

## IV.2.a

The Council of Nicaea...325 ADChurch Struggles:  
The Councils

## Nicaea

The most famous and successful of all the councils, the Nicene council was called to deal with the teaching of Arius, a presbyter from Alexandria. The question was one regarding the Person of Christ but is really a trinitarian problem as the heart and integrity of the trinity was at stake. The assault on the trinity centered on Christ. Was He truly God? Was He God in the concept of essence? Was He God by appointment or merit? Before proceeding to the council itself we must look at the key persons and the ideas that worked in the church at this time.

Arius

The villain in this scenario, Arius was a personable and gifted man and held the office of presbyter in Alexandria. His teaching held the strong point that Jesus had a beginning and he was not, therefore, God in any sense in which the Father was God. The teaching had been condemned by his bishop, Alexander, and various parties had been on either side of the question before the Nicene conference. The council would condemn Arius in his opinions and he would be exiled to Illyria. Many of his supporters would work for him "behind the scenes" and would succeed in having the Emperor change his mind about Arius. In fact, under imperial pressure, the judgment against Arius was reversed and he was instructed to receive reinstatement in office even though the imperial powers made no interference or change in the creed of Nicaea, per se. Death came to Arius on the very eve of reinstatement and it prompted the orthodox (Nicene) party to announce that God had enacted his judgment while the friends of Arius claimed the other side had harassed him to the point of death. Of his writings only parts of the THALIA remain as they are quoted by his foes. It is not clear to what degree he perceived the end or meaning of his teaching and it is regrettable that we do not have more of his own work. It is hard to make an evaluation on the merit and material when all you have is the stuff used by your enemies.

Athanasius

As Arius was the villain, so Athanasius was the hero. Born in Alexandria about 295, he became secretary to Alexander, the bishop,