



KATOOMBA

— BAPTIST CHURCH —

CHRIST'S CHURCH THROUGH THE AGES

LESSON 18: THE ARIAN CONTROVERSY

INTRODUCTION

- Named after its' heresiarch (arch-heretic): Arius
- The controversy arose at the beginning of the 4th Century.
- The 5th Century church historian, Socrates Scholasticus of Constantinople, explains that Arius first became a controversial figure during the patriarchate of Bishop Alexander of Alexandria.
- This theological dispute between Arius and Alexander spread like wildfire (particular across the African provinces), and soon arose to the level of a public disturbance in the Roman Empire.
- The emperor, Constantine the Great, sent letters to both the men, asking the respective church leaders to end the controversy so that order may be restored.
- This led to him convening the First Council of Nicaea (325).

ARIUS - THE MAN

- Arius (A.D. 256-336) was an ascetic and Presbyter.
- Born in Ptolemais, Cyrenaica, Roman Empire.
- Was a student at the Catechetical School of Antioch, and studied under Lucian of Antioch.
- Under the Diocletianic Persecution, there arose a dispute about what to do with those who had denied Christ out of fear for Roman torture; Arius sided with Bishop Melitius of Lycopolis.

- The controversy stemmed from differences of views on whether those who had denied Christianity could be readmitted into the Church (and *if so*, then *how so*).
- There were those - like Melitius and Arius - who refused to accept back into communion such people, even though they had later repented.
- Their hard-line stance stood in contrast to other Bishops & Presbyters (incl. from the time of the Decian Persecution).

ARIANISM – THE HERESY

- The Arian Controversy first breaks out in A.D. 318
- Arius (by now, a Presbyter of a congregation in Constantinople) publicly criticised the Christological views of Bishop Alexander of Alexandria.
- Alexander had delivered a sermon explaining the ontological similarity of God the Father & the Son.
- Arius interpreted this as a revival of the Sabellian heresy (Modalism), and gave a public refutation:

“If the Father begat the Son, he that was begotten had a beginning of existence; and from this it is evident: that there was a time when the Son was not. It therefore necessarily follows, that the Son had his substance from nothing.”

“God has not always been Father; there was a moment when he was alone, and was not yet the Father: later he became so. The Son is not from eternity; he came from nothing.”

THE FOUR DEFINING TENETS OF ARIANISM

1. The Logos and Father were not of the same essence (*ousia*).
2. The universe was created through the Son; thus, He must have existed before the universe, and time itself.
3. Yet, there was a ‘once’ in which the Son did not exist, before He was begotten of the Father.
4. The Son was the first and highest created being (*ksima* or *poiema*).