

## POSITION OF SDA PIONEERS ON "THE TRINITY" and "GODHEAD"

[This article written by R. F. Cottrell published in the *Review* of June 1, 1869, sets forth well the attitude of the pioneers and believers on the question of the trinity. —A. L. White.]

### THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

This has been a popular doctrine and regarded as orthodox ever since the bishop of Rome was elevated to the popedom on the strength of it. It is accounted dangerous heresy to reject it; but each person is permitted to explain the doctrine in his own way. All seem to think they must *hold* it, but each has perfect liberty to take his own way to reconcile its contradictory propositions; and hence a multitude of views are held concerning it by its friends, all of them orthodox, I suppose, as long as they nominally assent to the doctrine.

For myself, I have never felt called upon to explain it, nor to adopt and defend it, neither have I ever preached against it. But I probably put as high an estimation on the Lord Jesus Christ as those who call themselves Trinitarians. This is the first time I have ever taken the pen to say anything concerning the doctrine.

My reasons for not adopting and defending it, are 1. Its name is unscriptural —the Trinity, or the triune God, is unknown to the Bible; and I have entertained the idea that doctrines which require words coined in the human mind to express them, are coined doctrines. 2. I have never felt called upon to adopt and explain that which is contrary to all the sense and reason that God has given me. All my attempts at an explanation of such a subject would make it no clearer to my friends.

But if I am asked what I think of Jesus Christ, my reply is, I believe *all* that the Scriptures say of him. If the testimony represents him as being in glory with the Father before the world was, I believe it. If it is said that he was in the beginning with God, that he was God, that all things were made by him and for him, and that without him was not anything made that was made, I believe it. If the Scriptures say he is the Son of God, I believe it. If it is declared that the Father sent his Son into the world, I believe he had a Son to send. If the testimony says he is the beginning of the creation of God, I believe it. If he is said to be the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person, I believe it. And when Jesus says, "I and my Father are one," I believe it; and when he says, "My Father is greater than I," I believe that too; it is the word of

the Son of God, and besides this it is perfectly reasonable and seemingly self-evident.

If I be asked how I believe the Father and Son are one, I reply, They are one in a sense not contrary to sense. If the "and" in the sentence means anything, the Father and the Son are two beings. They are one in the same sense in which Jesus prayed that his disciples might be one. He asked his Father that his disciples might be one. His language is, "that they may be one, even as we are one."

It may be objected, If the Father and the Son are two distinct beings, do you not, in worshipping the Son and calling him God, break the first commandment of the Decalogue?

No; it is the Father's will "That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father." We cannot break the commandment and dishonor God by obeying him. The Father says of the Son, "Let all the angels of God worship him." Should angels refuse to worship the Son, they would rebel against the Father. Children *inherit* the name of their father. The Son of God "hath by *inheritance* obtained a more excellent name than" the angels. That name is the name of his Father. The Father says to the Son, "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever." Heb 1:8. The Son is called "The mighty God." Isa. 9:6. And when he comes again to earth his waiting people will exclaim, "This is our God." Isa. 25:9. It is the will of the Father that we should thus honor the Son. In doing so we render supreme honor to the Father. If we dishonor the Son we dishonor the Father; for he requires us to honor his Son.

But though the Son is called God yet there is a "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Pet. 1:3. Though the Father says to the Son, "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever," yet, that throne is given him of his Father; and because he loved righteousness and hated iniquity, he further says, "Therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee." Heb. 1:9. "God hath made that same Jesus both Lord and Christ." Acts. 2:36. The Son is "the everlasting Father," not of himself, nor of his Father, but of his children. His language is. "I and the children which God hath given me." Heb. 2:13.

—R. F. Cottrell

Other pioneers also expressed their understanding of the Godhead and dangers of the Trinitarian belief.

J. N. Loughborough:

In the *Review and Herald*, Nov. 5, 1861, p. 184 appears a column under the title "Questions for Bro. Loughborough." The question is posed: "What serious objection is there to the doctrine of the Trinity?" Elder Loughborough answered:

"There are many objections which we might urge, but on account of our limited space we shall reduce them to the three following:

"1. It is not very consonant with common sense to talk of three being one, and one being three. Or as some express it calling God 'the Triune God,' or 'the three-one-God.' If Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are each God, it would be three Gods; for three times one is not one, but three. *There is a sense in which they are one, but not one*

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person, as claimed by Trinitarians.[\*]

"2. It is contrary to Scripture. . . . The seventeenth chapter of John is alone sufficient to refer the doctrine of the Trinity. Over forty times in that one chapter Christ speaks of His Father as a person distinct from Himself. . . . And in this very testimony He shows us in what consists the oneness of the Father and the Son. It is the same as the oneness of Christ's church. "That. . . they may be one, even as we are one." *Of one heart and mind. Of one purpose in all the plan devised for man's salvation. . . .*" \* [\*Italics added.]

"3. Its origin is Pagan and fabulous. . . . We are pointed to the Trident of the Persians, with the assertion that "by this they designed to teach the idea of a Trinity, and if they had the doctrine of the Trinity, they must have received it by tradition from the people of God.

"Moreover, he is 'the beginning of the creation of God.' . . . The language does not necessarily imply that he was created; for the words. . . may simply signify that the work of creation, strictly speaking, was begun by him. 'Without him was not anything made.' Others, however, and more properly we think, take the word (for 'beginning' in Greek) to mean the 'agent' or 'efficient cause,' . . . understanding that Christ is the agent through whom God has created all things, but that he himself came into existence in a different manner, as he is called 'the only begotten' of the Father."

E.J. Waggoner: (*Christ and His Righteousness*, facsimile production of 1890 original, p.9.)

"The Word was 'in the beginning.' . . . It is not given to men to know when or how the Son was begotten; but we know that He was the Divine Word, not simply before He came to this earth to die, but even before the world was created. . . . And more than seven hundred years before His first advent, His coming was thus foretold by the word of inspiration: 'But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity.' Micah 5:2, margin. We know that Christ 'proceeded forth and came from God' (John 8:42), but it was so far back in the ages of eternity as to be far beyond the grasp of the mind of man."

James White:

"Here we might mention the Trinity which does away with the personality of God and of His Son, Jesus Christ." *JR. & H.*, Dec, 11, 1855.

Joseph Bates:

"Respecting the trinity, I concluded that it was an impossibility for me to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, was also the Almighty God, the Father, one and the same being. I said to my father, 'If you can convince me that we are one in this sense, that you are my father, and I your son; and also that I am your father, and you my son, then I can believe in the trinity.'" *Autobiography of Elder Joseph Bates*, page 205.

"I am instructed to say, The sentiments of those who are searching for advanced scientific ideas are not to be trusted. Such representations as the following are made: 'The Father is like the dew, invisible vapor; the Son is like the dew gathered in beauteous form; the Spirit is like the dew fallen to the seat of life.' Another representation: 'The Father is like the invisible vapor; the Son is like the leaden cloud; the Spirit is rain fallen and working in refreshing power.'

"All these spiritualistic representations are simply nothingness. They are imperfect, untrue. They weaken and diminish the Majesty to which no earthly likeness can be compared. God cannot be compared with the things His hands have made. These are mere earthly things, suffering under the curse of God because of the sins of man. . . . The Father is all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and is invisible to mortal sight.

"The Son is all the fullness of the Godhead manifested. The Word of God declares Him to be 'The express image of His person.' [Quotes John 3:16.] Here is shown the personality of the Father.

"The Comforter that Christ promised to send after He ascended to heaven, is the Spirit in all the fullness of the Godhead, making manifest the power of divine grace to all who receive and believe in Christ as a personal Saviour. There are three living persons of the holy 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 of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ."—*Special Testimonies*, Series B, No. 7, pp. 62, 63. (1905), quoted in *Evangelism*, pp. 614, 615.)

"The Holy Spirit is a person, for He beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God. . . . The Holy Spirit has a personality, else He could not bear witness to our spirits and with our spirits that we are the children of God. He must also be a divine person, else He could not search out the secrets which lie hidden in the mind of God. . . . 'The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.'"—*Manuscript 20*, 1906, quoted in *Evangelism*, pp. 616, 617.

"Again and again we shall be called to meet the influence of men who are studying sciences of satanic origin, through which Satan is working to make a non-entity of God and of Christ. The Father and the Son each have a personality. Christ declared, 'I and my Father are one.' Yet it was the Son of God who came to the world in human form. Laying aside His royal robe and kingly crown, He clothed His divinity with humanity, that humanity through His infinite sacrifice might become partakers of the divine nature, and escape the corruption that is in the world through lust."—*9T*, p. 68, (1909) (quoted in *Evangelism*, p. 614.)

[Quotes John 17:20-23.] "Wonderful statement! The unity that exists between Christ and His disciples does not destroy the personality of either. They are one in purpose, in mind, in character, but not in person. It is thus that God and Christ are one." *8T*, p. 269. [See also Zech. 6:12, 13.]