

Chapter Twenty-One

Arianism¹

A full analysis of the history of Arianism is far beyond the limits of this chapter.¹ The most we can do is to present a brief historical overview of the man Arius, his beliefs, and some of the movements which his theology; pawned throughout the history of the Church.

The Man Arius

Arius was a presbyter who lived in Alexandria, Egypt from a.d. 260 to a.d. 336 His preaching was noted for its vivid imagination and philosophic speculation. He showed great promise at first and could have done much to strengthen Christianity in Egypt. But his views of Christ and the Holy Spirit not only fractured the unity of the Church for generations to come, but prepared the way for Islam to conquer Egypt.

He first publicly objected to the orthodox doctrine of Christ in the year 318 while listening to a sermon by Bishop Alexander of Alexandria, in which he stressed the co-eternity of the Father and of the Son. In his letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia, Arius tells him what he found objectionable in the sermon.

All this because we do not agree with him when he states in public, “Always God, always Son,” “At the same time Father, at the same time Son,” “The Son ingenerably co-exists with God,” “Ever begotten, ungenerated-created, neither in thought nor in some moment of time does God proceed the Son,” “Always God always Son,” “the Son is from God himself.”²

¹ Robert A. Morey, [*The Trinity: Evidence and Issues*](#) (Iowa Falls, IA: World Pub., 1996), 468–469.

¹ The fullest treatment of Arianism in modern times is by Richard Patrick Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1988). We do not agree with everything he says, but it is the fullest treatment so far. See also William Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, and Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1970).

² We will be using Rusch’s translation of the primary documents: William G. Rusch, *The Trinitarian Controversy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1980), 29. For discussions on this new material see: *Arianism: Historical and Theological Reassessments*” ed. Robert Gregg (Philadelphia: Patristic Foundation, 1985), 1–58.

Bishop Alexander was clearly preaching the orthodox doctrine of the deity of Christ in the context of the Trinity. The eternal pre-existence of Christ with the Father is clearly stated. The Son partakes of the divine nature and attributes of the Father. Words cannot be clearer. Since it was Arius who was objecting to what was being taught in the Church, several things are evident.

First, Arius was *reacting* to orthodoxy. Thus, orthodoxy had to be in existence *before* Arianism. This is confirmed by Alexander's (of Alexandria) letter to Alexander of Thessalonica. In it he complained that Arius was "attacking the orthodox faith" and "denounced every apostolic doctrine" and "denied the deity of our Savior."

Second, no less than eighteen church councils were held on this issue beginning in 319 and ending with the Council of Constantinople in 381. Due to the constant interference from the Roman Emperors, the theo-political battle raged back and forth. But in the end, Arius and his followers were excommunicated as heretics by both the Eastern and Western Churches.

How can we explain the violent reaction to Arius? How can we explain what Alexander said in his sermon? Why all the church councils? Why all the fuss? The only adequate explanation is that Arius was attacking the *established* orthodox teaching of the Christian Church.

It is also obvious Alexander did not make up such sophisticated statements dealing the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son on the spur of the moment. As a matter of fact, a literary analysis of what he said reveals that he did not make up the statements. They were parts of various ancient creeds and hymns.

In Bishop Alexander's letter to Alexander of Thessalonica, he complains:

They denounced every pious apostolic doctrine; they organized in a Jewish manner a work group contending against Christ. They deny the divinity of our Savior.³

Alexander points out that the deity of Christ was an "apostolic doctrine" and that Arius' denial was blasphemous. Thus, it is clear that the Church was already worshipping the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is why all the Creeds which followed defended all Three members of the Trinity.

On the other hand, if we assume that no one had ever heard of the Trinity, as modern Arians claim, we are left with no explanation for all the controversy which followed. This observation refutes those who claim that the Trinity doctrine was not invented until the *ninth* century.

Third, while the worship of the Triune God had always been part of Christianity from the very beginning, the Church was now forced to give philosophic and sophisticated answers to Arius' philosophic and sophisticated questions about the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Since these questions were posed in philosophic language borrowed from contemporary Greek philosophy, the Church had to respond using the same language.

³ Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophic Implications of Arianism and Apollinarianism* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1958), 12–13.

In all fairness, we must point out that when the Nicene Fathers borrowed philosophic terms from contemporary culture in order to respond to the heresy of Arianism, they were not doing something inherently wrong. After all, the words “covenant” in the Old Testament and “Word” (Logos) in the New Testament were borrowed from contemporary culture by the biblical authors. All of us use terms which come from modern as well as ancient philosophy.

The fact that the Church was now forced to use Platonic or Aristotelian terminology does not mean that they were Platonists or Aristotelians. The noted Harvard scholar Prof. Harry Wolfson comments:

On the whole, it is not historically correct to arrange the Fathers into groups, to dress them in the uniform of the Academy or Lyceum or the Porch, to make them march under the banner of Plato or of Aristotle or of the Stoics and sing the songs of those schools. The Fathers did not regard themselves as followers of the various schools of Greek thought. They did not think in terms of contrasts between the different systems within philosophy; They thought only in terms of contrasts between Scripture and philosophy. Within philosophy itself there were to them only right doctrines, which were in agreement with Scripture, and wrong doctrines, which were in disagreement with Scripture, though on certain doctrines they found some philosophers were more often in agreement with Scripture than others.⁴

What Arius Taught

Until the last century, the only record of Arius’ theology was found in the fragments recorded in the works of Athanasius and other orthodox Fathers who quoted him in order to refute him. Since Arius may have been misquoted or taken out of context, there was some confusion as to what he really believed. But the discovery by Bell, Mai, Turner, Gryson, and others of new manuscripts now allows us access to Arius’ own writings.

In the opening lines of the *Thalia*, Arius applied the word γνῶσις (knowledge) to himself. This was a favorite term used by the Gnostics when they wanted to emphasize that they and they alone had “secret knowledge.” Perhaps this is why the Gnostic attitude “we have secret knowledge” has always afflicted Arianism.

Arius’ God

In his letter to Alexander of Alexandria, Arius states:

“God is thus before all as a Monas and cause.”⁵

The term “Monas” (Monas) or Monad is not a biblical term for God. It comes from pagan Greek philosophy, particularly Plato. In *Phaedo* 105C, Plato stated that “the Monas (Monas) is the cause.”⁶

⁴ Rusch, 32.

⁵ Richard Patrick Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1988) 86–87.

Arius clearly adopted the Monas of the Middle Platonists as his God.⁷ In other words, Arius' god was nothing more Plato's Monas! William Rusch comments, "As a result, Arius blurred Christianity and paganism."⁸

According to Plato, the Monas was *indivisible* by nature, i.e., it could not be divided into more than One Person. It had to be indivisible in order to be immutable. This was an idea Plato derived from the pre-Socratic philosopher Parmenides.

After stating that God was the Monas, Arius concluded that Christ could not be eternal because the nature and attributes of the Monas *cannot* be divided into Two Persons. His main *objection* to Sabellius in his letter to Alexander is that Sabellius *divided* the Monas: "*Sabellius, who divides the Monas, says, 'Father-and-Son.'*"

We shall see in the next chapter that both Arius and Sabellius started from Plato's concept of the indivisibility of the divine Monad as their core belief about God. Although they started with the same premise, they ended up with two contradictory conclusions.

Once again we return to the importance of *a priori* assumptions. Since Arius *presupposed* the indivisibility of the Monas, the Trinity was not even possible. Thus, in his letter to Alexander, Arius argues that, if God is the Monas, then he must exist before the Son:

God is thus before all as a Monas and cause. *Therefore he is also before the Son.*⁹

This is still the underlying principle of Arianism today. On one occasion, we asked a Jehovah's Witness whether he felt that it was even possible for God to be Triune. He replied, "No, it is not possible!"

The attributes of Plato's Monas were *incommunicable*, i.e., they could not be shared with anything or anyone outside of itself. Thus, the idea that Christ could share in the attributes of the Monas such as deity, perfection, eternity, immutability, omniscience, etc., was totally unacceptable to Arius. As Hagerty points out, "According to Arius, God cannot communicate his substance; therefore, the Logos, who is produced, cannot be God."¹⁰ Fortman comments:

⁶ Phaedo 105C *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. Jowett (New York: Random, 1937), 1:490.

⁷ Compare G.C. Stead's article, "The Platonism of Arius," *JTS*, n.s., 15, (1964), pgs. 16–37 and Charles Kannengiesser in *Arius and Athanasius* (Hampshire, England: Varionrum, 1991), 20–24. Stead at times falls into the trap of making theological distinctions where Arius made none.

⁸ Rusch, 17.

⁹ Rusch, 32.

¹⁰ Cornelius J. Hagerty, *The Holy Trinity* (North Quincy, MASS: Christopher, 1976), 164, see also 163. "Arius denied the communicability of the divine nature." This was also pointed out by Rowan Williams, *Arius* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1965), 224–232.

For Arius there is only one God. He alone is unbegotten, eternal, without beginning, truly God. He cannot communicate His being or substance since this would imply that He is divisible and mutable. If anything else is to exist, it must come into existence not by any communication of God's being but by an act of creation that produces it out of nothing.¹¹

Obviously, Arius' Platonic idea of God (the Monas) affected his interpretation of Scripture. This has been ably demonstrated by Helyer.¹²

Arius' Christ

In the Thalia, Arius referred to Christ as the "Duas" or Dynad which was another Platonic term. Since the "Duas" could not share the same attributes as the Monas, the "Duas" could not be eternal, immutable, etc. This is why he objected when Alexander said that both the Father and the Son were eternal. It was a philosophic term which implied inferiority and imperfection.

In Platonism, the Duas or Dynad was a demigod, i.e., he was not God nor was he like other creatures. He was a third kind of being. Thus, he was a demigod. As Rusch points out, "For Arius, Jesus is a demigod, neither fully God nor fully man."¹³ Fortman agrees:

God resolved to create the world, and so He created first a superior being, which we call the Son or Word, destined to be the instrument of creation. The Son occupies a place intermediate between God and the world, for he is neither God nor part of the world-system. He is before all creatures and the instrument of their creation.¹⁴

In its article on Arianism, *The Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* states that according to Arius:

... the Father is purely one, *monas*, the Logos is many-in-one, the realm of ideas. If the *monas* is to be wholly itself, indivisible and self-sufficient, it must be capable of subsisting without the Logos.¹⁵

Arianism is based on the pagan Greek philosophic principle that the being and attributes of the Monas (God) are *incommunicable*. This means that Jesus (the Duas) *cannot* partake of the nature or attributes of the Monas. Instead, Arius remolds Jesus into the image of Plato's Demiurge.

Hagerty comments:

Arius taught that the Logos is a demiurge who produces out of nothing all other creatures, including the Holy Ghost. This phase of Arianism received scant attention until the controversy over the divinity of Christ subsided.¹⁶

¹¹ Edmund J. Fortman, *The Triune God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 63.

¹² Larry Helyer, "Arius Revisited" (*JET*, xxxi. 1 March 1988), 59.

¹³ Rusch, 17.

¹⁴ Fortman, 63.

¹⁵ *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland, 1990), 85.

In the *Timaeus*, Plato had proposed the existence of a unique creature called the Demiurge as the Creator of all else mediated between God and the world. The Demiurge was finite in attributes, but was more powerful than any other creature. He created a host of smaller demigods to do his will.”¹⁷

Arius’ Christ was actually a “Christian” version of Plato’s Demiurge. The Arian “Jesus” has finite attributes and mediates between the universe and God. He created the angels to do his will.

A Summary of Arius’ Beliefs

1. In the classic Platonic sense, God is the eternal, immutable, and indivisible Monas. He is not the Father from all eternity because there was a time when He did not have a son.

Trinitarians do believe that God is indivisible in *Being* because you cannot take a knife and cut God into pieces. But at the same time, they see no conflict with saying that God is One indivisible Being *in Three Persons*. But Arius assumed that God is indivisible *in Person*. Thus, his concept of “indivisibility” is different from the classic orthodox concept.

2. Jesus Christ is called the Duas who was created by the Monas. This is why He is the demiurge-like creator and the mediator between Mind (God) and matter (the world). He was created by the Monas and thus there was a time when he was not.

3. Since the Monas is indivisible, the Son and the Spirit cannot partake of his nature or attributes. Thus, the Trinity cannot be true by definition.

4. The Holy Spirit was created by the Duas and is not God. This was later abandoned by most Arians and today they reduced the Spirit to a non-personal force.

The Origins of Arius’ Ideas

Many Arians today naively assume that Arius discovered his ideas of God and Christ in the Bible. When they are confronted by the fact that his views came from pagan Greek philosophy, they sometimes respond by saying that it is irrelevant where he got his ideas because modern Arianism is rooted in the Bible alone.

The early Church Fathers had no problem seeing the influence of Greek philosophy in Arius’ ideas of God and Christ. Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Socrates Scholasticus, and Epiphanius all pointed this out in their own day. Arius even believed in the Platonic doctrine of the pre-existence of the soul.

¹⁶ Hegerty, 169.

¹⁷ The Demiurge created a host of demigods to do his will: *Apol.* 27; *Tim.* 41E; *Statesman* 271 D; *Laws* 4.713 D, 717 B; 5. 727 A, 738 B, D, 740 A; 801 E; 8 848 D; 9.853 C; 10. 906 A, 910 A.

Today it is recognized that there are many different philosophic strains present in Arius' writings. Evidently, he was quite eclectic in his philosophic views. The following is a list of some of the sources of the ideas of Arius on God and Christ:

1. *Theological Sources*: Origin, Lucian of Antioch, Paul of Samosata, Methodius of Olympia, Sabellius
2. *Philosophical Sources*: Gnosticism, Philo, Plato, Aristotle, Stoicism, Atticus, Plotinus, Basilides, Middle Platonism

Evidently, Arius was epistemologically unaware of where he got his ideas. Like a dog picks up fleas, he picked up ideas everywhere. As pointed out by Harnack, Gwatkin, Loofs, Prestige, Stead, and many other scholars, Arianism is more pagan than Christian and more philosophical than exegetical.

The Nature of the Controversy

The Arian Controversy was not only complex, but multidimensional. No single explanation is sufficient to describe all the elements of it. Having studied most of the literature on the subject, we have concluded that there are at least eight elements that must be taken into consideration:

1. *Philosophical*: The struggle between Platonism, Aristotelianism, Gnosticism, and Stoicism which was taking place in society at large was now slipping into the Church. As we saw, Arius was clearly influenced in his thinking by these pagan philosophies. Instead of the Bible dictating his philosophy, his philosophy dictated his theology.
2. *Hermeneutical*: The hermeneutic principles used by Arius and Athanasius were not the same. This is why they came up with different interpretations of the same verses. Kannengiesser dogmatically states; "The crisis is essentially one of hermeneutics."¹⁸
3. *Epistemological*: While Arius appealed to reason, Athanasius appealed to Scripture. Thus, the hermeneutical issue was Rationalism versus the authority of Scripture.
4. *Political*: The interference of the Emperor Constantine and several Emperors after him unnecessarily politicized Church affairs. Once these "peace at any price" politicians got involved, the results were disastrous. Spies, political intrigue, assassination attempts, murder, exile, riots, fixed verdicts, etc., often took the main stage. Jehovah's Witnesses sometimes pretend that the entire controversy was political.
5. *Ecclesiastical*: The conflict often came down to the cultural and theological differences between the Eastern Church and the Western Church. These differences ultimately led to the great Schism between Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism in 1054 a.d.
6. *Theological*: Subordinationism and Trinitarianism are ultimately irreconcilable. These conflicting ways of understanding the relationship between the Three had to come to a parting of the way eventually.

¹⁸ Kannengiesser, Charles, *Arius and Athanasius* (Hempshire, England: Varionrum, 1991), 1.

7. *Dialectical*: Modalism arose as a reaction to primitive Trinitarianism. Then Arianism arose as a reaction to Modalism.

8. *Linguistical*: A large part of the controversy was actually semantic in nature due to the failure of the Greek Fathers of the Eastern Church and the Latin Fathers of the Western Church to understand each other's languages. The Latin Fathers often misunderstood and then mistranslated the meaning of the Greek terms found in the Eastern Creeds.

Each of the above elements had a role to play in the Arian Controversy. Some were more important at one time, and then not so important at other times. Those who are guilty of the fallacy of reductionism will choose one of the elements above and pretend that it alone caused the Controversy. Such a position only reveals intellectual poverty and a biased approach to the subject.

Arianism and Apollinarianism

Wolfson rightly pointed out that Arianism is most easily understood when you contrast it to the other early heresies. In his work, *Arianism and Apollinarianism*, he states:

Arianism and Apollinarianism are two contrasting heresies of the fourth century. Arianism may be described as a leftist heresy: it denied the divinity of the pre-existent Christ, the Logos; it also denied a divine nature to the born Christ, Jesus. Apollinarianism may be called a rightist heresy: it denied a human nature in the born Christ.”¹⁹

Wolfson is right on target. Arianism and Apollinarianism are the two extreme ends of the theological pendulum. The one denies what the other affirms.

Modalism and Arianism

The relationship between Arianism and Modalism should not be overlooked. Whereas Modalists accept the deity of the Son, but reject His personhood, Arians accept His personhood, but reject His deity! Whereas Arians reject the deity of the Spirit, Modalists accept it. They too take the extreme opposite positions on many issues.

Reactionary Theology

Both Modalism and Arianism are *reactionary* theologies, i.e., they arose in response to the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. They both attempted to solve the Trinitarian riddle: How can God be Three and One at the same time? But in their attempt, they fell into the classic Greek philosophic problem of the One and the Many.

Modalism emphasized the One to the exclusion of Three, while Arianism emphasized the Three to the exclusion of the One. The Modalists denied that the Three were separate Persons, but affirmed they were one God, while the first Arians denied the Three were One God, but affirmed they were separate persons. Early Arianism believed that the Holy Spirit was a creature just like the Son.

¹⁹ Wolfson, *The Philosophic Implications of Arianism and Apollinarianism*, 6.

This is why Arianism has always had a problem with polytheism, i.e., the belief in more than one God. For example, while the Jehovah's Witnesses deny that Jesus is to be worshipped as God, yet they have no difficulty giving "relative worship" to Jesus as "a god."²⁰ If they were true monotheists, then they would have never rendered John 1:1 as "the Word was *a god*."

The truth is that Sabellianism arose in reaction to Trinitarianism, and Arianism arose in reaction to Sabellianism. It was not mere happenstance that the controversy started when Arius accused Bishop Alexander on Sabellianism."²¹

The Modern Meaning of Arianism

Today, the word "Arianism" is an all embracing term denoting any and all anti-Trinitarian theological systems which deny the deity of Christ and the personhood and deity of the Holy Spirit. While this definition does not fit all the various stages and phases of the long history of Arianism, it is generally true today. It encompasses the entire religious spectrum from modern Liberalism to Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Reformation Period

Who would have ever thought that the ancient heresy of Arianism would be revived in modern times by the pantheistic astrologer Michael Servetus, who was burned as a heretic in Geneva in 1553.²²

Laelius Socinus (1525–1562) was present in Geneva when Servetus met his doom. But he went ahead and embraced the anti-Trinitarian fervor of Servetus and passed it on to his nephew Faustus Socinus (1539–1604) whose followers would be called the Socinians.

The Socinians gained popularity, first among Eastern Europeans, especially in Poland, and then among the Dutch and the English. Their denial of the Trinity and in particular the deity of Christ was the biggest scandal of the day.²³

During the seventeenth century, Socinianism was renamed "Unitarianism" in the English world and in 1687, John Nye's book *History of Unitarianism Commonly called Socinianism* created a great controversy in the English Church.²⁴

²⁰ The Watchtower, 15 Feb 1983, 18.

²¹ J. W. Nevin, "Arianism" (*The Mercerburg Review*, 1867), 14:428. See also Simonetti, in "Studi Sull' Arianesimo," 91, 124, n. 66. He states that Arianism arose as an extreme reaction to Sabellianism.

²² *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 7:419–420.

²³ *Ibid.*, 7:474–475. See also *The Two Treatises of Servetus on the Trinity* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1932); Philip Schaff, "Calvin and Servetus" (*The Reformed Journal*, Jan. 1893), 1:5–54.

Modern Unitarianism lost its faith in any kind of God and joined with the Universalists in the 1960's. Today, one can be an atheist or a witch and become a member of the Unitarian Universalist Association.

The demise of classic Unitarianism does not mean the demise of Arianism. Jehovah's Witnesses, Christadelphians, the Way, Assemblies of Yahweh, and a dozen other Arian cults still spend a large proportion of their time, energy, and money attacking the doctrine of the Trinity.

There are also some modern liberals who deny the Trinity and the deity of Christ due to their uncritical adoption of the Werde-Bousset thesis. John Hick's book *The Myth of God Incarnate* is an example of this form of liberal Arianism.

With this brief overview of the nature, origins, and history of Arianism, we will now turn to an analysis of the basic anti-Trinitarian arguments used by most Arians down through the ages.

Basic Arian Arguments

After spending over thirty years studying such Arian cults as the Jehovah's Witnesses, The Way International, etc., it is obvious that most of them have never studied logic, philosophy, Hebrew, Greek, hermeneutics, history, or linguistics. Most of their arguments are erroneous on the simple basis of logic. A brief summary of the more glaring fallacies is as follows:

1. *Circular Reasoning*: If you begin with the assumption that the Trinity is not true, and then proceed to conclude that the Trinity is not true, you have assumed in your premise what you are attempting to prove in your conclusion.

For example, when we point to a passage in the Apostolic Fathers where the Trinity doctrine is clearly in view, some Arians will respond, "That is not possible because the Trinity was not invented until many centuries later." They, thus, ignore the evidence by arguing in a circle:

Since the early Church did not believe in the Trinity, then there cannot be any references to the Trinity in the early Church.

Since there are no references to the Trinity in the early Church, therefore the early Church did not believe in the Trinity.

Another example of circular reasoning is:

Since the New Testament never calls Jesus "God," then there cannot be any verses where he is called "God."

Since there are no verses which call Jesus "God," then the New Testament never calls Jesus "God."

Circular reasoning is invalid regardless of who is doing it.

²⁴ For the history and beliefs of Socinianism, see pgs. 62–67, in my book, *Battle of the Gods*. See also George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 639–669; *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

2. *Undistributed Middle Term*: If you argue that if A implies B and B implies C, then A implies C, you are giving a valid argument. But if you argue A implies B and C implies D, then A implies D, your argument is invalid because the middle term B is not distributed in both the first and second premises. This is the root fallacy underlying all the pagan source arguments. You cannot jump from the pagan sources over to the Bible because there is no middle term to link the two together.

3. *Categorical Fallacies*: Whenever you hear such questions as:

“If Jesus was God, who ran the universe the three days he was dead?”

“If God cannot be tempted, why was Jesus tempted?”

“If Jesus was God, then to whom did he pray?”

“Since Jesus did not know when he was coming back, how can he be God?”

“How can Jesus have faith in God if he was God?”

“Why would Jesus call the Father God if he himself was God?”

“If Jesus was God, how could he die?”

Such questions arise only if you fail to distinguish between the categories of the economical and ontological Trinity, the two natures of Christ, and the three persons in the Trinity. They are called “nonsense questions” in logic.

4. *Arguments from silence*: When Arians challenge Trinitarians to show them where the word “Trinity” is found in the Bible, where Jesus said, “I am God” in the New Testament, etc., they are arguing from silence.

5. *Straw man argument*: Why do Arians keep defining the Trinity as “three gods”? Because it is easy to knock down such a straw man. Why do they give the following argument on John 1:1? Someone who is with another person cannot also be that other person.²⁵

Do Trinitarians maintain that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are *one person*? No. Do Trinitarians interpret John 1:1 to mean that Jesus and the Father are *one person*? No. Then why does the Watchtower waste everyone’s time by proving that there is only one God and refuting the idea that two persons can be one person? Because it is easier to refute a straw man of your own creation than to deal honestly with Trinitarian arguments.

6. *Arguments from ignorance*: It is sheer ignorance to use pre-archeological and pre-Dead Sea Scroll nineteenth century arguments against the Trinity. For example, the claim is still made that the early Jews did not use “Lord” (κύριος) as a title for God.

²⁵ *Should You Believe in the Trinity?* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1989), 27.

7. *Arguments of false cause*: Claiming that the Trinity doctrine was derived from pagan sources, from the Emperor Constantine, etc.

8. *Appeal To Misery*: Some Arians appeal to the misery and suffering they have endured over the centuries at the hands of Trinitarians as proof that the doctrine of the Trinity is false.

9. *Ad Hominem Arguments*: Arians often malign the character and motives of Trinitarian theologians by calling them crooks, thieves, racketeers, devilish, etc. This is malicious as well as invalid.

10. *Hidden assumptions*: For example, let us examine the question, “If Jesus was God, who ran the universe the three days he was dead?”

First, the person who asks this question *assumes* that the Trinity doctrine teaches that Jesus is the entire Godhead. But what Trinitarian would say this?

Second, he *assumes* that death means extinction or annihilation. This is the false doctrine of “soul sleep.”

Third, he *assumes* that, if Jesus was non-existent for three days, then the entire Godhead was non-existent for three days. And, if God did not exist for three days, who ran the universe while he was non-existent?

Since the hidden assumptions are erroneous, is it any wonder that the conclusions are false as well?

11. *Self-contradictory Arguments*: When the Watchtower Society describes the Arian Controversy at the beginning of the third century, sometimes it states that Arius was reacting to an already established Trinity doctrine. They even describe the Trinitarian Bishops running from the church with their fingers in their ears when they heard the blasphemous ideas of Arius. They define the Nicene Creed and the others creeds which followed as “Trinitarian.” Athanasius represented the majority view.²⁶

But in another place, they claim that the Trinity doctrine was not invented until the ninth century and, thus, there were no Trinitarians in the third century. The Nicene Creed and even the Athanasian Creed were not Trinitarian.²⁷ Athanasius represented a minority view. Evidently, they can contradict themselves without the least embarrassment.

Another example of convoluted reasoning is the Watchtower’s argument that since the word “Trinity” does not appear in the Bible, therefore, the doctrine is not in the Bible. But then they turn around and claim that Plato taught the Trinity, even though the word “trinity” does not appear in Plato’s’ writings. If we were to follow their convoluted reasoning, then Plato did not teach the Trinity either.

²⁶ *Awake*, Jan. 8, 1973, 17–18. See also *The Watchtower*, 1 March 1948, 67.

²⁷ *Should You Believe in the Trinity?*, 7–11.

12. *Out of Date Arguments*: The Unitarians during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries produced the most scholarly attacks on the doctrine of the Trinity in the history of the Arianism. Modern anti-Trinitarians for the most part still heavily rely on these arguments because it is assumed that they are still valid.²⁸

But the rise of the sciences of archeology and critical analysis has invalidated most of these old arguments. The only ones still using them are those Arians who still depend on nineteenth century Unitarianism.

Having pointed out the basic kinds of logical fallacies which underlie most Arian arguments, we will now deal with those arguments which are still being used by such Arian cults such as the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Objection #1 *The doctrine of the Trinity cannot be true because no one can fully comprehend or explain it.*

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (i.e., Jehovah's Witnesses) is the largest and most aggressive Arian cult in modern times. In its booklet *Should You Believe In The Trinity?* The Society argues that the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be a true because it is "beyond the grasp of human reason."²⁹ They go on to ask:

... would God be responsible for a doctrine about himself that is so confusing that even Hebrew, Greek, and Latin scholars cannot really explain it?³⁰

They conclude the Trinity cannot be true because it ends in mystery. But when we turn to their main reference work, *Aid To Bible Understanding*, we find that they admit that they believe in many such things as the infinite nature of Jehovah even though:

The human mind ... cannot actually comprehend the infinity of Jehovah's existence.³¹

We are at once confronted with a double standard. If it is true that incomprehensibility refutes the Trinity, then it should also equally refute "the infinity of Jehovah's existence." The attempt of the Jehovah's Witnesses to have their cake and eat it too, dooms their argument. (For the proof that the incomprehensibility of God is a biblical doctrine found in both the Old and New Testaments, see chapter 6.)

²⁸ When Linda Cebrian read *Should You Believe in the Trinity?*, she noticed that the Watchtower Society gave numerous citations from various books without supplying any bibliographical information such as the date and publisher of the book or even the page number from which the quote was taken. On July 18, 1991, she wrote to the Society and asked for the documentation. They replied on Sept. 17, 1991 (letter on file) by sending her several pages from Lamson's book against the Trinity which was written in 1869!

²⁹ *Should You Believe in the Trinity?*, 4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

³¹ *Aid to Bible Understanding* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1971), 889.

Objection #2 *Why should God be Three instead of One? How can God be One and Three at the same time?*

Trinitarians readily admit that the Trinity is beyond our finite capacity to understand or explain Him in an exhaustive sense. There is simply nothing in this world which is one and three at the same time, *in the same sense* in which God is One and Three. The Trinity is incomprehensible.

Modern cultists and liberal theologians join hands at this point and declare that, if no one can fully understand or explain the Trinity, then it is nonsense at its worst and error at its best. They may have different reasons for saying this, but they are united on this point.

Trinitarians admit that they do not have all the answers. But neither does anyone else. When anti-Trinitarians ask, “Why should God be Three Persons instead of One Person?” Trinitarians can just as easily ask, “Well, why should God be One Person instead of Three Persons?” The sword cuts both ways.

Obviously, no one can explain WHY or HOW God is what He is. He existed long before we were around and He is what He is regardless whether we can fully understand or explain Him.

Obviously, any god which man could fully understand and explain would be less than what man is. Such a god would not be worthy of our worship, awe or praise. The inescapable truth is that God will always be greater than our finite capacity to understand or explain Him.

Our failure to understand or explain fully the Trinity or any other aspect of God is not due to some defect in God or in His revelation. The “defect,” if it can be called that, is nothing more or less than the reality of our own finiteness.

Objection #3 *The Trinity is irrational. It is not in accord with human Reason.*

When Arians bitterly complain that the trinity cannot be true because it is not “rational,” i.e., it cannot be fully explained to their satisfaction, they are using the same old tired arguments developed by the Socinians in the 16th and 17th centuries. The vaunted rationalism of that age may be long gone but its anti-Trinitarian arguments remain.

II. Historical Arguments

Objection #4 *The word “Trinity” does not appear in the early Church. Thus, they did not believe in the Trinity.*

Since this is an argument from silence, it is logically invalid. All you can prove from silence is silence. But since this is a favorite argument of Jehovah’s Witnesses, it is important to point out that the word “Jehovah” first appeared in Europe in the late Middle Ages as an erroneous translation of **YHWH**.³²

If we are to date the doctrine of the trinity according to when the word “trinity” first appeared, as the Jehovah’s Witnesses claim, then we must date the appearance of Jehovah to the Middle

³² *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, 12:995

Ages! the Arians are clearly guilty of committing the logical fallacy of dating an idea by its final terminology.

Objection #5 *Since the Nicene Creed does not state that the Holy Spirit is a person or God, then it is clear that the early Church did not believe that the Holy Spirit was a person or God.*

Once again, this is an argument from silence. To claim that the early Church did not believe in the deity or personhood of the Holy Spirit because it was not dealt with at that time is illogical.

We must also point out that after stating that they believed in the Father and in the Son, the Nicene Fathers went on to say, “We believe in the Holy Spirit.” Obviously, the Holy Spirit was affirmed as part of the core beliefs of Christianity.

Since the issue which caused the Nicene Council to convene was Arius’ denial of the deity of Christ, they did not deal with the issue of the Holy Spirit. But as soon as that issue was resolved, they did in fact convene the Council of Constantinople which reaffirmed that the Church had always worshipped the Holy Spirit as the third Person in the Holy Trinity:

In the initial stages of the Arian controversy, up to about the middle of the fourth century, the status of the Holy Spirit was not a central issue; the creed approved by the Council of Nicaea in 325 powerfully emphasized the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father but concluded with the simple, traditional affirmation, “And we believe in the Holy Spirit.” By the time that the Council of Constantinople terminated the controversy in 381 and promulgated what is today known as the Nicene Creed, the third article had been considerably expanded to read, *inter alia*, “And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Life Giver, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.” These formulations, although not explicitly calling the Spirit “God” or “co-substantial” with the Father and the Son, are nevertheless clear enough in their intention. The Spirit is “Lord” (a divine title) and “Life Giver” (i.e., creator), comes forth “from the Father” (as does the Son), is worshipped “with the Father and the Son,” and is the same Spirit in the Old Testament (“who spoke by the prophets”) as in the New.³³

Objection #6 *The New Testament concepts of God and Christ have been historically traced back to pre-Christian pagan religions and philosophies such as Gnosticism. The concepts of a “virgin birth,” “the redeemer-myth,” and a “dying and rising Savior” are all found in many pre-Christian pagan religions such as the Iranian savior myth. Paul’s Christ was only an imitation of Adonis, Isis, Zeus, etc.*

This is a version of the Wrede-Bousset thesis *via* Bultmann. It is still standard fare in most liberal seminaries and state universities. Several comments are in order.

First, as Machen, Kim, Yamauchi, Ridderbos, and many other scholars have pointed out, when you ask those who make this claim to give you some clear *pre-Christian* primary source

³³ *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 430.

materials, they don't produce any. They will quote *modern* writers such as Bultmann, but they do not provide any primary documentation from *pre-Christian* sources.³⁴

For example, Bultmann claimed that the pre-Christian Gnostics had a "redeemer-myth" concept that influenced the New Testament's concept of the person and work of Jesus. Yet, he did not produce any pre-Christian materials to back up his claim. Even his devoted disciple, Schweitz had to admit:

I even think that, as far as the redeemer-myth (and not merely the gnostic atmosphere) is concerned, cross-fertilization started by and large only in the period *after* the New Testament and that the New Testament has scarcely been influenced by it.³⁵

The idea of a pre-Christian "redeemer-myth" is itself a myth. As Hengle states:

In reality there is no gnostic redeemer myth in the sources which can be demonstrated chronologically to be pre-Christian.³⁶

The same holds true for all the "virgin births," "savior-myths" and "crucified saviors" which supposedly predate the New Testament. For example, the Iranian "redeemer-myth" has been exposed as a fraud. Quispel comments:

Everyone now agrees that R. Reitzenstein, when reconstructing the Iranian mystery of salvation, made a mistake when he took Manichean for Iranian fragments and thus antedated the concept of the Saved Savior by a millennium. In other words: this Iranian mystery of salvation was a hoax.³⁷

Since we have already demonstrated that the New Testament is thoroughly *Jewish* in its concepts of God and the Messiah, we will not deal with the idea any further.

Not Enough Time

The fatal problem with all the pagan source arguments is that they require extremely late dates for the New Testament. Why? A sufficient amount of time had to transpire in order for people to forget what Jesus and the apostles really taught. This means that the New Testament could not be written while people who were eyewitnesses to Jesus or the apostles were still alive. If they were still alive, they would have protested the injection of pagan ideas into the New Testament.

³⁴ J. Gresham Machen, *The Origin of Paul's Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965). This is still considered the classic work on the subject. When combined with Yamauchi's work, the pagan *origin theory* is left without a leg to stand upon. See also Seyoon Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).

³⁵ Quoted in Edwin Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 244. Prof. Yamauchi's book is one of the most important works in the twentieth century. He demonstrates that there are *no* pre-Christian Gnostic writings which contain the redeemer-myth.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 207.

The Unitarians in the nineteenth century understood that they were entirely dependent upon very late dates for the New Testament, particularly the Pauline Epistles. They realized that if the New Testament was written *before* 70 a.d., when the eyewitnesses were still alive, then the idea that some theologian could get away with contradicting what Christ or the apostles taught, is absurd. Using circular reasoning, they had to give extremely late dates for the New Testament in order to give enough time for all the eyewitnesses to Christ and the apostles to die.

As early as 1907, John Illingworth points out this error:

Parallelism in different religions are too readily assumed to be causally connected. Thus the Christian trinity is said to be borrowed from earlier sources. But the critical reestablishment of the early date of the New Testament leaves no room for this and the Patristic tradition attributed the doctrine of Christ to Himself.³⁸

... the doctrine of the trinity is sometimes explained away by a similar misuse of the comparative method.... The possibility of such a supposition was further facilitated by assigning an extravagantly late date to all the writings in the New Testament ... But it is now a familiar fact that this radical attempt upon the dates of the documents in question has been abandoned, by all critics who are worthy of the name.³⁹

Yamauchi points out that late dates are assigned to the New Testament by those who desperately need sufficient time for paganism to creep into the Church without anyone noticing:

It is not altogether coincidental that scholars who assume a Gnostic background for New Testament documents in some cases also adopt very late dates for these books, because late dates for these documents would make a stronger case for affinities with Gnosticism. Thus Ruldoph dates Colossians to 80 a.d., Ephesians to the end of the first century, and both the Pastoral and the Johannine Epistles at the beginning of the second century. Koester dates the Pastorals to as late as between 120 and 160 a.d.⁴⁰

The internal evidence that the New Testament *in its entirety* was written before 70 a.d., has been irrefutably demonstrated by the well-known liberal theologian, John A. T. Robinson.⁴¹ The external evidence found in Cave Seven of the Dead Sea Scrolls has confirmed that the New Testament was written *before* 70 a.d.⁴² thus, the pagan source theory is patently absurd.

Objection #7 *The Christian Church derived its doctrine of the Trinity from pagan religions and from Greek philosophy, particularly Plato.*

³⁸ John Richardson Illingworth, *The Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Macmillan, 1907), ix.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 74–75.

⁴⁰ Yamauchi, 192–193.

⁴¹ John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976).

⁴² David Estrada and William White, Jr., *The First New Testament* (Nashville: Nelson, 1978) This book is available from the REF (P.O. Box 250, Newport, PA, 17074).

This is the same argument as above, but this time applied to the early Church instead of the Bible. While liberals use both arguments, Arian fundamentalistic cults such as the Watchtower Society will avoid the idea that the Bible was corrupted by pagan religions. Instead, they make the claim:

Many centuries before the time of Christ, there were triads or trinities, of gods in ancient Babylon and Assyria.⁴³ Throughout the ancient world, as far back as Babylon, the worship of pagan gods grouped in threes, or triads, was common. That influence was also prevalent in Egypt, Greece, and Rome in the centuries before, during, and after Christ. After the death of the apostles, such pagan ideas began to invade Christianity.⁴⁴

The Watchtower then “proves” their claim by pictures of three idols of various pagan deities standing together as if they represent the source of the Christian concept of the Trinity. For example, they point to Egyptian idols of Osiris, Isis, and Horus.⁴⁵

This argument is based on two very basic logical fallacies. First, it commits the fallacy of equivocation in that the word “Trinity” is being used with several different meanings. the word “Trinity” according to Christian theology refers to one, infinite/personal God eternally existing in three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit But the word “trinity” is used by the Arians to refer to any grouping of three finite gods and goddesses. Obviously, there is no logical relationship between three finite gods and the one triune God of Christianity.

Second, the fallacy of equivocation leads to the categorical fallacy of trying to relate together concepts which have no relationship at all. the following diagram illustrates the radical difference between the trinity and pagan triads:

THE TRINITY

PAGAN TRIADS

one God

three gods & goddesses

infinite in nature

finite in nature

infinite in attributes

finite attributes

omnipotent

impotent

⁴³ *Should You Believe in the Trinity?*, 9.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

omniscient	ignorant of some things
omnipresent	limited to one place
immutable	mutable
perfect	imperfect
good	good and evil

The Watchtower's attempt to link the Trinity to pagan triads reveals either that they do not understand the Trinity, or that, if they do, they are being deliberately deceptive.

The same problem arises when they claim the doctrine of the Trinity came from Plato.⁴⁶ They do not indicate where the Trinity can be found in the writings of Plato. They quote from Unitarians and other anti Trinitarians who make the same claim, but nowhere do they quote Plato.

Since we are quite familiar with Plato and have translated some of his dialogues from the original Greek, we must go on record that we have never found in Plato anything even remotely resembling the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Perhaps this is why Arians never give a single reference in Plato's works to back up their claims.

Furthermore, we can use one of the Arian arguments against the Trinity Against itself. Does the word "Trinity" ever appear in the writings of Plato? No. Does it appear in Aristotle? No. Does it appear in any pre-Christian pagan writings? No.

Since the Arians claim that the absence of the word "Trinity" in the Bible means that the concept is not present, then they must admit that since the word "Trinity" does not appear in Greek philosophy or in ancient pagan religions, the concept is not present either.

If the Arian responds that while the word "Trinity" may not be found in Plato, etc., the concept is there, then the Trinitarians have just as much a right to argue that the concept of the Trinity is in the Bible, even though the word "Trinity" is not found there.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 11.

Objection #8 *The early Christians took Plato’s concept of the Demiurge and turned it into their concept of Christ.*

In 1976, the Watchtower published an article entitled “How Christendom Borrowed from Plato.”⁴⁷ In it they claimed that the “early Christians” borrowed their concept of the Trinity from Platonism and used Plato’s Demiurge as their concept of Christ. They have made this claim many times.

What they fail to tell their readers is that Plato’s Demiurge was a finite being created by God and, thus, not equal to God. The following diagram reveals whose Christ is patterned after the Demiurge.

The Demiurge	Two Views of Christ	
	Arianism	Trinitarianism
Platonism	Arianism	Trinitarianism
created	created	not created
finite	finite	infinite
not eternal	not eternal	eternal
not omnipresent	not omnipresent	omnipresent
not omniscient	not omniscient	omniscient
not omnipotent	not omnipotent	omnipotent
semi-divine	semi-divine	full deity

⁴⁷ *Awake*, 22 Aug. 1976, 23f.

From the above chart, it is clear that it is Arianism that has patterned its view of Christ from Plato's Demiurge.

The Watchtower and Greek Philosophy

The Watchtower has argued that the Trinity doctrine is wrong because "there is but one First Cause."⁴⁸ This argument deserves several comments.

First, the title of the article from which we just quoted is, "the Three Gods of Religious Racketeers." It is clear that the Watchtower deliberately misrepresents the doctrine of the Trinity as belief in *three gods*. to add insult to injury, it also uses the ugly *ad hominem* argument that all Christian clergymen are "racketeers" i.e., thieves.

Second, *The Watchtower* magazine uses the phrase "First Cause" as a title for their God on many occasions. See *The Watchtower* 10/1/59 p.586; 10/15/61 p.614; 1/1/65 p.14; 9/1/70 p.537; 5/15/71 p.304; 1/15/71 p.52; 5/1/79 p.6; 2/15/81 p.5; 10/1/82 p.4; 6/15/93 p.13, etc.

In a debate, one of the best ways to refute the other side is to use their own arguments against them. In desperation, they will often declare their own arguments invalid! In effect, you get them to refute themselves. Let us apply the same arguments they used against the word "Trinity" to the words "First Cause."

Are the words "First Cause" found in the Old Testament? No. Are they found in the New Testament? No. Are they found in the early creeds of the Church such as the Apostle's Creed or the Nicene Creed? No.

If the Jehovah's Witnesses applied to the words "First Cause" the same argument that they use concerning the word "Trinity," then they would have to conclude that the concept of God as the "First Cause" is not a biblical doctrine.

Where then did the words "First Cause" originate? If we turn to Plato in the *Timeaus* 455a-b; 465d-466a or the *Statesman* 587a-589c or to Aristotle in *Physics* BK VII, chronicles 1-2, 326a-329a; VIII, 334a-355d, we find the pagan Greek philosophers were the ones who invented the phrase "First Cause" to indicate that there can be only one final and ultimate cause for all things and this First Cause of causes must be divine. Aristotle's argument for the existence of the Unmoved Mover depends entirely on the concept of an ultimate "First Cause."⁴⁹

If we were to follow the Watchtower's convoluted reasoning, we would conclude that the Jehovah's Witnesses derived their idea of God as the "First Cause" from pagan Greek philosophy!

Sauce for the Gander and for the Goose

⁴⁸ *The Watchtower*, 1 Feb. 1940, 44. this phrase is also found in the Watchtower Reprints, 15 Sept. 1939, 284.

⁴⁹ See Adler's overview of the history of the concept of causality in *The Great Ideas* (Chicago: Britannica, 1952), 1:158f.

The Watchtower could argue that the concept of God as the “First Cause” is found in Genesis 1:1, long before there were any Greek philosophers. Thus the use of the phrase has nothing to do with the origin of the concept. They were simply using the common philosophical language of today.

If they can do this, then so can the Trinitarians. The use of philosophic terms by the Nicene and post-Nicene Fathers in their definitions of the Trinity are not to be faulted either. They were simply using the common philosophical terms of their day.

Faulty Assumptions

How were the Arians able to turn the concept of God as the “First Cause” into an argument against the Trinity? By assuming that the Trinity means *three* gods, they concluded that the Trinity would also mean *three* First Causes! Since you cannot have three “Firsts,” they felt they could use it against the belief in *three* gods. But, the truth is the trinity doctrine is a statement about *one* God, and has nothing to do with three gods.

Just one added note. When Trinitarians show that Christ is called “the First and the Last” (Rev. 1:17; 2:8; 22:13) and then link it to Yahweh being “the First and the Last” (Isa. 41:4), the Jehovah Witnesses usually respond by saying that *there can be more than one “First and Last.”* It would seem that they are attempting to both deny and affirm that there can be only one “First.”

III. Biblical Arguments

The hermeneutical issues raised by Arian interpretations of biblical texts is a vast subject. Today, most Arians depend on a cultic hermeneutic in which the founder or leader is inspired by God to give a “special” and “hidden” meaning of biblical passages. Since this interpretation is supernaturally guided, there is no need to examine the original text or to observe the grammar, the literary context or the historical context of a verse.

The issue, thus, comes down to religious authority instead of exegesis. As long as the cultist believes that his leaders are inspired by God and thus rendered infallible in their interpretation of Scripture, there is not much a Trinitarian can say to change that interpretation. A grammatical, historical, exegetical approach to the Bible cannot compete with the vaunted claims of divine enlightenment and special revelation.

There are ten basic errors which appear in fundamentalistic Arian interpretations of Scripture:

1. Taking a verse out of context.
2. Misapplying texts.
3. Ignoring the grammar of the original text.
4. Reading their own ideas back into the text.
5. Deliberately mistranslating a verse.
6. Quoting only a part of a commentator and twisting his words to make him say the exact opposite of what he said in the context.

7. Inventing Hebrew and Greek grammatical terms and tenses.
8. Quoting a part of a verse in such a way as to misrepresent what it is saying.
9. Producing a false translation of the entire Bible.
10. Depending almost entirely upon defunct nineteenth century Unitarian arguments.

That Arians such as the Jehovah's Witnesses are guilty of committing such gross errors in their interpretation of Scripture has been well documented by many times by Walter Martin, Ed Gruss, Bruce Metzger, and many others.⁵⁰ Thus, we need only give several illustrations which show that the erroneous nature of the Arian hermeneutic.

Sample Texts

The Watchtower Society has written a small booklet entitled *Should You Believe In The Trinity?* In which they summarize all of their arguments against the Trinity.⁵¹ The reason we mention this specific booklet is that it contains all the logical, historical, philosophical, and exegetical fallacies we have so far pointed out. Most of the booklet deals with non-biblical arguments such as church history. But when it came to a positive representation of their "biblical" arguments against the trinity, they put forth only four texts. We will deal with these texts using them as illustrations of the erroneous nature of the Arian hermeneutic.

Proverbs 8:22

[Yahweh] possessed me at the beginning of His way, before His works of old.

יְהוָה קָנָנִי רֵאשִׁית דְּרָכָיו קָדָם מִפְּעֻלָּיו מֵאֵז

The Arian interpretation is as follows:

In the context "wisdom" is speaking (Prov. 8:1). the word "wisdom" is a name or title for Jesus, according to 1 Corinthians 1:30. Speaking as "wisdom," Jesus stated in verse 22, "Yahweh *created* me at the beginning." Thus, "wisdom" in Proverbs 8 is "his first creation, the master craftsman, the prehuman Jesus." Since Jesus states that he was created by God, then he cannot be God.

Analysis

1. the concept of "wisdom" in Proverbs 8:1 must be interpreted in the broader context of the genre of Jewish Wisdom literature (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes).

⁵⁰ Walter R. Martin, *Jehovah of the Watchtower*; Edmund Charles Gruss, *Apostles of Denial*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R: 1974); Bruce M. Metzger, "the Jehovah's Witnesses and Jesus Christ," (*Theology Today*, Apr. 1953). For a further listing of material see Robert A. Morey, *How to Answer a Jehovah's Witness* (Minnesota: Bethany, 1974).

⁵¹ *Should You Believe in the Trinity?*, 14.

2. the word “wisdom” in Proverbs 8:1, 11, 12 is חָכְמָה. Out of seventy-seven occurrences in the Old Testament, it appears fifty-four times in the Wisdom Literature (Job: 13 times, Prov.: 29 times and Eccles.: 12 times).

3. “Wisdom” can refer to man’s wisdom (Job 4:21) or to God’s wisdom (Job 12:13).

4. Divine wisdom is found in the fear of the Lord (Prov.: 9:10). It enables a man to live a good and happy life by giving him the divine perspective on life’s issues and trials.

5. Wisdom was at times personified in Scripture and “in such extra-biblical literature as the Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, and Baruch. In the book of Proverbs, divine wisdom is pictured as a woman who warns and counsels mankind to avoid sin (Prov 1:20). thus, its gender is feminine:

Wisdom shouts in the street, **She** lifts her voice in the square; At the head of the noisy streets **she** cries out; At the entrance of the gates in the city, **she** utters **her** sayings: (Prov. 1:20–21) Does not wisdom call, And understanding lift up **her** voice?

On top of the heights beside the way, Where the paths meet, **she** takes her stand; Beside the gates, at the opening to the city, At the entrance of the doors, **she** cries out: (Prov. 8:1–3)

6. In order to escape the feminine nature of the personification of wisdom in Proverbs, the Watchtower Society in its New World Translation renders the pronouns for “wisdom” in the neuter “it” (Prov. 1:20–21; 8:1–3, 11, etc.). This is a deliberate false translation made to avoid the feminine nature of the personification of wisdom.

7. The Jewish interpretation of Proverbs 8:22 is as follows: in the Midrash (Gen. 1:6), the Mishnah (Aboth 6:10), and the Babylonian Talmud (Pes. 54a, p. 265), wisdom was interpreted as a reference to the Torah or Law of God. It was never interpreted as reference to the Messiah. Neither did we find any messianic interpretation in Philo or in the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha.

8. As Dr. Kenneth Kantzer points out, “wisdom” in Proverbs 8, ... is better taken as a personification of the divine attribute which God exercised in the creation of all things and which also he wishes to impart to men in order to lead them into a righteous life.⁵²

9. As a divine attribute, “wisdom” is said to be “brought forth” in the sense that God’s wisdom was not displayed openly until He created the universe. It is the public display or manifestation of divine wisdom as seen in the act of creation that is in view.

10. The opposite of wisdom is folly. It too is personified as a woman in Proverbs 9:13–18. If personified wisdom is a real person (Jesus), who is the person personifying folly?

11. The attempt to use 1 Corinthians 1:24, 30 as “proof” that the word “wisdom” in Proverbs 8:1 refers to Jesus is a logical and hermeneutical fallacy. The word “wisdom” has many different

⁵² *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, 554. See also Keil and Delitzsch, Proverbs, 1:183; *Lange’s Commentary*, 5:98–104.

meanings depending on the context and the date of the book in which it is found. There is nothing in Proverbs to warrant a messianic interpretation of wisdom. Not one rabbi ever saw the Messiah in the passage.

12. Nowhere else in the Old Testament or the New Testament is the Messiah depicted as a woman. Thus there would have to be overwhelming contextual reasons for interpreting the woman as the Messiah.

13. It is irrelevant that some of the older Trinitarian writers thought that Proverbs 8 referred to Christ. They also mistakenly thought that the Song of Solomon referred to Christ and the Church, when it is actually an erotic love poem celebrating the sexual love between a husband and his wife. Only those who follow an allegorical hermeneutic would think that Christ was the focus of Proverbs 8.

The only reason that the Arians refer to Proverbs 8:22–31 is to establish that the Christ of the New Testament was a created being. But in order to do this, they have to mistranslate the gender of the Hebrew nouns and verbs and misapply New Testament texts.

John 14:28

You heard that I said to you, “I go away, and I will come to you.” If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father; for *the Father is greater than I*.

ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐγὼ εἶπον ὑμῖν, Ὑπάγω καὶ ἔρκομαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς. εἰ ἠγαπήατέ με ἐχάρητε ἂν ὅτι εἶπον, Πορεύομαι πρὸς τὸν πατέρα· ὅτι ὁ πατήρ μου μείζω

This has been a favorite text ever since Arius first used it himself. The Arian interpretation is that Jesus is here admitting that he is inferior to the Father in nature and being. Since he is inferior to the Father, then he cannot be God.

Analysis

The logical fallacies which underlies the Arian interpretation are the categorical fallacy of confusing the two natures of Christ and misrepresenting the doctrine of the deity of Christ.

Trinitarians believe that the second Person of the Trinity took upon himself human nature and was “man of very man” as well as “God of very God.” As the God/man, he was dependent upon the Father for all things. He prayed to the Father and submitted to His will as a slave to his master. He humbled Himself even to embracing death on the cross (Phil. 2:5–7).

Is the Father “greater” in rank and power than you or me? Yes. Then John 14:28 is a marvelous proof of the Incarnation of Christ which is a Trinitarian doctrine. It proves that He was fully human.

The Watchtower, either in ignorance or deception, gives the impression that the doctrine of the Trinity teaches that Jesus was *only* God. Thus, if they can find passages in the Bible where He is described as speaking or acting as a *man*, they foolishly think they have refuted the Trinity!

Once again they have set up a straw man which does not reflect the doctrine of the Trinity. John 14:28 is a Trinitarian text which speaks of the earthly relationship between the incarnate Word and God the Father.

Also, please notice that the word in the text is “greater,” not “better.” The President by virtue of his office is “greater” than me, but this does not mean that he is “better” than me. The word “greater” refers to superior rank and office while the word “better” refers to superior nature and being. A.T. Robertson comments:

Greater than I (μειζων μου). Ablative case μου after the comparative μειζων (from positive μεγας). The filial relation makes this necessary. Not a distinction in nature or essence (cf. 10:30), but in rank in the Trinity. No Arianism or Unitarianism here. The very explanation here is proof of the deity of the Son (Dods).⁵³

The attempt to use a passage which speaks of Christ’s humanity as an argument against His deity is the result of taking a text out of context and misapplying it.

Colossians 1:15

And He is the image of the invisible God, *the first-born of all creation.*

ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου, πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως·

This is perhaps the most used text in the Arian arsenal. The Arian arguments are as follows:

1. Since God is invisible, then Christ cannot be God.
2. Christ is called the “First born of all creation” in the sense that he is the first one created at the beginning.

Analysis

The first argument is once again a straw man. No Trinitarian claims that the visible Son is the invisible Father. It is a categorical error to confuse the Father and the Son, as if they were one person.

In this ancient hymn to Christ, the phrase “image of the invisible God” (εἰκὼν τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου) is actually an indication of the deity of Christ. It literally means that *what the Father is invisibly, the Son is visibly*.⁵⁴ It refers to His unique relationship to the Father. The word “image” (εἰκὼν) implies divine representation and manifestation.⁵⁵

⁵³ *Word Pictures*, 5:255. See also Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel*, 1020–1021.

⁵⁴ Eadie, *Colossians*, 43–52.

⁵⁵ J.B. Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 144–145; Rienecker and Rogers, 567.

Having related Christ to the Father, Paul now relates Christ to the universe. He is given the exalted title πρωτότοκος (First Born). At one time it was thought that πρωτότοκος was a unique biblical word. But it has now been found in numerous ancient inscriptions as far back as 5 BC.⁵⁶

The Arian interpretation is faulty for several reasons. If Paul wanted to say that Christ was the first thing *created*, he would have used the verb “to create” (κτίσω). Instead, he used a title of honor meaning the Preeminent One, the Head of all creation. Thus, it is not the chronology or order of creation, but the *honor* of the Creator Christ that is in view. Langkammer comments:

Gen. πάσης κτίσεως is dependent on πρωτότοκος and makes it clear that the firstborn stands in a relationship to creation as its mediator. Hence this is not a matter of a purely temporal priority of the preexistent Christ, but rather of a superiority in essence.... Christ, as the mediator of creation, is not a part of creation himself, but stands rather in a unique relationship to God, the “invisible.”⁵⁷

The importance of the grammar of the Greek text must not be overlooked. A.T. Robertson points out:

The first born (πρωτοτοκος). Predicate adjective again and anarthrous. This passage is parallel to the Δογος passage in John 1:1–18 and to Heb 1:1–4 as well as Php 2:5–11 in which these three writers (John, author of Hebrews, Paul) give the high conception of the Person of Christ (both Son of God and Son of Man) found also in the Synoptic Gospels and even in Q (the Father, the Son). This word (LXX and N.T.) can no longer be considered purely “Biblical” (Thayer), since it is found in inscriptions (Deissmann, *Light, etc.*, p. 91) and in the papyri (Moulton and Milligan, *Vocabulary*, etc.). See it already in Lu 2:7 and Aleph for Mt 1:25; Ro 8:29. The use of this word does not show what Arius argued that Paul regarded Christ as a creature like “all creation” (πασης κτισεως) by metonymy the *act* regarded as *result*). It is rather the comparative (superlative) force of πρωτος that is used (first-born of all creation) as in Col 1:18; Ro 8:29; Heb 1:6; 12:23; Re 1:5. Paul is here refuting the Gnostics who pictured Christ as one of the aeons by placing him before “all creation” (angels and men). Like εικων we find πρωτοτοκος in the Alexandrian vocabulary of the Δογος teaching (Philo) as well as in the LXX. Paul takes both words to help express the deity of Jesus Christ in his relation to the Father as εικων (Image) and to the universe as πρωτοτοκος (First-born).⁵⁸

In its context, Colossians 1:15 is speaking of Christ as the *present* mediator and Creator of the world. Thus, it does not say that Jesus was created in the distant past as the first thing created.

Since the passage goes on to say in verses 16 and 17 that Jesus created “all things,” *then He Himself cannot be a “thing.”* That this is a forceful argument is demonstrated by the deliberate mistranslation found in the New World Translation. In order to escape the logical conclusion that

⁵⁶ *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3:189–191.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 3:190.

⁵⁸ *Word Pictures*, 4:477–478.

Jesus cannot be a created “thing,” it inserts the word [other] before the word “things” to give the impression that he is the first “thing”. Such a blatant disregard for Scripture reveals the absurd lengths to which the Society will go to avoid the deity of Christ.

Lastly, verse 16 states that all things have been created *for Him*.” The antecedent is clearly Christ and, thus, He must be God for all things were created for His glory and honor.

Revelation 3:14

And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, *the Beginning of the creation of God*, says this:

Καί τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐκκλησίας Λαοδικέων γράψον, Τάδε λέγει ὁ Ἀμήν, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός καὶ ἀληθινός, ἡ ἀρκὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ Θεοῦ

The Arians seize upon the phrase “the beginning of the creation of God” as indicating that Jesus was numerically the first thing created.

Analysis

The word ἡ ἀρχὴ “the beginning” does not imply that Jesus was the first thing created. If it did, then the Jehovah’s Witnesses will have to reduce Jehovah to a creature because in Revelation 22:13, they apply the word ἀρχὴ to Jehovah:

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the first* and the last, the beginning and the end.”

ἐγὼ τὸ Α καὶ τὸ Ω, ἀρχὴ καὶ τέλος, ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος.

In contrast, Trinitarians apply Revelation 22:13 as well as Revelation 1:8 and Revelation 3:14 to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Arians will have to either admit that Revelation 22:13 refers to Christ, which proves that He is God, or reduce Jehovah to a mere creature.

Jesus is also called ἀρχὴ in Colossians 1:18:

He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the *beginning*, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have preeminence in everything.

καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος, τῆς ἐκκλησίας ὅς ἐστιν ἀρχὴ, πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν, ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων

Paul gives us several glorious titles for Christ, such as ἡ κεφαλὴ “the Head” and πρωτότοκος “First Born,” in addition to ἀρχὴ “Beginning.” Why? He states that he wants Jesus Christ to have the *preeminence in all things*.

In terms of Greek grammar, the words “all things” are emphatic. They are taken from the normal word order at the end of the sentence and placed before the verb πρωτεύων. Thus, when Paul said, “all things,” he meant, “ALL things” in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, material

and spiritual. A literal translation would be: “in order that **IN ALL THINGS** he may be holding first place.” A.T. Robertson comments:

That in all things he might have the preeminence Purpose clause with ἵνα and the second aorist middle subjunctive of γινομαι, “that he himself in all things (material and spiritual) may come to (γενηται, not ἦ be) hold the first place” (πρωτευων, present active participle of πρωτευω, old verb, to hold the first place, here only in the N.T.). Christ is first with Paul in time and in rank. See Rev 1:5 for this same use of πρωτοτοκος with των νεκρων (the dead).⁵⁹

What must be in order for what is to be what it is? If Paul viewed and worshipped Jesus as God, then we would expect to find such hymns of praise to Him. But, if Paul did not believe in the deity of Christ, such language must be deemed blasphemous and idolatrous.

The word ἀρχη is found fifty-five times in the New Testament. It has the definite article in Luke 20:20 as well as in Revelation 3:14:

And they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, in order that they might catch Him in some statement, so as to deliver Him up to **the rule** and the authority of the governor. (Luke 20:20)

καὶ παρατηρήσαντες ἀπέστειλαν ἐγκαθέτους,
ὑποκρινομένους ἑαυτοὺς δικαίους εἶναι, ἵνα
ἐπιλάβωνται αὐτοῦ λόγου εἰς τὸ παραδοῦναι αὐτὸν
τῇ ἀρχῇ καὶ τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ τοῦ ἡγεμόνος.

In this passage, the word τῇ ἀρχῇ is translated as “the rule” in the NASB. Even the New World Translation has “the government.” It is used in parallel to the word τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ “authority.” It has nothing to do with the idea of the first one created.

There are many detailed lexicographical discussions of the different meanings of the word ἀρχη which demonstrate that the word usually signifies *primacy*.⁶⁰ In Revelation 3:14, in order to magnify the superiority of Christ, John calls Jesus “the Origin of the creation of God,” i.e., He is the One *who created all things*. As Dean Alford states, “In Him the whole creation of God is begun and conditioned: He is its source and primary fountain-head.”⁶¹

James Moffatt comments:

⁵⁹ Ibid., 4:480.

⁶⁰ *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 1:161–163; Thayer, 76–77; Arndt and Gingrich, 111–112.

⁶¹ Alford, 4:588.

The resemblance of τῆ ἀρχῆ k.t.l., to a passage in Colossians is noteworthy as occurring in an open letter to the neighboring church of Laodicea.... Here the phrase denotes “the active principle of God’s universe or creation.”⁶²

Lenski’s penetrating analysis concludes our discussion of this text:

“The Arche” resembles “the First” used in 1:17. By no means does this title mean that the Lord is the first creature created by God.... Our Lord is the source of the creation of God, the beginning of it in an active sense. The two δία in John 1:3, 10 plus the χωρίς make him the absolute medium of the whole creation. Had it not been for him, there would have been no creation. All creation exists only with reference to him, otherwise it would not even exist.⁶³

Conclusion

We have been able only to offer the briefest analysis of the nature, origins, history, and arguments of Arianism. It springs from philosophic ideas foreign to the Bible and biblical religion. It is reactionary in nature and spends most of its time trying to tear down the doctrine of the Trinity. It even maligns the character and motives of those who worship the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, blessed God Three in One! In the last analysis, it falls under the ἀνάθεμα of God pronounced by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 16:22.

If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed. Maranatha.

Chapter Tw¹

⁶² *The Expositor’s Greek New Testament*, 5:370.

⁶³ Lenski, *Revelation*, 153. 8 Cooper, 201.

¹ Robert A. Morey, [*The Trinity: Evidence and Issues*](#) (Iowa Falls, IA: World Pub., 1996), 468–507.