

Three Cappadocians

The following is a statement of fact from history that cannot be refuted. **In the year 350 A.D., there was no Christian doctrine of the Trinity as later taught, anywhere on this planet!** This was over 250 years after the death of the last Apostle, therefore, the doctrine cannot be *biblical!*

The Nicean Council, convened by Emperor Constantine in **325 A.D.**, did not declare belief in a Trinity. The bishops decided that **Jesus is God** just as the **Father is God**, but the creed they adopted did not mention the deity of the Holy Spirit. It simply stated, “*We believe...in the Holy Spirit.*” Trinitarian professors Roger Olson and Christopher Hall say in their book, *The Trinity*, “*the Spirit had appeared almost as a footnote to the Creed of Nicea...*” (p. 40).

Enter Three Cappadocians

Following Nicea, the fires of this Godhead quarrel burned brightly for over fifty years. From 351 to 360, Emperor Constantius (son of Constantine) convened no fewer than nine councils of bishops for the sole purpose of trying to settle it, to no avail.

Then along came three theologians from the province of Cappadocia in Asia Minor and **figured it out**, *there is one God who exists as three Persons*. They were Basil “*the Great*” of Caesarea (**330-379 A.D.**), Basil’s younger brother Gregory, of Nyssa (**335-394 A.D.**), and their friend, Gregory of Nazianzus (**330-390 A.D.**). Together, they comprised what has come to be known as “*the three Cappadocians.*”

In **381 A.D.** the Roman emperor Theodosius called the Council of Constantinople which was presided over by **Gregory of Nazianzus**. After much bitter wrangling the views of the three Cappadocians won out, and this council of 186 bishops adopted the “*Creed of Constantinople.*” It states in part:

*“We believe in the **Holy Spirit**, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son **he is worshiped and glorified**”* (*Encyclopedia Americana; Vol. 20; p. 310*).

The following quotes from authoritative sources prove my statement at the beginning of this article.

Trinitarian scholar Charles C. Ryrie:

“In the second half of the fourth century, three theologians from the province of Cappadocia in eastern Asia Minor gave definitive shape to the doctrine of the Trinity...”
(*Basic Theology*; p. 65).

Trinitarian Baptist professor Millard J. Erickson:

“What Athanasius did was to extend his teaching about the Word to the Spirit, so that God exists eternally as a Triad sharing one identical and indivisible substance. The Cappadocians - Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa - developed the doctrine of the Spirit, and thus of the Trinity, further” (*God In Three Persons*; p. 90).

Harper-Collins Encyclopedia of Catholicism:

“Trinitarian doctrine as such emerged in the fourth century, due largely to the efforts of Athanasius and the Cappadocians... . The doctrine of the Trinity formulated in the late fourth century thus affirms that the one God exists as three Persons” (p. 1271).

Collier's Encyclopedia:

“Of the many who wrote on theology...Basil of Caesarea (fourth century), who, with his brother, Gregory of Nyssa, and their friend, Gregory of Nazianzus, fixed the orthodox formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity” (Vol. 9; p. 41-42).

Encyclopedia Britannica:

“The Greek philosophical theology that developed during the Trinitarian controversies over the relationships among the persons of the Godhead, which were settled at the ecumenical councils of Nicea (325) and Constantinople (381), owed a great deal to Origen on both sides, orthodox and heretical. Its most important representatives on the orthodox side were the three Christian Platonist [i.e. followers of Plato] theologians of Cappadocia, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Basil's brother Gregory of Nyssa” (*Macropaedia*; Vol. 25; p. 903).

Nineteenth century historian Adolph Harnack:

“The Cappadocians were still relatively independent theologians, worthy disciples and

admirers of Origen, using new forms to make the faith of Athanasius intelligible to contemporary thought, and thus establishing them, though with modifications” (History of Dogma; Vol. 3; p. 151). “Gregory (of Nyssa) was able to demonstrate the application of the incarnation more definitely than Athanasius could... . But he does so by the aid of a thoroughly Platonic idea which is only slightly suggested in Athanasius, and is not really covered by Biblical reference” (Vol. 3; p. 297).

Collier’s Encyclopedia:

“During the 4th century...the content of Christian dogma was developed...by the very able men who have come to be known as the Fathers of the Church. Living in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, and writing in Greek, were St. Basil of Caesarea, St. Gregory of Nyssa, and St. Gregory of Nazianzus. These men continued the speculative and Platonist tendencies of Clement and Origen...” (Vol. 15; p. 318).

The Encyclopedia Britannica sums it up well:

“Although Athanasius prepared the ground, constructive agreement on the central doctrine of the Trinity was not reached in his lifetime (297-373 A.D.). The decisive contribution to the Trinitarian argument was made by a remarkable group of philosophically minded theologians from Cappadocia - Basil of Caesarea, his younger brother Gregory of Nyssa, and his lifelong friend Gregory of Nazianzus. So far as Trinitarian dogma is concerned, the Cappadocians succeeded...in formulating a conception of God as three Persons in one essence that eventually proved generally acceptable” (Macropaedia; Vol. 16; p. 319). Note: Athanasius died in 373 A.D., but “agreement on the central doctrine of the Trinity was not reached in his lifetime.” Wow!

The above statement is shocking since the great majority of Christians today believe in the non-biblical doctrine of the Trinity. Again: *“So far as Trinitarian dogma is concerned, the Cappadocians succeeded...in formulating a conception of God as three Persons in one essence that eventually proved generally acceptable” (at Constantinople in 381 A.D.).*

Thus in 381 A.D., for the first time in history, Christianity had a doctrine of the Trinity. The Platonic beliefs of *“the three Cappadocians” had prevailed!*