



When Christ Became God by Rodney Bowen

If there's one thing that Christians today are not short of, it's a church to go to. There are literally thousands of different churches or religious denominations open and available to today's Christians. Among all of these churches there is a wide spectrum of differing views and diverging practices that makes each church unique in its own right. However, there is one founding principle, a common thread that unites the majority of these various sections of Christianity, and that is their concept of God.

Whether the believer is a Roman Catholic, an Eastern Orthodox Christian, a Presbyterian Anglican or Methodist, virtually all share the view that God is a trinity composed of three persons - God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. And they believe that the Son, Jesus Christ assumed human form and came down from heaven to earth for the salvation of the human race.

The doctrine of the Trinity is largely considered to be the single most important belief for the Christian Church. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church (their Statement of Faith commissioned by the late Pope John Paul II) it states that "The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life...It is the most fundamental and essential teaching in the 'hierarchy of the truths of faith'" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994, p. 62).

Mainstream Christian churches believe that the belief in the trinity is so fundamental to their understanding of Christianity, that they use it as the gauge to measure whether someone is really a Christian. Those Christians and churches who don't subscribe to the doctrine of the trinity aren't considered Christians at all. And this is the position that groups such as the Mormons, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Christian Scientists and myself as Christadelphian are in today.

However, there is increasing agreement among religious historians, commentators, and church theologians, many of whom themselves believe in the Trinity, that the belief in a triune God is not taught in the Bible but was introduced into the early church during the first four centuries after Christ.

And this is exactly the proposition I want to put to you today, that:

- That the belief that Jesus and God are the same equal and eternal being (part of the Trinity) has no basis in the Bible
- And that this idea developed during the first four centuries following the ministry of Christ

And the purpose of this presentation is to show you some of the evidence I use to make such a claim. And to do this:

1. First we're going to see what modern Catholic and Protestant churches believe about God and Jesus Christ's relationship
2. Compare this with what the Bible teaches
3. Then we're going to look at how the idea of the Trinity became part of accepted Church belief

So that there is no confusion about my theological stance, I am a Christadelphian; that is a Christian who believes that Jesus is God's Son and is both distinct and inferior to Him. And I believe the Bible, which is God's inspired message, tells us just this. I believe this is a true representation of what both Jesus and the early apostles taught. And I hope this will become clearer for you as we move through this presentation.

The Catholic and Protestant understanding of the Trinity

So what do Modern mainstream churches believe about the Trinity? And I should say here that there is going to be a whole range of beliefs among individual members of church, what I am interested in is what the basic Church belief is and what belief they are founded on.

- Protestant position

Starting with Protestant churches such as Anglican, Presbyterian, Apostolic, Elim, Open Brethren, Baptist, Methodist etc... Murray Darrock (1984) a Protestant member of an open brethren Assembly wrote the following about the roots of the Protestant churches:

"To consciously be a Christian as Protestants have traditionally understood this term involves a positive attitude towards the doctrine of the Church concerning the Trinitarian nature of the Godhead and the nature of the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Most protestant denominations in New Zealand have written doctrinal statements and in all cases these...are emphasized in these written statements...This indicates that they understand the Bible within the basic Christian and Catholic heritage of doctrinal understanding..." (Darrock, 1984 p. 2).

By way of summary he goes on to describe protestant denominations as those that:

1. See themselves as being part of the Protestant heritage [i.e. their roots are in the Protestant Church]

2. See the Protestant heritage as being derived from the Catholic heritage through the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century
3. Share with the Roman Catholic Church (and the Eastern Orthodox Churches) a basic Christian doctrinal heritage as typified in the Christian doctrines of the Trinitarian nature of the Godhead and the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ... (Darrock, 1984, p.3).

So from this we can see the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity to Protestant Churches, and also that the Protestant understanding of the Trinity is shared with and actually derives directly from the Roman Catholic Church.

- Catholic understanding

What then is the Catholic position on the Trinity? The Catechism of the Catholic Church uses the stock standard Athanasian Creed which says:

"Now this is the Catholic faith: We worship one God in the Trinity and the Trinity in unity, without either confusing the persons or dividing the substance; for the person of the Father is one, the Son's is another, the Holy Spirit's another; but the Godhead of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty coeternal" Athanasian Creed (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994, p. 70).

In summary, the doctrine of the Trinity as understood by both Protestant churches and the Catholic Church teaches very simply that:

- The Father and Jesus are two parts of the same God, (the Holy Spirit being the other part that were not dealing with today)
- They are equal
- And they are co-eternal - they both have always existed

Basic Catholic understanding, and therefore also what Protestant churches believe.

What does the Bible teach?

First we should point out that the Bible never explicitly mentions the Trinity, and that in itself should make any Trinitarian question the basis of their beliefs. However, they would reply that the Trinity although never mentioned is implied in many places.

Old Testament

Well were not going to look at verses from the Old Testament, if we did we'd be here for hours, suffice to say that it's widely recognised that the Jews in Old Testament times believed in one God - they were monotheistic; and there's no room in monotheism for a triune God. And perhaps the cornerstone of the Jewish faith in the Old Testament is what is called the 'Shama Yisrael,' it became like a mantra to the Jews: "Hear O Israel, the LORD our God is one LORD" (Deut. 6:4).

To show you that I'm not making this up, and that it's not a new idea, L. L. Paine, a Professor of ecclesiastical history wrote at the start of the 20th century:

"The Old Testament is strictly monotheistic. God is a single personal being. The idea that a trinity is to be found there, or even in any way shadowed forth, is an assumption that has long held sway in theology, but is utterly without foundation."

And more recently, The Encyclopaedia of Religion (1987):

"Exegetes and theologians today are in agreement that the Hebrew Bible does not contain a doctrine of the Trinity, even though it was customary in past dogmatic tracts on the Trinity to cite texts like Gen. 1:26 'Let us make humanity in our image, after our likeness.' Although the Hebrew Bible depicts God as the Father of Israel and employs personifications of God such as Word, Spirit, Wisdom, and Presence, it would go beyond the intention and the spirit of the Old Testament to correlate these notions with later Trinitarian doctrine..." (The Encyclopaedia of Religion, 1987).

There is no room in the Old Testament for the Trinity. It tells us about one God, and that's it.

New Testament

So what about the New Testament? Because the New Testament records the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, it's the best place for us to look at what the Bible teaches regarding the relationship between Jesus and God. So how does Jesus talk about his relationship with his Father? Did Jesus teach that he was God or part of a three-part God? Or did he teach that he was the Son of God who was under his Father's authority. And as I hope you will see shortly, the consistent claim of Jesus is that he was not equal to God. Jesus' comments about himself

First we're going to look at the Gospel of John which is interestingly enough is used so often by Trinitarians to justify their beliefs.

- John 14:28 "If you loved me, you would rejoice because I said, 'I am going to the Father,' for My Father is greater than I."
- John 10:29 "My Father...is greater than all"

These statements of Christ effectively demolish any Trinitarian idea of equality between Jesus Christ and God. John 14:28 has always been a thorn in the side of Trinitarians, and the way they explain it away is that only during his incarnation (his life on earth as a human) was Jesus temporarily inferior to God. Now for starters this idea contradicts their own Athanasian Creed, and it also falls down when we find out that the Bible teaches that Jesus was still not equal to God after he had ascended to his Father in heaven - after his incarnation. Speaking after Jesus had risen to heaven, Paul the Apostle tells the early church in 1 Cor. 11:3 "...the head of Christ is God"

Early Christian writings as we will see shortly confirm that the belief that Jesus was not equal to God continued on after Christ and the Apostles for a number of centuries before being corrupted...Throughout his conversations with the Jews, Jesus went to great lengths to stress that he was not acting on his own authority. This in itself implies that Jesus didn't have an equal relationship with his Father. And if Jesus was God - part of the three part Trinity, that's what you would expect. Instead Jesus shows us that he was an obedient son who was subject to the greater position and will of his Father.

- John 5:19, 30 "Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord...I can do nothing on my own authority. As I hear, I judge; and my judgement is righteous, because I do not seek my own will but the will of the Father who sent me..."
- John 7:16, 28 "Jesus answered them and said, "My doctrine is not mine, but His [God's] who sent me....I have not come of my own accord" What could be clearer? How could Jesus say that his doctrine wasn't his but God's who sent him, when he was himself part of that God. It wouldn't make sense.
- John 8:28 "I do nothing on my own authority, but speak thus as the Father taught me"
- John 13:16 "Most assuredly, I [Jesus] say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him."

These verses speak for themselves really. Jesus says that:

- He is taught by God
- He shows others his Fathers teaching,
- He doesn't act on his own authority, but his Fathers
- He says his Father is greater than he is

There isn't any hint here of an equal relationship between Jesus and God. Jesus is obviously the exalted Son of God, but he never claims to be of equal rank, equal power, equal authority as God. He clearly makes the distinction between him and his Father.

As well as the gospel of John, the other Gospels also have evidence from Christ's own lips that he never claimed to be equal with God. For example, when the mother of James and John asked that her sons be granted places of honour to sit on either side of Jesus in his kingdom, Christ's reply shows that he recognised God's higher authority (Matthew 20:23) "...To sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father."

On another occasion, referring to the timing of the second coming and the future kingdom, Jesus says "But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." Mark 13:32

If Jesus was equal and always existed with God, then how could this be possible? I find it impossible to conceive that one part of the all-knowing trinity concealed information from the other. Another example is when a ruler addressed Jesus as "good teacher." Jesus immediately replied: "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone." Luke 18:19

What can this mean but that God is superior to His Son. On other occasions Jesus asked his disciples who they thought he was, "Who do men say that I...am? You are the Christ, the Son of the living God..." Matthew 16:13-16 (Mark 8:29)

And in answering Jesus never claims to be God or part of a Triune God. The only claim he makes is that he is Christ - the Son of God, the saviour. And as the final quote we'll consider in this section, in Mark 14:36 when Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane before his crucifixion we see the possibility of a conflict of will

between Jesus and God. Jesus in effect asks if there is any way of achieving human salvation other than by the cruel death he had to face, "Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt." Mark 14:36

Jesus recognised the fact that there were things possible for God that he couldn't do himself, and so he asked God to change the way things had to be. But it wasn't to be. God had decided it had to be done with His Sons death, and Jesus submitted to the superior will of his Father. Now these aren't the words and wishes of an equal part of the divine Trinity.

Now there are more places we could go to, that show Jesus emphasising the superiority of his Father, but I think that the few we have considered, most coming straight from the mouth of Jesus himself, should give us enough reason to question the Biblical basis of the doctrine of the Trinity.

In view of these repeated and consistent statements and inferences of the subordinate position of Jesus in the Bible, it's no wonder that many reputable Trinitarians admit that their doctrine of God cannot be found in the Bible. The late Dr. W.R. Mathews, Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral wrote:

"It must be admitted by everyone who has the rudiments of an historical sense that the doctrine of the Trinity, as a doctrine, formed no part of the original message. St Paul knew it not, and would have been unable to understand the meaning of the terms used in the theological formula on which the Church ultimately agreed" (Mathews, 1940, *God in Christian Thought and Experience*, p.180, as cited in Broughton and Southgate, 1995).

And more recently Anthony and Richard Hanson who both believe in the Trinity wrote: "In order to understand the doctrine of the Trinity it is necessary to understand that the doctrine is a development, and why it developed...It is a waste of time to attempt to read Trinitarian doctrine directly off the pages of the New Testament" (A and R Hanson, 1980, *Reasonable Belief, A survey of the Christian Faith*, p. 171)

Problems Predicted

It is interesting that a prediction repeated by both Christ and the apostles was that soon after their death, ambitious men from within the early Christian church would corrupt the original teaching of Christianity. Paul gives the warning found in Acts 20:28-30 to the church at Ephesus:

"Take heed to yourselves, and to all the flock...I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them."

This warning was reiterated by Peter who said that the new Christian church would not escape the activities of false teachers. Speaking about the false prophets that had already caused problems for the Jews, Peter says in 2 Peter 2:1 "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies."

At the end of the first century, no more than 70 years after the death of Christ, the Apostle John referred to some individuals who had already corrupted at least one aspect of the original teaching about Jesus. He says in 2 John 7 "For many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge the coming Jesus Christ in the flesh: such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist."

Interestingly enough, it was out of this early corruption of how Jesus came (not in the flesh), that the idea of the Trinity developed. So at the end of the first century the early Christian church had no concept of a trinity. They saw Jesus the saviour as the Son of God, but not God himself. And yet when the church was still only in its infancy, Christians were warned that things were going to change. Christianity would soon be challenged by the beliefs and culture of those it so rapidly converted. And that's very unfortunate, but understandable.

The Trinity enters the church

So I guess the question arises, if the idea of the Trinity isn't taught in the Bible, what was it that led to the development of this doctrine in the early church?

The Greek Influence

After the almost universal spread of Greek culture and learning following the conquest of Alexander the Great, the teaching of the Greek philosophers began to be incorporated into both Jewish and consequently Christian thought.

The well-known Greek philosopher Plato introduced the idea of there being three components of the supreme deity or God. And in the first century B.C. Plato's followers further defined this relationship between Plato's three components of God. They said that the supreme Godhead was the originator of the other two components, who preceded or 'emanated' from him. Later these became known as the Protos Theos ('First God' or the One), Nous (second God, or the Mind) and Psyche (the World Soul). And don't worry if you don't understand all this, the important thing to note is that Greek philosophy before Christ had even been born, already had the idea that God was composed of three parts.

And so you can see just what's going to happen. This idea proved to be of great significance to the development of the doctrine of the Trinity.

In the book *A Statement of Reasons*, Andrews Norton who lived in the early 19th century says of the Trinity: "We can trace the history of this doctrine, and discover its source, not in the Christian revelation, but in...Platonic philosophy...The Trinity is not a doctrine of Christ and his Apostles, but a fiction of the school of the later Platonists." (Norton, A. (1859). *A Statement of Reasons for Not Believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians, Concerning the Nature of God and the Person of Christ*, 3rd ed., Boston, MA: American Unitarian Association).

As Christianity spread, and thousands became Christians, more and more people who had been socialised in both Latin and Greek culture were converting. Many of these people had been educated in the well-known Greek and Latin schools of philosophy, and some became leading writers and teachers in the early church. And as all of these became Christian, inevitably, much of what they previously believed was merged with the original Christian message.

Early Christian Writings

So let's take a look at some of the early church writings and see when the idea of the Trinity began to enter the Church. And there is a whole host of early church writings, but we're only going to mention a few from each century up till the time of Constantine 4th C.

- First century

The 1st century saw the birth and life of Christ, and the spread of the Christian message into the Roman world. And it was during this century that the New Testament was written, so we have already covered first century writings in the form of the New Testament. We saw that Jesus said himself that he is the Son of God distinct from his Father. And in the 2nd Letter of the Apostle John, written near the end of the first century, we saw that already there were people corrupting the truth, saying that when Jesus was on earth he didn't share the same flesh and blood as ourselves:

- John 5:19, 30 "Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord...I can do nothing on my own authority. As I hear, I judge; and my judgement is righteous, because I do not seek my own will but the will of the Father who sent me..." (Jesus Christ, ~30AD)
- 2 John 7 "For many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge the coming Jesus Christ in the flesh: such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist." (Apostle John, ~80-90AD)

So the truth had been stated, but there were going to be problems ahead.

- Second century

Clement of Rome lived in the immediate post-apostolic period, at the turn of the 1st century. He wrote a letter from Rome to the troubled Corinthian community that has been dated between around 90-110 A.D. and he says in his conclusion: "Finally, may the all-seeing God and Master of spirits and Lord of all flesh, who chose the Lord Jesus Christ, and us through him for his own people, give to every soul...faith, fear, peace...so that they may be well pleasing to his name through our high priest and defender Jesus Christ, through whom unto him [God] be glory and majesty, might and honour, both now and forever and ever. Amen" (1 Clement 64). It's really hard to understand these quotes like this because it's only a very short extract, and you don't have the context, but we're only wanting to emphasise the important points. So to Clement God was supreme. He says, "God chose Jesus," and it is only God who receives praise "through" Jesus. So in Clement's letter to the Corinthians at the turn of the 1st century there is no hint that Jesus was held to be equal to God or worshiped as God.

Ignatius of Antioch

Ignatius the bishop of Antioch was put to death in the Coliseum at Rome sometime between the year 110-117 A.D. And he wrote many epistles/letters to various churches before his death. And in all of these letters he keeps the distinction between God and Jesus. Just a couple of examples; speaking about reverencing bishops, he says: "...Yield place to him as to...God...the Father of Jesus Christ, even to Him who is Bishop of all men" (Magnesians 3:2) And later in his letter he tells his readers to: "...Submit yourselves to the bishop and to one another, as Jesus Christ [was subject] to the Father after the flesh" (Magnesians 13:2, translated by J. H. Srawley) In all his writings there is no hint of an equal relationship between God and Jesus.

Justin Martyr

However, during about the middle of the 2nd century (~150 A.D.) Justin Martyr, a Greek by birth and a Platonist by education and religion, embraced Christianity. And although Christianity had already begun to change, Justin played an important role in the corruption of the original Christian message. He threw himself into the questions of the day, readily adapting the ideas he had learnt from Greek philosophy and incorporating them with his Christian beliefs. "The Father of the universe has a Son, who also being the first begotten Word of God, is even God." (Justin Martyr, First Apology, ch 63) "God speaks in the creation of man with the very same design, in the following words: 'Let us make man after our image and likeness.'...we...indisputably learn that [God] conversed with someone numerically distinct from himself and also a rational being [Jesus]...But this offspring who was truly brought forth from the Father, was with the Father before all the creatures, and the Father communed with him" (Dialogue with Trypho the Jew 62).

While Justin Martyr's beliefs represent a significant shift from original Christian beliefs, he can't justly be described as a Trinitarian. He believed that Jesus wasn't equal to God, and speaks of his distinctness from God, calling him "the next in rank" and "next after God." Yet Justin Martyr seems to have been one of the first to have taught the pre-existence of Christ, and this became incorporated into the Trinitarian belief that God and Jesus were co-eternal, or that they always existed. Whereas I believe the Bible teaches that Jesus was the begotten Son of God, who was always in God's plan, but only born 2000 years ago.

- Third Century

Towards the end of the 2nd C. a Christian theological school was established in Alexandria, Egypt, a city famed for its philosophers who were said to even rival Athens and Rome's. The Encyclopaedia Britannica states that in this school Christian ideas were handled "in a free and speculative fashion and worked out with the help of Greek philosophy."

Clement of Alexandria

In the early days of the 3rd century the school was presided over by Clement of Alexandria, a man who well known to be educated in Greek culture and philosophy, and in Christian thought and ethics. And in his writings it's quite easy to see that his beliefs are heavily influenced by Greek philosophy, especially Plato and Plato's follower's writings (Neo-platonism). Some of his writings:

"When [John] says: 'What was from the beginning' [1 John 1:1], he touches upon the generation without beginning of the Son, who is co-equal with the Father...the Son, being one with the Father in regard to equality of substance, is eternal and uncreated." (Fragment in Eusebius History, Bk 6 Ch 14; Jurgens, p. 188)

"...He alone is both God and man..." (Exhortation to the Greeks 1:7:1).

And just to show you how much Clement borrowed from the Greek philosophy, I have a couple more quotes from his writings:

"Philosophy...educated the Greek world as the law did the Hebrews to bring them to Christ. Philosophy therefore is a preparation making ready the way for him who is being perfected in Christ." (Stromateis 6:6).

So Clement saw philosophy as an integral part of "being perfected in Christ" or coming to know him...Another quote: If you remember the three aspects of God that Plato described that we mentioned before; 'the One, the Mind, and the World Soul', well Clement refers to this idea and links it with the idea of the Trinity in his writings:

"For myself, I cannot understand the meaning of this text [Plato's writings] except as referring to the Holy Trinity: for the third is the Holy Spirit, and the Son is the second, by whom 'all things were made' according to the will of the Father." (Stromata, Book V, Ch. 14).

So William Rusch comments:

"Clement presents in a Platonic framework an image of the Trinity which he linked with the Christian triad of Father, Son and Holy Spirit...Understandably, Clement's trinity although Christian in character, has a strong resemblance to the triad of Neo-platonism, the One, Mind and World Soul." (Rusch, 1980, The Trinitarian Controversy, p.12).

So basically what he's saying is that Clement meshed Plato's philosophy that there were three parts to God, with Christianity and said Plato's three different parts were actually the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. So it shows us the importance some of these early Church Fathers placed on philosophy. Clement was using Greek philosophy to interpret the Bible instead of the other way round.

So we can see how Clements beliefs represent a significant shift from the original 1st century Christian teaching. His background in Greek philosophy clearly influenced his beliefs. Yet it's interesting that later in the 4th century when the concept of the Trinity was fully developed by what had by that time become the Roman Catholic Church, Clements views were regarded as heresy, because they weren't Trinitarian enough.

Tertullian

Tertullian lived about the same time as Clement but westward along the North African coast at Carthage. He seems to be the first to coin the expression trinitas to describe the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

"Keep always in mind the rule of faith which I profess and by which I bear witness that the Father and the Son and the Spirit are inseparable from each other, and then you will understand what is meant by it. Observe, now, that I say the Father is other [distinct], and the Son is other, and the Spirit is other. ...I say this, however, out of necessity, since they contend that the Father and the Son and the Spirit are the selfsame person" (Against Praxeas 9:1 ~216A.D.).

"All the Scriptures give clear proof of the Trinity, and it is from these that our principle is deduced...the distinction of the Trinity is quite clearly displayed" (Against Praxeas, 11).

Origen an influential Christian who lived at the same time as Tertullian quotes him as saying:

"Ignorant people were alarmed at the names of the Trinity, and accuse us [the philosophical Christians] of wishing to teach three Gods while they would be worshipers of one God." (as cited in Lamson, p. 224).

So in many ways Tertullian was before his time. His beliefs represent a more evolved form of what came to be the Trinity. Yet the Church Fathers (the philosophical Christians) had interweaved Greek philosophy with Christian beliefs and had changed original Christian teaching so much, that everyday Christians rejected his ideas - they still believed in or worshipped one God.

- Fourth Century

As you could well understand from the little we have seen, the first three centuries A.D. saw a period of intense examination and speculation concerning the relationship of God and Jesus. So when we come to the 4th century AD, we're coming to the crunch point for the doctrine of the Trinity. Within the church there is a range of different understandings on the subject.

1. Many still believe that Jesus was the Son of God, who was not equal to God and who had a beginning (was created) when he was born by Mary.
2. Others had come to believe that Jesus was God, and that they were equal and God and Jesus had both existed forever.

And these were major theological differences. This was a volatile situation that was only going to get worse. It was in the 4th century. that Constantine, the Roman Emperor adopted Christianity as the state religion. The Empire became Christian and was called The Roman Catholic (universal) Church.

One of Constantine's motives in doing this was to make his Empire more stable. Over the first 3 centuries Christians had been killed and persecuted because Christianity wasn't the Empires state religion, the problem the Emperors had was that no matter how much they persecuted and killed the Christians, the Christian church only got bigger. So Constantine decided to adopt Christianity as the state religion and solve all his problems in one. What he didn't realise was that within the Christian community, there were all of the problems and differences of understanding that we have just been talking about and because these things were matters of faith, people couldn't just agree to disagree. So Constantine had a bigger problem on his hands.

And there are so many books that you can read on this controversy, so if you're interested I can recommend you a couple after, but now we'll just summaries what happened.

The dispute over Jesus and Gods relationship came to a head between two men, Arius and Athanasius.

- Arius
 - Jesus was human, yet somehow more than human but less than God
 - Arians believed that Jesus was separate and not equal to God
- Athanasius
 - Jesus was both fully human and fully divine

- Jesus was not separate from the Father, they were both equal and co-eternal parts of God.

Hearing of the growing controversy, in 325AD, Constantine decided to convene a council at his summer residence in Nicaea to deal with this issue. And they came up with what is known as the Nicene Creed.

But it wasn't that simple. Over the next 50 years Constantine swapped many times between supporting Arius and supporting Athanasius. Arius was excommunicated and exiled 4 times, and Athanasius and excommunicated and exiled 5 times. And it wasn't until Constantine's successor Theodosius became Emperor who favoured Athanasius' views, and banned Arian's beliefs that the Trinity became accepted Church Teaching. Anyone who didn't agree was excommunicated and in some cases killed. So the Trinity largely as we know it today became the official doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church.

And at the council of Constantinople in 381AD the Bishops revised the Nicene Creed and came up with what really is the founding statement on the Trinity: "We 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 the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made..." (Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, 2nd Ecumenical Council, 381AD; adapted from The Creed of Nicaea as approved by the Nicene Council, 325AD)

So it was four centuries after Jesus Christ lived on this earth, that the Catholic Church adopted the idea of the Trinity, and by all intents and purposes, Jesus became God.

And as we saw at the beginning of this presentation, today the Catholic Church and all the Protestant Churches that come from the Catholic Church hold the Trinity as the central doctrine of their faith: "The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life...It is the most fundamental and essential teaching in the 'hierarchy of the truths of faith'" (Catechism of the C.C., 1994, p. 62).

Summary

So as I hope you can see, the idea of the Trinity didn't originate in the Bible. It was a belief that developed and was slowly incorporated into the Christian Church a long time after both Christ and the apostles lived. The Trinity is an amalgamation of some Bible passages and principles (taken out of context), and the beliefs of early church fathers that were heavily influenced by Greek philosophy and who mesh the two together - their philosophy with the Bible, and the result was the Trinity: a belief that is never found in the pages of the Bible.

The point I am really trying to push tonight is that the Bible is all we need; God has put everything we need in it, so that we can know Him, know His Son, and His purpose with us - God's promise of eternal life.

But the Catholic Church believes differently. In the introduction to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the late Pope John Paul II wrote:

"A catechism should faithfully and systematically present the teaching of Sacred Scripture, the living Tradition in the Church and the authentic Magisterium, as well as the spiritual heritage of the Fathers, Doctors, and saints of the Church, to allow for a better knowledge of the Christian mystery and for enlivening the faith of the People of God. It should take into account the doctrinal statements which down the centuries the Holy Spirit has intimated to his Church. It should also help to illumine with the light of faith the new situations and problems which had not yet emerged in the past." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994, p. 4).

Pope John Paul is saying that it's not just the Bible that forms foundation of the Catholic faith, all of those things he mentioned help form the understanding and beliefs of the Catholic Faith. The 'Magisterium' is a term that refers to the teaching and authority of the Pope and his Bishops. According to Catholic doctrine, only the Magisterium is able to teach or interpret the truths of the Faith infallibly.

And you might be thinking, well that's what Catholics believe, but I'm not a Catholic. But we've already seen that Protestants believe the same. Darrock (1984) who goes to a New Zealand protestant church described protestant churches as those that:

1. See themselves as being part of the Protestant heritage [i.e. their roots are in the Protestant Church]
2. See the Protestant heritage as being derived from the Catholic heritage through the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century
3. "Share with the Roman Catholic Church (and the Eastern Orthodox Churches) a basic Christian doctrinal heritage as typified in the Christian doctrines of the Trinitarian nature of the Godhead and the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ..." (Darrock, 1984, p.3).

It doesn't matter if you go to the Elim church, if your Apostolic, Presbyterian, Anglican, Methodist, Open Brethren, Sally Army, it doesn't matter - because your history, your churches heritage comes from the Catholic Church. Which

means that your understanding of Jesus and God's relationship is influenced not only by your understanding of the Bible, but by the early church fathers, by the Popes, Doctors, and Saints of the Catholic Church, and by what the Popes have claimed is the Holy Spirit speaking to them down through the centuries.

Now that's fine if they want to believe that, but if we want to be followers of Christ (Christians) - and not a follower of a Church, or a Pope or Fathers Doctors and Saints of the Church, but a follower of Christ - a Christian, then have a look at what Jesus Christ says and what he says alone. And as we have seen, the Bible is clear in what it teaches about Jesus and Gods relationship - and it doesn't teach the Trinity.

To show you the importance of knowing who God and Jesus Christ are, and God's purpose with us, listen to what Jesus tells us in John 17:3: "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." (Jesus, in Jn. 17:3)

God's promise is eternal life if we truly know who God is, who His son Jesus Christ is, and what His purpose is, he will give us eternal life.

And that's the great tragedy. The Trinity has clouded so many minds; truly knowing God and Jesus is seen as something that is too hard because the Trinity is a 'great mystery' - it's not something we can understand. But God wants us to know Him and His Son. That's the great Christian privilege; that can be your privilege.

So my challenge for you is too get back to the Bible. Get to know your creator, get to know your saviour, and get to know the wonderful future God has promised you. And we the Christadelphians would love to help you as you make this journey.