

Arianism Today

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by Jerry Finneman

Introduction

In surveying teachings from various Churches on the topic “Arianism Today,” evidence is that there are streams of professing Christian Churches and other religious groups who take an Arian or Semi-Arian doctrinal position regarding Christ and the Holy Spirit. Jehovah’s Witnesses is one such organization; others are: Mormons, Unitarians (both Christian and Muslim), Christadelphians, Messianic Judaism, Oneness Pentecostalism, Polish Brethren, Seventh-day Adventist pioneers and other Adventists today who believe our Church is in doctrinal apostasy because of Fundamental Belief number 2 regarding the doctrine of the Trinity. They believe the Church must return to the foundational purity of the Pioneers, especially regarding Anti-Trinitarian beliefs. So, the purpose of this paper is to explore original beliefs of Arianism, its influence today especially among Jehovah’s Witnesses, Unitarians and Seventh-day Adventists and some implications of this teaching.

Arianism

So, what is Arianism? The short answer is that Arianism, today, denies the doctrine of the Trinity, believing that God is one Person only, that Christ was either created by God or was begotten physically by Him and/or proceeded from Him in some unknowable manner.

Although this theological teaching existed before the time of Arius (about AD 250–336) it is attributed to him and named after him. Arius was a member of the governing body of the Catholic Church in Alexandria, Egypt. He believed that Christ did not exist as a person until God created Him. There is little direct knowledge of what Arius actually taught. This is because most of his writings were destroyed. What we know about what he taught comes from his followers, and from the writings of his opponents who considered him to be a heretic.¹ Foremost in opposition to Arius were his superior, Alexander, and Athanasius (about 293-373), an Egyptian born Greek.

¹ Donald Macleod, *Jesus Is Lord: Christology Yesterday and Today* (2000), Fearn, UK: Christian Focus Publications, p. 87.

The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary gathered from several sources the origin of Arianism:

Arianism received its name from “a presbyter of the Baucalis region of Alexandria (Boulerand 1964: 175), [who] began a controversy ca. 318 (Schneemelcher 1954: 394) with Bishop Alexander of Alexandria over the nature of Christ’s relation to the Father (Gregg and Groh 1977: 263). This controversy led ultimately to Arius’ condemnation by the Council of Nicaea (325 C.E.), to the exclusion of his ideas from orthodoxy in the Creed and Anathemas of Nicaea, and to the movement known as Arianism.”²

History has not been kind to heretics, real, or imagined. In the case of such men as Arius we know virtually nothing of his teaching except what can be gleaned from the voluminous writings of his opponents notably Athanasius.³ Recent scholarship has raised serious questions as to the personal integrity of Athanasius. Richard Hanson accuses him of equivocation, falsehood, sharp practice and treason.⁴ This unfavorable charge is endorsed by other contemporary scholars such as Professor Rowan Williams.⁵

Concerning Arius, Hanson points out, “we have no more than three letters, a few fragments of another, and what purport to be long quotations from the *Thalia*, verses written in the Sotadean⁶ metre or style to set forth his doctrines.”⁷

During the time of Athanasius and Arius, in the late third and early fourth centuries, Roman Catholics and Arians both claimed to be the true Catholic Church. The point here is that both parties – Roman and Arian – were Catholic. There are SDA Arians today who contend that because the Roman Catholic Church teaches the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine cannot be

² Groh, D. E. (1992). Arius, Arianism. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.), . *Vol. 1: The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (D. N. Freedman, Ed.) (384). New York: Doubleday.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), pp. 244–246.⁴

⁵ Rowan Williams in *The Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol. 45, Number 1, p. 107. Cf. Hans von Campenhausen, *The Fathers of the Greek Church* (London: SCM Press, 1963) p. 73, cited by Macleod.

⁶ Refers to coarse satires and mythological burlesques. “Athanasius repeatedly castigates Arius’ *Thalia* for its effeminate and undignified character and melody, which is in the manner of Sotades and would be more appropriate to a dance-act or to convivial revelry.” M.L. West, [Oxford] *Journal of Theological Studies*, “The Metre of Arius’ *Thalia*,” N. 8., Vol. XXXIII, Pt. 1, April 1982. “Soadean is an adjective with connotations of homosexual behaviour in classical usage; but Athanasius is not making a serious accusation.... Athanasius is able to damn the author by association. All the reliable evidence supports Epiphanius’s picture of a man [Arius] with a considerable ascetic reputation.” *The Works of Cardinal John Henry Newman*, “The Arians of the Fourth Century” by John Henry Cardinal Newman and Rowan Williams Leominster : Gracewing, 2001, Editor’s Notes, p. 495.

⁷ *Ibid.*

true. However, they need to be reminded that the Arians of yesteryear were just as strong Catholics as the Roman sect. The Arian controversy was a Catholic controversy.

Another argument put forth today, by Arian believers, is that because the term “Trinity” is not in the Bible it must be terribly wrong. However, another consideration should be taken into account: terms such as “substitution” and “investigative judgment” are not found in Scripture either. So, the absence of the terms such as “Trinity,” “investigative judgment” and “substitution” do not disprove that these are Biblical concepts. Doubts and inferences regarding these terms are wrong-headed. The question to be answered is, “Are these concepts found in Scripture?”

An interesting insight into the fourth to sixth century conflicts between Rome and Arian Catholics is that the argument for the Arian anti-Trinitarians was based largely on Scripture proof-texts and Greek logic. Greek philosophical reasoning was employed by the Eastern Orthodox and the North African churchmen, but not by the Roman Catholics who used the Latin language in their thinking and speaking. It was the Greek speaking men such as Athanasius who argued for Rome against Arianism. Athanasius became the leading opponent of Arius and his teachings.

There had been many localized battles between Roman and Arian Catholics, but the first official confrontation was during the Council of Nicaea. It is of special interest to note that most of the representatives of both the Roman and the Arian Catholics were in agreement in regard to the doctrine of the Trinity.

Another point of interest is this: the Council of Nicaea was neither Roman Catholic nor Arian Catholic. It was Constantinian. The Council was conceived and convened by Constantine, primarily for political purposes. Constantine previously had granted religious freedom to Christians. Christianity had been growing despite persecution. Constantine knew it would dominate Paganism eventually and he wanted Christianity for his political support. The Council was called by him in order to bring about peace among arguing Catholic factions.

Unlike today, however, the Arian Catholics of that time believed in the Trinity as did the Roman Catholics. Their debate was not about the existence of the Trinity. The dispute between the Papacy and the Arians was over the *nature* of the Trinity. They believed in the same Trinity, but their differences were in the precise relationship which the Son bears to the Father. (Arians

of yesteryear also believed that the Holy Spirit was/is a Person: “Lord and Giver of life” who was to be worshipped.⁸⁾

There was much misunderstanding and as a consequence each of the factions wrote volumes of materials, as though contending against adversaries. One who lived close to that time wrote that

although it was admitted on both sides that the Son of God has a distinct person and existence, and all acknowledged that there is one God in a Trinity of persons, yet, from what cause I am unable to divine, they could not agree among themselves, and therefore were never at peace.⁹

With the exception of a single point, the two views were identical, but stated in different ways. The Roman Catholic view held that the Son was begotten of the very essence of the Father, and so is of the *same identical* substance with the Father. Arius, on the other hand, held that the Son was created from nothing by the Father, not from His own essence, and that when He was created, He was of *like* but not the *same* substance with the Father.

The Iota

In his book entitled *The Two Republics*, A. T. Jones commented, then quoted Edward Gibbon regarding the murkiness of the debate:

Whether the Son of God, therefore, is of the same substance, or only of like substance, with the Father, was the question in dispute. The controversy was carried on in Greek, and as expressed in Greek the whole question turned upon a single letter. The word which expressed [Athanasius and] Alexander's belief, is *Homoousion* [homo = same; ousia = nature]. The word which expressed the belief of Arius, is *Homoiousion* [*homoios* = like; *ousia* = nature]. One of the words has two “i’s” in it, and the other has but one; but why the word should not have that additional “i,” neither party could ever exactly determine. Even Athanasius himself ... “has candidly confessed that whenever he forced his understanding to meditate upon the divinity of the Logos, his toilsome and unavailing efforts recoiled on themselves; that the more he thought, the less he comprehended; and the more he wrote, the less capable was he of expressing his thoughts.” [Gibbon]^{10 11}

This doctrinal controversy, revolving around those two words distinguished by a single iota (i), gave rise to the popular expression, “It makes not one iota of difference.” (Even Ellen

⁸The first sentence in the last paragraph of the Nicene Creed states: “And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father [and the Son], who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.”

⁹ Socrates of Constantinople, *Ecclesiastical History*, book i, chap. Xxiii, quoted by A.T. Jones, *Great Empires of Prophecy*, (1898), 498.

¹⁰ Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chap. v, par. i

¹¹ Alonzo T. Jones, *The Two Republics* (1891), The Review and Herald Publishing Company, Battle Creek, Michigan, p. 332

White used the expression “one iota of...”).¹² To the Roman Catholics, however, the iota was of great importance and although a number of Arian bishops signed the Nicene Creed, Arianism was condemned by the Council of Nicaea in 325 and all the written material by Arius was to be burned. The death penalty was declared against anyone who possessed or even read his books.

For Arius it was impossible for God to “beget” a divine Son, for this would involve dividing the inherently indivisible. So, for him, Christ had to be created by God.¹³ Arius began with the fundamental presupposition that the divine essence is an indivisible unity, not a substance that can be divided or distributed like helpings of mashed potatoes. If this was true, how could one argue coherently that God could be divided into persons?¹⁴ Even his reasoning got him into trouble.

Condemned as a heretic by the First Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.), Arius was later exonerated in 335 at the First Synod of Tyre¹⁵ then, after his death, pronounced a heretic again at the First Council of Constantinople of 381.¹⁶

Athanasius also was banished and brought back into favor several times, depending on which Catholic party was in power – the one to which he belonged or the one centered in Rome. For centuries following the initial combatants the battle raged between Roman and Arianism Catholicism with the Roman sect finally victorious because of the armed forces of Justinian who in 538 broke the military and political power of the Ostrogoths, the last of the Arians. By 555 they were no more.

Arianism Today

Today there are several groups, churches, and movements whose members believe in what we understand to be Arianism or Semi-Arianism. I will deal with three: Unitarians, Jehovah’s Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists. One form of Arianism is the belief that Christ was brought into existence as a person by God physically – that in some manner Christ came

¹² See the “EGW Comprehensive Research Edition 2008,” CD where she used this expression some 20 times in describing actions or lack of them; and some 40 times the word “iota”

¹³ According to Arius “the *Logos* was a dependent and spontaneous production, created from nothing by the will of the father.” Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol 2, Ch 21, Part III

¹⁴ *Christian History Magazine-Issue 85: The Council of Nicaea: Debating Jesus’ Divinity*. 2004. Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today.

¹⁵ Socrates of Constantinople, *Church History*, book 1, chapter 33. Anthony F. Beavers, *Chronology of the Arian Controversy*.

¹⁶ “First Council of Constantinople, Canon 1” Retrieved 8/18/2012 from: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf214.ix.viii.i.html>

forth from God's person. Another form of Arianism is that Christ was actually created as held by Jehovah's Witnesses and Unitarians (and at one time our own Uriah Smith).

One serious implication is the lack of salvation on the part of most of the belief systems of modern day Arians. (This is true of Trinitarians as well). Because our topic is "Arianism Today" we will deal primarily with Arians and their belief that Christ was a creature either by creation or by proceeding in some manner from the Person of God the Father. Alister McGrath observed, "An essential feature of being a creature is that one requires to be redeemed. No creature can save another creature. Only the creator can redeem the creation."¹⁷ This is the most serious point of debate in the Arian controversy today, for no matter how Christ is presented by modern Arians He has to be considered as some sort of a creation. All of them agree in this – that there was a time in eternity when the Son of God was not a Person.

First a look at Unitarianism. Unitarianism is a theological movement, so named because of its understanding of God as one Person only. Unitarianism is the belief that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not three Persons in any kind of heavenly trio. It denies both the deity of Christ and the personhood of the Holy Spirit. To them Jesus became the Son of God at His baptism. They also deny the vicarious atonement of Christ.

According to Unitarians, human reason and experience should be the final authority in determining spiritual truth and, therefore, conversion is unnecessary. "There is no formal conversion process, so becoming a Unitarian Universalist is simply a matter of self-identification."¹⁸ A "kindly Unitarian minister" told children in a kindergarten Sunday school class, "We do not need to have someone like Jesus look after us; we can take responsibility for our own lives and accomplish marvelous things."¹⁹ (If Jesus is not God, he cannot look after us or save us. We might then just as well become Unitarian humanists. Thank God this is not true!)

Thus, Unitarians adhere to strict monotheism, maintaining that Jesus was a prophet, perhaps even supernatural to some extent, but not God.²⁰ However, Christ to them is special and the sole agent by which creation was accomplished.

¹⁷ Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), p. 49.

¹⁸ David Miano, *An Explanation of Unitarian Christianity*, (2003), p. 15.

¹⁹ Sarah Oelberg, "The Faith of a Humanist." Accessed 10/31/12, from the official Unitarian Universalist website at <http://uua.org/>.

²⁰ David Miano, *An Explanation of Unitarian Christianity*, (2003), p. 15.

For most of its history, Unitarianism has been known also for its rejection of several Protestant doctrines; not only the Protestant teaching of the Trinity,²¹ but including the doctrines of original sin and predestination,^{22 23} and, in more recent times, has rejected the infallibility of Scripture.²⁴

The term Unitarian existed a short time before it became the name of a religious organization, and thus occasionally it is used as a common noun that describes any understanding of Christology that denies the Trinity or believes that God is only one Person. In that case it would be a belief system not necessarily associated with the Unitarian religious movement. For example, the Unitarian movement has never accepted Jesus as God, and therefore does not necessarily include those non-Trinitarian belief systems that do, such as Oneness Pentecostalism, United Pentecostal Church International and the True Jesus Church – all of which maintain that Jesus is God as a single person. These groups are unitarians in the common sense, not in the proper sense.

For modern day Arians, the use of the Christological titles such as “only-begotten” (John 1:14; 3:16; 1 John 4:9); or “firstborn” (Rom 8:29; Col 1:15) usually means that Christ is the only creature brought into being directly and physically by God. For these Arians the term always carries with it ideas such as “first Son” or “favored Son,” rather than the absolutely “only unique Son” of God. These and similar terms are used by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Jehovah’s Witnesses, in an appendix in their *New World Translation* (pp. 773–777), attempt to discredit the translation of John 1:1 on the point that Jesus, “the Word was God” is

²¹ Joseph Priestley, one of the founders of the Unitarian movement, defined Unitarianism as the belief of primitive Christianity before later corruptions set in. (Earl Morse Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism*, Harvard University Press 1952, pp. 302-303).

²² From *The Catechism of the Hungarian Unitarian Church in Transylvanian Romania*: "Unitarians do not teach original sin. We do not believe that through the sin of the first human couple we all became corrupted. It would contradict the love and justice of God to attribute to us the sin of others, because sin is one's own personal action" Ferencz Jozsef, 20th ed., 1991. Translated from Hungarian by Gyorgy Andrasi, published in *The Unitarian Universalist Christian*, FALL/WINTER, 1994, Volume 49, Nos.3-4; VII:107).

²³ In his history of the Unitarians, David Robinson writes: "At their inception, both Unitarians and Universalists shared a common theological enemy: Calvinism." He explains that they "consistently attacked Calvinism on the related issues of original sin and election to salvation, doctrines that in their view undermined human moral exertion. David Robinson, *The Unitarians and the Universalists*, Greenwood Press, (1985), pp. 3, 17.

²⁴ "Although considering it, on the whole, an inspired book, Unitarians also regard the Bible as coming not only from God, but also from humans.... Unitarians therefore do not believe in the infallibility of the Bible, as some other Christians do." David R. Miano, *An Explanation of Unitarian Christianity*. Accessed 11/1/12 from <http://americanunitarian.org/explanation.htm>.

merely “a god,” inferior to Jehovah, and not truly God in nature. Their interpretation reads: “The word was a god.” They realize that if Jesus and God (Jehovah) are “One” in nature, their theology cannot stand since they deny that unity of nature.

Another verse Jehovah’s Witnesses mistranslate is Col 2:9 which reads in most translations: “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (NKJV) or something comparable. This is true of older translations as well as newer ones. Compare the following:

- “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (KJV).
- “For in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily” (RSV).
- “For in Christ all the fulness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (NIV).
- “For in him all the fullness of deity lives in bodily form” (NET).
- “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (ESV).
- “For it is in Christ that the fulness of God's nature dwells embodied” (Weymouth).

The Jehovah’s Witnesses *New World Translation*, however, changes the meaning, interpreting Col 2:9 thus: “because it is in him that all the fullness of the divine quality dwells bodily.” For much of their interpretive work they rely on Unitarian Greek scholar Joseph Thayer’s *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. In the Watchtower magazine they refer to as being “comprehensive.” Jehovah’s Witnesses do well to remember that Thayer was a Unitarian (one who denies the deity of Christ), and therefore more prone to accept their interpretations than those of Christianity.

But despite his theological views, Thayer was a Greek scholar whose integrity in the presentation of honest facts, despite their disagreement with his personal beliefs is fairly presented. (This is a trait exemplified in all legitimate critics and honest scholars). Thayer states that the term Godhead is a form of Deity. In his own words he wrote about Col 2:9: “i.e., the state of Being God, Godhead” (p. 288, 1886 ed.). In other words, Christ was the fullness of “the Deity” (Jehovah) in the flesh! The *New World Translation* erroneously renders it “the divine quality,” robbing Christ of His Deity. The only way to substantiate this inaccurate translation would be to substitute the word (Divinity) and thus escape the condemning evidence of “the Deity.” However, documentary evidence reveals that they cannot rightfully do this, for in Thayer’s own words, “(Deity) differs from (Divinity) as essence differs from quality or attribute.” It cannot be translated as a “divine quality.” This kind of substitution of one word for another in translation is pure scholastic dishonesty. Jehovah’s Witnesses can produce no authority for this mistranslation of the Greek text. Not even Thayer, the Unitarian, agrees with

them. Jesus, according to the words themselves, is the same essence and substance as God, and as the essence (Deity) differs from the mere quality (Divinity). Accordingly, He is God – Jehovah manifest in the flesh. “For in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily” (Col 2:9, RSV).

This brings us to Seventh-day Adventism. It cannot be denied that several, if not most of the pioneers were Arian or semi-Arian and thus anti-Trinitarian in their beliefs. William Johnsson, in 1994, then editor of the Review, summed up what a large but indefinite number of the pioneers believed: “Many of the pioneers, including James White, J. N. Andrews, Uriah Smith and J. H. Waggoner held to an Arian or semi-Arian view – that is, the Son at some point in time, before the creation of our world, was generated by the Father.”²⁵

By studying those words of the pioneers describing why they opposed the Trinitarian doctrine, popular in their day, we learn their reasons for speaking out against it. Their arguments opposed Trinitarianism which sometimes defined God as a plurality who coexisted in one being, thus destroying the individuality and personality of both Father and Son. The pioneers were adamantly opposed to that specific unbiblical Trinitarian doctrine which defines God as three persons as one and the same being. Joseph Bates wrote about this false doctrine. “Respecting the trinity” Bates declared, it was not possible for him “to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ” and “the Father” were “one and the same being.”²⁶

Another reason for rejecting the Trinity was because those who held that doctrine believed also in the immortality of the soul. The concern of the pioneers was that this doctrine taught that only Christ’s humanity was sacrificed on Calvary. As they pointed out, this was spiritualizing away both the Father and the Son’s personalities.

J. N. Andrews and James White summarized Adventist opposition against the then common teaching of the Trinity. Andrews wrote: “This doctrine destroys the personality of God, and his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.”²⁷ James White expressed the same concern: “Here we might mention the Trinity, which does away [with] the personality of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ...”²⁸

²⁵ William Johnsson, *Adventist Review*, “Present Truth - Walking in God’s Light,” January 6, 1994.

²⁶ *Joseph Bates Autobiography* (Battle Creek, 1868), p. 205.

²⁷ J. N. Andrews, *The Advent Review & Sabbath Herald*, Mar 6, 1855.

²⁸ James S. White, *The Advent Review & Sabbath Herald*, Dec 11, 1855.

James White believed in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. He included the Doxology “Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost” in his first Hymn book compiled in 1849. It wasn't the “threeness” but the “oneness” he rejected, because this destroyed not only the individuality within the Godhead but it also denied the Father and the Son as individual Persons. In a letter to the *Day Star*,²⁹ James White wrote of: “a certain class who deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. This class can be no other than those who spiritualize away the existence of the Father and the Son, as two distinct, literal, tangible persons...”³⁰

James White did not believe that the Son of God was the same being as the Father. Even more examples of the language he and others used during the early years can be found in the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* issues beginning with its debut in 1851 published and edited by James White. Although he took care to preserve the distinction between the Father and the Son, he had no misgivings about also ascribing to the Son the title of “everlasting Father” and “the God of Abraham.”

Christ is the “everlasting Father” of his people, [Isa ix, 6,] the New Jerusalem the mother, [Gal. iv, 26.] and the members of the church of Christ are the children. Soon the whole family in heaven and in earth will be gathered. The view that the church is the bride of Christ, not only unites by marriage, the father with the children, but the bridegroom with the guests.³¹

Now, Christ being the Son of Man, the chief man, or second Adam, the man of God's right hand, the heir of all things, is of right “Lord even of the Sabbath day.” “As Christ proves the resurrection, in Mark xii, 26, 27, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob; I am not the God of the dead, but of the living;” so Christ is Lord of the Sabbath day. He is not Lord of the dead types and shadows, or of that which is not in being, but he is Lord of the lively oracles, of which I consider the Sabbath to be one. Acts vii, 38.”³²

In an article in November of 1854 James White opposed both Unitarian and Trinitarian teachings because of their views on the atonement. Both presented only a human sacrifice. The Unitarians believed Jesus was never God, but only a man, while the Trinitarians believed in the natural immortality of the soul. Both, according to James White, denied the atonement. This was so because if Christ was immortal, then His sacrifice was only human, the same in principle as the Unitarian doctrine. Following are his thoughts regarding these two systems.

²⁹ Letter by James White in the *Day Star*, January 24, 1846.

³⁰ James White, *The Advent Review & Sabbath Herald*, August 5, 1852

³¹ *Ibid.*, June 9, 1851.

³² *Ibid.*, September 2, 1851.

The Trinitarian view, I think is equally [as with the Unitarian view] exceptionable. They claim that the Son of God had three distinct natures at the same time; viz., a human body, a human soul, united with his Divine nature: the body being mortal, the soul immortal, the Divinity co-equal, co-existent, and co-eternal with the everlasting Father. Now, none of the advocates of this theory, claim that either his soul or Divinity died, that the body was the only part of this triple being which actually died “the death of the cross;” hence, according to this view (which makes the death of Christ the grand atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world) we only have the sacrifice of the most inferior part – the human body – of the Son of God.³³

James White never disputed the equality of Christ with the Father. He explained this more fully in 1877:

Paul affirms of the Son of God that he was in the form of God, and that he was equal with God. “Who being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God.” Phil. 2:6. The reason why it is not robbery for the Son to be equal with the Father is the fact that he is equal. If the Son is not equal with the Father, then it is robbery for him to rank himself with the Father.³⁴

In that same article James White wrote against Unitarianism as being worse than the doctrine of the Trinity:

The inexplicable Trinity that makes the Godhead three in one and one in three, is bad enough; but that ultra Unitarianism [and thus modern Ariansim] that makes Christ inferior to the Father is worse.

The great mistake of the Unitarian is in taking Christ when enfeebled with our nature as the standard of what he was with the Father before the creation of the world, and what he will be when all divine, seated beside the Father on his eternal throne.

True, Christ prayed to a superior. This is during the time of his humiliation, when enfeebled by the seed of Abraham. There was no such dependence before he humbled himself that he might reach the feeble sinner in all his weakness and shame. Neither will there be when Christ shall be seated at the right hand of power in Heaven.

The question of the state of the dead is not a practical subject. And yet we discuss it in order to warn the people against spiritualism. The question of the trinity and the unity is not practical, and yet we call attention to it to guard the people against that terrible heresy that takes from our all-conquering Redeemer his divine power.³⁵

Again: “We believe that Christ was a divine being, not merely in his mission, but in his person also; that his sufferings were penal and his death vicarious.”³⁶ Clearly, here, James White was contending against the Trinitarian doctrine as it was joined to the doctrine of the soul's immortality as well as the Unitarian belief of a human Christ only.

³³ James White, *Sabbath Review and Advent Herald*, November 21, 1854.

³⁴ *Ibid.* “Christ Equal with God,” November 29, 1877.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, June 27, 1878.

Finally, in the year of his death James White once again confessed the equality of Christ with God the Father: “In his exaltation, before he humbled himself to the work of redeeming lost sinners, Christ thought it not robbery to be equal with God, because in the work of creation and the institution of law to govern created intelligences, he was equal with the Father.”³⁷

Some modern day SDA Arians do not believe that Christ was co-equal³⁸ with the Father, but Ellen White had no problem with the term for she saw that it involved salvation. “It was to save the transgressor from ruin that he who was co-equal with God, offered up his life on Calvary. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”³⁹

A question comes to mind: Did the pioneer’s view change from an Arian to a Trinitarian view? The view of some of the pioneers changed, while others did not. Some were even hostile to the doctrine of the Trinity especially as it was presented by those outside of Adventism. Why was the issue not settled within Adventism during the period from 1850-1897? Because it never occupied a main position within Adventist discussions among themselves. That was the case, until Ellen White’s statements in the *Signs of the Times* in 1897 and especially the following year in the *Desire of Ages* regarding the self-existent life of Christ (discussed below).

Did James White change his view on the Trinity? No. But his attitude changed. His description in 1876-77 was “that Adventists hold the divinity of Christ so nearly with the trinitarian, that we apprehend no trial [conflict] here.” This was not the expression of his attitude as stated in his letter to the *Day Star* in 1846 when he wrote about “the old unscriptural trinitarian creed.”

Is the change of attitude of James White and similar changes by other pioneers an indication of a direction or movement of the church? It appears to be so. It shows also that a clear view about the Godhead had not yet been fully developed, but that it was in the process of developing.

The question now to be considered, is not whether Christ in His pre-incarnate state was Divine and immortal and thus eternal; but whether He as an individual Person was self-existent

³⁷*Ibid.*, January 4, 1881.

³⁸ Such as George Grow in a letter written to Robert Wieland in November, 1978: “That which I desired of the brethren was an answer which would harmonize with a phrase in the book Evangelism, ‘there are three living persons of the heavenly trio,’ for I am unable to grasp three personal co-equal, co-eval [sic] gods.” Others who believe in an identical or similar view are: Fred Allaback, Lynnford Beachy, Allen Stump, Bill Stringfellow (deceased), Rachel Cory-Kuehl, David Clayton and Michael Delaney.

³⁹ Ellen White, *Advent Review & Sabbath Herald*, June 28, 1892.

and eternal, thus of equal age, duration, or period as the Father. Was He co-equal with God the Father in its absolute and unlimited sense; or did He have an origin, a beginning, from non-existence to a Person? Jesus Himself settled this question when He claimed that He was Jehovah, the “I AM” – which means the self-existent, unborowed and underived eternal presence of God.

Silence fell upon the vast assembly. The name of God, given to Moses [“I AM”] to express the idea of the eternal presence, had been claimed as His own by this Galilean Rabbi. He had announced Himself to be the self-existent One, He who had been promised to Israel, “whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity.” Micah 5:2, margin.”⁴⁰

Ellen White is clear here. A year earlier, in 1897 she wrote: “Man has no control over his life. But the life of Christ was unborowed. No one can take this life from Him. ‘I lay it down of myself’ (John 10:18), He said. In Him was life, original, unborowed, underived.”⁴¹

The next year she repeated it: “In Christ is life, original, unborowed, underived.”⁴² These words caused theological agitation, upheaval and change among several Adventist Arians. (And it still causes agitation among SDA Arians today). Most SDA Arians attempt to either deny what she wrote or they try to explain it away.

One who could not believe these words were penned by Ellen White was M. L. Andreasen. He told “how astonished we were when *Desire of Ages* was first published, for it contained some things that we considered unbelievable; among others the doctrine of the Trinity, which was not generally accepted by the Adventists then.”⁴³

Andreasen’s doubt led him to speculate that someone must have changed Mrs White’s writings. Consequently, he went to her home to read for himself her own unedited handwritten material. He said that he

was particularly interested in the statement in *Desire of Ages* which at one time caused great concern to the denomination theologically: ‘In Christ is life, original, unborowed, underived’ (p. 530). That statement may not seem very revolutionary to you, but to us it was. We could hardly believe it.... I was sure Sister White had never written, ‘In Christ is life, original, unborowed, underived.’ But now I found it in her own handwriting just as it had been published.”⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages*, (1898), pp. 469, 470

⁴¹ Ellen White, *The Signs of the Times*, April 8, 1897.

⁴² Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages*, (1898), p. 530.

⁴³ M. L. Andreasen, “The Spirit of Prophecy,” unpublished chapel talk presented at Loma Linda, Calif., November 30, 1948, quoted by Russell Holt in “The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination: Its Rejection and Acceptance” (Term Paper, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 1969), 20. Also by George Knight, *Ministry*, “Adventist and Change,” October, 1993.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Although denied by some modern day Arians, it is clear that Ellen White had a role in leading Adventism out from Arianism into the belief of three Persons in the Godhead, which three are:

three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers--the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit--those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will co-operate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ.⁴⁵

At this time, let's consider Uriah Smith's evolution. He evolved from strict Arianism, to a so-called Semi-Arianism to his final bold assertion that "the evolution of deity ceased" with the generation of the pre-incarnate Christ sometime in eternity. In 1865, referring to Rev 3:14 in his book entitled *Thoughts, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Revelation*, Smith in his Arian phase wrote that Christ was "the first created being":

Moreover he [Christ] is 'the beginning of the creation of God.' Not the beginner, but the beginning, of the creation, the first created being, dating his existence far back before any other created being or thing, next to the self-existent and eternal God."⁴⁶

His was a similar misinterpretation like that of the Jehovah's Witnesses, where from this same verse they made Christ refer to himself as "the beginning of the creation by God." However, the genitive means "of God" not "by God." Sixteen years later Smith turned from a narrow Arian "created" position to a Semi-Arian procreation "only begotten" viewpoint.

Commenting on Revelation 3:14 regarding the phrase "the Beginning of the creation of God" Smith then wrote,

Some understand by this language that Christ was the first created being.... But the language does not necessarily imply that he was created ... he himself came into existence in a different manner, as he is called "the only begotten of the Father."⁴⁷

But even then, in 1881, Smith believed there was a time when Christ did not exist. If there was a time when He did not exist, can He be God? One attribute of God is that of an original underived eternal self-existence. Still later in 1898, five years before he died, Smith added a new thought about the cessation of the "evolution of deity."

"With the Son, the evolution of deity, as deity, ceased. All else, of things animate or inanimate, has come in by creation of the Father and the Son – the Father the antecedent cause,

⁴⁵ Ellen White, *Special Testimonies*, Series B, No. 7, (1905), pp. 62, 63.

⁴⁶ Uriah Smith, *Thoughts, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Revelation* (Battle Creek, 1865), p. 59.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* (1881), p. 74.

the Son the acting agent through whom all has been wrought.”⁴⁸

During his time, Smith advocated three impossibilities regarding the pre-incarnate Christ: 1) a created Christ (1865), 2) Christ “came into existence” (1881) and 3) Christ as Deity evolved, but ceased its evolutionary process with His entrance into existence (1898). How is this for transitioning from nothing to something; from creation to evolution?

Alister McGrath wrote, “An essential feature of being a creature is that one requires to be redeemed. No creature can save another creature. Only the creator can redeem the creation.”⁴⁹ Deity can become a part of His creation. He can become a creature, but a creature cannot become Deity, neither by procreation or by creation. This is because all creatures are under law. Only a Creator – One who is above all law can redeem a creature who is under its jurisdiction and its condemnation. Such a Person was/is Christ who declared Himself to be above all law when He stated that He was “Lord of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:28). Mrs White furnishes this insight:

The Son of God came voluntarily to accomplish the work of atonement. There was no obligatory yoke upon Him, for He was independent and above all law. The angels, as God's intelligent messengers, were under the yoke of obligation; no personal sacrifice of theirs could atone for the guilt of fallen man. Christ alone was free from the claims of the law to undertake the redemption of the sinful race.”⁵⁰

Contrary to Uriah Smith's doctrine that denies that Christ is God in the fullest sense, here is a picture of the Creator coming to redeem His creation.

Arianism Today: Implications in Conclusion

Since Christ is God, He is above all law. To be above law does not mean He violates it in any sense of interpretation. As God He is in harmony with His law. Only if Christ was/is God eternally, then He was above all law and would not be under obligation to any law, except by a voluntary choice.

If Christ had been created, or begotten physically, or proceeded forth from God, or was divided from and by the Father's Person, he would have had a beginning and that would have made him to be under obligation to the law that produced Him and not above it – unless there was an exemption. However, if an exemption is right, the law is wrong; if the law is right, exemption is wrong. Both the law and Christ, as God, are right and true and so no exemption is

⁴⁸ Uriah Smith, *Looking Unto Jesus*, “Christ as Creator,” *Advent Review & Sabbath Herald* (1898), p. 13.

⁴⁹ Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*, Malden, MA: Blackwell (1998), p. 49.

⁵⁰ Ellen White, *Testimonies For the Church Volume Four*, (1876-1881), p.p 120, 121.

possible nor allowable. Had He been under the obligation of law before His Incarnation, He could not have been our Savior and Redeemer. But He came voluntarily to be under the obligation of the law, so that by His obedience He can and will make many righteous.⁵¹ He also voluntarily came under the condemnation of the law in order to exhaust its penalty in order to redeem us “who were under the” broken law’s penalty.⁵² Nothing but His humanity as subject to death and His absolute Deity could accomplish this.

Some Arians today believe that Christ was created. Others say He was begotten by a divine birth and was thus the literal Son of God. But God does not beget nor create Gods. What God creates is not God. Christ is God by nature, not by creation, nor by some kind of divine procreation according to the letter of the law of creature reproduction. We worship God, not some creation or procreation. This worship is pagan in essence.

Christians worship and pray to Jesus as Stephen prayed to Him (Acts 7:59). This is because Jesus is God. We are totally forbidden to worship anyone or anything except God. So, according to the testimony of Jehovah’s Witnesses and Unitarians (as well as Arius of old) there are some modern day SDA Arians who are practicing idolatry if they worship Jesus. Arius was not able to significantly refute this in his day, neither can modern day Arians whether they are Jehovah’s Witnesses, Unitarians or Seventh-day Adventists.

Only God can save. Christ is our only Savior. Therefore, Christ is God in the highest sense with the life of Deity that is “original, unborrowed, underived” and which life was given to justify and to save us.⁵³ Our assurance of eternal life is nothing less than the Deity of Christ who came to dwell in human flesh.⁵⁴

There is a clear correlation between Jesus and the specific Deity known as Jehovah. Paul quoted passages from the Old Testament that refer to Jehovah and then refers them to Jesus. For instance Joel 2:32 states, “Whoever calls on the name of the LORD [Jehovah] shall be saved.” However, Paul in Romans 10:13 quotes that exact passage, but refers to Jesus as “the Lord” of the passage in 10:9 – “If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord” and then in verse 13 states, “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

⁵¹ Romans 5:19.

⁵² Galatians 4:4.

⁵³ Romans 5:9, 10; Ephesians 2:11-13.

⁵⁴ Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages*, (1898), p. 530.

Accordingly, is not the opposite likewise true? That is, if someone who knowingly refuses to confess with his mouth, from the heart, that Jesus is Jehovah, the eternal God, with “original, unborrowed, underived” self-existent life, does it not follow s/he is in danger of rejecting salvation?

In closing: Arianism today leans heavily toward salvation by Christ’s perfect example only. This is especially true among both Unitarians and Jehovah’s Witnesses who believe and teach this. They do so because that is all they have. They have no Deity as their Savior. This is because they do not believe that Christ is God and that it is by His power and grace, as God, saves. So they work at saving themselves by following Christ’s human example only. And it seems that although many Adventist Arians sing “the songs of Zion,” some are in the same salvation posture as their Unitarians and Jehovah’s Witnesses cousins who have no Savior.

Let us not trample the Son of God underfoot, counting His blood – “the blood of the [everlasting] covenant” as a common human thing and not as the blood – the life – of God⁵⁵ and thus insult “the Spirit of grace.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Acts 20:28.

⁵⁶ Hebrews 10:29.