Exploring Jesus

Week 7: The Man Who Created the World

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The Council of Nicaea, which was convened in 325, produced the bulk of the Nicene Creed, which Christians all over the world recite every week in worship. What was the central issue at stake in this council, and does it still matter?

The centrality of Jewish monotheism, e.g. Isaiah 45:5: "I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God…"

The worship of Jesus and the recognition of his divinity:

- 1 Corinthians 8:4-6: "…we know that 'no idol in the world really exists' and that 'there is no God but one.'…yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist."
- John 10:30: "The Father and I are one."
- Philippians 2:5: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped…"

Arius: "There was when Christ was not."
Homoiousios = of similar substance
Homoousios = of the same substance

"…We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
<u>of one Being [*homoousios* = consubstantial] with the Father.</u>
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man…"

Given Nicaea's teaching that Jesus is fully God, how did the fathers understand the relation between his divinity and his humanity?

If God is transcendent, omnipotent (all-powerful), and impassible (not subject to suffering), and Jesus is God, how do we make sense of what's said about him in the gospels?

One option: "Who will not admire them for their education as they clearly discriminate aspects of Christ: allocating his being born, being tempted, hungering, thirsting, being tired and sleeping to the human, and reckoning to the Godhead his glorification by angels, his conquest and putting to flight of the Tempter, and likewise his walking on top of the water?"
Gregory of Nazianzus, Letter 102.8

Nestorius: Christ's divinity and humanity are distinct subjects of action, side-by-side but operating independently. Mary is not the Mother of God (*theotokos*), but only the mother of Christ (*christotokos*).

Cyril of Alexandria: Christ's divinity and humanity are united indivisibly in a single person (*hypostasisis*). Everything said or done by Jesus proceeds from the one divine-human subject. Therefore, Mary is not only the mother of Christ (*christotokos*), but the Mother of God (*theotokos*).

The Council of Ephesus (430) condemned Nestorius and affirmed Cyril's teaching that Mary is the Mother of God.

But what about Jesus' humanity?

Is he really fully human, or is he "a drop of humanity in a sea of divinity" (Eutyches), or "God in a bod" (Apollinarius)?

The Council of Chalcedon (451) taught that Christ was not only *homoousios* (consubstantial, of one being) with the Father, but *homoousios* with us as well.

Hebrews 2:17: "… he had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every respect…"

The second Council of Constantinople (553) further clarified that Christ is a single *hypostasis* (person) composed of two natures, divine and human, which always act in union.

"As God, He was the motivating principle of His own humanity, and as man He was the revelatory principle of His own divinity. One could say, then, that He experienced suffering in a divine way, since it was voluntary and He was not mere man; and that He worked miracles in a human way, since they were accomplished through the flesh…"
Maximus the Confessor, Ambiguum 5.18

In Jesus, we can truly say that God died, and a man created the world.