



Good day Worthy Knights, in this part 18, The Arian Heresy (Wikipedia).

The **Arian controversy** was a series of Christian theological disputes that arose between Arius and Athanasius of Alexandria, two Christian theologians from Alexandria, Egypt. The most important of these controversies concerned the substantial relationship between God the Father and God the Son.

The deep divisions created by the disputes were an ironic consequence of Emperor Constantine's efforts to unite Christianity and establish a single, imperially approved version of the faith during his reign. These disagreements divided the Church into two opposing theological factions for over 55 years, from the time before the First Council of Nicaea in 325 until after the First Council of Constantinople in 381.

There was no formal resolution or formal schism, though the Trinitarian faction ultimately gained the upper hand in the Imperial Church; outside the Roman Empire this faction was not immediately so influential. Arianism continued to be preached inside and outside the Empire for some time (without the blessing of the Emperor), but it was eventually eradicated. The modern Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church, as well as most other modern Christian sects, have generally followed the Trinitarian formulation, though each has its own specific theology on the matter.

## **Beginnings**

The early history of the controversy must be pieced together from about 35 documents found in various sources. The Trinitarian historian Socrates of Constantinople reports that Arius first became controversial under the bishop Alexander of Alexandria, when Arius formulated the following syllogism: "If the Father begat the Son, he that was begotten had a beginning of existence: hence it is that there was when the Son was not. It follows then of necessity that he had his existence from the non-existence".

Bishop Alexander of Alexandria was criticised for his slow reaction against Arius. Like his predecessor, Dionysius, he has been charged with vacillation. According to Eusebius's work, *The Life of Constantine*, the controversy had spread from Alexandria into almost all the African regions, and was considered a disturbance of the public order by the Roman Empire.

Constantine the Great sent two letters to Arius and Bishop Alexander, asking the religious leaders to stop the controversy. Because the controversy continued to spread, in 325 Emperor Constantine held the first Council of Nicaea with an agenda to prosecute Arius.

## **First Council of Nicaea (325)**

Arianism would not be contained within the Alexandrian diocese. By the time Bishop Alexander finally acted against his recalcitrant presbyter, Arius's doctrine had spread far beyond his own see; it had become a topic of discussion—and disturbance—for the entire Church. The Church was now a powerful force in the Roman world, with Constantine I having legalized it in 313 through the Edict of Milan.

The Emperor had taken a personal interest in several ecumenical issues, including the Donatist (see note) controversy in 316, and he wanted to bring an end to the Arian dispute.

To this end, the Emperor sent bishop Hosius of Corduba to investigate and, if possible, resolve the controversy. Hosius was armed with an open letter from the Emperor: "*Wherefore let each one of you, showing consideration for the other, listen to the impartial exhortation of your fellow-servant.*" As the debate continued to rage despite Hosius' efforts, Constantine in AD325 took an unprecedented step. He called an ecumenical council composed of church prelates from all parts of the Empire to resolve this issue, possibly at Hosius' recommendation.

All secular dioceses of the Empire sent one or more representatives to the Council save for Roman Britain; the majority of the bishops came from the East. Pope Sylvester I, himself too aged to attend, sent two priests as his delegates. Arius himself attended the Council, but his bishop, Alexander, did not, but sent instead his young deacon Athanasius. Athanasius would become the champion of the Trinitarian viewpoint ultimately adopted by the Council and spend most of his life battling Arianism.

Also there were Eusebius of Caesarea and Eusebius of Nicomedia. Before the main conclave convened, Hosius initially met with Alexander and his supporters at Nicomedia. The Council would be presided over by the Emperor himself, who participated in and even led some of its discussions.

Those who upheld the notion that Christ was co-eternal and con-substantial with the Father were led by the young archdeacon Athanasius. Those who instead insisted that God the Son came after God the Father in time and substance were led by Arius the presbyter. For about two months, the two sides argued and debated, with each appealing to Scripture to justify their respective positions.

Arius maintained that the Son of God was a Creature, made from nothing; and that he was God's First Production, before all ages. And he argued that everything else was created through the Son. Thus, said Arius, only the Son was directly created and begotten of God; furthermore, there was a time that He had no existence. He was capable of His own free will, said Arius, and thus "were He in the truest sense a son, He must have come after the Father, therefore the time obviously was when He was not, and hence He was a finite being."

According to some accounts in the hagiography of Saint Nicholas, debate at the Council became so heated that at one point, he slapped Arius in the face.

The majority of the bishops at the Council ultimately agreed upon a creed, known thereafter as the Nicene Creed formulated at the first Council of Nicaea. It included the word *homousios*, meaning "consubstantial", or "one in essence", which was incompatible with Arius' beliefs.

On June 19, 325, Council and Emperor issued a circular to the churches in and around Alexandria: Arius and two of his unyielding partisans Theonas and Secundus, were deposed and exiled to Illyricum, while three other supporters — Theognis of Nicaea, Eusebius of Nicomedia and Maris of Chalcedon — affixed their signatures solely out of deference to the Emperor.

However, Constantine soon found reason to suspect the sincerity of these three, for he later included them in the sentence pronounced on Arius.

Note: Donatism was a heresy leading to schism in the Church of Carthage. They argued that Christian clergy must be faultless for their ministry to be effective and sacraments to be valid.