. They also further developed the doctrines of Nicea in combating Macedonianism and Apollinarianism. These three are Basil of Caesarea in Cappadocia, his brother of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa. They all saw that the question of Christ’s divinity involved His efficacy as a Savior, and thus, eventually they too came to defend Nicene faith.

HILARY OF POTIERS

Mention should also be made here of Hilary of Potiers. Burn calls him “the great western ally” of Athanasius. He did much to clarify the terms which had resulted in so much confusion at Nicea. It was his work in this area that finally made the union of Orthodox and Semi-Arians possible.

THE ORTHODOX POSITION

The views of the Orthodox party are best represented in the writings of Athanasius since he is the main figure in the controversy and since little else is extant. Athanasius, Berkhof says, strongly emphasized the unity of God and insisted on a construction of the doctrine of the Trinity that would not endanger this unity.  

He therefore defended without qualification both the Nicene doctrines of homoousios and of eternal generation.

His views are best presented by quoting him. In his own statement of faith we have a brief and clear picture of what he taught:

We believe in one Unbegotten God, Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible, that hath His being from Himself. And in

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one Only-begotten Word, Wisdom, Son, begotten of the Father without beginning and eternally; word not pronounced, nor mental, nor an effluence of the Perfect, nor a dividing of the impassible Essence, nor an issue; but absolutely perfect Son, living and powerful (Heb. iv. 12), the true Image of the Father, equal in honour and glory.\textsuperscript{25}

Neither do we hold a Son-Father, as do the Sabellians, calling him of one but not of the same essence (\textit{monooúsion kai oúk homooúsion}), and thus destroying the existence of the Son. Neither do we ascribe the passible body which He bore for the salvation of the whole world to the Father. Neither can we imagine three Subsistences separated from each other, as results from their bodily nature in the case of men, lest we hold a plurality of Gods like the heathen.\textsuperscript{26}

He (the Son) is then by nature an Offspring, perfect from prefect, begotten before all the hills (Prov. viii. 25), that is before every rational and intelligent essence, as Paul also in another place calls Him “firstborn of all creation” (Col. i. 15). But by calling Him First-born, he shows that He is not a creature, but Offspring of the Father. For it would be inconsistent with His deity for Him to be called a creature. For all things were created by the Father through the Son, but the Son alone was eternally begotten from the Father, whence God the Word is “first-born of all creation,” unchangeable from unchangeable.\textsuperscript{27}

That, in the words of Athanasius, is the Orthodox position.

\textbf{THE SEMI-ARIANS}

Finally, then, we come to the compromise party, usually called Semi-Arians. This was by far the largest party in the controversy. The party itself arose at Nicea out of opposition to the use of the word \textit{homoousios}, though it also rejected emphatically the views of Arius. In spite of the fact that the party really stood closer to the Orthodox doctrinally, and even though all signed the Creed of Nicea, the party afterwards sided with the ultra-Arians in opposition to the Orthodox.

Many of them did not even understand the point at issue and in the interest of Church unity tried to compromise. That compromise was never really successful. The many excesses of the Arian party eventually drove them closer and closer to the Orthodox. Finally, through the patient work of Athanasius and Hilary and the leadership of the Three Cappadocians they were united to the Orthodox in confession of \textit{homoousios}.

\textsuperscript{25} Athanasius, \textit{Ecthesis}, 1.  
\textsuperscript{26} Athanasius, \textit{Ecthesis}, 2.  
\textsuperscript{27} Athanasius, \textit{Ecthesis}, 3.
On the whole, they too held to eternal generation and the true divinity of the Son. They avoided *homoousios*, especially because of its Sabellian connotations. They proposed *homoiousios*, “of like substance,” as an alternative term at Nicea and that word became their battlecry.

**EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA**

The Semi-Arian party was under the leadership of Eusebius of Caesarea. From every point of view he is an excellent representative. In one person he represents the feelings of the whole Semi-Arian party: vacillating, indecisive, generally on the side of the Arians against Athanasius. But he is so inconsistent and indecisive that it is difficult to tell exactly what he believed. Most agree that he leaned toward Arianism but on the whole simply was not able to make up his mind where he stood:

At bottom, he thought like Arius; but in proportion as the latter was clear and precise in his explanations, so did the Bishop of Caesarea excel in clothing his ideas in a diffuse and flowing style, and in using many words to say nothing. 

Nevertheless, he was considered to be the greatest scholar of his day and thus wielded considerable influence both with the Emperor and with his own party. As Bishop of Caesarea he was succeeded by Acaius, a friend of the Arians.

**THE EMPERORS**

The Emperors cannot be considered as a separate party in the Nicene debate. Nevertheless, they hold a special place in the controversy and must be taken into account. Their interference in Church affairs made both the temporary triumph of Arianism and the final victory of Orthodoxy possible.

**CONSTANTINE**

Constantine was the first and most important of the Emperors who took a hand in church business. After becoming sole ruler of the Roman Empire he gave official recognition to the Christian church and used it as a force to weld together his huge empire. But he united the Empire under the banners of Christianity, only to find that the Church itself was divided and in turmoil over the Arian question. He was determined to have unity and called together the First Ecumenical Council of Nicea to end the strife.

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He himself took a leading hand in the controversy and attended the Council of Nicea (as well as several subsequent Councils) in person. His desire for Church unity made itself felt in the Council. Probably at the prompting of Hosius he supported the Orthodox, and himself proposed the addition of *homoousios* to the Creed when it became evident that nothing else would do. Once passed, the decisions of Nicea were zealously defended by him. Those who spoke against the Creed or showed a spirit of rebellion he sent into exile (Arius, Eusebius of Nicomedia, Theognis of Nicea). While he lived the Orthodox party held sway.

His interest in the question was primarily political. He does not seem to have had a great deal of interest in the question as such, dismissing it as petty bickering:

> . . . his great aim was the peace and unity of his empire and the good name of the new faith which he had espoused, and in his eyes the doctrine which commended itself to the mass of Christians was the only true faith whether in the event it proved to be Arian or Athanasian.  

His political motives can be clearly seen in the restoration of both Arius and Eusebius after only a few years in exile, and in the exile of Athanasius on the basis of trumped-up charges by the Arians.

**THE SUCCESSORS OF CONSTANTINE**

With the possible exceptions of Gratian and Theodosius, the Emperors who succeeded Constantine were moved by the same political motives as he. Two of them, his son Constantius and, later Valens, supported the Arians, even to the extent of persecuting the Orthodox. The rest more or less supported the Orthodox. Most of the time the Empire was divided not only politically, but also ecclesiastically, between two Emperors, the Eastern Emperor supporting Arianism, and the Western Athanasius. Gratian and Theodosius secured the final victory of the Orthodox.

**THE HISTORY**

The history of the Arian controversy is exceedingly complicated. There were some twenty or twenty-five councils held and nine or ten Creeds drawn up all in the space of less than fifty years. We will therefore, attempt to be brief and clear.

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BEFORE NICEA, 318-325

This history begins about A.D. 318 or 319 when Arius, the presbyter of Bauclis first began to preach and teach his heretical views concerning the divinity of Christ. After several private remonstrances by Alexander his Bishop showed that he was unwilling to retract, severer measures were taken. In 321 Alexander called together a Synod of the Egyptian Bishops. About 100 attended and proceeded to depose Arius. When he continued to agitate and teach his views, he was forced to leave Alexandria.

Arius went to Palestine and from there entered into correspondence with Eusebius of Nicomedia and Eusebius of Caesarea. The former immediately gave his full support. He flooded the East with letters, trying to drum up support for Arius, and wrote to Alexander urging him to receive Arius back into communion. Two Synods were held: one in Bithynia which agreed with Arius and advised Alexander to withdraw his verdict, and another in Palestine which confirmed Arius and his adherents in their clerical status and offices.\(^{30}\)

The result was that the whole Eastern Church was in an uproar and it was at this point that Constantine took a hand. In September, 324, he had defeated his opponent, Licinius, at the battle of Chrysopolis and had become the sole ruler of the Empire. Desiring unity in the Church as he had gained it in the Empire, he immediately took upon himself the role of peacemaker in the controversy. He sent his trusted aide and advisor, Hosius, to Alexandria with a letter entreat ing both parties to make peace. A council was then held at Alexandria which accomplished nothing.

Apparently Hosius returned with a report which favored Alexander, for Constantine wrote a vehement letter to Arius demanding his submission. This, too, accomplished little. Constantine, probably at the suggestion of Hosius, therefore resolved to call a Council of Bishops from the whole Empire to rule on the matter in question. It was decided to hold the Council at Nicea which was at the center of the Empire and accessible from land and sea.

THE COUNCIL OF NICEA, JULY 19, 325

To Nicea, then, came more than 300 bishops from all parts of the Empire, with their retinues. They traveled and were hosted at the public expense. They came to take care of three problems: the Meletian schism, the settling of the date of Easter, and the case of Arius. The last was the most important. Of the Bishops present there were only seven from the West, the principals being Hosius, two presbyters who represented Pope Silvester, and the Bishop of Carthage.

Although Arius had claimed the support of all the East save two or three “heretical and untutored persons,” at the Council his party was a very small minority — about 18 bishops. The Arians led by Eusebius of Nicomedia, first proposed a Creed, a concise statement of their views. It was received with “tumultuous disapproval” and torn to pieces in the sight of all. At this point the whole Arian party (including Eusebius of Nicomedia) with the exception of two Egyptian Bishops, Theonas and Secundus, abandoned the cause of Arius.

Eusebius of Caesarea then stood up and presented the Creed of his church. Although the Emperor approved of it, it was found to be insufficient: “this formula had the curious advantage of leaving out every reference to the point at issue.” The intent of the Fathers in dealing with these statements seems to have been to use only the language of Scripture, but this proved impossible. Whatever language was proposed, whatever phrase was used, the Arians twisted it to suit their own ends:

... but withal they (Eusebius and his fellows) were caught whispering to each other and winking with their eyes, that “like,” and “always,” and “power,” and “in Him,” were, as before, common to us and the Son, and that it was no difficulty to agree to these.

The Arians were very ready to accept the Caesarean Creed.

It was evident that something was needed to guard against all Arian evasions. The Emperor himself, again at the prompting of Hosius, formally proposed the word homoousios. After a long debate the word was finally adopted and the Creed of Eusebius was thereupon thoroughly revised under the direction of Hosius and several others. It was presented to and approved by the Council at the urging of the Emperor.

All were required to sign it, and all did except for Arius, Theonas, and Secundus. After a day’s deliberation Eusebius of Caesarea also signed, though he disliked the word homoousios. Arius’ books were burned and he was sent into exile to Illyria. The Emperor had made up his mind to admit no compromise and so also Eusebius of Nicomedia and Theognis of Nicea were banished for their evident hostility to the Creed, even though they had signed it. After being entertained by the Emperor at a great Banquet, the Bishops left for their respective Sees and the first Ecumenical Council was over.

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32 Cf. Appendix II; “Creed of Eusebius.”
34 Athanasius, *De Decretis*, v. 19.
THE ARIAN AND SEMI-ARIAN REACTION, 325-361

For a few years after Nicea, that is, as long as Arius and Eusebius were in exile things were relatively quiet. In the meantime Alexander died (April 17, 328) and Athanasius was made Bishop of Alexandria by common consent of populace and clergy. But the quiet was only the lull before the storm. Arius drew up a personal creed \(^{35}\) which he presented to the Emperor as proof of his good faith. And although the Creed carefully avoids all the terminology of Nicea, the Emperor received Arius back into communion. So also, by exercising his political influence, Eusebius also returned. Both were back by 328.

Eusebius especially was ready to move heaven and earth to efface the results of Nicea. His first target was Athanasius. The ensuing history is as violent as it is complicated:

The controversy now for the first time fairly broke loose and Arianism entered the stage of its political development and power. An intermediate period of great excitement ensued, during which council was held over against council, creed was set forth against creed and anathema against anathema was hurled. The pagan Ammianus Marcellinus says of the councils under Constantius: “The highways were covered with galloping bishops;” and even Athanasius rebuked the restless flutter of the clergy, who journeyed the empire over to find the true faith, and provoked the ridicule and contempt of the unbelieving world. In intolerance and violence the Arians exceeded the Orthodox, and contested elections of bishops not rarely came to bloody encounters. The interference of imperial polities only poured oil on the flame, and embarrassed the natural course of theological development.\(^{36}\)

In 330 a synod of Arian reactionary bishops assembled at Antioch. They secured the deposition of Eustathius of Antioch, one of the supporters of Athanasius, on false charges of immorality and Sabellianism backed by the complaint that he had indiscreetly repeated a current story concerning the Emperor’s Mother. Meanwhile, by alliance with the Meletians, the Arians were doing everything they could to foment disturbances in Egypt.

The purpose of this all was to discredit Athanasius in the eyes of Constantine. Eusebius was also busy at the Capitol using various channels to prefer all sorts of false charges against Athanasius, especially that he had been supporting treasonable persons. He also wrote to Athanasius, exhorting him to receive Arius, and when Athanasius refused, complained to Constantine. Athanasius finally cleared himself of all charges by appearing before the Emperor in person.

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\(^{35}\) Cf. Appendix I.

\(^{36}\) Schaff, p. 632.
Eusebius continued to bring accusations and prevailed finally upon Constantine to call a Council in Caesarea (where Athanasius had many enemies) to deal with these new charges. Athanasius refused to appear and the council fizzled. In 335-337 another council was held at Tyre in connection with the Thirtieth anniversary of Constantine’s reign.

All the enemies of Athanasius in the whole empire arranged to be present, hoping to obtain at Tyre their revenge for the abortive council at Caesarea, and to find means of getting rid of the troublesome Bishop of Alexandria.  

No questions of doctrine were raised. The council was very disorderly and many trumped-up charges were brought against Athanasius: that he had disrupted a worship service and broken a chalice; that he had put to death a Meletian Bishop; that he had committed adultery. Athanasius cleared himself of all charges but in the subsequent disorder was obliged to flee the council. In his absence the council proceeded to depose him.

Athanasius appealed to Constantine who wrote a letter to the Council defending him. The Eusebians responded by sending five representatives to the Emperor with a new charge: that Athanasius was threatening to stop grain shipments from Alexandria to Constantinople. This was a sore spot for Constantine, and without even a hearing, he immediately ordered Athanasius into exile at Treves. This exile lasted less than a year, for Constantine died soon after (337). “After much intrigue, sedition, and massacre, the three sons of Constantine assumed the title of Augustus.” Athanasius was recalled from his exile and immediately returned to Alexandria. Arians also died meanwhile in the midst of preparations for his formal reception into Church communion (February, 336).

Athanasius was in Alexandria only two years before he was again forced to go into exile. Constantius, the new ruler of the Eastern part of the Empire patronized the Arians and with his approval the Arians and Semi-Arians held a Synod at Antioch where they again deposed Athanasius, and appointed a successor, Gregory of Cappadocia. The arrest of Athanasius was ordered but he escaped first into the desert, and then to Rome. This time he was in exile for six years.

While Athanasius was in Rome the Arians corresponded with Pope Julius, attempting to gain his support. But at a Synod in Rome (341) Athanasius was completely vindicated and Julius wrote a letter to that effect to the Arians. Julius’ letter was considered at the Council of Dedication (of Constantius’ “Golden Church”) held in Antioch in the summer of 341. They again confirmed the

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38 Duchesne, p. 153.
deposition of Athanasius and drew up four anti-Nicene creeds which were mainly Semi-Arian in construction.\textsuperscript{39}

At the same time the Western Bishops had appealed Athanasius’ case to Constans, their Emperor, who decided that a general council was necessary. Together, he and Constantius arranged for a council to be held at Sandica in 343. The council failed completely. About 100 Western Bishops, as well as Athanasius and several others who had been deposed, attended. The Eastern Bishops refused even to come when they found that they were in a minority and that the defendants were to be seated at the Council. They held their own Synod at Philipopolis, drew up a long and angry statement of principles, and deposed everyone from Pope Julius to Hosius. The Western Bishops again confirmed the orthodoxy of Athanasius and refuted the charges of the Eusebians. And at another Council at Milan (346) the position of Sardica was reaffirmed.

Constans, the Western Emperor, defended Athanasius and urged his brother to restore him to his See. Gregory, Athanasius’ “successor” had died, and the people of Alexandria were also clamoring for the return of their rightful Bishop. Constantius did an abrupt about-face and invited Athanasius to return, giving him strong assurances of good-will and protection. Athanasius met with Constantius at Antioch and then returned to Alexandria where he was received with rejoicing. This restoration marks the beginning of his longest stay in Alexandria (10 years). Burn calls it “an armed truce” which was maintained by the formidable power of Constans.\textsuperscript{40}

In 350 Constans was assassinated. For three years Constantius was busy consolidating his powers and defeating his rivals. But in 353 he became sole ruler of the Empire and the axe fell on Athanasius once again. Constantius was false to his pledges and immediately began working to establish Arianism as the religion of the Empire. In 353 at the Synod of Arles, a formal Imperial condemnation of Athanasius was made. In 355 at Milan, the Western Bishops were forced to ascribe to and sign the deposition of Athanasius. Those who refused to sign (Hosius, Pope Liberius, and Hilary of Potiers were the only ones) were sent into exile.

Athanasius himself remained in Alexandria until early 356, when, in spite of the support of the populace and magistrates of Alexandria, he was deposed by force of arms, and very nearly lost his life before escaping into the desert once again. A certain George was made Bishop in his place and a period of terrible persecution and violence began in Alexandria. Many were killed or banished. Athanasius himself remained in exile until the death of Constantius, nearly six more years.

\textsuperscript{39} Cf. Appendices III V.
\textsuperscript{40} A.E. Burn, \textit{An Introduction to the Creeds and to the Te Deum} London, Methuen, 1899), p. 91.
During this six-year period a large number of councils were held, in the course of which the Arian cause finally triumphed. The synod of Sirmium, held in 357, condemned the word *ousios* as being unscriptural and proscribed both the words *homo-* and *homoiousios*. But the triumph of Arianism also marked its downfall, for the decisions of Sirmium, and Constantinople a little later, drove the Semi-Arians into the party of the Orthodox.\(^{41}\) The coalition between Arians and Semi-Arians had always been an uneasy one; now the two part ways. The Council of Constantinople in 360 is the high point of ultra-Arianism, but it also marks the end of the Arian and Semi-Arian league. At that council both the Orthodox and the Semi-Arian positions were condemned and many of the Semi-Arian leaders were deposed or excommunicated.

The Arians retained power for a brief time, but their days were numbered. In 361 Constantius died. This was the beginning of the end for Arianism, and in the next period we see the final victory of the Orthodox party.

**THE FINAL TRIUMPH OF ORTHODOXY, 361-381**

This final period of the Arian controversy is marked by the union of the Semi-Arians with the Orthodox and the downfall of the Arian party:

. . . The Arian victory had prepared the way for the ruin of Arianism, though that result was not immediately apparent. The opposition to the Nicene form had always been composed of two elements: a small Arian section, and a much larger conservative body which stood mainly on positions reached by Origen, to which Arianism was obnoxious, but which looked upon *homoiousios*, the Nicene phrase as an unwarranted expression, already condemned in Antioch, and of Sabellian ill-repute. Both elements had worked together to resist the Nicene form, but their agreement went no further. . . . They really stood near to Athanasius. He recognized this approach, and Hilary furthered union by urging that the conservatives meant by *homoi* what the Nicene party understood by *homo*. The ultimate Nicene victory was to come about through the fusion of the Nicene and the Semi-Arian or Conservative parties.\(^{42}\)

Constantius was succeeded by Julian the Apostate who supported the old pagan religion at the expense of both orthodoxy and Arianism. It was during his rule that the fourth exile of Athanasius took place. Julian was angry with Athanasius for

\(^{41}\) Cf. Appendix VI: “The dated Creed of Sirmium.”

making too many converts from paganism. Athanasius’ exile lasted only two years, and then he was allowed to return by Julian’s successor, Jovian.

Jovian ruled only a few months and was succeeded in the East by Valens. Under Valens there was a last revival of Arianism. His fanatical Arianism caused the Semi-Arians to move even closer to the orthodox. Athanasius was for the last time forced to go into exile, but this time for only four months. All Egypt supported Athanasius and Valens had no power to enforce his decrees, in part because his co-ruler in the West, Valentinian, supported the Athanasians.

In 373 Athanasius died. There was another brief revival of Arianism in Alexandria and again the Orthodox suffered many indignities. Valens died soon after (378) and the Empire passed into the hands of Gratian who appointed Theodosius to rule in the East. Both supported the Athanasians and the cause of the Nicene Faith was finally made secure. In 380 Theodosius issued an edict that all should “hold the faith which the holy Apostle Peter gave to the Romans,” which he defined more precisely as that taught by the Bishops, Peter of Alexandria and Damasus of Rome.43

In 381 he called a great council at Constantinople to deal with the new heresies of Apollinarianism and Macedonianism and to confirm the faith of Nicea. This council restated the decisions of Nicea and approved its Creed with a few improvements and additions. Arianism revived briefly in Italy under Gratian’s successor, Valentinian II, and lingered for a while in Gaul where it had been taught by Ulfilas, but in both East and West Orthodoxy prevailed.

THE NICENE CREED

In the history of the Church up to 381, the Nicene Creed was unique:

   It was the first symbol of faith framed by a council, enforced by a secular power, purely controversial in origin, theological as distinct from Scriptural in its peculiar terms, and furnished with a concluding anathema, a lash on the whip of discipline.44

Its importance cannot, however, be underestimated. In the long history of the Arian controversy it stood as the bulwark against Arianism. Many times the Arians drew up creeds which were intended to replace the Creed of Nicea, but it was the latter which was finally adopted officially by the Church. In a few short phrases it repudiated all the heresies of Arius and his followers. In fact it said clearly and concisely, all that could be said against Arianism.

43 Walker, pp. 117, 118.
It teaches in the first place, that the Son is “from the substance of the Father.” This is the “counter-blast” to the principal tenet of Arianism, that the Son had been created out of nothing and had no community of being with the Father. Its Second anti-Arian statement is: “True God from True God”: this in opposition to the Arian doctrine of the uniqueness of the Father. Thirdly, it said against Arius, that the Son was “begotten not made,” making more specific the doctrine of eternal generation. Finally, and the whole weight of the Orthodox reply to Arianism is concentrated here, the creed speaks of the fact that the Son was “of One Substance with the Father” (homoousion). It concluded with a series of anathemas specifically directed against the teachings of Arius.

It is interesting to note in this connection that the orthodox party, throughout the controversy, never saw any need to draw up another creed. All the other creeds of this period were the work of the Arians or Semi-Arians. Those of the Semi-Arians all proved insufficient to protect the Christian faith against Arianism, and none were ever officially adopted by the whole Church.

Throughout the controversy, the Nicene Creed was attacked for its use of unScriptural language. But history proves that although the language is not, as such, Scriptural, it nevertheless expresses the teaching of Scripture. This fact was proved, first of all, in that it held its own throughout the controversy:

> During thirty years it had held its own and the tenacity and loyalty of its defenders through this long period of doubtful conflict won for it a sanction which no council of Bishops, however learned, or spiritually minded, or unanimous, could bestow on a new confession.⁴⁵

But the orthodoxy of the Nicene Creed was vindicated, especially by the Council of Constantinople (381). That Second Ecumenical Council ended the Arian controversy by approving, with only a few, non-essential changes, the Nicene Creed.

**THE CREED OF CONSTANTINOPLE**

As we have noted, the Creed of Constantinople is in essence the older Nicene Creed. In fact, it is usually called the “Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.” But it is of value to note some of the changes which Constantinople made. For as Curtis says (p. 72): “The controversial character and the literary form of the Nicene Statement were obviously improved upon, and a fuller statement of apostolic faith was secured by it.”

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⁴⁵Burn, pp. 98, 99.
There are really two major differences. First of all, the Creed of Constantinople omits the terminal anathema in the Nicene Creed. It also adds all that follows the words “And in the Holy Spirit,” “without which the Nicene Creed is ill-proportioned, defective and ill-suited for the liturgical use which was made of it.”\textsuperscript{46} This latter was added especially, “to repel the Macedonian heresy of the impersonality of the Holy Spirit.”\textsuperscript{47} Besides these things, there is the omission of several words and phrases in the Nicene Creed which were redundant, as well as the addition of words here and there to strengthen and clarify several points: e.g., “to strengthen the affirmation of the atonement”\textsuperscript{48} the words “crucified for us” were added to Article 4.

Later several other additions were made. In the West and in later Reformed tradition, the creed was expressed in the singular; “I believe.” But the most important addition of all, was the addition of the words “and the Son” (\textit{filioque}) by the Council of Toledo in 589 to express the double procession of the Holy Spirit. This phrase contributed much to the Great Schism of the Eastern and Western Churches.

\textbf{THE WORD HOMOOUSION}

Much of the Arian controversy as we have seen, revolved around the word \textit{homoousion} in the Nicene Creed. Walker, (p. 118) even says that it is “a misfortune that a less disputed phrase was not adopted at Nicea.” The objections to it were really two: that it was unscriptural, and that it implied Sabellianism. Athanasius pointed out, in reference to the first objection, that the Arians also used non-Scriptural terminology: e.g., “created out of nothing,” “begotten out of the will of the Father,” etc. The second objection was done away with when the distinction between \textit{ousia} and \textit{hypostasis} (essence and person) was made clear. It was pointed out that several of the ancient Fathers had used the word in the Nicene sense: Irenaeus, Origen, Theognostur, and Dionysius of Alexandria.

Today there are still some who think that it has no place in the Christian faith:

\begin{quote}
It has been frequently alleged that by introducing this term \textit{ousia}, substance or essence, into the creed, the bishops entirely altered the character of Christian doctrine. They attached to it, so it is alleged, metaphysical conceptions which had no place in the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{46} Curtis, p. 73.
\textsuperscript{47} Daniel Lamont, \textit{The Church and the Creeds}, (London, James Clark, 1923), p. 47.
\textsuperscript{48} Lamont, p. 47.
original teaching of Christianity and ought to have no place in it still.\(^{49}\)

This is not true, however. As the Orthodox pointed out time and time again, the word does express the thought of Scripture. And what is more, it guards the truth of the absolute divinity of Jesus Christ against all error. The Great Reformation Creeds use the same language to guard against Socinianism (modern Arianism). One must remember that the Scriptures do not give us a ready-made doctrinal system and that, therefore, the Church has the obligation to express the truth of Scripture logically and systematically, especially over against heresy. This, of necessity, requires non-Scriptural technical terminology. The Church must, of course, be careful in the choice and use of terminology, but it must also be noted again that in this controversy the word homoousia was not pulled out of the air on the spur of the moment at Nicea. There had at least been some precedent for its technical use in the Nicene sense.

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ARIAN CONTROVERSY**

The Arian Controversy and the decisions of the Councils of Nicea and Constantinople have an important place in the history of the Church and in the history of the development of Christian doctrine.

**Importance for Church History**

In the history of the church Arianism represents:

> . . . a religious-political war against the Christian revelation, by the Anti-Christian spirit of the world. This world after having persecuted the Church 300 years from without, now sought under its Christian name to reduce her to a worldly, profane institution and Christianity to the level of a worldly humanistic religion. It attempted to do this by substituting for Christ the divine redeemer, a created demi-God.\(^{50}\)

“It was not heresy alone, but heresy arrayed in all the pomp of place and power”\(^{51}\) which the Church now had to combat. Having failed to destroy the Church by means of persecution, Satan attempted to use heresy as a means to destroy her. But by the grace of God, the Church was preserved.

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\(^{50}\) George Ophoff, *Church History. Ancient Period*, (Grand Rapids, Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches), pp. 160, 161.

\(^{51}\) Burn, p. 73.
Importance for the History of Dogma

God used this attack upon the faith of the Church to lead her into a clearer understanding of the truth of Scripture. It is no wonder that Satan attacked this doctrine first. The doctrine of the Trinity and of the Nature of God is basic to the whole Christian faith. Before anything else, the church confesses its faith in God, and everything else follows and is based on that confession.

The whole substance of Christianity was at stake, especially the truth of our redemption. If Jesus Christ is not very God, then we have no salvation. Then our faith is meaningless. Athanasius saw this very clearly. He says:

> Wherefore there was need of God; and the Word is God; that those who had become under a curse, He Himself might set free. If then He was of nothing, He would not have been the Christ or Anointed, being one among others and having fellowship as the rest. But whereas He is God, as being Son of God, and is everlasting King, and exists as Radiance and Expression of the Father, therefore fitly is He the expected Christ, whom the Father announces to mankind, by revelation to His holy Prophets; that as through Him we have come to be, so also in Him all men might be redeemed from their sins, and by Him all things might be ruled.\(^{52}\)

and again:

> And these are they who, having received the Word, gained power from Him to become Sons of God; for they could not become sons, being by nature creatures, otherwise than by receiving the Spirit of the natural and true Son.\(^{53}\)

This is the heart of Athanasius’ contribution to the development of the Christian Faith. It was his insistence on this point which finally won over the majority of the Semi-Arians and secured the triumph of Nicene Orthodoxy.

It is interesting in this connection to note that the doctrine of the complete divinity of the Holy Spirit, as well as the doctrine of double procession, were also developed in connection with the doctrine of Christ’s divinity, while the Arian error led directly into the errors of Macedonianism and Apollinarianism (both are really inherent in Arianism).

Here in the Arian heresy we see clearly the work of the Spirit of Truth as He leads the Church into the truth of the Scriptures. Without that Spirit, whom the risen and exalted Son of God gave to the Church, the Church has nothing, but

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\(^{52}\) Athanasius, *Orations* I, xii, 49.

\(^{53}\) Athanasius, *Orations* II, xxi, 59.
through the Spirit she has everything. It was necessary, therefore, that this doctrine basic to the whole Christian Faith should, through the leading of the Spirit of Truth, be established early in the history of the Church.

CONCLUSION

It is important, therefore, that the Church study and know the error of Arius:

The Arian heresy represents a mode of thought which will always prove attractive to some minds. Its appeal is to the present, to pressing intellectual difficulties in justification of a compromise, an illogical compromise between faith and reason. It permits a worship of Christ which on its own showing is little better than idolatry.\footnote{Burn, p. 96.}

Arianism is no longer really a threat in the Church. Modernism (which teaches the doctrines of Arius) is too far removed from the mainstream of Christianity to be of any real threat to the truth. But of such an attitude toward the truth, the Church must always beware.

The doctrine of the Trinity, as it was developed especially by Athanasius, we have today in basically the same form. All that can be said concerning the Being of God has been said. We must maintain this truth. With Athanasius we say, then, ”Let what was confessed by the Fathers at Nicea prevail.”\footnote{Athanasius, \textit{Epistola ad Maximum}, 5.}

APPENDICES

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

256 Birth of Arius.

274 Birth of Constantine the Great.

295 Birth of Athanasius.

306 Death of Constantine Chlorus, father of Constantine the Great.

312 Battle of the Milvian Bridge.

Alexander becomes Bishop of Alexandria.
313 Edict of Milan (Third Edict of Toleration).

318 First outbreak of Arianism.

323 Battle of Chrysopolis; Constantine becomes sole Emperor. Council at Alexandria deposes Arius.
   A council in Bithynia vindicates Arius.
   June 19, 325 The COUNCIL OF NICEA

328 Death of Alexander.
   Consecration of Athanasius.

329 Synod at Antioch, Eustathius deposed.

335 The Council of Tyre.
   First exile of Athanasius.

336 Death of Arius.

337 Death of Constantine the Great, accession of his three sons. Restoration of Athanasius.


340 Murder of Constantine II.

341 Death of Eusebius of Nicomedia.
   A council at Rome vindicates Athanasius.
   The Dedication Council at Antioch (four creeds).

343 Councils at Sardica and Philipopolis.

346 Council of Milan.

347 Restoration of Athanasius.

350 Death of Constans.

351 First Council of Sirmium.

353 Constantius becomes sole Emperor. Second Council of Arles.

355 Second Council of Milan, Athanasius deposed.

357 Second Council of Sirmium, (the second creed of Sirmium).

358 Third Council of Sirmium (the Dated Creed). Expulsion of George from Alexandria.

359 Double Council at Ariminium and Selucia.
   Council at Nice.
   Beginning of Macedonianism.

360 Dedication Council at Constantinople.

361 Death of Constantius, accession of Julian the Apostate.

362 Restoration of Athanasius.
   Council at Alexandria.
   Fourth exile of Athanasius.
   Outbreak of Apollinarianism.

363 Death of Julian, accession of Jovian.

364 Restoration of Athanasius.
   Death of Jovian, accession of Valentinian (West) and Valens (East).

365 Fifth exile and restoration of Athanasius.

373 Death of Athanasius.

375 Death of Valentinian, accession of Gratian.

378 Death of Valens, accession of Theodosius.

381 Second Ecumenical Council (Constantinople).

383 Death of Gratian, accession of Valentinian II.

* Many of the dates given here are only approximate.

APPENDIX I

THE CREED OF ARIUS (A.D. 328)

We believe in one God the Father Almighty:
And in the Lord Jesus Christ, His Son, who was begotten of Him before all ages, the Divine Logos, through whom all things were made, both those in the heavens and those on the earth; who came down and was made flesh, and suffered, and rose again, and ascended to the heavens, and shall come again to judge the living and the dead:

And in the Holy Spirit; and in the resurrection of the flesh; and in the life of the world to come; and in a kingdom of heaven; and in one Catholic Church of God from the ends to the ends of the earth.

APPENDIX II

THE CREED OF EUSEBIUS, CAESAREA (A.D. 325)

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible:

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, God of God, Light of Light, Life of Life, the only-begotten Son, first-born of all creation, begotten of God the Father before all worlds, through whom also all things were made; who for our salvation was made flesh, and lived his life among men; and suffered, and rose on the third day; and ascended to the Father; and will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead:

And in one Holy Spirit.

We believe that each of these is and exists, the Father truly father, and the Son truly son, and the Holy Spirit truly holy spirit; even as our Lord, when sending forth His disciples to preach, said: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

And concerning these things we affirm that we so hold and so think, and have of old so held, and will so hold till death, and stand steadfast in this faith, anathematizing all ungodly heresy. We testify before Almighty God and our Lord Jesus Christ that we have thought all this in heart and soul ever since we knew ourselves, and we now so think and speak in truth, being able to show by evidence and to convince you that we in past times so believed and preached accordingly.

APPENDIX III

THE FIRST CREED OF ANTIOCH (A.D. 325)
The faith is as follows: to believe in one God, the Father Almighty, incomprehensible, immutable and unchangeable, protector and ruler of the universe, just, good, maker of heaven and earth and of all the things in them, Lord of the law and of the prophets and of the new covenant;

and in one Lord Jesus Christ, only begotten Son, begotten not from that which is not but from the Father, not as made but as properly an offspring, but begotten in an ineffable, indescribable manner, because only the Father Who begot and the Son Who was begotten know (for ‘no one knows the Father but the Son, nor the Son but the Father’), Who exists everlastingly and did not at one time not exist. For we have learned from the Holy Scriptures that He alone is the express image, not (plainly) as if He might have remained unbegotten from the Father, nor by adoption (for it is impious and blasphemous to say this); but the Scriptures describe Him as validly and truly begotten as Son, so that we believe Him to be immutable and unchangeable, and that He was not begotten and did not come to be by volition or by adoption, so as to appear to be from that which is not, but as it befits Him to be begotten; not (a thing which it is not lawful to think) according to likeness or nature or commixture with any of the things which came to be through Him, but in a way which passes all understanding or conception or reasoning we confess Him to have been begotten of the unbegotten Father, the divine Logos, true light, righteousness, Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour of all. For He is the express image, not of the will or of anything else, but of His Father’s very substance.

This Son, the divine Logos, having been born in flesh from Mary the Mother of God and made incarnate, having suffered and died, rose again from the dead and was taken up into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Majesty most high, and will come to judge the living and the dead.

Furthermore, as in our Saviour, the holy Scriptures teach us to believe also in one Spirit, one Catholic Church, the resurrection of the dead and a judgment of requital according to whether a man has done well or badly in the flesh.

And we anathematize those who say or think or preach that the Son of God is a creature or has come into being or has been made and is not truly begotten, or that there was when He was not. For we believe that He was and is and that He is light. Furthermore, we anathematize those who suppose that He is immutable by His own act of will, just as those who derive His birth from that which is not, and deny that He is immutable in the way the Father is. For just as our Saviour is the image of the Father in all things, so in this respect particularly He has been proclaimed the Father’s image.

APPENDIX IV

THE SECOND CREED OF ANTIOCH (A.D. 341)
We believe, conformably to the evangelical and apostolical tradition, in one God, the Father Almighty, the Framer, and Maker, and Provider of the universe, from whom are all things.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, His Son, Only-begotten God (John 1:18), by whom are all things, who was begotten before all ages from the Father, God from God, whole from whole, sole from sole, perfect from perfect, King from King, Lord from Lord, Living Word, Living Wisdom, true Light, Way, Truth, Resurrection, Shepherd, Door, both unalterable and unchangeable; exact image of the Godhead, Essence, Will, Power, and Glory of the Father; the first-born of every creature, who was in the beginning with God, God the Word, as it is written in the Gospel, “and the Word was God” (John 1:1); by whom all things were made, and in whom all things consist (Col. 1:17); who in the last days descended from above, and was born of a virgin according to the Scriptures, and was made man, Mediator between God and man, and Apostle of our faith, and Prince of life, as He says, “I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me” (John 6:38); who suffered for us and rose again on the third day, and ascended into heaven, and sat down on the right hand of the Father, and is coming again with glory and power, to judge quick and dead.

And in the Holy Ghost, who is given to those who believe for comfort, and sanctification, and initiation, as also our Lord Jesus Christ enjoined His disciples, saying, “Go ye, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 28:19); namely, of a Father who is truly Father, and a Son who is truly Son, and of the Holy Ghost who is truly Holy Ghost, the names not being given without meaning or effect, but denoting accurately the peculiar subsistence, rank, and glory of each that is named, so that they are three in subsistence, and in agreement one.

Holding then this faith, and holding it in the presence of God and Christ, from beginning to end, we anathematise every heretical heterodoxy. And if any teaches beside the sound and right faith of the Scriptures, that time, or season, or age, either is or has been before the generation of the Son, be he anathema. Or if anyone says that the Son is a creature as one of the creatures, or an offspring as one of the offsprings, or a work as one of the works, and not the aforesaid articles one after another, as the Divine Scriptures have delivered, or if he teaches or preaches beside what we have received, be he anathema. For all that has been delivered in the Divine Scriptures, whether by prophets or apostles, do we truly and reverently both believe and follow.

APPENDIX V

THE FOURTH CREED OF ANTIOCH (A.D. 341)
We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Creator and Maker of all things; from whom all fatherhood in heaven and earth is named (Eph. 3:15).

And in His Only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who before all ages was begotten from the Father, God from God, Light from Light, by whom all things were made in the heavens and on the earth, visible and invisible, being Word, and Wisdom, and Power, and Life, and True Light; who in the last days was made man for us, and was born of the Holy Virgin; who was crucified, and dead, and buried, and rose again from the dead the third day, and was taken up into heaven, and sat down on the right hand of the Father; and is coming at the consummation of the age, to judge quick and dead, and to render to everyone according to his works; whose kingdom endures indissolubly into the infinite ages; for He shall be seated on the right hand of the Father, not only in this age but in that which is to come.

And in the Holy Ghost; that is the Paraclete; which having promised to the apostles, He sent forth after His ascension into heaven, to teach them and to remind of all things; through whom also shall be sanctified the souls of those who sincerely believe in Him.

But those who say that the Son was from nothing, or from some other substance and not from God, and there was time when He was not, the Catholic Church regards as aliens.

APPENDIX VI

THE DATED CREED OF SIRMUIM (A.D. 358)

We believe in one Only and True God, the Father Almighty, Creator and Framer of all things. And in one Only-begotten Son of God, who, before all ages, and before all origin, and before all conceivable time, and before all comprehensible essence, was begotten impassibly from God: through whom the ages were disposed and all things were made; and Him begotten as the Only-begotten, Only from the Only Father, God from God, like to the Father who begat Him, according to the Scriptures; whose origin no one knoweth save the Father alone who begat Him. We know that He, the Only-begotten Son of God, at the Father’s bidding came from the heavens for the abolishment of sin, and was born of the Virgin Mary, and conversed with the disciples, and fulfilled all the Economy according to the Father’s will, was crucified and died and descended into the parts beneath the earth, and regulated the things there, whom the gate-keepers of hell saw (Job 38:17) and shuddered; and He rose from the dead the third day, and conversed with the disciples, and fulfilled all the Economy, and when the forty days were full, ascended into the heavens, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father, and is coming in the last day of the resurrection in the glory of the Father, to everyone according to his works. And in the Holy Ghost, whom the
Only-begotten of God Himself, Jesus Christ, had promised to send to the race of men, the Paraclete, as it is written: “I go to My Father, and I will ask the Father, and He shall send you another Paraclete, even the Spirit of Truth, He shall take of Mine and shall teach and bring to your remembrance all things” (John 14:16, 17, 26; 16:14). But whereas the term “essence” has been adopted by the Fathers in simplicity, and gives offence as being misconceived by the people, because it is not contained in the Scriptures, it has seemed good to remove it, that no mention of “essence” with regard to God should be made at all in the future, because the Divine Scriptures nowhere mention “essence” of the Father and Son. But we say the Son is like the Father in all things, as also the Holy Scriptures say and teach.

APPENDIX VII

THE CREED OF CONSTANTINOPLE (A.D. 381)

We believe in one God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible:

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten of His Father before all worlds, (God of God), Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made being of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and made flesh of the Holy Ghost and the Virgin Mary, and entered humanity; and crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried, and rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father, and shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end.

And in the Holy Spirit, the lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father (and the Son), who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spake through the Prophets in the catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism unto remission of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead; and the life of the world to come.

APPENDIX VIII

Extracts from THE THALIA OF ARIUS

According to faith of God’s elect, God’s prudent ones, Holy children, rightly dividing, God’s Holy Spirit receiving, Have I learned this from the partakers of wisdom, Accomplished, divinely taught, and wise in all things.
Along their track, have I been walking, with like opinions,
I the very famous, the much suffering for God’s glory;
And taught of God, I have acquired wisdom and knowledge.
Quoted in Athanasius, Oratones Contra Arianos, I, ii, 5.