

# What About ... What Happened At the Council of Nicea?

BY CHUCK MAY

Often, I am confronted by critics of Christianity who say that for the first few hundred years of the church, Jesus was seen as a good man but not as God. It wasn't, they say, until the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325 that the deity of Christ was voted on and approved as official doctrine. The critics say that Nicea was called at the command of Emperor Constantine, who needed a unified Christianity for political reasons—and Christ being God would achieve this goal. It is, therefore, for political reasons that Christianity invented the idea that Jesus is God.

This theory is quite prevalent in modern culture, since the 2003 release of the book “The DaVinci Code.” On page 233, we find the following dialogue: Teabing said, “Constantine needed to strengthen the new Christian tradition and held a gathering known as the Council of Nicea”... “at this gathering many aspects of Christianity were debated and voted upon—the date of Easter, the administration of sacraments, and of course the divinity of Jesus.” “Until that moment in history, Jesus was viewed as a mortal prophet, a great man, but a man nonetheless, a mortal.” “Jesus’ establishment as the Son of God was officially proposed and voted on by Nicea.” Teabing goes on to say that the vote to establish Jesus’ divinity was “relatively close.”

So, what about these claims? Is the divinity of Jesus a creation of the church in A.D. 325, or does the evidence of history paint a different picture? Below are some facts about the Council of Nicea taken from Eusebius, a historian who was actually present during the Council.

1. Constantine did call hundreds of leaders to Nicea, a city in present-day Turkey, but the purpose was to address the teachings of a man named Arius, who was *denying* the deity of Christ. The deity of Christ had already been taught by the church for hundreds of years. It wasn't until A.D. 325 that the denial of Christ's deity had gotten pervasive enough that the church needed to address it.
2. There was no vote taken at Nicea to establish the deity of Christ. This “vote theory” is total fiction.
3. Nicea affirmed/clarified what it believed to be the apostles' teaching about Christ: that Christ is true God in deity with the Father. The result of this affirmation was a statement called the Nicene Creed.
4. By drafting and signing the Nicene Creed, the teaching that Jesus was not *fully* God was condemned as heresy. Of the 318 attendees, 316 signed the creed—affirming Jesus as *fully* God.
5. A significant doctrinal affirmation occurred while addressing the false claim that Jesus was not God at all. While addressing Arius' views, the leaders clarified the biblical teaching that Christ was not just like God in His nature. Nicea affirmed that Christ's divine nature was the same as (identical to) God's nature. No room was left for a simply mortal or partially divine Jesus at Nicea. The men at Nicea made it crystal clear that they believed Jesus to be FULLY GOD.

Jesus, in about A.D. 30, claimed to be God. For example, in John 10:30, He said, “*I and the Father are One.*” The Jews around Him clearly understood His meaning, since they tried to kill Him for what they viewed as blasphemy.

The authors of the New Testament wrote about Jesus from around A.D. 50 to 90. They claimed Jesus was the ...*great God and Savior* (Titus 2:13).

After the apostles left the scene, the early church leaders continued to make the claim that Jesus was God in-the-flesh. They held so strongly to this view that they were unwilling to deny it, even on the penalty of death. For example, Ignatius (A.D. 30-107), in his letters, used the following phrases: “Jesus Christ our God,” “He is God and man,” “who was from eternity with the Father.” Polycarp (A.D. 69-155) spoke of Jesus as “our lord and God Jesus Christ.” Justin Martyr (A.D. 100-165) stated of Jesus that “who...being the first begotten Word of God, is God.” About Jesus, Justin stated, “God was born from a virgin.” Tatian (A.D. 100-172) said of Jesus that “God was born in the form of a man.” Ireneaus (A.D. 120-202) wrote that Jesus was “perfect God and perfect man,” “not a mere man... but was very God.”

So, what about the Council of Nicea? Against the fabrications of the critics, Nicea was not called for political reasons to create a divine Jesus. The purpose of Nicea was to confront the heretical teaching that Jesus was not fully God.

**Nicea confirmed the biblical and historical position of the Christian church—that Jesus Christ's divine nature is identical to God the Father's.**

