The History of
The Doctrine of the Trinity
The True Scriptural Picture

"For there is ONE GOD and one mediator between God and men,
the MAN Christ Jesus" - 1 Tim. 2:5

By G.V. "Rene" Growcott

The history of religion has always been one of degeneration from the originally revealed pure monotheism to various forms of polytheism. "Christianity," as popularly known, has been no exception.

The Bible, in both Old and New Testaments, is very emphatic about the absolute oneness of God. When asked which is the first commandment of all?"

Jesus answered (Mark 12:29) -

"The first of all the commandments is; Hear, O Israel, THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD."

He was quoting from the words of Moses in Deut. 6:4. This is the consistent story of the Bible. There is not a word about three gods in it from beginning to end.

"Christendom" today has degenerated to a belief in four gods, three good ones and one evil one. Some parts of Christendom have five gods, as the Roman Catholic Church, which has added a "Mother of God" who is in their system of belief the supreme deity beside a host of demi-gods, one for every day of the year (and more), all of which mythical and man-invented deities are worshipped and prayed to.

The doctrine of the Trinity is this -

"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, so is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost.

"The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate, and the Holy Ghost uncreate. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal.

"And yet there are not three eternals, but one eternal. Also there are not three incomprehensibles, not three uncreated: but one uncreated, and one incomprehensible.

"So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet there are not three Almighties, but one 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.

"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 other, none is greater or less than others; 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."

This is the prize and tragic example of the natural mind of man speculating upon divine things rather than being content to humbly accept the simple testimony of Scripture.

In all Scripture, there is nothing to justify this absurd and self-contradictory mizmaze. While truly we can never hope with mortal minds to comprehend God, still the revelations He gives of Himself, and of His Son, and of His Holy Spirit - His power and presence which fills all immensity and works His will - is clear and simple and reasonable and a tremendously satisfying relief from the befuddled speculations as quoted above.

The doctrine of the "Trinity" is nowhere found in the Bible. The following quotations from recognized historians will give the background of the period in which this doctrine was developed, showing the general conditions of Christendom of the time, the philosophic influences at work, the methods of reasoning and argument used and the political forces that finally established the doctrine and enforced it by confiscation, prohibition, punishment and murder.

This will clearly show the frail, human foundation the doctrine of the Trinity rests on, and dissipate the weight it appears to have from centuries of "orthodox" acceptance.

COUNCIL OF NICE

Of the Council of Nice, 352 A.D., where the doctrine of the Trinity was first officially formulated, the well-known trinitarian historian Mosheim, a Lutheran, admits (Century 4, Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1)

"....the discussions concerning the three persons in the Godhead, among those who approved the decisions of the council of Nice.

"There is so little clearness and discrimination in these discussions, that they seem to rend the one God into three Gods.

"Moreover, those idle fictions, which a regard for the prevailing opinions of the day had induced most theologians to embrace, even before the time of Constantine, were now in various ways confirmed, extended and embellished.

"Hence it is that we see on every side evident traces of excessive veneration for saints in heaven, of belief in a fire to purify souls on leaving the body, of partiality for priestly celibacy,

the worship of images and relics, and for many other opinions which, in process of time, almost banished the true religion, or at least very much obscured and corrupted it.

"Genuine piety was gradually supplanted by a long train of superstitious observances, which were derived partly from a preposterous disposition to adopt profane rites.

"To the temples, to water consecrated with certain forms, and to likenesses of holy men, the same efficacy was ascribed and the same privileges assigned, as had been attributed to the pagan temples, statues and lustrations before the advent of Christ."

This is a trinitarian's description of conditions in the Catholic Church during the time the doctrine of the Trinity was being formulated and imposed.

In the same chapter, Section 5, Mosheim says:

"The doctors who were distinguished for their learning explained the sacred doctrines after the manner of Origen (see notes below on Origen) on whom they fixed their eye - in accordance with the principles of that philosophy which they learned in their youth at school, namely, the Platonic philosophy as corrected by Origen.

"Those who wish to get a full insight into this subject may examine Gregory Nazianzen among the Greeks and Augustine among the Latins who were regarded in the subsequent ages as the only patterns worthy of imitation, and may be fitly styled, next to Origen, the parents and supporters of philosophic or scholastic theology. They were both admirers of Plato."

PLATONIC INFLUENCE

Plato was the heathen Greek philosopher (around 400 B.C.) who popularized the Egyptian doctrine of the immortality of the soul. He was the brightest star and greatest influence in the pagan system of philosophy that Christianity in its original purity set out to combat (See 1 Cor., chapters 1 and 2).

But Platonic philosophers became dominent in the Catholic Church, and Platonic philosophy has dominated the beliefs of "orthodox" Christendom from the 3rd century A.D. to the present. The earliest Christians bitterly fought heathen philosophy; the later "Christians" adopted it.

Origen, mentioned by Mosheim as influential in this Platonizing movement (around 200-250 A.D.), was one of the greatest (and perhaps the greatest) influences in establishing this trend in the Church. Of him, Mosheim says (Cent. 2, Part 2, Chap. 1, Sec. 5) -

"A new class of philosophers had grown up in Egypt ...they much preferred Plato, and embraced most of his dogmas concerning God, the human soul, and the universe.

"This philosophy was adopted by such of the learned at Alexandria as wished to be accounted Christians, and yet to retain the rank of philosophers. All those who in this century presided in the schools of the Christians at Alexandria are said to have approved it."

Translator's footnote at this place in Mosheim -

"This cultivation of philosophy by Christian teachers greatly displeased those who were attached to the ancient simple faith, as taught by Christ and his apostles; for they feared, what afterwards actually happened, that the purity and excellence of divine truth would suffer by it. The issue of the long contest between them was that the advocates of philosophy prevailed."

Continuing Mosheim, Sec. 7 -

"This mode of philosophizing received some modification when Ammonius Saccas laid the foundation of that sect which is called the New Platonic."

Section 8

"The grand objects of Ammonius, to bring all sects and religions into harmony, required him to do much violence to the sentiments and opinions of all parties, philosophers, priests and Christians - and particularly by allegorical interpretations. He assumed... that the public religions of all nations should be corrected by this ancient (Platonic) philosophy.

Section 9 -

"With these Egyptian notions, he united the philosophy of Plato...Finally, the dogmas of other sects he construed, as far as was possible, by means of art, ingenuity and the aid of allegories into apparent coincidence with Egyptian and Platonic principles"

Section 12

"This new species of philosophy, imprudently adopted by Origen and other Christians, did immense harm to Christianity. For it led the teachers of it to involve in philosophic obscurity many parts of our religion which were in themselves plain and easy to be understood; and to add to the precepts of the Savior no few things of which not a word can be found in the holy Scriptures...

"And finally it alienated the minds of many, in the following centuries, from Christianity itself, and produced a heterogeneous species of religion, consisting of Christian and Platonic principles combined. And who is able to enumerate all the evils and injurious changes which arose from this new philosophy - from this attempt to reconcile true and false religions with each other?"

Editor's footnote at this place in Mosheim -

"That philosophy has injured enormously genuine Christianity will be readily conceded by all who rest faith solely upon the rock of Scripture.

"When such persons are asked to account for the existence of religious principles and usages which are incapable of proof from the sacred volume, and even seem at variance with it, they have only to cite the semi-Christian school of philosophy which arose at Alexandria before the second century closed."

(It will be noted from the quotation on pg. 4 that the most distinguished "Christian" teachers of the 4th century looked to Origen and the Platonic philosophy as their model. Any doctrines therefore - such as the Trinity - formulated at this time are bound to be more pagan than Christian.)

Returning to Mosheim's history of the 4th century, he records concerning the conduct and character of the church leaders (Cent.4, Part 2, Chap. 2, Sec. 5) -

"The bishop of Rome took precedence over all others of the episcopal order. He exceeded all other bishops in the splendor of the church over which he presided, in the magnitude of his revenues and possessions, and in the sumptuousness and magnificence of his style of living.

"These marks of power and worldly greatness were so fascinating to the minds of Christians even in this age that often the most obstinate and bloody contests took place at Rome when a new pontiff was to be created.

"A shocking example of this is afforded by the disturbance at Rome in the year 366. The contention caused a cruel war, great loss of life, conflagrations and battles."

Section 8 -

"The vices of the clergy, especially of those who officiated in large and opulent cities, were augmented in proportion to the increase of their wealth, honors and advantages. The bishops had shameful quarrels among themselves respecting the extent of their jurisdiction and boundaries; and while they trampled on the rights of the people and of the inferior clergy, they vied with the civil governors of provinces in luxury, arrogance and voluptuousness."

Cent. 4, Part 2, Chap. 3, Sec. 17:

"When there was nothing any longer to be feared from enemies without; when the character of most bishops was tarnished with arrogance, luxury, effeminacy, animosity, resentments, and other defects; when the lower clergy neglected their proper duties and were more attentive to idle controversies than to the promotion of piety and the instruction of the people; when vast numbers were induced, not by a rational conviction but by the fear of punishment and the hope of worldly advantage to enrol themselves as Christians - how can it surprise us that on all sides the vicious appeared a host, and the pious a little band almost overpowered by them?...

"The more honorable and powerful could sin with impunity, and only the poor and the unfortunate felt the severity of the laws."

Such is a trinitarian historian's testimony concerning the times in which the doctrine of the Trinity was developed on the admitted basis of human speculation and Platonic philosophy. Of the methods of argument and persuasion used by the church leaders of this period, Mosheim says -

Cen. 4, Part 2, Chap. 3, Sec. 7 -

"From the disputes with those who were regarded as opposed to divine truth, the ancient simplicity had nearly taken its flight; and in place of it, dialectical subtleties and quibbles, invectives and other disingenuous artifices had succeeded."

Section 8 -

"With the ancient form of discussion, new sources of argument were in this age combined. For the truth of doctrines was proved by the number of martyrs who had believed so, by prodigies and by the confessions of devils, that is, of persons in whose bodies some demon was supposed to reside.

"The discerning cannot but see that all proofs drawn from such sources are very fallacious, and very convenient for dishonest men who would practice imposition.

"And I greatly fear that most of those who at this time resorted to such proofs, though they might be grave and eminent men, may be justly charged with a dangerous propensity to use deception.

"Ambrose, in controversy with the Arians, brings forward persons possessed with devils, who are constrained, when the relics of Gervasius and Protasius are produced, to cry out that the doctrine of the Nicene council concerning three persons in the Godhead is true and divine, and the doctrine of the Arians false and pernicious.

"This testimony of the prince of darkness Ambrose regards as proof altogether unexceptionable."

Section 16 -

"To these defects in the moral system of the age must be added two principal errors now almost publicly adopted, and from which afterwards immense evils resulted. The first was that to deceive and lie is a virtue, when religion can be promoted by it.

"This principle had been embraced in the preceding centuries, and it is almost incredible what a mass of the most insipid fables and what a host of pious falsehoods have through all the centuries grown out of it, to the great detriment of true religion.

"If some inquisitive person were to examine the conduct and the writings of the greatest and most pious teachers of this century, I fear that he would find about all of them infected with this leprosy. I cannot except Ambrose, nor Hilary, nor Augustine, nor Gregory Nazianzen, nor Jerome."

Such were the principles of the men who formulated the doctrine of the Trinity, and with the aid of the civil power imposed it upon the whole body of believers on pain of severe punishment, as we shall see in later quotations.

Of the general conditions of worship in this century, Mosheim says (Cent. 4, Part 2, Chap. 4, Sec. 1)

"The Christian bishops introduced, with but slight alterations, into the Christian worship, those rites and institutions by which formerly the Greeks and Romans and others had manifested their piety and reverence toward their imaginary deities; supposing that the people would more readily embrace Christianity if they perceived the rites handed down to them from their fathers still existing unchanged among the Christians, and saw that Christ and the martyrs were worshipped in the same manner as formerly their gods were.

"There was, accordingly, little difference in these times between the public worship of the Christians and that of the Greeks and Romans. In both there were splendid robes, mitres, tiaras, wax-tapers, crosiers, processions, lustrations, images, golden and silver vases, and innumerable other things.

"No sooner had Constantine renounced the religion of his ancestors than magnificent temples were everywhere erected, adorned with pictures and images, and both in external and internal form very similar to the temples of the gods. True religion copied after superstition."

Section 4 -

"The prayers fell off greatly from the ancient simplicity and majesty, a considerable degree of vain inflation being admitted into them. The public discourses, among the Greeks especially, were formed according to the rules for civil eloquence, and were better adapted to call forth the admiration of the rude multitude who love display, than to amend the heart.

"And that no folly or senseless custom might be omitted in their public assemblies, the people were allowed to applaud their orators, as had been practiced in forums and theatres; nay, were bidden to clap besides.

"Who would suppose that men who were appointed to show to others the emptiness of all human things would become so senseless?"

Is it reasonable to expect any sound fruit from such a rotten tree?

The *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 9th edition, vol. 16, page 774, article "Montanism," says -

"From the middle of the second century a change began to take place in the outward circumstances of Christianity. Should the church take the decisive step into the world? Or

ought she, on the other hand to remain as she had been at first, a society of religious devotees, separated and shut out from the world by a rigorous discipline?

"It was natural that warning voices should then be raised in the church against secular tendencies, that the well-known counsels about the imitations of Christ should be held up in their literal strictness before worldly Christians, that demands should be made for a restoration of the old discipline and severity, and for a return to apostolic simplicity and purity.

"The church as a whole, however, decided otherwise. She marched through the open door into the Roman state. With the aid of its philosophy she created her new Christian theology."

The cornerstone of this "new Christian theology', based on pagan philosophy, is the doctrine of three Gods, three Persons in the "Godhead."

How this doctrine of the Trinity was developed during this period is frankly explained by a trinitarian writer in the Encyclopedia Britannica, 9th edition, Volume 23, page 240, article "Theism" -

"The propositions constitutive of the dogma of the Trinity - the propositions in the symbols of Nice, Constantinople and Toledo relative to the immanent distinctions and relations in the Godhead - were not drawn directly from the New Testament, and could not be expressed in New Testament terms. They were the products of reason speculating on a revelation to faith.

"They were only formed through centuries of effort, only elaborated by the aid of the conceptions and formulated in the terms of Greek and Roman metaphysics.

"The evolution of the doctrine of the Trinity was far the most important fact in the doctrinal history of the church during the first five centuries of its post- apostolic existence."

Surely the ignorance and audacity of this, from a scriptural point of view, takes our breath away! How terribly true and fitting are the words of Jude -

"It was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."

And Paul said -

"I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

And to the Corinthians -

"Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world, for after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:20).

Poor Jude! Poor Paul! What back numbers they were! Of course they could not understand that there were three Gods. They only had the inspiration of God - they completely lacked that essential aid-Greek and Roman metaphysics, without which the doctrine of three Gods could not be formulated.

The "Greek and Roman metaphysics" from which the doctrine of the Trinity was adopted, are referred to by Gibbon in his "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" Chapter 21, paragraph 6 -

"The genius of Plato, informed by his own meditation or by the traditional knowledge of the priests of Egypt, had ventured to explore the mysterious nature of the Deity.

"When he had elevated his mind to the sublime contemplation of the first self-existent, necessary cause of the universe, the Athenian sage was incapable of conceiving how the simple unity of his essence could admit the infinite variety of distinct and successive ideas

which compose the model of the intellectual world; how a Being purely incorporeal could execute that perfect model, and mould with a plastic hand the rude and independent chaos.

"The vain hope of extricating himself from these difficulties, which must ever oppress the feeble powers of the human mind, might induce Plato to consider the divine nature under the threefold modification-of the first cause, the reason or Logos, and the soul or spirit of the universe. His poetic imagination sometimes fixed and animated these metaphysical abstractions; the three archial or original principles were represented in the Platonic system as three Gods, united with each other by a mysterious and ineffable generation."

It is clear from this, as the trinitarian writer said in the Encyclopedia Britannica, that Christianity had to go to Greek metaphysics (and this term always means Plato, the center of the system) to formulate its doctrine of the Trinity. Surely we are compelled to wonder what Christianity could possibly have done without the help of the indispensable heathen philosopher Plato!

Mosheim (an esteemed, orthodox Lutheran trinitarian) describes the long civil war that attended the development of the doctrine, and its enforcement by civil power, finally ending in trinitarian triumph through the stern and energetic measures of the Emperor Theodosius (Cent. 4, Chap. 5, sec. 14) -

"After the death of Constantine the Great 337 AD) one of his sons, Constantius, the emperor of the East was very partial to the Arian cause, but Constantine and Constans (two other sons) supported, in the western parts where they governed, the decisions of the Nicene council.

"Constantius, being devoted to the Arians, involved the friends of the Nicene council in numerous evils and calamities. The Nicene (trinitarian) party made no hesitation to return the same treatment.

"Julian (the next emperor) had no partialities for either. Jovian espoused the orthodox sentiments. Valentinian adhered to the decisions at Nice, and therefore in the West the Arian sect - a few churches excepted - was wholly extirpated.

"Valens, on the contrary, took sides with the Arians, and hence in the East many calamities befell the orthodox. Gratian restored peace to the orthodox.

"After him, Theodosius the Great, by depriving the Arians of all their churches, caused the decisions of the Nicene council to triumph everywhere, and none could any longer publicly profess Arian doctrines."

This finely settled the question, for all time, as to whether there are three Gods, or one God. The Encyclopedia Britannica' 9th edition, vol. 23, page 259, article "Theodosius," records -

"It was not, however, till his illness at Thessalonica that the emperor received baptism at the hands of Bishop Ascholius, whereupon, says the historian Sozomen, he issued a decree (February, 380) in favor of the faith of St. Peter and Pope Damasus of Rome.

"This was to be the true catholic faith; the adherents of other creeds were to be reckoned as heretics and punished.

"Other edicts forbade the unorthodox to hold assemblies in the towns and enjoined the surrender of all churches to the catholic bishops."

Gibbon records, chap. 27 -

"Theodosius was the first of the emperors baptized into the true faith of the Trinity. As the emperor ascended from the holy font, he dictated a solemn edict:

"Let us believe the sole deity of the Father, the Son and - the Holy Ghost, under an equal majesty and a pious Trinity.

"We authorize the followers of this doctrine to assume the title of Catholic Christians; and as we judge that all others are extravagant madmen, we brand them with the infamous name of Heretics, and declare that their conventicles shall no longer usurp the respectable appellation of churches.

"Besides the condemnation of Divine Justice, they must expect to suffer the severe penalties, which our authority, guided by heavenly wisdom, shall think proper to inflict upon them!

"The emperor convened a synod of 150 bishops who proceeded to complete the theological system which had been established in the council of Nice.

"A final and unanimous sentence was pronounced to ratify the equal Deity of the Holy Ghost.

"Their knowledge of religious truth may have been preserved by tradition, or it may have been communicated by inspiration, but the sober evidence of history will not allow much weight to the personal authority of the Fathers of Constantinople (this synod).

"Many of the same prelates who now applauded the orthodox piety of Theodosius had repeatedly changed, with prudent flexibility, their creeds and opinions, and in the various revolutions of the church and state, the religion of their sovereign was the rule of their obsequious faith.

"In the space of 15 years Theodosius promulgated at least 15 severe edicts against the heretics, more especially against those who rejected the doctrine of the Trinity.

"The rigorous prohibition of conventicles was carefully extended to every possible circumstances in which the heretics could assemble with the intention of worshipping God and Christ according to the dictates of their conscience.

"The sectaries were gradually disqualified for the possession of honorable or lucrative employments..."