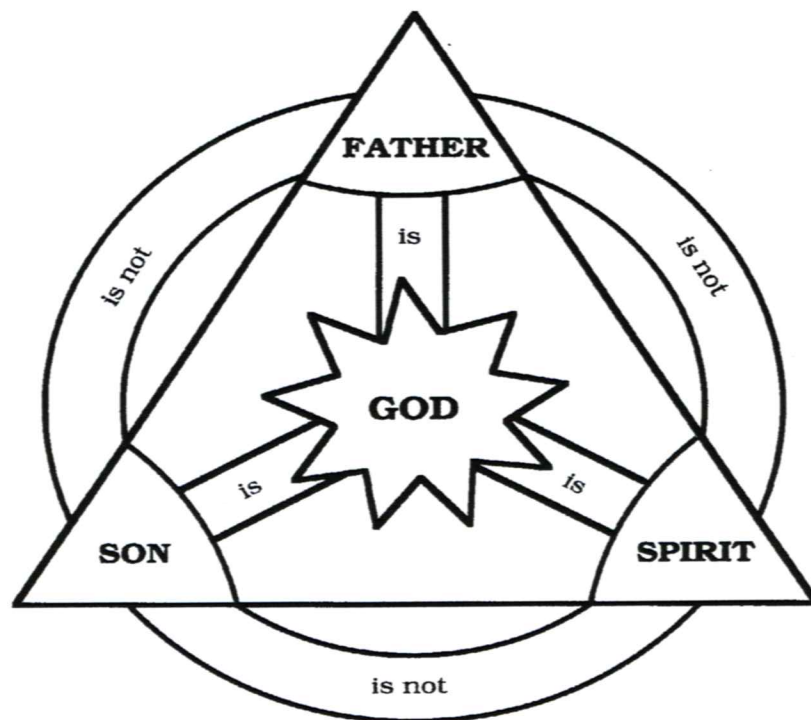


Position Paper No. 2.
WHY THE TRINITY MATTERS



***AN EXAMINATION OF THE RECENT ANTI-TRINITARIAN
CHALLENGED POSED BY HISTORICAL SDAs.***

By

**Richard R. Maraccini
California State University Bakersfield,
October 9, 2001**

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FOREWARD

This paper is the result of what started as a dialogue with a former Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) friend. He considered himself a "Historical Adventist" who in good conscience could no longer remain within the denomination. As a "Historical Adventist" he was committed to the doctrinal platform originally espoused by Mrs. White and the pioneers. This platform included a denial of the Trinity. Insofar as my friend was concerned, the Trinity constituted the long dreaded "Omega" of apostasy foretold by Mrs. White.¹ He was convinced that its acceptance by the leadership of the church was the start of the final shaking of Adventism.

I had always known that the pioneers were anti-Trinitarian. At the same time, I was also aware that at no time in the past had the denomination officially adopted an anti-Trinitarian plank in its platform. Evangelicals of all stripes can rejoice in the fact that SDA's are officially Trinitarian. His vehement denial of the Trinity shocked and surprised me. It revealed that anti-Trinitarianism was not solely a thing of the past within Adventism. I felt constrained to dialogue with him over the matter. For his part, he was eager to share his newfound understanding of the Godhead with me.

My friend called the Godhead "the family of God." Within this family were two persons: the Father and the Son. The Father was God in the absolute sense. He was the supreme monarch who alone had immortality and dwelt in the unapproachable light (I Tim. 6:15-16). A son is by definition another person's offspring. Christ was the offspring of the Father. This made him the Son of God. He was not God the Son, second person of the Trinity. The latter made two Gods. The Bible is clear. There is only one God—the Father.

"Does that mean that there was a time when the Son didn't exist?," I remember asking. My friend became very evasive. He pointed out that a biological son always partakes of the same nature as their father. The Son of God was God's offspring. He must therefore have the same nature as God the Father. Anything less would make it impossible for him to be the Son of God. I found his answer less than satisfactory. It didn't answer the question of whether the Son existed throughout eternity with the Father. I pressed him for an answer. Sure enough, he confirmed my worst fears. He pointed out that the prior to being begotten the Son pre-existed as the Father's Word or mind without individualization.

I told my friend that it sounded to me like he was espousing a form of Arianism. He emphatically denied this was the case. Arians believed that the Son was created *ex nihilo*. This made the Son nothing more than a creature. He believed that the Son was begot and not made through a process that he likened to mitosis or cellular division. The Father apparently reached into the deepest recesses of his mind and replicated himself in the person of his Son. All of this struck me as nothing more than a play on semantics. I told my friend that there are only two categories of being. The first is the Creator who alone has life in himself. The second is the creature, who derives his life from the Creator. If the Son as a person came into existence at some point in time then he is by definition a creature since he derives his life from another. My friend rejected both categorizations without offering any suitable alternatives.

His take on the Holy Spirit was equally strange. Prior to Pentecost the Holy Spirit did not even exist. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for spirit (*ruach*) oftentimes meant wind. Wind is not personal but a force. The Spirit of the Lord is nothing more than God's power or force. Since the Father was enthroned in heaven, he used "spirit" or "divine wind" to accomplish his purposes on earth. It was not until the Day of Pentecost that the form of God's power on earth changed into "holy spirit" in accord with Jesus' promise to send another comforter following his ascension (see Jn. 16:7-13). The "holy spirit" represents both the Father and the Son, and generally works through angelic as well as human agencies. These various manifestations proved to my friend that the Holy Spirit was not an individual with personality.

During the course of our discussion it became apparent that my friend had brought into certain misrepresentations of the Trinity. I tried to clarify that Trinitarians believed in one God who was revealed in three persons. Each person within the Trinity was coequal and coeternal. Each also had a separate identity. For example, the Father who listened was not the Son who prayed (modalism). Neither were the three persons separate deities (polytheism). All three partook of the same nature and essence. Take away the Trinity and you have an irresolvable contradiction given that the Bible teaches that there is only one God,

¹ Mrs. White wrote of an "Omega" of apostasy that would soon appear and be of a most startling nature (see *Selected Messages*, book 1, 48, 197-205, 406). She also warned it would make of none effect the testimonies of the Spirit of God or her writings. This author has heard several candidates suggested. These include immanent perfectionism, forensic justification, Walter Rea's findings concerning Mrs. White's literary borrowing, Desmond Ford's denial of the investigative judgment, and the acceptance of the Trinity by the denomination. Acceptance of the "Omega" would result in a widespread apostasy within Adventism, followed by the shaking and then the return of Christ.

and yet there are three persons identified as God. In spite of my painstaking efforts to clearly define and articulate my terms, he continued to insist that Trinitarians either believed in one person who somehow became three persons, or three gods.

This was not my last encounter with an anti-Trinitarian SDA. A few months latter I sent an email to The Ellen White G. White Website (www.ellenwhite.org). For a short period of time I was deluged with emails from those Adventists (mostly conservatives) who sought to persuade me that I should return to the fold. One of those who contacted me was an individual by the name of Lynnford Beachy. He emailed me an article that he wrote entitled "The Adventist Review Perpetuates the Omega."² Beachy's article was a rebuttal to an article that appeared in the *Adventist Review* by Jerry Moon entitled "Heresy or Hopeful Sign? Early Adventists' struggle with the truth about the Trinity."³ Like my friend, Beachy identifies himself as a "Historical Adventist." One of his goals is to restore the denomination to its original anti-Trinitarian platform. Such a platform would mark a return to the pristine purity of the historic teachings held by Mrs. White and the pioneers. Beachy has written numerous articles attacking the doctrine of the Trinity.

I went on to email Beachy's article to some friends. All are active Adventists. I asked each of them to respond to Beachy's assertion that none of the early Adventists (including Mrs. White) believed in the Trinity. A couple of my Adventist friends insisted that anti-Trinitarianism was a thing of the past. I replied by inviting them to respond to the Beachy article. It revealed that anti-Trinitarian sentiments are still very much alive within the church at present. The question that I then posed to them is that if such beliefs made Jehovah's Witnesses non-Christian cultists, what about the pioneers of early Adventism? Did it bother them to belong to a church in which the founder's openly espoused heretical teachings condemned by most major Christian bodies?

None of my SDA friends were willing to label the pioneers views as heretical. Most skirted the issue altogether. Some attempted to defend the pioneers by pointing out that there are probably as many non-Adventists who have a faulty understanding of the Trinity as there are Adventists. Others attempted to vindicate the pioneers by noting all the other areas they "got it right." One accused me of hairsplitting. As far as he was concerned, it didn't matter if Christians believed that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are coequal and coeternal. All that mattered is that we love all three to the best of our ability. I sent him an email asking how one can love a force or a manifestation (to this day I have never gotten a response). Nearly all hinted that the Trinity was "not a big deal doctrinally." One in three, three in one, persons or modes, equality or inferiority, why haggle over such minor details?

This paper is a refusal to allow my Adventist brethren the privilege of sweeping this issue under the rug. Adventists have correctly pointed out that that doctrine matters (see I Tim. 1:10; Tit. 1:9-11; 2:1). For this reason, Adventists have long prevailed upon the rest of Christendom to abandon such "unbiblical doctrines" as the conscious state of the dead, the immortality of the soul, eternal hellfire, and Sunday sanctity.⁴ The doctrine of God is the single most important doctrine in Christian theology. It is inextricably linked to all the other cardinal doctrines. To have a false understanding of the nature and person of God is to ultimately entertain heresy in such areas as Christology or soteriology. Christian devotion and worship likewise require a proper biblical understanding of the Trinity. It matters greatly that many of the founders of Seventh-day Adventism were either Arian or semi-Arian in their Christology. These deviations cannot be regarded as inconsequential given that they have continued to fuel the existing certain anti-Trinitarian sentiments in Adventism.

It is in keeping with all of the above considerations that I have undertaken the following analysis. Bear in mind that the official denominational position at present is Trinitarian. Nevertheless, Adventism has always been eclectic in its theology. Orthodox elements have been combined with heterodox or aberrant elements. The result is a curious theological mix. The same denomination that can sound orthodox concerning the Trinity or the deity of Christ can also sound aberrant when it comes to its teachings concerning 1844 and the investigative judgment or the quasi-canonical status of Mrs. White. Since the official church position is that it bases none of its teachings on a creed, orthodox and non-orthodox elements have historically co-mingled. Even though the church officially requires all members in good standing to subscribe to the Trinity, it is quite possible for a member of the church to subscribe to anti-Trinitarian views. All such individuals have to do is

² See the July 8, 1999 issue of *Old Paths* magazine.

³ Published in the April 29th, 1999 issue.

⁴ Adventists believe that some of these teachings (e.g. the immortality of the soul) were derived from pagan philosophy. Others (e.g. Sunday sanctity) were derived from Papal Rome. Adventists have since their very inception contended that none of these doctrines have scriptural support.

to keep such sentiments to themselves. I have met such Adventists since the initial encounter with my friend.

Presuppositions inevitably appear in any work of theology. This paper is no exception. It helped to reaffirm at least two convictions. First, the Trinity continues to be the best explanation of the scriptural evidence. There is one God who at the same time is revealed in three persons. Each person is coequal in terms of deity. Each is also eternally distinct from the other two persons. Second, the historical evidence from the early second century A.D. on reveals that all the basic components of the doctrine of the Trinity were embraced by the Church. Not only the word "Trinity" but even the words "being" and "person" were being used to describe the internal relationships within the Godhead. All the major ecumenical creeds, starting with the Apostles Creed (c.a. 90-100 A.D.) helped to codify this great truth by formulating what was already revealed in the scriptures. For the past 2000 years, mainstream or orthodox Christianity has embraced the Trinity as one of the essentials of the faith. To this author both the scriptural and the historical evidence in support of the Trinity is very compelling.⁵

For the reader interested in a theological as well as historical survey of the Trinity, I would like to encourage them to get hold of my *The Trinity in the Light of Scripture and History*.⁶ This paper discusses the doctrinal development of the Trinity. Some of the material has been appended in Part II. It provides both an explanation as well as defense of the doctrine of the Trinity as shared by orthodox Christians over the course of the centuries.

⁵ Taken from pages 4-5 of the preface to *The Trinity in the Light of Scripture and History*.

⁶ Available upon request from this author at rmaraccini@csbak.edu.

Introduction. The doctrine of God is the single most important doctrine in Christian theology. It is inextricably linked to all the other cardinal doctrines. To have a false understanding of the nature and person of God is to ultimately entertain heresy in such areas as Christology or soteriology. Christian devotion and worship likewise require a proper biblical understanding of the Trinity. It matters greatly that many of the founders of Seventh-day Adventism were either Arian or semi-Arian in their Christology. These deviations cannot be regarded as inconsequential given that they continue to fuel certain existing anti-Trinitarian sentiments in Adventism.

The fact that many of the founders of Adventism were anti-Trinitarians with Arian leanings explains some of the doctrinal aberrations that have historically plagued the denomination. Chief of these include the incomplete atonement, ontological perfection, the sinful human nature of Christ, the denial of original sin, and the confounding of justification with sanctification. Most anti-Trinitarian heresies deny the concept of vicarious atonement and imputed righteousness in favor of legalism. Prior to the 1950's most Christian apologists considered Adventism a cult in part because of its anti-Trinitarian past. The fact remains that a segment within the denomination still subscribes to these tenets. This segment typically goes under the rubric of "Historical Adventists."¹

It is in keeping with all of the above considerations that I have undertaken the following analysis. Officially, the denominational position at present is Trinitarian. Nevertheless, Adventism has always been eclectic in its theology. Orthodox elements have been combined with heterodox or aberrant elements. The result is a curious theological mix. The same denomination that can sound orthodox concerning the Trinity or the deity of Christ can also sound aberrant when it comes to its teachings concerning 1844 and the investigative judgment or the quasi-canonical status of Mrs. White. Since the official denominational position is that it bases none of its teachings on a creed, orthodox and non-orthodox elements have historically co-mingled. Even though the denomination officially requires all members in good standing to subscribe to the Trinity, it is quite possible for a member of the church to subscribe to anti-Trinitarian views. All such individuals have to do is to keep such sentiments to themselves. In recent years this element has become emboldened enough to make public its stance.

The following analysis is divided into four parts. It is a revision of an earlier work.² Part I is entitled "The Anti-Trinitarian Challenge" and contains a historical survey of the doctrine of the Trinity in Seventh-day Adventism. Part II is entitled "The Foundation of the Trinity." It examines the scriptural basis behind the three foundational truths undergirding the Trinity. Part III is entitled "The Importance of the Trinity." This part examines how each of the major anti-Trinitarian heresies departs from a biblically sound Christology and soteriology. It closes with a summary on how each of these heresies has affected modern Adventist understandings of not only the Trinity but the related doctrines of Christology and soteriology. Part IV, "Concluding Perspectives," examines the present anti-Trinitarian challenge in the light of the writings of Mrs. White and the Pioneers. It closes with some final observations.

¹ There are a myriad of groups and organizations going under this title. Many publish their own magazines and study materials. There is not complete agreement among "Historical Adventists" on doctrinal issues such as the Trinity. The only area where such agreement appears is that all believe that reform within the denomination is in need of reform.

² This paper is an expansion of an earlier work that also went by the same title *Why the Trinity Matters*. I wrote the original shortly after dialoguing with my Adventist friends over the issue of the importance of the doctrine in terms of Christian devotion and worship. The original study was based largely on the material found in Part III. Over the course of the next several months additional sections were added in response to questions and concerns raised by Adventist and non-Adventist readers alike. In contrast to the original study, I omitted the Christological as well as soteriological implications of modalism on the grounds that this particular heresy is not germane to Adventism. Part II is an entirely new section that just recently added. I felt it better to discuss what the foundational truths behind the doctrine are rather than to assume that the reader understands them.

The dilemma presented by the present anti-Trinitarian challenge is most acute in regards to Adventism's claim to follow the Bible and the Bible only in matters of doctrine. It is clear that Adventism's founders were anti-Trinitarians with Arian or semi-Arian leanings. If Adventist prophetess and seer Mrs. White was herself an anti-Trinitarian who leaned towards an Arian Christology then the problem becomes especially acute. This is due to the authority given her by many SDAs. Since God is believed to be the ultimate source behind her writings, He bears at least some of the responsibility for some of the unbiblical doctrines she held at one time such as the shut door.³ "Historical Adventists" are a reminder of what can happen if one chooses to be faithful to her writings. Out of this has come a willingness to embrace certain of her erroneous teachings.

I. The Present Anti-Trinitarian Challenge

Gerhard Pfandl has noted that a growing segment within present-day Adventism is challenging the doctrine of the Trinity.⁴ This segment is seeking to revive the Arian or semi-Arian⁵ views of the pioneers. The view held of Christ back in Adventism's formative years was that there was a time when he didn't exist. His deity was a derived one, making him inferior to the Father. The Holy Spirit was seen as God's effluence or power rather than as the third person of the Trinity.

It is easy to see why Christology has always been a point of contention within Seventh-day Adventism. Between the 1950's-1980's a heated debate raged over the human nature assumed by Christ at the incarnation. Did Christ assume the nature of Adam before the Fall or after it? Only since the 1980's has there been a quasi-official acknowledgment in print that Christ assumed the nature of Adam prior to the Fall.⁶ Certain Christological aberrations within

³ The "shut door" was a teaching derived from the parable of the ten virgins in Mtt. 25. In verse 10 it is announced that the Bridegroom came; the five virgins whom were ready went with him to the marriage. The door was shut leaving those not prepared out of the wedding feast. A small faction of the Millerites held that on October 22, 1844, Christ got up and moved from the holy into the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary. He shut the door of salvation to all except those Advent believers who had joined Miller's 1844 movement. The "shut door" Millerites believed that Jesus was "shut in" with his special people, preparing them to receive his kingdom by testing them on such truths as the Sabbath. Insofar as the rest of the world was concerned, their salvation was past.

Mrs. White claimed in *Selected Messages*, book 1, 63, that she held shut door views for a brief period of time but gave them up after being shown her first vision. Her first vision was claimed to have taken place on Dec. 24, 1844. New evidence has come to light that indicates that she held such views for the better part of over six years. Examples include *A Word to the Little Flock* (first published in May, 1847); *Letter B-3-1847* (Letter to Joseph Bates, July 13, 1847); *Letter 5-1849*, White Estate, (March 24-30, 1849); *Present Truth* (August, 1849); and the Camden, New Jersey Vision (June 21, 1851). One can view all this evidence for themselves in the "Shut Door Chronology," www.ellenwhite.org. In August of 1851, James and Ellen White publish *Experience and Views*, a little pamphlet of 64 pages. All mention of the shut door is omitted, apparently due to the fact that conversions of non-Millerites were being reported. What is disturbing is that she purported to have had visions showing her that the door was shut. Such a teaching is clearly unscriptural. For many both within and without the movement, it raises disturbing implications about her so-called inspiration. Worse yet is the apparent cover-up engaged in by the Whites, as well as the Ellen White Estate.

⁴ "The Trinity in Scripture," Biblical Research Institute, Silver Spring, MD, June 1999, 10.

⁵ Pfandl notes that "Semi-Arianism attempted a compromise between the orthodox and Arian position on the nature of Christ. They rejected the Arian view that Christ was created and had a different nature from the Father (*anomoios*—dissimilar), but neither did they accept the Nicene Creed which stated that Christ was 'of one substance (*homoousios*) with the Father.' Semi-Arians taught that Christ was similar (*homoios*) to the Father, or of a similar substance (*homoiousios*), but still subordinate." For further detail on the differences between Arianism, semi-Arianism, and Trinitarianism, see *The Doctrine of the Trinity Among Adventists*, Biblical Research Institute, Silver Spring, MD, June 1999, 1. Semi-Arianism as an attempted compromise goes all the way back to the fourth century A.D. Among early Adventists, the "s" in semi ranged from large to small. Some were closer to pure Arianism, while others were on the verge of embracing a forthright Trinitarianism.

⁶ The acknowledgment statement is found on page 49 of *Seventh-day Adventists Believe...A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Hagerstown, Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1988): "Unlike that of fallen humanity, Jesus' 'spiritual nature' is pure and holy, 'free from every taint of sin.' It would be mistaken to think that He is 'altogether human' as we are. He is the second Adam, the unique Son of God. Nor should we think of Him 'as a man with propensities to sin.' While His human nature was tempted in all points in which human nature is tempted, He never fell, He never sinned. Neither was there in Him an evil propensity."

Page iv of *Seventh-day Adventists Believe...* makes it clear that the volume "is not an officially voted statement." This means that even though it had the approval of then General Conference President Neal Wilson, it is not binding on

Adventism can best be understood in the light of its Arian or semi-Arian past. If Jesus was not God manifest in the flesh, then its only logical to conclude that as a fellow creature he assumed the same nature as Adam did after the Fall during the incarnation. Such a sentiment appears in L.M. Wilcox's March 1927 *Signs of the Times* article. Wilcox writes that Jesus triumphed over sin "in spite of bad blood and an inherited meanness." Although Wilcox would later retract his statement,⁷ the fact remains that such sentiments have been prevalent throughout much of Seventh-day Adventism's history.

Christology is inextricably linked to soteriology. All theological systems ultimately revolve around the person and work of Christ. Late cult apologist Walter Martin use to say to his audiences, "Tell me what you think of Christ and I'll tell you your theology." What a person believes about Christ influences their understanding of God, salvation, the church, the sacraments, and the last-things.

The implications of a defective Christology are especially evident in the area of soteriology. From its inception, Adventism has been plagued by legalism and perfectionism. Geoffrey's Paxton's *The Shaking of Adventism*⁸ documented the debate in the church from 1844 to the 1970's over justification by faith. The roots of this debate can be traced back to the defective Christology held by many of the pioneers. Uriah Smith is a case in point. Smith was the one time editor of the official church journal the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*. He was an Arian who believed that the Son of God did not exist at some point in eternity past. His belief was that terms such as "firstborn," "only begotten," and the "beginning of God's creation" pointed to the fact that Christ was God's first, original creation.⁹

Smith's Arian or semi-Arian leanings clearly affected his soteriology.¹⁰ This is evidenced by the fact that he emerged as a major opponent of Jones and Waggoner's 1888 message on objective righteousness. Such opposition is in keeping with Arianism. Arianism downplays objective righteousness and substitutionary atonement in favor of a legalistic, work-oriented system of salvation.¹¹ One of the logical outgrowths of anti-Trinitarianism is that it embraces a soteriology which exalts what humans can do in order to merit salvation.

Uriah Smith represented one end of the spectrum. The other end was occupied by individuals whose views were not so blatantly Arian. Their views can more properly be described as "semi-Arian." Three such examples include James White, Joseph Bates, and E.J. Waggoner. White and Bates started out as ordained ministers of the "Christian Connection." The Connection was a backcountry version of Boston Unitarianism. The Connection had ties to the "Restorationist Movement" of Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone. This movement advocated a non-creedal

members given that it wasn't voted on at a world session. At best then, the statement represents the beliefs of some of the denomination's top scholars. Officially, the denomination has yet to repudiate the doctrine of the sinful human nature of Christ at the incarnation.

⁷ Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977.

⁸ Wilcox's retraction is cited on page 432-433 of Walter Martin's *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis: Bethany Publishers, 1985). Wilcox writes in a 1957 letter that he was "spanked" by church officials for having made such a statement.

⁹ *Thoughts, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Revelation* (Battle Creek, 1865), 59.

¹⁰ Smith would later modify some of his earlier positions. For example, he later conceded that passages such as Rev. 3:14 ("beginning of the creation of God") did not necessarily imply a beginning in terms of point of origination given that Jesus is referred to as "the only begotten" of the Father (ibid, 1881 ed., 74). Nevertheless, Smith remained an anti-Trinitarian with Arian leanings until the day he died. In his book *Looking Unto Jesus*, he would write on page 13 of "the evolution of deity" ceasing with the Son (see Pfandl's *The Doctrine of the Trinity Among Adventists*, 2).

¹¹ So noted by O.J. Brown in *Heresies: Heresy and Orthodoxy in the History of the Church* (Hendriksen Publishers, 1997), 119-120. A similar observation is made by Linwood Urban in *A Short History of Christian Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press), 63. Linwood is cited by Woodrow Whidden in *Arianism, Adventism, and Methodism: The Healing of Trinitarian Teaching and Soteriology*, Tenth Oxford, MI, Institute of Methodist Theological Studies, 1997, 9.

Christianity. Followers understood terms such as "first-born" or "only begotten" in a literal sense. The Father was first and superior. White and Bates brought their anti-Trinitarian views with them into the Adventist church. At the same time, White could write "S.D. Adventists hold the divinity of Christ so nearly with the Trinitarians that we apprehend no trial here."¹² While considering the creedal Trinity itself to be unscriptural, White nonetheless affirmed what appears to be a delegated divinity for the Son.

E.J. Waggoner best exemplifies the semi-Arian position held by many of the pioneers. Waggoner believed that at some point Jesus proceeded amoeba-like from the "cell of the Father" and in the process emerged as a separate divine being. Waggoner based his arguments on such texts as Jn. 1:18 and 8:42. From a human standpoint it might just as well have been said to occur in eternity given that it occurred back in the days before finite comprehension. Waggoner concluded that Jesus was a begotten Son as opposed to a created subject. By inheritance he had a more excellent name than any angel.¹³ While he did not consider Jesus a creature, Waggoner's theology conjures up the image of a senior deity and his partner the junior divinity. It comes perilously close to polytheism. Ironically, Waggoner helped move the denomination towards a more Pauline/Lutheran expression of justification. Nevertheless, as Whidden points out, while Waggoner came close to the borders of a fully Athanasian Christology he never did quite make it over.¹⁴

The historical record in early Adventism is quite clear. Pioneer notables such as Smith, White, Bates, J.N. Andrews, R.F. Cottrell, D.W. Hull, J. N. Loughborough, and S.B. Whitney, all rejected the Trinity. In some cases the rejection was based on a faulty understanding of the doctrine. For example, Bates misunderstood the Trinity to teach that the three persons were somehow identical (modal monarchianism). Conversely, Loughborough attacked the Trinity on the assumption that it separated the three persons into three distinct individuals (tritheism). Both Bates and Loughborough mistakenly equated the Trinity doctrine with heresies that distorted the true biblical teaching of one God in three persons (e.g. Deut. 6:4; Mk. 12:29; Matt. 28:19; Rom. 14:17-18, 15:16; I Cor. 2:2-5, 6:11; II Cor. 1:21-22; 13:14; I Thess. 1:3-5, II Thess. 2:13; I Pet. 1:2). Others rejected the doctrine on the basis that it reflected speculative philosophy as opposed to the teachings of the scriptures.¹⁵ With this rejection came an aberrant Christology that resulted in the embracing of an equally faulty soteriology. It appears that Arianism's attraction for the pioneers of early Adventism stems from the primacy the former gives to the concept of Jesus as humanity's example. Christ's example as reflected in his obedience to the law was the bedrock upon which the pioneer's soteriology was built. Arianism thus appears to attract those movements preoccupied with obedience rather than with the gospel.¹⁶

Adventist historians and theologians have long been aware of the anti-Trinitarian sentiments shared by many of its founders. Consider Mervyn Maxwell's "Sanctuary and Atonement in SDA Theology: An Historical Survey." He notes that Adventist historian L.E. Froom was embarrassed enough by such sentiments to try and relegate them to the "lunatic fringe" of the church.¹⁷ Unfortunately for Froom, outsiders were aware that such sentiments were not limited to an

¹² Review and Herald, Oct. 12, 1876. Cited on page 6 of Pfandl's *The Doctrine of the Trinity Among Adventists*.

¹³ This analysis is provided by Woodrow Whidden in *Arianism, Adventism, and Methodism*, 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 5.

¹⁵ See Jerry Moon's "Heresy of Hopeful Sign? Early Adventist's Struggle With the Truth About the Trinity," *Adventist Review*, April 22, 1999, 10. Moon notes that Bates and Loughborough equated the Trinity with heresies long rejected by the historic Church. Also see Pfandl's "The Doctrine of the Trinity Among Adventists," 1-3, and Whidden's *Arianism, Adventism, and Methodism*, 7-9. Both provide additional documentation of the anti-Trinitarian views held by most of the pioneers as well as on the scriptural reasons they gave in defense of such views.

¹⁶ This point is made by Whidden, *ibid*, 9.

¹⁷ Noted on page 530 of his chapter in *The Sanctuary and the Atonement*, Wallenkamp and Leshner, eds., (Washington: Review and Herald Pub. Assoc, 1981).

isolated few. Cult-watcher Walter Martin certainly knew otherwise. That's why he initially labeled Adventism a cult in his book *The Rise of the Cults*.¹⁸

Martin's book precipitated a response from local Conference president J. Unruh. It led to the historic meeting between Martin and representatives of the SDA denomination at Takoma Park, Washington D.C. Martin met with Unruh, Froom, R.A. Anderson, and R.E. Read with the full backing and support of then General Conference President R. Figuhr. The end result was two books. One was written by Martin and was titled *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism*. The other was put out by the General Conference of SDA's and was titled *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*.¹⁹ *Questions on Doctrine* acknowledged the Arian sentiments of some of Adventism's founders. This acknowledgment appears under question # 5.²⁰ At the same time, the Adventist representatives maintained that these sentiments were never normative in shaping Adventist theology. Martin apparently agreed. He subsequently wrote Adventism a clean bill of health in *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism* as well as in the appendix of his book *The Kingdom of the Cults*.

If one looks at the 27 Fundamental Beliefs of the Church they'll see that Adventism is very much a Trinitarian denomination. Fundamentals nos. 2-5 require members to affirm the doctrine of the Trinity. Those who deliberately espouse any form of anti-Trinitarianism face church discipline. Usually this discipline takes the form of being disfellowshipped. The history of Adventism's transition from anti-Trinitarianism to Trinitarianism has been the subject of a book by Eric Webster.²¹ Numerous papers have likewise been devoted to the subject. Examples include Erwin Gane's *The Arian or Anti-Trinitarian Views Presented in Seventh-day Adventist Literature*,²² and Russell Holt's *The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-Day Adventist Denomination: Its Rejection and Acceptance*.²³ This history was further reviewed in a spate of articles put out by the *Adventist Review* and the Biblical Research Institute. Jerry Moon's "Heresy Or Hopeful Sign: Early Adventists Struggle With The Truth About the Trinity," appeared in a 1999 edition of the *Adventist Review*. That same year Gerhard Pfandl put out two articles under the imprimatur of the Biblical Research Institute. Their titles are *The Doctrine of the Trinity Among Adventists*, and *The Trinity in Scripture*.

The Moon and Pfandl articles highlight the fact that anti-Trinitarianism and Arianism are alive and well in present-day Seventh-day Adventism. Such elements explain the persistence of legalism and perfection in certain Adventist circles. Both obscure the article of justification by faith.

¹⁸ The following taped conference with the late Walter Martin bears this out. Referring to his meetings of 1955-1956 with church representatives, Martin relates "At that time Adventism was considered like Jehovah's Witnesses, like Mormonism, like most of the major cultic structures of the day....When I first met with L.E. Froom, he took me to task for about fifteen minutes on how I could ever possibly think Adventism was a cult. Adventism rings as true as steel. I said, 'Do you think Arius was a Christian?' And he was an excellent church historian and he said 'of course he wasn't a Christian, he denied the deity of Christ.' I said, 'so did Ellen White.' Dr. Froom said, 'What!' I said 'yes' and produced the quotations, and I opened up a suitcase and produced at least twelve feet of Adventist publications stacked and marked up for Dr. Froom's perusal....And they found everything I said was there was there. And they were in mortal shock I might add, to think it was as pervasive as it was....'That's why you were classified with the Jehovah's Witnesses early on, because of the Arian emphasis in Adventism" (Transcript from a taped conference at Loma Linda, January 1989).

¹⁹ The full title of the volume is *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald Pub. Assn., 1957). "Prepared by a Representative Group of Seventh-day Adventist Leaders, Bible Teachers, and Editors." As with *Seventh-day Adventists Believe....*, *Questions on Doctrine* was not an official volume although it did have the approval of then General Conference President Ruben Figuhr. *Questions on Doctrine* generated controversy from its very inception. It denied certain positions such as the sinful human nature of Christ at the incarnation while affirming others (most notably the completion of the atonement on Calvary). Critics were quick to point out that *Questions on Doctrine* broke with historic Adventist theology in several crucial areas. *Questions on Doctrine* played a pivotal role in the emergence of "evangelical Adventism."

²⁰ See "Our Present Relationship to Past Positions", 42-49.

²¹ The title of Webster's book is *Crosscurrents in Adventist Christology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1984).

²² M.A. thesis, Andrews University, 1963. Available at www.sdanet.org/atissue/trinity/gane-thesis/index.htm.

²³ Term paper, SDA Theological Seminary, 1969.

This now leads to the crux of the present dilemma. Mrs. White has generally been looked upon as an orthodox Trinitarian. The following statements in the 1898 edition of her book *The Desire of the Ages* have long been regarded by Adventist historians and theologians as decisive in establishing her orthodoxy in this respect:

"In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived" (p. 530).

"The Saviour (sic) came from the grave *by the life that was in Himself*" (p. 785).

"Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the *Third Person of the Godhead*, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power" (p. 671).

The above statements are consistent with an Athanasian Christology. All are thoroughly Trinitarian in outlook. Those who have studied Mrs. White's Christology note that there was a clear unfolding in terms of her understanding. Whidden observes that this unfolding took place in three stages.²⁴ The first lasted from 1850-70. Mrs. White pictured the preincarnate Christ in highly subordinationistic terms. In the second, which lasted from 1870 to 1890, Mrs. White depicted the Son as equal with the Father in terms of deity. The third occurred from 1890-1915. During this stage the Son is pictured as one with the Father in terms of substance and essence. A clearly Athanasian Christology emerges in this stage. Where it differs from the second is mainly in terms of the volume of statements affirming Christ's equality with the Father in terms of substance and person.

Many scholars within as well as from without Adventism have wondered why the sudden shift from a predominately subordinationist Christology prior to 1870 to a more Athanasian Christology by the 1890's. Seventh-day Adventist apologists have likewise had to grapple with another issue. Those who believe in the seer status of Mrs. White have long been hard-pressed to explain why she never spoke-out against those subscribing to either an Arian or a semi-Arian Christology. Moon has attempted to provide such an explanation by positing that God had a priority for introducing new truth into the church.²⁵ Moon hypothesizes that Mrs. White refused to disrupt badly needed church unity over any issues that might need correcting but weren't essential for practical godliness.

Moon has driven an unnecessary wedge between sound doctrine and practical godliness. Be that as it may, the fact remains that he correctly notes that the shift in Mrs. White's writings from a subordinationist to an Athanasian Christology appears quite suddenly.

The sudden appearance of this shift explains why many within the theological leadership of the church doubted whether these statements were actually penned by Mrs. White. A case in point is M.L. Andreason. Andreason taught at the denomination's main seminary. He doubted that Mrs. White ever penned the expression "In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived." Such a statement seemed totally contrary to anything he had previously heard. Andreason made a special trip in 1902 to Mrs. White's home. He brought a copy of some of her original quotations on the nature of Christ and asked to compare them to the *Desire of the Ages* quotation. He concluded that the handwriting of the manuscript that purported to be the one upon which page 530 of the *Desire of the Ages* was based was indeed her own handwriting.²⁶

²⁴ *Arianism, Adventism, and Methodism*, 4.

²⁵ See "Heresy Or Hopeful Sign," 11-12.

²⁶ Andreason's conversion to an Athanasian Christology is attributed to Mrs. White's statements by Moon in *ibid*, 11.

So-called "Historical Adventists"²⁷ exhibit a similar skepticism. A case in point is Lynnford Beachy. He wrote a rebuttal to Moon's *Adventist Review* article.²⁸ Given that Beachy accepts the seer status of Mrs. White, it is not surprising that he refuses to accept the statements found in the third edition of the *Desire of the Ages* as genuine or inspired. Beachy asserts that the real author of the statement "In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived" was Mrs. White's copyist Marian Davis. Davis edited many of Mrs. White's works.²⁹ He sees a triumvirate comprised of Davis, H.C. Lacey, and W.W. Prescott behind the sudden shift from a semi-Arian to an Athanasian Christology. In part, this shift came about as a result of an influx of converts from Trinitarian backgrounds. Lacey is a prime example. He was originally from the Church of England (Anglican). Lacey was also a committed Trinitarian who was appalled by the anti-Trinitarianism of many of the pioneers. He played a crucial role in the early work in England and was instrumental in helping to eliminate many of the anti-Trinitarian sentiments found in the older books and publications.³⁰ Also instrumental in this regard was Conference President Daniells and Adventist educator Prescott. The latter two in particular believed that Mrs. White's statements in the third edition of *Desire of the Ages* reflected new light for the church. Both men worked hard to expunge many of the earlier Arian and anti-Trinitarian statements from denominational books and articles. Such efforts are readily apparent from 1898 on.³¹

The SDA denomination has historically prided itself on having no official creed. Some SDA's have taken this position to mean the avoidance of any words or terms not found in the Bible. Those members influenced by this kind of thinking generally will not even use the word Trinity. They prefer to use the noun "Godhead" in its place. Mrs. White may have helped set the precedent here. She used Trinitarian-sounding language. However, never once did Mrs. White use the word Trinity. She always used the word Godhead instead in apparent consistency with King James Version usage in Acts 17:29, Rom. 1:20 and Col. 2:9.³²

The anti-creedal platform of Adventism means that it has allowed for a great deal of variation when it comes to understanding certain doctrines. The Trinity is no exception. Some Adventists have a very orthodox understanding of the Trinity. Others hold views that are aberrant. There are those Adventists who fail to make a proper distinction between the persons within the Godhead. The person of the Father becomes confused with the Son, or the Son with the Holy Spirit. Still others speak of the Trinity as the "family of God." In the process the persons within the Godhead are seen as separate deities. The irony here is that adherents from both segments usually consider themselves Trinitarian. What both segments have done is to embrace distortions of the Trinity. Regrettably, such distortions are found outside of Adventism as well.

The above segment needs to be distinguished from that which is overtly anti-Trinitarian. Besides being Arian or semi-Arian in its Christology, the latter represents Adventism's most perfectionistic as well as legalistic element. An indication of the relative strength of this segment is the existence of organizations dedicated to restoring the denomination to its pristine purity concerning

²⁷ By "Historical" I mean those Adventists committed to the original teachings of the pioneers. Anti-Trinitarianism is among these as are certain other landmarks such as conditional immortality, the Sabbath, and the Sanctuary doctrine. Historic Adventists tend to be rigid in their adherence to these teachings. They also regard Mrs. White as having doctrinal authority. Her writings are made a test of fellowship.

²⁸ Beachy's article is found in *Old Paths*, vol. 8, no. 7, July, 1999, 1-16. It is entitled "Adventist Review Perpetuates the Omega." It was originally sent to me in four installments via email at the behest of a friend. *Old Paths* is a historic Adventist publication and can be accessed at www.smyrna.org, an anti-Trinitarian Adventist website.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 8-9.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 10-11.

³¹ *Ibid*. Beachy believes that Mrs. White's earlier anti-Trinitarian statements were altered by the later church leadership. This accounts for the perceptual shift in post-1898 statements.

³² Why Mrs. White never used the word "Trinity" even when she appeared to be moving in such a direction is a question that no one in the Adventist church has been able to answer. Pfandl notes that she used the noun Godhead in a manner consistent with the meaning of the term Trinity (see *The Trinity in Scripture*, 1). But the fact remains that she never once used the expression in any of her writings.

the Godhead. One such example is the Smyrna Gospel Organization (www.smyrna.org). Allen Stump is its webmaster. He has written a book dedicated to 150 years of Adventist Christology titled *The Foundation of Our Faith*. Stump attacks the Trinity as papal in origin. He further asserts that introduction of this teaching into the church constitutes the dreaded "Omega of Apostasy" warned about by Mrs. White. *Old Paths* magazine is one of the Smyrna Gospel Organization's publications. Other anti-Trinitarian websites include Beachy's Truth About God Ministries (www.truthaboutGodministries.com) as well as Present Truth (www.present-truth.net) and Restoration Ministries (www.restorationministry.com). Its contributors are by and large Arian or semi-Arian in their Christology. While differences exist, these contributors share the following major tenets:

- 1). The Father alone is the one true God spoken of in the scriptures. He dwells in the unapproachable light and is the only one who has immortality in the absolute sense of the word. The Father is neither begotten nor derived.
- 2). The Son is begotten of the Father. He is the exact representation of the Father's person and substance. At some point he did not exist as a distinct person separate from the Father.
- 3). The Holy Spirit is not a distinct person but a divine effluence. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and is sent by the Son.
- 4). The Trinity is a pagan belief introduced into Christendom by the Papacy. The Council of Nicea (325 A.D.) along with the Emperor Constantine and the Bishop Athanasius are usually regarded as the main culprits in this regards.

The present anti-Trinitarian segment seeks to cast doubt on the authenticity of Mrs. White's pro-Trinitarian statements. It places great emphasis on the fact that pioneer notables such as Elder White, Smith, Bates, Loughborough, and Cottrell, rejected the Trinity as unscriptural.³³ As if the pioneers are not enough, correspondence from Mrs. White's son William C. or "Willie" (letter W.C. to H.W. Carr, April 30, 1935) is further cited in this connection. White wrote his letter in response to an inquiry concerning his mother's views about the Holy Spirit: "The statements and arguments of some of our ministers in their effort to prove that the Holy Spirit was an individual as are God the Father and Christ the eternal Son, have perplexed me and sometimes they have made me sad."³⁴

While acknowledging that his mother's views on the individuality of the Holy Spirit were not always clear, he believed that "the Holy Spirit without individuality was the representative of the Father and the Son throughout the universe."³⁵ White believed that his mother taught as such on page 669 of the *Desire of the Ages*. He further believed that the Bible taught a similar view in such passages as Gen. 1:2, Jn. 20:22, Acts 2:4, and 10:44.³⁶ The implication is that like mother like son. Willie didn't believe in the Trinity. It therefore follows that his mother didn't as well. Otherwise, why his concern over those ministers who were apparently making pro-Trinitarian statements in support of the Holy Spirit's personhood or individuality?

For those siding with the The Truth About God or Smyrna Gospel Organization, the facts of Adventist history are pretty straightforward. Neither Mrs. White nor the pioneers believed in the Trinity. It therefore follows that neither should the denomination as a whole. Two publications that purport to document Adventism's slide into Trinitarianism and Papal domination include

³³ A good example is Beachy's *What Did the Pioneers Believe?* (1998 revised edition). The book in its entirety can be downloaded or read at www.smyrna.org.

³⁴ Cited from page 8 of Beachy's "Adventist Review Perpetuates the Omega."

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

Holland 1995 by Fred Allaback and the aforementioned *The Foundations of Our Faith* by Allen Stump. Allaback's book contends that Mrs. White's quotations were changed after her death to support the Trinity. It further alleges that church leaders changed the denomination's teachings about the Trinity in order to gain acceptance by Protestant churches.

Anti-Trinitarians find it highly relevant that it wasn't even until 1931 that the church used the term Trinity in the statement of Adventist beliefs and yearbook. It wasn't until the following year that the first pro-Trinitarian statement of beliefs appeared in the first church manual and all succeeding Adventist yearbooks. Moreover, it wasn't until 1941 that the first pro-Trinity revision of the baptismal vow appeared. The entire scenario is spelled out in "History of the Change in Beliefs."³⁷ During this same period there was the further deletion of anti-Trinitarian statements from Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation* (1945), followed by the compilation of *Evangelism* (1946) with its seeming pro-Trinitarian E.G. White statements.³⁸ Those who espouse anti-Trinitarianism see a concerted effort on the part of the leadership to distort the facts of Adventist history.

Herein lies the dilemma that presently confronts SDA historians and apologists. It's clear that the pioneers were not Trinitarian. It's also clear that by 1898 Mrs. White was espousing an Athanasian Christology as were other leaders in the church such as Daniells, Prescott, and Lacey. This shift was not only sudden but has continued to remain a source of controversy within the church. Those who support the orthodox view of the Trinity, as well as the seer status of Mrs. White, have several important issues they must grapple with. Why did Mrs. White appear prior to 1870 to support a subordinationist Christology only by 1898 to have switched to an Athanasian one? Given the semi-Arian views of her husband as well as most of the early leaders, why was no message sent warning them of their error? Even after the church moved in a more Trinitarian direction after 1898, Mrs. White gave no indication that she was providing the church with new light.

In reading through the various works set forth by anti-Trinitarian Adventist writers, three implicit premises appear to guide their research. First, Mrs. White was a prophetess of God. Her writings are sufficient in and of themselves to determine doctrine. Second, Mrs. White never corrected the pioneers in regards to their Christology. Never once did she write that their views concerning the Godhead were unscriptural. Third, Mrs. White's seeming acceptance of the pioneers beliefs are taken as a blanket endorsement of their views concerning the Godhead.

³⁷ At one time this article could be read at (www.bibletruth.org/Trinity/SDAmenu/SDA.doc/History/change) courtesy of The Bible Truth Organization. Fred Allaback was its webmaster. Allaback is presently abroad doing missionary work. Neither his article nor his website are accessible at present.

³⁸ Ibid. It should be noted that Allaback provides a similar analysis in his book *No New Leaders...No New Gods!* (Creal Spring: Illinois, 1995). In regards to the book *Evangelism*, the editorial changes on 616 make Mrs. White's statement read as follows: "We need to recognize that the Holy Spirit, who is as much a person as God is a person, is walking through these grounds." Allaback notes that the statement originally read as follows: "The Lord instructed us that this was the place in which we should locate, and we have had every reason to believe we are in the right place. We have been brought together as a school, and we need to realize that the Holy Spirit, who is as much a person as God is a person, is walking through these grounds, that the Lord is our keeper, and helper. He hears every word we utter and knows every thought of the mind."

Allaback contends that the replacement of the comma after "grounds" in the original by a period in the revised edition alters the meaning of Mrs. White's statement (see *No New Leaders...No New Gods!* 69). He goes on to note "The original and intended meaning of the quotation is NOT to prove the Holy Spirit to be 'another God' along with the Father and His Son. But rather, that the 'Lord' who 'instructed us,' 'the Holy Spirit' who is 'walking through these grounds,' the 'Lord God' who 'is our keeper' and 'helper' and who 'hears every word' and 'knows every thought,' is one and the same person—The glorified Lord Jesus Christ...Ellen White is saying the same thing as the Bible. Jesus 'is as much a person' as God the Father 'is a person.' Jesus 'is walking through these grounds.' Jesus 'hears every word we utter and knows every thought of the mind'" (ibid).

Allaback contends that there are not two persons being spoken of in the above quote. He identifies the Holy Spirit with Christ, the Father (65), and the angels (65). Allaback attempts to give the Holy Spirit three distinct identities in order to prove he has no separate existence. The Holy Spirit works in and through the Father, Son, and the ministering angels (71). For a refutation of Allaback's treatment of the above statements, see pages 7-8 of Pfandl's *The Doctrine of the Trinity Among Adventists*.

Therefore, SDA's need to rely not only on the writings of Mrs. White but also those of the pioneers if they wish to be "Historical Adventists."³⁹

In the Nov. 1996 edition of *Old Paths*, a magazine dedicated to "Historical Adventism," Beachy wrote an article titled "What Does it Mean to be Orthodox?"⁴⁰ "Orthodox" was defined in terms of adherence to the ecumenical creeds. Such creeds are largely denigrated on the grounds that they exalt human reason and philosophy over the scriptures. The doctrine of the Trinity is relegated to the status of an unbiblical tradition. The irony is that Beachy and many of the proponents of anti-Trinitarianism have made a creed out of both Mrs. White and the pioneers. The latter two have become the primary determinants of Adventist orthodoxy.

Allaback, Beachy, and Stump have correctly pointed out that it doesn't matter what Athanasius or the other formulators of the ecumenical creeds believed or taught concerning the Godhead. Their teachings have to be tested in the light of scripture. The same criteria must also be applied to Mrs. White and the pioneers. It doesn't matter whether Mrs. White or the pioneers were anti-Trinitarian. All of the uninspired statements in the world will not make this teaching right if the Bible teaches otherwise. The issue isn't what Mrs. White, W.C. White, James White, J.N. Loughborough, J.H. Waggoner, or R.F. Cottrell have to say, as interesting as their comments might be. Rather, it's what the inspired writers of the scriptures teach. The latter take precedence over the former.

II. The Foundation for the Trinity

The existing anti-Trinitarian element in present-day Adventism holds that only one divine being has existed throughout eternity—the Father. The Son later came into existence, while the Holy Spirit is a force and not a person. Allaback refers to all three as the great powers of heaven who manifest and represent God the Father. He denies that all three have the same divine qualities or powers.⁴¹ In this he is seconded by Rachel Cory-Kuehl,⁴² Allen Stump,⁴³ and Bill Stringfellow.⁴⁴ Many of the same misunderstandings or misrepresentations of the doctrine of the Trinity that appear in the writings of anti-Trinitarian cults such as the Jehovah's Witnesses or Oneness Pentecostals also appear in the writings of these anti-Trinitarian Adventists. One such example is made in the following statement by Allaback: "There is a 'trio' of three living God's in the 'God family,' who all have the same qualities and divine powers."⁴⁵ Allaback is equating Trinitarianism

³⁹ Pfandl notes that save for a few Bible passages, most of the arguments advanced by anti-Trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists are taken from historical statements made by the pioneers and Mrs. White (*ibid*, 5). My own perusal of the research done by Allaback, Beachy, Stump, and other anti-Trinitarian Adventist writers affirms that Pfandl is correct.

⁴⁰ This article is found online in vol. 5, no. 11, pages 1-6 of *Old Paths* magazine. Beachy uses orthodox in a purely pejorative sense throughout his article. As his source of authority he quotes Mrs. White. Beachy notes that Mrs. White took an unfavorable position towards the concept of orthodox: "The orthodox churches used every means to prevent the belief in Christ's soon coming from spreading" (*Life Sketches*, 1915 ed., 59). "There are ministers from the so-called orthodox churches traveling from one place to the next to war against Seventh-day Adventists, and they make Mrs. White their textbook. The scoffers of the last days are led on by these ministers professing to be God's watchmen" (*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, 69). Mrs. White used orthodox in the context of those established churches that rejected the message preached by the fledgling Seventh-day Adventist church.

⁴¹ *No New Leaders...No New Gods*, 71.

⁴² *The Persons of the Godhead* (Aggelia Publications, 1996).

⁴³ *The Foundation of Our Faith*.

⁴⁴ *The Red Flag is Waving* (Spencer, TN: Concerned Publication, n.d.). On page 15, Stringfellow expresses the following Arian sentiment: "Just think, there was a certain, specific day when God brought forth His Son...There was a time (even though it is impossible to think that far into the past) when Christ did not exist." This sentiment is shared by Allaback, Beachy, Cory-Kuehl, and Stump.

⁴⁵ See page 71 of *No New Gods...No New Leaders*. This statement is a paraphrase of the following quotation from Mrs. White: "There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will co-operate with the obedient subjects if heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ" (*Evangelism*, 614-615). Since Allaback denies that the Godhead consists of three persons, he paraphrases the "three living persons of the heavenly trio" as follows: "the

(one God, three persons) with tritheism (three Gods). The latter is a form of polytheism. Such misrepresentations are common among anti-Trinitarians.

The doctrine of the Trinity is derived from the Latin word *Trinitas*. The word was coined by the second century A.D. Christian apologist Tertullian. He wrote of one God in substance, who was three in person.⁴⁶ Implicit in the concept of the Trinity is the notion of God's triunity. Critics of the doctrine frequently misunderstand the doctrine as triplex: $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$. Anti-Trinitarians have oftentimes accused Trinitarians of believing in three "gods" who somehow are one God. The classical expression of the Trinity is found in the Athanasian Creed:

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 Spirit, all is one; the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit....And in this Trinity none is before, or after, another. None is greater, or less, than another. But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and coequal. So that in all things, as was said before, the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in unity, is to be worshipped.⁴⁷

The Athanasian Creed is clear. Christians worship one God in triunity. The Trinity is not triplex but triune: $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$. In dealing with anti-Trinitarians, it is imperative that the groundwork first be laid in terms of explaining the doctrine within the framework of historic, orthodox Christianity. This section will focus on providing such a framework.

There are three major foundations that serve as the scriptural basis behind the doctrine of the Trinity.⁴⁸ It is imperative that individuals understand what these foundations are and how they relate to scripture. Table 1⁴⁹ (see page 15) provides a summation of these three foundations: monotheism, three persons, and equality. There are likewise three corresponding anti-Trinitarian errors that outright deny or compromise these three scriptural foundations (i.e. subordinationism, modalism, and tritheism). Opponents of the doctrine invariably embrace one of the three. The fourth column identifies who some of these groups are. Readers need to understand where they stand in relationship to Table 1. Many individuals have inadvertently embraced distortions of the doctrine of the Trinity because they misunderstand what each of the three foundations entails.

Foundation #1: Monotheism. The united testimony of scripture is clear. There is only one God (Deut. 4:35, 39; 6:4; Isa. 44:6; Zech. 14:9; Mk. 12:29; I Cor. 8:4; Eph. 4:6; Jms. 2:19). God's oneness centers around his ontology or being. Orthodox or mainstream Christianity has always tied God's essence or being in to his non-contingent life.⁵⁰ God's possesses non-contingent life within himself (Ex. 3:14; Isa. 44:24; Acts 17:24-25; c.f. I Cor. 8:6). He shares it with no one else (Isa. 40:25; 43:10; Gal. 4:8). The God of the Bible is totally unique in this regard (Isa. 43:10-11; 45:22). Non-contingent life is a good operating definition of God's essence. In his essence God

three great powers of heaven who manifest, represent, and personify God the Father." Pfandl observes that Allabck's paraphrase alters the simple meaning of the sentence (*The Doctrine of the Trinity Among Adventists*, 8).

⁴⁶ Concerning the Trinity, Tertullian writes "Thus the connection of the Father in the Son, and in the Son the Paraclete, produces three coherent Persons, who are yet distinct, one from another. These three are one essence, not one persons, as it is said, 'I and the Father are one, in unity of substance, not singularity of number'" (*Against Praxeas*, 25).

⁴⁷ The Athanasian Creed in its entirety is found in Appendix 1 of G.A. Maher and L.A. Nichols *Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions, and the Occult* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993, 331-332).

⁴⁸ James White sets forth these three foundations on page 28 of *The Forgotten Trinity* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1998).

⁴⁹ Table 1 is a modification of a similar table by White in *ibid*. Dustin Adams, director of the Christian Essentials Outreach (CEO) graciously offered some suggestions on how to modify aspects of the table for purposes of this analysis.

⁵⁰ In regards to God's non-contingent life, Francis Beckwith writes, "Moreover, since everything that exists depends on God, and God is unchanging and eternal, it follows that God cannot-not-exist. In other words, He is a necessary being, whereas everything else is contingent (see "Philosophical Problems with the Mormon Concept of God," *Christian Research Journal*, Spring, 1992).

always remains distinct from the creation (Acts 17:29; Rom. 1:20-23). That is why the created order is never depicted as being part of God anymore than it is seen as existing apart from God. The former in particular smacks of pantheism. In biblical theology the world exists because of God (Ps. 50:10-12; Isa. 42:5; Acts 14:15). God is always other than the world.

Within the divine being there is one indivisible substance or essence. The divine being is indivisible insofar as it can't be chopped up or divided. God's being is unique in the sense that it is not shared by any other creature.⁵¹ This is bore out in Isa. 44:6-8. Here God rhetorically asks, "Is there any God besides me?" The divine answer is "Beside Me there is no God... There is no other Rock" (vv. 6, 8). God's being is shared by Him alone.

The doctrine of the Trinity holds that God is indivisibly one in respect to his Being. That is why discussions on God's triunity must invariably start with a discussion of his oneness first and then proceed to explain how God can be three.⁵² The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one in terms of sharing the same divine nature. However, they are three in terms of personal distinctions. Such categorizations are important in order to avoid certain unscriptural frameworks. For example, subordinationism gives prayer and worship to the Father alone. Conversely, polytheism offers it to more than one God. Modalism offers no objective referent by which to define or describe the God that Christians claim to worship. All three of these errors contradict the pattern of religious devotion revealed within the pages of the New Testament. To combat these errors we now turn to the second foundation: three persons.

Foundation #2: Three Persons. Of the three foundations this one is the most controversial. Some anti-Trinitarians attack the doctrine on the grounds that "person" is nowhere used in the Bible to describe God. For example, writers for Oneness Pentecostal groups such as the United Pentecostal Church (UPC) do not believe that it is appropriate to speak of God as a person. Person is something that is appropriate only for individual human beings. UPC writers instead prefer to use the word "manifestations" to describe the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁵³ Mormon writers likewise hold that the doctrine of the Trinity suggests a "plurality" of divine beings, which in turn, validates their belief in a pantheon of gods.⁵⁴

Foundation one establishes the truth of absolute monotheism. At the same time, orthodox Christians have affirmed that within the non-contingent being of God there is internal relationality. God shares his essence in a plurality of self-distinctions. Such hints appear as early as the Old Testament. Genesis 1:1 says that in the beginning "God" created the heavens and the earth. Yet in the prologue to the gospel bearing his name, the apostle John writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God" (1:1). The apostle Paul reiterates this same point by noting that Jesus bears God's image (Col. 1:15). Like the Father, he is before all things and through him all things hold together (v. 17). The Holy Spirit was likewise with both the Father and the Son at the very beginning of the creation (Gen. 1:2). Psalms 104:24 and 30 associate the Spirit with God's Wisdom. God's Wisdom existed before the created universe

⁵¹ White, *The Forgotten Trinity*, 169. White calls Isa. 40-48 the "Trial of the False Gods." Here God establishes his utter uniqueness and the truth of absolute monotheism.

⁵² On page 5 Owen notes that whereas Roman Catholicism and Protestantism start with recognition of God's oneness and then attempt to explain how he can be three, the Eastern Orthodox Church starts with knowledge of God's threeness and then attempts to explain how he can be one. This author agrees with Owens that the appropriate scriptural starting point is to begin with God's oneness and from there try to explain his threeness. The *shema* (Deut. 6:4) is absolutely foundational: "Listen, Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!"

⁵³ For example, see David Bernard, *The Oneness of God* (World Aflame Press, 1983), and Kenneth V. Reeves, *The Godhead* (World Aflame Press, 1962).

⁵⁴ In *The Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (370, 372) and *Mormon Doctrine* (576-577), Mormon writers promulgate the teaching that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each separate gods. Belief in a plurality of gods is either implicitly or else explicitly taught in such sacred Mormon texts as *Doctrine and Covenants* 121:26, 28, 32, and the *Book of Abraham* 4:1-5:21.

came into existence (Prov. 8:22-31).⁵⁵ Just as God's Word (i.e. the Son) has always existed with the Father, so too has God's Wisdom (i.e. the Spirit) existed with the Father throughout eternity. Owen summarizes this point well when he writes:

The Son and the Spirit are not creations of God; nor was there ever a time when the Son was not the Son or the Spirit not the Spirit. From another angle, never was there a time when the God was a Son/Word-less God, or a Spirit/Wisdom-less God. The essential nature of who God eternally is, irrespective of the created order, is displayed in this plurality of self-distinction.⁵⁶

Trinitarians have sought to maintain a scriptural balance between the God's oneness and God's internal relatedness by distinguishing between being and person. A workable understanding of the Trinity requires that one understands the difference between the two.⁵⁷ In terms of his divine nature or being God is one. However, in respect to personal distinctions God is three. In foundation #1 God's ontology or being was discussed. Orthodox Christians have historically held that God is an eternal and spiritual divine substance. At the same time, God's being is revealed in three personal self-distinctions. Scripture reveals these distinctions as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Christian orthodoxy has defined person in terms of separate identities formed on the basis of personal relationships. The Father thus has an identity that is distinct from the Son and Holy Spirit.

An important distinction must be made when using being and person in regards to God and humans. Humans are personal. They are also finite beings limited to one spatial and geographic location. To be human means to share one being in one person. God's being is infinite and unlimited. It can therefore be fully shared by three persons. Since the three share the same essence, they unify as one being.⁵⁸

The use of "person" to describe God's internal relatedness is most in evidence in those passages that suggest a plurality in God's self-distinctions.⁵⁹ In the Old Testament some of the strongest

⁵⁵ Paul E. Owen provides an analysis of those passages that suggest a plurality within God's unity in "Reflections on the Doctrine of the Trinity" (Part I), *The Institute for Religious Research*, 1999, 2. He notes that many commentators have associated God's Word with the Son and God's Wisdom with the Spirit. While useful to a point, rigid distinctions along these lines are clearly unwarranted. For example, Col. 1:15 and Heb. 1:2-3 apply wisdom imagery to Christ. In regard to God's Word, the act of speaking implies breath. The Hebrew word for both breath and spirit is *ruach*. Breath can easily be applied to the Holy Spirit (see Isa. 40:7-8).

⁵⁶ Ibid. Owen points out that Trinitarians have always maintained that while each person of the Trinity is distinguishable, God could never be God-without-Wisdom or God-without-Word. The divine essence is shared by each self-distinction. To assert otherwise is to destroy the monotheistic foundation upon which the Bible is based.

⁵⁷ White, provides a helpful discussion on the categorical distinction between person and being in his book *The Forgotten Trinity*, 171-172.

⁵⁸ For a discussion on how the early church grappled with coming up with language suitable for describing the categorical distinction between being and person, see pages 127-131 of Brown's *Heresies*.

⁵⁹ A common objection offered by anti-Trinitarians is that the Jews never believed in a plurality within the Godhead. Such an objection overlooks the fact that Judaism was never a religious monolith. Moreover, Jewish religious tradition has never been static. There is evidence that Jewish scholars throughout the course of the centuries have had to grapple with the issue of a seeming plurality within the nature of the one God. One such example appears in the *Zohar*, an ancient book of Jewish mysticism. Note the following comments in conjunction with Deut. 6:4: "'Hear, O Israel, Adonai Eloheinu Adonai is one.' These three are one. How can the three Names be one? Only through the perception of faith; in the vision of the Holy Spirit, in the beholding of the hidden eye alone...So it is with the mystery of the threefold Divine manifestations designated by Adonai, Eloheinu Adonai—three modes which yet form one unity" (*Zohar* II:43b, vol. 3, 134, in the Socino Edition).

The *Zohar* is somewhat esoteric and admittedly not normative within Judaism. At the same time, Jewish scholars and rabbis have sought throughout the centuries to counter Christian suggestions that within the Old Testament there is proof of a seeming plurality within the nature of the one God. This is evidenced in Jewish scholars interpretations of Gen. 1:26, where God says "Let us...". Medieval commentators such as David Kimchi and Moses Maimonides accepted the talmudic interpretation of Rabbi Joshua b. Levi (God was speaking to the creation). In his commentary on the Pentateuch, Rashi interprets "Let us" to mean God was speaking to angels. The *Hertz Commentary on Genesis* suggest that Gen. 1:26 is a plural of majesty similar to the royal "we." Such interpretations are an attempt on the part of Jewish scholars to deny the Christian contention that Old Testament verses such as Gen. 1:26 suggest a plurality of distinctions.

examples appear in the form of certain triadic allusions. For example, in Isa. 48:16 the triad of God, the Servant, and the Spirit appear. There is no question that the God of Israel enjoys an unrivalled exclusivity as the one true God (Isa. 40:25; 43:10; 44:6-8). At the same time, the Servant sent by the God of Israel appears to be God as well (Isa. 50:1-3). He is clearly identified as YHWH in Isa. 48:16. Both God and the Servant appear in conjunction with God's Spirit. When God comes to rule the earth he will do so in the power of his immutable Spirit (Isa. 40:11). In Isa. 42:1 the Spirit will rest upon God's Servant. There is a common identity shared by God, the Servant, and God's Spirit. Such an identity hints of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Another triad in the form of YHWH, the angel of the Lord, and the Holy Spirit appears in Isa. 63:7-19. Verse 7 clearly identifies YHWH as the Israelite's savior. Verse 9 talks about the angel of God's presence. This angel is identified in other places as the angel of the Lord or YHWH himself (e.g. Ex. 23:20-23; 33:14-15). Christianity has historically identified the angel of the Lord as a preincarnate theophany of the Lord Jesus. Finally, vv. 10-11 mentions the Holy Spirit in conjunction with YHWH and the angel of the Lord. As with Isa. 48:16, there is a relatedness suggested between the three. Within the Old Testament there are glimpses of the triune nature of the one God.⁶¹

The triune nature of God is more clearly revealed in the pages of the New Testament. Besides the Father, there is mention of the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19; II Cor. 13:14; I Pet. 1:2). As with the Old Testament, the New Testament reiterates that there is no God but one (I Cor. 8:4-5; Gal. 4:8). At the same time, the New Testament declares the threefold nature of the one God. It is the Father who sends his Son into the world on a mission of redemption (Gal. 4:4; c.f. Jn. 3:16). It is the Father who likewise sends the Spirit into the believer's heart (Gal. 4:6; c.f. Rom. 5:5-6).⁶² Other triadic allusions include Rom. 14:17-18, 15:16, I Cor. 2:2-5, 6:11, II Cor. 1:21-22, I Thess. 1:3-5, and II Thess. 2:13. Note that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all mentioned.

The Trinity is most clearly evidenced in those passages in which three persons appear to exist simultaneously. Matthew 3:16-17 provides one such example. The Son is baptized in the waters of the Jordan by John the Baptist. In turn, the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon the Son like a dove from heaven. Finally, a voice is heard from heaven declaring "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." Another example appears in Acts 7:55-56. The church's first martyr (Stephen) had a vision of the Son of Man assuming a position of authority beside another presence, the Father. At the same time, Stephen is said to be in the immediate presence of a third, the Holy Spirit. In both Matt. 3:16-17 and Acts 7:55-56 the presence of all three appears to be immediate as well as continual. This suggests persons rather than mere modes or manifestations. Other passages likewise make triadic allusions. These allusions once again suggest a presence that is immediate and continual.

Modalism presented one of the earliest challenges to the notion of one God in three persons. Modalists sought to explain the three persons as roles acted out by God in space and time. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are simply titles that God assumes within history. The Son is not a real person who stands before the Father as our substitute. He's either a clever ventriloquist who

⁶⁰ Owens notes several triadic allusions in the four "servant songs" of Isaiah chapters 42:1-53:12 in "Reflections on the Doctrine of the Trinity" (Part I), 3-4.

⁶¹ This paper has examined only a few of the Old Testament passages that suggest a plurality of persons within the being of God. For example, Arnold Fruchtenbaum suggests that the following passages reflect such a plurality: Gen. 20:13, 35:7, II Sam. 7:23, and Ps. 58:12 where *Elohim* in reference to the one true God is followed by a plural verb; Gen. 1:26, 3:22, 11:7, Isa. 6:8 where God uses plural pronouns in reference to himself; Ps. 45:7-8 and Hos. 1:7, where *Elohim* is applied to two personalities in the same verse; and Gen. 19:24 and Zec. 2:8-9, where two YHWH's appear in the same verse (see "Jewishness and the Trinity," *Issues* 1:8, 1-10). While agreeing that the Old Testament provides evidence of a plurality within the nature of God, this author is aware that scholars differ with Fruchtenbaum in terms of whether some of the above passages actually allude to more than one person. This author personally feels that the triadic allusions found in chapters 40-55 of Isaiah are the best proofs for establishing a plurality of persons in God's self-distinctions.

⁶² See Owens, "Reflections on the Doctrine of the Trinity" (Part I), 3.

can throw his voice, or else is nothing more than a mere human who at his baptism was adopted as the Son of God. In contrast, orthodox Trinitarianism affirms that these three modes of existence are neither temporal nor sequential. Discernment of the Trinity is suggested in the following four examples:

I. The presence of God as discerned in Jesus through his miracles and prophetic teachings (Jn. 5:19; Matt. 11:25-27).

II. The presence of God as further discerned in conjunction with the distinct personal presence of God-the-Father in both the prayers of Jesus and the responses of the Father (Matt. 17:5; Jn. 12:28).

III. Two persons are likewise discerned to be reciprocally related as manifested in the intimacy of prayer or Jesus' use of "Abba." The implication here once again is of the existence of two divine personages revealed in one God (Jn.10:30; 14:11; 17:21).

IV. Final discernment of these divine personages is evidenced by the divine inspiration or presence of a third, the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:3). The presence of the Holy Spirit is continual, immediate, and intimately related to the apprehension of God as "Father" and Jesus as his "Son" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6).⁶³

The above four examples provide ample New Testament support for the orthodox Trinitarian position of the existence of one God who coinheres in three divine persons. In summary, the evidence for Trinitarianism is based on the following scriptural considerations: (1) God is one; (2) Three persons are identified in scripture as God; (3) Each person is coequal and coeternal; and (4) Each person is described as distinct and separate from the other two.

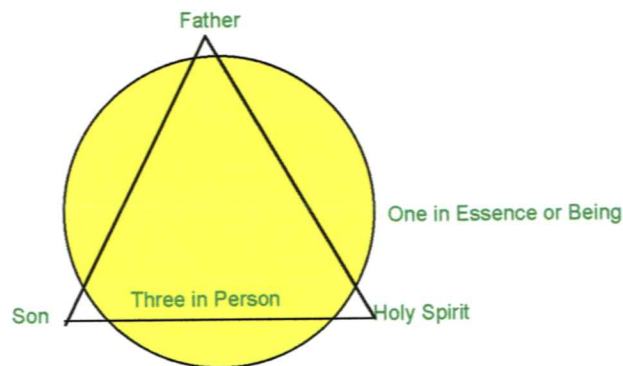
Figure 1⁶⁴ provides a diagram of the historic, orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. It is intended to highlight the being/person distinction do critical to Trinitarian theology. The circle represents God's essence or being. The triangle represents each person. Encirclement of the triangle means that each person within the Trinity is equally God and shares in the same non-contingent life as well as in the same incommunicable attributes. Protrusion of each point of the triangle from the circle illustrates that each person has an identity that is distinguishable from the other two. Trinitarians throughout the centuries have posited that the doctrine of the Trinity is the best explanation of the scriptural evidence.

Foundation #3: Equality. Monotheism holds that God is indivisibly one in terms of his divine nature. Christians must therefore avoid seeking to divide God's non-contingent essence by saying that the Father is 1/3rd God, the Son 1/3rd God, and the Holy Spirit 1/3rd God. All three are fully God and share in the same divine nature. This once again takes us back to what was said under the first foundation: the Trinity is not triplex but triune (i.e. $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$). The divine nature equally coinheres in all three. One evidence is that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are described as having the same attributes. For example, all three are called eternal (Ps. 90:2, Jn. 1:2; Rev. 1:8, 17; Heb. 9:14), omniscient (Jer. 17:10; Rev. 2:23; 1 Cor. 2:11), and omnipresent (Jer. 23:24; Matt. 18:20; Ps. 139:7). As there is only one God who shares these incommunicable

⁶³ Kaiser has devoted an entire chapter to exploring the biblical evidence in support for distinct persons within the Godhead in "The Discernment of Trinity" (ch. 3) in *One God in Trinity*, (Westchester: Cornerstone, 1980, Peter Toon and James Spiceland eds.). He views the empirical-phenomenological approach as the key to unlocking the apostle's discernment of this doctrine. This approach looks at specific, concrete historical situations. It then relies on personal intuition or discernment in ascertaining truth-value. Kaiser provides seven such examples on page 37 of his chapter. These seven examples have been conflated into four for purposes of this analysis.

⁶⁴ Adapted from Houses "Ancient Diagram of the Trinity" (chart no. 22), *Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine*, 45.

Figure 1. Diagram of the Trinity



attributes, the three must be God. This further explains why the Father (Rom. 1:7; Eph. 4:6), Son (Jn. 1:1-3, 14, 18; 5:18; 10:33; Heb. 1:8), and Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-4) are each called God.⁶⁵

Equality is essential once again for maintaining the pattern of religious devotion found in the New Testament. New Testament faith is explicitly Trinitarian. Believers have been washed, justified, and sanctified in the name of Jesus and the Spirit of our God (I Cor. 6:11). Likewise, there is one body and Spirit, as well as one Lord and faith, and one God and Father of all (Eph. 4:4-6). Through Jesus believers have access in one Spirit to the Father (Eph. 2:18). The Father has established and anointed the Church through his Son Jesus. In the process he has further given the Holy Spirit as both a seal and pledge (II Cor. 1:21-22). Members of the Body of Christ are further commanded to be baptized in the name of the triune God (Matt. 28:19). The Trinity also has implications in terms of Christian worship. All three persons are identified as Lord (II Cor. 3:17-18; Eph. 4:6; Rev. 4:8-10; c.f. Rom. 8:9-11). Since the God of the Bible alone is Lord, and given that he will not share his glory with any other (Isa. 48:11; c.f. 43:10-11; 44:6), each person within the Godhead is the object of Christian devotion and veneration (Jn. 5:22-23; 20:28; II Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3; Phil 2:10-11; Rev. 4-5). Subordinationism once again violates the biblical pattern by dividing the substance between the three and making only one (the Father) Lord and God. In a similar manner, tritheism violates this pattern by dividing the substance and making each person within the Trinity part of an existing pantheon comprised of lords many and gods many (I Cor. 8:4). Both ignore the testimony of scripture so eloquently captured in the Athanasian Creed: "But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and coequal. So that in all things, as was said before, the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in unity, is to be worshipped."

Table 1 summarizes the previous discussion on the three foundations. Only orthodox Trinitarianism affirms all three. Subordinationism denies the second and third foundations. Subordinationist groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses generally do not even view the Holy Spirit as a person but rather as a force.⁶⁶ Jehovah's Witnesses further compromise the first foundation insofar as they divide God's substance and in the process make the Son a lesser or a

⁶⁵ Ibid, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), provides a discussion of the essential elements of the Trinity under chart no. 24 ("A Biblical Presentation of the Trinity," 48-49). The following paragraph is based largely on House's discussion.

⁶⁶ It appears that Arius viewed the Holy Spirit as a person. However, he saw the Godhead comprised of a hierarchy headed by the Father. Just below the Father in rank was the Son and Holy Spirit. Both were created beings composed of a different substance than the Father (see Brown, *Heresies*, 113-114).

Table 1. The Doctrine of the Trinity and its Foundational Truths

	Foundation #1 Monotheism	Foundation #2 Three Persons	Foundation #3 Equality	Groups
Trinitarianism	Affirmed	Affirmed	Affirmed	Orthodox Christianity
Subordinationism	Compromised	Denied	Denied	Jehovah's Witnesses
Modalism	Affirmed	Denied	N/A	Oneness Pentecostals
Tritheism	Denied	Denied	Denied	Mormonism

derived deity. While monotheistic in a unitarian⁶⁷ sense, an element of polytheism is introduced insofar as the Son is made a junior deity.⁶⁸ Modalists such as the Oneness Pentecostals affirm the first foundation but deny the second.⁶⁹ Not only is God in his essence unknown, but objective categories of salvation such as vicarious or substitutionary atonement are denied in favor of a purely subjective works righteousness.⁷⁰ This is in keeping with modalism's aforementioned belief that there is no objective or referential basis by which believers can claim to be in a right relationship with God.⁷¹ The tritheism espoused by the Mormon church essentially denies all three foundations. Historic Mormon theology denies the first foundation by embracing polytheism rather than monotheism given that it views the three persons of the Godhead as three separate gods rather than one God revealed in three persons.⁷² Such a teaching clearly denies the second foundation. In its doctrine of eternal progression,⁷³ Mormonism ends up denying the third

⁶⁷ Unitarianism defines monotheism to mean that God is a single, solitary being. It denies that one in the biblical sense can refer to triunity. Jehovah's Witnesses are Unitarian in the sense that they recognize the Father alone as God in the fullest sense of the word.

⁶⁸ This is evidenced in the Jehovah's Witness translation of the Hebrew and Greek scriptures known as the *New World Translation*. John 1:1 is translated "and the Word (Jesus) was a god." Jesus shared a similar nature to the Father, making him godlike but not God. While the Father is Jehovah the almighty God, the Son is lesser in stature or a "mighty god." At a minimum, Jehovah's witnesses have introduced a pantheon compromised of one true God and a demi-god. Watchtower theology therefore borders on polytheism. This confirms Brown's observation that Arianism is potentially polytheistic (*Heresies*, 120).

⁶⁹ Modalists view the essence of God as simplex. God is a single, solitary being revealed as Father in the Old Testament, Son in the incarnation, and Holy Spirit in regeneration.

⁷⁰ So noted by Brown on page 100 of his book *Heresies*.

⁷¹ This author views foundation #2 as largely inapplicable to modalism. Equality is applicable to persons and not manifestations.

⁷² See page 34 of Anthony Hoekema's *The Four Major Cults* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976). Hoekema cites the following statement in this connection by Mormon prophet Joseph Smith: "I wish to declare I have always and in all congregations when I preached on the subject of Deity, it has always been the plurality of Gods...I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and that the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit; these three constitute distinct personages and three Gods...(taken from Smith's sermon "The Christian Godhead—Plurality of Gods," delivered on June 16, 1844, and quoted on page 35 of *The Four Major Cults*).

⁷³ By eternal progression Mormon apologists mean that God the Father was once a mortal man who attained exaltation by obeying the precepts of the God of his planet. Eternal progression is best encapsulated in the following statement: "As man is, so God once was; as God is, so man may become" (Prophet Lorenzo Snow, quoted in Milton Hunter's *The Gospel Through the Ages*, 105-106; cited on page 203 of Martin's *The Kingdom of the Cults*). Mormon prophet Joseph Smith taught that God-the-Father was a resurrected, exalted being named Elohim who eventually attained godhood (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 345; *Mormon Doctrine*, 321). As God (or the gods) mature in their exaltation, they advance in their omniscience or omnipotence. Because this progression is ongoing, this means that God-the-Father has progressed to a higher state of exaltation than God-the-Son. In turn, both will have attained a higher state than those

foundation (equality) as well.⁷⁴

This table provides an interpretive grid by which the reader can better assess whether or not he or she is an orthodox Trinitarian. It should be noted that none of the pioneers of early Adventism were modalists. All maintained an eternal distinction between the Father and the Son. On the other hand, subordinationism in either its Arian or semi-Arian form influenced the theology of the pioneers as well as those individuals claiming to be "historic Adventists." There has likewise been a subtle tritheistic influence. It manifests itself when Adventist writers describe the members of the Trinity as divine, anthropomorphic beings. Both the Christological as well as soteriological consequences of these two belief systems will be examined in more detail in the next section.

III. The Importance of the Trinity

Many Christians view the doctrine of the Trinity as a sterile academic debate between ivory tower theologians that lacks any application in terms of practical godliness. It can be likened to the wrangling by Medieval divines over such matters as the number of angels capable of dancing on the point of a needle. One in three, or three in one, the doctrine ultimately remains a mystery to the average layperson. Such sentiments explain why the Trinity has become a neglected doctrine from both a theological as well as a practical standpoint. This is amply highlighted in White's *The Forgotten Trinity*. Some well-meaning Christians argue that persons or modes, oneness versus threeness, what difference does it really make so long as we are sincere in our convictions. All that matters is that we love God as we understand him with all our soul and might.

Love is thus seen as covering a multitude of sins. This includes false teachings that deny essential biblical doctrine. It is true that an individual can have extensive knowledge about biblical doctrine and yet lack love. Without love such knowledge is meaningless (I Cor. 13:2). At the same time, one has to strike the appropriate scriptural balance. Christians are commanded to love one another (Jn. 13:34-25). They are also exhorted to follow after sound doctrine (Eph. 4:24; II Tim. 4:3). Love without true knowledge is also meaningless. The New Testament ties true worship of God in with a correct understanding of His nature and person (Jn. 4:24; 17:3; I Jn. 2:23; 5:20; II Jn. 9).

The Trinity is clearly a mystery. To fully apprehend how one God can exist simultaneously as three persons is humanly impossible. The only way a finite human mind could fully comprehend an infinite God is to be infinite itself. There are certain things that God has chosen not to reveal (Deut. 29:29). At the same time, He has revealed certain things about his character and nature. While the human mind cannot fully understand the Trinity, it can correctly comprehend the doctrine. Paul admonishes Timothy to show himself a workman of God, capable of rightly interpreting the word (II Tim. 2:15). This admonition applies to the doctrine of the Trinity as well.

Eternal life is based on empirical as well as experiential knowledge of the one true God and he who was sent: Jesus Christ. Jesus makes some exclusive claims. He says that he's the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by him (Jn. 14:6). The apostles likewise advance similar claims. Peter does so in Acts 4:12 (there is salvation under no other). John does the same in his Epistles. In II John 9 he says that only those who abide in the doctrine of

gods who come after them. For a further discussion on the Mormon conception of God, see Beckwith's "Philosophical Problems with the Mormon Conception of God."

⁷⁴ Martin notes on page 205 of *The Kingdom of the Cults* that Mormon theologian Joseph Talmage makes Elohim and Jehovah two separate gods. Elohim (the Father) is the "greater god" as he has progressed farther than Jehovah (the Son) who is the "lesser god" (see Talmage's *Articles of Faith*, "Jesus the Christ" (ch. IV), 466-467. Throughout the Old Testament the compound *Jehovah/Yahweh Elohim* appears in reference to the one true God of Israel. Therefore, Talmage ends up denying the second foundation and in the process denying the first by making Elohim and Jehovah two separate deities.

Christ have the Father. This doctrine entails acceptance of Christ's person and nature. If one does not abide in this doctrine then they are bereft of the Father and the Son. The "Apostle of Love" emphasizes the importance of truth concerning God and His Son Jesus Christ (I Jn. 5:20-21). What one believes concerning the nature and person of God is important. John says that it has consequences in terms of their eternal destiny.

Unless one understands the triune structure of both the divine being and the divine economy they cannot hope to have a proper understanding of the gospel. For example, Jn. 3:16 declares that the Father so loved the world that he sent the Son to die on its behalf. It was not the Father who suffered and died on the cross. In his infinite love the first person of the Trinity (the Father) sent the second person (the Son) to die on behalf of fallen humanity. Within this divine economy there is further mention of a third person: the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Counselor whom Jesus promised to send once he went away (Jn. 14:16; 26). One of the Spirit's tasks is to testify of the saving efficacy of Christ's work of redemption (Jn. 15:26). He is the member of the Trinity who indwells and in the process renews the believer (Rom. 8:11). It is the Holy Spirit who regenerates and indwells believers: not the Father or the Son.

The doctrine of the Trinity best explains the divine being and the divine economy. It is predicated on the aforementioned foundational truths of monotheism, equality, and three persons. Denial of one leads to an upsetting of the proper theological balance between the other two. Deny monotheism and the door is opened to tritheism or polytheism. To deny equality is to open the door to subordinationism. Finally, deny the three persons and the door is opened to modalism.

All the major antitrinitarian heresies are predicated on a denial of at least one of these three foundational truths. Each results in an aberrant Christology that ultimately distorts the gospel. What one believes about God has eternal consequences. Jesus said this is eternal life, to know the one true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent (Jn. 17:3). God is Spirit; those who worship him must do so in Spirit and truth (Jn. 4:24). To have a false conception of the person and being of God makes this impossible. It is possible to embrace a false Spirit and a false Jesus even if one is using correct biblical terminology (II Cor. 11:4). Ultimately, to embrace one or the other also leads to the acceptance of a false gospel. Paul is adamant. There is only one gospel that saves and he preached it. He pronounces the divine curse or anathema on those who receive any other gospel other than the one he preached (Gal. 1:6-9).

What follows is a summary of the Christological as well as soteriological implications of the major anti-Trinitarian heresies. Given that modalism has never had an impact on Adventist theology, the ensuing discussion will focus first on the Christological as well as soteriological implications of subordinationism and tritheism. It will be followed by a summary on the role that both have played in defining Adventist Christology and soteriology. This section will start with a discussion of subordinationism.

Subordinationism. The early Adventist pioneers shared certain beliefs in common with the Jehovah's Witnesses. The latter believe that the Son in both his preincarnate and incarnate state was subordinate to the Father. He was ontologically inferior to the Father, although ontologically superior to all other created beings. The pre-incarnate Christ existed as Michael the Archangel, the firstborn of God's creation. God created Jesus (Michael) first and then through him created all other things.⁷⁵ Jehovah's Witnesses claim to hold Jesus in high esteem. They will even go so far as to call him "godlike."⁷⁶ Unfortunately, the subordinationism that the Watchtower subscribes to denigrates the person of Christ no matter how elevated his status is relative to all other creatures. There are several reasons why this is so.

⁷⁵ See *Studies in the Scriptures*, vol. V, 84. Cited in Martin, *ibid*, 58.

⁷⁶ ..."the true Scriptures speak of God's Son, the Word, as 'a god.' He is a 'mighty God,' but not the Almighty God, who is Jehovah—Isa. 9:6" (*The Truth Shall Make You Free*, 47). Cited in *ibid*.

The Jesus of the Watchtower is not the Word of God who became flesh (Jn. 1:14). Unlike the Jesus of Trinitarian theology, the Jesus of the Watchtower is not the Word of Life (I Jn. 1:2) who upholds all things by his power (Heb. 1:3). He too is a dependent creature and as such cannot be the life and light of men (Jn. 1:4). He must derive his life and light from another. No subordinationist can proclaim as did Thomas "My Lord and my God!" (Jn. 20:28). This holds true even if they attempt to elevate Jesus to the highest creaturely status possible. On the other hand, Trinitarians hold that Jesus is categorically different from all other humans. As God in the flesh Jesus offered a divine sacrifice on behalf of fallen humanity's sins. That is why Trinitarians are able to proclaim that Jesus is able to "save" to the uttermost those who come to him (Heb. 7:25). The individual who believes that Jesus is God also believes that Jesus can do for them what he or she could never do for him or herself (Phil. 4:13). Justification by faith in his atoning sacrifice is possible only if one believes in Christ's full deity.⁷⁷

In contrast, Arianism regards Jesus as a creature who is like God. Brown notes that if Jesus is nothing more than a creature than it is more appropriate to think of him as our example rather than as our substitute. Instead of being called to exercise faith in him, believers are called upon to imitate his example. Arianism ultimately exalts what a creature can do.⁷⁸ The Jesus of the Watchtower is not the unique Godman. He is a fellow creature. Granted, he was created before all other things came into existence and in his pre-incarnate state exercised more power and authority than any other creature. Nevertheless, the Son of God is a subordinate, created being.

There is little doubt that the Arianism of the Watchtower colors the average Jehovah's Witnesses understanding of the atonement. It is not God who was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (II Cor. 5:18). The incarnate Jesus of Watchtower theology is a mere human. The "ransom" in Watchtower theology is not the means whereby the second person of the Trinity pays the penalty for our sin. As the Second Adam Jesus pays the penalty for the First Adam's transgression. What he laid down in death was a perfect human life with all its rights and earthly prospects.⁷⁹ Therefore, the atonement is not a satisfaction of divine justice. It is a redemptive price whereby those "who have faith in God's provision may come into harmony with him, and, serving him faithfully, they may receive the gift of life, being freed from inherited sin and from eternal death as a result of sin."⁸⁰ Christ's atoning death is a thing with purchasing power. It doesn't save the individual *per se* but is available for use on behalf of faithful individuals. Salvation for the average Jehovah's Witness is not by grace apprehended through faith. The Watchtower instead commands its followers to work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). Such a soteriology is consistent with a subordinationist Christology.

Arianism ultimately results in a works-oriented system of salvation. Believers are called upon to follow Jesus' example. While on earth the Son submitted himself totally to the will of the Father. He lived a life of perfect obedience and in the process paved the way for individuals to work out their salvation by following in his footsteps. The Watchtower holds Jesus' subordination to the Father as the standard believers must follow if they hope to someday be saved. Jesus never sought let alone contemplated equality with God. From the outset Jesus submitted himself totally to the Father's will. Such subordination is the example one must follow if they someday hope to

⁷⁷ Brown correctly observes in his book *Heresies* (119) that if Jesus' nature differed from that of the Father's then it is not evident that he would possess the divine power and authority needed to provide atonement on humanity's behalf.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 119-120. Also see footnote no. 8.

⁷⁹ "The human life that Jesus Christ laid down in sacrifice must be exactly equal to that life which Adam forfeited for all his offspring: it must be a perfect human life, no more no less...This is just what Jesus gave..." (*You May Survive Armageddon into God's New World*, 39; cited on page 54 of *The Kingdom of the Cults*). Martin notes that the atonement in Watchtower theology is half of God and half of man, even though II Cor. 5:20 teaches that it is wholly of God. Jesus only removed the effects of Adam's sin on Calvary. The work will not be fully completed until the survivors of Armageddon return to God of their freewill and submit to his Theocratic rule (*ibid*, 99).

⁸⁰ The following Jehovah's Witness understanding of the atonement is found in *Make Sure of All Things* (Brooklyn, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society; 1957), 262-263.

have a part in paradise restored. Salvation is by example. The incarnation no longer remains a unique event in salvation history. It is something that the believer must reproduce in his or her own life.⁸¹

Unquestioning obedience to God's theocratic organization rather than faith or trust is the means whereby the Jehovah's Witness attains right standing before God. Such a soteriology stems from the strict unitarianism of the Watchtower. The Jehovah of the Watchtower is a solitary being who remains aloof from his creatures. Instead of Jehovah God becoming human through the miracle of the incarnation, he sends the highest of his creatures to pay the price for humanity's ransom. In Watchtower theology the Creator remains unattached and uninvolved with his creation. It should come as no surprise that the emphasis among most Arian or semi-Arian groups is on works as opposed to faith. Such an emphasis is the natural outgrowth of a belief system that depicts God as distant. This distance makes God somewhat impersonal and difficult to please. Individuals belonging to such systems invariably turn to each other when God is portrayed as remote. That is why Jehovah's Witnesses ultimately look to their organizational leadership for guidance and acceptance.⁸²

Compare Watchtower theology with the testimony of scripture. Jesus declared that the one who has seen him has seen the Father (Jn. 14:9-11). That is because he and the Father are one (Jn. 10:30).⁸³ In Jesus dwelt the fullness of the divine nature bodily (Col. 2:9). He was God, second person of the Trinity, manifest in the flesh. God is not so distant that individuals are left to their own devices to try and please him. Jesus is His beloved Son in whom He is well pleased (Matt. 3:17). God's work is not that to go door-to-door passing out literature or preaching the kingdom. It's to believe in the one whom He sent to die in our place (Jn. 6:29).

Watchtower soteriology is based on a crass system of works righteousness or legalism. At the heart of the Watchtower gospel is a performance-oriented deity. No matter how much one might admire Jehovah's Witnesses for going door to door, their Jesus is a different Jesus. Their gospel is likewise a different gospel. Neither can save. Jehovah's Witnesses have a zeal for God as did the Israelites of old. Unfortunately, they have a zeal that is based on a lack of knowledge. Instead of trusting in the finished work of Christ they have sought to obtain righteousness on the basis of their own works (Rom. 9:31-32; 10:3). They have blurred the distinction between grace and works (Rom. 11:6). Contrast Watchtower theology to the biblical teaching that sinners are justified by faith rather than by works (Gen. 15:6; Hab. 2:4; Rom. 3:20-21, 24, 28; 4:18-23; 5:5; 9:11; 21). Salvation is based on God's grace or unmerited favor (Eph. 2:8-9). It is a gift (Rom.

⁸¹ Brown notes on page 120 of his book *Heresies* that Arian soteriology is predicated on the idea that humans can resemble God. It flows logically out of Arius' contention that Christ is a Godlike creature who serves as humanity's model.

⁸² Jehovah's Witnesses exhibit what Steve Arterburn and Jack Felton term "toxic faith" (see *Toxic Faith*, Colorado: Waterbrook Publishers, 2001). Toxic faith systems are based on "process addiction." Many religious addicts start out with a sincere desire to find God's love. In their search they become derailed and end up settling for the more tangible love of a human (185). Religious addiction is a form of idolatry centering around the worship of the process as well as its outcome (91-92). Individuals with an addiction to a toxic faith system will not only live for it but if necessary die for it as the ultimate act of worship and devotion (92). Cult-watchers have long noted the toxic faith behaviors displayed by JW's. These included shattered familial relationships, destroyed education plans, career aspirations, and even the loss of loved ones stemming from the leadership's prohibition against blood transfusions. One cannot help but observe the connection between the remoteness of God in WATCHTOWER theology with the near slavish devotion of the average Jehovah's Witness towards the leadership's dictates. The latter provide the rank and file with a caricature of God.

⁸³ *The New World Translation* interprets Jn. 10:30 as "I and my Father are in union." One is translated in the sense of a functional unity. The use of the neuter plural *heri* for one better denotes unity in the sense of essence. This is further implied in vv. 36-38, where Jesus says he was sanctified and sent by the Father into the world to do the Father's works. These works testify that the Father is in him, and he in the Father. The use of the neuter plural for one guards against the dual error of Arianism and modalism. The latter argues for absolute identity. Had Jesus wished to teach he was the same person as the Father, he would have employed the masculine *heis*. For further detail, see Lenski's *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 759-761.

6:23). Salvation is not something owed but something received by faith (Rom. 4:4-5; 11:6). Those who have been justified engage in good works because they are being recreated in God's image. Believers are God's workmanship called in advance to do good works (Eph. 2:10). Jesus can only be an example to those who first know him as Lord and Savior (I Pet. 2:21-25).

In the final analysis, the Jesus of the Watchtower cannot save the sinner or bring him or her to a right standing with God. His death did not represent a divine sacrifice.⁸⁴ Consequently, the average JW is forced to rely on his or her works in order to earn a spot on paradise restored. They can never be certain if God will be pleased enough with their efforts to award them such a spot. This is in decided contrast to the Trinitarian believer. The latter has such assurance because they know that it was a divine sacrifice that was offered by Jesus on Calvary. The second person of the Trinity was cloaked in human flesh and offered himself as the perfect sacrificial lamb (I Pet. 1:29).

Subordinationism ultimately leads to a denial of the shema: "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one" (Deut. 6:4; Mk. 12:29). Subordinationists invariably have two deities: the almighty God (the Father) and his junior partner the mighty god or the Son.⁸⁵ The Holy Spirit invariably becomes reduced to an impersonal force or "it." Such beliefs have serious theological implications. Subordinationists start by denying the clear testimony of scripture. God will not share His glory with another (Isa. 48:11). No god, mighty or otherwise, was formed before him. Neither will one be formed after him (Isa. 43:10). There is only one God who saves (Isa. 43:11). No subordinationist can honestly proclaim as can the Trinitarian that they are waiting for the glorious appearing of "our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Tit. 2:13; NASB and NIV). No subordinationist with Arian leanings can know who God is. That is why they cannot proclaim as can the Trinitarian that the Second Coming of Jesus is the believer's blessed hope. When Jesus returns it will be God, second person of the Trinity, who will appear in glory.

Jesus says that no one can honor the Father unless they first honor the Son whom he has sent (Jn. 5:23). Subordinationism denies the doctrine of Christ by saying that one is to honor the Father as God but not the Son. Those who deny the doctrine of Christ lack the Father (II Jn. 9; c.f. I Jn. 2:22-23). The early church understood this all too well at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. when it condemned Arianism as a rank heresy.

Subordinationists can appeal to certain passages in support of their position. For example, Col. 1:15-18 calls Jesus the firstborn of creation as well as the firstborn from the dead. Firstborn in both the Old and the New Testament was not always employed in the sense of first in order of generation. It oftentimes meant first in order of pre-eminence.⁸⁶ For example, Jer. 31:9 calls Ephraim Israel's firstborn even though Manasseh was the older of the two (Gen. 48:12-14). Likewise, the king of Israel is called firstborn among the monarchs of the world (Ps. 89:25-27). Obviously, the nation of Israel was not the first to establish a monarchy. The king of Israel is pre-

⁸⁴ Concerning the virgin birth, note the following comments found on page 231 of the Watchtower publication *What Has Religion Done For Mankind?*: "During the virgin birth, Jesus assumed one nature—that of a human. He emptied himself of all things heavenly and spiritual and became fully flesh" (cited on page 54 of Martin's *The Kingdom of the Cults*). Jesus assumed only a single nature—that of a mortal man. His birth was not an incarnation. That's why Jehovah's Witnesses stress Christ's obedience as opposed to his sacrificial death. As a perfect human, he provides an example of the kind of obedience Jehovah God expects of those who will take part in paradise restored. Conspicuously absent once again is the biblical notion of vicarious atonement and justification by faith.

⁸⁵ This was previously discussed under endnote no. 65.

⁸⁶ A discussion on both the Hebrew and the Greek meanings of the word firstborn are found in Vine's *Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), E. Vine, M. Unger, and W. White eds. In the Old Testament the Hebrew word for firstborn is *bekor*. While it sometimes refers to the oldest child, it frequently takes on the meaning of "first" in terms of "privileged position" (83). Similarly, the Greek word for firstborn, *protokos*, is a compound word taken from *proto* (first) and *tikto* (beget). In reference to Christ it expresses his relationship to the Father as well as his pre-eminence and priority over the creation. In Col. 1:15, firstborn denotes Jesus' eternal relationship with the Father. He was before all creation and served as its creator (194-195). Firstborn does not denote Christ being the first thing created by God.

eminent among the kings of the earth. Similarly, Jesus was not the first individual to be resurrected from the dead (I Kings 17:21-22; Jn. 11:38-44). His resurrection is pre-eminent in the sense that he is the only one to date to be raised in an immortal body never to die again (I Cor. 15:51-54; Phil 3:20-21). The rest of the dead will have to await his Second Coming for this to happen (I Thess. 4:13-17). Nevertheless, his resurrection makes that of those who have died trusting in him a sure thing.

So it is with Jesus. He is firstborn in the sense of pre-eminence. He was before all things. Through him all things hold together (Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 1:3). John identifies Jesus as the Word who existed throughout eternity in a face-to-face relationship with the Father (Jn. 1:1-3). That is why the Father at the ascension calls Jesus "God" in fulfillment of the royal Psalm (Heb. 1:8; Ps. 45:6-7). At his coronation the Messiah will rule over the nations of the earth as God's vice regent. This was fulfilled at Christ's ascension to the right hand of the Father. Note that it is the Father who calls Jesus "God." Scripture declares that it pleased the Father that all fullness dwelt in Christ (Col. 1:19). Since no other God but one exists, anyone who truly believes in the Bible will do the same as the Father and acknowledge the full deity of Jesus.

There are some who argue for subordinationism on the grounds that Jesus said that the Father was greater (Jn. 14:28; c.f. I Cor. 15:28). Jesus went on to say that there were some things that only the Father knew such as when he would return the second time around (Mk. 13:32). He also said that could do nothing apart from the Father (Jn. 5:19). Many have felt that these verses prove that Jesus is subordinate to the Father. It is important at this juncture to distinguish between two types of subordinationism: ontological (by nature) and economic (by role).⁸⁷ Ontological subordination means that there is a qualitative distinction between the members of the Godhead in terms of essence. This results in a hierarchy in which the Father is viewed as superior in terms of nature in relationship to the Son and Holy Spirit. Ontological subordination characterizes the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in both the contingent as well as the non-contingent realms.

On the other hand, economic subordinationism refers to the roles acted out by the members of the Godhead in redemption. Prior to the incarnation the Son existed in God's form or *morphe* (Phil. 2:6). At the incarnation the Son humbled himself by taking on another nature: that of a human. Jesus thus assumed the role of the servant (v. 7).⁸⁸ As a human he submitted himself to the Father's authority and in the process took on many of the limitations associated with human nature (see Heb. 2:17-18; 4:15-16). That is why he could say that he could do nothing apart from the Father (Jn. 5:19). This also makes sense of his statement that the Father was greater (Jn. 14:28). The Father outranked him positionally. However, Jesus never ceased being God. The Father himself calls Jesus "God" (see Heb. 1:8). Through his act of humility, the Father has

⁸⁷ Owen provides a summary on the differences between ontological as opposed to economic subordinationism in Part II of his "Reflections on the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity," 3-5. He notes that an element of ontological subordinationism appears in the writings of the Eastern church fathers as reflected by the Cappadocian theologians concerning the inter relations of the persons of the Trinity. A potential problem with the Eastern view is tritheism.

⁸⁸ In chapter 8 ("Carmen Cristi: The Hymn to Christ as God") White analyzes the meaning of God's form as well as Christ's "emptying" in *The Forgotten Trinity* (119-120). Jesus voluntarily laid aside his divine privileges and in the ultimate act of humility lived his life in service for those he came to redeem, culminating in his death on the cross. Conservative Christian theologians have long seen Phil. 2:5-11 as one of the New Testament's strongest affirmations of the deity of Christ.

Among biblical scholars there has long been differences on the meaning of Christ's emptying (*kenoo*) in Phil. 2:7. The doctrine of the kenosis holds that in order to assume the form of a servant and become incarnate, Jesus the Messiah had to give up some, several, or even all the powers and attributes of God in order to live as a mere man in accord with Phil. 2:5-11. There is more than one variation of the kenosis. Scholars such as Benjamin Warfield (correctly in this author's estimation), consider the KJV's translation of *kenoo* as "emptying" a mistranslation. John 1:1-14 declares that Jesus divested himself of nothing at the incarnation. What he took on was an additional nature. While on earth Jesus humbled himself by giving up the free exercise of his divine power and prerogatives (Jn. 5:30). He never ceased being God. Glimpses of his deity manifested themselves at times (Mk. 2:7-10; Mtt. 17:1-2). For a further discussion on the various theories concerning the kenosis, see chart no. 30 ("Theories of the Kenosis") in House's *Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine*, 57-58.

further bestowed upon Jesus a name that is above all other names (Phil. 2:9-11). There will be a day when the entire universe will acknowledge Jesus as "Lord."

This now necessitates an examination of some of the passages used in support of ontological subordinationism. The aforementioned Jn. 14:28 is the favorite of Jehovah's Witnesses and most like-minded groups. The Greek word that Jesus uses in Jn. 14:28 to describe his subordinate position relative to the Father is *meizon*. The Father was positionally greater in the sense that He outranked the Son during his sojourn on earth. Jesus came in the form of a servant (man) rather than in his unveiled glory. At no point did he ever cease to be God by nature.

Further consider Jesus' prayer for the disciples in John chapter 17. It was that they would be one as he was one with the Father (see verse 21). Note this prayer occurs in the context of his allusion to the glory that he shared with the Father throughout eternity (Jn. 17:5). Since God will not share His glory with another (Isa. 48:11), the second person of the Trinity must have shared fully in the divine glory held by other two persons. The fact that someone outranks or is positionally higher than another doesn't mean that they are ontologically superior by nature. A sergeant is greater than a private in terms of rank. This says nothing qualitatively about the two in terms of their respective natures. The private may well be superior to the sergeant in terms of intelligence, strength, or moral rectitude.

Had Jesus wanted to teach that the Father was ontologically superior in terms of nature then he would have used the word *kreisson* or "better." *Kreisson* appears in Heb. 1:4. Jesus outranks the angels not simply because he is positionally greater but because qualitatively he is superior as well. In other words, the angels are ontologically inferior to Jesus in terms of both nature and position. This is revealed in the aforementioned verse 8, where the Father addresses the Son as "God" (in verse 10 the Father also addresses Jesus as "Lord" or Yahweh in accord with Ps. 102:25-27). Had Jesus wished to communicate that he was ontologically subordinate to the Father he would have used *kreisson* instead of *meizon* in Jn. 14:28.⁸⁹

The incarnation is a divine mystery. Jesus simultaneously took on two natures. He was not divine one moment and then merely human the next. Neither was there a blending of the two natures. *He was fully God and fully human.*⁹⁰ His humanity was subject to certain limitations. This accounts for the seeming subordination of the Son to the Father at times in terms of duty. At the same time, Jesus never ceased being God by nature. He accepted human worship (Jn. 9:38), as well as displayed such vestiges of his deity as omniscience (Lk. 6:8; Jn. 2:25) and omnipotence (Lk. 8:22-25). What occurred at the incarnation was Jesus clothed his unveiled deity in a human form. He surrendered the independent exercise of his deity in fulfillment of his role as a servant.

This now leads to a consideration of the third person of the Trinity. What one believes concerning the person of the Holy Spirit also has clear soteriological implications. Denial of the Trinity usually results in a denial of the personality of the Holy Spirit and his corresponding deity. Many who deny the personality of the Holy Spirit argue that spirit (*pneuma*) in the Greek is in the neuter gender. Since the term is neither male nor female it is argued that the Holy Spirit is an "it" rather than a "he." White notes that Greek genders do not necessarily indicate personality. For example, the Greek word for love (*agape*) is in the feminine gender. Inanimate things can have either masculine or feminine genders while personal things can take the neuter gender. The

⁸⁹ Martin provides a discussion on the meaning of *meizon* (greater) and *kreisson* (better) in *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 118-119. The following discussion is taken largely from Martin's book.

⁹⁰ House provides a chart of the major Christological heresies in charts nos. 27-28 of his *Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrines*, 54-55. Among the major heresies listed in his charts: Ebionism (denied Christ's divinity); Doceticism (denied Christ's humanity); Eutychanism (denied distinction of natures); Nestorianism (denied union of two natures); and Apollinarianism (denied Christ had a human spirit).

personality of the Holy Spirit can be demonstrated in the same way that one would demonstrate the personality of the Father or the Son.⁹¹

Some of the clearest references to the personality of the Holy Spirit are those passages in which he uses personal pronouns in reference to himself. In Acts 13:2 the Holy Spirit says "separate me Paul and Barnabas." In Acts 10:19-20 the Holy Spirit says, "I have sent them" in reference to the three men who were looking for Peter. Another example appears in Jn. 16:13-14. The demonstrative pronoun *ekeinos* is translated as "he" in reference to the Holy Spirit whom Jesus promises at some future date to send him to the apostles.⁹²

The Holy Spirit is known in places as the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9; I Pet. 1:10-11).⁹³ Like Jesus, he intercedes for the saints with groanings and pleadings that cannot be heard (Rom. 8:26). Only a person can groan and plead with others. Likewise, only a person has thoughts. In I Cor. 2:10-11, the Holy Spirit is said to know the thoughts of God. Another attribute of personality is will. Jesus "wills" to reveal the Father to his followers in Matt. 11:27. Conversely, the Holy Spirit distributes gifts to the members of the Body of Christ in accordance with his "will" in I Cor. 12:9-11. White comments that the same Greek word for will appears in both Matt. 11:27 and I Cor. 12:11 (*boloma*). This word is used only of persons and never of animate objects and forces.⁹⁴ Another attribute of personality is the ability to feel emotion. In Eph. 4:30 the Ephesians are warned not to grieve the Holy Spirit. A similar passage appears in Isa. 63:11 in reference to the Holy Spirit being "vexed" by the ancient Israelites during their rebellion at Meribah. Hebrews 10:29 says that the Holy Spirit can be insulted. Only a person is capable of feeling insulted. Not an impersonal force such as the wind or electricity.

Matthew 28:19 commands believers to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father and the Son are clearly persons. So too is the Holy Spirit given that all three share a single name. Just as the Bible refers to both the Father and the Son as Lord as well as God (Jn. 20:28; Eph. 4:5-6; Phil. 2:11; Rev. 1:8, 17-18; 4:8-10), so too does it refer to the Holy Spirit as both Lord (II Cor. 3:17) and God (Acts 5:3-4). The association of the Holy Spirit in such a manner with the Father and Son suggests that the New Testament writers viewed him in the same personal categories as the other two persons of the Trinity.

Tritheism. Many Christians have unwittingly embraced a polytheistic conceptualization of the Trinity. This most frequently occurs in those analogies in which the Trinity is depicted as the "family of God."⁹⁵ Should one look into the throne room of heaven they'd see three individuals occupying three separate thrones. Or else they'd hear all three engaging in separate

⁹¹ *The Forgotten Trinity*, 140.

⁹² Concerning the use of the demonstrative pronoun *ekeinos* in relationship to the personality of the Holy Spirit, Leon Morris writes, "The conjunction *ekeinos*, to *pneuma* (he, the Spirit)...is noteworthy, with the masculine pronoun in immediate juxtaposition to the neuter noun. It emphasizes the fact that John thought of the Spirit as personal." Quoted from page 699 of Morris' *The Gospel According to John*, in *The New International Commentary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971).

⁹³ *Ibid*, 142.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 142.

⁹⁵ The family of God analogy needs to be distinguished from the social Trinitarian model, which also uses "community" or "family" analogies. The following is representative of the social Trinitarian model: "Let me propose generally, then, that the Holy Trinity is a divine, transcendent society or community of three fully personal and fully divine entities: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit or Paraclete. These three are wonderfully unified by their common divinity, that is, by the possession by each of the whole generic divine essence — including, for instance, the properties of everlastingness and of sublimely great knowledge, love, and glory. The persons are also unified by their joint redemptive purpose, revelation, and work. the of sublimely great knowledge, love, and glory.... The Trinity is thus a zestful, wondrous community of divine light, love, joy, mutuality, and verve." Cornelius Plantinga, "Social Trinity and Tritheism," in *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays* (Norte Dame: University of Norte Dame, 1989), 27-28. The social Trinitarian model is mainly concerned with the inter-relation of the persons in terms of *perichoresis* or "mutual indwelling." It does not stretch the community analogy to the point where the three persons of the Trinity become individual members.

conversations with the other. Such an erroneous teaching appears in *Dake's Annotated Reference Bible*.⁹⁶

There are over 500 plain scriptures that refer to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as being **THREE SEPARATE AND DISTINCT PERSONS** (*emphasis mine*), each with His own personal body, soul, and spirit in the sense that all other persons have them. . . If two or three persons are referred to in all these passages and they are called God, then we must understand them as referring to this many divine persons, as we do when the same statements are made of two or three persons of the human race.⁹⁷

Just as each human person is a separate and distinct being, so too is each member of the Trinity a separate and distinct being. If we were to go to heaven we would see three different beings sitting bodily on three different thrones. God's oneness is nothing more than a functional unity. The three persons of the Trinity are one in the sense of sharing a united purpose or goal. Dake attacks the orthodox view of the Trinity as both "mystical" and "foolish." By equating person with being, Dake destroys the categorical distinction that was foundational to such major Trinitarian creeds as the Nicene.

The above error stems from a careless use of "person" as it pertains to God. Finite humans can exist only in a single person or body. God is an infinite being who as spirit lacks extension in time or space (I Kings 8:27; Ps. 137:8-9; Jer. 23:24; Jn. 4:24). That's why God can exist simultaneously in three persons. Since God is infinite, His being or substance cannot be divided as is the case for finite humans. Any formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity that divides the nature of God into parts, making each person one-third God, is unscriptural. In his being or substance God is indivisibly one. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each fully God. At the same time, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct personages. For this reason, Christians must avoid confusing the persons of the Trinity as is the case in modal monarchianism. In other words, one God or *what*, and three persons or *whos*.⁹⁸

Some might argue that it doesn't really matter if one uses the family analogy. After all, or so the argument goes, no analogy of the Trinity is perfect. All analogies taken from human experience concerning the Trinity are imperfect. However, some are clearly less biblical than others. The "family of God" analogy is a form of tritheism. Tritheism, in turn, is a derivative of polytheism. Polytheism goes against God's self-disclosure. Monotheism is at the heart of biblical theology (Deut. 4:35; 6:4; Isa. 43:10-11; 44:6, 24; 46:8; Mk. 12:29; I Cor. 8:4-6; Jms. 2:19).

Many Christians have inadvertently embraced some form of heresy in an endeavor to explain the Trinity. While considering themselves Trinitarian, such individuals describe this doctrine in either modalistic or tritheistic categories. Trinitarian errors invariably spillover into the areas of Christology and Pneumatology. For example, modalism oftentimes results in an adoptionistic Christology while Arianism leads to a denial of both the personality as well as of the full deity of the Holy Spirit. Such errors crop up as a result of trying to describe the Trinity in categories familiar to human experience.

Christians need to come up with the most scripturally accurate models possible when attempting to explain the Trinity. God has revealed enough about himself so that believers can correctly comprehend the doctrine of the Trinity and in the process avoid bad analogies. Consider Mormon theology in this regard. In a vision Mormon Prophet Joseph Smith supposedly saw in vision that the Father and the Son had bodies of flesh and bone. He further taught God was once

⁹⁶ Lawrenceville" GA, 1961.

⁹⁷ Ibid, NT 280; see also *God's Plan for Man*, 500.

⁹⁸ White makes this distinction in *The Forgotten Trinity*, 154. He credits the source of his attribution to Hank Hanegraff, President of the Christian Research Institute.

a mortal human who eventually attained exaltation or deity.⁹⁹ In his book *Heresies*, Brown observes that tritheists tend to conceptualize the divine nature and person in terms of the human anatomy.¹⁰⁰ God thus becomes a divisible being limited in terms of physicality and location. This is probably a vestige of the ancient polytheism upon which tritheism is derived. Many polytheistic religions such as the ancient Babylonians and Greeks viewed the gods in anthropomorphic terms. The god's were depicted as "big humans."

The tritheism espoused by the Mormons spills over into the area of Christology. Mormonism sees Jesus as the spiritual brother of Lucifer. Such a teaching is absolutely heretical. It blurs the distinction between the creator and the creature. Scripture reveals that Satan (Lucifer) is a creature rather than Christ's equal. Satan was created perfect until iniquity arose in him (Ezek. 28:15). To suggest as Mormon theology does that Satan wanted to be mankind's savior places him on the same level as the second person of the Trinity. It is tantamount to making Satan God.¹⁰¹

Mormonism's denial of the Trinity and espousal of polytheism leads them into the unscriptural view that there are as many gods as there are stars in the heavens or grains of sand on the beach. These heresies explain why neither the cross nor Christ's atoning sacrifice carries any significance in their soteriology. Jesus does not share a unique relationship with the other two persons of the Trinity. All humans are "spirit children" of the Father. Jesus is our elder brother. He is one god among many. Nor is his death efficacious since humans by nature are gods in the making and therefore good. Consequently, humanity does not need a savior from sin. The difference between God and humanity is one of degree rather than one of kind. Humans are gods in the making. Everyone has within themselves the potential to attain godhood. Like Oneness Pentecostals and JW's, Mormonism is based on a works oriented system of salvation. Salvation is the same thing as exaltation or godhood.

Part of tritheism's error is that it defines person in highly anthropomorphic terms. This explains why tritheists such as the Mormons ultimately exalt humanity. In the process, the divine nature becomes anthropomorphized (Rom. 1:21-23). The difference between God and humanity is not one of nature but one of degree. Human nature is thus deified. Humanity does not need a savior from sin so much as it needs a savior who can enable it to realize its potential. Tritheism has historically been limited to cults such as the Mormon Church. However, in more recent times it has made some inroads among professing Christian groups such as the Word-Faith movement. Word-Faith teachers such as Benny Hinn describe the Trinity in tritheistic terms. Hinn claims that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three separate beings. He also teaches that each is a triune being having their own body, soul, and spirit.¹⁰²

Word-Faith teachers often take the anthropomorphisms of the Bible literally. In this respect they are similar once again to the Mormons. For example, Kenneth Copeland deduces on the basis of Isa. 40:12 that God the Father stands around 6'2 to 6'3 in height given that he is described as having a nine-inch hand span. Copeland concludes that God has a spirit-body given that the

⁹⁹ Joseph Smith describes the Father and Son as "personages" with bodies of flesh and bone (*Doctrine and Covenants* 130:22). By giving God a body of flesh and bone, Smith limits him in terms of physicality and location. Such a belief is contrary to the scriptural teaching that God is Spirit (Jn. 4:24; I Tim. 6:15-16) and not limited in terms of extension in space or time (Ps. 139:7; Jer. 23:24). Concerning his statements on God once being a man who attained exaltation (see footnote no. 68), Smith contradicts the scriptural testimony that God is not a human (Num. 23:19; Hos. 11:9; Rom. 1:22-23).

¹⁰⁰ See *Heresies*, 127. It appears that tritheism is particularly susceptible to conceptualizing the divine nature and person in terms of the human anatomy. God thus becomes a divisible being limited in terms of both physicality and location. This could well be a vestige of the ancient polytheism upon which tritheism is ultimately derived. Not only were the gods human in appearance; they also had all of humanities emotions, virtues, and vices.

¹⁰¹ This teaching appears in *The Pearl of Great Price*, *Moses* 4:1-4, and in a statement made by Brigham Young in *Journal Of Discourses*, vol. 13, 282.

¹⁰² Benny Hinn, Praise the Lord, TBN broadcast, October 3, 1990.

Bible makes reference to God having eyes, nostrils, ears, hands, and feet.¹⁰³ Copeland appears to be influenced in this regards by Dake who takes a similar position in his *Annotated Reference Bible*. It appears that Dake is also the source of Hinn's Trinitarian deviations.

It is no coincidence that the doctrine of *apotheosis* or deification (i.e. believers are gods in the making) characterizes not only Mormonism but the theology of certain Word-Faith teachers given that both are polytheistic movements that exalt humanity. Some Word-Faith teachers such as Copeland, Kenneth Hagin, and Charles Capps, teach that humans were created in God's class as "little gods." Humans have the ability to exercise the God kind of faith by calling things into existence. While this ability was lost due to the fall, God corrected this situation by sending Christ to this earth as a man where he died spiritually by receiving Satan's nature. Jesus then went to hell where he atoned for our sins by becoming born-again through the power of the resurrection. Raised up again in God's nature, Jesus sends the Holy Spirit into believers so that the incarnation can be duplicated in their lives. Through the force of faith believers are assured of success and prosperity.¹⁰⁴

The faith teaching concerning deification cannot be harmonized with scripture as Robert Bowman points out in "'Ye Are Gods?' Orthodox and Heretical Views on the Deification of Man."¹⁰⁵ It is true that some of the Early Church Fathers and the Eastern Orthodox tradition have used deification in reference to the Holy Spirit indwelling Christians and transforming them into the image of God in Christ. This process would climax when the Holy Spirit endowed believers with immortality during the resurrection. Bowman notes that this view is confusing as well as inconsistent. Nevertheless, it is in keeping for the most part with the monotheism of the Bible insofar humanity never transcends its creaturehood.

Not so with the deification being promulgated by certain of the Word-Faith teachers. The latter give to humans a sovereign will comparable to God's.¹⁰⁶ Humans therefore have the capacity to exercise "God kind of faith" and to command whatever they will into existence. Copeland and likeminded Word-Faith teachers believe in a finite deity given that they assign God a body of human proportions with definite measurements.¹⁰⁷

The tritheism and by extension polytheism of certain Word-Faith teachers results in the demotion of God and the promotion of humanity. This is clearly outlined by Hank Hanegraff in his book *Christianity in Crisis*.¹⁰⁸ Both Mormonism and Word-Faith theology start out with a wrong view of God. In turn, both movements promote a false view of the nature and person of Christ. The latter leads to the preaching of a false gospel. As with modalism and Arianism, tritheism downplays the importance of substitutionary atonement. Christ's incarnation and by extension his example is what is most crucial to salvation. Believers in both Mormonism and Word-Faith theology are mini-incarnations. By following Christ's example either through obedience to the gospel ordinances or by properly exercising the force of faith humans fulfill their divine destiny and in the process become gods themselves.

The issue is not whether tritheists such as Mormons or certain proponents of Word-Faith theology love Jesus. The real issue is whether they love the Jesus of divine revelation. Clearly, a Jesus who is the spiritual brother of Lucifer is not the Jesus of the Bible. Is it loving to let Mormons go on believing the things they do simply because they are sincere individuals who love God and appear deeply committed to him? Or that the error of certain Word-Faith teachers can be

¹⁰³ *Holy Bible: Kenneth Copeland Reference Edition*; Ft. Worth, Texas, 1972, lvi.

¹⁰⁴ A discussion of Word-Faith teachings concerning the Fall, the atonement, faith, and deification is found in Weldon and Ankerberg's booklet *The Facts on the Faith Movement* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1993).

¹⁰⁵ See the *Christian Research Journal*, Winter/Spring 1987.

¹⁰⁶ For example, see Copeland's *The Holy Bible: Kenneth Copeland Reference Edition*, iii.

¹⁰⁷ See "Spirit, Soul and Body I," side 1, Kenneth Copeland Ministries tape.

¹⁰⁸ See ch. 10, "The Demotion of God," (Eugene: Harvest Books, 1993), 121-127.

overlooked because they embrace an elevated view of the person of Christ? The appropriate scriptural response is that if an individual truly has the love of Christ in their heart then he or she will want to be used of God to win both over to the Jesus of divine revelation.

Summary. Section III has sought to show the relationship between the major anti-Trinitarian heresies and their affects on the related doctrines of Christology and soteriology. This summary will outline the implications of these heresies in terms of the modern Adventism's understanding of Christology and soteriology.

Subordinationism has always had an affect on aspects of traditional Adventist theology. If Jesus was a fellow-creature, then it follows that it is more appropriate to think of him as our example instead of as our substitute. Believers are called upon to imitate Christ's example rather than to exercise faith in him. Arianism in particular stresses that humans can resemble God. Christ's death on the cross actually saves no one. Its not a divine sacrifice for sin. Instead, it's one perfect creature offering his life as a ransom for another. This ransom is available for use to those faithful individuals desiring to make use of it so they might someday receive the gift of life. The operative phrase is "make use of."

One can readily see how compatible a subordinationist Christology is with a soteriology based on works righteousness. Jesus is the model man who comes to show us how to live the perfect life required by God's Law. Assisting grace takes precedence over imputed righteousness. Justification is mere pardon for past sins. Sanctification is the greater work. Calvary is primarily a demonstration of God's government. In line with the moral influence view of the atonement, it is a martyrdom meant to woo us back to God. Salvation is largely an internal process based on character development. All of these elements appeared in some form or another in the soteriology of the pioneers. The latter were amenable to the governmental theory of the atonement,¹⁰⁹ as well as to ontological perfection. They fused justification with sanctification, and held to the doctrine of the sinful human nature of Christ. Such beliefs are consistent with an Arian Christology.

Sadly to say, elements of the above continue to find a home in Adventist theology. This home is found even in those segments claiming to be Trinitarian but holding to such traditional Adventist doctrines as 1844, the investigative judgment, the sinful human nature of Christ, and harvest or end-time perfectionism.

This now leads to a consideration of tritheism. This author is by no means suggesting that the early Mrs. White was a tritheist given that this would contradict his earlier assertion that she was a subordinationist with Arian or semi-Arian leanings. At the same time, she took the anthropomorphisms of the Bible literally as did Joseph Smith and the Mormons before her. For example, in *Early Writings* she defined the Father and the pre-incarnate Christ as separate individuals with spirit bodies localized in the throneroom of heaven.¹¹⁰ She claimed to have been told in vision that the Father had a form similar to that of the Son's.¹¹¹ Humans are likewise said to bear God's image in outward resemblance and character.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ According to governmental theory, Christ's atonement guards against presumptive license taken from divine pardon or amnesty. The atonement further spurs us on to acts of virtue. Christ thus serves as the exemplar for the wicked who think they can sin with impunity. Christ's sacrifice is primarily a demonstration of God's commitment to law and moral virtue. While substitutionary language is not altogether abandoned, it is usually put in the framework of public justice. For further discussion on the governmental theory of the atonement and how it differs from the substitutionary view, see R.C. Sproul's *Willing to Believe* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 175-177.

¹¹⁰ Washington D.C., Review and Herald Publishing Assoc., (1882), 19.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* Interestingly enough, she only gave the pre-existent Christ and the Father such forms. The Holy Spirit appears at this juncture to have been more of a divine effluence.

¹¹² See *Patriarchs and Prophets*, Review and Publishing Assoc., (1890), 84.

Later Adventist writers have followed Mrs. White's lead and described the divine personages of the Trinity in anthropomorphic terms. Such a position is taken by the authors of *Seventh-day Adventists Believe...*¹¹³ Certain passages are believed to teach that God has a humanlike form (e.g. Gen. 1:26-27; 18:1-19:22; Ex. 33:20-23; Dan. 7:9-13; 9:21; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3).¹¹⁴ If one bases their understanding of the divine person on a literal interpretation of Mrs. White's writings, it appears that God is human in form and appearance. Such teachings run the risk of making God a divisible being with human proportions that limit Him in terms of physicality and location. They are dangerous from the standpoint that they can open the door to tritheism.

The problem here is the use of language as it pertains to the personage of the Father and the Son. Tritheists regard the Father and the Son as separate individuals. Each has a form or a shape independent of the other. Such conceptualizations take the anthropomorphisms of the Bible literally.¹¹⁵ While not heretical per se, they run the risk of making God a "big human" with all their attendant Christological as well as soteriological implications. Where the "big human" conceptualization is problematic is that it divides or cuts-up the divine being. It thus introduces a form of polytheism. The latter is clearly heretical insofar as it violates the first scriptural foundation of the Trinity (monotheism).

Those segments of traditional Adventism that have embraced a tritheistic understanding of the Trinity have unwittingly accepted a construct leading to the anthropomorphization of the divine nature. Because tritheism blurs the clear and absolute distinction between the Creator and the creature, those Adventists who have a tritheistic understanding of the Trinity end up espousing some form of ontological perfection. The latter is a derivative of the doctrine of *apotheosis*. Adventist writer Helmut Ott notes the perfectionistic tendencies inherent in Adventist theology in his book *Perfect in Christ*. Noteworthy in this connection are some of the remarks he makes in chapter 6 ("Ellen G. White and a Deception Aimed at Adventists"). There is a tendency in traditional Adventism to eliminate the radical qualitative distinction between the Creator and His creatures by seeking to achieve a state of spiritual equality with the Creator and the God-man, Christ Jesus. This is done by developing in one's life a righteousness that is just as perfect as that attained by Christ through partaking of the divine nature. Ott's comments are particularly insightful:

¹¹³ Ibid, 85.

¹¹⁴ A common argument used in defense of God having a spirit body with a humanlike form is that angels are spiritual beings who always appear in the form of a human male (Lk. 1:11-28; Acts 12:5-10). In a similar vein, Moses and the seventy Israelite elders saw God's feet (Ex. 24:9-11). As a personal being, it should come as no surprise that God has a personal form (Jn. 4:24; Phil. 2:7) which humans resemble. The Hebrew words for image and likeness suggest such.

This warrants an examination of the meaning of the Hebrew words for image and likeness: *tselem* and *demuwth*. *Tselem* denotes a representative figure and appears in such passages of scripture as Gen. 5:3, 9:6, Ex. 20:4, Ps. 73:20, 106:19, Isa. 40:19-20, 44: 9-10, 15, and 17. The Hebrew word for likeness is *demuwth*. It is similar in meaning to image and conveys the notion of fashioning after a model or shape (see Gen. 5:1,3, Ex. 20:4, Deut. 4:16-18, 23,25, Isa. 40:18, and Eze. 1:5, 10, 13, 16, 22, 26, and 28). Image and likeness pertain primarily to humanity's relatedness to God. Humanity's chief reason for existence is to reveal God's glory in thought, speech, and action. This image also extends to humanity's relationship with others; Godlikeness is to characterize the believer's relationship towards all other humans. Finally, humanity was to image God in terms of ruling the earth in harmony with his divine will. Genesis 1:26 indicates that humanity resembles God in terms of relationships as opposed to substance or form (taken from page 33 of Anthony Hoekema's *Doctrine of Man* and cited on pages 24-25 of Robert Brinsmead's "Man as Image of God," *Verdict*, 1978).

¹¹⁵ Ramm discusses the whole issue of accommodation and the anthropomorphic nature of Biblical revelation in his book, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 99-101. The Bible was written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. It was also written in a human or social environment out of which certain analogies were drawn. God's almightiness is spoken of in terms of a right arm because among men the right arm is a symbol of strength or power. Such expressions do not mean that God is a being resembling man (i.e. that God has a face, ears, eyes, etc.). If taken literally, God could be seen not only as a "big man" but also as a blasting furnace (God is a consuming fire) or a bird (God will cover you with his feathers). The anthropomorphic character of scripture is necessary for the communication of God's truth to humanity. These anthropomorphisms denote valid, analogical descriptions of reality. Ramm notes that some scholars prefer to speak of Biblical revelation as anthropic (characteristic of the human) rather than as anthropomorphic (the divine in terms of human analogy).

So when someone endeavors to develop in his own attained life a righteousness that is as perfect—and consequently as meritorious—as that of Christ, he does more than just attempt to equal the outstanding spiritual achievements of the only perfect Man who ever lived on earth since the Fall. He is striving to eliminate all distinction between the Savior and the sinners he came to save. He is seeking to erase the difference and bridge the distance between himself and the Son of God, who, being pure, righteous, and holy as God the Father, needed no mediator, but lived in direct and unhindered spiritual unity with the other two Persons of the Godhead.¹¹⁶

The above explains why in its insistence on sinless perfection traditional Adventism parallels the doctrine of *apotheosis*. Tritheism ultimately reduces the divine nature to the human and in the process elevates human nature to the divine level. By insisting that image or likeness refers to “counterpart,” humans end up reflecting the divine nature not only in form but also in character. The incarnation thus takes place in the life of the believer during regeneration. Deification and ontological perfection are based on humanity’s desire to reach a state different than that of the Creator’s original intent (see Gen. 3:5). Ott writes “Man’s first sin was a refusal to accept his creatureliness—a presumptuous attempt to transcend the limitations of his finite status and attain to the self-determination and autosufficiency that belongs to God alone.”¹¹⁷

Subordinationism and tritheism thus elevate what humans can do. But they do so in different ways. Subordinationism does so through the theology of re-enactment. The incarnate Son of God is reduced to the status of a mere perfect human being.¹¹⁸ Christ’s perfect life can thus be reproduced in the life of the Christian if the latter will but follow his example. Tritheism does so through the theology of exact representation. Interpreting the *imago Dei* to mean exact representation makes God out to be nothing more than a “big human.” As God’s “little” counterpart, humans can perfectly reflect the divine image by once again following Christ’s example in terms of “letting go and letting God.” The Son of God is the God-man or image-bearer par excellence. He stayed perfectly surrendered to the Father. If believers will do the same, Jesus will live his life out perfectly in them. Under this schema, humans are seen as a fitting receptacle given that they are God’s counterpart. One cannot help but notice the pantheistic sentiments implicit in such a soteriology. Such sentiments occur anytime the distinction between the Creator and the creature is blurred. Tritheism leads to such a blurring.

In both cases the end result is a soteriology predicated on the believer attaining a righteousness that is just as perfect as that achieved by Christ two thousand years ago. It is no wonder that Seventh-day Adventists continue to be divided over the meaning of justification by faith. Certain

¹¹⁶ Cited from page 12 of Ott’s book.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹¹⁸ In the sidebar entitled “What Happened to Christ’s Deity When He Died?,” the *Review* states that the pioneers felt they could maintain the reality of Christ’s death on the cross only by denying that he had preexistent divine immortality (*Adventist Review*, April 22, 1999, 10). This was one of the primary reasons why they objected so strongly to the doctrine of the Trinity. Beachy notes on page 5 of his rebuttal “Adventist Review Perpetuates the Omega” that the doctrine of the Trinity forces one to accept the conclusion that Christ couldn’t have died on Calvary if he is the self-existent God of the universe. He observes that the New Testament declares in some thirty places that it was the Father who raised Jesus from the dead. Therefore, Jesus couldn’t have raised himself. Note certain parallels with JW teachings in this regard. The virgin birth was not an incarnation of the second member of the Godhead. Jesus was raised from the dead by the Father. He could do nothing supernatural apart from the Father. Moreover, if Jesus was God in the flesh than who ran the universe the three days he was dead? Beachy and his fellow anti-Trinitarian Adventists resort to the same arguments employed by JW’s in an effort to refute the deity of Christ.

This leads to a consideration of Mrs. White’s statement in regard to Christ’s death on the cross: “Deity did not die. Humanity died” (Manuscript 131, 1897). Trinitarian Adventists have long seen in this statement recognition of the orthodox teaching that Jesus held two natures: one human, the other divine. Anti-Trinitarians such as Beachy have another take. Jesus became fully human. Since his divinity was derived from the Father, at the cross he died as a human. But the Father who has preexistent divine immortality remained in the throneroom of heaven where he raised his son from the dead three days later. The deity or divinity that did not die was found in the Father and not the Son (see pages 5-6 of Beachy’s “Adventist Review Perpetuates the Omega,” 5-6)

segments have grasped the truth of imputed righteousness. Besides having a biblical understanding of the Trinity, this segment sees the connection between the nature of the atonement, the impeccable human nature of Christ at the incarnation, and original sin. This segment recognizes that justification by faith is inimical to ontological perfection. The more traditionalist segment, on the other hand, continues to promote such doctrines as the sinful nature of Christ at the incarnation, the idea of an incomplete atonement, and ontological perfection. These aberrations stem from Adventism's anti-Trinitarian past. They also stem from certain Trinitarian deviations that have made their way into present Adventist theology. Given its synthetic tendencies,¹¹⁹ it is not surprising then that certain elements within Adventism have embraced a soteriology that combines aspects of an Arian Christology along with an implicit tritheism concerning the Trinity.

IV. Concluding Perspectives

The previous section demonstrates that a proper biblical understanding of the Trinity is necessary in order to proclaim the gospel. The good news concerning salvation centers on a proper understanding of the nature of God. Jesus reveals a personal God who is intimately involved in the minute details of our lives. One who has counted every hair on our head (Matt. 10:30). Nothing is beyond His notice. He takes notice of the little sparrow when it drops to the ground (Matt. 10:29). We can approach the Father with confidence. The reason is because He first loved us (I Jn. 4:10). Calvary demonstrates the depth of the Father's love (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8). The very God who never tires (Isa. 40:28), and knows the beginning from the end (Isa. 44:7), has a personal interest in His children (I Pet. 5:7). He is the savior of all men, especially those who believe (I Tim. 4:10). Calvary reveals the value of the human soul. To love God means to want to share with others the scriptural truth about him.

This now leads to a discussion on the theology of Mrs. White and the pioneers in regard to the Trinity. While studying for the ministry at Pacific Union College my theology professors maintained that the denomination was settled on the doctrine of the Trinity. They also affirmed that Mrs. White was a Trinitarian who believed in the full deity of Christ as well as the personality of the Holy Spirit. Doctrinally she was said to stand head and shoulders above her contemporaries. In fact, the denomination's turnaround could be attributed to her unequivocal support of the Trinity in the 1898 edition of the *Desire of the Ages*.

The Mrs. White who penned the statements found on pages 539, 671, and 785 of the *Desire of the Ages* was clearly an orthodox Trinitarian. These statements espoused views that stood in advance of anything her SDA contemporaries had written. At the same time, an element of ambiguity appears in many of her writings. The pre-1870 Mrs. White clearly held what appears to have been a subordinationist Christology. If a Trinitarian, it would appear that her writings had more in common with the Cappadocian Fathers of the Eastern Church tradition. The latter embodies an implicit subordinationism in its understanding of the inner relationships between the persons within the Godhead.¹²⁰ So if the pre-1890 Mrs. White was a Trinitarian, then she was not

¹¹⁹ The late-Walter Martin noted such tendencies in Adventist theology. He saw Adventism as an eclectic mix. Alongside certain orthodox teachings were some clearly heterodox (i.e. soul sleep and Sabbatarianism) as well as heretical features (i.e. the doctrine of the incomplete atonement and the sinful human nature of Christ at the atonement). One of Martin's main concerns was that the denomination's leadership failed to police its ranks appropriately. As a result, aberrational and even heretical elements existed side by side within the denomination. Many manifested themselves in print. This is in keeping with Brown's assessment of the synthetic tendencies inherent within Arianism (*Heresies*, 120). To the extent that Arian sentiments have colored aspects of Adventism, such tendencies are to be expected.

¹²⁰ The Cappadocian theologians of the fourth century A.D. articulated what can be called the Eastern view concerning the Trinity. Whereas Roman Catholicism and Protestantism view God's essence as residing in his being, the Cappadocian theologians placed it within the person of the Father. All three persons of the Trinity are fully divine. However, the person of the Father is the source of the Son and Holy Spirit's deity. Therefore, within the Trinity there is a hierarchy in which the Father is supreme and the Son and Holy Spirit subordinate. The Cappadocian theologians were thoroughly Trinitarian in their monotheism. Their greatest desire was to avoid modalism in any form. Unwittingly, they

a creedal one. Moreover, her Trinitarianism would have stood in stark contrast to the views held by her husband and most of her contemporaries.

It is also possible that the earlier Mrs. White was herself a semi-Arian. Those individuals that she most closely interacted with were semi-Arian. Her husband is a case in point. These same individuals were also anti-Trinitarian in their theology. This means that one has to take seriously the claim that the early Mrs. White herself might have been an anti-Trinitarian. Her writings manifest a certain ambiguity in this regard. She never once used the word Trinity. Besides espousing a subordinationist Christology, she sometimes referred to the Holy Spirit as an "it."¹²¹ Her seemingly orthodox statements have to be balanced by her less orthodox ones. Consider the following quotation:

"But although Christ's glory was for a time veiled and eclipsed by his assuming humanity, yet he did not cease to be God when he became man...*The man Christ Jesus was not the Lord God Almighty*, yet Christ and the Father are one."¹²²

This statement is perplexing. Either it explicitly denies that Jesus was God almighty, or it attempts to separate his deity from his humanity. The former makes Jesus a lesser deity and is consistent with an Arian Christology. The latter is reminiscent of the error of Nestorius, who sought to drive a wedge between Christ's deity and his humanity. Jesus thus becomes a split personality. This is clearly a heretical teaching.

Mrs. White's defenders will no doubt argue that this statement is careless as opposed to heretical. One can perhaps give Mrs. White the benefit of the doubt by noting that she did affirm that Jesus was one with the Father. In her effort to distinguish the Son from the Father she used Arian or semi-Arian sounding language. Such language is careless to be sure and prone to misunderstanding. But it enables her Trinitarian supporters to maintain that she was a true Trinitarian. Her major crime in this particular instance was that she mainly used a poor choice of words.

A better case can be made that the early Mrs. White was semi-Arian. As was previously observed, her early statements reflect subordinationist tendencies. A subordinationist Christology is consistent with Arianism and other anti-Trinitarian belief systems. Consider the following subordinationist statement (italicized) in Mrs. White's book the *Spirit of Prophecy*:

A special light beamed in his (Satan's) countenance, and shone around him brighter and more beautiful than around the other angels' yet Jesus, God's dear Son, had the pre-eminence over all the angelic host. He was one with the Father before the angels were created. *Satan was envious of Christ, and gradually assumed command which devolved on Christ alone.*

*The great Creator assembled the heavenly host, that he might in the presence of all the angels confer special honor upon his Son...The Father then made known that it was ordained by himself that Christ, his Son, should be equal with himself; so that wherever was the presence of the Son, it was his own presence.*¹²³

compromised the consubstantiality of the three persons by having the divine nature reside in the person of the Father. For further discussion, see Owen's "Reflections on the Trinity" (Part II), 3-4.

If the pre-1890 Mrs. White was a full-blown Trinitarian then her subordinationist statements could be attributed to her having embraced the Eastern view on the Trinity. While a possibility, this author believes that the preponderance of the evidence points to the fact that in her earlier years she was a non-Trinitarian who subscribed to a semi-Arian Christology.

¹²¹ See *Testimonies to the Church*, I:124, *Pamphlet* 154:4, and *Youth Instructor*, 8-1-1895.

¹²² Quoted from *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, 1129.

¹²³ See vol. I, 17-18. Dr. Verle Streifling points out in his article "Did Ellen White teach 'A Different God'?" that devolve means to "transfer from one person to another" (www.ellenwhite.org/egw68.html) 2. In other words, Jesus' deity was

A similar sentiment is conveyed in Mrs. White's book *Patriarchs and Prophets*:

The King of the universe summoned the heavenly hosts before Him, that in their presence He might set forth the true position of His Son and show the relation He sustained to all created beings. The Son of God shared the Father's throne, and the glory of the eternal, self-existent One encircled both. About the throne gathered the holy angels, a vast, unnumbered throng--"ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands" (Revelation 5:11), the most exalted angels, as ministers and subjects, rejoicing in the light that fell upon them from the presence of the Deity. *Before the assembled inhabitants of heaven the King declared that none but Christ, the Only Begotten of God, could fully enter into His purposes, and to Him it was committed to execute the mighty counsels of His will.* The Son of God had wrought the Father's will in the creation of all the hosts of heaven; and to Him, as well as to God, their homage and allegiance were due. Christ was still to exercise divine power, in the creation of the earth and its inhabitants. *But in all this He would not seek power or exaltation for Himself contrary to God's plan, but would exalt the Father's glory and execute His purposes of beneficence and love.*¹²⁴

The subordinationist-leaning elements are once again italicized. Mrs. White appears to be teaching that the Father had to declare Christ's exalted position before the heavenly hosts. The implication is that such a position was not evident to the angels prior to the Father's proclamation. While she writes of the Son's being the creator of this earth and of his sharing in the Father's glory, the above statements make it sound like the Son was not recognized as the Father's equal until the Father declared him so. In *Testimonies to the Church*,¹²⁵ Christ is said to have been accorded special honor by the Father. The inference is that the preincarnate Christ did not bear such honor prior to the Father having bestowed it upon him. Equally confusing is the following statement:

*There had been no change in the position or authority of Christ. Lucifer's envy and misrepresentation and his claims to equality with Christ had made necessary a statement of the true position of the Son of God; but this had been the same from the beginning. Many of the angels were, however, blinded by Lucifer's deceptions.*¹²⁶

It appears from the italicized portions that Christ's authority and deity were not recognizable to the angels. This necessitated a statement of his position and authority from the Father.

If the early Mrs White was semi-Arian in her Christology, then she embraced heretical teachings concerning the nature and person of Christ. Seventh-day Adventist apologists and historians need to continue grappling with the issue of Mrs. White's Christology as it relates to her understanding of the Trinity. Gerhard Pfandl does so to a certain extent in "The Doctrine of the Trinity Among Adventists." His conclusion that Mrs. White's affirmation of the Trinity progressed as the light she received from heaven on the topic also progressed is mostly convincing to those individuals who has first bought into the idea that she was a prophet of God.¹²⁷ Pfandl's

derived or handed down to him from the Father. Such a position is inconsistent with an Athanasian Trinitarianism. However, it is quite consistent with Arianism.

¹²⁴ See page 36.

¹²⁵ 8:268.

¹²⁶ *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 38.

¹²⁷ This position is taken on pages 3-4 of Pfandl's study. One of Pfandl's examples is contained in footnote no. 13. He notes that the early Mrs. White permitted the eating of pork. By 1868 she had reversed herself on the grounds that God's Word forbade the consumption of pork (see *Counsels on Diet*, 392). Along similar lines, Moon suggests that God had a timeline for introducing new truth ("Heresy or Hopeful Sign," 11-12). He posits that God first wanted church members to

conclusion is predicated on the assumption that Mrs. White's visions bear the indelible stamp of heaven. While this paper has not dealt with the issue of Mrs. White's inspiration and authority, it should be noted that the anti-Trinitarian segment of the church bases its position largely on many of the above Mrs. White statements.

This now leads to a consideration of the pioneers. In the aftermath of Glacierview and the continued questioning in scholarly circles of what some might consider traditional Adventist theology, a host of organizations committed to "Historical Adventism" have arisen. Some of the major publications in this regard include *Adventist LandMarks* and the out of print *Our Firm Foundation Magazine*. Herein lies a paradox. All claim to be committed to upholding the historic landmarks as defined by Mrs. White and the pioneers. Yet the pioneers themselves espoused either an Arian or a semi-Arian Christology. While some so-called historic Adventist organizations and publications are anti-Trinitarian such as the Truth About God or Smyrna Organization, not all historical Adventists are anti-Trinitarian. For example, www.sdadefend.com and www.pathlights.com are historical Adventist websites that hold to the doctrine of the Trinity. All of which is to say that those organizations claiming to uphold the historic Adventist landmarks cannot even agree on what Mrs. White's true position was concerning the Godhead.

Quite clearly, the Arian or semi-Arian sentiments embraced by the pioneer's places them outside the scope of biblical orthodoxy. Such beliefs further account for their defective soteriology. For example, Uriah Smith denied that Jesus completed the atonement on the cross.¹²⁸ Most of the pioneers embraced an immanent perfectionism. Early Adventism was permeated with legalism. Jesus was seen primarily as our example in terms of sinless living as opposed to our sinless substitute. One can perhaps grant the pioneers an indulgence in the sense that many of them were immature when it came to the essentials of the historic Christian faith. None were schooled in theology or essential biblical doctrine. All of this should warn SDA's against attempting to canonize their teachings or to make them normative. Adventists can best honor the pioneers by honestly examining their theology. This means acknowledging it, warts and all.

Part of Adventism's dilemma lies in the fact that it denies basing any of its teachings on a particular creed. It believes in a progressive unfolding of doctrinal truth. This has resulted in Adventism allowing literature to go out under its imprimatur that is a hodgepodge of contradictions. Some is quite orthodox sounding. Other contains aberrant or heretical statements. The Dallas Statement of 1980 reaffirms Adventism's commitment to the Trinity and is consistent with historic orthodoxy. At the same time, such a reaffirmation is vitiated by the continued existence of an anti-Trinitarian segment that espouses either an Arian or a semi-Arian Christology. It's position is best summarized in the following statement: "the church as a whole rejected the doctrine of the Trinity, and it was not until many years after the death of Ellen G. White that the Adventist church changed its position in regards to the Trinity."¹²⁹ This segment is committed to restoring the church to its historic anti-Trinitarian stance.

Adventists need to take a stand on "the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). The present controversy does not center around Adventism's willingness to allow for ongoing dialogue on the Trinity in accord with its belief in the progressive understanding of doctrine. Such a position is reasonable in light of the fact that the language used in the major creeds is not infallible. It's normative only to the extent that it can be harmonized with the scriptures. That is why it's legitimate for Adventists to seek to come up with more suitable language in an effort to better articulate scriptural teachings concerning the Trinity.

investigate what the scriptures had to say on a subject. God thus allowed partial truth or outright error to stand for years or even decades until church members exhaustively studied and evaluated a particular doctrine from the scriptures. It is one thing to suggest that God in his permissive will allows for partial truth or error. It's another to suggest that he is in some way responsible. Some of Moon's comments seem to imply the latter.

¹²⁸ *Looking Unto Jesus* (Review and Herald, 1898), 237.

¹²⁹ Lynnford Beachy, *What Did the Pioneers Believe?*, 1.

The present controversy owes much of its origins to Adventism's ahistoricism.¹³⁰ The denomination sees itself occupying a privileged status within Christianity. It is the faithful remnant called out by God to give earth its final warning: the three angel's message of Rev. 14:6-12. The ecumenical creeds are usually regarded as unreliable when it comes to establishing doctrine. By brushing aside the whole history of doctrinal development in the Christian Church, Adventists ensure they will have to repeat the mistakes of the past.

An examination of Christian Church history bears this out. For example, by about the fifth century A.D. the Christian Church had more or less established the great truth of the Trinity. It should further be noted that the church settled the controversy over the two natures of Christ during the Monothelite, Monophysite, Eutychian, and Apollinarian debates that raged between 300-600 A.D.¹³¹ As late as the 1890's, however, Adventists were still struggling over the doctrine of the Trinity. During this same period Adventists likewise struggled over Christological issues. Even as late as 1950, SDA's were still unsettled over the human nature of Christ at the incarnation as well as the doctrine of original sin. Both controversies embroiled the church in an ongoing conflict over the related issues of the nature of the atonement and Soteriology (especially justification by faith). Adventism has paid a real price for its brushing aside the history of doctrinal development in the Christian Church. Adventism will continue to have to relive these controversies so long as it detaches its history from the rest of Christianity's.

Much needless struggle could have been avoided if the early Adventist pioneers conceded that God was at work before the remnant community arrived on the scene.¹³² For example, both the Apostles (c.a. 90-100 A.D.) and the Nicene Creed (325 A.D.) spell out the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. Conversely, both the Council of Constantinople (381 A.D.) and the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) affirm not only the doctrine of the Trinity but Christ's full deity. Other councils such as Ephesus (431 A.D.), the Second Constantinoplian (553 A.D.), and the Third Constantinoplian (681 A.D.) reaffirmed Christ's deity as well as repudiated certain heresies that compromised scriptural truth concerning his two natures and their union.

¹³⁰ Russell R. Paden has written a paper on the Churches of Christ entitled *From the Churches of Christ to the Boston Movement: A comparative Study*, (submitted to the Department of Religious Studies and the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts, 1994). Paden notes that the Churches of Christ are ahistorical in the sense that they divorce themselves entirely from the rest of Christianity. They equate their history with that of apostolic Christianity. Such ahistoricism has fostered an exclusivist mentality supplemented by a proof-texting approach to the Bible. Scripture is seen as a collection of facts out of which disconnected texts are typically strung together into codified doctrinal truths. Typically, the doctrinal development of the historic Christian faith as embodied in the major church councils or codified in the ecumenical creeds is ignored on the grounds that both violate *sola scriptura* or the principle of the Bible alone as the source of all doctrine. The parallels between Adventism and the Churches of Christ extend all the way from a rigid exclusivism to a common use of the proof-text method. All of this stems in part from the ahistoricism that pervades both groups. Interestingly enough, within the Churches of Christ are those members who also deny the Trinity.

¹³¹ Eutychianism and Apollinarianism were previously discussed under footnote no. 86. Monophysitism was a fourth to fifth century heresy, which held that Jesus had a single nature—divine. Monophysitism was condemned at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. Monothelism was a related heresy, which held that Jesus shared a single will—divine. Orthodox Christians have always maintained that Jesus had two natures and two wills.

¹³² In the conclusion to his 1977 book entitled *The Shaking of Adventism*, Reformed Anglican theologian Geoffrey Paxton made the following astute observation: "The Adventist community gives considerable evidence of being isolationist. This was particularly the case in the early decades of the movement; and it is still to be found today, though to a lesser degree. The early pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism tended to believe that the Holy Spirit Dove flew straight from the apostles to their own shoulders—with only occasional stopovers in the intervening period. They blithely brushed aside virtually the whole history of doctrinal development in the Christian church."

Paxton's point is well taken. Seventh-day Adventists have tended to act at times as if they are the *only* denomination around—at least the only one that subscribes to sound biblical doctrine. Such isolationist tendencies are less pronounced at present than they were in the early stages of the denomination's formation. However, the fact remains that the early Adventists viewed the entire church (Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant) as apostate. Nearly every cardinal doctrine historically held by the Christian Church was regarded with suspicion. Consequently, Adventists had to reinvent the wheel so to speak in an effort to become settled on the eternal verities of the faith.

There is nothing wrong per se with Adventists attempting to improve upon the existing doctrine of the Trinity by seeking to avoid the more speculative philosophical elements embodied within the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds.¹³³ The problem is that the pioneers suspected every cardinal doctrine held by the Christian Church. Pfandl documents the fact that many of the pioneers were opposed to the Trinity on the grounds that it was not only unscriptural but also contrary to common sense. Its roots were regarded as either pagan or Papal in origin. Terms such as "firstborn of creation" (Col. 1:15) or "only begotten son" (Jn. 3:16) were understood in a literal sense. As the one true God, the Father was first and superior, the Son second and subordinate. The Holy Spirit was not even a person but the influence or power of God.¹³⁴ The affinity with Jehovah's Witness theology should be obvious.

The real issue confronting Adventism ultimately centers on the issue of authority. Neither Mrs. White nor the pioneers should be the source of Adventist doctrine or exposition. The latter in particular entertained some serious heresies or else held aberrant views concerning the Godhead. The scriptures should be the ultimate source of Adventist theology and doctrine. They are their own best interpreter.

At issue then is the seriousness of the present anti-Trinitarian legacy within Adventism. Such a legacy still exists and is being promoted by certain organizations going under the guise of "Historical Adventist." It will do no good to pretend that such a legacy is entirely a thing of the past. Such a legacy still exists at present within the church. Attempts on the part of some Adventists to downplay this legacy or pretend that it is inconsequential ignore the fact that the doctrine of the Trinity is essential for the proclamation of the everlasting gospel. It is at the heart of God's revelation concerning himself. To deny this or to downplay the importance of the doctrine is to compromise essential biblical doctrine.

Final Observations. It is only fitting that this paper close with some final observations. First, the pioneers of early Seventh-day Adventism held aberrant views on the Trinity. This explains the legalistic tendencies that plagued the denomination during its formative years.¹³⁵ Second, the early Mrs. White held what appears to have been a semi-Arian Christology. She described the pre-existent Christ in subordinationistic terms, as well as appears to have denied the personality of the Holy Spirit. Third, from 1870 Mrs. White increasingly came to stress Christ's equality with the Father in terms of deity. Whether an incipient Trinitarianism starts to emerge at this stage in her writings depends largely on one's understanding of her teachings concerning the individuality of the Holy Spirit. If she denied the latter then her views can more appropriately be termed "binitarian."¹³⁶ At any rate, she was on the frontiers of an Athanasian Trinitarianism. Finally, from 1898 on Adventism embraced an Athanasian Trinitarianism that increasingly came to stress the full deity of both Christ and the Holy Spirit with the Father.

Mrs. White played a pivotal role in this development. Mention should also be made of the part that the 1888 message played with its stress on objective justification, as well as the contributions made by such church leaders as Camden Lacey, A.G. Daniells, and W.W. Prescott. The net

¹³³ See Moon's "Heresy or Hopeful Sign," 9-10. While criticizing these elements, Moon fails to provide better alternatives. The Arian or semi-Arian constructs favored by the pioneers were clearly retrogressive in this respect.

¹³⁴ Pfandl, *The Doctrine of the Trinity Among Adventists*, 1-2.

¹³⁵ Mrs. White accused the church at one time of preaching the law "until we are as dry as the hills of Gilboa, that had neither dew nor rain" (see Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Aug. 13, 1889; Mar. 11, 1890).

¹³⁶ Binitarianism is based on the belief that within the Godhead are two persons: the Father and the Son. Brown notes that in the brief semi-Arian revival of 362-381 A.D., adherents accepted the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father but not the Holy Spirit. Semi-Arianism destroyed the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity by denying the scriptural teaching of three divine persons within the Godhead (*Heresies*, 139). It is conceivable that during the second stage of her Christological development (1870-1890) Mrs. White started out as a binitarian. The latter is consistent with a subordinationist Christology in which the font of God's deity resides in the person of the Father but not the Son. The Son is divine in the sense that he derives his deity from the Father. Such a sentiment appears in her statement that the preincarnate Christ shared a devolved deity with the Father (see *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. I, 17-18).

effect is that all these developments put the denomination on a more orthodox footing in terms of both its theology and its Christology.

At the same time, not all vestiges of the anti-Trinitarian legacy have been eliminated. For example, traditional Adventism has embraced elements of an Arian soteriology in which the primary concern has been on Christ as humanity's example. The focus in both Arianism and traditional Adventism has been on obedience to God's Law. A subordinationist Christology is consistent with a soteriology that fuses justification with sanctification. Such fusion has been characteristic throughout most of Adventism's history. "Historical Adventists" have seen the logical connection between the two. This explains their heavy reliance on certain statements taken from the Spirit of Prophecy¹³⁷ to bolster their anti-Trinitarian views. These have been further combined with historic statements taken from the pioneers.

Adventist historians and theologians have largely been unable to systematize Mrs. White's statements concerning the Godhead given that her views changed over time. For example, the pre-1870 Mrs. White depicted the pre-existent Christ in very "graphic, literalistic, anthropomorphic" terms.¹³⁸ She described the Father and Son as distinct, anthropomorphic divine beings. Such descriptions continue at present to color some Adventist's understanding of the being and person of God. In contrast, the post-1898 Mrs. White subscribed to a more Athanasian Christology. Christ is depicted as equal to the Father in terms of essence and substance. Her latter statements seemingly contradict her earlier ones. The early Mrs. White was anti-Trinitarian; the later Mrs. White was Trinitarian. It's no wonder then that as one examines the full panoply of her writings they can detect Arian, semi-Arian, binitarian, and Trinitarian sentiments. In some places she can sound like an orthodox Trinitarian. In others she holds views not altogether different than the JW's.

If the writings of the early Mrs. White are taken as a barometer, then it appears that apocalyptic rather than the gospel was the preoccupation of the founders of early Seventh-day Adventism. Her early writings show little interest in the eternal verities of the "catholic faith."¹³⁹ She was primarily an apocalyptic visionary.¹⁴⁰ Apocalyptic prevented the early Adventists from making any real progress in their understanding of justification by faith. It appears that the Seventh-day

¹³⁷ Adventist's use the term "Spirit of Prophecy" in conjunction with Mrs. White's writings. It is believed on the basis of Rev. 12:17 and 19:10 to be an identifying characteristic of the "remnant church." Adventists further believe that the Spirit of Prophecy is equivalent to the gift of prophecy enumerated in I Cor. 12-14. Besides forthtelling, this gift also entails foretelling. Adventists interpret Joel 2:28-32 to teach that God will restore the gift of prophecy to his people during the end-times.

¹³⁸ Eric Webster, *Crosscurrents in Adventist Christology*, 142-143.

¹³⁹ By "catholic," this author means universal in terms of the invisible church and the eternal verities upon which it is based (see Eph. 4:4-6). The one true or catholic church is not associated with any one denomination but was founded by Jesus Christ and his apostles and has been around ever since Pentecost.

¹⁴⁰ Non-Adventists have found many of Mrs. White's visions puzzling. Among some of the more bizarre:

- 1). Satan appearing to her in vision as a portly gentleman with sagging flesh (*Early Writings*, 152).
- 2). Meeting "good old Enoch" on a distant planet having seven moons (*Ibid*, 39-40).
- 3). The redeemed having wings at the resurrection (*Ibid*, 59).
- 4). Angels having to present gold cards in order to enter heaven (*Ibid*, 59).
- 5). The redeemed having golden shelves in their heavenly mansions on which to set their golden crowns (*Marantha*, 360, par. 3; *ibid*, 18).
- 6). Amalgamation of man and beast being the great sin that led to the flood. Such amalgamation was said to appear in some of the post-flood races (*Spirit of Prophecy* vol. III, 64, 75).

This author is not calling any of the above into question because of their bizarreness. The Bible itself has its peculiarities. The problem is that none of the above has scriptural support. All go beyond what is written (Prov. 30:5-6; I Cor. 4:2). The issue does not center per se over whether the gift of prophecy is extant in the church today. Many non-Adventists believe on the basis of I Cor. 14 that it is. The problem is that many Seventh-day Adventists have elevated such extra-biblical revelations as those above to the same level of authority as the scriptures.

Adventist church had to first recognize the relationship between the full deity of Christ and his atoning work before it could experience the justification by faith breakthrough of 1888. Even then, it was only after a Trinitarian undergirding of soteriology emerged that the movement started to move towards a more biblical understanding of justification by faith. With this came the start of a more balanced view of the relationship between justification and sanctification.¹⁴¹

Both anti-Trinitarians and Trinitarians alike have appealed to Mrs. White in support of their respective positions. With this appeal has come a certain selectivity. Anti-Trinitarians have had to rely mainly on her earlier writings. In contrast, Trinitarians have had to rely on her later works. The dilemma faced by both is that they believe her inspiration is the same as that of the Bible in terms of degree and quality. Herein lies the problem. If the anti-Trinitarians are right, then it appears that the latter Mrs. White is in error.¹⁴² Conversely, if the latter Mrs. White is more theologically sound then it appears that there are indeed degrees of inspiration at work even in her own writings.¹⁴³ The writings of the early Mrs. White end up becoming pitted against those of the latter Mrs. White. This calls into question whether it is the same God who is at work in all of her writings. To this can be added a further conundrum. Why didn't God send Mrs. White any correction during all those years when Arianism was in the ascendancy within the movement?¹⁴⁴ If the same God is at work in her writings as well as the scriptures, then it follows that God is partly to blame for the early misunderstandings held by the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism.¹⁴⁵ Blaming God for certain errors is a practice that goes back to Mrs. White herself.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ See Whidden, *Arianism, Adventism, and Methodism*, 10-11. He attributes the "Trinitarian healing" to the emergence of a more Pauline/evangelical soteriology in Adventism.

¹⁴² Anti-Trinitarian Adventists have contended that the writings of the later Mrs. White were changed in order to put Adventism in line with the rest of Christendom concerning the Trinity. Such theories have been invoked in order to account for the seeming discrepancy between the early Mrs. White as opposed to the later Mrs. White.

¹⁴³ Then General Conference President G.I. Butler proposed a difference in the quality of inspiration between canonical and non-canonical prophets in a series of ten articles published by the *Review and Herald* (Jan. 8th through June 23rd, 1884). Mrs. White came out five years later with a sharply critical response found in Letter 22, 1889 (cited in *Selected Messages*, Book I, 23). She categorically denied that there were degrees in inspiration. Since that time, the denominational leadership has affirmed that the quality of her inspiration is not any different from that of any Bible writers. For a recent reaffirmation of this position see "The Inspirational Authority of Ellen G. White Writings," issued by the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (1982). At the same time, the leadership has also denied that her writings are an extension of the canon (*ibid*, see denial no. 2). In light of Glacierview and the Walter Rea findings, it appears to many outside the movement that Adventists want it both ways. They want to assert that they believe in the closing of the canon while simultaneously granting Mrs. White canonical authority within the denomination.

¹⁴⁴ It is well known that James White exerted a strong influence over his wife's views when he was alive. Mrs. White's gradual acceptance of a more Trinitarian understanding of the Godhead might well have emerged as a result of his passing away and the influence of such church leaders such as C.H. Lacey and W.W. Prescott. Lacey and Prescott not only had her confidence, but both subscribed to an Athanasian Trinitarianism.

¹⁴⁵ Some Adventist scholars and Ellen White apologists have invoked the principle of progressive revelation as a possible explanation for the seeming inconsistencies that appear in Mrs. White's writings. Such invocation will not work in this particular instance for the following reasons. Progressive revelation entails a gradual unfolding of God's redemptive purpose. This unfolding is cumulative and climaxes with the Christ-event. Since God places a premium on truth (Jn. 16:13; 17:17; I Jn. 4:6; 5:20), it follows that what is earlier revealed does not contradict or deny what is subsequently revealed. Later revelation always supplements or clarifies what God previously disclosed according to Heb. 1:1-3, I Pet. 1:10-11, and II Pet. 1:19 (see Ramm's *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 101-102). Groups claiming to have modern prophets or prophetesses misinterpret progressive revelation to mean "corrective revelation." In other words, God must correct his earlier mistakes.

¹⁴⁶ Consider the following statement found on page 74 of Mrs. White's *Early Writings*: "I have seen that the 1843 chart was directed by the hand of the Lord, and that it should not be altered; that the figures were as He wanted them; *that His hand was over and hid a mistake in some of the figures*, so that none could see it, until His hand was removed" (*emphasis mine*). While she goes on to say that God removed his hand once the chart and its figures served their purpose, the fact remains that the God was seen as being partly responsible for the Millerite's mistaken belief that Christ would initially return in 1843.

The above are issues that Adventist scholars, historians, and Ellen White apologists must resolve for themselves. What is clear is that anti-Trinitarianism is something that can be based on a straightforward reading of some of her writings. None of this is problematic if Adventists really mean what they say concerning her writings; that they are not inerrant and should never be used in place of the Bible.¹⁴⁷ The problem is that many Adventists do in fact use her writings to settle doctrinal matters. They are seen as a guide to correct scriptural interpretation.¹⁴⁸ This explains why Adventists have put themselves in the unenviable position of trying to defend her anti-Trinitarian and semi-Arian statements as opposed to simply acknowledging that she was in error and changed her mind as time went on. The latter may be regarded by the leadership as too candid an admission for most within the church to handle.

Adventists of today have accepted many of the cardinal doctrines of the historic Christian faith. Among these is the doctrine of the Trinity. Adventism's acceptance of the Trinity is evidence of God's providence at work within the movement. Nevertheless, the fact remains that when Adventism was formed it taught many false doctrines. Some have resurfaced with the rise of "Historical Adventism." The latter seek to faithfully reproduce what early Adventism taught, including all of its associated heresies. Some 150 years later, Adventism has not been able to fully shed many of its previous errors or to outgrow its heretical past. The movement cannot expect to do so as long as it continues to lionize the pioneers or treat Mrs. White as a prophet whose inspiration is equal to that of the Bible writers.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ The Ellen White Estate (www.ellenwhiteestate.org) has a section entitled "Some Principles for Correctly Interpreting the Writings of Mrs. White" that denies both her verbal inspiration and infallibility. Likewise, an ad hoc committee of the General Conference prepared a statement on the relationship of the writings of Ellen G. White to the Bible ("The Inspiration and Authority of the Ellen G. White Writings," issued by the Biblical Research Institute of The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists). The committee's statement was published in the July 15, 1982 edition of the *Adventist Review* and the August, 1982 issue of *Ministry* magazine. Denial nos. 4 and 5 stated that Mrs. White's writings were not the basis of doctrine. They also were not to be used in place of the scriptures.

¹⁴⁸ In 1980 the church published *The Pillars*. This book set out to defend Adventism's doctrinal distinctives. One of its contributing editors, Morris Vendon, invited readers to study fifteen facts with him. Number 14 is especially revealing. On page 30 Vendon refers to Mrs. White's writings as an inspired commentary on the scriptures. Her writings thus settle theological disputes between uninspired scholars and commentators concerning the meaning of a debated passage of scripture. This idea is nothing new. It was first proposed by G.A. Irwin in his 1911 book *The Mark of the Beast*. Irwin came right out and called Mrs. White the infallible interpreter of scripture (1). Although A.G. Daniells and other leaders would come out against Irwin's position in the 1919 Bible Conference, the fact remains that Irwin's sentiments have always been shared by many Adventists both in theory and in practice. The net effect has been to put Mrs. White above the Bible rather than under it.

¹⁴⁹ It is clear that for many Adventists Mrs. White's writings are superior in certain respects to the Bible. Note the following statement made by her grandson the late Arthur White: "Seventh-day Adventists are uniquely fortunate in approaching the question of inspiration of the prophets. We are not left to find our way, drawing our conclusions from writings of two thousand years and more ago, that have come down to us through varied transcriptions and translations. With us it is an almost contemporary matter, for we had a prophet in our midst. It is generally granted by the careful student of her works that the experience of Ellen G. White was no different from that of the prophets of old. What is more, rather than having in our possession only relatively few chapters of a handful of letters as is the case of the extant records of the Bible prophets, we have the full range of Ellen G. White's writings, penned through a period of 70 years. She wrote in the English language, so we are not confronted with the problems of translation" (*The Ellen G. White Writings*, 15).

Arthur White was for years in charge of the Ellen G. White Estate. He sees his grandmother's writings as superior to the Bible in at least four respects: (1) she is a contemporary prophet; (2) most of her writings were penned through a period of 70 years rather than two thousand as in the case of the Bible; (3) her chapters have come down to us in full instead of only in a few manuscripts; and (4) since Mrs. White wrote in English, there is no problem in terms of translation. Aside from the mounting evidence that her writings came from sources other than God and that she made all kinds of errors in matters pertaining to theology, science, and history, Mr. White's statements overlook certain relevant facts. Among the most crucial: (1) the manuscript evidence for the Bible is based on far more than a few extant chapters or letters; (2) far from being fragmentary, there is enough evidence to construct the Bible in its entirety and be reasonably certain that what we have today corresponds to what was first written over two thousand years ago; (3) the manuscript evidence is further supplemented by translations in other languages (i.e. Latin, Syriac, etc) which further enhance the reliability of the Bible; and (4) problems of translation certainly exist for non-English speaking Seventh-day Adventists. What Mr. White did was overstate the case for the veracity of his grandmother's writings while understanding it for that of the Bible.