

Are SDAs Advancing?

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One of the most significant statements by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in recent times regarding advancement in light is that of William G. Johnsson, Editor of the Adventist Review.

"Adventist beliefs have changed over the years under the impact of 'present truth'. Most startling is the teaching regarding Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord..... the Trinitarian understanding of God, now part of our fundamental beliefs, was not generally held by the early Adventists." - Adventist Review, Jan 6, 1994. p.10.

Of such significance is this change that George Knight, Andrews University Seminary professor made the following statement in Ministry, the official Seventh-day Adventist journal for ministers:

"Most of the founders of Seventh-day Adventism would not be able to join the church today if they had to subscribe to the denomination's Fundamental Beliefs. More specifically, most would not be able to agree to belief number 2, which deals with the doctrine of the trinity." - Ministry, October 1993, p. 10.

A recent exposition on this new "advance in light" presented in the Week of Prayer readings, appointed to be read in all Seventh-day Adventist churches worldwide is as follows:

"A plan of salvation was encompassed in the covenant made by the Three Persons of the Godhead, who possessed the attributes of Deity equally. In order to eradicate sin and rebellion from the universe and to restore harmony and peace, one of the divine Beings accepted, and entered into the role of the Father, another the role of the Son. The remaining divine Being, the Holy Spirit, was also to participate in effecting the plan of salvation." - Adventist Review, October 31, 1996, p.12- Gordon Jenson

This statement unmistakably implies that (1) the appellations,

Father and Son are merely designations based on an arrangement rather than substantive fact and (2) there are three separate Persons, each of whom is God, equally.

The above conclusions are fundamentally opposed to the earlier beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. This is evident by comparison with a statement of faith that was published in 1874, which declares:

"1. That there is one God, a personal, spiritual Being, the Creator of all things, omnipotent, omniscient, and eternal; infinite in wisdom, holiness, justice, goodness, truth, and mercy; unchangeable, and everywhere present by His representative, the Holy Spirit. Psalm 139:7.

2. That there is one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Eternal Father, the One by whom God created all things, and by whom they do consist...."- Signs of the Times, June 4, 1874

Pioneers Not Arian

While the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were distinctly non-Trinitarian, it is no less distinct that they were emphatically not Arian. That is, they were just as removed from that camp which denies the divinity of Christ and makes Christ a created being as they were removed from the Trinitarian camp. A sample of statements issued by some of the more notable ones among the Seventh-day Adventist pioneers show that they were not Arian.

"The inexplicable Trinity that makes the Godhead three in one and one in three is bad enough; but that ultra Unitarianism that makes Christ inferior to the Father is worse. Did God say to an inferior, 'let us make man in our image?' " - James White, Review and Herald, November 29, 1877

"the great mistake of Trinitarians, in arguing this subject, is this: they make no distinction between a denial of a trinity and a denial of the divinity of Christ. They see only the two extremes, between which the

truth lies; and take every expression referring to the pre-existence of Christ as evidence of a trinity. The Scriptures abundantly teach the preexistence of Christ and his divinity; but they are entirely silent in regard to a trinity."- J. H. Waggoner, Review and Herald, November 10, 1863

Ellen G. White, who is regarded by Seventh-day Adventists as a prophet, by no indication, differed from the other pioneers on this matter. While she did not use the term 'trinity', many of her statements were clearly incompatible with a trinity concept, but were evidently consistent with the general view of the other pioneers. The following statement furnishes an example:

*"Lucifer in heaven, before his rebellion, was a high and exalted angel, **next in honor** to God's dear Son.... Christ, God's dear Son, had the preeminence over all the angelic host. He was one with the Father before the angels were created. Lucifer 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 His Son, it was as His own presence. The word of the Son was to be obeyed as readily as the word of the Father. His Son **He had invested** with authority to command the heavenly host." - E.G. White, *the Story of Redemption*, p.13.*

Christ was not regarded as a created being, but rather as the literal Son of God, begotten of the Father; hence, of the same nature, being equally divine and of like mind, yet subject to His Father.

Startling Indeed

The editor of the Adventist Review, declared the doctrinal change to Trinitarianism, "Most startling", and indeed it is, but for perhaps other reasons than might have been foremost in consideration

when it was so declared.

The trinity has long been a cornerstone of Roman Catholic theology, as is declared,

"The mystery of the trinity is the central doctrine of Catholic faith. Upon it are based all the other teachings of the church." - Handbook for Today's Catholic, p.16.

When one considers that the founders of Seventh-day Adventism were not only anti-Trinitarian but also anti-Catholic it raises serious questions regarding the movement's claim to be the remnant church when it has now come to accept the trinity which is the very central, root doctrine of Roman Catholicism.

A number of questions arise which demand frank and honest answers. When Ellen G. White admonished the movement to advance in the light, was there envisioned in this a departure from established pillars? If so, what then, did she mean when she declared that God had led them step by step until He had placed them upon a "solid immovable platform" of truth, from which a block should not be moved nor a pin stirred (Early Writings pp.258,259)?

Why did the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church write so extensively against the trinity doctrine and were never once rebuked or corrected by the prophet who was among them? Why did the Seventh-day Adventist Church accept and profess Trinitarianism only after the prophet had died?

Who or what do we worship? Do we worship a three-person God-committee or a Personal, Sovereign Being? Was the love of God for humanity manifested in the sacrifice of merely a colleague, an associate or a fellow God? Is Christ not truly the Son of God, but only "Son" by designation, based on an arrangement?

The faith of the pioneers was predicated on the view of God as a Personal Being, a literal Father, who has an eternal relationship with an only begotten, beloved, literal Son. In the gift to humanity of His dearly beloved Son is seen the measure of God's love (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9). David, the man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22), in his mourning and lamentation over the death of his son Absalom is perhaps a faint reflection of that which occurred in

God's heart of infinite love as He endured the scene of His only begotten Son expiring on the cross. David mourned, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" 2 Sam. 18:33.

So fundamental is this truth (that Christ is the Son of God) that, upon Peter's confession "Thou art the Christ, **the Son of the living God,**" Jesus declared, "flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.... **upon this rock I will build my church;** and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it". Matt. 16:16-18.

The trinity concept of God distorts the most fundamental truth of Christianity, that "God (the protagonist) so (to such extent) loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" John 3:16. Yet Seventh-day Adventists have joined the majority of churches in Christendom in professing belief in the trinity, declaring this change to be an advancement in light.

Is such a change indeed advancement in light? Or is it rather a mirror image of Israel's experience when it was said of them:

"And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel (Judges 2: 7, 10).