

NICAEA: A RESPONSE TO THE INNOVATIVE RADICALS OF ARIANISM

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Abstract:

The year 2025 marks the 1700th anniversary of the convocation of the first Ecumenical Council in the history of the Catholic Church. The belief in Jesus as the Son of God is fundamental to Christian theology, and it is rooted in Scripture, Tradition, and the lived experience of believers who study and ponder over the Word of God. Our faith conviction centres on Jesus, but sometimes, innovative radicals confuse our understanding of Jesus in our Christian life. Within the secular world, confident thinkers and poets appreciate Jesus as a social reformer and religious person who encourages people to lead happier and more meaningful lives. Christians confess with unwavering faith that Jesus is God and the Son of God; in Him, we have been moved by Him for our lives. This faith conviction is affirmed in the Council of Nicaea against Arianism and played a crucial role in safeguarding the simple faith of the followers that Jesus is the Son of God, who was incarnated for our salvation.

Key Words: Council of Nicaea, Christology, Athanasius, Arius, Emperor Constantine, Son of God, Homoousios, Creed, Canon.

Introduction

The title of this article means that there are innovative radicals whose work is to find fault and challenge the established faith of the Church with their intellectual arrogance; according to some authorities, Arius was the aggressor whose heretical teaching made

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the Church convoke the Council of Nicaea.¹⁹⁰ The Council of Nicaea (325) is a General Council in the Church, which was the supreme expression of the Church's mind.¹⁹¹ However, people with strong faith in Jesus, as He is fully human and divine, will engage in the teachings of Nicaea; in its Creed, the Council solemnly proclaimed the oneness of being of the Son with the Father.¹⁹² There is a Tamil song that appeared in 1966, which is titled "*Butthan Yesu Gandhi*," in this song, the poet presents a view where Jesus is serialised with other human figures without any hidden and harmful motif, and the song has the meaning that Jesus was born for social reform, and convincingly forgets the divine nature of Jesus.¹⁹³ The fourth century of the Christian era witnessed a controversy that produced some of the basic principles of classical Trinitarian and Christological doctrine, the most important Creed in the history of Christianity.¹⁹⁴ History teaches how the divinity of Jesus was achieved in the Council of Nicaea from a strong Arian party because Arius denied the equality of the Son with the Father.¹⁹⁵

In the history of the Church, the first four ecumenical councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon have an apparent interest in the knowledge of the law and institutions of early Christianity. The teachings of these councils helped the nascent Church to be strengthened as an institution and, above all, vibrant in their understanding of Jesus and their spirituality. Pope Julius spoke of the Council of Nicaea as 'divine inspiration' in referring to Canon Five of Nicaea, and Pope Leo declared that the legislation of Nicaea is inviolable.¹⁹⁶ Above all, the Council of Nicaea affirmed the divinity of Jesus, establishing the foundational belief for the followers of Christ that He is not merely a social and religious reformer but a divine person. A traditionalist named Arius invented, by his logical

¹⁹⁰ Athanasius, *The Arian Controversy before Nicaea* 2.2 (NPNF 4:xv).

¹⁹¹ Athanasius, *The Council of Nicaea* 2.3.1 (NPNF 4:xvii).

¹⁹² Neuner J. and Dupuis J., *The Christian Faith*, ed. Leonard Fernando and John D. Romus, Eighth Revised and Enlarged Edition (Bengaluru: Theological Publications in India, 2022), # 7. Hereafter Neuner J. and Dupuis J., *The Christian Faith* will be denoted as ND with its canon number within the text, as well as in the short footnote.

¹⁹³ *Butthan Yesu Gandhi*, 1966, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1O5zxTNxvoQ>.

¹⁹⁴ Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1.

¹⁹⁵ Neuner J. and Dupuis J., *The Christian Faith*, 4.

¹⁹⁶ Peter L'Huillier, *The Church of the Ancient Councils* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 1.

argument, that the Son is not like the Father and created heretical teaching in the Church, which profoundly impacted the Church's faith. Arianism sparked one of the most significant theological controversies in the early Church. Let us explore the reasons behind the Arian controversy.

1. The Arian Controversy

The theological interpretation of faith before the Council of Nicaea was nonetheless full of trial and error and marked by a varying interpretation, often shaped by individual understanding and articulation. In the third century, a cleavage appeared between popular belief and reflective theology.¹⁹⁷ Arius was born in Libya and was an Alexandrian priest who himself held that the Son was a creature; the roots of his teachings are traced back to Lucian of Antioch, founder of the exegetical school at Antioch, who favoured subordinationism, who spent a long time outside of the Church, and who died a martyr's death in 312.¹⁹⁸ The teachings of Lucian of Antioch influenced Arius; Arius was a priest of the Church of Baucalis, and he popularised his views about God and Christ by singing songs he had written himself (*The Thalia*).¹⁹⁹ Thus, Arius came into open conflict with his bishop, Alexander of Alexandria, denying the Word's eternity and real divine nature.²⁰⁰ Alexander taught that God was always Father and that the Son was always Son, thus implying the eternal generation of the Son; as the Father's Word and Wisdom, the Son must always have been with the Father, and the Son is the exact image of the Father and thus able to reveal and represent Him.²⁰¹

The core teaching of Arius is that the Son of God, the Logos, cannot be God. Like others, he is the first of God's creatures and was brought out of nothingness, not from the divine substance, and he differs essentially from the Father.²⁰² The reason is that the Father alone is God and immortal (1 Tim 6: 16); Arius saw the Son as a

¹⁹⁷ L'Huillier, *The Church of the Ancient Councils*, 17.

¹⁹⁸ Bernard Lonergan, *The Way to Nicaea: The Dialectical Development of Trinitarian Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 68–69.

¹⁹⁹ Stephen W. Need, *Truly Divine and Truly Human: The Story of Christ and the Seven Ecumenical Councils* (London: SPCK; Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 44.

²⁰⁰ L'Huillier, *The Church of the Ancient Councils*, 17.

²⁰¹ Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology*, 16.

²⁰² Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. III (Maryland: Christian Classics, 1986), 8.

being distinct from and inferior to the Father.²⁰³ The Son of God is subordinate because He is not divine, and Jesus cannot be equal to God.²⁰⁴ Arius teaches that there was a time when the Son of God was not; Jesus is the Son of God not in the metaphysical, but in the moral sense of the Word; the title of God is improperly given to him by adoption, and thus Jesus becomes the Son of God.²⁰⁵

Arius followed the *Logos-sarx* Christological framework and taught the ontological inferiority of the Logos. He argued that if the Logos could suffer and die, Jesus was not God, and he also interpreted the term 'begotten' as 'created.'²⁰⁶ Thus, Arius continued his teachings and refused to submit to the decisions made by a Council of one hundred bishops from Egypt and Libya under the presidency of Bishop Alexander. Arius did not accept the teachings of the Church and instead continued to look for support primarily from his former fellow disciples in the school of Antioch.²⁰⁷ Arius was not an isolated thinker; as a religious personality of considerable charm and an able writer, he recruited many followers, found himself at the head of a community, and continued to spread Arianism.²⁰⁸ Therefore, Emperor Constantine invited the bishops of the empire to Nicaea to convoke an ecumenical council to resolve the heretical teachings of Arius.

2. The Convocation of the Council at Nicaea (325)

Emperor Constantine convened the General Council of Nicaea,²⁰⁹ the first ecumenical Council in the history of the Church, to settle a doctrinal controversy.²¹⁰ The Council of Nicaea was initially planned to convene in Ancyra in Galatia. However, Emperor Constantine summoned the bishops to Nicaea, as this city appeared preferable since the emperor had a palace there, which also afforded easier access for the western bishops.²¹¹ The Council opened on 19 June 325

²⁰³ Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology*, 16.

²⁰⁴ Joseph F. Kelly, *The Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church: A History* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2009), 21.

²⁰⁵ Quasten, *Patrology*, III:8.

²⁰⁶ Sebastian Athappilly, *Christology Today: Mystery and History of Jesus Christ*, vol. I (Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2022), 291.

²⁰⁷ L'Huillier, *The Church of the Ancient Councils*, 18.

²⁰⁸ Hubert Jedin, *Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church: An Historical Outline* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1960), 16.

²⁰⁹ Neuner J. and Dupuis J., *The Christian Faith*, # 7.

²¹⁰ Athappilly, *Christology Today: Mystery and History of Jesus Christ*, I:291.

²¹¹ L'Huillier, *The Church of the Ancient Councils*, 18.

in the presence of the emperor Constantine and two presbyters who represented the Apostolic See, namely, Vitus and Vincentius, with 318 Fathers.²¹² The meetings of the Council of Nicaea were held in the imperial palace, which was the only place large enough to accommodate the bishops and their attendants.

The most outstanding achievement of the Council of Nicaea was the definition of the faith, composed as a Creed. In addition, the Council promulgated twenty canons, which dealt with various contemporary issues.²¹³ In this Council, we find that the inordinate champion of the Council was St. Athanasius, whom Bishop Alexander ordained. Both of them participated in the Council, where the debates of Athanasius with Arians attracted attention. Athanasius was a steadfast defender of the faith of Nicaea, whom the Arians regarded as their chief enemy, and he did everything to destroy him.²¹⁴ Successfully, the affirmation of the true divinity of Christ was solemnly proclaimed in the Council of Nicaea. It is the faith of the Church because, in the early Church, Christians sought to express their experience of Jesus in the language available to them, drawing upon various words and expressions. The early Christians applied the Son of God to Jesus and emphasised it, with the Scriptural references and the faith in Jesus.²¹⁵

2.1. The Affirmation of the True Divinity of Christ

The Council officially clarified the absolute divinity of Christ by affirming his consubstantiality with God the Father; the Son is of one being or substance with the Father.²¹⁶ The Greek term the Council of Nicaea adopted is '*homoousios*', which means 'same substance,' that Jesus is consubstantial with the Father (ND # 7).²¹⁷ Many Eastern bishops rejected the term '*homoousios*' through misunderstanding, and Athanasius evinces great sympathy and patience in winning them back to the truth.²¹⁸ With regard to the term '*homoousios*', it is

²¹² Heinrich Denzinger and Peter Hünermann, eds., *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, Forty-Third Edition (San Francisco, California, USA, Bangalore, India: Ignatius Press; Asian Trading Corporation, 2012), 50. Cf. Norman P. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Nicaea I to Lateran V*, vol. 1 (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 1–2.

²¹³ Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Nicaea I to Lateran V*, 1:3.

²¹⁴ Quasten, *Patrology*, III:20.

²¹⁵ Need, *Truly Divine and Truly Human*, 5.

²¹⁶ Athappilly, *Christology Today: Mystery and History of Jesus Christ*, I:278.

²¹⁷ Neuner J. and Dupuis J., *The Christian Faith*, # 7.

²¹⁸ Quasten, *Patrology*, III:20.

said to be used by the Syro-Palestinian region in their baptismal Creed, and the fathers of the Council used this term to make a precise response to the Arian heresy.²¹⁹ The Council of Nicaea was a pivotal moment in the history of the Church and directly opposed those who asserted that the Son was not God but a creature. Explicitly, the Council affirmed its faith in one God, adding at once, the Father Almighty; then it named the Son, calling him Lord, God of God, begotten, not made, of the Father's substance, and consubstantial with the Father (DS 125).²²⁰ The Council of Nicaea, in its response to Arianism, made the dogmatic declaration that clarified the divine status of Jesus, and it represents an important milestone in the development of Christology.²²¹

2.2. The Faith and Teaching of the Council of Nicaea

The Council of Nicaea used seven expressions to clarify the true Christian faith regarding Christ.²²² They are as follows: firstly, Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the only begotten born from the Father, and Jesus is in complete contrast to other beings (DS 125).²²³ Secondly, Jesus is from the being (*ousia*) of the Father (ND # 7); unlike mere creatures created out of nothing, Christ, the only begotten Son, comes out of the Father's own being.²²⁴ Thirdly, Jesus is God from God (DS 125),²²⁵ Jesus is as much God as the Father, sharing perfectly in the one and same divine nature, yet the two are distinct, for one originates and the other is originated.²²⁶ The fourth expression is that Jesus is the light from light (DS 125); this is to bring out the total oneness of essence between the Father and the Son, having identical nature.²²⁷ The fifth expression is that Jesus is true God from true God (ND # 7), and the sixth expression is that Jesus, the Son of God, is begotten, not made (ND # 7); this expression refers to a profound mystery of our faith, and the negation 'not made' is a reference to

²¹⁹ L'Huillier, *The Church of the Ancient Councils*, 19.

²²⁰ Denzinger and Hünemann, *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, 50. Cf. Lonergan, *The Way to Nicea: The Dialectical Development of Trinitarian Theology*, 95.

²²¹ Athappilly, *Christology Today: Mystery and History of Jesus Christ*, I:291.

²²² Athappilly, *Christology Today: Mystery and History of Jesus Christ*, I:291.

²²³ Denzinger and Hünemann, *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, 50.

²²⁴ Athappilly, *Christology Today: Mystery and History of Jesus Christ*, I:292.

²²⁵ Denzinger and Hünemann, *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, 51.

²²⁶ Athappilly, *Christology Today: Mystery and History of Jesus Christ*, I:292.

²²⁷ Athappilly, *Christology Today: Mystery and History of Jesus Christ*, I:292.

Arius, who had insisted that the Son was made out of nothing in the sense of a created being.²²⁸ The seventh expression is that Jesus is one in being (*homoousious*) with the Father (ND # 7); this is to state that the Father and the Son have only one divine nature, substance, or being.²²⁹

All the expressions used in the Council of Nicaea affirmed the divinity of Jesus in response to Arius, who was trying to figure out Jesus as one among the unique human beings without recognising the divine nature of Jesus. The teachings of the Council strongly affirm the divine nature of Jesus Christ. Thus, the proclamation of faith in Nicaea became a foundational statement of Christian orthodoxy.

2.3. The Anathematism

Anathema is a solemn form of excommunication or exclusion from the community. St. Paul uses the term against anyone who preaches a false gospel (Gal 1:9) and refuses the love of Christ (1 Cor 16: 22).²³⁰ As the result of the Council of Nicaea, in an appendix the most important theses of Arius were expressly condemned in the Council of Nicaea,²³¹ and the Council approved the Creed on 25 August, 325.²³² The Council made a strong statement of faith that as for those who say there was a time when He was not, and before being begotten He was not, and He was made from nothing, and the Son of God is from a different substance or being and subject to change and alteration, such persons are condemned by the Catholic Church (ND # 8).²³³ The Creed formulated in the Council was approved by all present, except two bishops who refused to sign it; along with Arius, they were excommunicated and banished, and the emperor promulgated the Creed as a law of the empire.²³⁴ Arius and his supporters could not accept the teachings of the Council, and Emperor Constantine banished Arius to Illyria (modern Balkans). Two Arian bishops who refused to sign the statement of the Council

²²⁸ Athappilly, *Christology Today: Mystery and History of Jesus Christ*, I:292.

²²⁹ Athappilly, I:293.

²³⁰ Gerald O'Collins and Edward G. Farrugia, "A Concise Dictionary of Theology" (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 9.

²³¹ Jedin, *Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church: An Historical Outline*, 18.

²³² L'Huillier, *The Church of the Ancient Councils*, 19.

²³³ Neuner J. and Dupuis J., *The Christian Faith*, # 8.

²³⁴ Jedin, *Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church: An Historical Outline*, 18-19.

were deposed.²³⁵ Thus, the Conciliar Fathers officially condemned some famous phrases of Arian doctrines. The Arian doctrine, though condemned at Nicaea, could still muster considerable support at Alexandria, and the controversy over the Council of Nicaea continued with their influence.²³⁶

3. Controversy Over the Council of Nicaea

A relentless campaign started against the head of the Orthodox party, Athanasius, who had been raised to the see of Alexandria in the meantime. The Council of Nicaea did not end the disruptions caused by the doctrine of Arius, and the teaching of this heresiarch so flagrantly contradicted the Holy Tradition of the Church.²³⁷ After the Council, the Arian controversy raged on, and various forms of Arianism emerged; in the later fourth century, the radical Arians, Aetius and his pupil Eunomus, separated the Son from the Father even more than Arius had done.²³⁸ The problem with *homoousios* is that this term seemed too non-scriptural for many conservative bishops; it lacks a Scriptural foundation and has Monarchian overtones.²³⁹ Opponents of Nicaea used this unease and slowly worked to discredit the Council and its leaders.

A politically minded and well-connected Arian Bishop, Eusebius of Nicomedia, used this easy access to the emperor Constantine and played a crucial role in targeting all kinds of false accusations against the three chief supporters of Nicaea to be punished.²⁴⁰ Thus, the opponents of Nicaea conspired to make decisions for the Bishop of Antioch and the Bishop of Ancyra to be deposed, and Athanasius, a staunch defender of Nicaea, was sent into exile in Trier. The adversaries of Nicaea were so successful that the emperor was even ready to rehabilitate Arius in Constantinople in 336.²⁴¹ Amazingly, the evening before the formal ceremony of rehabilitation, Arius died of an intestinal haemorrhage in a public toilet, which the Nicenes enthusiastically interpreted as a sign from God. In the following year, Emperor Constantine also died.²⁴² On account of the death of Emperor Constantine (337), Athanasius and other exiled bishops

²³⁵ Kelly, *The Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church: A History*, 23.

²³⁶ Quasten, *Patrology*, III:20.

²³⁷ L'Huillier, *The Church of the Ancient Councils*, 101.

²³⁸ Need, *Truly Divine and Truly Human*, 61.

²³⁹ Kelly, *The Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church: A History*, 25.

²⁴⁰ Kelly, *The Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church: A History*, 25.

²⁴¹ Kelly, *The Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church: A History*, 25.

²⁴² Kelly, *The Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church: A History*, 26.

returned to their diocese by 23 November of that year,²⁴³ but his opponents did not rest; at the instigation of Eusebius, bishop of Nicomedia, they again deposed Athanasius in a synod of Antioch (339), and elected an excommunicated priest Pistus, as bishop of Alexandria, and Athanasius took refuge in Rome.²⁴⁴ In 343, Pope Julius I, at the extraordinary synod of Sardica, completely exonerated Athanasius as the legal bishop of Alexandria.²⁴⁵ The opponents of the Nicene Creed persuaded the pro-Arian Emperor Constantine to convoke another general synod. This assembly met in the year 359 at Rimini for the West and Seleucia for the East, but no reconciliation was effected.²⁴⁶

4. The Significance of Nicaea

The significance of the Council of Nicaea can be understood in two ways: first, it clarified Christian understanding of Jesus, and second, it was conceived and expressed in a new way.²⁴⁷ The new way of adopting new terminology was creative, and the Christians were no longer bound to twist the Bible endlessly to prove a point.²⁴⁸ Athanasius thus testifies that the Nicene faith is intended to go beyond the affirmation of a mere similarity between the Father and Son to an affirmation of identity and Christian faith, explicitly affirmed faith in one God.²⁴⁹

The Council of Nicaea also engaged her in teaching a new way of encountering challenges. First of all, the Council made a challenge to Biblical fundamentalism, and there was a fundamentalist attitude that some participants in the Council said *homooousios* was not scriptural. It was essential to point out that such a new term could only adequately respond to Arius and solve the problem by clarifying the true Christian faith, for Arius could explain all the biblical statements in terms of his own erroneous understanding.²⁵⁰ Secondly, the Council entered into a new sphere, the ontological perspective, to affirm that Jesus is God in himself, and He is not a

²⁴³ Robert W. Thomson, trans., *Athanasius: Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione* (Clarendon Press, 1971), xv.

²⁴⁴ Quasten, *Patrology*, III:21.

²⁴⁵ Quasten, III:21.

²⁴⁶ Jedin, *Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church: An Historical Outline*, 22.

²⁴⁷ Athappilly, *Christology Today: Mystery and History of Jesus Christ*, I:293.

²⁴⁸ Kelly, *The Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church: A History*, 24.

²⁴⁹ Lonergan, *The Way to Nicea: The Dialectical Development of Trinitarian Theology*, 95.

²⁵⁰ Athappilly, *Christology Today: Mystery and History of Jesus Christ*, I:295.

creature. The acceptance of the Nicene Creed has been the litmus test of the genuine Christian faith, and it remains so; it is also a challenge to us.²⁵¹ Thirdly, the subject in Christ has been clarified; in Christ, there is a single subject, the Logos, who is God.²⁵²

4.1. The Nicene Creed as a Standard of Faith

The Creed produced at the Council of Nicaea is often called the 'Creed of Nicaea' and popularly known today as the 'Nicene Creed' and recited by Christians at the Eucharist, and its clauses were deliberately aimed at Arius and his followers and to have a faith formula for the followers of Christ with conviction.²⁵³ The Nicene Creed was intended to stand as a binding and universal formula of Christian faith, with carefully chosen terminology defining the fundamental Christian account of the relationship between Father and Son. The bishops at Nicaea thought that the local baptismal Creed was a sufficient definition of Christian belief and summary of the faith as Scripture taught, because the baptismal creeds were central to the catechesis and the rite of Christian initiation.²⁵⁴ We find this baptismal Creed in the second-century writers whose works can be discerned, for example, Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus, and Tertullian. These writers indicate a threefold belief in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in texts used to question candidates for Christian baptism.²⁵⁵ These local baptismal creeds were handed down through a community's liturgical practice and sometimes associated with the name of a local saint or church founder, and various comparable creeds were in use.²⁵⁶ The early baptismal Creed was in interrogatory form, and by the Council of Nicaea, the Creed became declarative in form; the original Greek of the Creed of Nicaea has the plural 'We believe' as its opening words and is a statement of corporate faith of the Church.²⁵⁷ The Council of Nicaea introduced the standard faith formula in the Church when the Council's position became established. Nicaea, with its Creed and twenty canons, attempted to implement a degree of unity and common practice

²⁵¹ Athappilly, *Christology Today: Mystery and History of Jesus Christ*, I:297.

²⁵² Athappilly, *Christology Today: Mystery and History of Jesus Christ*, I:298.

²⁵³ Need, *Truly Divine and Truly Human*, 52.

²⁵⁴ Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology*, 85.

²⁵⁵ Need, *Truly Divine and Truly Human*, 53.

²⁵⁶ Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology*, 86.

²⁵⁷ Need, *Truly Divine and Truly Human*, 54.

among the fourth-century churches because the Church needed more incredible organisation and administration, especially regarding matters of morality, authority, and general practice.²⁵⁸

5. Reception of the Council of Nicaea

Reception means that it does not create truth nor legitimise the decision; it is the final indication that such a decision has fulfilled the necessary conditions to express the faith truly.²⁵⁹ In the earlier phase of Arianism, the opponents of the Council of Nicaea were unwilling even to utter the word '*homoousios*', and they suspected the term.²⁶⁰ The Church has received the teaching of Nicaea because it recognises the Apostolic faith.²⁶¹ Yves Congar wrote in an article about the reception of Nicaea that it is only after 56 years of strife punctuated by synods, there were many excommunications, exile, interventions, and imperial violence, and the Council of Constantinople put an end to all these quarrels.²⁶² The teaching of the Council was defended by Athanasius, who was an active agent for its reception; finally, in 363, Athanasius said that the Nicene Creed is the Word of God that lives eternally.²⁶³

6. Nicaea and Marginalised

One of the most striking characteristics of the Council of Nicaea is its neglect of social and economic issues because, at that time, the condition of people with low incomes and women was not a concern. About 90 percent of the state income was derived from land taxation and the agricultural population. Nicaea says nothing about those at the margin of the political process.²⁶⁴ Scholars are unanimous in

²⁵⁸ Need, *Truly Divine and Truly Human*, 59–60.

²⁵⁹ Bernard Sesboue, "Reception of Councils from Nicaea to Constantinople II: Conceptual Divergences and Unity in the Faith Yesterday and Today," *Jurist: The Catholic University of America* 57. 01 (1997): 88.

²⁶⁰ Lonergan, *The Way to Nicaea: The Dialectical Development of Trinitarian Theology*, 93.

²⁶¹ Sesboue, "Reception of Councils from Nicaea to Constantinople II: Conceptual Divergences and Unity in the Faith Yesterday and Today," 88.

²⁶² Sesboue, "Reception of Councils from Nicaea to Constantinople II: Conceptual Divergences and Unity in the Faith Yesterday and Today," 94. Cf. Yves Congar, "La 'Réception' Comme Réalité Ecclésiologique," *Revue Des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 56 (1972): 372.

²⁶³ Sesboue, "Reception of Councils from Nicaea to Constantinople II: Conceptual Divergences and Unity in the Faith Yesterday and Today," 94–95.

²⁶⁴ Paulo D. Siepierski, "Nicaea and the Marginalized," *Theology Digest* 38. 01 (1991): 23.

asserting that Christianity between 80-325 C.E. abandoned Jesus' feminism and reasserted Old Testament patriarchalism. The Creed from Nicaea does not mention the Virgin Mary, but Constantinople added that Jesus became flesh from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man (ND # 12).²⁶⁵ In general, the Creed acquires its legitimacy as an ecumenical symbol to the extent it cooperates in the emancipation of the ordinary people, and the Council could have spoken about the struggles and sufferings of the poor and marginalised in one of their canons to be liberated from social evils.

7. The Council of Nicaea as the Bridge for a New Theology

In the third century, under the influence of Origen, Christians began to have dialogue with non-Christians; this effort and its culmination in the next century at the Council of Nicaea was a paradoxical and complex culmination, says John Henry Newman.²⁶⁶ The Alexandrians had trained up a corps of first-rate intelligence, Gregory, Athenodorus, Dionysius, Alexander, Athanasius, and many others—and they were men of high seriousness.²⁶⁷ They required a change in presenting their belief, as required by Arians; the Alexandrians found a term, either a non-scriptural or non-traditional word, to express what the Church understood as the Son of God.²⁶⁸ The Council of Nicaea became a bridge for a new theology of affirming the divinity of the Holy Spirit and for an ulterior precision of faith in Jesus as our Lord and God, and the Nicene faith remains a connection of faith with all the Christians and their theology. In general, the Council of Nicaea paved the way for a strong Christological doctrine of the Church, without doubt and wavering faith. Jesus is the Son of God and consubstantial to the Father; such authoritative statements serve our conviction in Jesus that He is God for His followers.

Conclusion

The Council of Nicaea was the most momentous event in the history of the Christian Church up to that time because of the Christian quest for the most appropriate language and the most useful philosophical categories with which to speak and think of the

²⁶⁵ Neuner J. and Dupuis J., *The Christian Faith*, 12. Cf. Siepierski, "Nicaea and the Marginalized," 25.

²⁶⁶ Michael Novak, "Newman on Nicaea," *Theological Studies* 21. 03 (n.d.): 444.

²⁶⁷ Novak, "Newman on Nicaea," 449.

²⁶⁸ Novak, "Newman on Nicaea," 449.

relation between the Son and the Father.²⁶⁹ The Council of Nicaea affirmed the Apostolic faith in the Church. Its teaching is inevitable and marks a transition from multiplicity to unity: from a multiplicity of symbols, titles, and predicates to the ultimate ground of our faith, namely that Jesus is the Son of God, consubstantial with the Father. The Church is being guided by the power of the Holy Spirit from the heretical belief. It upholds our faith in Jesus worldwide, and we confess with unwavering faith in times of trials, tribulation, persecution, violence, and internal crisis. The Council of Nicaea clarified the divinity of Jesus; if the Council had not affirmed the divinity of Jesus due to fear of Arians, Jesus could be in the line of one of the social reformers, and it is the faith of the Nicenes that they believed in the Church sustained it in all the times. The orthodox doctrine was defended, the meaning of the Incarnation of God's Son was defined in the form of the Creed, and the Council of Nicaea guarded the fundamental truths of our faith. The Christian identity was set once and for all by the acceptance and profession of the Nicene Creed and staying away from other heretical and religious systems.

The Council reinforced the authority of the bishops, and a particular prominence was given to the Bishop of Rome to confirm the doctrine of the Church. The unity in the Church is maintained by the profession of the Creed in the Catholic Church throughout the world. The faith formula of Nicaea is universal, and this Creed plays a vital role in Christological development and as a unifying principle for all Christians in the Church. Christian faith and Christology are based on Jesus, the disciples, and the early Church, who preached him as the Messiah, Son of God, and the Lord. This confession of faith was recognised in the first ecumenical Council of Nicaea. The various heresies that emerged during the centuries have manifested how delicate and complex it is to conceptualise the great mystery of the Incarnation; it is the excellent help of the Council of Nicaea for the faithful to clarify and profess the authentic faith of the Church. The Council of Nicaea's authoritative teaching asserted Jesus's divine nature.

²⁶⁹ Need, *Truly Divine and Truly Human*, 60.