

# The Council of Nicea

*Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims point to the influence of the Emperor Constantine on the Council of Nicea in AD 325 and argue that the secular government of Rome imposed the doctrine of the Trinity on the Christian church. In reality, church leaders were too resilient for such a simple conclusion, and Constantine's role more complex than is often presented.*

*This article is also available in [Spanish](#). *

The doctrine of the Trinity is central to the uniqueness of Christianity. It holds that the Bible teaches that "God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God."[\[1\]](#) So central is this belief that it is woven into the words Jesus gave the church in His Great Commission, telling believers to " . . . go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . . ." (Matthew 28:19).

It is not surprising, then, that the doctrine of the Trinity is one of the most denigrated and attacked beliefs by those outside the Christian faith. Both Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses reject this central tenet and expend considerable energy teaching against it. Much of the instruction of the Jehovah's Witness movement tries to convince others that Jesus Christ is a created being, not having existed in eternity past with the Father, and not fully God. Mormons have no problem with Jesus being God; in fact, they make godhood available to all who follow the teachings of the Church of Latter-day Saints. One Mormon scholar argues that there are *three* separate Gods—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who are one in purpose and in some way still one God.[\[2\]](#) Another writes, "The concept that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are one God is totally incomprehensible."[\[3\]](#)

Among the world religions, Islam specifically teaches against the Trinity. Chapter four of the Koran argues, "Say not 'Trinity': desist: it will be better for you: for Allah is One God: glory be to Him: (far Exalted is He) above having a son" (4:171). Although Muhammad seems to have wrongly believed that Christians taught that the Trinity consisted of God the Father, Mary the Mother, and Jesus the Son, they reject as sinful anything being made equivalent with Allah, especially Jesus.

A common criticism by those who reject the doctrine of the Trinity is that the doctrine was not part of the early church, nor a conscious teaching of Jesus Himself, but was imposed on the church by the Emperor Constantine in the early fourth century at the Council of Nicea. Mormons argue that components of Constantine's pagan thought and Greek philosophy were forced on the bishops who assembled in Nicea (located in present day Turkey). Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the Emperor weighed in against their view, which was the position argued by Arius at the council, and, again, forced the church to follow.

In the remaining portions of this article, we will discuss the impact the three key individuals—Arius, Constantine, and Athanasius—had on the Council of Nicea. We will also respond to the charge that the doctrine of the Trinity was the result of political pressure rather than of thoughtful deliberation on Scripture by a group of committed Christian leaders.

## **Arius**

Let's look first at the instigator of the conflict that resulted in the council, a man named Arius.

Arius was a popular preacher and presbyter from Libya who was given pastoral duties at Baucalis, in Alexandria, Egypt. The controversy began as a disagreement between Arius and his

bishop, Alexander, in 318 A.D. Their differences centered on how to express the Christian understanding of God using current philosophical language. This issue had become important because of various heretical views of Jesus that had crept into the church in the late second and early third centuries. The use of philosophical language to describe theological realities has been common throughout the church age in an attempt to precisely describe what had been revealed in Scripture.

Alexander argued that Scripture presented God the Father and Jesus as having an equally eternal nature. Arius felt that Alexander's comments supported a heretical view of God called Sabellianism which taught that the Son was merely a different mode of the Father rather than a different person. Jehovah's Witnesses argue today that the position held by Arius was superior to that of Alexander's.

Although some historians believe that the true nature of the original argument has been clouded by time and bias, the dispute became so divisive that it caught the attention of Emperor Constantine. Constantine brought the leaders of the church together for the first ecumenical council in an attempt to end the controversy.

It should be said that both sides of this debate held to a high view of Jesus and both used the Bible as their authority on the issue. Some have even argued that the controversy would never have caused such dissension were it not inflamed by political infighting within the church and different understandings of terms used in the debate.

Arius was charged with holding the view that Jesus was not just subordinate to the Father in function, but that He was of an inferior substance in a metaphysical sense as well. This went too far for Athanasius and others who were fearful that any language that degraded the full deity of Christ might place in question His role as savior and Lord.

Some believe that the position of Arius was less radical than is often perceived today. Stuart Hall writes, "Arius felt that the only way to secure the deity of Christ was to set him on the step immediately below the Father, who remained beyond all comprehension."[\[4\]](#) He adds that whatever the differences were between the two sides, "Both parties understood the face of God as graciously revealed in Jesus Christ."[\[5\]](#)

## Emperor Constantine

Many who oppose the doctrine of the Trinity insist that the emperor, Constantine, imposed it on the early church in 325 A.D. Because of his important role in assembling church leaders at Nicea, it might be helpful to take a closer look at Constantine and his relationship with the church.

Constantine rose to supreme power in the Roman Empire in 306 A.D. through alliance-making and assassination when necessary. It was under Constantine's Edict of Milan in 313 A.D. that persecution of the church ended and confiscated church properties were returned.

However, the nature of Constantine's relationship to the Christian faith is a complex one. He believed that God should be appeased with correct worship, and he encouraged the idea among Christians that he "served their God."[\[6\]](#) It seems that Constantine's involvement with the church centered on his hope that it could become a source of unity for the troubled empire. He was not so much interested in the finer details of doctrine as in ending the strife that was caused by religious disagreements. He wrote in a letter, "My design then was, first, to bring the diverse judgments found by all nations respecting the Deity to a condition, as it were, of settled uniformity; and, second to restore a healthy tone to the system of the world . . ."[\[7\]](#) This resulted in him supporting various sides of theological issues depending on which side might help peace to prevail. Constantine was eventually

baptized shortly before his death, but his commitment to the Christian faith is a matter of debate.

Constantine participated in and enhanced a recently established tradition of Roman emperors meddling in church affairs. In the early church, persecution was the general policy. In 272, Aurelian removed Paul of Samosata from his church in Antioch because of a theological controversy. Before the conflict over Arius, Constantine had called a small church synod to resolve the conflict caused by the Donatists who argued for the removal of priests who gave up sacred writings during times of persecution. The Donatists were rebuked by the church synod. Constantine spent five years trying to suppress their movement by force, but eventually gave up in frustration.

Then, the Arian controversy over the nature of Jesus was brought to his attention. It would be a complex debate because both sides held Jesus in high regard and both sides appealed to Scripture to defend their position. To settle the issue, Constantine called the council at Nicea in 325 A.D. with church leaders mainly from the East participating. Consistent with his desire for unity, in years to come Constantine would vacillate from supporting one theological side to the other if he thought it might end the debate.

What is clear is that Constantine's active role in attempting to resolve church disputes would be the beginning of a new relationship between the empire and the church.

## **Athanasius**

The Council of Nicea convened on May 20, 325 A.D. The 230 church leaders were there to consider a question vital to the church: Was Jesus Christ equal to God the Father or was he something else? Athanasius, only in his twenties, came to the council to fight for the idea that, "If Christ were not truly

God, then he could not bestow life upon the repentant and free them from sin and death.”[\[8\]](#) He led those who opposed the teachings of Arius who argued that Jesus was not of the same substance as the Father.

The Nicene Creed, in its entirety, affirmed belief “. . . in one God, the Father almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; he suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost.” [\[9\]](#)

The council acknowledged that Christ was God of very God. Although the Father and Son differed in role, they, and the Holy Spirit are truly God. More specifically, Christ is of one substance with the Father. The Greek word *homoousios* was used to describe this sameness. The term was controversial because it is not used in the Bible. Some preferred a different word that conveyed *similarity* rather than *sameness*. But Athanasius and the near unanimous majority of bishops felt that this might eventually result in a lowering of Christ’s oneness with the Father. They also argued that Christ was begotten, not made. He is not a created thing in the same class as the rest of the cosmos. They concluded by positing that Christ became human for mankind and its salvation. The council was unanimous in its condemnation of Arius and his teachings. It also removed two Libyan bishops who refused to accept the creed formulated by the Council.

The growing entanglement of the Roman emperors with the church during the fourth century was often less than beneficial. But rather than Athanasius and his supporters seeking the backing of imperial power, it was the Arians who actually were in favor of the Emperor having the last word.

## Summary

Did Constantine impose the doctrine of the Trinity on the church? Let's respond to a few of the arguments used in support of that belief.

First, the doctrine of the Trinity was a widely held belief prior to the Council of Nicea. Since baptism is a universal act of obedience for new believers, it is significant that Jesus uses Trinitarian language in Matthew 28:19 when He gives the Great Commission to make disciples and baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The *Didache*, an early manual of church life, also included the Trinitarian language for baptism. It was written in either the late first or early second century after Christ. We find Trinitarian language again being used by Hippolytus around 200 A.D. in a formula used to question those about to be baptized. New believers were to asked to affirm belief in God the Father, Christ Jesus the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit.

Second, the Roman government didn't consistently support Trinitarian theology or its ardent apologist, Athanasius. Constantine flip-flopped in his support for Athanasius because he was more concerned about keeping the peace than in theology itself. He exiled Athanasius in 335 and was about to reinstate Arius just prior to his death. During the forty-five years that Athanasius was Bishop of Alexandria in Egypt, he was banished into exile five times by various Roman Emperors.

In fact, later emperors forced an Arian view on the church in a much more direct way than Constantine supported the Trinitarian view. Emperors Constantius II and Julian banished Athanasius and imposed Arianism on the empire. The emperor Constantius is reported to have said, "Let whatsoever I will, be that esteemed a canon," equating his words with the authority of the church councils.[{10}](#) Arians in general "tended to favor direct imperial control of the church."[{11}](#)

Finally, the bishops who attended the Council of Nicea were far too independent and toughened by persecution and martyrdom to give in so easily to a doctrine they didn't agree with. As we have already mentioned, many of these bishops were banished by emperors supporting the Arian view and yet held on to their convictions. Also, the Council at Constantinople in 381 reaffirmed the Trinitarian position after Constantine died. If the church had temporarily succumbed to Constantine's influence, it could have rejected the doctrine at this later council.

Possessing the freedom to call an ecumenical council after the Edict of Milan in 313, significant numbers of bishops and church leaders met to consider the different views about the person of Christ and the nature of God. The result was the doctrine of the Trinity that Christians have held and taught for over sixteen centuries.

## Notes

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# The Council of Nicea and the Doctrine of the Trinity

*Don Closson argues that Constantine did not impose the doctrine of the Trinity on the church, demonstrating the actual role of church leaders and Constantine.*

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## **“Was Reincarnation Ever in the Bible?”**

I have a question about reincarnation. My father recently read this book called *Many Lives, Many Masters* by Dr. Brian Weiss. It is about a psychiatrist who explored the past lives of one of his patients through hypnotic regression.

In the third chapter he claims that reincarnation was in the Bible but was later removed. I quote from the book:

“There were indeed references to reincarnation in the Old and New Testaments. In A.D. 325 the Roman emperor Constantine the Great, along with his mother, Helena, had deleted references to reincarnation contained in the New Testament. The Second Council of Constantinople meeting in A.D. 553, confirmed this action and declared the concept of reincarnation a heresy.” (p. 35-36)

**Is this true?**

I would like to answer two issues in your e-mail. The first is about past-lives regression through hypnosis. Our friends at the Watchman Fellowship have a MOST interesting article by their director, James Walker, called “The Day I Hypnotized a Reincarnated Prospector.” The point was to demonstrate to a Dallas Seminary class the powerfully deceptive nature of the

cults and the occult. I highly recommend this article:  
[www.watchman.org/na/chair10.htm](http://www.watchman.org/na/chair10.htm)

Secondly, concerning your question about reincarnation being excised from the Bible. Similar to what your father found in the book he read, a section of Shirley MacLaine's book *Out on a Limb* records these comments from her New Age mentor, David:

"The theory of reincarnation is recorded in the Bible. But the proper interpretations were struck from it during an Ecumenical Council meeting of the Catholic Church in Constantinople sometime around 553 A.D, called the Council of Nicea. The Council members voted to strike those teachings from the Bible in order to solidify Church control." [New York: Bantam Books, 1983, pp. 234-5.]

Dr. Paul R. Eddy, Associate Professor of Theology at Bethel College in St. Paul, Minnesota, responds:

"In response to this claim, we must begin by pointing out a few basic historical inaccuracies. First, The Council of Nicea, the first of the seven Ecumenical councils, took place in 325 A.D. It was concerned with the teachings of Arius and their implications for a correct understanding of the person of Jesus Christ. The documents from this Council offer no evidence that the topic of reincarnation ever came up for discussion, let alone that it was condemned and removed from the Bible. No doubt this claim means to refer, rather, to the fifth Ecumenical Council, held in 553—the Council of Constantinople. The primary purpose of this Council was to ease the tensions in the Church caused by the Council of Chalcedon 100 years previous. Again, there is no evidence whatsoever that the idea of reincarnation was ever discussed, let alone condemned and purged from the Bible. What the reincarnationists are probably referring to here is the condemnation of Origenism, which included belief in the pre-existence of the soul. This should not, however, be confused with the notions of the karmic cycle of

reincarnation. This is clear from Origen's own words on this matter when he writes of "the dogma of transmigration, which is foreign to the Church of God not handed down by the Apostles, nor anywhere set forth in the Scriptures." Other early theologians, including Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Gregory of Nyssa, also explicitly rejected the idea of reincarnation. Another problem with this theory is the fact that manuscripts of the Bible exist dating back to the third century. For example, the Bodmer Papyri (dated around 200-225), the Chester Beatty Papyri (dated around 200-250), Codex Vaticanus (dated around 325-350), and Codex Sinaiticus (dated around 340) are all documents written centuries prior to the 533 Council, and none of them reveal any supposed reincarnationist teachings that were removed from later editions of the Bible! Beyond this, it is known that the core canon of the Bible was essentially recognized and acknowledged throughout the orthodox Church as early as the late second and early third centuries, as evidenced by the list contained in the Muratorian Fragment (dated around 170). All of this points towards the impossibility of a conspiratorial purgation of the doctrine of reincarnation—or any other doctrine for that matter—from the Bible during any of the Ecumenical Councils."

[[ittsy.com/focusonthefaulty.com/reincarnation-and-the-bible/](http://ittsy.com/focusonthefaulty.com/reincarnation-and-the-bible/)]

I hope you can see that the burden of proof is on the reincarnationists to show us those supposed Biblical passages supporting reincarnation! The idea that the original versions of the Bible containing teachings on reincarnation were all confiscated and burned—another fantasy floating around these days—is merely that, a fantasy. There is no evidence for any myth of reincarnation taught in the Bible, either past or present. Hebrews 9:27 nails that coffin shut: "It is appointed unto man to die once, and after that comes judgment."

Hope this helps!

# Why We Should Believe in the Trinity

## How the Doctrine of the Trinity Developed

The doctrine of the Trinity separates orthodox Christian teaching from heresy. This essential teaching of Christianity states that we believe in one God who exists in three separate and distinct persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Each member is equal in nature and substance. (For a biblical defense of the Trinity, see [Jehovah's Witnesses and the Trinity](#).)

A common question raised by heretical groups is, When and how did this doctrine develop? According to the Watchtower tract *Should You Believe in the Trinity?* this doctrine was not held by the church fathers. Rather, it was imposed on the church by the pagan emperors who had “converted” to Christianity at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. and the Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D. The bishops in attendance were overawed by the emperor and signed the creed against their inclination. Let's take a careful look at what really happened at these two key church councils.

The Council of Nicea was the first church council ever called. Until this time, the church was under severe persecution from the Roman Empire. Early in the fourth century, the emperor Constantine showed an interest in Christianity and was tutored by Hosius of Cordova who held to the doctrine of the Trinity. With peace in the empire, Christianity spread all across the

world. However, in Alexandria a presbyter named Arius gathered a significant following around his teaching that Jesus was a created being and not God. As his teachings spread, the controversy grew and Constantine realized it needed to be addressed. He thus called for the first universal church council at Nicea to debate the matter.

Although the doctrine of the Trinity itself was not discussed, the doctrine of the deity of Christ was confirmed. In attendance were approximately 300 bishops, many of whom were divided over the issue. Arius with his supporters, Theonas, Secundus, and Eusebius of Nicomedia, held the view that Jesus was an inferior creature to God the Father. The orthodox camp was led by Bishops Hosius, Alexander of Alexandria, Eusebius of Caesarea, and Athanasius who argued that Jesus is God.

After hours of debate, the council concluded the following in their creed:

*"We believe . . . in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten, that is from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one substance (homoousios) with the Father. . . ."*

While the deity of Christ—a crucial aspect of the doctrine of the Trinity—was affirmed, Arius nevertheless continued to teach his doctrine of Christ's inferiority, and Arianism came back into favor for a short time. Fifty years later, in 381 A.D., the Council of Constantinople was called by Emperor Theodosius. Here the Nicene Creed was reaffirmed and further clarified. It is at this council that the Holy Spirit was declared equal in divinity with the Father and the Son.

The councils of Nicea and Constantinople did not establish a new creed. The councils clarified and formalized the belief in the deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit, views already held by the apostles and church fathers. However, Jehovah's Witnesses

contest this point. Let's see if the church fathers who lived before the Council of Nicea, the ante-Nicene fathers, held to the deity of Christ.

## What Did the Church Fathers Say About the Trinity?

According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, the deity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity were never a part of the theology of the church fathers. In the article *Should You Believe in the Trinity?* several church fathers are cited as denying the orthodox view of Jesus. They include Justin Martyr who died in 165 A.D., Irenaeus 200 A.D., Clement of Alexandria 215 A.D., Tertullian 230 A.D., Hippolytus 235 A.D., and Origen who died in 250 A.D. The Watchtower list quotes from each theologian, claiming that they believed the inferiority of the Son to the Father. But the article contains no footnotes citing the source of these quotations.

Did these significant figures in church history really deny the divine nature of Christ? Let us take a careful (and referenced) look at what the ante-Nicene fathers stated in their original writings.

*Justin Martyr:* "...the Father of the universe has a Son; who being the logos and First-begotten is also God" (*First Apology* 63:15).

*Irenaeus:* (referencing Jesus) "...in order that to Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Savior, and King, according to the will of the invisible Father, . . ." (*Against Heresies* I, x, 1).

*Clement of Alexandria:* "Both as God and as man, the Lord

renders us every kind of help and service. As God He forgives sin, as man He educates us to avoid sin completely" (*Christ the Educator*, chapter 3.1). In addition, "Our educator, O children, resembles His Father, God, whose son He is. He is without sin, without blame, without passion of soul, God immaculate in form of man accomplishing His Father's will" (*Christ the Educator* Chapter 2:4).

*Tertullian*: "...the only God has also a Son, his Word who has proceeded from himself, by whom all things were made and without whom nothing has been made: that this was sent by the Father into the virgin and was born of her both man and God. Son of Man, Son of God, ..." (*Against Praxeas*, 2).

*Hippolytus*: "And the blessed John in the testimony of his gospel, gives us an account of this economy and acknowledges this word as God, when he says, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.' If then the Word was with God and was also God, what follows? Would one say that he speaks of two Gods? I shall not indeed speak of two Gods, but of one; of two persons however, and of a third economy, the grace of the Holy Ghost" (*Against the Heresy of One Noetus*. 14).

*Origen*: (with regard to John 1:1) "...the arrangement of the sentences might be thought to indicate an order; we have first, 'in the beginning was the Word,' then 'And the Word was with God,' and thirdly, 'and the Word was God,' so that it might be seen that the Word being with God makes Him God" (*Commentary on John*, Book 2, Chapter 1).

Not only in these instances, but also throughout their writings the ante-Nicene fathers strongly defend the deity of

Christ.

## What Did the Apostle John Say?

To summarize our argument thus far, we discovered that the doctrine of the Trinity was formally adopted as the official teaching of Christianity after the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. I argued against opponents who state that the doctrine was imposed on the church by Constantine in a political move. Rather, the Nicene Creed was a formal statement of a doctrine already articulated by the church fathers even before Nicea. Now, let us take a look and see what the apostle John teaches.

John opens his Gospel with, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." *In the beginning was the Word* shows that the Word was eternally with the Father and not a created being. The second phrase, *and the Word was with God*, shows that the Word is a distinct person from the Father. Thirdly, *and the Word was God* reveals that although separate and distinct, the Word in nature and substance is fully God.

Throughout his Gospel, John demonstrates that Jesus possesses the attributes which qualify Him to be God. Jesus displays power over nature, over disease, and even death. He has a grasp of the Law of God which He, though not formally trained, teaches with such authority as had never been seen before (7:14-16). Testimony from John the Baptist (1:29; 3:26-36) shows His authority to be God. Jesus also accepted the worship of men (9:38).

Jesus also makes several statements revealing His divinity. In John 5:22-23 Jesus says, "Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him." Here, Jesus commands followers to honor Him as they honor the Father. To do this, one must acknowledge Jesus as being equal in nature



to God.

John 8:58 states, “‘I tell you the truth,’ Jesus answered, ‘before Abraham was born, I am.’” The term *I am* is the term God used when He spoke to Moses in Exodus 3:14. Here is a clear statement of Christ declaring His divinity.

In John 10:30 Jesus says, “I and the Father are one.” Jesus did not mean “I am one in purpose with God.” He was claiming to *be* God. The verses that follow His declaration make that clear: “Again the Jews picked up stones to stone Him, but Jesus said to them, ‘I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?’ ‘We are not stoning you for any of these,’ replied the Jews, ‘but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God” (vv. 31-33). The Jews clearly understood His statement and Jesus does not deny their accusation.

The culmination of John’s testimony of Jesus’ deity is in 20:28, which is the conclusion he desires all his readers to come to. “Thomas said to him, ‘My Lord and my God!’” John argues throughout his entire Gospel for the purpose that all who read it might come to believe that Jesus is God incarnate.

## **John 1:1**

In spite of the overwhelming testimony throughout the entire Gospel of John, there are some who argue about the translation of John 1:1. *The New World Translation* of the Jehovah’s Witnesses reads, “In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was a god,” which makes Jesus to be an inferior being to God. In refutation of this translation, I will explain the Greek rules behind the proper translation and argue that the Greek word *God* (*theos*) in John 1:1c must be translated in the definite or qualitative sense—written *God* with a capital G—rather than indefinitely—a *god*—as the NWT has done. This discussion will get a little technical, but the importance of the subject deserves careful attention.

Let me first define some key terms of Greek grammar. An *anarthrous noun* is a noun without the definite article, the English equivalent of the word *the*. A noun in the nominative case in Greek often signifies that this is the subject of the sentence. A predicate nominative noun is a noun in the same case and is equivalent to the subject. The Greek construction of John 1:1c looks like this, *theos e^n ho logos*, and is literally translated "God was the Word."

The subject of this phrase is *the Word* (*ho logos*). We know this because it is in the Greek nominative case and it possesses the definite article *ho*. *God* (*theos*) is in the nominative case and does not have an article. It precedes the equative verb "was" (*e^n*), and therefore is the predicate nominative.

The Jehovah's Witnesses argue that since *God* (*theos*) does not have the article before it, it must be translated indefinitely. So we get their translation, "a god." However, there are other possibilities available for translation.

According to a Greek grammar rule called Colwell's rule, the construction in John 1:1c—anarthrous predicate nominative (*theos*)equative verb (*e^n*)articular noun (*ho logos*)does not automatically mean that the predicate nominative must be indefinite. Colwell's rule, in summary, states that an anarthrous predicate nominative preceeding an equative verb can be translated as either (1) definite, (2) qualitative, or (3) indefinite. Thus, (1) as a definite noun *the Word* equals *God*, (2) as a qualitative *the Word* has the attributes and qualities of *God*, or (3) as an indefinite noun *the Word* is a *god*. Context determines which one it will be.

In the vast majority of cases in the New Testament, especially in the Gospel of John, this construction is translated as a qualitative or definite noun. Greek Scholar Dan Wallace writes, "an anarthrous pre verbal PN [predicate nominative] is normally qualitative, sometimes definite and only rarely

indefinite. . . . We believe there may be some in the NT, but this is nevertheless the most poorly attested semantic force for such a construction.”[\[1\]](#)

Furthermore, the translators of the *New World Translation* are not even consistent with their own rule of translation. Throughout John we find instances of an anarthrous *God* (*theos*) not translated as “a god,” but as “God.” John 1:6 and 1:18 are clear examples of this. Therefore, to argue that *God* (*theos*) in John 1:1c *must* be translated as indefinite solely because it has no article is clearly incorrect.

In an effort to insure that our decision agrees with the overall context of John’s Gospel, we must see if the Gospel of John argues that Christ is inferior to God. As I showed previously, this is certainly not the case.

We must conclude that grammar and context argue against an indefinite translation that makes the Word an inferior being to God. The noun *God* (*theos*) should be translated “God,” as a definite or qualitative, thus upholding the fact that Jesus is 100 percent God and 100 percent man.

## **Alleged Objections from the Gospel of John**

To close this discussion, I will address several problem verses in the Gospel of John that are used in attempts to deny the deity of Christ.

In some translations like the *King James Version* and *New American Standard*, John 1:14 reads that Jesus is “the only begotten from the Father.” Some cults understand the Greek word translated *only begotten* to mean “to procreate as the Father.”[\[2\]](#) In other words, God created Jesus. However, this definition would be inconsistent with John 1:1a, 17:5, and 17:24 which declare the eternal nature of the Word.

The term, translated in some versions as “only begotten,” may sound to English ears like a metaphysical relationship. However, in Greek it means no more than *unique* or *only*. Elsewhere in the New Testament it is used of the Widow of Nain’s “only” son and Jairus’ “only” daughter (Luke 7:12, 9:38 and 8:42). Its use in Hebrews 11:17 with reference to Isaac is particularly insightful. Isaac, we know, was not Abraham’s only son. According to Genesis 16 and 25:1, Abraham fathered several other sons. Isaac is the “only begotten” in that he was unique; he was the only son given to Abraham by God’s promise. Therefore, when *only begotten* is used of Jesus, He is the only begotten in the sense that He is unique. No other is or can be the Son of God. The unique relationship the Son has with His Father is one of the great themes in the Gospel of John.

The next controversial verse is John 14:28. Jesus states, “...I am going to the Father for the Father is greater than I.” Here the Jehovah’s Witnesses understand the term *greater* to mean “superior in nature.” Thus they assert that Jesus is stating His inferiority to God. Once again, however, this would argue against John’s consistent theme of the deity of Christ. *Greater* here refers to position, not to nature. For example, we would agree with the statement that the President of the United States is greater than you or I. As the chief executive of the country he is greater due to his position. However, we would disagree with a statement that says the President is by nature better than you or I. In other words, is he a superior being to the rest of the citizens of the United States? No, we are all human and equal in nature. *Greater* refers to position, not to nature.

There is an established economy in the Trinity. The Father is the head who sends the Son. The Son sends the Spirit. All three are equal in nature, but different in position. This is called “functional subordination.” We see the same principle in 1 Corinthians 11:3, “...and the head of every woman is man,

and the head of Christ is God.” The husband is greater than his wife, her head by position. However, he is not a superior being to his wife. The same applies to Jesus. The Father is greater by position, not by nature.

It is essential that we defend the doctrine of the Trinity, the foundation of Christian theology. Many of the great church fathers courageously defended this truth. Let us follow in their footsteps.

## **Notes**

1. Dan Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 262.

2. Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Should You Believe in the Trinity?* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1989), 15.

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