


Voices from church history

Expanding on the question about other witnesses to Jesus


Just knowing Jesus lived— not enough

- Because history talked about lots of men at that time and if he was just a man, you have accusations like this one:
- *At the Council of Nicea, "...many aspects of Christianity were debated and voted upon—the date of Easter, the role of the bishops, the administration of sacraments, and, of course the divinity of Jesus...until that moment in history, Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet...a great and powerful man, but a man nonetheless. A mortal....Because Constantine upgraded Jesus' status almost four centuries after Jesus' death; thousands of documents already existed chronicling His life as a mortal man" The Da Vinci Code: p. 233 & 244.*



If that statement is true

- Jesus isn't really God
- And cannot be trusted for our eternal salvation
- But is it true?
- What really happened at Nicea?
- Did people believe Jesus was God prior to that time?
- That's what we'll look at today through:
 - What Nicea was all about
 - What secular writers of the time prior to the time of Constantine said about Jesus.
 - What church fathers said about Jesus prior to the time of Constantine.
 - What Jesus said about himself in the New Testament—already shown to be a verifiable historical document.




Constantine

- Called Nicea, first Ecumenical (worldwide) Church Council
- Made Christianity legal Edict of Milan 313
- *In Hoc Signo Vinces*




What really happened at Nicea 325

- He attended, but did not debate or vote
- First Church Council
- Key issue Arian controversy
 - Also: How to date Easter
 - Also: What to do about those who recanted their faith when persecuted and then repented?
- **NOT about what books were to be included in the Bible**



Arian heresy

- Never in debate whether Jesus was God or not
- Question is when he became God or was he always God?
- The result—the Nicene Creed:
We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.
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, of one Being with the Father;



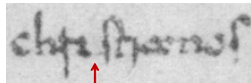
Tacitus

- Secular citations of the reality of Jesus and people's opinion of him:
- In the *Histories of Tacitus, reporting on Emperor Nero's decision to blame the Christians for the fire that had destroyed Rome in A.D. 64, the Roman historian Tacitus wrote:*
- Nero fastened the guilt . . . on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of . . . Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome.

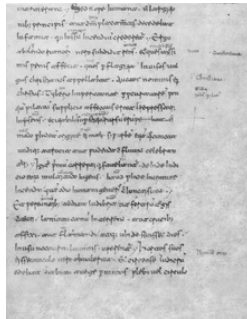


Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians [or Chrestians;] by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. . .

Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car. Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed.



e or i and a medieval manuscript of Tacitus



Letters of Pliny the Younger to Emperor Trajan (ruled 98-117)

- Pliny was the Roman governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor. In one of his letters, dated around A.D. 112, he asks Trajan's advice about the appropriate way to conduct legal proceedings against those accused of being Christians. Pliny says that he needed to consult the emperor about this issue because a great multitude of every age, class, and sex stood accused of Christianity.
- They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food—but food of an ordinary and innocent kind.



What the Church fathers who lived well before Constantine thought of Jesus.

- If you look up these men in Wikipedia, go to the bottom of the page and link to their writings. Many of them are wonderful, edifying, encouraging writings.
- They sound much like the rest of the Bible, quote much of it and it is easy to see how some, such as the first letter of Clement, were considered by some parts of the church to be part of the canon. But on careful reading you will also discover why a book such as Clement was not finally included—he quotes from the Apocrypha, among other things.
- ***Be aware and remember these writings are not Holy Scripture, but they are useful as Christian teaching and a historical view of the church.
- There is no debate (other than within a few years) among scholars conservative or liberal of when these men lived.
- The following short quotes are only a tiny part of the many things they say about Jesus affirming that he was God.

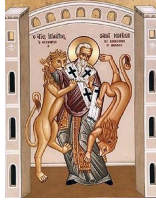
Apostles of Jesus

Apostolic Fathers, first generation of the church

Church Fathers, second generation of the church, prior to Nicea

Ignatius, third bishop of Antioch, a disciple of both Peter and John, wrote between 105-115

- His fate, after many years of teaching was to die a martyr in the arena. The Roman authorities hoped to make an example of him and thus discourage Christianity from spreading. Instead, he met with and encouraged Christians who flocked to meet him all along his route, and he wrote seven letters to the churches in the region (and one to a fellow bishop). Following is a quote from one of them.



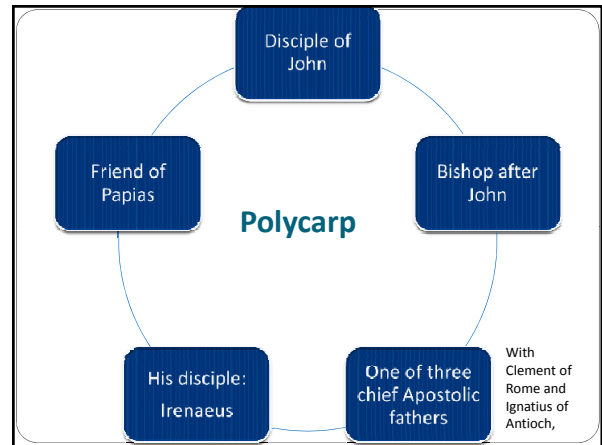
Born c. 35
Died c. 108
Rome

The Epistle of Ignatius to the Church at Smyrna (where Polycarp was Bishop)

“...In very truth, with respect to our Lord Jesus Christ, that He was the Son of God, “the first-born of every creature,”⁸ God the Word, the only-begotten Son, and was of the seed of David according to the flesh,⁹ by the Virgin Mary; was baptized by John, that all righteousness might be fulfilled¹⁰ by Him; that He lived a life of holiness without sin, and was truly, under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch, nailed [to the cross] for us in His flesh.”

Polycarp, the disciple of the Apostle John, martyred in 155-167, at 87 years old

- Letter to the Phillipians: “I have greatly rejoiced with you in our Lord Jesus Christ, because ye have followed the example³ of true love [as displayed by God], and have accompanied, as became you, those who were bound in chains, the fitting ornaments of the true elect of God and our Lord; and because the strong root of your faith, spoken of in days⁴ long gone by, endureth even until now, and bringeth forth fruit to our Lord Jesus Christ, who for our sins suffered even unto death, [but] “whom God raised froth the dead, having loosed the bands of the grave... .But may the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ Himself, who is the Son of God, and our everlasting High Priest, build you up in faith and truth, and in all meekness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, forbearance, and purity;



Saint Papias Bishop of Hierapolis, Martyr, born before AD 70, Died c. AD 155

- Papias describes his way of gathering information:
- I will not hesitate to add also for you to my interpretations what I formerly learned with care from the Presbyters and have carefully stored in memory, giving assurance of its truth. For I did not take pleasure as the many do in those who speak much, but in those who teach what is true, nor in those who relate foreign precepts, but in those who relate the precepts which were given by the Lord to the faith and came down from the Truth itself. And also if any follower of the Presbyters happened to come, I would inquire for the sayings of the Presbyters, what Andrew said, or what Peter said, or what Philip or what Thomas or James or what John or Matthew or any other of the Lord's disciples, and for the things which other of the Lord's disciples, and for the things which Aristion and the Presbyter, the disciples of the Lord, were saying. For I considered that I should not get so much advantage from matter in books as from the voice which yet lives and remains.

Clement of Rome (d. 99 AD), was bishop of Rome,

- When John was bishop of Ephesus, wrote 1 Clement:
 - “From the church of God that temporarily resides in Rome, to the church of God that temporarily resides in Corinth.”
 - “It is fitting that you should think of Jesus Christ as of God.”
- Clement was martyred by being tied to an anchor and thrown from a boat into the Black Sea.



Tertullian, b.150 AD in Carthage

- Roman Lawyer, son of Centurion, converted as an adult
- The first great writer of Latin Christianity. He introduced the term Trinity, to the Christian vocabulary and also probably the formula “three Persons, one Substance” as the Latin “tres Personae, una Substantia”
- Also the terms *vetus testamentum* (“old testament”) and *novum testamentum* (“new testament”),
- Referred to Jesus as “Christ our God.”



Other contributions by Tertullian

- Tertullian was the first to break the force of such charges as that the Christians sacrificed infants at the celebration of the Lord's Supper and committed incest.
- He said Christians can afford to be put to torture and to death, and the more they are cast down the more they grow; "the blood of the martyrs is seed" (*Apologeticum*, 50).

Irenaeus (ca. 130-202) was bishop of Lyon, France.

- He was a disciple of Polycarp, who himself was a disciple of John the Evangelist.
- “For I have a more vivid recollection of what occurred at that time than of recent events . . . so that I can even describe the place where the blessed Polycarp used to sit and discourse—his going out, too, and his coming in—his general mode of life and personal appearance, together with the discourses which he delivered to the people; also how he would speak of . . . John, and with the rest of those who had seen the Lord; and how he would call their words to remembrance. Whatsoever things he had heard from them respecting the Lord, both with regard to His miracles and His teaching, Polycarp having thus received [information] from the eyewitnesses of the Word of life, would recount them all in harmony with the Scriptures. . . with regard to Christ, that as He is the Son of man, so is the same Being not a [mere] man; and as He is flesh, so is He also spirit, and the Word of God, and God. . .”



More Irenaeus

- Note: in addition he wrote quite a bit against heresy and refuted the Gnostic heresy which was becoming prominent at this time, he is the writer who specifically refuted the Gospel of Judas. (think *Da Vinci Code* and similar stories for what gnosticism is)
- from *Against Heresies* “Error, indeed, is never set forth in its naked deformity, lest, being thus exposed, it should at once be detected. But it is craftily decked out in an attractive dress, so as, by its outward form, to make it appear to the inexperienced (ridiculous as the expression may seem) more true than the truth itself.

Origen ca. 182–ca. 251)

- Origen ca. 182–ca. 251) was a Christian scholar and theologian and one of the most distinguished of the Fathers of the early Christian Church. He is thought to have been born at Alexandria, and died at Caesarea. His writings are important as one of the first serious intellectual attempts to describe Christianity.
- He said, “No one should be offended that the Savior is also God.”
- Escaped early persecutions, taught in various schools, wrote volumes about the faith, we have over 2,000 recorded sermons. In 250 persecutions of the Church broke out anew, emperor Decius and this time Origen did not escape. He was tortured, pilloried, and bound hand and foot to the block for days without yielding, but later died from the torture.



Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, is quoted “Jesus Christ, our Lord and God” in AD 250

- And in saying that, it was more than just a theological statement, it was his death warrant.
- In Africa Cyprian courageously prepared his people for the expected edict of persecution by his *De exhortatione martyrii*, and himself set an example when he was brought before the Roman proconsul Aspasius Paternus (August 30, 257). He refused to sacrifice to the pagan deities and firmly professed Christ....he was imprisoned at the behest of the new proconsul, Galerius Maximus. The day following he was examined for the last time and sentenced to die by the sword. His only answer was “Thanks be to God!” The execution was carried out at once in an open place near the city. A vast multitude followed Cyprian on his last journey. He removed his garments without assistance, knelt down, and prayed. Two of his clergy blindfolded him. He ordered twenty-five gold pieces to be given to the executioner, who with a trembling hand administered the death-blow.



All of these men affirmed Jesus was God because of course

- That's what Jesus said:
- **John 10:30: "I and the Father are one."**
- **John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." 8 Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." 9 Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."**



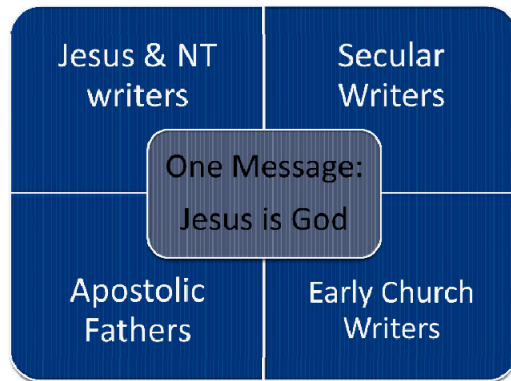
John 8:58 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"

- *C.S. Lewis helps put this passage into perspective*
- ...remember what the words 'I am' were in Hebrew. They were the name of God, which must not be spoken by any human being, the name which it was death to utter. . . . If you had gone to Buddha and asked him, 'Are you the son of Bramah?' He would have said, 'My son, you are still in the value of illusion.' If you had gone to Socrates and asked, 'are you Zeus?' He would have laughed at you. If you had gone to Mohammed and asked, 'Are you Allah?' He would have first rent his clothes and then cut your head off. If you had asked Confucius, 'Are you Heaven?' I think he would have probably replied, 'Remarks which are not in accordance with nature are in bad taste.' The idea of a great moral teacher saying what Christ said is out of the question. In my opinion, the only person who can say that sort of thing is either God or a complete lunatic suffering from that form of delusion which undermines the whole mind of man. . . . He was never regarded as a mere moral teacher. He did not produce that effect on any of the people who actually met Him. He produced mainly three effects—Hatred—Terror—Adoration., There was no trace of people expressing mild approval" From *Asking them Questions*, by C. S. Lewis

The people who heard him knew exactly what he was referring to.

- Jesus claimed to be God and his enemies in many ways responded appropriately. If he was a mere man, and made those claims falsely he was supposed to be executed. That is why they kept asking him about it.
- The Crucifixion one of the best evidences for who Jesus claimed to be—without his claim to be God—he was not very threatening.
- **Conclusion: Jesus clearly and plainly told his audience he was God. They understood what he was saying and the consequences of it—that was why they wanted him to die. It was not something that was made up later.**

Summary: all before 325 AD



Who do you say.....

It isn't to "eat, pray, love...."

Do you live like you mean it?