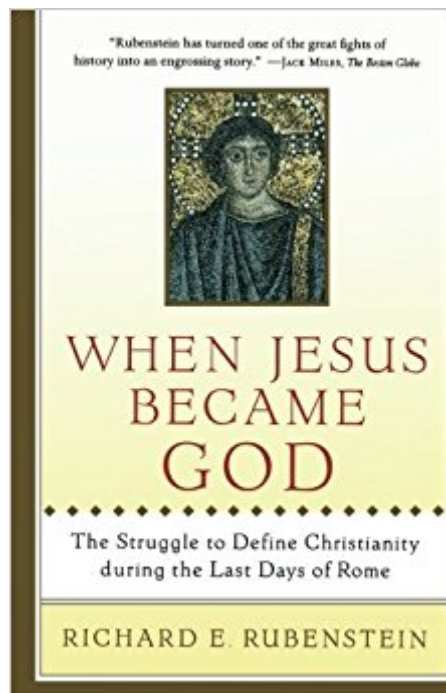




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# When Jesus Became God: The Struggle To Define Christianity During The Last Days Of Rome



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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 --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I've had this book on my wish list for years and I finally got the chance to read it. Rubinstein can be accused of being "pro-Arian" by a reader who refuses to investigate the information critically. However if the reader is honest with himself he cannot come to the conclusion that the doctrines and ideas produced during this era were "divinely inspired." I believe the author is attacked simply because he is writing about the true events (which anyone in today's world can look up for themselves) surrounding the few centuries after Christ's death. The truth is that before Nicea Christianity was a diverse movement more in line with her cousin Judasim, which practiced "orthopraxy" which means "right action" over "orthodoxy" which mean right belief. In Judasim, personal beliefs we're secondary to personal actions. For the Jews, the unknown was God's concern, what was made manifest was man's responsibility (Deut 29:29). This meant that one Jew could have a weird view regarding the unknown while another's view could be different and yet he and another Jew could worship God together as long as they knew God was one and they did what He commanded. It appears that early Christianity shared this characteristic until Nicea. Once the Greco-Romans took over the Christian population, many Hebraic concepts were lost or as Rubinstein writes many were subverted purposely to separate the faiths. I think the author could have discussed further the phenomenon of once the Roman state got involved instead of the desired unification of the movement it actually became more polarizing. I contend that this is because once people start forcing an issue that is certainly not explicit...it becomes one's opinion (one's pride) against another's. when this happens the search for truth is thrown out the door and the desire to "win" or "defeat" the enemy takes precedent. Rubinstein's book is easy to read but one does get confused with all the names and where they're alliances lie as the conflict unfolds. It was fascinating to read about the vast number of times each side was excommunicated and one wonders in today's age if eventually both sides would be ignored if such things were to happen now. In the end this book clearly illustrates how faith can turn ugly and violent once sinful man goes beyond what is written.

This is a great history lesson on the first 4 centuries of Christianity in the Roman Empire. The story may not be welcomed by fundamentalist Christian that believe the Holy Trinity was God given. As is

so typical with power struggles, those with the most might ends up right. For further reading, I also recommend a book with a similar title "How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee". The two books complement each other very well without much duplication of story line.

An informative and clarifying look at the history of Christianity in the 400 years after Jesus Ascension. It explains why I am a follower but not a worshiper of Christ Jesus. So glad to have read this book.

The historical details are enlightening and the author paints a picture of this great controversy that still is going on today, is Jesus Christ the Son of Man/Son of God, or God? I have researched this question, originally in 1975 as I was taught the trinity as a child, but became exposed to the idea of Jesus not being God based on Old Testament and New Testament. History as revealed in this book and as I have researched previously definitely point and show that the trinity (word not even used once in the Bible) is not NOT a Biblically based idea, and in fact violates so many principles and scriptures; especially the oneness of God, not three in one. The infighting between the factions within Christianity then, even to the point of murder, and mobs roaming the streets is well documented by the author, as well as the main characters including a listing of them at the back of the book to help keep it all straight. The author is to be applauded for this important addition to understanding history of the church and Christianity, which even today has too much infighting and unbiblical doctrines and failure to follow God in spirit and truth. In today's Christianity, settled and sound doctrines that were settled and common practice have become lost, forgotten, countered or labeled heretic; such as not only that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (thinking he was God was unthinkable in the Book of Acts period), as well as speaking in tongues and the other manifestations of holy spirit. When Constantine took over the church, he persecuted any other doctrines and practices which became institutionalized in what became the Catholic church. The oneness of God and that Jesus is in subjection to God (not co-equal, co-eternal), speaking in tongues and other common practices of the first century church went underground or practically disappeared, replaced by a dogmatic institution of a system of priests and nuns, destroying the one body of Christ and other principles as stated by the Apostle Paul in his seven church epistles.

A 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.

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