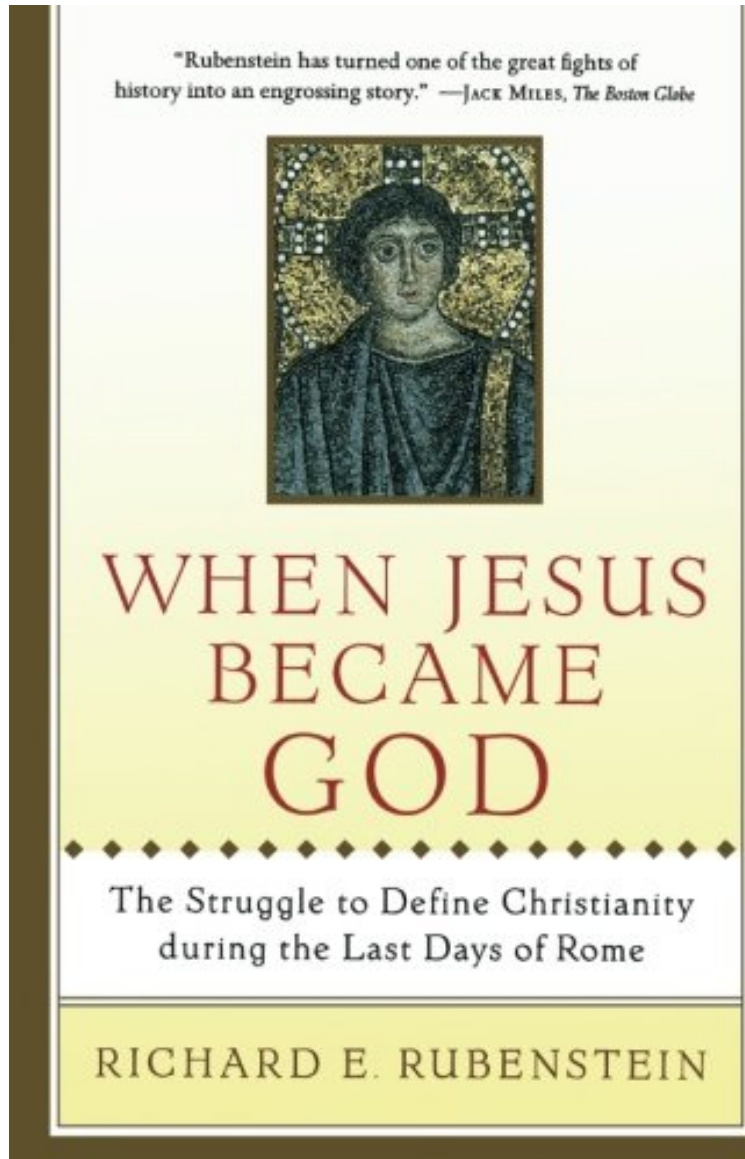


(Download pdf) When Jesus Became God: The Struggle to Define Christianity during the Last Days of Rome

When Jesus Became God: The Struggle to Define Christianity during the Last Days of Rome

Richard E. Rubenstein

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Richard E. Rubenstein : When Jesus Became God: The Struggle to Define Christianity during the Last Days of Rome before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised When Jesus Became God: The Struggle to Define Christianity during the Last Days of Rome:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. "Tradespeople felt perfectly competent to debate abstract theological

issues and to arrive at their own conclusions'By Clay GarnerIn a sermon delivered at his church in Constantinople [381], Gregory . . .If in this city you ask a shopkeeper for change, he complained, he will argue with you about whether the Son is begotten or unbegotten. If you inquire about the quality of bread, the baker will answer, The Father is greater, the Son is less. And if you ask the bath attendant to draw your bath, he will tell you that the Son was created ex nihilo [out of nothing]. (6)Key issue - Son created or eternal?Gregorys wry comment is fascinating both for what it says and what it implies. It suggests that ordinary tradespeople and workers felt perfectly competentperhaps even driven to debate abstract theological issues and to arrive at their own conclusions. (6)This seems. . .different to the modern ear. Analysis, meditation, careful reasoning - what a thought!It reveals that disputes among Christians, specifically arguments about the relationship of Jesus Christ the Son to God the Father, had become as intense as the centuries-old conflict between Christians and pagans. (6)And it implies that Arianism, which orthodox Christians now consider the archetypal heresy, was once at least as popular as the doctrine that Jesus is God. (6)Gregorys shopkeeper questions whether Jesus Christ is begotten or unbegotten that is, whether he is a creation of God or the Creator Himself. The bath attendant says that he was created from nothing, meaning that he was brought into existence like the rest of Gods creatures. And the baker asserts that Christ is separate from and lesser than God. All these are Arian positions, so called because they were developed in sharpest form by an Alexandrian priest named Arius. The ill-fated George was also an Arian: one who believed that Jesus Christ was, indeed, the holiest person who ever lived, but not the Eternal God of Israel walking the earth in the form of a man. (6)Rubenstein writing as a historian, not a theologian. Hence, although explaining the doctrinal, Biblical, religious ideas carefully and clearly, most of the focus is the political, personal, military, economic influences. Arias and his fundamental arguments likewise are drawn quickly but thoroughly. For example. . .Was Christ, then, to be considered human? In one sense, the answer was yes. Jesus of Nazareth was a real man, not some divine apparition or mask of God. But his moral genius and the importance of his mission raised him high above even the greatest prophets. The Savior was sui generis. Many Arians believed that the Eternal had somehow conceived him (or conceived of him) before time began, and used him as an instrument to create the rest of the universe. Jesus vital in gods purpose. Nevertheless. . .Even so, they insisted, he could not possibly be God Himself. How could an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good Creator experience temptation, learn wisdom, and grow in virtue? How could he suffer on the Cross and die the death of a human being? Surely, when Jesus cried out, My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? he was not talking to himself! When he admitted that nobody knows the day and hour of Judgment, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only, he was not just being modest. And when he told his disciples that the Father is greater than I, he meant exactly what he said. (6)This presentation is countered with clear explanation offered by Athanasius. . .Yet he had to be both fully human and fully divine, argued Athanasius. Could the death of a mere human being redeem our sins, grant us immortality, and, eventually, resurrect our physical bodies? Of course not! But could Omnipotent God, the Beginning and the End, suffer for our sake without becoming human? The answer was equally plain. Therefore, whether or not it seemed reasonable to people schooled in Greek philosophy, Jesus Christ was both true man and true God. Hosius would surely have found this exposition convincing. His people the people of western Europe would not accept a Jesus who was too much like them. They knew they were feeble sinners, struggling to survive in a hostile environment. The Christ they wanted and needed was a High God who could save them by His grace and comfort them through the ministrations of His Church. This was one objection. In fact, many Christians still accept this. There was another. . .In fact, Arian theology implicitly reduced the role of the institutional Church. If Jesus life and character were supposed to serve ordinary Christians as a usable model of behavior, the principal mission of the clergy would be to help people transform themselves, not maintain theological and political unity throughout the empire. This was another reason Constantine would probably favor the doctrine of Alexander and Athanasius. The Church he needed was one that would help him keep order among ordinary folk: people who would never become immortal unless God decided for reasons of His own to save them. (62)Desire for power, control, authority, was probably decisive. Wow! Contents -An Incident in AlexandriaThe Silence of ApolloA Quarrel in Gods HouseThe Great and Holy CouncilSins of the Body, Passions of the MindThe Broken ChaliceDeath in ConstantinopleEast against WestThe Arian EmpireOld Gods and NewWhen Jesus Became GodPrincipal CharactersRubensteins sociological foundation shows here . . .One underlying question was this: To what extent were the values and customs of the ancient world still valid guides to thinking and action in a Christian empire? Some Christians, among them Arius and Eusebius of Nicomedia, had a stronger sense of historical continuity than others. Those whose ideas and social relationships were still shaped to a large extent by the optimistic ideals and tolerant practices of pagan society, and for whom Christianity seemed a natural extension of and improvement on Judaism, tended to be Arians of one sort or another. (73)Christianity as extension of Judaism is obvious. Jesus was a Jew!By contrast, the strongest anti-Arians experienced their present as a sharp break with the past. It was they who demanded, in effect, that Christianity be updated by blurring or even obliterating the long-accepted distinction between the Father and the Son. Update Jesus! What???From the perspective of our own time, it may seem strange to think of Arian heretics as conservatives, but emphasizing Jesus humanity and Gods transcendent otherness had never seemed heretical in the East. On the contrary, subordinating the Son to the Father was a rational way of maintaining ones belief in a largely unknowable, utterly singular First Cause while picturing Christ as a usable

model of human moral development. For young militants like Athanasius, however, ancient modes of thought and cultural values were increasingly irrelevant. Greek humanism and rationalism were shallow; Judaism was an offensive, anti-Christian faith. (73)The key issue, the decisive idea, was to turn eyes away from the human messiah. Why? Focusing on a mystery, an incomprehensible puzzle, left priests and the church to intercede. Power is good, more is better. Along with the exposition of the ideas, Rubenstein devotes many pages to analysis of the personalities. Constantine, Arius, Athanasius, Eusebius, etc., etc.. Outstanding! Includes a list at the end. Lists about forty names. Excellent! Two-hundred fifty nine notes. One map. No photographs. Eleven page index (links worked great). About the author -Richard E. Rubenstein is professor of conflict resolution and public affairs at George Mason University and an expert on religious conflict. A graduate of Harvard University and Harvard Law School, he was a Rhodes Scholar and studied at Oxford University. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. When did Arianism die? By CustomerA fascinating exploration of the history behind the eventual declaration of Arianism to be a heresy. This took decades of debate for long after the Council of Nicea. It was not quick and it was not easy. A very good read. 12 of 13 people found the following review helpful. THE Introduction to Church History By Leonard R Budney The Church entered a new era when Constantine came along. The days of persecution were over, everyone thought; the Church was now not only legal, but sanctioned by the Emperor himself. Bishops dined in the Emperor's palace, at his own table, and they later compared it to sitting down with Christ himself to dine. A new golden age had begun. But reaching the top brings its problems. Church politics--nasty enough, at times--had suddenly merged with the politics of Empire. The Emperor's favor came at a price, and Constantine sat in Church councils fully expecting his word to carry authority. Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, was given great political power--and used it to blackmail Constantine, earning himself exile twice. "When Jesus Became God" is a gripping history of the "Arian controversy": a theological debate which was bursting with political consequences. Who should rule the church? What is its relation to the state? How should the church deal with its "heretics"? This debate became a turning point in history: when the church went from illegal to legal; from persecuted to persecutor; from anti-state to a political force which outlived the state itself, reigning as mistress of the world until the 19th century. Rubenstein captures all of this and more in his gripping account, "When Jesus became God."

A thoroughly researched and vivid re-creation of one of the most critical periods in the history of Western religion The life of Jesus, and the subsequent persecution of Christians during the Roman Empire, have come to define what many of us know about early Christianity. The fervent debate, civil strife, and bloody riots within the Christian community as it was forming, however, is a story that is rarely told. Richard E. Rubenstein takes readers to the streets of the Roman Empire during the fourth century, where a divisive argument over the divinity of Jesus Christ was underway. Ruled by a Christian emperor, followers of Jesus no longer feared for the survival of their monotheistic faith, but they found themselves in different camps led by two charismatic men on the topic of Christian theology. Arius, an Alexandrian priest and poet, preached that Jesus, though holy, is less than God, while Athanasius, a brilliant and violent bishop, saw any diminution of Jesus' godhead as the work of the devil. Between them stood Alexander, the powerful Bishop of Alexandria, in search of a solution that would keep the empire united and the Christian faith alive.

.com The Gospel narratives may suggest that Jesus was divine, but they do not insist upon it. Hundreds of years after Jesus' death, the Church councils made Jesus' divinity a central tenet of belief among many of his followers. When Jesus Became God: The Epic Fight over Christ's Divinity in the Last Days of Rome by Richard Rubenstein is a narrative history of Christians' early efforts to define Christianity by convening councils and writing creeds. Rubenstein is most interested in the battle between Arius, Presbyter of Alexandria, and Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria. Arius said that Christ did not share God's nature but was the first creature God created. Athanasius said that Christ was fully God. At the Council of Nicea in 325, the Church Fathers came down on Athanasius's side and made Arius's belief a heresy. Rubenstein's brisk, incisive prose brings the councils' 4th-century Roman setting fully alive, with riots, civil strife, and spectacular public debates. Rubenstein is also personally invested in the meaning of these councils for religious life today: he wrote this book, in part, because he grew up in a mixed Jewish Catholic neighborhood and was bewildered by animosity between the religious groups on his block. Digging back in history, Rubenstein learns that before the Arian controversy, "Jews and Christians could talk to each other and argue among themselves about crucial issues like the divinity of Jesus.... They disagreed strongly about many things, but there was still a closeness between them." But when the controversy was settled, Rubenstein notes, "that closeness faded. To Christians, God became a Trinity and heresy became a crime. Judaism became a form of infidelity. And Jews living in Christian countries learned not to think very much about Jesus and his message." --Michael Joseph Gross From Publishers Weekly The Gospel stories of Jesus' life, death and resurrection are familiar tales in Western literature. Yet, the Gospel narratives do not themselves pose or answer the theological question of Jesus' divinity. None of the disciples become engaged in disputations about whether Jesus is fully God or fully human. It took almost 300 years for these questions to be raised in such a serious way that Christianity was changed forever. Rubenstein, a Jew who proclaimed in a now famous book (After Auschwitz, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992) that God died "after

Auschwitz," examines the details of the fractious period in early Christian history when Christianity was defining itself against other religious sects through a number of councils and creeds. Although he focuses on several of the controversies surrounding the divinity of Jesus, Rubenstein zeroes in on the fiery battle between Arius, a presbyter of Alexandria, and Athanasius, who was Bishop of Alexandria. Arius contended that Christ did not share God's nature but was simply the first creature created by God the Father. Athanasius, on the other hand, argued that Christ was fully God, asserting that the incarnation of God in Jesus restored the image of God to fallen humanity. With a storyteller's verve, Rubenstein brings to life the times and deeds of these two leaders as well as the way that the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325 established the Christian orthodoxy that was later used to judge and exile Arius as a heretic. As a result of Nicea, the author says, "To Christians God became a Trinity. Heresy became a crime. Judaism became a form of infidelity." Rubenstein's lively historical drama offers a panoramic view of early Christianity as it developed against the backdrop of the Roman Empire of the fourth century. (Aug.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Few 20th-century Christians know of the intense religious, social, and political struggle surrounding the Arian Controversy, which spanned 60 years of the 4th century. But Rubenstein, a scholar specializing in the analysis of violent religious and social conflict, explains that the elements of this theological struggle reflected a monumental historical shift: Christianity, once a persecuted sect, became the Roman Empire's official religion, and the Church councils decided once and for all that Jesus was fully divine--to believe otherwise became heresy. The Arians believed that Jesus was "the holiest person who ever lived, but not the Eternal God," explains Rubenstein. On the other side were followers of Athanasius, who believed that Christ was fully God. After much strife, the Church adopted the Nicene Creed, which settled the matter in favor of Athanasius and made the Arian belief heresy. The decision resonated long afterward, Rubenstein writes, leading to the break between the western and eastern Catholic church and to centuries of distrust between Christians and Jews. Before the conflict, "Jews and Christians disagreed strongly about many things, but there was still a closeness between them. They participated in the same moral culture." When it ended, "when Jesus became God--that closeness faded. To Christians, God became a trinity and heresy became a crime. Judaism became a form of infidelity." Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.