

# **A simple guide to understanding the trinity doctrine – its theology, its history and its implications**

**By Terry Hill**

**“Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding”...  
“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”**

**Proverbs 23:23, John 8:32**

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\*Unless otherwise stated, all emphasis in this article is supplied.

## Chapter one

### What the trinity doctrine is and what it is not

#### An introduction

There are probably millions of Christians who profess to be trinitarian but I wonder how many have taken the time to understand what the trinity doctrine really teaches? I would humbly suggest 'not too many'.

It also appears that most, because they understand the Scriptures to reveal the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as God, believe also that this is a very good reason for calling themselves trinitarian but this is not necessarily so. The trinity doctrine is far more involved (far more complex). So too are its implications. This is why this author, in this study, has sought to explain this teaching in an easy to understand manner.

First we need to understand what the trinity doctrine is and what it is not.

#### The trinity doctrine – not a scriptural teaching

The first thing to realise is that the trinity doctrine cannot be found in Scripture. This is something freely admitted by those who deem themselves 'worthy scholars' of the Scriptures, What is purported though, by these scholars, is that within the Scriptures there is enough evidence to justify the existence of such a teaching - although those who oppose it (the non-trinitarians) refute this claim. The non-trinitarians say that the trinitarians are going too far – meaning going beyond what God had revealed. This of course is very true. If the trinity doctrine could be found in the Scriptures, the trinitarians would not be going beyond what God has revealed.

We shall now take a look at what can be termed 'trinitarian confessions' – and it may be of a surprise that those who made these 'confessions' believe the trinity doctrine to be a very important teaching.

The first is from a very well known trinitarian – namely the late Edmund J. Fortman. Fortman was a Jesuit teacher of 40 years experience. He is said to have had a tremendous influence amongst other Jesuits. He was a very well respected theologian. In his book *The Triune God* he asks this simple but very important question

*"What does the Old Testament tell us of God?" (Edmund J. Fortman, *The Triune God*, Introduction, page XV, 1972)*

His answer was

*"It tells us there is one God, a wonderful God of life and love and righteousness*

and power and glory and mystery, who is the creator and lord of the whole universe, who is intensely concerned with the tiny people of Israel. It tells us of His Word, Wisdom, Spirit, of the Messiah He will send, of a Son of Man and a Suffering Servant to come.” *(Ibid)*

Fortman admits though (even as an ardent trinitarian)

“But it tells us nothing explicitly or by necessary implication of a Triune God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” *(Ibid)*

Even as a passionate supporter of the trinity doctrine, Fortman freely admits that nowhere in the Old Testament does it even imply that God is a trinity of persons let alone actually say it. He says also that these Scriptures only speak of the “one God” – the Father - who sent His Son to save mankind.

He says exactly the same regarding the New Testament Scriptures. He explains

“If we take the New Testament writers together they tell us there is only one God, the creator and lord of the universe, who is the Father of Jesus. They call Jesus the Son of God, Messiah, Lord, Savior, Word, Wisdom. They assign Him the divine functions of creation, salvation, judgment. Sometimes they call Him God explicitly.” *(Ibid)*

Fortman also said concerning the New Testament writers themselves

“They give us no formal or formulated doctrine of the Trinity, no explicit teaching that in one God there are three co-equal divine persons. But they do give us an elemental trinitarianism, the data from which such a formal doctrine of the Triune God may be formulated.” *(Ibid)*

We can see that Fortman admits that the trinity doctrine itself cannot be found in the Bible – although as do all trinitarians, he does claim that the information is there for such a teaching to be formulated (invented). In chapter 2 of his book, Fortman again says

“There is no formal doctrine of the Trinity in the New Testament writers, if this means an explicit teaching that in one God there are three co-equal divine beings”. *(Ibid, Chapter 2, ‘The New Testament Witness to God’, page 32)*

This is exactly what the trinity doctrine does mean – that in the “one God” there are “three co-equal divine beings”. As Fortman clearly says though, this teaching cannot be found in the New Testament. This is no more than it can be found in the Old Testament. His conclusion was

“The Biblical witness to God, as we have seen, did not contain any formal or

formulated doctrine of the trinity, any explicit teaching that in one God there are three co-equal divine persons. Rather it contained the data from which a doctrine of this kind could be formulated.” (*Ibid*, chapter 2, ‘*The Triune God in the Early Christian Church*’, page 35)

Again this is the admittance that the trinity doctrine itself cannot be found in Scripture – although like every other trinitarian, Fortman says that this teaching is based upon what the Scriptures reveal. He also explained

“And it would take three centuries of gradual assimilation of the Biblical witness to God before the formulation of the dogma of one God in three distinct persons would be achieved.” (*Ibid*)

This just about sums it up. The trinity doctrine cannot be found in the Scriptures. The church formulated it in the 4th century. This was when the church was fast declining into apostasy - which in itself should send out very serious warning signals. By this time (the 4<sup>th</sup> century), Sunday-keeping – instead of seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday) keeping - was already becoming commonplace. One truth after another, by the church, would eventually be replaced with beliefs that were not Scriptural. It was indeed a time of apostasy from the truth.

Concerning the trinity doctrine, Emil Brunner wrote in his book *The Christian Doctrine of God* (note the chapter title – *The Triune God*)

“Certainly, it cannot be denied that not only the word "Trinity", but even the explicit idea of the Trinity is absent from the apostolic witness to the faith.” (*Emil Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of God, Chapter 16, page 205, ‘The Triune God’*)

By “apostolic witness”, Brunner means the teachings of the apostles (that which we can find in the Scriptures). In other words, the apostles did not teach the trinity doctrine therefore this teaching cannot be found in the Scriptures. In brief, it was not part of the apostle's message. He also said on the next page (note that the Greek word *kerygma*, means *preaching, proclamation or announcement*)

“The ecclesiastical doctrine of the Trinity, established by the dogma of the ancient Church, is not a Biblical kerygma, therefore it is not the kerygma of the Church, but it is a theological doctrine which defends the central faith of the Bible and the Church.” (*Ibid* page 206)

This is confirmation that the trinity doctrine is not a Biblical teaching. It was formulated (invented) by “the ancient Church”. We shall return our thoughts to Brunner's latter words later.

In the Harper Collins Encyclopedia of Catholicism it says of the trinity doctrine

“The doctrine of the Trinity as such is not revealed in either the OT or the NT; however, the essential elements of what eventually became the doctrine are contained in Scripture (*The Harper Collins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, page 1270, General Editor Richard McBrien, 1995)

Many more quotations, all saying the very same thing, can be found written by various trinitarian (and non-trinitarian) authors and scholars. They tell us that the trinity doctrine itself cannot be found in the Scriptures. This is obviously very important to realise.

### **A Seventh-day Adventist admittance**

Richard Rice, Professor of Religion at Loma Linda University, wrote in his book ‘The Reign of God, An Introduction to Christian Theology from a Seventh-day Adventist Perspective’

“The role of the trinity in a doctrine of God always raises questions. One reason is that the word itself does not appear in the Bible, nor is there any clear statement of the idea. But the Bible does set the stage for its formulation, and the concept represents a development of biblical claims and concepts. So even though the doctrine of the trinity is not part of what the Bible itself says about God, it is part of what the church must say to safeguard the biblical view of God.” (*Richard Rice, The Reign of God, An Introduction to Christian Theology from a Seventh-day Adventist Perspective*, page 89, ‘A constructive proposal’, 1985)

Rice is agreeing with the aforementioned trinitarians. He is saying the trinity doctrine cannot be found in Scripture but was, after the canon of Scripture had been closed, formulated (invented) by the church. This is more or less the same as was said by Brunner – where he said the trinity doctrine “defends the central faith of the Bible” (see above). Why though should the church feel the need to invent a doctrine to “safeguard the biblical view of God”? Are not the Scriptures adequate enough in themselves? Do they need protecting by the invention of a doctrine not found in Scripture? As we shall see later, the trinity doctrine involves beliefs concerning the Godhead that are not revealed in Scripture – also that are contrary to the gospel. Rice says on the next page of his book (this time under the sub-title *Biblical Evidence for the Trinity*)

“We can find hints of this doctrine in the Old Testament and preliminary expressions of it in the new.” (*Ibid*)

Again this is the admittance that the trinity doctrine cannot be found in Scripture. All that can be found there, according to Rice, are “hints” and “preliminary expressions”. After quoting several passages that speak of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the same author wrote

“As these passages indicate, the idea of the trinity has precedents in the Bible, even though a full-fledged doctrine of the trinity is not to be found there.” (*Ibid*) This should be ‘enough said’. The trinity doctrine cannot be found in the Bible. Admittedly it does tell us of the divinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit but as was said earlier, this does not constitute the trinity doctrine. The trinity doctrine is far more complex. It is as one Presbyterian minister said about those who believe the extreme claims of the trinity doctrine

“It is only when men speculate outside of the Bible and beyond it, and seek to be wiser than they can be, that difficulties arise; and then they do arise as the rebuke of their own folly.” (*The Rev. Samuel T. Spear D. D., The New York Independent, 1889, ‘The Subordination of Christ’. Later published by the Pacific Press as ‘The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity’ and included as No. 90 in the ‘The Bible Student’s Library’ of Seventh-day Adventists*)

Spear then added (concerning what the Scriptures alone say about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit)

“A glorious doctrine then becomes their perplexity, and ingulfs them in a confusion of their own creation. What they need is to believe more and speculate less.” (*Ibid*)

It stands to reason that if God had wanted us to know more than He has chosen to reveal (which is what the trinity doctrine attempts to explain by speculation), He would have put it in the Scriptures. This is why it is wrong to attempt to explain something that God has obviously chosen to keep to Himself.

If you would like to read the entirety of Spear’s article please go [here](#)

### [The Spear Article](#)

Spear’s article is well worth reading. In fact I would say it was the best explanation of what the Bible says concerning the three persons of the Godhead that I have ever read. Its excellence of presentation – also its strict adherence to what the ‘Bible only’ says - is why Spear’s article was published as a tract in the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Students Library* (a collection of tracts available to the public explaining the fundamental principles of our faith). This was because it reflected, concerning the Godhead, what was then generally believed amongst Seventh-day Adventists. This was in 1892.

The article is what we would term today non-trinitarian. This is because it only presented what the ‘Bible only’ has to say about the Godhead – meaning omitting the extreme speculations of the trinity doctrine. This is why it was called (when it was published in the Bible Students library) ‘*The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity*’ (note my emphasis). It actually opposed the trinity doctrine.

We shall see later that the year following the inclusion of Spear's article in the *Bible Student's library*, Ellen White said that Seventh-day Adventists were teaching the truth concerning Christ's pre-existence. We shall see this in section 5.

### **An official Seventh-day Adventist admittance**

In explanation of their fundamental belief No 2 (that God is a trinity of persons), Seventh-day Adventists say in their official 'Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology' (the twelfth volume of the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia)

“The concept of the Trinity, namely the idea that the three are one, is not explicitly stated but only assumed.” (*Fernando L. Canale, the Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology, Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia Volume 12, page 138, 'Doctrine of God'*)

From the above we can clearly see that even official current Seventh-day Adventism admits to the fact that the trinity doctrine cannot be found in the Scriptures. As said earlier, is an invention of the church. This is why with respect to our salvation it is not necessary to believe it. We can reject the trinity doctrine without it affecting our salvation. This is why early Seventh-day Adventists rejected it. It was deemed unscriptural.

So what is the trinity doctrine? We shall discover this in chapter two (*Defining the trinity doctrine*)



## Chapter two

### Defining the trinity doctrine

#### The orthodox trinity doctrine

Needless to say, the trinity doctrine has not always been a teaching of Christianity. As we have previously noted, it was not formulated (invented) until the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. Even then it came in under a very dark cloud. We shall see this later. The reason why it was formulated is very interesting (and very often misunderstood) but we will not go into this in detail here although we shall discuss these things in chapter 4. For now we will see what this doctrine actually says. To do this, we shall first take a look at the *Athanasian Creed*. This is a creed not written by the person whom it is named after (meaning Athanasius) but carries his name probably because of the major part he played in the formulation of the trinity doctrine – also in its promulgation. Athanasius died prior to the creed being written. The creed says

“Whosoever 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 coeternal.” (*The Athanasian Creed*)

Putting this in simple terms, this creed says that the trinity doctrine (which as can be seen is said to be the central teaching of the Roman Catholic Church) teaches that all three persons of the Godhead are all of ‘one indivisible substance’ and together constitute the one God. This of course goes far beyond what God has revealed but it is the belief held by trinitarians. This is why it is said by the trinitarians that God is three-in-one – meaning that all three ‘persons’ are God and all subsist in the ‘one substance’ of God - making the three together the ‘one God’. Notice too that the creed says that anyone who does not believe this three-in-one teaching will not be saved. This is a total misunderstanding of how a person is saved (justification by faith).

Even apart from this, it is being said in the creed that unless a person believes what the church teaches – even though it is a teaching not found in the Bible – he or she will not be saved. This is tantamount to drawing people’s attention away from Christ and putting in His place ‘the church’. Again this is a serious violation of the gospel.

## Shifting the emphasis

Emil Brunner (1889-1966) was an eminent Swiss theologian. He agreed that the trinity doctrine was correct but he also believed that to a degree, the stress placed on the importance of believing it has taken the place of a dynamic faith in Christ. In his book *Dogmatics (Volume iii)* he wrote

“The doctrine of the Trinity has a different concern from the apostolic proclamation of Christ. The primary intention of the *kerygma* of the Apostles was not to speak of the ontological unity of the Son - and of the Spirit - with the Father but to witness to something quite different: that God has communicated His love to us through the Spirit of faith in the Cross of Jesus Christ and thereby has promised to mankind a new goal of history, the revelation of the sons of God in His eternal kingdom. That was their good news;...” (*Emil Brunner, Dogmatics Volume iii, 'The Christian doctrine of the Church, Faith and the Consummation, page 231, 1962)*

The “ontological unity of the Son - and of the Spirit - with the Father” is only another way of referring to how the three persons of the Godhead have their existence together. Brunner says it was not the intention of the Apostles to speak about it. In other words, regarding this matter, the Scriptures are silent. This is why we too should be silent about it. He later added

“... what stood in the foreground was not the ontological unity of Father and Son but the *event* of reconciliation as an act of God in Christ, which we know through the Holy Spirit in faith.” (*Ibid*)

This is very true. The emphasis of the apostles was not concerning how God and Christ have their existence together (neither the Bible writers or the apostles even mentioned it) but rather what God, through Christ, has done in redeeming humanity from the results of sin. It is the love shown in what God has done for each of us through His Son that will draw us to Him and cause us to love Him in return – not the trinity doctrine. On the next page, Brunner explained (this after saying it was not the intention to cast doubt on the truth of the doctrine of the trinity)

“But what we do say most emphatically is that with its introduction the centre of interest was shifted from the gospel and re-sited elsewhere. A speculative ontology took the place of the existential soteriology based on saving history.” (*Ibid page 232*)

Brunner is quite right. The trinity doctrine is only “speculative ontology” – and very often is presented as more important to believe than having a living faith in Christ. In some parts of Christianity, the gospel emphasis has been well and truly shifted. On page 442 of the same book Brunner wrote

“We must not, however, forget what we said above about the orthodox doctrine

of the trinity. It is directed to an interest that was not at all the true interest of faith. It is speculative and therefore static, while the Bible is consistently concerned with salvation history and is therefore dynamic.” (*Ibid pages 442-443*)

Who could argue with Brunner? The trinity doctrine is only “speculative”. Thus we see the ‘the problem’ with the trinity doctrine is two fold. First it attempts to explain what God has chosen to keep silent about (this is why it is speculative) whilst secondly, as Emil Brunner points out, ‘the church’ today attaches so much importance to this teaching – even though it is a teaching not found in Scripture – that the emphasis of the gospel has been shifted.

This shift of emphasis can be seen in the fact that some churches, even the Seventh-day Adventist Church, will not baptise someone who will not accept the trinity doctrine. This is wrong. God instituted baptism as a sign (a witness) to a person’s faith in Jesus as Saviour. Baptism should not be refused to someone simply because they will not believe a doctrine that is purely speculative. This really is putting the church (and what it teaches) in the place of Christ. If Christ were here today, He would not say the church was correct in refusing baptism to a person who refuses to accept what cannot be proven from the Scriptures. He would condemn such an action. In fact I would say that any attempt, no matter what it is, to explain the ontology (the metaphysical study of the nature of being and existence) of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (the trinity doctrine) is not only trying to explain what God has not revealed but also serves to destroy the gospel. Certainly it does not uplift it. I say this because this teaching has implications that seriously affect the gospel. We shall take a look at these in chapter 3. For now we shall see what this teaching means to orthodox trinitarians. Following this we shall see what it means to present day Seventh-day Adventists.

### **Orthodox trinitarianism explained**

In my quest to understand the ‘nitty-gritty’ of what trinitarians really do believe, I made enquiries of those who were trinitarian (who better to ask?). One such person is an orthodox priest. He compiled the following statement for me. This was so that I could share it with others. He wrote (speaking as an orthodox trinitarian)

“We maintain rather the invariability of the Godhead (its simplicity and unity) in the sense that no action can lead to ontological change; namely in this case that the Word, one ousia [substance] with the Father and the Spirit, never leaves the Father's side even when He joins with our human nature in the Incarnation.”  
(*Email, Father Gregory Hallam, Orthodox Priest, to Terry Hill, 16th May 2007*)

This is basic trinitarianism. It applies to all versions of the trinity doctrine – else it would not be a trinity doctrine. It is that all three persons of the Godhead are of one substance and constitute the ‘one God’. This means - because this ‘one (trinity) God’ is immortal – this can never change. In other words, the way God exists is static.

As Father Hallam explains, the consequence of this belief (if it were true) is that the

Son of God never leaves the Father's side – not even in the incarnation. In other words, in trinitarianism, the Son of God never actually (literally) vacates heaven or separates Himself from the Father but always exists safely with the Father in the one substance of God. In fact in trinitarianism, the Son of God is not literally a separate person from the Father, at least not as far as having a form of His own is concerned. This is because in trinitarianism, neither the Father, nor the Son, have forms of their own. This reasoning we shall encounter later. Needless to say, it seriously affects all aspects of the incarnation.

In a hymn written by an 8<sup>th</sup> century monk named St Germanus, this trinity reasoning is reflected. The hymn is called *A great and mighty wonder*, the second verse of which says (note the first line)

“The Word becomes incarnate and yet remains on high,  
And cherubim sing anthems to shepherds from the sky.  
Repeat the hymn again: “To God on high be glory  
And peace on earth to men!””

(*St. Germanus, 'A Great and Mighty Wonder'*)

This is the basic concept of trinitarianism. It is that the Father and the Son, in the one substance of God, are never separated from each other – not even in the incarnation.

### **Current Seventh-day Adventist trinity reasoning**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has today what is termed '28 fundamental beliefs'. They are listed in their Church Manual – also in their various official publications. As most Seventh-day Adventists will probably realise, beliefs number 3, 4 and 5 concern the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit but none of these express the teaching that God is a trinity of persons (three-in-one). This is expressed by belief number 2 which says

“There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons”. (*Seventh-day Adventist Church manual*)

If the only Godhead beliefs listed in our 28 fundamentals were numbers 3, 4 and 5 (meaning without belief number 2), this would not constitute a trinity doctrine. This is even though it is said that the three persons of the Godhead are each divine and equal to each other. To have a trinity doctrine, there must be a belief included that says all three exist together in one substance as the 'one God'. It also says of this three-in-one God (please note the highlighted words)

“God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. He is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation. (Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2; 1 Tim. 1:17; Rev. 14:7.)

Note that this “one God” (albeit said to be the three persons of the Godhead collectively) - is said to be a “He”. In other words, the personal pronoun is applied to this trinity God – although it must be admitted that this “He”, apart from not being mentioned in Scripture, would be very difficult to imagine. Why I say this is because what picture comes to mind if we attempt to imagine God as three persons-in-one as in the trinity doctrine? Certainly we would not conceive ourselves as being made in His image and likeness (see Genesis 1:26-27). This is probably why, in the *Seventh-day Adventist Handbook of Theology* (the 12<sup>th</sup> volume of the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia*), it says of God

“In Himself He is real and has a form, yet that divine reality and form completely surpass the reality and capability of comprehension of the highest intelligences.”  
(*Fernando L. Canale, Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology, Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia Volume 12, page 113, ‘Doctrine of God’*)

Prior to this statement, it had been explained that although God can perform tasks such as you and I can perform, He does not have like body members as we do (like arms etc.). It says

“Only God can use analogy to reveal Himself without involving vain speculations. Some of the analogies God draws are called anthropomorphisms, that is, they attribute to God characteristics belonging to human beings.” (*Ibid*)

Anthropomorphism is ascribing the characteristics of humanity to someone (or something) not human. This is what is being said here – that God does not have body and parts like as we have but with what He does possess (whatever that may be) He can accomplish the same tasks we accomplish. In other words, when God said the following to Moses He was only using “anthropomorphisms”.

“... I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy ... Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live ... Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.” Exodus 33:19-23

According to official Seventh-day Adventism, we should not take this literally (that God has a face, hands and back parts etc. as we have) but regard these things as God using anthropomorphisms (note it was God who spoke these things). As it says in the same article (*The Doctrine of God*) in the *Seventh-day Adventist Handbook of Theology*

“In biblical anthropomorphisms, God reveals what He is and what He can do in terms of human realities.” (*Fernando L. Canale, Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology, Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia Volume 12, page 113, ‘Doctrine of God’*)

By way of explanation the author then says

“For instance, when God says that He has an arm (Exodus 15:16; Psalm 89:13), He does not mean that He has exactly or univocally what we call an arm. The expression signifies that God’s reality is capable of performing all that can be performed by a human arm and infinitely more.” (*Ibid*)

We can see here that God is said not to have arms like us (even though He told us He does have arms) but why stop there? If God does not have arms like we do then perhaps He does not have legs like we do or a face or a head even or a body like we do. Certainly I would say it means He does not have hands like we do. So where do we arrive at with this type of reasoning? It can only be reasoned, if the above were true, we look nothing like God. This is probably why Canale concluded

“We cannot conceive or imagine the actual structure of God’s reality that allows Him to perform these acts. Yet the analogical language reveals to us aspects of God’s being and divine capabilities, while at the same time guarding the mystery of His divine nature.” (*Ibid*)

According to this reasoning, we have no idea as to what God looks like yet we have been so clearly told that God made us in His image and likeness (see Genesis 1:26-27).

Whilst no one expects God to look like us in every detail, it must be said that if we did not look similar to Him (meaning in outward form and appearance) then there would have been no point in saying we were made in His image and likeness. As we have been told through the spirit of prophecy

“Man was to bear God’s image, both in outward resemblance and in character. Christ alone is “the express image” (Hebrews 1:3) of the Father; but man was formed in the likeness of God.” (*Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, page 45, ‘The creation’*)

“In the beginning man was created in the likeness of God not only in character but in form and feature”. (*Ellen G. White, Spirit of Prophecy, Volume 4 page 463, ‘God’s people delivered, see also ‘The Great Controversy, page 644’*)

Needless to say, the above remarks are not in keeping with current Seventh-day Adventist theology (that God is three-in-one). This is because we are officially saying today that we have no idea as to what God looks like. Obviously our present

reasoning that God is three-in-one (a trinity) has brought about the rejection of (or at least brought a very serious doubt upon) what we have been told through the spirit of prophecy.

Did you notice that Ellen White said, “**Christ alone** is “the express image” (Hebrews 1:3) of the Father”? No mention is made of the Holy Spirit being the image of the Father.

Our present three-in-one teaching is also contrary to where Ellen White wrote

“I saw a throne, and on it sat the Father and the Son. I gazed on Jesus’ countenance and admired His lovely person. The Father’s person I could not behold, for a cloud of glorious light covered Him. I asked Jesus if His Father had a form like Himself. He said He had, but I could not behold it, for said He, “If you should once behold the glory of His person, you would cease to exist.” (*Ellen G. White, Early Writings, page 54, 1882*)

“I have often seen the lovely Jesus, that He is a person. I asked Him if His Father was a person and had a form like Himself. Said Jesus, “I am in the express image of My Father’s person.”” (*Ibid page 77, see also Spiritual Gifts, Volume 2 page 74, 1860*)

Here is brought to view two separate divine personages – one of whom is the “express image” of the “Fathers person”. Notice again that Ellen White did not mention the Holy Spirit – only the Father and the Son. In other words, she did not ask whether the Holy Spirit has a form. I would say that this is very interesting. Wouldn’t you agree? A trinitarian would never accept as true the remarks made here by Ellen White. I say this because a trinitarian does not believe that God and Christ are two separate personages – each with a form of their own - as spoken of here by Ellen White.

Max Hatton (who wrote the much promoted Seventh-day Adventist publication *Understanding the Trinity*) agreed that what was written here by Ellen White does not fit into a trinitarian concept of God. He says in an article called *Ellen G. White and the Trinity Doctrine* (that he has on his website)

“We have to conclude from these statements that Jesus did not share the glory of the Father. This is not what we would expect from *John 17:5*. The fact that Mrs White says she saw in vision that Jesus and the Father are quite separate individuals does not fit with the Trinitarian concept found in Scripture.” (*Max Hatton, website article ‘Ellen G. White and the Trinity Doctrine’*)

Max Hatton knows that a trinitarian would never say such a thing. He is wrong though where he refers to the “Trinitarian concept [of God] found in Scripture”. We know this because this concept cannot be found in Scripture. Hatton is here denying that Ellen

White spoke as a trinitarian. He is also saying she was not speaking in accordance with Scripture. We must ask though, is he also saying that God did not show her this in vision? It would certainly appear that way – else the vision would be correct (if it were from God). When it is reasoned through, it must be one way or the other. God would not have shown Ellen White something that is error.

Returning our thoughts to what was said by Ellen White above (that the Father and Son both have forms of their own), she later wrote

“I have often seen that the spiritual view took away all the glory of heaven, and that in many minds the throne of David and the lovely person of Jesus have been burned up in the fire of Spiritualism.” (*Ellen G. White, Early Writings, page 77, 1882, see also Spiritual Gifts, Volume 2 page 74, 1860*)

It is only reasonable to believe that these ‘spiritual views’ (whatever they were in the mind of Ellen White) denied the belief that the Father and Son are two separate individual persons, each with a form of their own. If this were not so, then why would she make these remarks? It is quite possible that she had in mind the trinity doctrine. After all, as Max Hatton quite rightly said, the above remarks made by Ellen White do not fit into a trinitarian concept of God. In other words (because trinitarians do not believe that God and Christ each have forms of their own as individual divine beings), Ellen White, according to Hatton, was not speaking as a trinitarian but in opposition to trinitarianism.

Speaking from my experience of the many conversations I have had with church members, I would say that not many Seventh-day Adventists realise that Ellen White spoke out against the type of illustrations that depict God as three-in-one. You can read about this in chapter 23 of the study found here

### [A study of the Godhead – as it pertains to Seventh-day Adventism](#)

In Chapter 4 of the same study, you can also see what the Scriptures say about Christ taking the throne of David - also why Ellen White said that in the minds of people, ‘spiritual views’ destroy this belief. The latter chapter is called *The trinity doctrine and spiritual views*.

There was no doubt in Ellen White’s mind that God and Christ (Father and Son) are two separate individuals. She wrote in her diary in 1905 (this was after quoting, John 1:1-4, 14-16 and John 3:34-36)

“In this Scripture God and Christ are spoken of as two distinct personalities, each acting in their own individuality.” (*Ellen G. White, Manuscript 760, Diary note, October 31<sup>st</sup> 1905*)

### **Official confirmation and explanation**

In 2008, because of the growing increase of opposition to the trinity doctrine within



Seventh-day Adventism in Australia, a 'trinity congress' was held in Wahroonga, Sydney. This congress consisted of over 65 theologians, biblical scholars, administrators, teachers and pastors etc. The outcome of this getting together (of those of our leadership) was published in the Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Research newsletter 'Reflections'. After saying that the "Seventh-day Adventist Church has expressed its position on the Godhead in its fundamental beliefs", it said under the sub-heading *Consensus Statement*

"We, a group of Seventh-day Adventist Christians, theologians, pastors, and administrators, convening in Wahroonga, have been invited by the South Pacific Division to study biblical, theological, and historical aspects of this doctrine." (*Biblical Research Institute newsletter 'Reflections', July 2008, page 5*)

There then followed the consensus statements (meaning that which was concluded by the congress delegates) the first of which reads

"On the basis of our study of Scripture we affirm our belief in "one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal persons" (Fundamental Belief # 2).

This was the outcome of the congress. It was confirmed by the delegates that belief No.2 (saying that God is a trinity of persons) is correct. In this same newsletter – in support of this three-in-one belief - Ekkehardt Mueller (now *Deputy Director of the SDA Biblical Institute*) contributed a Bible study. In this study he wrote

"There is only one God (Deut. 6:4), however, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all called God (Matthew 27:46, John 20:28: Acts 5:3-4). Consequently, we do not worship three Gods, but one God who reveals Himself in and consists of three "persons". The three persons share one indivisible nature." (*Ekkehardt Mueller, Biblical Research Institute, Reflections newsletter, July 2008, Page 8, 'Scripture Applied, - A Bible Study'*)

This is the same as stated by the orthodox priest (see above). It goes beyond what God has revealed but without it (that the three persons exist inseparably in "one indivisible nature" as the 'one compound God') there would be no such teaching as the trinity doctrine - at least not as it is generally known today. Mueller also said

"Each person of the Godhead is by nature and essence God, and the fullness of the deity dwells in each of them. On the other hand, each person of the Godhead is inseparably connected to the other two." (*Ibid*)

Again this is basic trinity reasoning but please note the highlighted part of this statement. This is really very important. We shall return our thoughts to this later. Canale concludes this section

“This concept of God surpasses our experiences and our intellect.” (*Ibid*)

This is very true. It also goes beyond what God has revealed.

If you would like to read the Bible study in its entirety, you can do so at the Biblical Research Institute’s website here

<http://biblicalresearch.gc.adventist.org/Bible%20Study/Our%20God.pdf>

If you would like to read Max Hatton’s article ‘Ellen G. White and the Trinity Doctrine, you can do so here

<http://thetrinitydoctrine.com/articles/ellen-g-white-and-the-trinity-doctrine>

We shall now go to chapter 3 – The implications of the trinity doctrine

## Chapter three

### The implications of the trinity doctrine

#### The Son is never separated from the Father

There are three basic implications of the trinity doctrine to which I would draw your attention. All three concern the incarnation of Christ and the gospel.

In trinitarianism, as we have seen from the above, the divine person of the Son of God never actually separates Himself from the Father. This is because, according to trinitarians, He always has His existence in the one substance of God. This would mean of course, if it were true, that Christ never actually (literally) vacated Heaven but instead, in some way not explained in the Scriptures, existed at the same time in the human body of Christ (this is akin to a pantheistic type of reasoning – God in things). This seriously affects what the Scriptures mean when they tell us “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). A trinitarian understanding of the Godhead would prohibit us from taking this verse literally.

This again appears to violate the gospel. This is because Christ said that He had come down from Heaven where He had been before (John 6:62). He also told Mary, after His resurrection, that He had not yet ascended to His Father in Heaven (John 20:17). He also said that He was going to His God and to our God. If Christ were always with His Father (in the one substance of God) His words would make no sense at all. It would not make sense either where Jesus cried out “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (see Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34). We have been told though through the spirit of prophecy (contrary to trinity reasoning)

“A way is opened before everyone in the office to engage from the heart directly in the work of Christ and the salvation of souls. Christ left heaven and the bosom of His Father to come to a friendless, lost world to save those who would be saved. He exiled Himself from His Father and exchanged the pure companionship of angels for that of fallen humanity, all polluted with sin.” (*Ellen G. White, 3<sup>rd</sup> Vol. Testimonies page 190, ‘Laborers in the Office’*).

There is no trinitarian reasoning here. Ellen White also said to the youth in 1897

“It is important that we each study to know the reason of the life of Christ in humanity, and what it means to us, -- why the Son of God left the courts of heaven,-- why he stepped down from his position as Commander of the heavenly angels, who came and went at his bidding,--why he clothed his divinity with humanity, and in lowliness and humility came to the world as our Redeemer.” (*Ellen G. White, Youth’s Instructor, 21<sup>st</sup> January 1897, ‘Christ’s Mission to Earth’*)

Again we can see that Ellen White wrote that Christ literally (physically and bodily) vacated Heaven. This is not trinitarianism.

### **The Son never really dies**

The trinity belief (that all three persons of the Godhead always exist in the one substance of God and are therefore inseparable) also leads to another conclusion. This is that at Calvary, the divine personage of the Son of God did not really die. This has repeatedly been said to me by many Seventh-day Adventist trinitarians – even those of the ministry. It was this belief (that the divine person of Christ did not die at Calvary) that led to J. H. Waggoner (a Seventh-day Adventist pioneer) to write

“THE great mistake of Trinitarians, in arguing this subject, seems to be this: They make no distinction between a denial of a trinity and a denial of the divinity of Christ. They see only the two extremes, between which the truth lies; and take every expression referring to the pre-existence of Christ as evidence of a trinity.” (*J. H. Waggoner, Review and Herald, November 10<sup>th</sup> 1863, ‘The Atonement – part II, The doctrine of a trinity degrades the atonement’*)

This is still very true today. Most trinitarians still regard the divinity of Christ as proving God to be a trinity – which of course it doesn’t. Many also believe that a denial of the trinity doctrine is a denial of the divinity of Christ, which as Waggoner said above is not true either. If we want to present the divinity of Christ correctly, then all that needs to be done is present it as the Bible presents it – which is totally silent about God being a trinity. Waggoner continued

“The Scriptures abundantly teach the pre-existence of Christ and his divinity; but they are entirely silent in regard to a trinity.” (*Ibid*)

Again this is very true. We have seen this confessed even by the trinitarians (see Chapter 1). Waggoner added with respect to the teaching of trinitarians

“The declaration, that the divine Son of God could not die, is as far from the teachings of the Bible as darkness is from light. And I would ask the Trinitarian, to which of the two natures are we indebted for redemption?” (*Ibid*)

Here Waggoner seems to confuse nature with personality (meaning he

misunderstood the fact that the incarnate Christ had two natures but they were blended together to form one person) but it is very clear as to what he actually meant by His remarks. He is simply asking the question - are we indebted to human nature for our redemption or do we have a sacrifice that is divine? In reply to his own question he said

“The answer must, of course, be, to that one which died or shed his blood for us; for “we have redemption through his blood.” Then it is evident, that if only the human nature died, our redeemer is only human, and that the divine Son of God took no part in the work of redemption, for he could neither suffer nor die.” (*Ibid*)

Waggoner knew exactly what was taught by means of the trinity doctrine. He concluded

“Surely I said right, that the doctrine of a trinity degrades the atonement, by bringing the sacrifice, the blood of our purchase, down to the standard of Socinianism.” (*Ibid*)

Socinianism, because it teaches that Christ by nature is only a human being, also teaches that the sacrifice made at Calvary was only human – meaning not one that is divine. This is why the trinity teaching (regarding the atonement) is equal to that of Socinianism. It provides only a human sacrifice. Waggoner also wrote in 1867

“I believe the Trinitarian views are unscriptural, and greatly disparage the atonement by denying that the Son of God died;” (*J. H. Waggoner, Review and Herald, November 19<sup>th</sup> 1867, ‘What think ye of Christ?’*)

Another person who held to this belief was Judson Washburn.

Washburn was a prolific Seventh-day Adventist evangelist. He was also very well acquainted with both James and Ellen White. He was in fact baptised by James White. He also kept Ellen White informed of how the work was progressing wherever his evangelistic efforts took him. When Washburn sensed that attempts were being made to bring the trinity doctrine into Seventh-day Adventism, he wrote an open letter to the General Conference saying (here he was referring to the trinity doctrine itself)

“This monstrous doctrine transplanted from heathenism into the Roman Papal Church is seeking to intrude its evil presence into the teachings of the Third Angel’s Message.” (*Judson Washburn, ‘The Trinity’, letter to the Seventh-day Adventists General Conference, 1940*)

Note Washburn said that the trinity doctrine was “seeking to intrude its evil presence into the teachings of the Third Angel’s Message”. This was in 1940. This shows that at that time, meaning in 1940, the trinity doctrine was not accepted as a standard teaching in Seventh-day Adventism. With reference to the trinity teaching that the

divine Son of God did not die at Calvary, Washburn wrote

“Any doctrine that leads a man to deny that the Son of God died must be an evil doctrine, an anti-Christian doctrine, not from God but from Satan.” (*Ibid*)

This was Judson Washburn’s main objection to the trinity doctrine. It ‘prohibited’ the death of a divine person. This is why he spoke out against it so vehemently. When speaking of the trinity doctrine, it is my personal belief that we should share the very same sentiments of the longest serving pioneer of Seventh-day Adventism – namely John Loughborough. He wrote in the *Review and Herald* as early as 1861

“It will not do to substitute the human nature of Christ (according to Trinitarians) as the Mediator; for Clarke says, "Human blood can no more appease God than swine's blood." Com. on 2 Sam. xxi, 10.” (*John Loughborough, Review and Herald, November 5<sup>th</sup> 1861, ‘Questions for Bro. Loughborough’*)

From the above, we can see that one of the implications of the trinity doctrine is that the divine person of Christ did not die at Calvary. This stems from the trinity belief that all three persons of the Godhead exist continually together as the ‘one God’ – meaning that regardless of circumstances, all three are always alive in the one substance of God (never separated from each other). As can be seen, this teaching has an extremely adverse affect on the atonement made by our Saviour at Calvary.

### **The risk factor**

Another implication of the trinity doctrine is that in the making of the decision for the person of the divine Son of God to become incarnate (to be made flesh), no risk was taken concerning His existence. This conclusion stems from the very same trinitarian belief that all three persons of the Godhead are inseparably connected to each other (in one substance) as the ‘one God’ who is immortal – meaning, as was noted above, that the Son of God, even in the incarnation, is not separated from the Father. In other words, according to trinitarianism, the divine Son of God can no more go out of existence than He can die. This is the teaching of trinitarians. As Ekkehardt Mueller wrote, “each person of the Godhead is inseparably connected to the other two” (see above). If this were not true then the trinity doctrine would be error.

This ‘no risk’ belief makes Christ’s earthly life a travesty (a farce). This is because if Christ could not be lost because of failure (meaning if He could have sinned and not suffered the consequences), then His being subject to temptation is of very little consequence. It is only when we realise He could have forfeited His eternal existence that His achievements on earth become valuable to us – priceless in fact. This is because it not only tells us that Christ overcame sin like each one of us needs to overcome it but also reveals the unfathomable depths of God’s love for fallen humanity. This is because it is saying that in order to pay the price of man’s redemption, God risked the eternal existence of His only Son. According to the trinitarians, neither God the Father or Christ risked anything in the plan of redemption.

The reality of the gospel is that Christ took our place in all things. This is why He is truly our substitute. If Christ could not have sinned and lost His existence because of it then He never really became the 'last Adam' (see 1 Corinthians 15:45). This is because with Adam, one sin was enough to separate him from God and thus be in need of redemption. If this was not the way it was with Christ then He certainly did not take Adam's place (or your place or mine).

It was Roy Adams - as *Associate Editor of the Advent Review* - who correctly summed up the 'no risk' belief. He wrote

"To say there was no risk in the Incarnation is to argue the biblically untenable position that it was impossible for Jesus to sin. If that were the case, then we'd be into divine playacting of the most cynical kind. And Jesus' 40-day fast in the desert, His all-night prayer vigils, and His agony in *Gethsemane* would all amount to a cruel farce." (Roy Adams, *Advent Review*, April 17<sup>th</sup> 2008, 'An impenetrable mystery')

Adams freely admits that there must have been a risk involved in saving us from sin, else, as he says, Christ's life on earth was nothing more than "divine playacting of the most cynical kind".

Over 60 years earlier, Charles Longacre, a non-trinitarian minister of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, in a study of the Godhead submitted to a group then known as the *Bible Research Fellowship*, wrote

"If it were impossible for the Son of God to make a mistake or commit a sin, then His coming into this world and subjecting Himself to temptations were all a farce and mere mockery. If it were possible for Him to yield to temptation and fall into sin, then He must have risked heaven and His very existence, and even all eternity. That is exactly what the Scriptures and the Spirit of Prophecy say Christ, the Son of God did do when He came to work out for us a plan of salvation from the curse of sin." (Charles Smull Longacre, paper titled 'The Deity of Christ' submitted to the *Bible Research Fellowship*, January 1947)

Longacre's reasoning is perfectly correct. If Christ could have sinned - which according to Scripture was possible (see Hebrews 2:16-18, 4:14-15) - then He would have become lost if He had sinned. If it were not this way with Christ then His life on earth really was a farce. As Longacre also says, the Scriptures and the spirit of prophecy writings both say that Christ could have sinned and become lost if He had sinned.

If you would like to understand what is said in the spirit of prophecy concerning this 'risk factor', you can do so by going to the following link and read chapter 24 – *Ellen White not a trinitarian - the risk factor*

[A study of the Godhead – as it pertains to Seventh-day Adventism](#)

or you can see a list of spirit of prophecy quotations here

[Ellen G. White - The risk taken concerning Christ's existence](#)

In doing so you will find such statements as

“Remember that Christ risked all; "tempted like as we are," he staked even his own eternal existence upon the issue of the conflict.” (*Ellen G. White, General Conference Bulletin 1<sup>st</sup> December 1895 'Seeking the Lost'*)

You can also read about the risk factor in the *Detailed History Series*. The section dealing with this is named *The power of the gospel (Infinite risk, infinite sacrifice, infinite love)*. You will find it here as section 13

[A Detailed History of the Trinity Doctrine](#)

By reading chapter 25 of the following study, you can also read what we have been told through the spirit of prophecy concerning who or what died at Calvary

[A study of the Godhead – as it pertains to Seventh-day Adventism](#)

You will see that Ellen White repeatedly said that a divine person died.

### **The conclusion of trinitarian reasoning**

From the above, we can see that trinitarians believe that

- We have no idea as to what God looks like
- The Father and Son are not two separate individuals each having a form of their own
- The divine Son of God never actually vacates Heaven or leaves His Father's side – not even in the incarnation
- The divine Son of God never died at Calvary
- In the making of the decision for Christ to become incarnate, there was no risk to His eternal existence.

It is this (trinity) reasoning that has led many Seventh-day Adventists to reject the trinity doctrine – plus the fact that this three-in-one teaching cannot be found in Scripture.



In Chapter 4 we shall see how the trinity doctrine came to be formulated.

## **Chapter four**

### **How the trinity doctrine came to be formulated**

#### **A 4<sup>th</sup> century theological disagreement**

We have already noted it was not until the 4<sup>th</sup> century that the trinity doctrine was formulated – which was over 200 years after the canon of Scripture was closed. It came about because of a disagreement between the Bishop of Alexandria (namely Alexander) and one of his presbyters – a man by the name of Arius. This was around AD 318. Later that same century the trinity doctrine was formulated, albeit there were stages in its development. From what we can read of the history of this dispute, it is more than likely that the initial debate was only between Arius and his fellow presbyters but eventually, after listening to both sides of the argument (because it was obviously causing a rift), Alexander chose not to accept the views of Arius.

Arius made public his objections to Alexander's reasoning. He had many supporters. This was not only from his fellow presbyters but also from many bishops. The dispute grew so big it was splitting the church. Alexander called a local synod of his bishops who exiled Arius because of his beliefs. If Alexander believed that this would silence Arius (and resolve the problem) then he made a very big mistake. This is because Arius continued to promulgate his views – the outcome of which the division in the church continued to grow. In fact it grew so big that the Roman Emperor Constantine became involved. It was no small matter. Constantine had nominally accepted Christianity. Many say he had hoped that the Christian religion would stop his ailing kingdom from 'falling apart at the seams'.

In AD 321 (which was about 3 years into this Godhead dispute) it was Constantine who issued a decree (an edict) ordering the first day of the week (Sunday) to be a public festival. This was the first 'Sunday law'. It was also the result of the state becoming involved with the affairs of the church. This is how the trinity doctrine became established in Christianity. We shall see this now.

#### **The Council of Nicaea**

In 325 AD (approximately 7 years after the dispute began), because by then the dispute had caused so much division and disruption in the church, also because the attempts he had made to bring reconciliation between the vying factions had failed, Constantine called a council of all the bishops of Christianity. This was held at Nicaea (now Iznic Turkey). In comparison to the total number who could have attended, only a small percentage accepted the invitation. Most came from the east. The council itself lasted for over 3 months (many things were discussed), the outcome of which (in opposition to what was believed by Arius and his followers) the belief was formulated saying that Christ was of the one and the same substance as the Father (as in trinitarianism). This is the belief that Arius could not accept. The formulation of this belief, albeit the council had to go outside of Scripture to achieve it, became the basis for the later formulated trinity doctrine.

To achieve (formulate) the 'one substance' belief, the Greek word 'homoousios' was employed. Jesus was described as being 'homoousios with God the Father'. The fact of the matter is that no matter what word had been used it would have been wrong. This is because the ontology of the Godhead (how God and Christ have their existence together) has not been revealed. In other words, the Council of Nicaea attempted to explain what God has chosen to keep to Himself. The result of this decision (the decision of Nicaea) was that Arius was once again condemned for his faith and exiled. Constantine ordered the writings of this presbyter to be destroyed. This is why almost nothing of his original works exists today. This is also why his 'enemies' have found it so easy to misrepresent his beliefs.

The Council of Nicaea cannot be credited with the formulation of the trinity doctrine. This is because in the creed depicting what was voted at Nicaea, the Holy Spirit was not stated as belonging to the one substance of God. It simply said, "We believe in the Holy Spirit". Nothing else was said of the Holy Spirit. It was only later, at the first Council of Constantinople in AD 381 (the second ecumenical council), that the Holy Spirit was included in this 'one substance of God' belief. Thus it was that as the 4<sup>th</sup> century was drawing to a close, the trinity doctrine was 'given life'. It was also as the Church of Rome (now the Roman Catholic Church) was coming to the forefront of Christianity. As we have already noted above, the trinity doctrine is now the central teaching of the Papacy.

At the Council of Jerusalem in AD 335, Arius, now over 80 years of age, was cleared of the charges of heresy. He was admitted to full communion with the church although the Alexandrians would still not permit him back into ecclesiastical office. Constantine, in response, ordered the the Bishop Alexander to admit Arius. As it says in the New Catholic Encyclopedia

*"It is certain that the assembly of Jerusalem (335) decided to readmit him [Arius] into the church. Constantine ordered a solemn reinstatement in Constantinople, but Arius died suddenly on the eve of the appointed day, early in 336." (New Catholic Encyclopedia 1967, page 814, 'Arius')*

Some (mainly trinitarians) say the sudden demise of Arius was the ‘hand of God’ (against heretics) but others say it was the work of men. In other words, the latter believe that in order to stop Arius from being re-instated, his enemies poisoned him – which is more than likely.

Following the death of Arius, the dispute continued to flourish. In fact the truth of the matter is that Arianism (as it is commonly called today although this designation is often very ambiguous), almost won the day. In other words, as time progressed, it was Arianism that was steadily gaining the ascendancy over the Nicene faith (the one substance theory).

So what brought the Nicene faith back into the ascendancy – which eventually developed into trinitarianism? As has been said earlier, it was the intervention of the state into the affairs of the church – which is something that should never have happened. Church and state should always remain separate.

### **The state defines and establishes Christian orthodoxy**

The establishment of the ‘one substance’ theory as Christian orthodoxy came about when Theodosius became Emperor of Rome.

This emperor (known as *Theodosius the Great*) was an ardent believer in the Nicene (one substance) faith. When he became emperor he issued decrees that only supporters of it should be allowed in the pulpit - or take office in the church etc. In fact he issued threats against all who would not accept the faith of Nicaea. In other words, he used secular power (Roman power) to enforce and establish what became known as ‘Christian orthodoxy’. The historian Edward Gibbon wrote

“In the space of fifteen years, he [Theodosius] promulgated at least fifteen severe edicts against the heretics; more especially against those who rejected the doctrine of the Trinity; and to deprive them of every hope of escape, he sternly enacted, that if any laws or rescripts should be alleged in their favor, the judges should consider them as the illegal productions either of fraud or forgery. The penal statutes were directed against the ministers, the assemblies, and the persons of the heretics; and the passions of the legislator were expressed in the language of declamation and invective.” (*Gibbon, The decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Volume 3 page 9)

These “heretics” of course were those who would not accept the ‘one substance’ faith drawn up at the Council of Nicaea.

E. Glenn Hinson summed up the situation this way

“Theodosius himself, therefore, deserves credit for turning the empire into a fully Christian state.” (*E. Glenn Hinson, The Early Church, page 214-215, chapter 19,*

## *'Church and state after Constantine'*

He then said

"In sum, that would mean to believe in "the doctrine of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one deity of equal majesty and pious trinity." Those who adhered to such faith could call themselves Catholic Christians, but others must be designated demented and barbarian and heretical and be stricken first by divine vengeance and then by imperial action in accordance with the will of heaven (*Cod. Theod. XVI.1.2.*). (*Ibid*)

Note that all who would not accept the 'one substance' theory of Nicaea (that later developed into trinitarianism) were designated "demented and barbarian and heretical". On the same page Hinson wrote

"Shortly after his arrival at Constantinople, at any rate, Emperor Theodosius began to remove Arians and replace them with bishops who accepted the Nicene Creed. In Constantinople itself, Arianism had gotten a strong grip, and Theodosius had to weather a popular storm against his replacement of Demophilus with Gregory of Nazianzus. Soldiers had to protect the saintly Gregory on his way to the Church of the Apostles." (*Ibid*)

It can be seen here that in Constantinople, Arianism "had gotten a strong grip". This was during the latter stages of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. This was over 50 years after the Council of Nicaea had devised the 'one substance' theory.

In his book *Truth Triumphant*, Benjamin Wilkinson noted

"The burning question of the decades succeeding the Council of Nicaea was how to state the relations of the Three Persons of the Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The council had decided, and the Papacy had appropriated the decision as its own. The personalities of the Trinity were not confounded, and the substance was not divided. The Roman clergy claimed that Christianity had found in the Greek word *homoousios* (in English, "consubstantiality") an appropriate term to express this relationship." (*Benjamin Wilkinson, Truth Triumphant, Chapter 7, 'Patrick, organizer of the church in the wilderness in Ireland'*)

"Then the papal party proceeded to call those who would not subscribe to this teaching, Arians, while they took to themselves the title of Trinitarians. An erroneous charge was circulated that all who were called Arians believed that Christ was a created being. This stirred up the indignation of those who were not guilty of the charge." (*Ibid*)

Today, even within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, those who refuse to accept the 'one substance' theory (the trinity doctrine) are still being misrepresented as believing

that Christ is a created being whilst in reality they believe He is God in the person of the Son.

As we have seen, the trinity doctrine, albeit only an assumed teaching, was 'forced' into Christianity by the secular power of Rome. If this had not happened, this teaching would probably never have become established. It is no wonder that J. N. Andrews, whom many believe was one of the most ablest theologians of the Seventh-day Adventist Church said regarding the trinity doctrine

"This doctrine destroys the personality of God and his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. The infamous, measures by which it was forced upon the church which appear upon the pages of ecclesiastical history might well cause every believer in that doctrine to blush." (*J. N. Andrews, Review and Herald 'The Fall of Babylon' March 6th 1855 Vol. 6 No. 24 page 185*)

We can see from the above why J. N. Andrews made this statement. The trinitarians do not accept that God and Christ are two separate persons each with a form of their own. Alonzo Jones, a famous man in the history of Seventh-day Adventism wrote

"There was no dispute about the fact of there being a Trinity, it was about the nature of the Trinity. Both parties believed in precisely the same Trinity, but they differed upon the precise relationship which the Son bears to the Father." (*A. T. Jones, The two republics, pages 332 – 333 'Establishment of the Catholic faith'*)

For those who would like to know more about how the trinity doctrine made its way into Christianity, sections 7, 8 and 9 of the 'Detailed History Series' found here will be of help

[A Detailed History of the Trinity Doctrine](#)

### **So what did Arius really believe?**

Even though (at the Council of Nicaea) Constantine ordered the writings of Arius to be destroyed, we know something of what Arius believed because of letters that have been preserved in various historical documents. In one such letter, Arius wrote to his friend Eusebius

"But we say and believe, and have taught, and do teach, that the Son is not unbegotten, nor in any way part of the unbegotten; and that He does not derive His subsistence from any matter; but that by His own will and counsel He has subsisted before time, and before ages, as perfect God, only begotten and unchangeable, and that before He was begotten, or created, or purposed, or established, He was not. For He was not unbegotten." (*The Ecclesiastical History of Theodoret, Book 1, Chapter 3, 'Letter of Arius to Eusebius of Nicomedia'*)

Notice first of all that Arius believed that Christ, in His pre-existence, subsisted “by His own will” as “perfect God, only begotten and unchangeable”. He also described the Father as “unbegotten”. At that time, this was the standard belief of Christianity. It was that the Father is unbegotten whilst the Son is the only begotten (of God) therefore Christ is truly the Son of God. It was also believed that because Christ is begotten of God, then He is God. This is obviously why Arius said that Christ, in His pre-existence, was “perfect God”. The one thing that Arius would not accept was that Christ is of the one and the same substance of God (as explained and believed by the trinitarians). He reasoned it was not Scriptural to say such things.

Arius was a highly esteemed presbyter. He was well respected for his ascetic life. Even those who opposed his theology spoke well of him. He was said to be a brilliant student of the Scriptures. The only objection made concerning Arius was his Godhead theology. Arius was also in charge of a church in one of the most prodigious areas in Alexandria. This reveals how much he was respected. In his book *A History of the Early Church*, J. W. C. Wand offers a description of Arius. After saying that he was “in charge of the suburb Baucalis” (an “important charge” because the granaries were there that shipped corn to Rome) he wrote

“There was much to commend Arius for such a position: he was a person of commanding presence, tall, grave, and with a great reputation for asceticism.” (*J. W. C. Wand D. D., A History of the Early Church to A. D. 500, page 149, ‘chapter ‘Ecclesiastical troubles’*)

So why did Arius object to this ‘Christ was of the one substance of God’ belief? We can pick this up from something that the Christian historian Sozomen wrote – who said of Arius

“A most expert logician (for he is said to have been not without proficiency even in such studies) he plunged headlong into absurd arguments, and had the audacity to preach in church what no one before him had ever suggested, namely, that the Son of God has come into existence ‘out of the non-existent’ and that ‘there was when he was not’, that as possessing free will he was capable of virtue or of vice, and that he was created and made, and he gave voice to many other similar assertions which one professing such views might utter.” (*Sozomen, taken from A New Eusebius by J. Stevenson, revised by W. H. C. Frend*)

Notice that Arius was said to have believed that because Christ possessed free will He “was capable of virtue or of vice”. In other words, the person of Christ (whom Arius said existed in His pre-existence as “perfect God” and “unchangeable” – see above) had become subject to sin (could have sinned). This was because of the incarnation. To put it in another way, Arius believed that Christ, in becoming incarnate, could have sinned and because of it (if He had sinned) become changed. The ‘one substance’ (trinity) belief prohibits this reasoning. This is why this ‘risk factor’ is not believed by

trinitarians (those who believe that God and Christ are of the one substance therefore they are inseparable). In a letter to his clergy, the Bishop Alexander explained why Arius and his followers had been condemned for their beliefs. He wrote

“Some one accordingly asked them [the Arians] whether the Word of God could be changed, as the devil has been, and they feared not to say ‘Yes: he certainly could; for being begotten and created, his nature is susceptible of change.’ We then, with the bishops of Egypt and Libya, being assembled together to the number of nearly a hundred, anathematized Arius for his shameless avowal of these heresies, together with all such as have countenanced them.” (*Alexander to his clergy, c. AD 319, taken from A New Eusebius by J. Stevenson, revised by W. H. C. Frend*)

Notice here that Christ is called “the Word of God”. This is a reference to John 1:1.

We need to remember here that fallen human nature being what it is - Alexander (also probably most who opposed the beliefs of Arius) wanted to put the worst possible slant on what was believed by Arius. This is normally done by those wanting to put the opposition in the worse possible light. We know that Arius believed that Christ, in His pre-existence, was unchangeable (see letter of Arius above) so he must have believed it was by becoming incarnate He became subject to sin. Athanasius (the arch enemy of the beliefs of Arius) wrote of what was believed by Arius

“And by nature, as all others, so the Word Himself is alterable, and remains good by His own free will, while He chooseth; when, however, He wills, He can alter as we can, as being of an alterable nature. For ‘therefore,’ saith he [Arius], ‘as foreknowing that He would be good, did God by anticipation bestow on Him this glory, which afterwards, as man, He attained from virtue. Thus in consequence of His works fore-known, did God bring it to pass that He being such, should come to be.’” (*Athanasius, Discourses against the Arians, Discourse 1, chapter 2, ‘Extracts from the Thalia of Arius’*)

Athanasius was saying much the same as Alexander and Sozomen. This is that Arius believed that Christ, when on earth, remained sinless by exercising free will – or to put it another way, Christ **chose** not to sin. Athanasius is also saying that Arius believed that Christ could have sinned and become changed because of it (if He had sinned). We can now see why the finally accepted creed of Nicaea (the one that was formulated to defeat the beliefs of Arius) said

“And whosoever shall say that there was a time when the Son of God was not, or that before he was begotten he was not, or that he was made of things that were not, or that he is of a different substance or essence [from the Father] or that he is a creature, or subject to change or conversion — all that so say, the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes them.” (*The finally accepted creed of Nicaea*)

In the book *The Story of the Church* it says this of Arius (this was after saying that this controversy came to its height in Alexandria and that there was no church like the one at Alexandria for the learning of its scholars or the power of its preachers)

“Of its many great preachers none was more striking than Arius (265-336), a tall man with a stoop, with wild, blazing eyes, and with a capacity for terrific outburst. No man could sway the hearts of his hearers as he did. He was eloquent, learned and sincere. But the doctrine which He preached cut at the very roots of the Gospel.” (*The Rev. J. Aulay Steele M.A. and the Very Rev. A. J. Campbell D.D., The Story of the Church, page 102, Chapter ‘Nicaea’*)

So what was the ‘crime’ of Arius? Why was he considered so heretical? The book goes on to say

“Arius said that God the Father and God the Son were separate beings.” (*Ibid*)

This of course is in opposition to trinitarianism (see above) but not in opposition to what we have been told through the spirit of prophecy. If you remember from what has been quoted above, Ellen White said that the Father and the Son are two separate individual persons each having forms of their own. This is not trinitarianism. She said to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference session

"And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." All through the Scriptures, the Father and the Son are spoken of as two distinct personages." (*Ellen G. White to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Takoma Park Washington D. C., May 25<sup>th</sup> 1905 Review and Herald 13<sup>th</sup> July 1905, ‘Lessons from the first Epistle of John’*)

Ellen White also warned the delegates (concerning God and Christ being two separate personages)

“Wrong sentiments regarding this are coming in, and we shall all have to meet them” (*Ibid*)

With the introduction of trinitarianism into Seventh-day Adventism, these “Wrong sentiments” have come to pass. As we have seen from the above, no longer do we ‘officially teach’ that God and Christ are two separate personages. Instead we say that the three persons of the Godhead are inseparably connected to each other as the ‘one God’.

### **Oneness between God and Christ**

In 1906, Ellen White wrote an article called *The Word made flesh* It was published in the *Review and Herald*. In this article she wrote about the ‘oneness’ that had existed between God and Christ prior to the foundation of the world,. She wrote (this was after saying that Christ really did partake of human nature and that before He did this He existed in eternity as the Son of God)



“The Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, existed from eternity, a distinct person, yet one with the Father. He was the surpassing glory of heaven. He was the commander of the heavenly intelligences, and the adoring homage of the angels was received by him as his right. This was no robbery of God. "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way," he declares, "before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth; while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, April 5<sup>th</sup> 1906, 'The Word made flesh'*)

Ellen White is quoting Proverbs 8:22-27. This is a reference to Christ being the wisdom of God “brought forth”. This was in eternity. This is why He truly is the Son of God. He was “brought forth” (begotten) of God in eternity. It was then that Ellen White wrote of the ‘oneness’ that Christ had with the Father before the foundation of the world. She wrote

“There are light and glory in the truth that Christ was one with the Father before the foundation of the world was laid. This is the light shining in a dark place, making it resplendent with divine, original glory. This truth, infinitely mysterious in itself, explains other mysterious and otherwise unexplainable truths, while it is enshrined in light, unapproachable and incomprehensible.” (*Ibid*)

This really is very important. We are told here that there was a ‘oneness’ between God the Father and Christ (before the foundation of the world was laid) but we are told also that it is “enshrined in light, unapproachable and incomprehensible”. In other words, this was a ‘oneness’ that we cannot possibly understand. This is why we should not attempt to explain it. This is the problem in this ‘trinity debate’. People, namely the trinitarians, are trying to explain what we are told here is unexplainable – certainly not revealed in the Scriptures or through the spirit of prophecy.

Ellen White did say though that this ‘oneness’, whatever it is or was, “explains other mysterious and otherwise unexplainable truths”. To put this in another way, there are truths in the Bible (obviously concerning God and Christ) that would not make sense (be unexplainable) if this ‘oneness’ had not existed. This is very important – as also is the fact that we cannot understand this ‘oneness’. This is why we should not conjecture about it – as do the trinitarians in their trinity doctrine. As has been said, trinitarians are attempting to explain the unexplainable – and in doing so are drawing conclusions that are contrary to what God has revealed. This is why we have the erroneous implications that we have spoken of above. Trinitarian ‘oneness’ diminishes the gospel. Did you notice that Ellen White did not include the Holy Spirit in this 'oneness'? This I believe is very interesting.

We shall now go to chapter 5. In this chapter we shall see that history has repeated itself.

## **Chapter 5**

### **History repeating itself**

#### **The early Christian church**

In early Christianity, the beliefs that were held concerning God and Christ were very simple. God the Father was said to be the source of all being (unbegotten) whilst Christ was believed to be the only begotten Son of God. It was believed that God the Father created all things through Christ (Ephesians 3:9). Early Seventh-day Adventists held these same beliefs.

As we have seen from the above, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century these beliefs took on a different complexion. Instead of staying solely with what the Scriptures reveal, the church, into its beliefs, introduced speculation. This was done at the Council of Nicaea where a creed was formulated saying that the Father and the Son were of the 'one and the same substance' therefore were inseparable. Later in AD 381, the Holy Spirit was included in this 'one substance' theory thereby producing a teaching not found in Scripture. This of course is the doctrine of the trinity. Eventually, 'the church' progressed into a fully developed apostasy from what the Scriptures say and became what we now know as the Roman Catholic Church.

Through the preaching of the gospel (through those whom God raised up to speak out against the beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church) different denominations and groups came into being. This was the result of the reformation. Eventually, to proclaim the end time message that God designed the world to receive prior to the second coming of Christ, God raised up a movement of people that eventually became known as the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

As we shall now see, that which has happened in the Seventh-day Adventist Church,

particularly as far as our Godhead beliefs are concerned, is only a repeat of what happened in early Christianity. This is because we began by teaching what the 'Bible only' had to say concerning the three persons of the Godhead but eventually brought into our beliefs the speculations of the trinity doctrine.

### **Early Seventh-day Adventism**

When the Seventh-day Adventist Church became established, the beliefs it held could be supported by using Scripture alone. It was believed that the Father was the source of all being – also that Christ, begotten/brought forth of God in eternity, was the divine Son of God. Christ was said therefore to be God in the person of the Son. Shortly after the death of Ellen White, moves were made to change this belief. This was even though it had been held throughout the time of her ministry. As we shall now see, Ellen White confirmed this belief to be true.

In 1893 when in New Zealand, Ellen White explained (after saying that those of other denominations were spreading false rumours about what was believed by Seventh-day Adventists)

“For instance, an effort was made to obtain the use of the hall at a village four miles from Hastings, where some of our workers proposed to present the gospel to the people; but they did not succeed in obtaining the hall, because a school-teacher there opposed the truth, and declared to the people that Seventh-day Adventists did not believe in the divinity of Christ. This man may not have known what our faith is on this point, but he was not left in ignorance. He was informed that there is not a people on earth who hold more firmly to the truth of Christ's pre-existence than do Seventh-day Adventists.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 5<sup>th</sup> December 1893, 'An appeal for the Australasian field'*)

The reason why it was often said that we (Seventh-day Adventists) did not believe in the divinity of Christ appears to be mainly twofold. First we held to the belief that Christ was begotten (brought forth) of God in eternity whilst secondly we did not accept the trinity doctrine. As we can see though, Ellen White said that what was being taught by Seventh-day Adventists concerning Christ was the truth. Early Seventh-day Adventists knew of this 'problem' (that very often we were often said not to believe that Christ was divine) but as Joseph Waggoner explained (we noted this above)

“THE great mistake of Trinitarians, in arguing this subject, seems to be this: They make no distinction between a denial of a trinity and a denial of the divinity of Christ. They see only the two extremes, between which the truth lies; and take every expression referring to the pre-existence of Christ as evidence of a trinity.” (*J. H. Waggoner, Review and Herald, November 10<sup>th</sup> 1863, 'The Atonement – part II, The doctrine of a trinity degrades the atonement'*)

Waggoner then wrote

“The Scriptures abundantly teach the pre-existence of Christ and his divinity; but they are entirely silent in regard to a trinity.” *(Ibid)*

The latter is very true. This is why the early Seventh-day Adventists held to their non-trinitarian reasoning. They upheld the divinity of Christ but they rejected the trinity doctrine. As Russell Holt put it in the 1967 term paper he wrote for Dr. Mervyn Maxwell (here he is referring to the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists up to the time of the death of James White in 1881)

“A survey of other Adventist writers during these years reveals, that to a man, they rejected the trinity, yet, with equal unanimity they upheld the divinity of Christ.” *(Russell Holt, “The doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination: Its rejection and acceptance”, A term paper for Dr. Mervyn Maxwell, 1969)*

Holt then wrote of the pioneers’ beliefs

“To reject the trinity is not necessarily to strip the Saviour of His divinity. Indeed, certain Adventist writers felt that it was the trinitarians who filled the role of degrading Christ’s divine nature.” *(Ibid)*

If you would like to read what early Seventh-day Adventists believed concerning the divinity of Christ – also how they were often misunderstood not to believe that Christ is divine – you can do so by reading Chapter 13 of this study here

[A study of the Godhead – as it pertains to Seventh-day Adventism](#)

You will also read in this same chapter what they had to say about the trinity doctrine – meaning why they rejected it.

You can also read of this in sections 21 and 22 of this study

[A Detailed History of the Trinity Doctrine](#)

### **Leadership dissatisfaction (with beliefs concerning Christ)**

Unfortunately, not every Seventh-day Adventist was satisfied with ‘staying with Scripture alone’. This is because the trinity doctrine, by those termed ‘mainstream Christianity’, is regarded as the central teaching of the Christian faith. This stems from the 4<sup>th</sup> century when the trinity doctrine was established in Christianity as ‘orthodox Christianity’. In fact most trinitarian denominations believe that those who do not accept the trinity doctrine cannot really be termed ‘Christian’. So it was that whilst we were not a trinitarian denomination, we were not considered a part of mainstream Christianity. This is why we were often denounced a cult or a sect. This is also why many believe that those of our leadership sought to change our non-trinitarian beliefs.

In other words, the belief is that our leadership wanted the Seventh-day Adventist Church to be recognised by other denominations as part of mainstream Christianity.

As has been noted, the move to change our beliefs concerning Christ began in earnest just a few years after Ellen White died (1915). This was when a Bible council was called. This eventually came about in 1919 - with invitations going only to the higher echelon (the uppermost leadership) of our denomination. Those of the ministry in general were not allowed to attend. This is obviously why some referred to it as a 'secret' Bible council. When explaining the decision of the General Conference as to who could attend the conference, Bert Haloviak (as Assistant Director of the office of Archives and Statistics of the Seventh-day Adventist Church) said

*“Bible and history teachers from SDA colleges and junior colleges, leading editors and "such other leading men" as the GCC might designate, were invited to attend. A committee of seven selected some 40 delegates and assigned approximately 67 Bible and history topics to be considered.” (Bert Haloviak, A paper presented at the meeting of Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Scholars in New York City November 14, 1979 ‘In the Shadow of the Daily’, ‘Background and Aftermath of the 1919 Bible and History teachers Conference’)*

This was much the same as was said by A. G. Daniells (then General Conference President) who in his opening address as chairman of the Bible Conference explained to the delegates

*“I think I can state the action of the General Conference Committee with reference to the personnel of the Conference. It was to be the members of the General Conference Committee in America who could attend; the Bible and history teachers in our colleges, junior colleges, and seminaries; and a number of our leading editors in this country.” (A. G. Daniells. Notes on the discussions of the 1919 Bible Conference and Teachers Meeting held at Takoma Park in Washington D.C. July 1<sup>st</sup> 1919, page 10)*

During this Bible conference, ideas were presented concerning Christ that seriously conflicted with what was then generally believed by Seventh-day Adventists. Admittedly the teaching that Christ is the Son of God (begotten of God) was still the belief presented at the 1919 Bible Conference (even by those not satisfied with our beliefs) but it took on a different slant. Some of our leadership, like W. W. Prescott (who was leading out each day in a presentation called ‘The Person of Christ’) stressed the belief that Christ’s Sonship was eternal. This is how it is considered to be in orthodox trinitarianism. At the end of the conference, it was decided by the delegates that their discussions, faithfully recorded by stenographers, should not be made public. This was another reason for this council to be called a 'secret' Bible council.

In 1974, the records of the discussions were 'discovered' in the Seventh-day

Adventist archives by Dr. Donald Yost. This was 55 years after the conference had taken place. If you would like to read the dialogue that took place amongst the delegates at the 1919 Bible Conference, particularity concerning Christ, then you can do so by reading chapters 35 and 36 of the study found here

### [A Detailed History of the Trinity Doctrine](#)

Over the decades that followed - through our various denominational publications - this 'new' belief (the new theology) was often promoted. It also underwent development. Eventually, this resulted in our present-day denominational teaching that Christ is not really the Son of God (not begotten of the Father) but is only role-playing the part of a son (pretending to be a son). It can be seen therefore that over the years, our beliefs concerning Christ have changed dramatically. Originally He was believed by Seventh-day Adventists to be the Son of God but with the introduction of our current trinity doctrine this is now denied,. This all stemmed from what was presented at the 1919 Bible Conference. William Johnsson, as editor of the *Review*, wrote

[“Adventists beliefs have changed over the years under the impact of present truth. Most startling is the teaching regarding Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord.”](#) (*William Johnsson, Adventist Review, January 6<sup>th</sup> 1994, Article ‘Present Truth - Walking in God’s Light’*)

He went on to say

[“Many of the pioneers, including James White, J. N. Andrews, Uriah Smith and J. H. Waggoner held to an Arian or semi-Arian view - that is, the Son at some point in time, before the creation of our world, was generated by the Father.”](#) (*Ibid*)

Johnsson was here referring to our past 'begotten faith' concerning Christ – which, as has been said above, during the entire time of Ellen White's ministry, was the preponderant faith of Seventh-day Adventists. The belief was that because Christ is begotten of God, He is God in the person of the Son. Johnsson then said of this belief

[“Only gradually did this false doctrine give way to the Biblical truth, and largely under the impact of Ellen Whites writings in statements such as “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. \(Desire of ages p 530\)”](#) (*Ibid*)

Here Johnsson calls our past beliefs concerning Christ “false doctrine” yet as we have seen above, Ellen White said in 1893 (this when we were still teaching that Christ is begotten/brought forth of God therefore He is truly the Son of God) [“there is not a people on earth who hold more firmly to the truth of Christ's pre-existence than do Seventh-day Adventists.”](#) It is quite obvious (because the claim is made today that it was Ellen White's writings that led us to believe our past beliefs concerning Christ were error) that Ellen White's writings are being misused to say something she never

believed.

Whilst the 1919 Bible Conference did not have an immediate impact on Seventh-day Adventism, the seeds of dissatisfaction had been well and truly sown. Today we see the end result of it. If you would like to read how Ellen White endorsed the belief to be true that Christ is begotten of God and is therefore truly the Son of God, you can do so in Chapter 14 here

[A study of the Godhead – as it pertains to Seventh-day Adventism](#)

### **More leadership dissatisfaction (with beliefs concerning the Holy Spirit)**

This same dissatisfaction was also extended to our once held belief concerning the Holy Spirit. During the time of Ellen White's ministry – also for decades beyond - the Holy Spirit was said to be both God the Father and Christ omnipresent whilst they (God the Father and Christ) were both in the sanctuary in Heaven. It was also believed that the nature of the Holy Spirit was something that humanity could not understand – albeit it came to be believed that He is a person. Those who were dissatisfied with this belief began to promote the idea that the Holy Spirit was a divine being with individuality exactly the same as God the Father and Christ. This in turn, when this teaching eventually caught on in Seventh-day Adventism (which took decades to happen as did the change in beliefs concerning Christ) paved the way for the introduction of the trinity doctrine that is now espoused by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

It was not until these changed beliefs concerning Christ and the Holy Spirit had been accepted as the 'norm' by Seventh-day Adventists that it was possible for a trinity doctrine to be voted in as one of our fundamental beliefs. This happened at the 1980 general Conference session held at Dallas Texas. This was the first time the trinity doctrine had been voted into the fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. You can read about how it was formulated (at the 1980 General Conference session) in chapter 28 here

[A study of the Godhead – as it pertains to Seventh-day Adventism](#)

The discussions on how to phrase the trinity doctrine are very interesting. It shows that the delegates were trying to explain something not revealed in Scripture. This is why they found it so difficult to get the wording correct. They were trying to formulate a belief to explain the unexplained. This difficulty showed too that it was a doctrine not previously held.

This changeover in beliefs is why, at present, in 2012, there is so much contention in the church over our Godhead beliefs. The non-trinitarians are saying we should return to the beliefs of early Seventh-day Adventists (the beliefs that Ellen White said were correct) whilst our church insists today that these past beliefs were wrong (false doctrine) and that God, as explained in our fundamental beliefs, really is a trinity of

inseparable persons.

In the Seventh-day Adventist Church, this has been a developing apostasy – meaning a gradual moving away from the simple truths of the Scriptures to accepting speculations of God being a trinity. This is exactly how it happened in early Christianity. It is history repeating itself. Sadly, the end result of early Christianity apostatising from the truth ended in a complete apostasy from God. We need to be aware of these things.

In Chapter 6 we shall summarise what has been said above and draw a conclusion.

## Chapter six

### Summary and conclusion

#### Who is right and who is wrong?

Jerry Moon is an ardent supporter of the belief that God is a trinity of persons. He also summed up to perfection the 'bottom line' of the present Godhead debate within Seventh-day Adventism. In the book *The Trinity*, which he co-authored along with John Reeve and Woodrow Whidden (this was a book published by our church to so say answer the many questions in our Godhead debate), he wrote the following

“As one line of reasoning goes, either the pioneers were wrong and the present church is right, or the pioneers were right and the present Seventh-day Adventist Church has apostatized from biblical truth.” (*Jerry Moon, 'The Trinity', chapter, 'Trinity and anti-trinitarianism in Seventh-day Adventist history, page 190*)

Moon is saying that one of two things has happened. Either as a church today we have it correct - meaning that the three divine personalities of the Godhead together make up the 'one triune God' as stated in our current fundamental beliefs – or “the pioneers were right and the present Seventh-day Adventist Church has apostatized from biblical truth.” This really is the bottom line of the argument. It is either one way or the other. The non-trinitarians of course are saying that what we taught concerning God, Christ and the Holy Spirit as Ellen White's ministry was drawing to a close is correct. Our current leadership is saying exactly the opposite. They say that what we were teaching then, in the early 1900's, is false doctrine. This is why George Knight wrote



“Most of the founders of Seventh-day Adventism would not be able to join the church today if they had to subscribe to the denomination's Fundamental Beliefs.

More specifically, most would not be able to agree to belief Number 2, which deals with the doctrine of the Trinity.” *(George Knight, 'Ministry' magazine, October 1993, page 10, 'Adventists and Change')*

This “not be able to join the church today” actually takes in more than just some of our pioneers. It takes in the vast majority of Seventh-day Adventists who lived during the time of Ellen White’s ministry – also those who lived up to the end of the 1940’s and even into the 1950’s. The latter was the time when trinitarianism began to take a foothold in Seventh-day Adventism – although I would say that more than likely, even those who then would have called themselves trinitarian would not have understood this teaching to be as it is expressed today in our fundamental beliefs and official explanations.

It is also true to say that those who believe the things revealed through the spirit of prophecy (the writings of Ellen White) regarding God, Christ and the Holy Spirit cannot accept the beliefs now held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

### **Your decision**

It is entirely your decision as to who (and what) in this debate is right and wrong. I have made my decision. I believe that our once-held Godhead beliefs – meaning before we changed them to accommodate the trinity doctrine - were correct. These are beliefs that do not require a going beyond Scriptures but take into consideration only that which God has revealed. This is the stand taken today by the Seventh-day Adventist non-trinitarians.

### **In closing**

In closing it can only be said that much more could be written concerning what is believed by trinitarians. We could also say so much more about the trinity doctrine in history. This is whether it concerns how it became a part of early Christianity or how it became a part of the teaching of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Enough though has been said already to understand the basics of this teaching, also its history and its implications – which was the objective of this article.

If you would like to know more about any of the various aspects of the trinity doctrine, there is much written on this website. Simply proceed to the [main menu](#) and select a section suited to your particular interest.

May God bless you in your search for the truth.

Terry Hill (UK)

Website: - <http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/>