

# SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS & THE TRINITY

"To earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3)

"In presenting to the public this synopsis of our faith, we wish to have it distinctly understood that **we have no articles of faith, creed, or discipline, aside from the Bible**. We do not put forth this as having any authority with our people, nor is it designed to secure uniformity among them, as a system of faith, but is a brief statement of what is, and has been, with great unanimity, held by them." (1872 *Fundamental Principles*)

## A HUMBLE APPEAL TO THE CHURCH - AN EARNEST PLEA WITH GOD'S PEOPLE

**1872/1889** [Trinity not mentioned]

**I – That there is one God**, a personal, spiritual being . . . everywhere present by his representative, the Holy Spirit.

**II – That there is one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Eternal Father.** "based on unquestionable authority" (8T 298)

**pre-1980** [Trinity not mentioned, including my own baptismal certificate from 1986!]

**1. The true and living God**, the first person of the Godhead, is our Heavenly Father, and He, by His Son, Christ Jesus, created all things. (Mt 28:18, 19; 1 Cor 8:5, 6; Eph 3:9; Jer 10:10-12; Heb 1:1-3; Acts 17:22-29; Col 1:16-18.)

**2. Jesus Christ**, the second person of the Godhead, and the eternal Son of God, is the only Savior from sin; and man's salvation is by grace through faith in Him. (Mt 28:18, 19; Jn 3:16; Mic 5:2; Mt 1:21; 2:5, 6; Acts 4:12; 1 Jn 5:11, 12; Eph 1:9-15; 2:4-8; Rom 3:23-26.)

**3. The Holy Spirit**, the third person of the Godhead, is Christ's representative on earth ... (Mt 28:18, 19; Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-15; Rom 8:1-10; Eph 4:30.) **Baptismal Vow: 1. I believe in God the Father, in His Son Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit.**

**TODAY**

**Wording goes beyond Father, Son, Holy Spirit although NO Bible text defines God as 3 persons = 1 God!**

**2. The Trinity ... There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit**, a unity of three coeternal Persons. God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. (Gen 1:26; Deut 6:4; Isa 6:8; Mt 28:19; Jn 3:16; 2 Cor 1:21, 22; 13:14; Eph 4:4-6; 1 Pet 1:2.) *3 Persons = 1 God?!*

**3. God the eternal Father** is the Creator, Source, Sustainer, and Sovereign of all creation. ... The qualities and powers exhibited in the Son and the Holy Spirit are also those of the Father. (Gen 1:1; Deut 4:35; Ps 110:1, 4; Jn 3:16; 14:9; 1 Cor 15:28; 1 Tim 1:17; 1 Jn 4:8; Rev 4:11.)

**4. God the eternal Son** became incarnate in Jesus Christ. ... Forever truly God, He became also truly human, Jesus the Christ. (Isa 53:4-6; Dan 9:25-27; Lk 1:35; Jn 1:1-3, 14; 5:22; 10:30; 14:1-3, 9, 13; Rom 6:23; 1 Cor 15:3, 4; 2 Cor 3:18; 5:17-19; Phil 2:5-11; Col 1:15-19; Heb 2:9-18; 8:1, 2.)

**5. God the eternal Spirit** was active with the Father and the Son in Creation, incarnation, and redemption. He is as much a person as are the Father and the Son. (Gen 1:1, 2; 2 Sam 23:2; Ps 51:11; Isa 61:1; Lk 1:35; 4:18; Jn 14:16-18, 26; 15:26; 16:7-13; Acts 1:8; 5:3; 10:38; Rom 5:5; 1 Cor 12:7-11; 2 Cor 3:18; 2 Pet 1:21.) *3 Gods?!*

**14. The church** is one body with many members ... **This unity has its source in the oneness of the triune God**

(Ps 133:1; Mt 28:19, 20; Jn 17:20-23; Acts 17:26, 27; Rom 12:4, 5; 1 Cor 12:12-14; 2 Cor 5:16, 17; Gal 3:27-29; Eph 2:13-16; 4:3-6, 11-16; Col 3:10-15.)

*Comment: "till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (Eph 4:13) - Unity is based on knowing Jesus as the Son of God!*

Ellen White: "There is a personal God, the Father; there is a personal Christ, the Son" (RH 8 Nov 1898; publication year of DA!; 6BC 1068). "God is a Spirit; yet He is a personal being; for so He has revealed Himself" (ST 2 Aug 1905). "From girlhood I have been given plain instruction that God is a person, and that Christ is 'the express image of His person'" (Ms137-1903). "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**" (MH 422). "The Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of the Father, is truly God in infinity, but not in personality" (Ms 116 1905). "The Eternal Father, the unchangeable one, GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, tore from his bosom HIM WHO WAS MADE IN THE EXPRESS IMAGE OF HIS PERSON, and sent him down to earth to reveal how greatly he loved mankind" (RH July 9, 1895, par. 13) - a real Son: "Before the foundations of the world were laid, Christ, the Only Begotten of God, pledged Himself to become the Redeemer of the human race, should Adam sin. ... In His incarnation He gained in a new sense the title of the Son of God" (1SM 226).

**Jn 17:3; Rom 3:30; 15:6; 1 Cor 8:4, 6; 11:3; Eph 4:4-6, 13; 1 Thess 1:9-10; 1 Tim 2:5; 2 Jn 3; Rev 3:12; SR 13-19; MH 409ff!**

"But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him" (1 Cor 8:6).

**Loughborough warns:** "The first step of apostasy is to get up a creed, telling us what we shall believe. The second is to make that creed a test of fellowship. The third is to try members by that creed. The fourth to denounce as heretics those who do not believe that creed. And fifth, to commence persecution against such" (in Bates/Smith (1861-10-08). "Doings of the Battle Creek Conference, Oct. 5 & 6, 1861". *Review and Herald*. 18 (19): 148.)

**"You are not definitely clear on the personality of God, which is everything to us as a people. You have virtually destroyed the Lord God Himself" (Letter 300, 1903). Ellen White quotes John 17:3 right after stating: "We have now before us the alpha of this danger. The omega will be of a most startling nature." (1SM 197)**

**This is THE Great Controversy:** "This fact the angels would obscure, that Christ was the only begotten Son of God" (L1 42-1910.3). "Christ was the only begotten Son of God, and Lucifer ... **got up a warfare over the matter**, until he had to be thrust down to the earth" (Ms 86, Aug. 21, 1910). "Satan was well acquainted with the position of honor Christ had held in Heaven **as the Son of God**, the beloved of the Father" (RH March 3, 1874). The loyal angels "would not yield the point that CHRIST SHOULD HAVE THE PREMINENCE NEXT TO GOD. And there was war in heaven." (Ms90-1910.1).

**The Three Angels' Message directs humanity's final attention to the Father 3x in a row:**

"Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and **worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water**" (Rev 14:7) = God the Father (Acts 14:15; Mt 16:16; John 6:69).

**Historical Caution:** The annihilation of the non-trinitarian Arian tribes (Heruli, Vandals, Ostrogoths) by AD 538 began the 1,260-year supremacy of the papacy (until 1798). *Fidelity to biblical truth prompts persecution - past, present, and future!*

## HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ~ PIONEER PLATFORM ~ PROPHETIC WARNING

**Ellen White:** "...speculation regarding God's personality we will not venture to express, except in the language of the Word which represents His personality. There is to be no discussion over this question lest God would give unmistakable revelation of what He is that would extinguish the one who dares venture on the holy ground in his speculative theories, as some ventured to do in opening the ark to see what was in it as its power and how God was manifested. ... It is safe to contemplate God, the great and wonderful God, and Jesus Christ, the express image of God. God gave His only begotten Son to our world, that we might through His righteous character behold the character of God" (Ms22, 1902). "I feel my spirit stirred within me. I feel to the depth of my being that the truth must be borne to other countries and nations and to all classes. **"Let the missionaries of the cross proclaim that there is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, who is Jesus Christ the Son of the Infinite God. This needs to be proclaimed throughout every church in our land.**" (Ms40-1891.78; EGW 1888 Mat. 886.3). "The knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ expressed in character is an exaltation above everything else that is esteemed on earth or in heaven. It is the very highest education. It is the key that opens the portals of the heavenly city. This knowledge it is God's purpose that all who put on Christ shall possess" (MH 457).

**The Pioneers:** "We are to repeat the words of the pioneers...Let that which these men have written...be reproduced" (1IMR 63; 2MR 440; Lt 229, 1903; RH May 25, 1905). "The past fifty years have not dimmed one jot or principle of our faith as we received the great and wonderful evidences that were made certain to us in 1844...Not a word is changed or denied. **That which the Holy Spirit testified to as truth after the passing of the time ... is the solid foundation of truth. [The] pillars of truth were revealed, and we accepted the foundation principles that have made us what we are - Seventh-day Adventists,** keeping the commandments of God and having the faith of Jesus" (Lt 326-1905.3; Ms111-1905.4: "the essential points of truth"). "It required much study and anxious care to search it out, link after link. By care, anxiety, and incessant labor has the work moved on until **the great truths of our message, a clear, connected, perfect whole,** have been given to the world" (1T 79), a "standing with the old landmarks" (11MR 319.1), "the principles of truth that God has revealed to us" as "our only true foundation" (CW 52). "Those who try to bring in theories that would remove the pillars of our faith concerning the sanctuary, or concerning the personality of God or of Christ, are working as blind men" (Ms62-1905.14; though the context was the Kellogg/Ballenger controversy, the warning remains relevant). "Let none seek to tear away the foundations of our faith,-the foundations that were laid at the beginning of our work ..." (GW 307) - **"truth that for the past fifty years God has been giving to His people"** (1 SM 162). We "stand on the same platform of truth that we have maintained for more than half a century" (Ms142-1905.6). *Caution! Pioneers who use the term "trinity" did not define it as we do today - they simply thought of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but not 3=1.*

"I beseech those who are laboring for God not to accept the spurious for the genuine. Let not human reason be placed where divine, sanctifying truth should be. Christ is waiting to kindle faith and love in the hearts of His people. **Let not erroneous theories receive countenance from the people who ought to be standing firm on the platform of eternal truth. God calls upon us to hold firmly to the fundamental principles that are based upon unquestionable authority"** (8T 298).

"All who have a knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, may have just as pure a faith as had Abel" (Ms200-1899.12).

**James White:** The Trinity "does away with the personality of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ" (ARSH 85.15 Dec 11, 1855).

**J.N. Andrews:** "[It] destroys the personality of God, and his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. The infamous measures by which it was forced upon the pages of ecclesiastical history might well cause every believer in that doctrine to blush" (TAR 54.3 1855).

### Scholars admit:

- **"That most of the leading SDA pioneers were non-Trinitarian"** is "accepted Adventist history...**either the pioneers were wrong and the present church is right, or the pioneers were right and the present Seventh-day Adventist Church has apostatized from biblical truth"** (J. Moon, *The Trinity*, p. 190). *Retired Andrews historian*
- **"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...the doctrine of the Trinity" (G. Knight, *Ministry*, Oct. 1993, p. 10). *Retired Andrews historian*
- SDA beliefs "have changed over the years under the impact of 'present truth'. Most **startling** is the teaching regarding Jesus Christ...**The Trinitarian understanding of God, now part of our fundamental beliefs, was not generally held by the early Adventists.** Even today a few do not subscribe to it" (W. Johnson, *AR* Jan. 6, 1994, p. 10). *"The omega will be of a most startling nature"* (1SM 197).
- **"No single Scripture passage states the doctrine of the Trinity,** it is assumed as a fact...only by faith can we accept the existence of the Trinity" (AR Vol 158, No. 31, p. 4). *No "Thus sayeth the Lord"!*
- **The trinity "cannot be clearly detected within the confines of the canon" (Oxford Companion to the Bible 1993, p. 782).**
- "In the New Testament there is no explicit statement of the doctrine" of the trinity (Bromily, BEDT, p. 1112).
- "The concept of Trinity...that the three are one, **is not explicitly stated but only assumed"** (F. Canale, SDABC 12:138). *Retired Andrews Prof.*
- **"No text of Scripture specifically says that God is three Persons"** (K. Donkor, *Theology*, p. 20). *GC-BRI scholar!*
- Protestantism "accepted...the Trinity, **for which there is no such precise authority in the Gospels"** (Assumption of Mary, *Life*, Oct. 30, 1950, p. 51).

### An Ecumenical Bridge: The Catholic Connection

(*despite differences, the philosophical language is similar, even identical!*)

"The Reformers stopped reforming..." Had they "left the last vestige of Papacy behind, such as natural immortality, sprinkling, **the trinity,** and Sunday-keeping, the church would now be free from her unscriptural errors" (James White, RH Feb.7, 1856). **"The mystery of the trinity is the central doctrine of the Catholic faith. Upon it are based all the other teachings of the church"** (*Hbk for Today's Catholic*, p.11). *Catechism* (2003): p.233f.: "There is only one God, the almighty Father, his only Son, and the Holy Spirit: the Most Holy Trinity...The faith of all Christians rests on the Trinity." "The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life." p.251: **"To articulate the dogma of the Trinity, the Church had to develop its own terminology with the help of certain notions of philosophical origin."** p.253: "We do not confess three Gods, but one God in three persons...but each of them is God whole and entire." p. 262f.: "in the Father and with the Father, the Son is one and the same God...the Spirit is one and the same God." p.82: **"The Church...does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence."** p.266: **"This is the Catholic faith: We worship one God in the Trinity and the Trinity in unity."** **"The theological foundations of ecumenism derives from faith in the persons of the Trinity"** (C. Hill, "The Ec. Mvmt.," *Zndvyn Hbk Hist. of Christian*. 2006, p.435)! "We have far more in common than what divides us" since "we believe in the Trinity" (Rick Warren, *CNS* Nov. 2014). "No doctrine is more fundamental or more emphasized in Freemasonry than that of the Trinity" (*masonicworld.com*)! But Adventists "do not, and never have accepted the dark, mysterious, Catholic doctrine of the Trinity" (B. Wilkinson, 1936!). "It is a backsliding church that lessens the distance between itself and the Papacy" (ST Feb.19,1894, par.4). **"He who denies the personality of God and of His Son Jesus Christ is denying God and Christ.** 'If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son and in the Father.' If you continue to believe and obey the truths you first embraced regarding the personality of the Father and the Son, you will be joined together with them in love. There will be seen that union for which Christ prayed just before His trial and crucifixion" (Ms23-1906).