

As I mentioned in the last post, in my debate this past Friday at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, I was trying to sketch out how it was that the early Christians came to think that Christ was God. I decided in the debate **not** to start at the beginning, for example, with the teachings of Jesus, his understandings of himself, the views of his disciples and so on. Instead, in order to set up a key contrast, I started at the end (well, one of the ends) of the Christological conflicts and discussions of Christianity's first three hundred years, the conflict specifically between the famous Christian teacher of Alexandria Egypt, Arius, and his bishop, Alexander.

It was this controversy that led to the famous Council of Nicaea, called by the emperor Constantine (who had converted to Christianity just thirteen years earlier) in the year 325 CE. The controversy is widely misunderstood by people today, who frequently hear completely erroneous things about it - for example, that Arius thought that Christ was human, not divine, or that he was not really the son of God. Wrong, wrong, wrong. Both Arius and Alexander thought that Jesus was the Son of God. More than that, they both thought that he was God, the God who created the universe. He was **not** God the Father, but God the Son. But still he was God.

The question focused on what sense Christ was God. To many people today their difference might seem technical, picayune, and completely uninteresting. But in the day, it was a BIG deal.

Bishop Alexander had apparently asked the various priests in his church of Alexandria to explain a key passage of Scripture, possibly (we don't know for sure) Proverbs 8 (which you should read!) in which the figure known as Wisdom talks about being with God at the beginning and being the one through whom God created all things. Everyone agreed that this passage was referring to Christ. But how was one to understand it?

Arius developed his views along lines that for well over a century had been completely acceptable within orthodox Christian circles. His view was that...

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