

The Debate at Nicaea

1. The Problem: Trinitarianism: Was Jesus really, fully God.
2. Views: Arius: Christ was "the creation of the Divine Will, not the unfolding of the Divine Nature. He was different and unlike the substance and peculiar nature of the Father in all respects.  
 Athanasius: "Jesus Christ is very God of very God, of one substance with the Father from eternity."
3. Opponents:
 

Arius	Alexander
Eusebius of Nicomedia	Athanasius
Theognis of Nicaea	Marcellus of Ancyra
	Eustathius of Antioch

(These thought the words of Athanasius to sound like Sabellianism)      (And, in truth, there were some Sabellians in the camp and such were later condemned)

Both sides made good use of Origen!
4. The Mediators: Eusebius of Caesarea, Hosius of Cordova, Caecilian of Carthage, and, to some extent, the Emperor Constantine.
5. The issue as Athanasius saw it was one of salvation; to Arius it was the integrity of the Godhead; to Constantine it was the unity of the Empire in the face of barbarianism; to many bishops a matter of imperial favor. It was not an issue in the west. Only six western bishops attended.
6. The Gathering: 318 bishops attended (Ambrose of Milan would later compare it to Abraham's army in Genesis 14).  
 The Bishop of Rome (Sylvester I) did not come..he pleaded age.  
 The council lasted for three months (June-August)  
 The procedure was one of debate, discussion, research of tradition and traditional understanding, harangue, agreement and eventually threats!
7. The Outcome: The creed of Athanasius was accepted as definitive (horos).  
 Twenty canons on church order, etc., were given.  
 The western dating of Easter was accepted  
 A way was opened for Novatians, et al, to return.  
 Celibacy was refused as a necessary step for clergy.
8. The Aftermath: 50 good years of confusion as politics and churchmanship worked on society and each other.
  - 335, Tyre, council reversed Nicaea, Banned Athanasius, moved to reinstate Arius, but he died before the ceremony.
  - 341, Antioch, council sought broader definitions...no one happy
  - 343, Sofia..split among eastern/western bishops...westerners reaffirm Athanasius, easterners sulk and use a new term to define Christ's deity
  - 351, Sirmium, Milan 355..Arian followers split among themselves.  
 Strict Arians are called Aetians, major group follow Eudoxius
  - 357, Sirmium. Son pronounced unsearchable in "ousia". Many Arians of the Eudoxian party can live with this
  - 358, compromise statement at Sirmium.."The Son is like the Father in everything according to the Scripture." Many Arians agree.
  - 380-81, Nicene Theology confirmed at Constantinople.
9. A lot of grief and anguish but necessary, I think, in this case. But without political overtones much would never have happened.