

How could the Arians renew the contest after Nicaea?

The belief of the churches was not yet definitely Nicene.

In the West: conservative people thought of Nicene decisions as questionable innovations. They couldn't translate the technical terms into Latin.

"East and West were alike conservative; but while conservatism in the East went behind the council, in the West it was content to start with it." p.42

In the East:

[1] Heathenism was still strong in practice, particularly the public service. Education was still heathen as was philosophy. Most philosophy in the east was melded with eastern superstition. Heathenism never quite got the idea of worshipping one God only; and from the Christian side it was very nominal. Christians engaged in the heathen world of sport, games sins connected with them. So heathen influences supported the old Arian status quo.

[2] Jewish support of the heathen situation, although there was hatred of the Romans for destroying the Temple in AD70. They resented the adoption of the Gospel. The lower moral tone of Arianism, and especially its denial of the Lord's divinity was welcome to the Jews.

[3] The imperial Court. many Arian sympathisers, who were content to swear allegiance to the Nicene decisions - but with conscientious reserve - fraternised the court. And the public service that lay behind the action and life of the court was heathen.

The best bishops, and the able generals were the court's prey. They were content to upset these high ones, but not defend them.

[4] Constantius and Valens had reasons to support the Arians. From Constantinople, running east to Antioch, was the solid mass of Asia - and 4th Century Asia was a stronghold of conservatism, even though in Cappadocia there was an Arian pocket. The Asian hatred of the Council of Nicaea rested on a great mass of conservative discontent.

Particularly in Egypt and Syria there were already forces at work which would separate them later from the Eastern Orthodox empire. And when Constantius and Valens stuck Egypt or Rome it was always seen as a reaction to the opinions in Asia. The Asian tail wagged the Empire's dog.

After the Council

[1] The Creed was signed and done and seemed forgotten. It was so important to Athanasius but it was unknown in the West.

All parties blame careful after Nicaea however. Marcellus wouldn't admit to Sabellianism; nor Eusebius to Arianism at least as long as Constantine lived.

[2] Alexandria, in the spring of 328 Alexander died and Athanasius was consecrated bishop with some objection by the Arians and Melitians.

328-373 Athanasius bishop of Alexandria

330 Founding of Constantinople

[3] Character of Athanasius:

Showed little sign of Coptic influence, no evidence of the Egyptian love of the mysterious. His style was simple and clear. His training was neither Coptic, nor monastic but Greek and scriptural. He knows the Greek classics and seldom alludes to Egyptian gods.

As a scriptural scholar he has a firm grasp of its leading thoughts. He was a thinker, and a statesman with considerable political skill. He "was philosopher, statesman, and saint in one". His life was consecrated to the witness to the truth.

"The secret of his grandeur is his intense and vivid faith that the incarnation is a real revelation from the other world, and that its issues are for life and death supreme in heaven and earth and hell forevermore" Gwatkin p49

[4] Athanasius' early years in Alexandria - the Nicene faith took hold of Greek and Coptic alike. The Melitians dwindled and the Arians even more so. Nicene orthodoxy was fast becoming the national faith of Egypt.

Beginnings of Reaction

Series of attacks upon persons was the strategy. Eusebius of Nicomedia was exiled after the Council, but not for long. Once restored to his old friends at Court, then he reasoned that if it was unsafe to attack the Creed, the defenders of it were fair game. The Lucianists were at the centre of the party of intrigue: the Melitians of Egypt joined them. Attacks were brought against:

[1] Eustathius of Antioch - well favoured in Antioch. He had favoured the Arian denial of the Lord's human soul and had been exiled to Thrace in 330. His vacant see was offered to Eusebius of Caesarea but was accepted by a Cappadocian, Euphronius. The Nicene would not recognise him and they lived a separate life in Antioch under a deacon Paulinus for 30 years.

330 Euthanias deposed from Antioch

[2] Marcellus of Ancyra - was a stranger to the wider movements of his time, and agreed with the Arians that sonship implies inferiority, so the Son of God is neither eternal nor equal to the Father. In a Sabellianising sense he accepted the Nicene faith. Greeks and Jews acted to this and so the conservative forces allied with them

[3] Athanasius of Alexandria

Early attack on Athanasius in 331 were repulsed by facts which corrected the charges brought against him. Constantine was handling the Gothic war till 334 and his attention was deflected.

335 Councils of Tyre and Jerusalem

The Council of Tyre 335 - about 150 bishops gathered and Athanasius summoned by Emperor, brought 50 bishops with him. Athanasius was accused of episcopal tyranny. Athanasius defended, went on to Jerusalem for the proper business of their meeting without waiting of the judgment. Here at Jerusalem Athanasius was condemned and Arius, recently returned from his 10 years of exile in Illyricum, was given communion.

336 February - 337 November **The First Exile of Athanasius**

Later, an angry letter was sent to court and followed by a deputation of the Eusebians. Instead of attenuating to defend the council of Tyre, Eusebius skilfully brought a new charge, he accused Athanasius of holding back the corn supply for the capital - a capital offence. He was exiled to Trier in Gaul.

All that was left was to formally re-instate Arius at Constantinople - but he died the day before.

Constantine's policy

His pursuing of peace - left only uneasy suspense which satisfied neither party.

Athanasius was not exiled for heresy. Eusebius had signed the Nicene Creed. That Constantine had simply exiled Athanasius implied that he did not believe the accusation about the corn levy - otherwise he would have executed him at once. He sent him away probably because the quarrel with the Asiatic bishops was a nuisance. He simply did as he had done at Nicaea - he let the bishops guide him.