

First council of nicaea and jehovah s witnesses



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Arianism, a Christian heresy first proposed early in the 4th century by the Alexandrian presbyter Arius. It affirmed that Christ is not truly divine but a created being. Arius' basic premise was the uniqueness of God, who is alone self-existent and immutable; the Son, who is not self-existent, cannot be God. Because the Godhead is unique, it cannot be shared or communicated, so the Son cannot be God. Because the Godhead is immutable, the Son, who is mutable, being represented in the Gospels as subject to growth and change, cannot be God.

The Son must, therefore, be deemed a creature who has been called into existence out of nothing and has had a beginning. Moreover, the Son can have no direct knowledge of the Father since the Son is finite and of a different order of existence, Brown, and Heresies (1988; 45). The other definition of Arianism is that, Arianism is the idea that Jesus Christ is not equal to the Father by nature, but He is the first creation of God. The founder of Arianism was Arius who died in 336. His ideas would have a tremendous impact on the early Church by causing it to define orthodoxy with a number of creeds.

However, his impact continues to this present day with such groups as the Jehovah's Witnesses. As a result of their convictions, these modern day Arians produce a number of Biblical arguments to support their contention that Jesus is not God. Though Arianism is false Biblically, its doctrines force the Church throughout all generations to define what she believes regarding the person and nature of Christ. As mentioned above, the founder of Arianism was no other than Arius. He studied under Lucian of Antioch who saw Jesus as a semi divine intermediate being.

In fact, Lucian thought the Logos was not fully God or man. Therefore, Jesus has a high status among the creatures even being called “ the firstborn of all creation (Col. 1). ” Jesus is supernatural, but He is not equal to the Father. Brown states, “ Arianism developed the idea that the Son is a semidivine being created, not begotten, by the Father and having an origin in time, or at least a definite beginning before the creation of the material world. ” Arius would later receive his ordination as a presbyter in Alexandria in 311.

He had many friends in high places including quite a few Asian bishops who tolerated his ideas. As a result of the spread of his teachings, Arius received opposition from some of his opponents. One of these opponents was Bishop Alexander. He argued that Jesus was the same substance with the Father (homoousios). The contrasting party was known as the homoiousios group. They believed that Jesus was of similar substance with the Father. As a result of this disagreement, there was great controversy among the various local churches.

This arguing would convince Constantine to call the Council of Nicea. According to its opponents, especially the bishop Athanasius, Arius' teaching reduced the Son to a demigod, reintroduced polytheism (since worship of the Son was not abandoned), and undermined the Christian concept of redemption since only he who was truly God could be deemed to have reconciled man to the Godhead. Despite the best efforts of the Orthodox Church to stamp out Arianism, there are branches of the belief that continue to this present day. One of them is the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Founded in the mid to late nineteenth century by Charles Taze Russell, this group contains several million adherents in numerous countries. Like the

ancient Arians, these modern day Witnesses believe that Jesus is a created being who is therefore not eternal and not God. They specifically argue that Jesus was Michael the Archangel. However, by examining a number of Scriptures, their contentions do not hold up. The Arian heresy had infected parts of the Church all the way from Alexandria through Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor to Greece.

It was bad enough that it viciated the very heart of Christian doctrine from within, but there was also danger that it would weaken the Empire itself, and so Constantine, who was trying hard to consolidate the Empire, took an active part in trying to solve the matter. He called for a council of bishops of the Church. At first it appeared that he had in mind only the Eastern bishops since he first designated Ancyra in Galatia (Ankara in Turkey) as a place for the bishops to assemble.

Arianism had particularly divided the Church there. But this would make it difficult for himself to attend, and besides it might be good for other bishops to attend, those not necessarily involved in the controversy. Hence Nicaea in Bithynia was finally selected; it was close to the sea making it easier for more bishops to attend, he had there a large palace compound, both to house the bishops and with a great hall in which they could assemble, and he could keep an eye on them from nearby Nicomedia, Harold and Brown, (1988; 65).

Constantine himself was strongly influenced by certain Arian bishops, particularly by Bishop Eusebius of the capitol city of Nicomedia, and if he did not actually have Arian leanings himself, he had been informed by them that a council of the Church would show that the teaching of Arius was correct. It

would be to Constantine's credit that when the bishops in council voted the opposite way, condemned Arianism and overwhelmingly affirmed the traditional doctrine, that he got behind them 100% and promulgated their decisions.

In AD 325 Constantine called for the council, 318 bishops from the East and a few from the West came to the Council in Nicea. They debated the matters for quite a while, but no agreement was reached. Eventually, the Arians made the mistake of presenting a statement of their faith from Eusebius of Nicomedia. Brown comments, " It frankly and flatly denied the deity of Christ, stunning even the least acute of the uncommitted majority. " As a result, " It was roundly rejected. The Arians appealed to Eusebius of Caesarea who drew up a creed that would become the blueprint for the Nicene Creed. Constantine himself acted and advocated the addition of homoousios (consubstantial). Most of the Arian bishops gave in and the emperor commanded that the writings of Arius be burned. McGrath, (1998; 34). Despite the efforts of the emperor, the Nicene Creed did not completely settle the issue. The emperor soon began to listen to Arian sympathizers. He even reinstated Eusebius of Nicomedia.

He also removed some pro-Nicene bishops. After Constantine's death, his three sons allowed many of the pro-Nicene bishops to return to their positions. Arianism did not simply influence several theologians in the early centuries of Christianity; its impact affected the emergence of Orthodoxy. Brown comments that Arianism gave " the church the first standard by which orthodoxy could be reliably measured. " The Arian controversy was the first controversy to be decided by an ecumenical council.

This impact continues today with groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses who deny the deity of Christ. However, despite their best efforts, their arguments do not square with the Biblical evidence. Instead, their Jesus lacks the power to save. Metzger rightly points out the effects of the Witnesses view, " While he was on earth he was nothing more than a man, and therefore the atoning effect of his death can have no more significance than that of a perfect human being. Further, " if a sect's basic orientation regarding Jesus Christ be errant, it must be seriously doubted whether the name ' Christian' can rightly be applied to such a system," Metzger, B M. (1953; 67). However, despite the negative evaluation the Christian " has the joyous confidence that his divine Lord's mediatorial work is sufficient to bring into heaven itself not only the hundred and forty four thousand but a great multitude which no man can number. "