

**SHOULD CHRISTIANITY
ABANDON THE DOCTRINE
OF THE TRINITY?**

Michael A. Barber

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Should Christianity Abandon the Doctrine of the Trinity?

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1 Introduction

In view of the great quantity of books available in support of the doctrine of the Trinity, it may seem unusual to find that this book denies it. Fortunately the author should fare better than the individuals referred to in the book's opening paragraphs in view of the available freedom of speech. But it may be viewed as heretical nonetheless. The central doctrine of Christian churches, accepted by far and away the majority as a divinely authored teaching, the Trinity seems entrenched beyond question of doubt.

This book endeavours to provide a comprehensive answer to the question of the Trinity dogma. Although theologians and Christian writers have provided abundant material to define and explain the teaching of the Trinity, it is the contention of this book that the doctrine is nowhere taught — nor even alluded to — in the Holy Scriptures, and that it should be formally denied.

Support Sought From Bible Manuscripts

Bible students rely on Bible translations when studying God's Word, in contrast with the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek manuscripts. This book reveals that scriptures which support the teaching of the Trinity in some Bible versions are incorrectly translated. The student can be forgiven for readily accepting the Trinity when his or her own Bible clearly teaches it! Such is the power of the Bible (see Hebrews 4:12), that *translations* have taken on the status that the original *manuscripts* by the Bible writers held. However, no translation today can claim to be "inspired by God" (2 Timothy 3:16). Consequently, throughout this book, appeal is made to Bible

manuscripts to verify the true sense of a passage of text.

Thus, extensive use is made of the most basic resource available to Bible students — the Hebrew and Greek texts from which all Bible translations are drawn. This method is considered to be more accurate than relying on a translation because (a) translations can be coloured by doctrinal or partisan beliefs, or at least open to the suspicion of such, and (b) the meaning is extracted “from the horse’s mouth” as it were. To illustrate: If you were to undertake a deep study, say of history, would you not appreciate the value of studying (as far as is possible) the actual texts of famous historians of ancient times, such as Herodotus or Josephus, rather than relying on an interpretative view of a modern-day historian? Granted, a modern-day teacher would provide you with a lucid and encapsulated knowledge of such works. But if you sought the unadulterated truth of history, without allowing yourself to be side-tracked by possibly erroneous interpretation or even propaganda, then nothing but the *original* would suffice. This is what an examination of the Hebrew and Greek Bible manuscripts provides.

For this reason, frequent use is made of highly respected Hebrew and Greek grammars and dictionaries. As there may be readers who are not acquainted with these languages, assistance is given by depicting all such words in bold, fully-capitalised text. For example, the Hebrew word for God is written thus: **E.L.O.HIM’**. The syllables are separated by dots, and the accent (the syllable which takes the stress) is indicated by a single quotation mark following the syllable. This convention applies even when quotations are made from works which contain actual Hebrew and Greek characters; in which case the transliterated words are placed in square brackets, thus: θεος [**THE.OS’**: *God*].

Every Known Key Scripture ...

Exponents of the Trinity use many “support texts” in defence of the doctrine; that is, scriptures that they believe prove the Trinity. When countering these arguments, it is insufficient to disprove one scripture. It is the belief of Trinitarians that, though a scripture they may select for support may prove difficult to defend on its own, other scriptures add weight to it. And herein lies the purpose of this book. It purports to cover *every known key scripture* used by Trinitarians in support of the doctrine, and to refute each one using God’s Word the Holy Bible. A comprehensive index at the back contains all the scriptural references used. This presupposes the most common way the book is expected to be used. If background information on a given scripture is required, the index will no doubt be the first port of call.

It will become apparent to the reader that a moderate amount of repetition takes place within this volume. This is quite intentional. It fulfils a two-fold purpose, (a) as a teaching aid (“repetition is the mother of retention”), and (b) in the supposition that the volume will be used more as a reference aid than as a book to be read in chapter sequence like a novel. It is thus with a view to thoroughness that ideas relevant to two or more chapters may be found in each place rather than the reader being sent from place to place within the book.

Conventions Used in the Book

Where squares brackets [such as these] are used, they indicate interpolations into quoted documents. For example, books often refer to Hebrew and Greek words and expressions without providing a translation. The translation is often supplied, but is placed in square brackets to indicate that it is not in the original work.

Abbreviations Used

LXX: The Greek Septuagint. A translation from the Hebrew into the Greek produced during the third and second centuries before Christ during the ascendancy of the Greek empire under Alexander the Great.

MS: Manuscript. A document, usually made from papyrus or animal skin, on which a copy of a Bible book was made.

MSS: Manuscripts.

MT: Masoretic Text. The Hebrew text from which modern-day translations of the Old Testament are made. This usually makes reference to the text contained in the authoritative *Biblia Hebraica*, a master Hebrew Text by Rudolf Kittel first produced in 1906.

PART ONE:

ROOTS AND CONTROVERSIES

2 One Branch, Many Roots

Joan Bocher was burned to death in England in 1550 AD. Her crime? The *Encyclopædia Britannica* (1964) says: “She was condemned for open blasphemy in denying the Trinity, the one offence which all the church had regarded as unforgivable ever since the struggle with Arianism.”

On October 27th, 1553 AD, Michael Servetus, a medical practitioner, was burned at the stake at Geneva, Switzerland, for denying the doctrine of the Trinity.

In 1693 AD a pamphlet attacking the Trinity was burned by order of the House of Lords, and the following year its printer and author were prosecuted.

In 1697 AD Thomas Aikenhead, an 18 year old student, was charged with denying the Trinity and hanged at Edinburgh, Scotland.

In 1711 AD Sir Isaac Newton’s friend, William Whiston (translator of the works of Jewish historian Josephus), lost his professorship at Cambridge for denying the Trinity.

An Historical Account of Two Notable Corruptions of Scripture, detailing Sir Isaac Newton’s condemnation of the Trinity teaching, was first published in 1754, twenty-seven years after Newton’s death, due to the controversies surrounding the doctrine.

What is it about the doctrine of the Trinity that has created such extreme examples of religious intolerance? Moreover, what was it that the above people, and others like them, saw in this teaching that impelled them to deny it at such great cost?

Merely a superficial study of its origin will reveal how deeply rooted in paganism the doctrine is. Advocates of the Trinity are as well aware of these facts as are its opponents. The difference lies in the attitude toward these roots; whether they are palatable or acceptable to the Christian conscience.

How far, then, do these roots extend, and where do they originate?

“We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one: the glory equal, the majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost. ... The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal. ... So likewise the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Ghost almighty. ... So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet there are not three Gods, but one God. ... The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding. ... And in this Trinity none is afore or after other; none is greater or less than another. But the whole three persons are coeternal together, and coequal. So that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity.”

These are the words of the *Athanasian Creed* (as quoted from *M’Clintock & Strong’s Cyclopoedia*) formulated in the 4th century AD. The Creed was a result of a controversy which raged from the 2nd to the 4th centuries (and beyond).

The earliest record of the use of the word Trinity is in the writings — in the Greek language — of Theophilus of Antioch, 181 AD. The Latin word from which our English term is derived, **TRINITAS**, is first found in the writings of Tertullian (200 AD), who also first used the formula **UNA SUBSTANTIA, TRES PERSONAE**, “one substance, three persons.” The doctrine owes something to the work of the so-called

ante-Nicene Fathers, the most outstanding of which were Ignatius, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen.

Sabellius, of the 3rd century, taught that the thinking of none of the three persons of the Trinity was subordinate to the others. The teachings of Apollinarius and Athanasius, among others, paved the way for the Nicene Creed of 325 AD. Here the doctrine was formally adopted by the Church and given a clear-cut, definitive formula.

Interestingly, though, at the time of the Nicene Creed, the doctrine was not so “clear-cut” as many suppose. For example, it says nothing about the Holy Spirit being a person. Even the nature of the Father and the Son, as defined later, was not so “clear-cut.” Note what *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* states:

“Whether the Council intended to affirm the numerical identity of the substance of Father and Son is doubtful.”

The so-called Cappadocian Fathers, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory Nazianzus helped to further crystallise the teaching. It was given formal statements in a synodical letter of a council held in Constantinople in 382 AD. A document, called the Tome of Damasus, written by Damasus, Bishop of Rome, contained the following statements:

“If anyone denies that the Father is eternal, that the Son is eternal, and that the Holy Spirit is eternal: he is a heretic.

“If anyone denies that the Son of God is true God, just as the Father is true God, having all power, knowing all things, and equal to the Father: he is a heretic.

“If anyone denies that the Holy Spirit ... is true God ... has all power and knows all things, ... he is a heretic.

“If anyone denies that the three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are true persons, equal,

eternal, containing all things visible and invisible, that they are omnipotent, ... he is a heretic.

“If anyone says that [the Son who was] made flesh was not in heaven with the Father while he was on earth: he is a heretic.

“If anyone, while saying that the Father is God and the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God, ... does not say that they are one God, ... he is a heretic.”

Therefore this book itself (the book you are holding) constitutes a very great heresy. But a heresy from what? From a teaching which, through many agonies, was “adopted” by the church several centuries after the death of our Lord.

However, can you think of any of the teachings of the apostles which had to be “adopted” by the church? Surely the body of truth laid down between the covers of the Bible, completed toward the end of the 1st century, did not contain any teachings that required adoption by Jesus’ followers. And, following Paul’s “rule”, the church should surely “keep to what is written.” — 1 Corinthians 4:6, *Jerusalem Bible*.

It is here that the teaching of the Trinity lies in direct contrast with the contents of the Holy Scriptures. It is the Scriptures themselves which deny the truth of the doctrine.

3 The Role of Constantine the Great

The one who organised and orchestrated the Nicene Council of 325 AD was a non-Christian, Constantine the Great. Constantine was emperor of Rome during many of the debates which raged over the Trinity. He saw in these controversies the potential to tear his empire apart and so wanted to use the pagan beliefs so close to his heart in order to weld the fractions together. Cardinal Newman, in his book *The Development of Christian Doctrine*, says concerning this:

“Constantine, in order to recommend the new religion to the heathen, transferred into it the outward ornaments to which they had been accustomed in their own.”

The *Encyclopædia Britannica* says:

“Constantine himself presided, actively guiding the discussions, and personally proposed ... the crucial formula expressing the relation of Christ to God in the creed issued by the council, ‘of one substance with the Father’ ... Overawed by the emperor, the bishops, with two exceptions only, signed the creed, many of them much against their inclination.”

History informs us that Constantine was incriminated in the murder of seven of his close friends and family. Moreover, he was a sun-worshipper. And as far as his spiritual and intellectual credentials go, was he qualified to propose the teaching of the Trinity? *A Short History of Christian Doctrine* states:

“Constantine had basically no understanding whatsoever of the questions that were being asked in Greek theology.”

In proof of this is the fact that Trinitarians did not really come to the fore until the 4th century. At the

beginning of the 3rd century the majority of Church Fathers believed in Unitarianism — that the Father is one God, and Jesus is the Son of God. The aforementioned Theophilus' Trinity was actually a far cry from the 4th century controversy — it consisted of “God, and His Word, and His wisdom.” The Trinity of Tertullian was inconsistent. He believed that “there was a time when there was no Son.”

Another who believed that there was a time when the Son was not was Arius, presbyter of the Church at Alexandria, Egypt. Arius was in the thick of the Trinity controversy, opposing the views of Alexander, his bishop, and Athanasius, who believed the three persons of the Godhead were of the same substance (Greek: **HU.PO'ST.A.SIS**), being not three but one God. Arius publicly opposed Alexander in 318 AD on the eternal pre-existence of the Son, after which Alexander excommunicated him from the Church. But Arius found many allies and “in a short time the whole East Church became a metaphysical battlefield.” This resulted in the Council of Nicea, organised by emperor Constantine in 325 AD, where Arius' views were condemned. He was banished to Illyria by Constantine's order.

Toward the end of his life, however, Constantine favoured Arius' views — this with the support of Eusebius of Nicomedia — and, after five years, Arius was recalled from exile. Many Trinitarian bishops were banished, and even Athanasius himself was banished to Gaul (France).

After Constantine's death, though, the Trinitarians once again came to the fore. In 381 AD the ecumenical Council of Constantinople reaffirmed the Council of Nicea with a few alterations. This is regarded today as the definitive theological statement on the doctrine — that God, though three persons, is to be worshipped as one God. It is subscribed to by the Roman Catholic

Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and most Protestant churches.

Hence, after considerable dispute and confusion, and many Church Council's and synodical letters, the Church finally adopted the teaching of the Trinity. As is summed up by *The Encyclopedia Americana* (Vol. XXVII, p. 294L):

“Christianity derived from Judaism and Judaism was strictly Unitarian [believing that God is one person]. The road which led from Jerusalem to Nicea was scarcely a straight one. Fourth century Trinitarianism did not reflect accurately early Christian teaching regarding the nature of God; it was, on the contrary, a deviation from this teaching.”

Thus the Trinity is a “deviation,” in direct contrast to Paul's counsel in Galatians 1:8 to reject any teaching that is not part of the “version of the Good News” (*Jerusalem Bible*) laid down by the Bible writers.

4 Ancient and Pagan Trinities

Today the doctrine is found throughout the entire realm of Christendom. However, non-Christian religions also have their Triads and Trinities of gods.

The Buddhist Triads are plentiful: Manjusri, Sakyamuni, and Samanta-bhada, the Three Holy Ones of the Hua-yen School; Mahasthama, the embodiment of Wisdom, and Amitabha, and Avalokitesvara, the embodiment of Compassion; Bhaishajvaguru, Sakyamuni, and Amitabha to name a few. Then there is the Taoist Triad of Yuan-shih T'ien-chun, Tao Chun, and Lao Tzu. The Hindu Trinity consists of Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Supreme God, and Shiva the Destroyer. There are also the Norse gods of Odin, Thor, and Freyr, and the Zoroastrian gods of Sraosha, Mithra, and Rashnu.

In almost every religion of the world a Triad of gods of one form or another is worshipped by the religion's adherents. And herein lie clues to the common roots of the belief. For, though the details differ, the essential elements of each belief remain the same. This formula is borne out by tracing the doctrine to the remote past. It goes beyond the time of Plato and Aristotle — the Greek philosophers who had a strong influence on the Church's decision to adopt the Trinity. It is seen in the religion of the ancient Persians (Zoroastrians) and in the gods of the Assyrian empire (virtual mirrors of the gods of ancient Babylon). Of greater antiquity is the Egyptian Triad of Osiris, Isis (Osiris' wife), and Horus (his son).

However, the earliest records of all, pre-dating Christianity by some twenty-three centuries, lead to the plains of Shinar, and to the founder of Babylon, Nimrod. Evidence to this effect is found in Alexander

Hislop's book *The Two Babylons*, which compares the practices and beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church with those of ancient Babylon. On pages 12, 16, 17, Hislop says:

“If the Egyptians and Greeks derived their arithmetic and astronomy from Chaldea, seeing these in Chaldea were sacred sciences, and monopolised by the priests, that is sufficient evidence that they must have derived their religion from the same quarter. Both Bunsen and Layard in their researches have come to substantially the same result. The statement of Bunsen is to the effect that the religious system of Egypt was derived from Asia, and “the primitive empire in Babel.” ... So utterly idolatrous was the Babylonian recognition of the Divine unity, that Jehovah, the Living God, severely condemned His own people for giving any countenance to it: ‘They that sanctify themselves, and purify themselves in the gardens, after the rites of the ONLY ONE, eating swine’s flesh, and the abomination, and the mouse, shall be consumed together’ (Isaiah lxvi. 17). In the unity of that one Only God of the Babylonians, there were three persons, and to symbolise that doctrine of the Trinity, they employed, as the discoveries of Layard prove, the equilateral triangle, just as it is well known the Romish Church does at this day. In both cases such a comparison is most degrading to the King Eternal, and is fitted utterly to pervert the minds of those who contemplate it, as if there was or could be any similitude between such a figure and Him who hath said, ‘To whom will ye liken God, and what likeness will ye compare unto Him?’”

Hislop goes on to describe the Babylonian, Assyrian, Indian, and Buddhist Trinities. His intention, in harmony with the sub-title of his book *The Papal Worship Proved to be the Worship of Nimrod and His Wife* — is to prove the pagan origins of Mary worship. However, due to his characteristic thoroughness of research, he actually succeeds in doing more (though his book is, as a result, in some discord). For, while criticising the Catholic worship of

Mary and child on the one hand, he tries to defend the ‘Scripturalness’ of the Trinity on the other. Surely if the worship of Mary-and-child is “proved to be the worship of Nimrod and his wife” — Nimrod being in opposition to the will of God — then this conclusion cannot be divorced from the fact that the Trinity too (the worship of Father-Mother-Son as one) is also from the same pagan roots.

5 Pagan Philosophies, or Biblical Truth?

In order to maintain the former opinion (that Christ is the “origin” or, “ruler” of God’s creation) support is sought from Greek philosophy, from Christian writers such as Origen, and from Jewish wisdom literature. It is generally admitted amongst Bible commentators that the Trinity is not taught in the Bible, but some claim that the *idea* must have been in the minds of the Bible writers (even if it did not flow from their pens). And support is sought amongst Scriptural statements, which they feel harmonise with their views. For one example, the book, *The Trinity in the New Testament*, by Arthur W. Wainwright, places great store by the “I am” statements made by Jesus in the book of John (as do so many others, saying that this is a claim to the divine title). But then, on page 91, makes this comment:

“The ‘I AM’ sayings, however, in the fourth gospel do not directly imply that Jesus is linked with Yahweh. It is rather a case of undefined suggestion.”

Can a book that contains “*undefined suggestion*” prove itself a reliable guide for “setting things straight”? And does it make sense to assert that the Trinity was on the minds of the Bible writers when the concepts of the doctrine are not included in their writings? — 2 Timothy 3:16, 17; compare 2 Timothy 1:13 and Acts 20:27.

Regarding the development of the Trinity doctrine and its ascendancy to the first place amongst Christendom’s teachings, note the following references:

“The trinity of persons within the unity of nature is defined in terms of ‘person’ and ‘nature’ which are