

The Resurgence of Arianism in Jehovah's Witnesses and its Christological Challenge for the Gospel in Africa

By

Philemon Cletus Gado¹

Abstract

It is startling to discover that heresies are as old as the early church. Even though heretical teachings played vital roles in the development of the Christian dogma and orthodoxy, it was expedient that the early church took uncompromising positions to defend what was believed to be the truth about God and His word. One of the doctrines that cause a serious contention in the early church was the Trinity. Today, the Trinity is still one of the difficult doctrines to explain and accept. The Bible teaches that Christ had two natures while on earth. He was fully human and fully divine. This claim has been challenged and rejected over the ages by some Christians. People like Arius held the view that Jesus the Son is not of the same essence and nature with the Father. In the late 19th century, a movement known as Jehovah's Witnesses

¹ Philemon Cletus Gado holds an MTh degree from ECWA Theological Seminary Kagoro, Nigeria. He is a Pastor with the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) serving with Kaduna Central District Church Council and an adjunct lecturer with ECWA Theological Seminary, Kagoro and the Jos ECWA Theological Seminary, (Kaduna Centre), where he lectures in the New Testament, Systematic Theology, and Ethics. His research interests include Christology, Ethics, Social Justice, Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation. He could be reached at philemongado@etskagoro.edu.ng

founded by Charles Russell adopted the teaching of Arius which denied the divinity of Christ. This work focuses on the Christological challenge posed by the resurgence of Arianism and its impact on the gospel in Africa and the urgent need to combat it.

Key words: Christology, Arianism, Trinity, Heretical, Orthodoxy, Jehovah's Witnesses, Council

Introduction

The deity of Christ has been challenged and denied over the ages by both Christians and non-Christians.² People like Arius held the view that Jesus, the Son, is not of the same essence and nature with the Father. Arius, a presbyter (priest) in Alexandria taught that God the Son was at one point created by God the father, and that before that time the Son did not exist, nor did the Holy Spirit, but the Father only. Thus, though the Son is a heavenly being who existed before the rest of creation and who is far greater than all the rest of creation, he is still not equal to the Father in all his attributes – he may even be said to be “like the Father” or “similar to the Father” in his nature, but he cannot be said to be “of the same nature” as the Father. This controversy went on for some time and none was willing to compromise his stand. This compelled Bishop Alexander in 319 C. E. to call a local synod of the bishops of Egypt and Libya to deliberate on this controversy.

² Every major cult and non-Christian religion which seeks to deride orthodox theology continually attacks the doctrine of the Trinity. Jehovah's Witnesses (the Russellites of today) are the most vehement in this endeavor, and because they couch their clever misuse of terminology in Scriptural contexts, they are also the most dangerous. See Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*. Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1985), 63.

The council at Nicea 325 was meant to address the Arian heresy. At the end, Arius, together with thirteen of his sympathizers were condemned and excommunicated³ by the Alexandrian synod.⁴ Though, Emperor Constantine ordered the burning of Arius' writings after the council prevailed against him and his followers, the idea lived on afterwards. Like Arius, Mohammed, trying to accentuate the unity and omnipotence of God, lost the Trinity. The central point where Islam struck home with a mortal blow against Orthodox tradition was a full denial of the Incarnation. Arius did not deny the Incarnation of the Son, but made rather the Son a creature of God. Mohammed went farther than Arius and stated that Jesus Christ was not the Son of God, that he was simply a prophet, like Moses or Abraham, a man like other men. In this way Islam eliminated the Trinity altogether.⁵ In the late 19th century, a movement known as Jehovah's Witnesses founded by Charles Russell adopted the teaching of Arius which

³ It is worth clarifying that the synod **first excommunicated Arius and his immediate followers** for teaching that the Son of God was created and not equal to the Father. It was a regional disciplinary action by the Alexandrian church authority before the empire-wide council. Afterwards, the Council **condemned Arianism doctrinally**, formulated the Nicene Creed affirming the Son's full divinity, and confirmed Arius's excommunication and banishment from Alexandria and the church community and ordered the burning of Arius' writings. (See, Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*. London: Penguin Books, 1993. 128–130; Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity, Volume 1: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*. np: Harper One, 2010; W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

⁴ Idrissu Adam Shaibu, "The Arian Controversy, Its Ramifications and Lessons for the Ghanaian Church." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention* Volume 2 Issue 11 November. 2013, 48-54, 49.

⁵ Adrian Ignat, "The Spread Out of Arianism: A Critical Analysis of the Arian Heresy." *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 3:3 (2012), 124.

denied the deity of Christ. The church in Africa today must not be ignorant of this very serious heretical movement (as Victor Perry chose to call it)⁶ and its destructive consequences on the spread of the gospel on the continent.

According to the Jehovah's Witnesses Worldwide Service Year Report of 2022 to 2024, **Angola** leads the worldwide growth of the sect with a strong **13%** increase—signifying a sharp acceleration of growth in publishers (those who actively publish, or preach, the good news of God's Kingdom) followed by **Zambia** and **Uganda** each posting an impressive **11%** growth, maintaining their status as top-performing countries in region-wide expansion while **DR Congo**, **Ghana**, and **Mozambique** also showed significant increases (8–9%). In Nigeria, the Service Year Report of Jehovah's Witnesses Worldwide 2022 recorded a Population 216,747,000; Peak Publishers 389,961; Ratio 1 Publisher to 616; Average Publishers 351,732; % increase over 2023, 8; Number of baptized 4,521; Average Pioneers Publishers 40,227; No. of Congregations 6,081; Average Bible Studies 347,454; Memorial Attendance, 742,933.⁷ While in 2024, it recorded a population of 232,679,000; Peak Publishers 406,732; Ratio 1 Publisher to 596; Average Publishers 390,623; % increase over 2023 4; Number of Baptized 18,930; Average Pioneers Publishers 47,987; No. of Congregations 6,145; Average Bible Studies 748,645; Memorial

⁶ Victor Perry, "Jehovah's Witnesses and the Deity of Christ," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 35.1, 1963: 15-22, 15.

⁷ Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, *Service Year Report of Jehovah's Witnesses Worldwide*, 2022. *syr22-E* 1/23. (Pennsylvania, 2023), 6. <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/2022-Service-Year-Report-of-Jehovahs-Witnesses-Worldwide/2022-Country-and-Territory-Reports/>. (Accessed 19/06/2025).

Attendance 857,080.⁸ The statistics above indicate a remarkable four-fold increase in baptism from 4,521 in 2022 to 18,930 in 2024. This means a dramatic boost in conversion rate and recruitment emphasis. The growth of full-time volunteer preachers by about 19% is a reinforcement of stronger ministry capacity while the slight improvement from 1:616 to 1:596, signifies that Witness preaching activity is growing faster than the population, intensifying their reach. This disturbing growth of Jehovah's Witnesses implies that many have been swayed both from the Church and outside the Church, and the trend will continue unless the Church in Africa urgently launches a campaign to counter their exponential growth.

The Arian Controversy

Arius (256-336), a native of Libya, received his theological training in Antioch at the School of Lucian, whom Bishop Alexander of Alexandria called one of the fathers of Arianism. From Antioch, he went to Alexandria where he was ordained deacon and later priest. He was appointed to the Church of St. Baucalis, the most important church in Alexandria. Arius was one of the public preachers of Alexandria and, some suppose, Master of the Catechetical School.⁹ In the fourth century, numerous Christological errors arose and required an extensive defense from Christian leaders. The first major error was

⁸ Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, *Service Year Report of Jehovah's Witnesses Worldwide*, 2024. *syr22-E* 1/23. (Pennsylvania, 2024), 6. . <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/2024-Service-Year-Report-of-Jehovahs-Witnesses-Worldwide/2024-Country-and-Territory-Reports/>. (Accessed 19/06/2025).

⁹ Adrian Ignat, "The Spread Out of Arianism: A Critical Analysis of the Arian Heresy." 107.

Arianism. Arius, began teaching in 313 that the Son was created rather than being the co-equal eternal Son of God. According to Arius and his followers, Jesus was a created being, not ontologically equal to the Father. To help spread this teaching, he even composed songs which incorporated his belief about Christ stating, “There was a time when he was not.”¹⁰ Akin portrayed Arius as one who placed the church in its first great Christological debate. In two brief letters Arius declared that Jesus Christ is not the eternal, unbegotten, uncreated Son of God, rather he is the first and most glorious of God’s creation and therefore yet a creature.¹¹ The Arian heresy was considered one of the many forms of the powerful heresy of Monarchianism. The earliest form of the Monarchian doctrine was the humanitarian view of the Adoptionists, who were so named from the fact that they held Christ to have been a man whom God adopted to be His Son.¹²

Arius, considered the greatest critic of his time, was a student of the venerated martyr Lucian of Antioch. He had a name for learning, and his letters bear witness to his dialectical skill and mastery of subtle irony. At the outbreak of the controversy, about the year 318, we find him in charge of the church of Baucalis at Alexandria, and in high favour with his bishop, Alexander. It was no love of heathenism, but a real difficulty of the gospel which led him to form a new theory. His aim was not to lower the person of the Lord or to refuse him worship, but to defend that worship from

¹⁰ Coleman Ford, “Christological Controversies in the Early Church: An Essay.” *The Gospel Coalition* 2023, 4.

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/christological-controversies-in-the-early-church/>. (Accessed 15/06/2024).

¹¹ Daniel Akin, *The Doctrine of Christology*, *Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary* (Wake forest NC), 14.

¹² Adrian Ignat, “The Spread Out of Arianism: A Critical Analysis of the Arian Heresy.” 118.

the charge of polytheism.¹³ He used four lines of scriptural argument to support his position: (1) Passages that suggested that the Son was a creature; including Prov. 8:22 (“The Lord created me”); Acts 2:36 (“God made Him Lord and Christ”); Rom 8:29 (“The first-born among many”); Col 1:15 (“The first-born of all creation”); Heb 3:2 (“Who was faithful to Him who made Him.”). (2) Passages that represented God the Father as the sole veritable God; including John 17:3 (“This is life eternal, that they should know Thee the only true God, and Him whom Thou didst send, Jesus Christ”). (3) Passages that seemed to imply Christ’s inferiority to the Father. John 14:28 (“The Father is greater than I.”). (4) Passages that attributed ignorance, weakness, suffering or development to the Son of God.¹⁴

Arius believed that the Son of God was not eternal but was created before the ages by the Father as an instrument for the making of the world.¹⁵ The Arians depended heavily on texts that called Christ God’s “only begotten” Son (John 1:14; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). If Christ were “begotten” by God the Father, they reasoned, it must mean that he was brought into existence by God the Father (for the word “beget” in human experience refers to the Father’s role in conceiving a child).¹⁶ Further support for the Arian

¹³ Henry Melvill Gwatkin, “The Arian Controversy.” Mandell Creighton (Ed.) In *Epochs of Church History* (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph & Company), 5.

¹⁴ Donald E. Green, *The Trinity and the Arian Controversy*. 2001. https://www.thegracelife.org/pulpit.com/pdf/arian_controversy.pdf (Accessed 15/06/2024).

¹⁵, Michael B Thompson, “Arianism: Is Jesus Christ Divine and Eternal or Was He Created?” In *Heresies and How to Avoid Them: Why It Matters What Christians Believe*, Ben Quash and Michael Ward (Ed.) London: SPCK, 2007.

¹⁶ Fastening upon the term “begotten,” Arius said that because Christ is begotten He must have had a beginning. Athanasius countered that because Christ is begotten of the Father, He could not have had a beginning. To say

view was found in Colossians 1:15, “He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation.” Does not “first-born” here imply that the Son was at some point brought into existence by the Father? And if this is true of the Son, it must necessarily be true of the Holy Spirit as well.¹⁷ Arianism is considered as the third major Christological heresy. It denied that Jesus was co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. They maintained that God the Father was not yet a Father. He did not become the Father until the creation of the Son. The Son is the highest of the created beings. He is pre-existent but not eternal. He has creative power but His power is limited to that which was given to Him at His creation.¹⁸ Arius thus confirmed the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth, declaring that he was supreme among the creatures. Like Ebionitism, Arius declined to accept that Jesus could be said to be divine in any meaningful sense of the term.¹⁹ Arius concluded that the Logos must belong to the creaturely side of being; hence he is not eternal, but is himself a created being; ‘there was a time when he [Christ] was not’. Christ is the most exalted of all creatures, certainly, but

that a father begets a child is one thing, but to say that the Father begat the Son is another. The one is temporal, the other eternal; the one is of the will, the other from the being of the Father. Thus the Nicene Creed insisted that Christ is of the substance of the Father, thereby sacrificing neither the impassibility of God nor the deity of the Son. To say that the Son is begotten from the Father from eternity is not to divide the indivisible God but to accept the testimony of the apostles. See Samuel J. Mikolaski, “Arianism.” *New International Dictionary of The Christian Church*, (Ed.) J. D. Douglas.

(Grand Rapids: Zondervan,

1974), 1. https://drsamstheology.com/historical/early_christian_theology.pdf.

¹⁷ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Intervarsity Press, 1994), 243.

¹⁸ Danny McCain, *We Believe: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Bukuru: ACTS, 2004), 130.

¹⁹ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2011), 275.

ultimately only that.²⁰ He taught what may be called a creature Christology that denied the teaching of Pope Alexander of Alexandria who said: “God always, the Son always; at the same time the Father, at the same time the Son; the Son co-exists with God, unbegotten; he is ever-begotten, he is not born by-begetting; neither by thought nor by any moment of time does God precede the Son; God always, Son always, the Son exists from God himself.”²¹

The Arius school of thought is clear on its position that Christ could only be of similar homoiousios but not the same essence with God the Father. The heresy was firmly resisted by the Church Fathers during the Council of Nicaea in 325. The Nicene Council called by the Emperor Constantine (c. 272–337), declared that Jesus is “begotten not made,” “light from light,” “true God from true God,” and “of one being (or essence) with the Father,” using the word homoousios (Greek – homo: “same”; ousia – “substance”) to describe the relationship of essence between Son and Father. This word, though not from Scripture, was used to express the biblical relationship revealed in Scripture, and denounce the unbiblical view of the Arians.²² The council condemned Arius and declared the Son homoousios (co-equal, consubstantial, and co-eternal) with the Father. The council at Constantinople in 381 confirmed the results of the Council of Nicaea and ended the Trinitarian controversy. Similarly, the council at Chalcedon in 451 declared the two natures of Christ

²⁰ Bruce Milne, *Know the Truth: A handbook of Christian Belief*. (Nottingham, England: Intervarsity Press, 2009), 196.

²¹ Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Christian Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 410.

²² Coleman Ford, “Christological Controversies in the Early Church: An Essay,” 4.

unmixed, unchanged, undivided and inseparable. This was indeed victory for the Christian faith and Orthodoxy. For Athanasius, one of the Church Fathers who fearlessly and scholarly rebuked and refuted Arius' error maintained that he had destroyed the internal coherence of the Christian faith, rupturing the close connection between Christian belief and worship. First, Athanasius argued that it is only God who can save. God, and God alone, can break the power of sin, and bring humanity to eternal life. The fundamental characteristic of human nature is that it requires to be redeemed. No creature can save another creature. The second point that Athanasius makes is that Christians worship and pray to Jesus Christ... Arius was not in disagreement with the practice of worshipping Jesus; he refused, however, to draw the same conclusions as Athanasius.²³ The education of Athanasius has well equipped him to confront strong heretics like Arius.²⁴

Jehovah's Witnesses' Adoption of Arianism

The group currently known as Jehovah's Witnesses traces its roots back to a smaller group established in the late 1800s. The members of the International Bible Students Association, or

²³ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2011), 276.

²⁴ Athanasius received classical and theological education. "He received a thorough grounding in the scriptures and in biblical exegesis, which formed the basis of his thought and writings throughout his life". He was regarded as both bilingual and bicultural, being equally at home in Coptic and Greek. His theology can be considered to represent a fusion of Coptic literalism and Hellenistic spiritualism. Also "reading through his works one gets the impression that he must have been, just like for instance Augustine and Jerome, a man with an extraordinary good memory: without using a card-index he is capable to produce arguments from a substantial number of sources. See Adrian Ignat, "The Spread Out of Arianism: A Critical Analysis of the Arian Heresy." 111).

IBSA, were adherents of a man named Charles Russell. Russell was an author who wrote a series of books that outlined his personal ideas about Bible prophecy. This series, called *Studies in the Scriptures*, purported to explain Bible chronology and foretelling from the books Ezekiel, Daniel, Revelation, and other “prophetic books” of the Bible.²⁵ Russell was born in Old Allegheny, Pennsylvania, on February 16, 1852, to Joseph and Eliza Birney Russell, both of Scotch-Irish lineages. Reared in an orthodox Congregational church, he worked in his early adult years in his father’s clothing store. At the age of seventeen, apparently as a result of his failure to convert an unbelieving friend to Christianity, Russell himself became skeptic. He approached the scripture with the idea that their interpretation must be subject to human reason. Using this process, he developed his “Present Truth” theology, which was characterized by a rejection of virtually every major Christian doctrine as “unreasonable and unscriptural”. In 1884 he established the Watchtower Society as a vehicle for the publication of his writings. He died in 1916 and was succeeded by Joseph F. “Judge” Rutherford. Nathan Knorr succeeded Rutherford after his death in 1942. Similarly, Fred W. Franz succeeded Knorr after his demise in 1977. Milton George Henschel and Don Alden Adams also led the movement until Robert Ciranko took over from 2014 to date.²⁶

Jehovah’s Witnesses are often referred to as “modern-day Arians” or sometimes “Semi-Arians”, usually by their opponents. While there are some significant similarities in theology and

²⁵ David Rice. *Before You Open the Door: The Truth Jehovah’s Witnesses Don’t Want You to Know* (Scotts Valley, CA: Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2014), 9.

²⁶ Robert U. Finnerty, *Jehovah’s Witnesses on Trial: the Testimony of the Early Church Fathers* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 1993), 11-15.

doctrine, the Witnesses differ from Arians by saying that the Son can fully know the Father (something Arius himself denied), and by their denial of literal personality to the Holy Spirit. Arius considered the Holy Spirit to be a person or a high-ranking angel, which had a beginning as a creature, whereas the Witnesses consider the Holy Spirit to be God's "active force" or "energy", which had no beginning, and is not an actual person. The original Arians also generally prayed directly to Jesus, whereas the Witnesses pray to God, through Jesus as a mediator.²⁷ The beliefs of the Jehovah's Witnesses, in keeping with their confidence in "progressive revelation" through the God-ordained channel of the Watchtower Society, have undergone considerable change over the years, a process readily discerned by a historical review of their literature. Nevertheless, their major doctrines have remained fairly stable since they were put forth by Russell. While Jehovah's Witnesses may have little modifications on the Arian doctrine that Christ was created by God thus, totally denying His deity, their rejection of the full deity of Christ is indeed an offshoot of What Arius taught. They teach that Jesus Christ is Michael the Archangel in his pre-human state and was Jehovah's chief agent in the creation process. While on earth, he was a perfect human being, nothing more. Jesus died on the cross as a ransom for the sin of Adam alone, to allow man a second chance. He was raised by Jehovah, not in the flesh, but as a spirit creature. After his ascension to heaven, he was exalted because of his obedience, and he will return to execute judgment on all those who reject Jehovah's plan of salvation.

²⁷Arianism,
https://www.gracenotes.info/Documents/Topics_Doc/Arianism.Pdf.
 (Accessed 15/06/2024).

Jehovah's Witnesses claim that Christ was created²⁸ and pre-existed in heaven. The purpose for His coming down from heaven is to be a witness to the kingdom of Jehovah. In this way they fall into the heresy of Arius which was anathematized by the Nicene Ecumenical Council in 325 A.D. They believe that the Lord Jesus Christ was assigned as a son to God in Baptism, which was the beginning of his second birth. The Lord Jesus Christ became a spiritual son to God in it, and a king over the Kingdom of Jehovah. Actually, Baptism was one of the occasions in which the Father witnessed to this Son-ship saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). John the Baptist also witnessed to this, saying, "And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God" (John 1:34).²⁹

²⁸ According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus is not God but was created by Jehovah God. He is "a god" and a "mighty God" (Is. 9:6), but he is not Almighty Jehovah God. "One's being in the image of God and according to his likeness would never mean that one was the equal of Jehovah God. An 'image' is not the real thing" (God's "Eternal Purpose" Now Triumphant For Man's Good, 1974; p. 37); Jesus was supposedly Michael the Archangel before He came to earth. "There is Scriptural evidence for concluding that Michael was the name of Jesus Christ before he left heaven and after his return" (The Watchtower, May 15, 1969, p. 307); While on earth Jesus was a perfect man but not God. "When on the earth, he was not a divine god-man. He was wholly human, though perfect, as Adam originally was. Since Jesus' resurrection, he has been an exalted immortal spirit ever subordinate to God" (The Watchtower, Jan 15, 1992, 23); 4. Jesus has no physical resurrection body, only a spirit body; He only appeared to have a body. "He was the first to be raised as a spirit person" (You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth, 1982, 172). See David W. Cloud, *The Jehovah's Witnesses* (Port Huron, MI: Way of Life Literature, 2012), 11.

²⁹ H.H. Pope Shenouda III. "The Heresy Of Jehovah's Witnesses." 'El-Keraza' English Magazine, 2018. <https://stmarkcharlotte.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/the-heresy-of-jehovah-s-witness.pdf>. 15.

The Jehovah's Witnesses Bible (New World Translation³⁰ – a corrupt and adulterated bible³¹) have evidences of verses that deny the deity of Christ such as Luke 2:43, Luke 23:42, Acts 3:13, I Tim. 3:16, Phil. 2:6, Luke 2:33 etc. For instance, Phil 2:6 in their Bible reads:(NWT- who, although he was existing in God's form, gave no consideration to a seizure, namely, that he should be equal to God) and also Luke 2:33 (NWT- And its father and mother continued wondering at the things being spoken about it). Describing the NWT, Lester Murrieta quoted Ron Rhodes, who said that "it was developed to lend support to its deviant teachings, the Watchtower Society has published a theologically biased translation of the Bible known as the New World

³⁰ Dickerson observed, "The New World Translation was born from an anonymous committee of men in the Watchtower Society's main headquarters located in Brooklyn, New York. Frederick William Franz, then vice-president of the Watchtower Society, was the man assigned to oversee the committee and its translation; this, in spite of the fact that Franz had absolutely no credentials in Biblical languages, which he admitted during the Walsh trial in Scotland, November 1954. 6 As part of the research involved in writing the New World Translation the team used a variety of sources to support their alternative wordings in some Bible passages. One of these was a known spirit medium named Johannes Greber. Through the years the Watchtower Society frequently cited Greber in support of their New World Translation ,especially in support of the New World Translation's wording of the verse at John 1:1 which reads as follows: In the beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god. (NWT) Since the Watchtower Society teaches that the Trinity is a false doctrine and Jesus is not a part of the Godhead, they insist that this passage refers to Jesus, a.k.a. "the Word" as " a god ", instead of " God " See Tami Dickerson. *Jehovah's Witnesses A Religion Based on the Occult and Spiritism*. Timothy Kline (Ed.), (Scotts Valley, CA: Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2013), 9.

³¹ The rendering of the first letter of the *bible* in a small letter here is deliberate to emphasize the distortion of the Jehovah's Witnesses' publication.

Translation.”³² Concerning the fraudulent nature of the New World Translation bible of Russell’s followers, Pope Shenouda III warned, “The copy of the New Testament which they have is their own special translation, in which they delete and change as they wish, and they do not accept any other translation. Therefore, extensive discussions with them are not fruitful, for there is nothing easier than quoting a verse to them and having them deny its existence, saying that it is not so in their translation, or interpreting it in a roundabout way.”³³ Commenting on how fake they are, Staelens said, “The vast majority of these Witnesses are not aware of over thirty different prophecies, spanning the 131 years from 1844 to 1975; these prophecies were made and published by the W/W/H in its own literature, foretelling the end of the world and/or events related to it—all turned out to be failed prophecies!”³⁴

The Christological Challenge on the Gospel in Africa

The Bible is very clear in its defense of the Deity of Christ. Here we arrive at the staggering truth which lies at the heart of the Christian religion, that Jesus Christ while truly human was also truly God. This is one of Christianity's supreme distinctiveness. Jews and Muslims also acknowledge one supreme God, and revere the Patriarchs and the prophets of the OT, but in the claims made

³²Paul M. Lester Murrieta. “Sharing The Triunity of God with the Jehovah’s Witness at Your Door.” *A Research Paper* Presented To Dr. William E. Nix In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Rw499 Research and Writing Methods, Veritas Evangelical Seminary CA June 2014, 2.

³³H.H. Pope Shenouda III, “The Heresy of Jehovah’s Witnesses.” 10.

³⁴ Jim Staelens, *Jehovah’s Witnesses - The Good... The Bad... The Deceptive... And Worse! An Exposé* (South Carolina: Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2013), 16.

for Jesus Christianity stands alone.³⁵ People have asked questions about the two natures of Christ and will certainly continue to do so. Coming to an understanding of how Jesus was completely human and completely God is not a doctrine that one could easily grasp. Admittedly, the Trinity and most especially the second person (Jesus Christ) of the Trinity is a mystery, but that does not suggest that Christians are left in the dark concerning the things they should know about God and His word. Kunhiyop observed, “Yes it is true that we cannot understand the Trinity fully, but this does not mean that we are unable to understand anything. Yes, it is a mystery, but it does not mean that God has not revealed anything about this concept and that we cannot say anything intellectually rational about it.”³⁶ On the Trinity, a term first coined by Tertullian, the Bible teaches that God is one but co-exists in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Christians believe in the one monotheistic God like the Jews and the Muslims but claim that this one God exists eternally in three persons. The second person of the Trinity took on a human body to be able to totally redeem mankind from eternal damnation. This generates a lot of contentions and doubts about the deity of Christ. If Christ is God, how could He be reduced to being born by a woman (a mortal being)? How could He not have sinned if He was in the womb of a sinful woman for nine months? If the Son is of one substance with the Father, how can the historical Jesus be understood? Interestingly, the Bible is replete with a lot of evidences and answers to questions such as the ones above. Jesus’

³⁵ Bruce Milne. *Know the Truth: A handbook of Christian Belief*, 177.

³⁶ Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, “The Trinity in Africa: Trends and Trajectories”. In *The Trinity among the Nations: The Doctrine of God in the majority World*. Gene L. Green, Stephen T. Pardue, K.K. Yeo (Eds). (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 56.

works and ministry while on earth clearly demonstrated that He is God. As a matter of fact, Christian theology revolves around the person and work of Christ.³⁷ Jesus did and said things that only God could do and say.

First, Jesus demonstrated his omnipotence when he stilled the storm at sea with a word (Matt. 8:26-27), multiplied the loaves and fish (Matt. 14:19), and changed water into wine (John 2:1-11). Some might object that these miracles just showed the power of the Holy Spirit working through him, just as the Holy Spirit could work through any other human being, and therefore, these do not demonstrate Jesus' own deity. But the contextual explanations of these events often point not to what they demonstrate about Jesus himself. For instance, after Jesus stilled the storm on the Sea of Galilee, the disciples did not say, "How great is the power of the Holy Spirit working through this prophet," but rather, "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?" (Matt. 8:27). Secondly, Jesus asserts his eternity when he says, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58), or "I am the Alpha and the Omega" (Rev. 22:13). Thirdly, the omniscience of Jesus is demonstrated in his knowing people's thoughts (Mark 2:8) and seeing Nathaniel under the fig tree from far away (John 1:48), and knowing "from the first who those were that did not believe, and who it was that would betray him" (John 6:64). Fourthly, the divine attribute of omnipresence is not directly affirmed to be true

³⁷ Erickson noted, when we come to the study of the person and work of Christ, we are at the very center of Christian theology... one of the most controversial topics here is the deity of Christ. It is at the same time one of the most crucial. It lies at the heart of our faith. For our faith rests on Jesus' actually being God in human flesh, and not simply an extraordinary human, albeit and the most unusual person who ever lived. See Millard J. Erickson. *Introducing Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2001), 216.

of Jesus during his earthly ministry. However, while looking forward to the time that the church would be established, Jesus could say, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20). Fifthly, that Jesus possessed divine sovereignty, a kind of authority possessed by God alone, is seen in the fact that he could forgive sins (Mark 2:5-7). The sixth consideration is the fact that unlike the Old Testaments who declared, “Thus says the LORD,” he could preface his statements with the phrase, “But I say to you” (Matt. 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44) – an amazing claim to his own authority. He could speak with the authority of God himself because he was himself fully God. Jesus also possessed the divine attribute of immortality, the inability to die (John 2:19; 10:17-18, Heb. 7:16, 1 Tim. 6:16). Another clear attestation to the deity of Christ is the fact that he is counted worthy to be worshipped, something that is true of no other creature, including angels (Rev. 19:10; Heb 1:6), but only God alone.³⁸ Conclusively, His complete deity is testified to by John 1:1-2: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.” Jesus himself claimed, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30), thereby both distinguishing himself from the Father and asserting the unity between himself and the Father.³⁹

The Christological challenge on the Gospel in Africa is the fact that a heresy that is believed to have been buried in the fourth century is still alive and misleading people. Jehovah’s Witnesses are spread all over the world in Europe, Asia, and Africa. This movement seems to be receiving good attention in Africa and

³⁸ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 547-9.

³⁹ Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2012), 46.

South America.⁴⁰ This therefore, underscores the need for the Church to swiftly rise to the occasion to combat this obnoxious claim that is plaguing the Church. Even though the Church has been classified as a cult because of its alteration and denial of core doctrinal tenets of the Christian faith, not everyone is aware of its subtle presentation of its heresies. Even though this movement calls itself Christian,⁴¹ is unfit to be one in so many dimensions. Rice noted that “Witnesses will tell you that they are Christians. They mention this often in their door-to-door evangelizing in order to put people at ease and combat the notion that they are a cult. However, unlike most Christians, Witnesses believe that Jesus was created by God, but is not God or any part of God. They believe that God’s personal name is Jehovah.”⁴²

⁴⁰ The majority of growth is coming from developing countries in Africa and South America. In 2016, 70% of the increase in average publishers came from just 7 countries, Angola ten thousand, Brazil twenty-one thousand, Ecuador three thousand, Ghana four thousand, Mexico eleven thousand, Rep. of Congo thirty-four thousand and Nigeria three thousand. On the other hand, developed countries with the highest level of wealth, education and internet access to information regarding Watchtower have little to no growth. In 2016, many of these countries reported less publishers than *previous year peaks, including Britain, Australia, Germany, Italy, USA, Canada and Japan*. See Paul Grundy. *Jehovah's Witness Statistics*. 2015-2017.

<http://www.jwfacts.com/watchtower/statistics.php>. Accessed 6/12/2017).

⁴¹ Pope Shenouda III observed that they are not Christians; they do not accept this title nor are they related to Christ. They are related to ‘Jehovah’, one of the names of God in the Old Testament. They are against Christianity; they do not believe in it and attack it as they do every other religion without exception. See H.H. Pope Shenouda III, “The Heresy Of Jehovah’s Witnesses” *‘El-Keraza’ English Magazine*, 2018, 10.

https://stmarkcharlotte.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/the-heresy-of-jehovah_s-witness.pdf.

⁴² David Rice. *Before You Open the Door: the Truth Jehovah’s Witnesses Don’t Want You to Know*, 11.

The Jehovah's Witness is a dangerous cult the Church has to contend with. The fact that Jehovah's Witness parade itself as a Church and using the Bible ⁴³(though a distorted one), make a lot of African believers to be susceptible to its lies and tricks. Christian councils, scholars, pastors and the laity must continue vigorously, like the early church Fathers to preach and write in defense of the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ so as to save the present and future generations from heretical movements whose proliferation is on the increase. The recent Reforming Catholic Confession– A "Mere Protestant" Statement of Faith to mark the 500th anniversary of the Reformation which reechoed the doctrines of the Christian Faith such as the Triune God, Holy Scripture, Human Beings, Fallenness, Jesus Christ (here He is declared as one person with two natures, fully God and fully human), The Atoning work of Christ, The Gospel, The person and work of the Holy Spirit, The Church, Baptism and Lord's Supper, Holy Living and Last Things, is a good step in the right direction and thus, commendable. The Church has to go back to constant reading and recitation of the Articles of Faith. Our children in the Sunday schools need to make this part and parcel of their lives from childhood. Seminary teachers and students ought to be fully immersed in Christology and the Christian doctrine on Christology should find its way through Sunday sermons and weekly teachings of the Bible.

⁴³ Witnesses use a special translation of the Bible - The New World Translation, which sometimes translates key passages, such as those about the nature of Jesus Christ, differently than other reputable English-language Bible translations. (Compare John 1:1-3 and Philippians 2:5-8 in the New World Translation and the King James Version or the New International Version.) *Jehovah's Witnesses Beliefs* 2017. <http://www.religionfacts.com/jehovahs-witnesses/beliefs> Religion Facts.) Accessed 6/12/2017.

Conclusion

The Resurgence of Arianism in Jehovah's Witnesses and the Christological Challenge on the Gospel in Africa is a call for more proactive measures to refuting doctrines that undermine the Biblical tenets of the Christian faith. The denial of the Deity of Christ is only one of the Christological/Trinitarian issues Christian cults like the Jehovah's Witnesses go round the world propagating. The Church at this juncture, must not turn a blind eye to heresies that would lead many away from the truth and eternal life. The African Church must stand firm against all odds like the third and fourth century Church to uphold the truth that Christ is God in all ramifications and not a created being. The Triune God of the Christian faith must be preached at all costs and at all given opportunities and must not be sacrificed or compromised at the altar of the so-called "inter-faith" religious dialogue and other related forums. Refusal to preach the Triune God in its totality by the Church today would be tantamount to a denial of one's faith and salvation that comes through grace and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. A swift return to teaching and preaching Christian doctrines that uphold the humanity and divinity of Christ to children at the Sunday school and teenage Bible classes, weekly Bible studies for adults and the Sunday worship services must be upheld by the church in Africa against the trends of the prosperity gospel that has turned the heart of the Church from the gospel of repentance, salvation and righteousness through faith in Christ Jesus to health and wealth that comes through positive confession, seed sowing and the payment of tithes; and the new waves of hyper-grace theology, moral relativism and ethical pluralism.

The African Church must embark on digital evangelism and counter-cult content through developing YouTube channels,

podcasts and social media content specifically for answering Jehovah's Witnesses with sound biblical doctrines using local languages like Umbundu, Kimbundu, Kikingo, and Chokwe in Angola; Bemba, Nyanja, Tonga, Kaonde, and Luvale in Zambia; Luganda, Runyankore-Rukiga, Runyoro-Rutooro, Ateso, Lango, and Acholi in Uganda; and Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba in Nigeria. Since ex-Jehovah's Witnesses suffer shunning⁴⁴ and isolation, developing a strong support system facilitated by trained pastors and counselors will help in providing healing from psychological and emotional trauma and equally serve as an avenue for re-learning sound doctrine and publicly sharing their stories. Luther observed that, Shunning within the Jehovah's Witnesses congregation structure is complex. Due to the high level of involvement expected from members and the separationist ideology prevalent in the community, members' social supports and families are within the Jehovah's Witnesses circle. When shunned, members lose their families, their friends, and their entire social network, usually without anything outside of the congregation to fall back on.⁴⁵ He noted further, "shunning has a deep impact on former members. Current members are not to have communication with those who leave the religion. Once a person leaves the Jehovah's Witnesses religion, they are relegated to the

⁴⁴ Luther shared the experience of an ex-Jehovah's Witness, "Now my dad has had zero contact with me. My mother on the other hand, in the three years that I've been out, I've probably spoken [to her] like four times. The very first time I went to her place, crying, because I . . . "I just want you guys to talk to me." And then my mom was like, "You know what you must do to come back." (Frank, 23, disfellowshipped)." See Rosie Luther "What Happens to Those Who Exit Jehovah's Witnesses: An Investigation of the Impact of Shunning" *Pastoral Psychology* (2023) 72:105–120, 108.

⁴⁵ Rosie Luther, "What Happens to Those Who Exit Jehovah's Witnesses...", 108.

status of an outsider. People who are not members of the religion are deemed selfish, cruel, manipulative, and insincere.”⁴⁶ Many people are drawn to Jehovah’s Witnesses due to unmet social, economic, or emotional needs. In this case, Community-based outreach to vulnerable populations where Churches run targeted community service projects such as food banks, provision of skills and entrepreneurship trainings for self-reliance, counseling for the lonely, will help close the gap Jehovah’s Witnesses often exploit. Interdenominational Anti-Cult Task Forces where churches, theological schools, mission agencies form strong alliances (as against responding in isolation) to coordinate counter-cult seminars against the heretics of Jehovah’s Witnesses is another effective tool for tracking the activities of a highly organized cult like the Jehovah’s Witnesses. To further strengthen the campaign against the onslaught of Jehovah’s Witnesses against the Christian faith in Africa, the Church has to introduce age-appropriate apologetics into Sunday school, youth fellowships, and campus ministries because Jehovah’s Witnesses recruiters often target teenagers and university students who lack solid doctrinal foundation.

⁴⁶ Rosie Luther, “What Happens to Those Who Exit Jehovah’s Witnesses...” 111.