

TRACKING DOWN THE TRINITY DOCTRINE WITH IN ADVENTISM

- 1844...October 22nd, The Great Disappointment
- 1844-1854...The disappointed little flock recovered all the truths that have been covered beneath the rubbish of the error of the Dark Ages. During this period the waymarks and fundamental principles (non-Trinitarian beliefs included) that are based upon unquestionable authority were discovered and firmly laid.
- 1860...the remnant was given the name “Seventh-Day Adventist”
- 1863...Organization of the General Conference of the Seventh-Day Adventists. Health Message was given.
- 1872...Declaration of the Fundamental Principles taught and practiced by the SDA (Non-Trinitarian creed included)
- 1888...The message of righteousness by faith: This message included and reassured the truth that Christ was the begotten Son of God, and that there “was a time when Christ proceeded forth and came from God, from the bosom of the Father” (John 8:42; 1:18), “but that time was so far back in the days of eternity that to finite comprehension it is practically without beginning.” {1890 EJW, CHR 21.2}
- 1889: The SDA fundamental principles are slightly revised. The non-trinitarian belief, however, remains the same but instead of the 1872 wording of “great unanimity” the new version asserts that with respect to these beliefs “so far as is known” there is “ENTIRE UNANIMITY throughout the body.” In other words the SDA people were unitedly non-trinitarian in 1889. This statement of fundamental principles was published up until 1915, the year of Mrs. White’s death.
- 1891: M.C. Wilcox, reacts to D. M. Canright’s criticisms, and publishes a two-fold article entitled “The Subordination of Christ” in the Signs of the Times, December 7th, 1891 and December 14th, 1891 editions. This is the first positive published usage of the word “trinity” that I can find within Adventism. It is important to note that M.C. Wilcox himself was not actually a trinitarian. Even in 1914 he still did not regard the Holy Spirit as “an individual person” as Father and Son are but rather the “Spirit that is common to both the Father and the Son” which brings “to every soul that believes the personal presence of our Lord Jesus Christ” (M.C. Wilcox, “The Personality of the Spirit” ST Nov 24, 1914). This suggests that he is using the word "trinity" for apologetic purposes to help defend against Canright's attacks.
- 1892: M.C. Wilcox publishes “The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity” in the Bible Student’s Library, No. 90. This is the same article “The Subordination of Christ” published again but he changed the title and omitted the sentence “or triune God, which has so long been the faith of the Christian Church” from the original article. Again this evidences the fact that he was not a believer in the triune god. This series, the Bible Student’s Library, was “designed for the public” to let them know “SDA teachings” (SDA Encyclopedia, entry on “Bible Student’s Library”). This is a part of the defense against Canright. The promotion of this new material came forth immediately but there were disclaimers:

“No. 90 is entitled “The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity,” by the late Samuel T. Spear, D.D. and is reprinted form the New York Independent. WHILE THERE MAY BE MINOR THOUGHTS IN THIS WORTHY NUMBER WHICH WE MIGHT WISH TO EXPRESS DIFFERENTLY, on the whole we believe that it sets forth the Bible doctrine of the trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit with a devout adherence to the words of Scripture, in the best brief way we ever saw it presented” (Signs of the Times Vol 18, No. 22, 1892)

"The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity. This tract of 16 pages is a reprint of an article in the New York Independent, by the late Samuel Spear, D.D. It presents the Bible view of the doctrine of the Trinity in the terms used in the Bible, and THEREFORE AVOIDS ALL PHILOSOPHICAL DISCUSSION AND FOOLISH SPECULATION. It is a tract worthy of reading" (Ibid Vol 20. No. 29, 1894)

Unfortunately Wilcox does not say what "minor thoughts" he would want to "express differently" (and that's probably because if he did so then he would defeat the whole purpose of why he is publishing these- to deflect Canright's criticisms because as we noted earlier, Wilcox himself, even in 1914 was not a trinitarian). So then what is he doing here? He is actually just using the word. It looks like the word "trinity" is being used here for covert purposes. As Merlin Burt notes:

"The title, Bible Doctrine of the Trinity, implied that the work would be sympathetic to the doctrine of the trinity. Upon reading the tract, one finds almost nothing which nineteenth-century Adventists would have found objectionable." (Merlin Burt, 'Demise of Semi-Arianism and anti-trinitarianism in Adventist Theology, 1888-1957', pages 5-6, December 1996)

You see due to Canright's criticisms people were investigating Adventism's beliefs about the Godhead more than ever. And as soon as they heard or believed that Adventist were non-trinitarian (which they were) they refused to hear them. This was what Canright knew and he pushed this agenda thoroughly. Wilcox tried to undo some of the damage. Now an article was in print that could be used as a reference to deflect his critique as the following quote from an 1893 Signs of the Times indicates:

"73. FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT.

What is your idea about the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost being three in one? SUBSCRIBER.

It matters very little what our idea is in the matter. What does the Bible teach? should be the question with us all. Christ says "I and my Father are one," and prays that his disciples may be one as he and his Father are one. John 10: 30; 17:11,21. The unity is one we may apprehend, though not comprehend. "The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity," No. 90 of the Bible Students' Library, price two cents (Pacific Press, Oakland, Cal.), will give you some good thoughts and suggestions on the matter. (ST Jan 23, 1893)

Notice that Wilcox evades the question? If he were a trinitarian why didn't he just say the Bible says that they are one God? Careful readers and thinkers will see my point. The truth of history is that Canright, while an opponent of Seventh-day Adventism, has a huge part as to why the church today is trinitarian but this part of history is frequently obscured. There's more data on this too.

- 1895: Mrs. White publishes statement regarding the begotten nature of God's Son - He was begotten in all the brightness of His Father's majesty and glory. It is harmonious with the pioneer statements regarding the same. This is a position she never repudiated the rest of her life but wrote sentiments which continued to mesh with it. This is not a popular point amongst the trinitarian brethren but it is true nonetheless.
- 1898: Mrs. White publishes the Desire of Ages. It is claimed that this book changed the doctrine of Adventism regarding the trinity but this is not quite true. It did change the view regarding the Holy Spirit as a Person but, as we have already shown via M.C. Wilcox, this change was not to the trinitarian view of It's Personhood that is held today. It also presented the Son of God as eternal but that is a point that many non-trinitarians today deny. There's a problem on both sides here.
- 1900 ... Dr. Kellogg began to teach dangerous sentiments (Pantheism and the trinity - Kellogg had also admitted to Daniells that "he had come to believe in the trinity")(letter: A. G. Daniells to W .C. White, October 29,1903, p.12)

- 1902... February 18th, Battle Creek Sanitarium Fire
- 1902... December 30th, The Review and Herald publishing house fire (the printing plates of Kellogg's book 'The Living Temple' were destroyed in the fire)
- 1903... 'The Living Temple' was published.
- 1904... Ellen White strongly warned against 'The Living Temple'.
- 1906: Mrs. White publishes "heavenly trio" statement which defines the 3 Persons of the Godhead in contrast against Kellogg's trinitarian view. She was actually quoting a trinitarian named William Boardman but she modified his quote by not using the words "trinity" or "triune god" like Boardman did and she completely repudiated the illustrations which he used to try to teach the triune god. Her "trio" is not the same as modern trinitarianism. This is a key point which many historians and scholars today obscure.
- 1907... J. H. Kellogg continued to hold to his wrong theories and severed all connection with the SDA Denomination.
- 1913: James Gray, president of Moody Bible College, parrots Canright's claim:

"The Seventh-day Adventists...reject the doctrine of the Trinity, which involves the Deity of Christ, though this is not stated... We would recommend you to read Seventh-day Adventism Renounced by Elder Canright...." (Bible Problems Explained, James Martin Gray, 1913)

Note: Canright's criticisms were still making great headway in Christendom despite M.C. Wilcox's defensive maneuvering.

- 1913: SDAs still on defensive against Canright's attacks regarding the trinity "Garbled Statements of Facts

A CORRESPONDENT sends us a copy of the Louisville Christian Observer of February 12, containing an article on the Seventh-day Adventists. It aims to set forth the views of Seventh-day Adventists, not from their own published statements so much, but statements from a disappointed, ambitious man who felt that his ability was not sufficiently recognized, and who apostatized.

The simple fact is that in all this time this man never really knew the truth as taught by Seventh-day Adventists and as it is in Jesus. He learned facts and theories, but not truth. He learned doctrines, separate and distinct articles of faith, but never the doctrine, the teaching of the Bible, the center of which is Christ Jesus. He perhaps tells us truly what he believed once, but he does not rightly represent the denomination. For instance, HE DECLARES THAT AMONG THE CHIEF DOCTRINAL POINTS OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS ARE "REJECTION OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY; materiality of all things ; that the Bible must be interpreted to harmonize with the writings of Mrs. White ; that when Christ comes only 144,000 out of all then living will be saved, and all those will be Seventh-day Adventists." Now in the sense in which these are set forth they are not true. This man may not know it, but our correspondent evidently thinks so, who says that he is a member of the Presbyterian Church, and a reader of the SIGNS OF THE TIMES, and remarks that "I do not think this article quite fair." And it is not fair, nor is it true.

The best way to understand just what Seventh-day Adventists believe is to read just what they have to say. All of the great fundamental Scriptural views of the denomination are given each year in the SIGNS OF THE TIMES, and these are taught as the editors understand the Bible to teach them. (Signs of the Times, April 8, 1913)

Now Wilcox just got himself in a bit of trouble here because he just reference the reader to the fundamental principles which were non-trinitarian! But don't worry his brother will come to his aid.

1913: F.M. Wilcox writes a statement of SDA beliefs (this is not the official published statement in the yearbook) in an attempt to repudiate Canright:

1. In the divine Trinity. This Trinity consists of the eternal Father, a personal, spiritual being, omnipotent, omniscient, infinite in power, wisdom, and love; of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the eternal Father, through whom all things were created, and through whom the salvation of the redeemed hosts will be accomplished; the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, the one regenerating agency in the work of redemption." (F. M. Wilcox, *The Message for Today*, RH Oct. 9, 1913, p. 21)
2. F.M. Wilcox's maneuver here was an attempt to disempower Canright who said they reject the trinity. Now there was a statement to back up the declaration that Canright "does not rightly represent the denomination" when "he declare[d] that among the chief doctrinal points of Seventh-day Adventists are "rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity."
3. *Note: Modern SDA trinitarians, like Jerry Moon and others, quote this statement by using ellipsis. They leave out the part about God the Father being His own "being" and that Jesus Christ is "the Son of the eternal Father" and leave the reader with the impression that the "trinity" back then was the Trinity of today's Adventism. This is patently false. Leroy Froom, the fountain head of historical distortions on this subject, doesn't even mention this 1913 statement at all in his book MOD (and it's not because he was unaware of it!). The probable reason is because the statement above is actually not the trinitarianism of Adventism today. Gilbert Valentine notes:
4. "Even though F. M. Wilcox had published in the Review in 1913 that Adventists believed in the divine Trinity, the statement avoids discussion of inner-trinitarian relations, stating that Jesus is 'the Son of the eternal Father' rather than the eternal Son. RH, Oct. 9, 1913, p. 21. Semi-arians such as Washburn could live with it." (Gilbert M. Valentine, W.W. Prescott, p. 285)
5. Let me be even bolder than brother Valentine. The statement above is actually a semi-arian trinitarianism! This is what Froom knew and wanted to avoid bringing public attention to. He had his agenda but that's another story. Yet Canright still had a card to play and he did so as our next point shows

- 1915... Ellen White , a messenger of the Lord laid to rest.
- 1915: Canright obliterates SDA minister Elder Wheeler by publically pointing out that SDA fundamental principles were non-trinitarian:

Seventh-day Adventists and the Doctrine of the Trinity By Rev. D.M. Canright, Grand Rapids Mich.

EDITOR of The Christians Workers Magazine:

In the June number of your magazine, under the above title, you say that in a previous issue, by request, you gave a summary of the Seventh-day Adventists doctrines in which you said, "They reject the doctrine of the trinity." For this Elder Wheelers, an Adventist minister, "took you to task" and convinced you of error on this point. So you apologized and corrected your statement.

In my book, "Seventh-day Adventism Renounced," page 25, I give a summary of their doctrines and use exactly these words. So I judge you accepted my statement as reliable. I now re-affirm my statement: "They reject the doctrine of the trinity" as held by evangelical churches as the previous

line in my book states. But Elder Wheeler says: "I regard our position upon the trinity as in harmony with that of other evangelical churches."

His statement is untrue. Either he does not know the doctrine of his church or has not read their standard works, or else he misleads you. I was a minister and writer among them for over twenty years.... I know all of their doctrines as well as they do themselves, much better than their young ministers like Elder Wheelers. I have just spent two years writing another book answering their arguments against the Lord's Day in the early centuries. While an Adventist I often preached against the orthodox doctrine of the trinity and other ministers did the same.

What shall we say to Elder Wheeler's assertion that Adventist believe in the trinity as held by the evangelical churches? Again you asked Elder Wheeler "if they had put out ANY OFFICIAL STATEMENT OF THEIR FAITH." He says, "The denomination has declined to adopt such a creed." HERE IS ANOTHER STATEMENT WHICH IS UNTRUE. THEY HAVE CAREFULLY PREPARED, OFFICIALLY ENDORSED, PRINTED CREED, AND ENFORCE EVERY ARTICLE STRICTLY. We Baptists have our "Articles of Faith," the Methodists their "Articles of Religion" and the Presbyterians their "Confession of Faith." Adventists say these are our "creeds" and so they are, and we are not ashamed of them. Seventh-day Adventists have a creed as clearly defined as any of these. Webster defines creed thus: "A definite summary of what is believe; especially, a summary of Christian belief."

Our Baptists Articles begin: "We believe, etc." That is a creed. The Adventist creed is entitled, "FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS." It says, "The following propositions may be taken as a summary of the principle features of their religious faith." "They believe" – then follow 29 Articles of Faith. This is exactly Webster's definition of a creed. If Baptists have a creed so have Adventists. THIS IS PUBLISHED IN THEIR YEAR BOOKS, LISTED IN THEIR CATALOGUES, FOR SALE IN ALL THEIR OFFICES. I just went to their office here and brought five copies, once cent each, 14 pages. This is just what you asked for, so I send you one. WHY DID NOT ELDER WHEELER SEND YOU ONE IN HIS LETTER? Instead, he says they have nothing of that kind! You may sometime learn that THE STATEMENTS OF ADVENTISTS CONCERNING THEIR OBJECTIONABLE DOCTRINES ARE NOT ALWAYS RELIABLE.

You see Articles 1 and 2 of that creed give at length their doctrine concerning God and Christ but only mention the Holy Spirit without mentioning His personality in any way. NOR IS THERE ANY MENTION OF THE TRINITY. These two articles give exactly the information you ask for. Why did Elder Wheeler withhold them from you? THE ANSWER IS EVIDENT - THEIR STATEMENT IS NOT TRINITARIAN. A line is added at the close saying that these articles are not a rule of their faith or practice. I positively know to the contrary. I myself expelled a prominent Advent minister from the church for refusing to abide by one of these articles. In recent years both ministers and laymen, many of them, have been expelled for simply disagreeing with one or two of these articles. Whole churches have been disbanded by conference officials for the same reason. These members are not charged with any immoral or un-christian conduct. Generally they are among their most intelligent, zealous members. Largely they are excommunicated because they disagree with Article 10 on the "Sanctuary" or Article 20 on spiritual gifts, really meaning, with them, Mrs. White's "Testimony."

I enclose you a tract of ten pages entitled, "An Open Letter to the Florida Conference Committee of Seventh-day Adventists," by L. H. Crisler, Orlando, Fla. This gives an account of how he and many others were cast out for not accepting some of the Articles of Faith as stated in their "Fundamental Principles," their creed. I quote a few lines to show that these articles are made a test of fellowship. I am personally acquainted with ministers and lay members who were tested and cast out in the same way:

I believe this is a sufficient answer to Elder Wheeler. Please read the two tracts and the book I send you, THEN TELL YOUR READERS WHETHER OR NOT ELDER WHEELER INFORMED YOU

FAIRLY AND CORRECTLY. (D.M. Canright quoted in “The Christian Workers Magazine, Volume 16 pg 84, 85; Year 1915)

- 1915: SDAs stop publishing non-trinitarian belief statement.

And can you blame them? Canright just obliterated Elder Wheeler in the article above. This is why the fundamental principles stopped being published. It was not because the SDA people got together and concluded that the trinity was true and the doctrine needed to be changed. That isn't even what happened in 1931 but that's more history which needs to be properly told. I can't do it right now though.

- 1919... Secret Bible Conference held in Tacoma Park , Washington DC. Several questions and points of differences were discussed among denominational leaders. Several delegates expressed their fear that the church might be heading toward the Trinitarian doctrine which proves the historical fact that the SDA Church was not yet a Trinitarian denomination. 1. Response to Dr. Jerry Moon by Luther Cohen, 2. The Alpha and Omega of Deadly Heresies pg. 94, 3. Understanding the Trinity Doctrine by Terry Hill pg. 35, 4. The Seventh-day Adventist Godhead Debate by Terry Hill pg. 261, 5. Godhead by Sherlene Turner pg. 428, 435, 507
 - 1928... L. E. Froom who is hailed by SDA theologians as the most visible champion of the trinitarianism among SDA , published his book, The Coming of the Comforter. This was an unprecedented book in Adventism to speak of the Holy Spirit was a separate person like the Father and the Son. Years later he confessed that he “was compelled to search out a score of valuable books written by men outside of our faith...” (Movement of Destiny, P.322) in his efforts to put the book together. (cf. Andrews University Seminary Studies, Vol. 41, No. 1, 113-129)
 - 1931... First Trinitarian statement included in the Statement of Beliefs.
 - 1941... Baptismal “Covenant” and “Vow” –and then in the Church Manual- included belief about the trinity (cf. Movement of Destiny, p. 482).
 - 1944... Uriah Smith’s classic book Thoughts on Daniel and Revelation is revised without the permission of the author. This revision eliminated the several strong anti-Trinitarian statements throughout the book. (cf. Movement of Destiny, p. 425 & 465)
 - 1946... The General Conference session of the 1946 made the 1931 Trinitarian statement more official, “voting that ‘no revision of this Statement of Fundamental Beliefs, as it now appears in the [Church] Manual, shall be made at any time except at a General Conference session’” (Fifteenth Meeting General Conference Report No. 8, Review and Herald, June 14, 1946, 197.) (cf. Andrews University Seminary Studies, Vol. 41, No. 1, 113-129)
 - 1946... L. E. Froom and associates compiled the book ‘ Evangelism’ in order to sustain and give credence to the newly adopted Trinitarian concepts. The compilers included the word ‘trinity’ (a word which was never used by Sister White) in a heading, and used statements out of context in an effort to convince the reader to think that E. G. White was a Trinitarian (cf. Letter of LeRoy Froom to Roy A Anderson January 18, 1966).
- Froom’s Recollection: “Later When I connected with the Ministerial Association of the General Conference, I did considerable research in the Spirit of Prophecy writing on this subject, and found much more. When we were asked to help in a compiling the book evangelism this and many other counsels became a vital part of that book.” (Movement of Destiny, p. 621)
- 1955... Prominent Evangelical Christians (Walter Martin, George E, Cannon, Donald Barnhouse) challenged SDA leadership on what SDA believed about the trinity. (cf. Adventist Review September 8, 1983, p. 4)

- 1957... ‘Seventh-Day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine’ was published in an effort to prove that Seventh Day Adventism is a Trinitarian denomination and to present a more favorable light to the Evangelical world. A SDA theologian wrote about its role in promoting the Trinity doctrine in the following statement: “it anchored the doctrine of the Trinity or Godhead” (cf. Journal of the Adventist Theological Society, 17/1 (Spring 2006): p. 138; Ministry Mag-Feb,2009 p. 8)
- 1960... L. E. Froom admitted that when his book *The coming of the Comforter* was published, he “was pummeled by some of the old timers because I pressed on the personality of the Holy Spirit as the Third person of the Godhead.” He also acknowledged that there were men who still denied it. (cf. Letter of LeRoy Froom to Dr. Otto H. Christenson, October 27, 1960)
- 1980... The current statement of the Trinity in the Seventh day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs was revised and voted at the 1980 General Conference Session. (cf. Ministry Mag-Feb, 2009, p. 8)

By officially approving the trinity doctrine as a fundamental doctrine of the Seventh-Day Adventist the domination has publicly declared to the world that she is following in the steps of the daughters (fallen Churches) of the mother of harlots (the Roman Catholic church) whose central Pillar doctrine is the trinity. Therefore the SDA church has left the original mission (proclaiming the three angels’ messages) of God’s calling and the firm foundation of our faith (fundamental principles) that are based upon unquestionable authority. No longer can the present SDA church be considered as the “remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ”. It is now only a nominal (name only) Seventh Day Adventist church which keeps the Sabbath, but at the same time rejects the Lord of the Sabbath.

How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed! the stones of the sanctuary are poured out in the top of every street. Lam 4:1

- 1984... New pro-Trinitarian baptismal vow was released.