

The First Council of Nicaea

First Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church, held in 325 on the occasion of the heresy of Arius ([Arianism](#)). As early as 320 or 321 St. Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria, convoked a council at Alexandria at which more than one hundred bishops from Egypt and Libya anathematized Arius. The latter continued to officiate in his church and to recruit followers. Being finally driven out, he went to Palestine and from there to Nicomedia. During this time St. Alexander published his "Epistola encyclicato which Arius replied but henceforth it was evident that the quarrel had gone beyond possibility of human control. Sozomen even speaks of a Council of Bithynia which addressed an encyclical to all the bishops asking them to receive the Arians into the communion of the Church. This discord, and the war which soon broke out between Constantine and Licinius, added to the disorder and partly explains the progress of the religious conflict during the years 322-3. Finally Constantine, having conquered Licinius and become sole emperor, concerned himself with the re-establishment of religious peace as well as of civil order. He addressed letters to St. Alexander and to Arius deprecating these heated controversies regarding questions of no practical importance, and advising the adversaries to agree without delay. It was evident that the emperor did not then grasp the significance of the Arian controversy. Hosius of Cordova, his counsellor in religious matters, bore the imperial letter to Alexandria, but failed in his conciliatory mission. Seeing this, the emperor, perhaps advised by Hosius, judged no remedy more apt to restore peace in the Church than the convocation of an oecumenical council.

The emperor himself, in very respectful letters, begged the bishops of every country to come promptly to Nicaea. Several bishops from outside the Roman Empire (e.g., from Persia) came to the Council. It is not historically known whether the emperor in convoking the Council acted solely in his own name or in concert with the pope; however, it is probable

that Constantine and Sylvester came to an agreement (see POPE ST. SYLVESTER I). In order to expedite the assembling of the Council, the emperor placed at the disposal of the bishops the public conveyances and posts of the empire; moreover, while the Council lasted he provided abundantly for the maintenance of the members. The choice of Nicaea was favourable to the assembling of a large number of bishops. It was easily accessible to the bishops of nearly all the provinces, but especially to those of Asia, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Greece, and Thrace. The sessions were held in the principal church, and in the central hall of the imperial palace. A large place was indeed necessary to receive such an assembly, though the exact number is not known with certainty. Eusebius speaks of more than 250 bishops, and later Arabic manuscripts raise the figure to 2000 - an evident exaggeration in which, however, it is impossible to discover the approximate total number of bishops, as well as of the priests, deacons, and acolytes, of whom it is said that a great number were also present. St. Athanasius, a member of the council speaks of 300, and in his letter "Ad Afros" he says explicitly 318. This figure is almost universally adopted, and there seems to be no good reason for rejecting it. Most of the bishops present were Greeks; among the Latins we know only Hosius of Cordova, Cecilian of Carthage, Mark of Calabria, Nicasius of Dijon, Donnus of Stridon in Pannonia, and the two Roman priests, Victor and Vincentius, representing the pope. The assembly numbered among its most famous members St. Alexander of Alexandria, Eustathius of Antioch, Macarius of Jerusalem, Eusebius of Nicomedia, Eusebius of Caesarea, and Nicholas of Myra. Some had suffered during the last persecution; others were poorly enough acquainted with Christian theology. Among the members was a young deacon, Athanasius of Alexandria, for whom this Council was to be the prelude to a life of conflict and of glory (see ST. ATHANASIUS).

The year 325 is accepted without hesitation as that of the First Council of Nicaea. There is less agreement among our early authorities as to the month and day of the opening. In order to reconcile the indications

furnished by Socrates and by the Acts of the Council of Chalcedon, this date may, perhaps, be taken as 20 May, and that of the drawing up of the symbol as 19 June. It may be assumed without too great hardihood that the synod, having been convoked for 20 May, in the absence of the emperor held meetings of a less solemn character until 14 June, when after the emperor's arrival, the sessions properly so called began, the symbol being formulated on 19 June, after which various matters - the paschal controversy, etc. - were dealt with, and the sessions came to an end 25 August. The Council was opened by Constantine with the greatest solemnity. The emperor waited until all the bishops had taken their seats before making his entry. He was clad in gold and covered with precious stones in the fashion of an Oriental sovereign. A chair of gold had been made ready for him, and when he had taken his place the bishops seated themselves. After he had been addressed in a hurried allocution, the emperor made an address in Latin, expressing his will that religious peace should be re-established. He had opened the session as honorary president, and he had assisted at the subsequent sessions, but the direction of the theological discussions was abandoned, as was fitting, to the ecclesiastical leaders of the council. The actual president seems to have been Hosius of Cordova, assisted by the pope's legates, Victor and Vincentius.

The emperor began by making the bishops understand that they had a greater and better business in hand than personal quarrels and interminable recriminations. Nevertheless, he had to submit to the infliction of hearing the last words of debates which had been going on previous to his arrival. Eusebius of Caesarea and his two abbreviators, Socrates and Sozomen, as well as Rufinus and Gelasius of Cyzicus, report no details of the theological discussions. Rufinus tells us only that daily sessions were held and that Arius was often summoned before the assembly; his opinions were seriously discussed and the opposing arguments attentively considered. The majority, especially those who were confessors of the Faith, energetically declared themselves against

the impious doctrines of Arius. (For the part played by the Eusebian third party, see EUSEBIUS OF NICOMEDIA. For the Creed of Eusebius, see EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, Life.) St. Athanasius assures us that the activities of the Council were nowise hampered by Constantine's presence. The emperor had by this time escaped from the influence of Eusebius of Nicomedia, and was under that of Hosius, to whom, as well as to St. Athanasius, may be attributed a preponderant influence in the formulation of the symbol of the First Ecumenical Council, of which the following is a literal translation:

- We believe in on God the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten of the Father, that is, of the substance [ek tes ousias] of the Father, God of God, light of light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of the same substance with the Father [homoousion to patri], through whom all things were made both in heaven and on earth; who for us men and our salvation descended, was incarnate, and was made man, suffered and rose again the third day, ascended into heaven and cometh to judge the living and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost. Those who say: There was a time when He was not, and He was not before He was begotten; and that He was made out of nothing (ex ouk onton); or who maintain that He is of another hypostasis or another substance [than the Father], or that the Son of God is created, or mutable, or subject to change, [them] the Catholic Church anathematizes.

The adhesion was general and enthusiastic. All the bishops save five declared themselves ready to subscribe to this formula, convince that it contained the ancient faith of the Apostolic Church. The opponents were soon reduced to two, Theonas of Marmarica and Secundus of Ptolemais, who were exiled and anathematized. Arius and his writings were also branded with anathema, his books were cast into the fire, and he was exiled to Illyria. The lists of the signers have reached us in a mutilated condition, disfigured by faults of the copyists. Nevertheless, these lists

may be regarded as authentic. Their study is a problem which has been repeatedly dealt with in modern times, in Germany and England, in the critical editions of H. Gelzer, H. Hilgenfeld, and O. Contz on the one hand, and C. H. Turner on the other. The lists thus constructed give respectively 220 and 218 names. With information derived from one source or another, a list of 232 or 237 fathers known to have been present may be constructed.

Other matters dealt with by this council were the controversy as to the time of celebrating Easter and the Meletian schism. The former of these two will be found treated under EASTER, Easter Controversy; the latter under MELETIUS OF LYCOPOLIS.

Of all the Acts of this Council, which, it has been maintained, were numerous, only three fragments have reached us: the creed, or symbol, given above (see also NICENE CREED); the canons; the synodal decree. In reality there never were any official acts besides these. But the accounts of Eusebius, Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret, and Rufinus may be considered as very important sources of historical information, as well as some data preserved by St. Athanasius, and a history of the Council of Nicaea written in Greek in the fifth century by Gelasius of Cyzicus. There has long existed a dispute as to the number of the canons of First Nicaea. All the collections of canons, whether in Latin or Greek, composed in the fourth and fifth centuries agree in attributing to this Council only the twenty canons, which we possess today. Of these the following is a brief résumé:

Canon 1: On the admission, or support, or expulsion of clerics mutilated by choice or by violence.

Canon 2: Rules to be observed for ordination, the avoidance of undue haste, the deposition of those guilty of a grave fault.

Canon 3: All members of the clergy are forbidden to dwell with any woman, except a mother, sister, or aunt.

Canon 4: Concerning episcopal elections.

Canon 5: Concerning the excommunicate.

Canon 6: Concerning patriarchs and their jurisdiction.

Canon 7: confirms the right of the bishops of Jerusalem to enjoy certain honours.

Canon 8: concerns the Novatians.

Canon 9: Certain sins known after ordination involve invalidation.

Canon 10: Lapsi who have been ordained knowingly or surreptitiously must be excluded as soon as their irregularity is known.

Canon 11: Penance to be imposed on apostates of the persecution of Licinius.

Canon 12: Penance to be imposed on those who upheld Licinius in his war on the Christians.

Canon 13: Indulgence to be granted to excommunicated persons in danger of death.

Canon 14: Penance to be imposed on catechumens who had weakened under persecution.

Canon 15: Bishops, priests, and deacons are not to pass from one church to another.

Canon 16: All clerics are forbidden to leave their church. Formal prohibition for bishops to ordain for their diocese a cleric belonging to another diocese.

Canon 17: Clerics are forbidden to lend at interest.

Canon 18: recalls to deacons their subordinate position with regard to priests.

Canon 19: Rules to be observed with regard to adherents of Paul of Samosata who wished to return to the Church.

Canon 20: On Sundays and during the Paschal season prayers should be said standing.

The business of the Council having been finished Constantine celebrated the twentieth anniversary of his accession to the empire, and invited the bishops to a splendid repast, at the end of which each of them received rich presents. Several days later the emperor commanded that a final session should be held, at which he assisted in order to exhort the bishops to work for the maintenance of peace; he commended himself to their prayers, and authorized the fathers to return to their dioceses. The greater number hastened to take advantage of this and to bring the resolutions of the council to the knowledge of their provinces.

From the Catholic Encyclopedia

Arianism

A heresy which arose in the fourth century, and denied the Divinity of Jesus Christ.

DOCTRINE

First among the doctrinal disputes which troubled Christians after Constantine had recognized the Church in A.D. 313, and the parent of many more during some three centuries, Arianism occupies a large place in ecclesiastical history. It is not a modern form of unbelief, and therefore will appear strange in modern eyes. But we shall better grasp its meaning if we term it an Eastern attempt to rationalize the creed by stripping it of mystery so far as the relation of Christ to God was concerned. In the New Testament and in Church teaching Jesus of Nazareth appears as the Son of God. This name He took to Himself (Matthew 11:27; John 10:36), while the Fourth Gospel declares Him to be the Word (Logos), Who in the beginning was with God and was God, by Whom all things were made. A similar doctrine is laid down by St. Paul, in his undoubtedly genuine Epistles to the Ephesians, Colossians, and Philippians. It is reiterated in the Letters of Ignatius, and accounts for Pliny's observation that Christians in their assemblies chanted a hymn to Christ as God. But the question how the Son was related to the Father (Himself acknowledged on all hands to be the one Supreme Deity), gave rise, between the years A.D. 60 and 200, to number of Theosophic systems, called generally Gnosticism, and having for their authors Basilides, Valentinus, Tatian, and other Greek speculators. Though all of these visited Rome, they had no following in the West, which remained free from controversies of an abstract nature, and was faithful to the creed of its baptism. Intellectual centres were chiefly Alexandria and Antioch, Egyptian or Syrian, and speculation was carried on in Greek. The Roman Church held steadfastly by tradition. Under these circumstances, when Gnostic schools had passed away with their "conjugations" of Divine powers, and "emanations" from the Supreme unknowable God (the "Deep" and the "Silence") all speculation was thrown into the form of an inquiry touching the "likeness"

of the Son to His Father and “sameness” of His Essence. Catholics had always maintained that Christ was truly the Son, and truly God. They worshipped Him with divine honours; they would never consent to separate Him, in idea or reality, from the Father, Whose Word, Reason, Mind, He was, and in Whose Heart He abode from eternity. But the technical terms of doctrine were not fully defined; and even in Greek words like essence (ousia), substance (hypostasis), nature (physis), person (hyposopon) bore a variety of meanings drawn from the pre-Christian sects of philosophers, which could not but entail misunderstandings until they were cleared up. The adaptation of a vocabulary employed by Plato and Aristotle to Christian truth was a matter of time; it could not be done in a day; and when accomplished for the Greek it had to be undertaken for the Latin, which did not lend itself readily to necessary yet subtle distinctions. That disputes should spring up even among the orthodox who all held one faith, was inevitable. And of these wranglings the rationalist would take advantage in order to substitute for the ancient creed his own inventions. The drift of all he advanced was this: to deny that in any true sense God could have a Son; as Mohammed tersely said afterwards, “God neither begets, nor is He begotten” (Koran, 112). We have learned to call that denial Unitarianism. It was the ultimate scope of Arian opposition to what Christians had always believed. But the Arian, though he did not come straight down from the Gnostic, pursued a line of argument and taught a view which the speculations of the Gnostic had made familiar. He described the Son as a second, or inferior God, standing midway between the First Cause and creatures; as Himself made out of nothing, yet as making all things else; as existing before the worlds of the ages; and as arrayed in all divine perfections except the one which was their stay and foundation. God alone was without beginning, unoriginate; the Son was originated, and once had not existed. For all that has origin must begin to be.

Such is the genuine doctrine of Arius. Using Greek terms, it denies that the Son is of one essence, nature, or substance with God; He is not consubstantial (*homoousios*) with the Father, and therefore not like Him, or equal in dignity, or co-eternal, or within the real sphere of Deity. The Logos which St. John exalts is an attribute, Reason, belonging to the Divine nature, not a person distinct from another, and therefore is a Son merely in figure of speech. These consequences follow upon the principle which Arius maintains in his letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia, that the Son “is no part of the Ingenerate.” Hence the Arian sectaries who reasoned logically were styled Anomoeans: they said that the Son was “unlike” the Father. And they defined God as simply the Unoriginate. They are also termed the Exucontians (*ex ouk onton*), because they held the creation of the Son to be out of nothing.

But a view so unlike tradition found little favour; it required softening or palliation, even at the cost of logic; and the school which supplanted Arianism from an early date affirmed the likeness, either without adjunct, or in all things, or in substance, of the Son to the Father, while denying His co-equal dignity and co-eternal existence. These men of the *Via Media* were named Semi-Arians. They approached, in strict argument, to the heretical extreme; but many of them held the orthodox faith, however inconsistently; their difficulties turned upon language or local prejudice, and no small number submitted at length to Catholic teaching. The Semi-Arians attempted for years to invent a compromise between irreconcilable views, and their shifting creeds, tumultuous councils, and worldly devices tell us how mixed and motley a crowd was collected under their banner. The point to be kept in remembrance is that, while they affirmed the Word of God to be everlasting, they imagined Him as having become the Son to create the worlds and redeem mankind. Among the ante-Nicene writers, a certain ambiguity of expression may be detected, outside the school of Alexandria, touching this last head of doctrine. While Catholic teachers held the *Monarchia*, viz. that there was only one God; and the *Trinity*, that this Absolute One existed in three distinct subsistences; and the

Circuminsession, that Father, Word, and Spirit could not be separated, in fact or in thought, from one another; yet an opening was left for discussion as regarded the term “Son,” and the period of His “generation” (genesis). Five ante-Nicene Fathers are especially quoted: Athenagoras, Tatian, Theophilus of Antioch, Hippolytus, and Novatian, whose language appears to involve a peculiar notion of Sonship, as though It did not come into being or were not perfect until the dawn of creation. To these may be added Tertullian and Methodius. Cardinal Newman held that their view, which is found clearly in Tertullian, of the Son existing after the Word, is connected as an antecedent with Arianism. Petavius construed the same expressions in a reprehensible sense; but the Anglican Bishop Bull defended them as orthodox, not without difficulty. Even if metaphorical, such language might give shelter to unfair disputants; but we are not answerable for the slips of teachers who failed to perceive all the consequences of doctrinal truths really held by them. >From these doubtful theorizings Rome and Alexandria kept aloof. Origen himself, whose unadvised speculations were charged with the guilt of Arianism, and who employed terms like “the second God,” concerning the Logos, which were never adopted by the Church -- this very Origen taught the eternal Sonship of the Word, and was not a Semi-Arian. To him the Logos, the Son, and Jesus of Nazareth were one ever-subsisting Divine Person, begotten of the Father, and, in this way, “subordinate” to the source of His being. He comes forth from God as the creative Word, and so is a ministering Agent, or, from a different point of view, is the First-born of creation. Dionysius of Alexandria (260) was even denounced at Rome for calling the Son a work or creature of God; but he explained himself to the pope on orthodox principles, and confessed the Homoousian Creed.

HISTORY

Paul of Samosata, who was contemporary with Dionysius, and Bishop of Antioch, may be judged the true ancestor of those heresies which relegated Christ beyond the Divine sphere, whatever epithets of deity they allowed Him. The man Jesus, said Paul, was distinct from the Logos, and, in Milton's later language, by merit was made the Son of God. The Supreme is one in Person as in Essence. Three councils held at Antioch (264-268, or 269) condemned and excommunicated the Samosatene. But these Fathers would not accept the Homoousian formula, dreading lest it be taken to signify one material or abstract substance, according to the usage of the heathen philosophies. Associated with Paul, and for years cut off from the Catholic communion, we find the well-known Lucian, who edited the Septuagint and became at last a martyr. From this learned man the school of Antioch drew its inspiration. Eusebius the historian, Eusebius of Nicomedia, and Arius himself, all came under Lucian's influence. Not, therefore, to Egypt and its mystical teaching, but to Syria, where Aristotle flourished with his logic and its tendency to Rationalism, should we look for the home of an aberration which had it finally triumphed, would have anticipated Islam, reducing the Eternal Son to the rank of a prophet, and thus undoing the Christian revelation.

Arius, a Libyan by descent, brought up at Antioch and a school-fellow of Eusebius, afterwards Bishop of Nicomedia, took part (306) in the obscure Meletian schism, was made presbyter of the church called "Baucalis," at Alexandria, and opposed the Sabellians, themselves committed to a view of the Trinity which denied all real distinctions in the Supreme. Epiphanius describes the heresiarch as tall, grave, and winning; no aspersion on his moral character has been sustained; but there is some possibility of personal differences having led to his quarrel with the patriarch Alexander whom, in public synod, he accused of teaching that the Son was identical with the Father (319). The actual circumstances of this dispute are obscure; but Alexander condemned Arius in a great

assembly, and the latter found a refuge with Eusebius, the Church historian, at Caesarea. Political or party motives embittered the strife. Many bishops of Asia Minor and Syria took up the defence of their “fellow-Lucianist,” as Arius did not hesitate to call himself. Synods in Palestine and Bithynia were opposed to synods in Egypt. During several years the argument raged; but when, by his defeat of Licinius (324), Constantine became master of the Roman world, he determined on restoring ecclesiastical order in the East, as already in the West he had undertaken to put down the Donatists at the Council of Arles. Arius, in a letter to the Nicomedian prelate, had boldly rejected the Catholic faith. But Constantine, tutored by this worldly-minded man, sent from Nicomedia to Alexander a famous letter, in which he treated the controversy as an idle dispute about words and enlarged on the blessings of peace. The emperor, we should call to mind, was only a catechumen, imperfectly acquainted with Greek, much more incompetent in theology, and yet ambitious to exercise over the Catholic Church a dominion resembling that which, as Pontifex Maximus, he wielded over the pagan worship. From this Byzantine conception (labelled in modern terms Erastianism) we must derive the calamities which during many hundreds of years set their mark on the development of Christian dogma. Alexander could not give way in a matter so vitally important. Arius and his supporters would not yield. A council was, therefore, assembled in Nicaea, in Bithynia, which has ever been counted the first ecumenical, and which held its sittings from the middle of June, 325. (See FIRST COUNCIL OF NICAEA). It is commonly said that Hosius of Cordova presided. The Pope, St. Silvester, was represented by his legates, and 318 Fathers attended, almost all from the East. Unfortunately, the acts of the Council are not preserved. The emperor, who was present, paid religious deference to a gathering which displayed the authority of Christian teaching in a manner so remarkable. From the first it was evident that Arius could not reckon upon a large number of patrons among the bishops. Alexander was accompanied by his youthful deacon, the ever-memorable

Athanasius who engaged in discussion with the heresiarch himself, and from that moment became the leader of the Catholics during well-nigh fifty years. The Fathers appealed to tradition against the innovators, and were passionately orthodox; while a letter was received from Eusebius of Nicomedia, declaring openly that he would never allow Christ to be of one substance with God. This avowal suggested a means of discriminating between true believers and all those who, under that pretext, did not hold the Faith handed down. A creed was drawn up on behalf of the Arian party by Eusebius of Caesarea in which every term of honour and dignity, except the oneness of substance, was attributed to Our Lord. Clearly, then, no other test save the Homousion would prove a match for the subtle ambiguities of language that, then as always, were eagerly adopted by dissidents from the mind of the Church. A formula had been discovered which would serve as a test, though not simply to be found in Scripture, yet summing up the doctrine of St. John, St. Paul, and Christ Himself, "I and the Father are one". Heresy, as St. Ambrose remarks, had furnished from its own scabbard a weapon to cut off its head. The "consubstantial" was accepted, only thirteen bishops dissenting, and these were speedily reduced to seven. Hosius drew out the conciliar statements, to which anathemas were subjoined against those who should affirm that the Son once did not exist, or that before He was begotten He was not, or that He was made out of nothing, or that He was of a different substance or essence from the Father, or was created or changeable. Every bishop made this declaration except six, of whom four at length gave way. Eusebius of Nicomedia withdrew his opposition to the Nicene term, but would not sign the condemnation of Arius. By the emperor, who considered heresy as rebellion, the alternative proposed was subscription or banishment; and, on political grounds, the Bishop of Nicomedia was exiled not long after the council, involving Arius in his ruin. The heresiarch and his followers underwent their sentence in Illyria. But these incidents, which might seem to close the chapter, proved a beginning of strife, and led on to the most complicated proceedings of which we read in the fourth

century. While the plain Arian creed was defended by few, those political prelates who sided with Eusebius carried on a double warfare against the term “consubstantial”, and its champion, Athanasius. This greatest of the Eastern Fathers had succeeded Alexander in the Egyptian patriarchate (326). He was not more than thirty years of age; but his published writings, antecedent to the Council, display, in thought and precision, a mastery of the issues involved which no Catholic teacher could surpass. His unblemished life, considerate temper, and loyalty to his friends made him by no means easy to attack. But the wiles of Eusebius, who in 328 recovered Constantine’s favour, were seconded by Asiatic intrigues, and a period of Arian reaction set in. Eustathius of Antioch was deposed on a charge of Sabellianism (331), and the Emperor sent his command that Athanasius should receive Arius back into communion. The saint firmly declined. In 325 the heresiarch was absolved by two councils, at Tyre and Jerusalem, the former of which deposed Athanasius on false and shameful grounds of personal misconduct. He was banished to Trier, and his sojourn of eighteen months in those parts cemented Alexandria more closely to Rome and the Catholic West. Meanwhile, Constantia, the Emperor’s sister, had recommended Arius, whom she thought an injured man, to Constantine’s leniency. Her dying words affected him, and he recalled the Lybian, extracted from him a solemn adhesion to the Nicene faith, and ordered Alexander, Bishop of the Imperial City, to give him Communion in his own church (336). Arius openly triumphed; but as he went about in parade, the evening before this event was to take place, he expired from a sudden disorder, which Catholics could not help regarding as a judgment of heaven, due to the bishop’s prayers. His death, however, did not stay the plague. Constantine now favoured none but Arians; he was baptized in his last moments by the shifty prelate of Nicomedia; and he bequeathed to his three sons (337) an empire torn by dissensions which his ignorance and weakness had aggravated.

Constantius, who nominally governed the East, was himself the puppet of his empress and the palace-ministers. He obeyed the Eusebian faction; his spiritual director, Valens, Bishop of Mursa, did what in him lay to infect Italy and the West with Arian dogmas. The term “like in substance”, Homoiousion, which had been employed merely to get rid of the Nicene formula, became a watchword. But as many as fourteen councils, held between 341 and 360, in which every shade of heretical subterfuge found expression, bore decisive witness to the need and efficacy of the Catholic touchstone which they all rejected. About 340, an Alexandrian gathering had defended its archbishop in an epistle to Pope Julius. On the death of Constantine, and by the influence of that emperor’s son and namesake, he had been restored to his people. But the young prince passed away, and in 341 the celebrated Antiochene Council of the Dedication a second time degraded Athanasius, who now took refuge in Rome. There he spent three years. Gibbon quotes and adopts “a judicious observation” of Wetstein which deserves to be kept always in mind. From the fourth century onwards, remarks the German scholar, when the Eastern Churches were almost equally divided in eloquence and ability between contending sections, that party which sought to overcome made its appearance in the Vatican, cultivated the Papal majesty, conquered and established the orthodox creed by the help of the Latin bishops. Therefore it was that Athanasius repaired to Rome. A stranger, Gregory, usurped his place. The Roman Council proclaimed his innocence. In 343, Constans, who ruled over the West from Illyria to Britain, summoned the bishops to meet at Sardica in Pannonia. Ninety-four Latin, seventy Greek or Eastern, prelates began the debates; but they could not come to terms, and the Asiatics withdrew, holding a separate and hostile session at Philippopolis in Thrace. It has been justly said that the Council of Sardica reveals the first symptoms of discord which, later on, produced the unhappy schism of East and West. But to the Latins this meeting, which allowed of appeals to Pope Julius, or the Roman Church, seemed an epilogue which

completed the Nicene legislation, and to this effect it was quoted by Innocent I in his correspondence with the bishops of Africa.

Having won over Constans, who warmly took up his cause, the invincible Athanasius received from his Oriental and Semi-Arian sovereign three letters commanding, and at length entreating his return to Alexandria (349). The factious bishops, Ursacius and Valens, retracted their charges against him in the hands of Pope Julius; and as he travelled home, by way of Thrace, Asia Minor, and Syria, the crowd of court-prelates did him abject homage. These men veered with every wind. Some, like Eusebius of Caesarea, held a Platonizing doctrine which they would not give up, though they declined the Arian blasphemies. But many were time-servers, indifferent to dogma. And a new party had arisen, the strict and pious Homoiousians, not friends of Athanasius, nor willing to subscribe to the Nicene terms, yet slowly drawing nearer to the true creed and finally accepting it. In the councils which now follow these good men play their part. However, when Constans died (350), and his Semi-Arian brother was left supreme, the persecution of Athanasius redoubled in violence. By a series of intrigues the Western bishops were persuaded to cast him off at Arles, Milan, Ariminum. It was concerning this last council (359) that St. Jerome wrote, “the whole world groaned and marvelled to find itself Arian”. For the Latin bishops were driven by threats and chicanery to sign concessions which at no time represented their genuine views. Councils were so frequent that their dates are still matter of controversy. Personal issues disguised the dogmatic importance of a struggle which had gone on for thirty years. The Pope of the day, Liberius, brave at first, undoubtedly orthodox, but torn from his see and banished to the dreary solitude of Thrace, signed a creed, in tone Semi-Arian (compiled chiefly from one of Sirmium), renounced Athanasius, but made a stand against the so-called “Homoean” formulae of Ariminum. This new party was led by Acacius of Caesarea, an aspiring churchman who maintained that he, and not St. Cyril of Jerusalem, was metropolitan over Palestine. The Homoeans, a sort of Protestants, would have no terms employed which were not found

in Scripture, and thus evaded signing the “Consubstantial”. A more extreme set, the “Anomoeans”, followed Aetius, were directed by Eunomius, held meetings at Antioch and Sirmium, declared the Son to be “unlike” the Father, and made themselves powerful in the last years of Constantius within the palace. George of Cappadocia persecuted the Alexandrian Catholics. Athanasius retired into the desert among the solitaries. Hosius had been compelled by torture to subscribe a fashionable creed. When the vacillating Emperor died (361), Julian, known as the Apostate, suffered all alike to return home who had been exiled on account of religion. A momentous gathering, over which Athanasius presided, in 362, at Alexandria, united the orthodox Semi-Arians with himself and the West. Four years afterwards fifty-nine Macedonian, i.e., hitherto anti-Nicene, prelates gave in their submission to Pope Liberius. But the Emperor Valens, a fierce heretic, still laid the Church waste.

However, the long battle was now turning decidedly in favour of Catholic tradition. Western bishops, like Hilary of Poitiers and Eusebius of Vercellae banished to Asia for holding the Nicene faith, were acting in unison with St. Basil, the two St. Gregories, and the reconciled Semi-Arians. As an intellectual movement the heresy had spent its force. Theodosius, a Spaniard and a Catholic, governed the whole Empire. Athanasius died in 373; but his cause triumphed at Constantinople, long an Arian city, first by the preaching of St. Gregory Nazianzen, then in the Second General Council (381), at the opening of which Meletius of Antioch presided. This saintly man had been estranged from the Nicene champions during a long schism; but he made peace with Athanasius, and now, in company of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, represented a moderate influence which won the day. No deputies appeared from the West. Meletius died almost immediately. St. Gregory Nazianzen (q. v.), who took his place, very soon resigned. A creed embodying the Nicene was drawn up by St. Gregory of Nyssa, but it is not the one that is chanted at Mass, the latter being due, it is said, to St. Epiphanius and the Church of

Jerusalem. The Council became ecumenical by acceptance of the Pope and the ever-orthodox Westerns. From this moment Arianism in all its forms lost its place within the Empire. Its developments among the barbarians were political rather than doctrinal. Ulphilas (311-388), who translated the Scriptures into Maeso-Gothic, taught the Goths across the Danube an Homoean theology; Arian kingdoms arose in Spain, Africa, Italy. The Gepidae, Heruli, Vandals, Alans, and Lombards received a system which they were as little capable of understanding as they were of defending, and the Catholic bishops, the monks, the sword of Clovis, the action of the Papacy, made an end of it before the eighth century. In the form which it took under Arius, Eusebius of Caesarea, and Eunomius, it has never been revived. Individuals, among them are Milton and Sir Isaac Newton, were perhaps tainted with it. But the Socinian tendency out of which Unitarian doctrines have grown owes nothing to the school of Antioch or the councils which opposed Nicaea. Neither has any Arian leader stood forth in history with a character of heroic proportions. In the whole story there is but one single hero -- the undaunted Athanasius -- whose mind was equal to the problems, as his great spirit to the vicissitudes, a question on which the future of Christianity depended.

Homoousion

(Gr. homoousion - from homos, same, and ousia, essence; Lat. consubstantialem, of one essence or substance), the word used by the Council of Nicaea (325) to express the Divinity of Christ. Arius had taught that the Son, being, in the language of Philo, the Intermediator between God and the world, was not eternal, and therefore not of the Divine substance, but a creature brought forth by the free will of God. (See ARIANISM) Homoousion was indeed used by philosophical writers to signify "of the same or similar substance"; but as the unity of the Divine nature wasn't questioned, the word carried the fuller meaning: "of one and the same substance". However, not only is homos ambiguous; the word ousia itself was often taken as equivalent to hypostasis (person), as apparently is the case in the anathema attached to the Nicene Symbol. And therefore the affirmation of the identity of nature might be taken in the heretical sense of the Sabellians, who denied the distinction of person. It was only after many years of controversy that the two words acquired their distinct meanings, and the orthodox were able to describe the Trinity as one in ousia and three in hypostasis or persona. Previously to the Council of Nicaea, Tertullian had already used the Latin equivalent of Homoousion, conceding to Praxeas the Sabellian that the Father and the Son were unius substantiae, of one substance, but adding duarum personarum, of two persons (Adv. Prax., xiii). And Dionysius of Alexandria used the actual word in a letter to Dionysius of Rome (Athan., "De dec. Syn. Nic.", xxv, 26) and again in his letter to Paul of Samosata. On the other hand, Origen, who is, however, inconsistent in his vocabulary, expressed the anti-Sabellian sense of Dionysius of Alexandria by calling the Son "Heteroousion". The question was brought into discussion by the Council of Antioch (264-272); and the Fathers seem to have rejected Homoousion, even going so far as to propose the phrase heteras ousias, that is, Heteroousion, "of other or different ousia". Athanasius and Basil give as the reason for this rejection of Homoousion the fact that the Sabellian Paul of Samosata took it to mean "of the same

of similar substance". But Hilary says that Paul himself admitted it in the Sabellian sense "of the same substance or person", and thus compelled the council to allow him the prescriptive right to the expression. Now, if we may take Hilary's explanation, it is obvious that when, half a century afterwards, Arius denied the Son to be of the Divine ousia or substance, the situation was exactly reversed. Homoousion directly contradicted the heretic. In the conflicts which ensued, the extreme Arians persisted in the Heteroousion Symbol. But the Semi-Arians were more moderate, and consequently more plausible, in their Homoiousion (of like substance). When one considers how the four creeds formulated at Antioch (341) by the Semi-Arians approached the Nicene Creed as nearly as possible without the actual word Homoousion, there may be a temptation to think that the question was one of words only; and the Councils of Rimini and Seleucia (359) may seem to have been well advised in their conciliatory formula "that the Son was like the Father in all things, according to the Holy Writ". But this very formula was forced from the Fathers by the Emperor Constantius; and the force and fraud which the Semi-Arians used throughout the greater part of the fourth century, are proof sufficient that the dispute was not merely verbal. The dogma of the Trinity was at stake, and Homoousion proved itself to be in the words of Epiphanius "the bond of faith", or, according to the expression of Marius Victorinus, "the rampart and wall of orthodoxy."