

# **The Origin of the Trinity: From Paganism to Constantine**

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The Rabbi's deep voice echoes through the dusk, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord' (Deuteronomy 6:4). What a far cry that is from Judaism's offspring, Christianity, and its belief in the Trinity. While the majority of the Christian world considers the concept of the Trinity vital to Christianity, many historians and Bible scholars agree that the Trinity of Christianity owes more to Greek philosophy and pagan polytheism than to the monotheism of the Jew and the Jewish Jesus.

The search for the origins of the Trinity begins with the earliest writings of man. Records of early Mesopotamian and Mediterranean civilizations show polytheistic religions, though many scholars assert that earliest man believed in one god. The 19th century scholar and Protestant minister, Alexander Hislop, devotes several chapters of his book *The Two Babylons* to showing how this original belief in one god was replaced by the triads of paganism which were eventually absorbed into Catholic Church dogmas. A more recent Egyptologist, Erick Hornung, refutes the original monotheism of Egypt: '[Monotheism is] a phenomenon restricted to the wisdom texts,' which were written between 2600 and 2530 BC (50-51); but there is no question that ancient man believed in 'one infinite and Almighty Creator, supreme over all' (Hislop 14); and in a multitude of gods at a later point. Nor is there any doubt that the most common grouping of gods was a triad.<sup>1</sup>

Most of ancient theology is lost under the sands of time. However, archaeological expeditions in ancient Mesopotamia have uncovered the fascinating culture of the Sumerians, which flourished over 4,000 years ago. Though Sumeria was overthrown first by Assyria, and then by Babylon, its gods lived on in the cultures of those who conquered. The historian S. H. Hooke tells in detail of the ancient Sumerian trinity: Anu was the primary god of heaven, the 'Father', and the 'King of the Gods'; Enlil, the 'wind-god' was the god of the earth, and a creator god; and Enki was the god of waters and the 'lord of wisdom' (15-18). The historian, H. W. F. Saggs, explains that the Babylonian triad consisted of 'three gods of roughly equal rank... whose inter-relationship is of the essence of their natures' (316).

Is this *positive* proof that the Christian Trinity descended from the ancient Sumerian, Assyrian, and Babylonian triads? No. However, Hislop furthers the comparison, 'In the unity of that one,

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<sup>1</sup> Hislop devotes the first 128 pages of his book *The Two Babylons* to proving that the Christian Trinity is directly descended from the ancient Babylonian trinity. In particular, he convincingly proves that the origin of the Babylonian trinity was the triad of Cush (the grandson of Noah), Semiramis (his wife), and Nimrod (their son). At the death of Cush, Semiramis married her son, Nimrod, and thus began the confusion between the father and son so prevalent in early paganism.

Only God of the Babylonians there were three persons, and to symbolize [sic] that doctrine of the Trinity, they employed... the equilateral triangle, just as it is well known the Romish Church does at this day' (16).

Egypt's history is similar to Sumeria's in antiquity. In his *Egyptian Myths*, George Hart, lecturer for the British Museum and professor of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics at the University of London, shows how Egypt also believed in a 'transcendental, above creation, and preexisting' one, the god Amun. Amun was really three gods in one. Re was his face, Ptah his body, and Amun his hidden identity (24). The well-known historian Will Durant concurs that Ra, Amon, and Ptah were 'combined as three embodiments or aspects of one supreme and triune deity' (Oriental Heritage 201). Additionally, a hymn to Amun written in the 14th century BC defines the Egyptian trinity: 'All Gods are three: Amun, Re, Ptah; they have no equal. His name is hidden as Amun, he is Re... before [men], and his body is Ptah' (Hornung 219).

Is this *positive* proof that the Christian Trinity descended from the ancient Egyptian triads? No. However, Durant submits that 'from Egypt came the ideas of a divine trinity...' (Caesar 595). Dr. Gordon Laing, retired Dean of the Humanities Department at the University of Chicago, agrees that 'the worship of the Egyptian triad Isis, Serapis, and the child Horus' probably accustomed the early church theologians to the idea of a triune God, and was influential 'in the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity as set forth in the Nicæan and Athanasian creeds' (128-129).

These were not the only trinities early Christians were exposed to. The historical lecturer, Jesse Benedict Carter, tells us of the Etruscans. As they slowly passed from Babylon through Greece and went on to Rome (16-19), they brought with them their trinity of Tinia, Uni, and Menerva. This trinity was a 'new idea to the Romans,' and yet it became so 'typical of Rome' that it quickly spread throughout Italy (26). Even the names of the Roman trinity: Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva, reflect the ancestry. That Christianity was not ashamed to borrow from pagan culture is amply shown by Durant: 'Christianity did not destroy paganism; it adopted it' (Caesar 595).

Is this *positive* proof that the Christian Trinity descended from the Etruscan and Roman triads? No. However, Laing convincingly devotes his entire book *Survivals of the Roman Gods* to the comparison of Roman paganism and the Roman Catholic Church. Dr. Jaroslav Pelikan, a Catholic scholar and professor at Yale, confirms the Church's respect for pagan ideas when he states that the Apologists and other early church fathers used and cited the [pagan] Roman Sibylline Oracles so much that they were called 'Sibyllists' by the 2nd century critic, Celsus. There was even a medieval hymn, 'Dies irae,' which foretold the 'coming of the day of wrath' based on the 'dual authority of 'David and the Sibyl' ' (Emergence 64-65). The attitude of the Church toward paganism is best summed up in Pope Gregory the Great's words to a missionary: 'You must not interfere with any traditional belief or religious observance that can be harmonized with Christianity' (qtd. in Laing 130).

In contrast, Judaism is strongly monotheistic with no hint of a trinity. The Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) is filled with scriptures such as 'before Me there was no God formed, Neither shall any be after Me' (Isaiah 43:10 qtd. in Isaiah), and 'there is no other God...I am the Lord and

there is none else' (Isaiah 45:14, 18 qtd. in Isaiah). A Jewish commentary affirms that '[no] other gods exist, for to declare this would be blasphemous...' (Chumash 458). Even though 'Word,' 'Spirit,' 'Presence,' and 'Wisdom' are used as personifications of God, Biblical scholars agree that the Trinity is neither mentioned nor intended by the authors of the Old Testament (Lonergan 130; Fortman xv; Burns 2).

We can conclude without much difficulty that the concept of the Trinity did not come from Judaism. Nor did Jesus speak of a trinity. The message of Jesus was of the coming kingdom; it was a message of love and forgiveness. As for his relationship with the Father, Jesus said, '... I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me' (John 5:30), and in another place 'my doctrine is not mine, but His that sent me' (John 7:16); and his words 'my Father is greater than I' (John 14:28) leave no doubt as to their relationship.

The word 'trinity' was not coined until Tertullian, more than 100 years after Christ's death, and the key words (meaning substance) from the Nicene debate, *homousis* and *ousis*, are not biblical, but from Stoic thought. Nowhere in the Bible is the Trinity mentioned. According to Pelikan, 'One of the most widely accepted conclusions of the 19th century history of dogma was the thesis that the dogma of the Trinity was not an explicit doctrine of the New Testament, still less of the Old Testament, but had evolved from New Testament times to the 4th century. (Historical Theology 134)

If the Trinity did not originate with the Bible, where did it come from? To find the origins of the Trinity in Christianity, we need to take a look at the circumstances in which early Christians found themselves.

Even the Church of the Apostles' day was far from unified. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Thessalonians that 'the mystery of iniquity doth already work' 2 Thessalonians 2:7). Throughout his book *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, the German New Testament scholar, lexicographer, and early Church historian, Walter Bauer, effectively proves that many early Christians were influenced by gnosticism. He believes it possible that certain '[heresies recorded by early Christian Fathers] originally had not been such at all, but, at least here and there...were simply 'Christianity'' (xxii). Bauer goes even further, as he proves that early Christians in Edessa appear to have been followers of the Marcion's beliefs (considered heretical today), with 'orthodox' views being so strongly in the minority that 'Christian' referred to one with Marcion's beliefs, and 'Palutian' to one with 'orthodox' (by today's standards) beliefs (21-38). In his work [The Greek Fathers](#), James Marshall Campbell, a Greek professor, bears out the great fear of gnosticism prevalent in the early church.

With Gnosticism being so predominant in this early period, it behooves one to learn what they believed, for many early church writings were defenses against gnosticism. Gnosticism borrowed much of its philosophy and religion from Mithraism, oriental mysticism, astrology, magic, and Plato. It considered matter to be evil and in opposition to Deity, relied heavily on visions, and sought salvation through knowledge. The late Professor Arthur Cushman McGiffert interprets some of the early Christian fathers as believing the Gnosticism to be 'identical to [sic] all intents

and purposes with Greek polytheism' (50). Gnosticism had a mixed influence on the early Christian writers: like the pendulum on a clock, some were influenced by Gnostic thought, while others swung to the opposite extreme.

Knowledge was also the desire of the Greek philosophers. We owe a lot to these sages of old. J. N. D. Kelly, lecturer and principal at St. Edward Hall, Oxford University, states that '[the concepts of philosophy] provided thinkers... with an intellectual framework for expressing their ideas' (9) to the extent that it became the 'deeper religion of most intelligent people' (9). The eminent theologian Adolf Harnack considered Greek philosophy and culture to be factors in the formation of the 'ecclesiastical mode of thought' (1:127). According to McGiffert, the concepts of philosophy prevalent during the time of the early church were Stoicism, which was 'ethical in its interests and monistic in its ontology' and Platonism, which was 'dualistic and predominately religious' (46).

That these philosophies affected Christianity is a historical fact. What did these philosophers teach about God? In Plato's Timeus, 'The Supreme Reality appears in the trinitarian form of the Good, the Intelligence, and the World-Soul' (qtd. in Laing 129). Laing attributes elaborate trinitarian theories to the Neoplatonists, and considers Neoplatonic ideas as 'one of the operative factors in the development of Christian theology' (129).

Is this *positive* proof that the Christian Trinity descended from Greek philosophy? No. However, in a comparison between the church of the third century and that of 150-200 years before, the noted German theologian, Adolf Harnack, finds 'few Jewish, but many Greco-Roman features, and... the philosophic spirit of the Greeks' (1:45). In addition, Durant ties in philosophy with Christianity when he states that the second century Alexandrian Church, from which both Clement and Origen came, 'wedded Christianity to Greek philosophy' (Caesar 613); and finally, Durant writes of the famed pagan philosopher, Plotinus, that 'Christianity accepted nearly every line of him...' (Caesar 611).

World conditions were hardly conducive to the foundation of a new and different religion. Pagan gods were still the gods of the state, and the Roman government was very superstitious. All calamities were considered the displeasure of the gods. When the dissolute Roman government began to crumble, it was not seen as a result of corruption within, but as the anger of the gods; and thus there were strong persecutions against Christians to placate these gods.

In such a time was Christianity born. On one side were persecutions; on the other the seduction of philosophy. To remain faithful to the belief of Jesus Christ meant hardship and ridicule. It was only for the simple poor and the rich in faith. It was a hard time to convert to Christianity from the relatively safer paganism. In the desire to grow, the Church compromised truth, which resulted in confusion as pagans became Christians and intermingled beliefs and traditions. In his Emergence of Catholic Tradition, Pelikan discusses the conflict in the Church after AD 70 and the decline of Judaic influence within Christianity. As more and more pagans came into Christianity, they found the Judaic influence offensive. Some even went so far as to reject the Old Testament (13-14).

With this background, the growth and evolution of the Trinity can be clearly seen. As previously stated, the Bible does not mention the Trinity. Harnack affirms that the early church view of Jesus was as Messiah, and after his resurrection he was 'raised to the right hand of God' but not considered as God (1:78). Bernard Lonergan, a Roman Catholic priest and Bible scholar, concurs that the educated Christians of the early centuries believed in a single, supreme God (119). As for the holy Spirit, McGiffert tells us that early Christians considered the holy Spirit 'not as an individual being or person but simply as the divine power working in the world and particularly in the church' (111). Durant summarizes early Christianity thus: 'In Christ and Peter, Christianity was Jewish; in Paul it became half Greek; in Catholicism it became half Roman' (Caesar 579).

As the apostles died, various writers undertook the task of defending Christianity against the persecutions of the pagans. The writers of these 'Apologies' are known to us now as the 'Apologists'. Pelikan states that 'it was at least partly in response to pagan criticism of the stories in the Bible that the Christian apologists... took over and adapted the methods and even vocabulary of pagan allegorism' (Emergence 30). Campbell agrees when he states that 'the Apologists borrowed heavily and at times inappropriately, from the pagan resources at hand' (23). They began the 'process of accommodation' between Christianity and common philosophy, and used reason to 'justify Christianity to the pagan world' (22-23).

The most famous of these Apologists was Justin Martyr (c.107-166). He was born a pagan, became a pagan philosopher, then a Christian. He believed that Christianity and Greek philosophy were related. As for the Trinity, McGiffert asserts, 'Justin insisted that Christ came from God; he did not identify him with God' (107). Justin's God was 'a transcendent being, who could not possibly come into contact with the world of men and things' (107).

Not only was the Church divided by Gnosticism, enticed by philosophy, and set upon by paganism, but there was a geographic division as well. The East (centered in Alexandria) and the West (centered in Rome) grew along two different lines. Kelly shows how the East was intellectually adventurous and speculative (4), a reflection of the surrounding Greek culture. The theological development of the East is best represented in Clement and Origen.

Clement of Alexandria (c.150-220) was from the 'Catechetical School' of Alexandria. His views were influenced by Gnosticism (Bauer 56-57), and McGiffert affirms, 'Clement insists that philosophy came from God and was given to the Greeks as a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ as the law was a schoolmaster for the Hebrews' (183). McGiffert further states that Clement considered 'God the Father revealed in the Old Testament' separate and distinct from the 'Son of God incarnate in Christ,' with whom he identified the Logos (206). Campbell summarizes that '[with Clement the] philosophic spirit enters frankly into the service of Christian doctrine, and with it begins... the theological science of the future' (36). However, it was his student, Origen, who 'achieved the union of Greek philosophy and Christianity' (39).

Origen (c.185-253) is considered by Campbell to be the 'founder of theology' (41), the greatest scholar of the early church and the greatest theologian of the East (38). Durant adds that 'with

[Origen] Christianity ceased to be only a comforting faith; it became a full-fledged philosophy, buttressed with scripture but proudly resting on reason' (Caesar 615). Origen was a brilliant man. At 18 he succeeded Clement as president of the Alexandrian school. Over 800 titles were attributed to him by Jerome. He traveled extensively and started a new school in Cesarea.

In Origen we find an important link in the changing view of God. According to Pelikan's Historical Theology, Origen was the 'teacher of such orthodox stalwarts as the Cappadocian Fathers' (22) but also the 'teacher of Arius' (22) and the 'originator of many heresies' (22). Centuries after his death, he was condemned by councils at least five times; however, both Athanasius and Eusebius had great respect for him.

As he tried to reckon the 'incomprehensible God' with both Stoic and Platonic philosophy, Origen presented views that could support both sides of the Trinity argument. He believed the Father and Son were separate 'in respect of hypostasis' (substance), but 'one by harmony and concord and identity of will' (qtd. in Lonergan 56). He claimed the Son was the image of God.

In the way in which, according to the bible story, we say that Seth is the image of his father, Adam. For thus it is written: 'And Adam begot Seth according to his own image and likeness.' Image, in this sense, implies that the Father and the Son have the same nature and substance. (qtd. in Lonergan 58)

He also maintained that there was a difference between *the* God and God when he said '... *the* God [God himself]... Whatever else, other than him who is called *the* God, is also God, is deified by participation, by sharing in his divinity, and is more properly to be called not *the* God but simply God' (qtd. in Lonergan 61).

As Greek influence and Gnosticism became introduced into the Eastern church, it became more mystical and philosophical. The simple doctrines that Jesus taught to the uneducated gave way to the complex and sophisticated arguments of Origen.

As Clement and Origen represented theological development in the East, so Tertullian had tremendous influence in the West. Kelly explains that the West, centered in Rome, gave greater credence to the traditional role of faith than to philosophy, and was more apt to expound on scripture (4).

It was Tertullian (c.160-230) who first coined the term *trinitas* from which the English word 'trinity' is derived. He clarifies thus the 'mystery of the divine economy... which of the unity makes a trinity, placing the three in order not of quality but of sequence, different not in substance but in aspect, not in power but in manifestation' (qtd. in Lonergan 46). At other times he used other images to show his point, such as the monarchy: '... If he who is the monarch has a son, and if the son is given a share in the monarchy, this does not mean that the monarchy is automatically divided, ceasing to be a monarchy' (qtd. in Lonergan 47). Again, Tertullian explains the concept of being brought forth: 'As the root brings forth the shoot, as the spring brings forth the stream, as the sun brings forth the beam' (qtd. in Lonergan 45).

Tertullian did not consider the Father and Son co-eternal: 'There was a time when there was neither sin to make God a judge, nor a son to make God a Father' (qtd. in Lonergan 48); nor did he consider them co-equal: 'For the Father is the whole substance, whereas the Son is something derived from it' (qtd. in Lonergan 48). In Tertullian we find a groundwork upon which a trinity concept can be founded, but it has not yet evolved into that trinity of the Nicene Creed.

The world around the early Church was changing. The Roman Empire began to crumble and Constantine came to power. He wished to unify the Empire, and chose Christianity to do so. But Christianity was far from unified.

Constantine invited the bishops from East and West to join him in the small seaside village of Nicea for a council to unify the church. McGiffert summarizes the council: three main groups were present at this council: Eusebius of Nicomedia presenting the Arian view of the Trinity, Alexander of Alexandria presenting the Athanasian version, and a very large 'middle party' led by Eusebius of Cesarea whose various theological opinions did not interfere with their desire for peace (259). Eusebius of Nicomedia submitted the Arian creed first and it was rejected. Then Eusebius of Cesarea submitted the Cesarean baptismal creed. Instead of submitting a creed of their own, the anti-Arians modified Eusebius', thereby compelling him to sign it and completely shutting the Arians out. Those Arians who did not sign were deposed and exiled (261-263).

Thus Constantine had his unified Church which was not very unified. McGiffert asserts that Eusebius of Cesarea was not altogether satisfied with the creed because it was too close to Sabellianism (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three aspects of one God). Eusebius was uncomfortable enough with the Nicene creed that he felt it expedient to justify himself to his own people in a long letter in which he states that he 'resisted even to the last minute' until the words were examined and it was explained that the words 'did not mean all they seemed to mean but were intended simply to assert the real deity of the Son...' (264-265). McGiffert goes on to show that a 'double interpretation [was authorized by the leaders] in order to win Eusebius and his followers.' (266).

Lonergan shows just how much of the creed Eusebius took exception to as the words were explained. 'Out of the Father's substance' was now interpreted to show that the Son is 'out of the Father', but 'not part of the Father's substance.' 'Born not made' because 'made' refers to all other creatures 'which come into being through the Son', and 'consubstantial' really means that the Son comes out of the Father and is like him (75). It is clear that the council strongly lacked unity of thought. Lonergan goes on to explain that the language of debate on the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son has made many people think that the 'Church at Nicea had abandoned the genuine Christian doctrine, which was religious through and through, in order to embrace some sort of hellenistic ontology' (128). He concludes that the Nicene dogma marked the 'transition from the prophetic Oracle of Yahweh... to Catholic dogma' (136-7).

The end result was far less than Constantine had hoped. That he personally was never truly swayed to Athanasius' views is amply shown by Durant: Constantine invited Arius to a

conference six years later; did not interfere with Athanasius' expulsion by the Eastern bishops; had an Arian bishop, Eusebius of Nicomedia, baptize him; and had his son and successor, Constantius, raised as an Arian (Age 7-8).

The Nicene was not a popular creed when it was signed. Durant affirms that the majority of Eastern bishops sided with Arius in that they believed Christ was the Son of God 'neither consubstantial nor co-eternal' with his Father (Age 7). Arianism has never been truly quenched. While the West accepted the Athanasian view of the Trinity, and the East accepted the Trinity of the Cappadocian fathers, Arianism lives on in the Unitarian Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, and in many smaller religions.

There is an unfortunate side to the whole Athanasian/Arian debate. Campbell could find no parallel in medieval nor modern times in the intensity of debate (49). Historically, this 'doctrine of God' has proved to be a bloody doctrine that has no relation to the true God of love, nor His Son Jesus Christ. Durant details the problems that arose from the Council at Nicea and summarizes that period with a dreadful verdict: 'Probably more Christians were slaughtered by Christians in these two years (342-3) than by all the persecutions of Christians by pagans in the history of Rome' (Age 8). Thus they perverted the teachings of Christ: 'Love thy neighbor as thyself' (Matthew 19:19), and of his apostles: 'If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us' (1 John 4:12).

The evolution of the Trinity can be well seen in the words of the Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed.<sup>2</sup> As each of the creeds became more wordy and convoluted, the simple, pure faith of the Apostolic church became lost in a haze. Even more interesting is the fact that as the creeds became more specific (and less scriptural) the adherence to them became stricter, and the penalty for disbelief harsher.

In summary, the common culture of the day was one filled with triune gods. From ancient Sumeria's Anu, Enlil, and Enki and Egypt's dual trinities of Amun-Re-Ptah and Isis, Osiris, and Horus to Rome's Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva the whole concept of paganism revolved around the magic number of three. In Greek philosophy, also, we have seen how the number three was used as an unspecified trinity of intelligence, mind, and reason.

In stark contrast, is the simple oneness of the Hebrew God. Jesus was a Jew from the tribe of Judah. He claimed to be sent to the 'lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Matthew 15:24). His apostles were all Jews. His god was the Jewish God. He called himself the Son of God and acknowledged his role as the Christ (Matthew 16:15-17), and the Messiah (John 4:25-26). His message was one of love, righteousness, and salvation, and he despised the religious dogma of tradition. What a contrast from the proceedings of the Council of Nicea and the murders that followed! He gave the good news of his coming kingdom to the poor and meek: the lowly of this

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<sup>2</sup> The three most famous Christian creeds are the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian (or Trinitarian). The words of these three creeds show us a lot about the evolution of the Trinitarian theology. The creeds are printed below as translated in the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England, and quoted in pages 18-20 of an unpublished work by Bible Scholar, Eugene Burns.



world. He did not require dogmatic creeds that had to be believed to the word, but rather said, 'Follow me' (Matthew 9:9).

There can be no doubt: Jesus was a stranger to all sides of the political proceedings in Nicea. He never claimed to be God, but was content to be God's son. His creed was not of words that must be followed to the letter, but rather of spirit: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God' (Matthew ). He did not require wealthy and learned bishops to mingle philosophy and pagan polytheism with his simple truth, but blessed the 'poor' and the 'meek' (Matthew 4:1-12). No, it was not from Jesus that the dogma of the Trinity came.

Is this *positive* proof that the Trinity owes its origins to paganism and philosophy? The evidences of history leave little doubt. **The concept of the Trinity finds its roots in Pagan theology and Greek philosophy: it is a stranger to the Jewish Jesus and the Hebrew people from which he sprang.**

## Reference Notes

1. Hislop devotes the first 128 pages of his book *The Two Babylons* to proving that the Christian Trinity is directly descended from the ancient Babylonian trinity. In particular, he convincingly proves that the origin of the Babylonian trinity was the triad of Cush (the grandson of Noah), Semiramis (his wife), and Nimrod (their son). At the death of Cush, Semiramis married her son, Nimrod, and thus began the confusion between the father and son so prevalent in early paganism.

It is interesting to note that the Gnostics considered the Holy Spirit to be the 'motherly mystery of God,' based on its attributes. It is also interesting to note that a modern controversy wants to bring back the feminine side of the Trinity by making the Holy Spirit feminine. (This is a very weak argument based on the attributes of the Holy Spirit as *Paraklete* (comforter) and the fact that, in Hebrew grammar, the word for spirit, *Ruach*, is feminine.)

2. The three most famous Christian creeds are the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian (or Trinitarian). The words of these three creeds show us a lot about the evolution of the Trinitarian theology. The creeds are printed below as translated in the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England, and quoted in pages 18-20 of an unpublished work by Bible Scholar, Eugene Burns.

**The Apostles' or Unitarian Creed** was the creed used during the first two centuries AD. It was not written by the Apostles, though it bears their name:

I believe in **God, the Father Almighty**, Maker of heaven and earth:

And in Jesus Christ, his only son our Lord: who was conceived by the holy ghost (spirit), born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell (the grave); the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of **God, the Father Almighty**: From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead:

I believe in the holy ghost (spirit); the holy catholic (general) Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

**The Nicene, or Semi-trinitarian Creed**, as commonly used today, is a revision of the original creed signed at Nicea in 325 AD. It was revised at the Council of Constantinople in 381.

I believe in **One God, the Father Almighty**, Maker of heaven and earth; and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God; begotten of his Father before all worlds; God of (or from) **God**; Light of (or from) **Light**; Very God of (or from) **Very God**; begotten, not made; being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven; and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the virgin Mary; and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered, and was buried, and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the **Father**; and he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, (the Lord and Giver of life; who proceedeth from the Father (and the Son); who is with the Father and the son together is worshipped and glorified; who spake by the prophets).

And I believe [in] one catholic and apostolic [sic] church: I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins: and I look for the resurrection of the dead; and the life of the world to come. Amen.

**The Athanasian, or Trinitarian Creed** was probably written sometime in the fifth century. Although it bears the name of Athanasius, it was not written by him.

Whosoever [sic] will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith; which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.

And the Catholic Faith is this: that 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 co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost, the Father uncreate, the son uncreate, and the Holy Ghost uncreate; the Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal; and yet they are not three eternals, but one eternal. As also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated, but one uncreated, and one

incomprehensible. So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Ghost Almighty; and yet they are not three Almighties, but one Almighty. So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God; and yet they are not three Gods, but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Ghost Lord; and yet not three Lords, but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every person by himself to be God and Lord; so we are forbidden by the Catholic religion to say, There be three Gods, or three Lords. 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. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity none is afore or after another, none is greater or less than another; but the whole three persons are co-eternal together, and co-equal. 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**.

Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation, that he also believe rightly the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right faith is, that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man; God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and man, of the substance of his mother, born in the world; perfect God, and perfect man; of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting; equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead; and inferior to the Father, as touching his manhood; who, although he be God and man, yet is he not two, but one Christ; one, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of the manhood into God. One altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ: who suffered for our salvation; descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead; he ascended into heaven, he sitteth on the right hand of the Father, God Almighty, from whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead; at whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies, and shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire. This is the Catholic faith, which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved. Glory be to the Father and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

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