

## 28. Seven Common Methods Used to Defend the Trinity

Posted Jul 25, 2007 by Adrian Ebens in Return of Elijah

### 1. A Spiritual view of Father and Son as opposed to Literal Position (Addressed in Chapters 23, 25, 26)

One of the key arguments used against a true Father and Son relationship is that it is too literal and is a superimposing of human concepts onto God. A true Father and Son relationship is seen as diminishing the equality of the Son with the Father. The central flaw of this argument is to fail to define the basis of equality. Power based equality is naturally assumed in exactly the same manner as William Miller assumed the Sanctuary to be the earth. As I have endeavoured to show in this paper, the concept of equality reflected in power and position terms is a superimposing of human ideas onto the Godhead. I contend that Miller's failure to correctly define the term Sanctuary led to severe disappointment, so our failure to correctly determine the nature of equality will do the same. Based on a power-performance view of equality, I concur that it is impossible to hold a literal view of the Father-Son relationship. This is a natural consequence. The second consequence is an altering of hermeneutical principles from a plain reading to a spiritualized reading as we see evidenced below:

“Another important point involves how we interpret the Bible. Here the issue pertains to whether we should interpret some passages literally or whether we may treat them more figuratively. Maybe we could illustrate this way. While we often refer to Jesus as the Son and frequently call the first person of the Godhead the Father, do we really want to take such expressions in a totally literal way? Or would it be more appropriate to interpret them in a more metaphorical way that draws on selective aspects of sonship and fatherhood” “The Trinity” by Whidden, Moon and Reeve, Page 94

The authors question was, do we need to take things in a literal way? The question I pose is, what drives the inclination to a metaphorical understanding, is it not a predetermination that the Trinity is correct?

“It is not quite apparent that the problem texts become problems only when one assumes an exclusively literalistic interpretation of such expressions as “Father,” “Son,” “Firstborn,” “Only Begotten,” “Begotten” and so forth? Does such literalism go against the mainly figurative or metaphorical meaning that the Bible writers use when referring to the persons of the Godhead.” Ibid Page 106

The texts are only a problem if you pre-determine a Trinitarian view. The authors take incredible liberties to assume they know what the Bible writers were meaning and pronounce a figurative meaning. Once you use a metaphorical reasoning process to deal with Bible passages that don't suit your pre-determination, any Bible doctrine that stands in your way can be brought to the position you want. The needless assumption of the metaphorical makes certain man's triumph over that which he is required to believe. This is the method used by Evangelicals to escape the Sabbath, by making it a spiritual rest only rather than a literal one.

“In their zeal to reject everything not found in the Bible, the "Christians" were betrayed by over literalism into interpreting the Godhead in terms of the human relationships suggested by the words "Son," "Father," and "begotten," that is, into a tendency to disparage the non-Biblical word "Trinity" and to contend that the Son must have had a beginning in the remote past.” QOD Page 47

Froom accuses some of the pioneers of interpreting the Godhead in human relational terms while he fails to realise that the Trinity can be easily seem as a human construct to support power equality. The argument is completely flawed. Based on his metaphorical view of Scripture Froom goes a step further when he writes

“There is danger of limiting our idea of personality to bodily manifestations. It seems difficult to grasp the idea of personality apart from the tangible bodily form of humanity—existence with a limited, human, bodily shape.

But personality and such corporeality are to be clearly distinguished, though they are often confused. Personality does not require the limitations of humanity.”[1]

No Scriptural evidence is given to support this view, it is a philosophical leap from a metaphorical mindset. Apart from this it expresses the very sentiments that Kellogg expressed.[2]

“The Doctrine of the Trinity. The word “begotten” was taken literally, [by the pioneers] which meant that Christ at some point in eternity proceeded from the Father, and was therefore subordinate to Him.” G Pfandl – The Doctrine of the Trinity among Seventh-day Adventists. Journal of the Adventist Theological Society Spring 2006. Page 165.

The assumption made that a begotten Son automatically demands a subordinate inferior Christ. When the assumption is corrected, subordination is no longer an issue.

Early Adventists strove to be true to Scripture. When they read “first-born of every creature,” they took it at face value. Other Bible phrases, such as “only begotten Son of God,” also were understood on a literal English level. – Merlin Burt, Journal of Adventist Theological Society page 128. Spring 2006.

Does the above author infer that early Adventists were naïve and that an informed face value reading of Scripture is a sign of weakness?

There is no direct Biblical reason to take a spiritual rather than a literal view of the Father and Son relationship except that it makes it impossible to believe in a power-equality Trinity. This is open to the charge of premise forcing, a putting of the cart before the horse. Notice the pioneer principles for interpretation

“How to know when a word is used figuratively. If it makes good sense as it stands, and does no violence to the simple laws of nature, then it must be understood literally, if not, figuratively.” Rev. xii. 1,2. xvii. 3-7. Millers rules of interpretation XI

I contend that it does make good sense to understand the terms Father and Son just as they read. The only reason I can see not to, is to defend a predetermined agenda. Opponents will create straw man arguments trying to push this into extreme literalism, such as Jesus is the true vine.[3] We can all laugh at this and say of course we don’t take that to a literal extreme, because it does violence to the simple laws of nature. But comparing the term Son to Christ being the Vine or the door as a reason to avoid calling Jesus a literal Son is quite a poor argument and suggests desperation.

“The Most Holy, containing the Ark of the Ten Commandments, was then opened for our Great High Priest to enter to make atonement for the cleansing of the Sanctuary. If we take the liberty to say there is not a literal Ark, containing the Ten Commandments in heaven, we may go only a step further and deny the literal City, and the literal Son of God. Certainly, Adventists should not choose the spiritual view, rather than the one we have presented. We see no middle ground to be taken.” James White {J. S. White, The Parable, p. 16}

James understood the implications of a spiritual view on other doctrines. It is interesting that he contends that a spiritual view of the sanctuary could lead to a spiritual view of the literal Son of God and which he saw as a rejection of Adventism. Ellen White echoes her husbands view with a number of statements supporting a plain reading of scripture.

- A great work can be done by presenting to the people the Bible just as it reads. 5T 388
- If all would take the Scripture just as it reads, and open their hearts to understand the word... CS 92
- He is seeking to teach them that the Lord's way is always to be closely followed, that His word is to be taken as it reads, and that men are not to devise and plan according to their own judgment, irrespective of His counsel. {CT 353.1}
- Unaccustomed to accept God’s Word exactly as it reads, or to allow it to be its own interpreter, they read it in the light of their maxims and traditions. So long had they neglected to study and contemplate the Bible

that its pages were to them a mystery. They turned with aversion from the truth of God to the traditions of men. {CTr 226.3}

Dealing directly with the issue of a literal Father and Son, Ellen White is explicit on this issue.

- “God is the Father of Christ; Christ is the Son of God. To Christ has been given an exalted position. He has been made equal with the Father. All the counsels of God are opened to His Son.” 8T 268 (1909)
- "The Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of the Father, is truly God in infinity, but not in personality." UL 367

In summary, a failure to define the basis of equality and giving a strictly Biblical framework for that definition, forces a spiritualized method of interpreting scripture. Once this principle is established, the central principle of Protestantism (The Bible and the Bible Only) fails and tradition must triumph. It is important to remember that the breeding ground of the Trinity took place in Alexandria, a place well known for using a spiritualized method of interpretation. My appeal to my brethren is to examine the basis of equality in a scriptural context rather than assume the meaning of the term.

## 2. A Change in the Identity of Christ in the Incarnation (Addressed in Chapter 24)

The centre of this debate usually revolves around a discussion on the meaning and timing of begotten. Once a person is committed to a power-equality Trinity using a spiritualized method of interpretation, then obviously it is impossible to believe that Christ was begotten in eternity. The spiritualized principle once started must continue and therefore not only must cause the terms Father and Son be spiritualized but also the term begotten. The flow on effect begins. The spiritual view allows for two alternatives, a spiritual begetting in eternity or a spiritual begetting at the incarnation. Most scholars favour the latter. In any event, it is a spiritual view that is presented. Notice the following sample statements.

1. “Some passages that seem to point to the position of subordination that Christ takes in relation to the Father could very well be speaking from the perspective of His incarnate state rather than His glorified status. “The Trinity” by Whidden, Moon and Reeve. Page 94
2. “However, as we will shortly find, there is no compelling evidence that the Son of God was “begotten” at any time before His incarnation.” Glyn Parfitt – The Trinity Book Page 45 in Manuscript.
3. “I believe John 5:26 refers to the life given to the Son during the incarnation, not to Christ receiving life from the Father back in eternity.” Erwin Gane – Personal Email 3/10/07

A belief in a begetting at the incarnation ultimately involved a change in the nature of the relationship between Father and Son. Meaning, Christ was not a Son before the incarnation and He became a son after the incarnation. This method isolates passages of scripture that identify Christ as the Son of God. When people point to this as evidence of Sonship, the cry goes up – “yes but that is in the incarnation.” I addressed this issue in Chapter 24 but will raise a few points from John 5.

John 5:18 tells us:

Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.

This verse is used consistently in Trinitarian contexts to refer to the pre-existent divinity of Christ and a reference proving that He is the second person of the Godhead.

But what about the next verse?

Joh 5:19 Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.

This verse is consistently referred to as an incarnational reference. But what makes John 5:18 a reference to Christ's true existence and the next verse a reference to his incarnational work? Who decides? Without a consistent point of reference, everyone decides for themselves what verse refers to what segment.

Let's look at another example in John 5.

Joh 5:28,29 Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his [Christ's] voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

Christ is telling us that He possesses power to raise people from the dead, and that He will do it at the end of human history. Clearly, this is a reference to the power that Christ possesses, the power to give life. But the immediate verse following says this:

Joh 5:30 I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.

Is John 5:30 simple an incarnational reference? If we would allow the terms Father and Son to be our consistent point of reference, we would not even have to ask this question, because no segmentation is required, because any references to Father and Son, reveal exactly who they are, not just what they do. Again the Spirit of Prophecy is reasonably clear on this issue:

**The Scriptures clearly indicate the relation between God and Christ, and they bring to view as clearly the personality and individuality of each.**

"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; being made so much better than the angels, as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee? And again, I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son?" Hebrews 1:1-5. God is the Father of Christ; Christ is the Son of God. To Christ has been given an exalted position. He has been made equal with the Father. All the counsels of God are opened to His Son.

Jesus said to the Jews: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. . . . The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do: for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth Him all things that Himself doeth." John 5:17-20.

Here again is brought to view the personality of the Father and the Son, showing the unity that exists between them. {8T 269.4}

Notice carefully that Ellen White opens this passage with a clear statement that the relation of Father and Son is clearly revealed in their relation to each other and their personality. She then refers to Heb 1:1-4 and then moves directly to John 5:17-20 where Christ says he can do nothing of himself and again restates that this is the relation of the Father and the Son. There is no segmenting of the verses, it is consistent all the way through. This shows that Ellen White uses a universal point of reference of Father and Son, not a segmented incarnational era verses pre-begotten era. The only reason I can see to divide the Scriptures in this way is due to a predetermined view of a power-equality Trinity. Once this predetermination is removed and Scripture is read plainly there is no issue here.

### **3. Confusion over the Term Mystery (Addressed in Chapter 23)**

The use of the word mystery to describe God can lead to immediate conflict of ideas. The Bible clearly tells us that salvation is directly linked to knowing God.<sup>[4]</sup> Ellen White says that in order to be like God, we must know

Him aright.<sup>[5]</sup> There is no question in Scripture that we must know God's character in order to know Him. No one would argue against this fact. When we come to discuss some aspects of God's nature, like, where does His power come from, or how does He speak things into existence, or what is the substance of His body, none of this is revealed to us, it is a mystery. But there are clearly some aspects of His nature that we do understand as Paul states in Rom 1:20

Rom 1:20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-- his eternal power and divine nature-- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. NIV

How then do we divide the need to know His Character from the inability to understand certain aspects of His nature? Where is the dividing line? There is obviously a tension here. There are two dangers present. If we try and seek to understand the mysterious aspects of God's nature, we can very quickly fall into idolatry and develop a false concept of God. On the other hand if we attribute parts of God's nature that have been revealed or all of His character and person that we need to know, as a mystery, we are in danger of not knowing the essential part of God that is critical to our salvation.

When we use the terms Father and Son, are these terms knowable and understandable? Do these terms reflect the respective characters of Father and Son that we must know or are they transient labels reflecting a Deity that we cannot really know? Secondly, is it important to know how the Father relates to the Son? Does their relationship have any bearing on how we should treat each other? Is not their relationship foundational to all relationships and how they should be conducted?

It is common knowledge for Bible students, that names of individuals in the Bible were attached to their character. Ellen White reflects this view when she states:

Great significance was attached to the names given by Hebrew parents to their children. Often these stood for traits of character that the parent desired to see developed in the child. PK 481

Is it possible that this principle established by God and representative of His kingdom could apply to the terms Father and Son. Are these terms reflective of Character, personality and person or are they simply functional, workable labels and metaphors to help us scratch the surface of a great mystery?

There certainly are mysteries concerning God that we do not understand, but a Trinity model creates extra-biblical mysteries that force a retreat to the mystery as an only defense. The things that are revealed are for us and our children and it is our duty to study them out and get the Bible answer. I think Raoul Dederen sums it up quite well:

"The difficulty is evident enough. A doctrine that affirms that God is one, and yet that there are three persons in God, must often bewilder the mind in its attempt to find a relevant and intelligible framework in which that seeming contradiction can be expressed and at the same time meet the average person's religious needs. No wonder that the reference to the Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible has encouraged sardonic remarks to the effect that the whole doctrine is incomprehensible." Raoul Dederen. 'Reflections on the Doctrine of the Trinity,' 1970. Andrews University.

And sometimes these remarks are not always sardonic but simply a cry of confusion and sadness that the doctrine of God has been made so hard to understand.

In dialogue with Erwin Gane, he expressed to me the following:

The problem arises, I believe because of a misunderstanding of Jesus' teaching. John 14:9 says "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." Then He proceeded to say, "I am in the Father and the Father is in me." Here is a very mysterious relationship. There is a unity of existence between the Father and the Son which is infinitely mysterious. ***They are One in a sense that human minds cannot grasp.*** So much so that Isa. 9:6 can refer to the Son as "Mighty God, Everlasting Father." And Col. 2:9 tells us that "in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily."

Gerhard Pfandl expresses it this way:

“God himself is a mystery, how much more the incarnation or the Trinity. However, that should not trouble us as long as the different aspects of these mysteries are clearly taught in Scripture. Even though we may not be able to comprehend logically the various aspects of the trinity, we need to try and understand as best as we can the scriptural teaching regarding it. All attempts to explain the Trinity will fall short, “especially when we reflect on the relation of the three persons to the divine essence ... all analogies fail us and we become deeply conscious of the fact that the Trinity is a mystery far beyond our comprehension. It is the incomprehensible glory of the Godhead.” Therefore, we do well to admit that “man cannot comprehend it and make it intelligible. It is intelligible in some of its relations and modes of manifestations, but unintelligible in its essential nature.” G. Pfandl. *The Trinity in Scripture*, 1999.

If all attempts to explain the Trinity will fall short and is far beyond our comprehension, why do we even have fundamentals about it? If we can't explain it, then we are bound to mislead people when we try to explain it. If we can't explain it should there not be a measure of restraint against attacking those who might see this mystery from a different perspective? It's hard to be dogmatic about a mystery. Isn't it? I believe this is why Ellen White says that each person should study this subject for themselves and come to their own conclusions.<sup>[6]</sup>

I can certainly see how this could be a mystery from a Trinitarian point of view, but if the Father-Son relationship is beyond the comprehension of the human mind, where do we turn for a model of a perfect relationship to pattern after? Is the oneness of the Father, Son relationship so hard to understand? Again it must be conceded that there are aspects of this relationship we certainly don't understand but is it mysterious to the point where we can't even identify with them. Ellen White states clearly that the oneness between Father and Son can be understood because it is the same as the oneness between Christ as the disciples.

“Christ is one with the Father, but Christ and God are two distinct personages. Read the prayer of Christ in the seventeenth chapter of John, and you will find this point clearly brought out. How earnestly the Saviour prayed that His disciples might be one with Him as He is one with the Father. But the unity that is to exist between Christ and His followers does not destroy the personality of either. They are to be one with Him as He is one with the Father.” *Review and Herald*, 1-6-1905.

So when Dr Gane says that God is one in a sense that we can't understand, he may have overlooked the above statement and sentiments of John 17. Only the Trinity makes it mysteriously complex and yet it does not need to be this complex. Nothing in the Bible demands such complexity except we demand to superimpose our presuppositions upon it. Roman 1:20 states quite clearly that:

Rom 1:20 Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse;

Paul says, that His invisible attributes are clearly perceived in the things that are made. I think that makes it fairly plain. If not, the John 17:3 formula for salvation becomes very problematic.

In the Sabbath School Lesson of April 10, 2008 Roy Adams states the following:

In John 10:30, for example, He declared: 'I and the Father are one' (NIV). The neuter form of the Greek used here for 'one' implies a union as close as our minds can conceive. Jesus and the Father are of one substance, one nature, yet not one and the same Person (in which case He would have used the masculine gender). If you have trouble plumbing the depths of all this, you have lots of company. The deeper you probe the subject, the more keenly you understand the depths of your ignorance.

Again, from a power equality point of view in the Trinity, this concept of oneness is indeed a mind boggling mystery. But from a perspective of the Son being in the image of the Father and receiving everything from Him and a sharing of a very close relationship, certainly we can say that the eternal Godhead can be understood by the things that are made.<sup>[7]</sup> It is the doctrine of the Trinity that creates the impossibilities to the point where I am asked to believe in something that I can't even comprehend nor understand. God says. Let us reason together.<sup>[8]</sup>

Again I state there is much we do not know about God, it has not been revealed, but what has been revealed clearly states that there is a Father: the source of all and His only begotten Son, who received an inheritance from the Father, so in Him dwells all the fullness and that God is present with us as a person through the omnipresent Spirit. This is not complicated, it is rather simple and all of this is revealed in Scripture and is for us and our children.<sup>[9]</sup>

My main concerns about the use of mystery language is its impact of the identity of God and our ability to relate to Him. Again in the Sabbath School Lesson of April 10 2008, Roy Adams highlights the potential confusion of identity that can arise when we believe in the Trinity.

But imagine a situation in which the being we have come to know as God the Father came to die for us, and the one we have come to know as Jesus stayed back in heaven (we are speaking in human terms to make a point). Nothing would have changed, except that we would have been calling each by the name we now use for the other. That is what equality in the Deity means.

The point here is that the identity of the person is irrelevant, only the job matters. This must be the inevitable result of power equality.<sup>[10]</sup> It is also the inevitable result of a spiritualized view of God. Speaking in human terms, it would not matter if you called your father, mother or your mother, father, the only thing that matters is what role they fulfill at the time. But this cuts across the heart of relational identity and the point of knowing someone. If a person changes as in Son and Father, then they cease to exist as they were, the connection is lost, and so is the blessing. I cannot accept such speculation and reject it as an attack on my personal relationship with the Father and Son I have come to love and know through the Scriptures.

#### 4. Performance Based Measuring of Deity (Addressed in Chapter 21)

This is the key issue in my mind and yet I have not found in any of the literature I have read that the word equal or equality means anything else than performance based equality. No alternatives seem to have been perceived let alone entertained.

In reading through Whidden, Moon and Reeve's book, the terms "Full Deity" of Christ are presented again and again in terms of the power that Christ possesses of himself.<sup>[11]</sup> It is his own powers that qualify Him as divine. No where is the idea entertained that such power could be inherited and equality is in the relationship. I contend that equality can be seen differently and the Deity of Christ preserved and actually enhanced in this model.

This power based equality is clearly stated in Questions on Doctrine.

(1) Christ is one with the Eternal Father—one in nature, equal in power and authority, God in the highest sense, eternal and self-existent, with life original, unborrowed, underived; and (2) that Christ existed from all eternity, distinct from, but united with, the Father, possessing the same glory, and all the divine attributes. QOD 14 web edition on MaranathaMedia.com

QOD makes it clear that Christ's Divinity is unequivocally from His own resources and not in any way inherited from the Father. In personal discussions with some scholars I have been told exactly the same – Deity can only be recognized through self originated inherent power and position. I contend that such a belief does not arise from Scripture but is rather forced onto Scripture. It is Lucifer not Christ who seeks equality through power and position. Christ's equality is assured in His relationship to the Father, He didn't need to prove it to Satan in the Temptation in the Wilderness and He doesn't need to prove it to us. We all can just accept the Word of the Father that Christ is His Beloved Son and it pleased the Father that in Him should all the fullness dwell.<sup>[12]</sup>

I quoted this before, but this statement provides the best example of identity destruction.

But imagine a situation in which the being we have come to know as God the Father came to die for us, and the one we have come to know as Jesus stayed back in heaven (we are speaking in human terms to make a point). Nothing would have changed, except that we would have been calling each by the name we now use for the other. ***That is what equality in the Deity means.*** [Emphasis mine] Sabbath School Lesson April 10 2008.

If we accept power-based equality, this statement must indeed be correct. But what are the implications? Identifications of individuals become meaningless, they can no longer represent who that person is. This principle can open the door to role identity neutering and confusion of how we relate to each member of the Godhead.

Vance Ferrell continues this principle in the following statement:

People confuse the nature of the Godhead with Their work. Learning about the individual mission of each member to save mankind, we are tempted to imagine that Their individual activities and work for mankind explain the nature and inner attributes of each of Them. Yet we are limited by our language. So in identifying each member of the Godhead, in this book we will speak of Them as the Father, the Son or Christ, and the Holy Spirit. The problem here is that these names identify Their work, not Their nature. (Defending the Godhead Page 7)

Vance Ferrell indicates like Roy Adams that the terms Father and Son do not reflect their identity but their work. Can it not be seen that this is identity destruction, that this actually makes it impossible to know the members of the Godhead. The answer comes, but God is a mystery beyond our comprehension. This must make God ultimately unknowable and this is the genius of the Trinity doctrine; to make a doctrine that passes a means of remembering God that actually leads to forgetting Him. It is my observation that while those of us who have grown in the modern era and simply ask the question “Is it right?” for those of us brought up in a post modern environment where relational elements have become increasingly important, the Trinity is going to continue to come under fire as not meeting the relational needs of people apart from the fact it is not explicitly stated in the Bible.

I could cite several more examples but it appears to be commonly accepted as a universal principle of determining Deity. I reject this principle on the basis that this methodology is not supported in Scripture.

## **5. Conducting the Discussion in Terms of Nicean and Athanasian Creeds.**

It is quite amazing to me that many in our church would accept the Nicea and Athanasian Creedal statements as a point to work forward from and a legitimate context for a discussion of the Godhead. These creeds were introduced in a period of wholesale apostasy and as these creeds were formulated in the period of Pergamos, I find them highly suspect. In his book “Understanding the Trinity”, Max Hatton begins chapter one with quoting the Athanasian Creed.<sup>[13]</sup> While he modifies some aspects of it, it is his starting point. For anyone who studies the history of the development of these creeds it must be understood that God had no hand in formulating them.

There is a more subtle form of dragging the Godhead debate back to the apostasy of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries and that is the continuing use of labels such as Arian and Semi-Arian. Whether one believes the creeds or not, to invoke these terms is to immediately set the stage of orthodoxy and non-orthodoxy in the context of the Nicean and Athanasian creeds. It seems quite odd to me that on the one hand some Adventists will claim they reject the Catholic Trinity and yet will still employ the labels that arose out of the Catholic formulation of the Trinity. Why not use the term semi-Trinitarian? It makes as much sense as semi-Arian.

A third issue that I find interesting is that many Adventist scholars will favourably quote works from contemporary protestant authors concerning the Godhead. I find it difficult to conceive that someone who believes that the human soul is immortal and who also believes that God burns sinners in hell forever could have any right conception of God.<sup>[14]</sup> To my mind, these authors worship and speak of a god that I do not acknowledge, nor will worship, therefore to favourably quote their works and echo their sentiments might seem like good scholarship but it is dangerous and can lead to the wrong conclusions.

## **6. Making Assumptions. (Addressed in Chapter 27)**

When it comes to truth, is it wise to assume things not stated in Scripture? The Church does admit that the doctrine of the Trinity is exactly that – an assumption.

“While no single scriptural passage states formally the doctrine of the Trinity, *it is assumed as a fact* by Bible writers and mentioned several times. Only by faith can we accept the existence of the Trinity.” (Adventist Review Vol. 158 No. 31, 1981, P. 4) (Emphasis Supplied)

“Although the Old Testament does not explicitly teach that God is triune, it alludes to a plurality within the Godhead.” Seventh-day Adventists Believe ... A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines, 1988. R & H Publishing Assoc. p.22.

Fernando Canale is correct when he states:

“Because human philosophy is called to be subject to the Bible, and since divine philosophy is already available in the Scriptures, our understanding of God must stand free from human speculations.” (Fernando L. Canale, the Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology, Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia Volume 12, page 105, ‘Doctrine of God.)

But later he appears to make a statement that completely denies his previous statement:

“The concept of the Trinity, namely the idea that the three are one, is not explicitly stated but only assumed.” (Ibid, page 138)

Many would agree that it is a calculated human assumption based on what appears to be correct, but in the end it must be conceded that it is human speculation. H. Maldwyn Hughes, the very first principal of Wesley House, a Methodist theological College acknowledges this speculation when he states:

“The doctrine of the Trinity is not primarily a speculative doctrine. It is a speculative construction of materials provided by revelation and Christian experience. The definition has stood the test of time, mainly because it is believed that the Church was divinely guided in framing it.” (H. Maldwyn Hughes, M. A., D. D. Christian foundations, An introduction to Christian doctrine, page 141, fourth edition, July 1933)

Some may quibble about this being a Methodist perspective, but Adventist Scholars freely quote evangelical scholars to make their points concerning the Trinity. Many of these scholars freely admit that the Trinity is not a Bible based doctrine:

“Exegetes and theologians today are in agreement that the Hebrew Bible does not contain a doctrine of the Trinity, even though it was customary in past dogmatic tracts on the Trinity to cite texts like Genesis 1:26, “Let us make humanity in our image, after our likeness”(see also Gn. 3:22, 11:7, Is. 62-3) as proof of plurality in God.” (Encyclopedia of Religion, Trinity, Volume 15, page 54, 1987)

It also says later;

“Further, exegetes and theologians agree that the New Testament also does not contain an explicit doctrine of the trinity.” (Ibid)

While some scholars might disagree with this assessment, they majority appear to admit it. The question must be asked – Is this the way we should form Bible doctrine?

Again, Whidden, Moon and Reeve, rely on strong clues rather than explicit statements when they say:

“Probably the strongest clues to such a divine triunity occur in the famous gospel commission that Jesus gave the church in its baptismal formula: ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’ (Matt. 28:19).” The Trinity, by Jerry Moon, Woodrow Whidden, & John W. Reese, published by R & H 2002, p.32. (Chapter entitled “The Strongest Biblical Evidence for the Trinity”)

The strongest clues are of course not explicit statements. Using a methodology of strongest clues for that which you want to find can lead to statements like the following:

“But what about direct prayer to the Holy Spirit? While we have no clear example of or direct command to pray to the Holy Spirit in Scripture, doing so does have, in principle some implicit biblical support.... It only seems logical that God’s people can pray directly to and worship the Holy Spirit. (The Trinity. Page 273)

Wow, this is a big call. Even though the Bible does not command it, these men feel it is ok to pray directly to the Holy Spirit. Is this a safe Biblical principle? I think Richard Rice sums it up best when he says:

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

The admission is plain. The Trinity is a device that the church felt it must construct to safeguard what they believed the Bible tries to say about God. This is a fairly clear case of tradition over Scripture and the wisdom of men being wiser than God.

Another assumption:

No informed Trinitarian has ever said that 3 persons = 1 Person. What Trinitarians really do say is that what we can only describe as three Persons all exist within the one substance. The Three Persons are therefore, the One God. (Understanding the Trinity Page 133)

Again, this is a big call and no scriptural support for it. I think many thinking Trinitarians would cringe at the above statement and I do know of at least one who calls it Heresy.[\[15\]](#)

Here is another statement:

Although the word Trinity is not found in the Bible (neither is the word incarnation), the teaching it describes is clearly found there. Briefly defined, the doctrine of the Trinity stands for the concept that “God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God.” *The Trinity in Scripture* by Gerhard Pfandl June 1999

Again, the admission that it is not explicitly stated and yet is found in Scripture. Is this a safe procedure for a key doctrine of the Adventist Church?

One of the most fascinating reads is Vance Ferrell’s description of the Heavenly Council and how each member of the Godhead decided on the roles and how the three of them worked everything out.:

Returning now to that distant past. The three members of the Godhead had to figure out a way to solve three inherent problems:

The first problem was that the Godhead had such immense power, authority, and intellect. —The angels, the inhabitants of the other worlds, and humans on earth would have a difficult time relating to Them and loving Them. Although I like the little wild animals which live around my country home, they live in constant fear of me. Recognizing that I seem to have immense abilities and power which they cannot begin to understand, they are apprehensive.

The Godhead recognized that They would later face this same problem when They created such greatly subordinate beings. How could They express the great depth of Their love for those creatures and convince them of it?

The second problem was the fact that there were three in the Godhead. It is difficult to identify with three leaders. Think about that for a moment. (For example, how would fallen man go about praying to three Gods?) There was need for a special pattern, so humans would look to one sovereign God as Lord of all in their lives.

The third problem was that each of the members of the Godhead needed a definite name by which Their creatures could identify and partly understand them. Keep in mind that each was fully divine with all the powers of the other two; yet They needed separate names.

While each member of the Godhead, being infinite, had all power, each maintained a position and did a work which was different than the others. This was not difficult to do, since one was already the supreme One. Another was the beloved Son. The third was the Holy Spirit. Their positions and actions would solve each of the three problems mentioned above.[\[16\]](#)

Highly speculative and of course not found in the Bible.[\[17\]](#) Once you are no longer bound to Scripture, it becomes very simple to defend your position and you also can become very creative. Are we really Sola Scriptura in our beliefs?

## 7. Premise Forcing EGW Statements to Support the Trinity. (Addressed in Chapter 15)

This method is common and was first employed by Froom when putting Evangelism together. I find it interesting that while the church does not generally believe in using EGW for doctrinal purposes, in the History of the Trinity she is pointed out as the key figure that shifted the churches doctrine into a Trinitarian view of the Godhead. If the doctrine was not a popular one like the investigative judgment, outsiders looking at our history could accuse us of getting our belief of the Trinity from Ellen White rather than the Bible, an interesting thought.

Ellen White makes many statements. Some certainly seem to indicate a view that reflects the Trinity and these are regularly quoted, but what about the many that are completely contrary. The only person I have read that has made a serious attempt to defend the Trinity using every statement of EGW is Vance Ferrell. I commend him for his effort, but the twists and turns required to make it all fit makes for a very interesting read.

For others Ellen White is convenient, we can quote her when she agrees with us and call her human when she does not. I address this issue in detail throughout the manuscript because it was the conflicting statements of EGW that first raised my interest in this subject. Of course those who oppose the Trinity often use the similar process of using Ellen White to defend their position and negate statements that seem to support the Trinity, again I challenge the method used here.

Whether we like it or not, whether we call her human or a lesser light or not doctrinal, as long as we encourage people to read EGW, this issue is going to keep surfacing. It will not simply disappear. She makes too many statements that don't support the current view of the Godhead. So it appears the Prophet that launched us into the freedoms and respect of Evangelical Christianity through the revelations of her statements on the Trinity, is now like an old anchor that is a bit irritating. Will we let the anchor hold or cut it loose and let our spiritualized views smash us on the rocks of ecumenism?

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[\[1\]](#) L. E. Froom, The Coming of the Comforter, rev. ed., 1956

[\[2\]](#) For an expanded discussion on this see Brendan Knudson's work, the Alpha and Omega of Deadly Heresy. Commenting on Froom, Knudson makes this important observation: "It is largely from Froom that the church has inherited its hermeneutic in interpreting the statements of Ellen White on the Father, Son and Spirit. He boasted at one time to R. A. Anderson, with whom he worked on the compilation Evangelism, "I am sure that we are agreed in evaluating the book 'Evangelism' as one of the great contributions in which the Ministerial Association had a part back in those days. You know what it did with men in the Columbia Union who came face to face with the clear, unequivocal statements of the Spirit of Prophecy on the Deity of Christ, personality

