

a new heresy arose, and aroused so much dissension that the whole empire was filled with confusion. This was the heresy of Arius, a view which gave Christ great honor, declaring Him to be the first and greatest of all created beings, and yet not God, for, the Arians declared, there had been a time when Christ did not yet exist. A noted thinker of the nineteenth century related that at one time he had thought it ludicrous that the Christian world should have divided itself in two over just one Greek letter, the i which distinguished the Homoiousians, those who said that the nature of Christ was similar to that of the Father, from the Homocousians, who maintained that His substance was identical with that of the Father. Yet this same thinker later declared that he had come to see that the very existence of Christianity had been at stake in this question which loomed so large in the first century after the accession of Constantine.

Constantine called the Council of Nicea to determine the matter, and after considerable hesitation that body produced a statement which clearly upheld the full deity of Christ, declaring that He was of the same substance as the Father. The faith of the mass of Christian believers had triumphed over the doubts of the theologians. Arius and the few who still stood by him were banished for a time. Constantine rejoiced that unity and peace would now reign in the church.

Yet the Arians, apparently vanquished, gradually regained their power, until it seemed as if their views would become universal. Weasel-worded declarations of faith, clever evasions, personal recrimination -- all the devices that anti-Christian thought can use so cleverly were brought to bear. Little by little the Arians came into positions of authority. One after another the supporters of orthodoxy were attacked on various charges, real or imaginary, and it looked as if belief in the full deity of Christ would altogether disappear.