

Dear all, greetings.

I want to pick up on the theme of the last Worldview “b” edition – the personhood of the Holy Spirit. What is written below and in the subsequent Worldview “b” edition is taken from my own earlier writings on this topic. I wrote this material in response to a dear brother who was going astray with the writings and teachings of certain groups who are pushing certain ideas regarding the Holy Spirit.

Within the wider remnant context, two groups are now proclaiming what appears to be ‘another gospel’ which has led both groups away from the SDA fold. These two groups publish as [www.worldslastchance.com](http://www.worldslastchance.com) (WLC) and Restitution Ministries (RM) under [www.acts321.org](http://www.acts321.org). Both these groups are attracting a small but vocal following through their internet outreach, and whilst both groups are not in full agreement with each other, they both are teaching doctrines antithetical to the SDA understanding of Scripture, most notably in the following areas:

- The nature of Trinity, and if there is even a Triune God per se.
- The ‘begotten’ nature of Jesus Christ, implying there was a time when He was not.
- A denial of the separate existence within the Godhead of the Holy Spirit.
- An explicit or implicit attack on the SDA movement as being part of spiritual Babylon, from whom God’s faithful saints are called to ‘come out’ (Rev. 18.4).
- WLC have gone on to further teachings such as Pope John Paul II will return from the dead as the literal Antichrist, that 7-day Sabbaths were done away with at Calvary but we must ‘follow the Lamb wherever He leads’ and adhere to lunar-solar calendar Sabbaths (the festival Sabbaths of Lev. 23).

Some today (particularly emanating from the RM movement) are alleging that the SDA Church has consciously or unconsciously, by intent or by conspiracy (depending on who one listens to) changed its teachings on the Triune God, the doctrine of the Trinity, the begotten nature of Christ, and the personality of the Holy Spirit from the teachings held by the pioneers of the SDA movement. SDA members are being called back to the alleged primitive doctrines of the SDA movement’s founders, including those allegedly held by Ellen G. White.

Growth in understanding of God does not necessarily mean that ‘pillar’ or ‘landmark’ doctrines are being changed – it can simply mean that the understanding is deeper, has grown, or more mature. For instance, if one were to present two Biblical truths to a person with no Biblical background such as a) God is love, and b) God instructed Saul to wipe out the Amalekites, including slaughtering every man, woman, boy and girl, the person with no Biblical background would be hard pressed to accept both ideas as being true and in harmony with one another. At this stage of their spiritual experience, such ideas seem mutually contradictory, yet a growth in understanding will lead to a harmony despite initial apparent contradictions in the mind of the individual.

To visualize such a growth in understanding, a child may be named ‘Adam’ at birth, and in full manhood the individual remains ‘Adam’. Adam is truly Adam whilst weighing 8lbs or 200lbs, Adam is still loved by God at both 8lbs and 200lbs, and to kill Adam at 200lbs does not incur a heavier penalty or is no more grievous sin than to kill Adam at 8lbs. Is Adam different at 200lbs

than at 8lbs? Undoubtedly, yes. Yet, does Adam remain Adam when he has grown to 200lbs? Undoubtedly, yes.

Furthermore, with respect to Ellen G. White (EGW), she received her first vision, and presented it in public, whilst still a Sunday-worshipper and heavy ‘flesh eater’, i.e. she was a bona-fide prophet of God whilst still growing in her own understanding of God and His self-revelation and His revealed will for us. A careful study of the life of EGW would reveal that she grew in her own walk with God and understanding of God throughout her life. Some could try and insist that the doctrinal understandings of EGW when God called her to the prophetic ministry must therefore be the original ‘pillars’ of the SDA movement, and that any movement or growth on the part of Ellen G. White (which undoubtedly there was) after the initial call was not as God intended, but this is to shift the basis of doctrine away from what is inspired by God in the Scriptures, and one cannot build a house that will survive the flood unless the house is built on the Word of God.

With the above context in mind, we will turn to a brief background of the Christological debates that occurred in the early church, for these will continue to set the theological context for our later discussions.

As stated above, there is ‘nothing new under the sun’, and Satan has sought to deceive every generation from Adam and Eve onwards about the character and nature of God. The Christian faith finds its source, center and certainty in the historical person of Jesus Christ as revealed by God in the New Testament. John affirms (John 1.1-3, 14) that Jesus Christ is very God in the absolute and unqualified sense of the word, and truly man in every respect, sin excepted. In the incarnation, deity and humanity were inseparably united in the person of Jesus Christ, the unique God-man, Emmanuel (God with us).

The Scriptures also declare that ‘The LORD our God is one LORD (Deut. 6.4, Mark 12.29). The legacy of truth to which the Christian church is heir includes the paradox of a triune monotheism, and the mystery of an incarnate God, both of which concepts transcend finite understanding and defy ultimate analysis and definition.

As the generations passed, and the eye-witnesses to the literal risen Lord passed away, men turned increasingly from the pure Gospel to intriguing theoretical aspects, under the illusion that by searching with the intricate sophistries of philosophy they might find and know God. In the early church, one of the most bitter and divisive controversies was the debate over the nature and person of Jesus Christ.

Whilst such history may appear distant and dusty, the issues raised in the early church era are issues that are still raised today as Satan through the ministry of false prophets seeks to deceive the very elect of God. A brief review of the ancient heresies helps modern Christians to both recognize and address the same errors that divided the elect in ages past.

The two phases of this protracted debate are generally referred to as the Trinitarian and the Christological controversies. The first was concerned with the status of Christ as God, and the second with the incarnate relationship between His human and divine natures. The Trinitarian debates occurred in the 1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries in the struggles with Arianism, Docetism and

Monarchianism, and the Christological debates occurred in the 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries in the struggles with Nestorianism, Monophysitism, and Monothelism.

The belief of the apostolic church concerning Jesus is well summed up by Peter's declaration that Jesus is 'the Christ, the son of the living God' (Matt. 16.16), and in the simple declaration of Paul that 'Jesus is the Lord' (1 Cor. 12.3, here 'Lord' being equivalent to the OT 'YHWH' or 'Yahweh' or 'Jehovah'). The early Christians believed Jesus to be God in the highest sense of the word, and made this belief their cornerstone of faith. 'Flesh and blood' could not reveal or explain this truth: it must be accepted by faith (Matt. 16.17). This implicit certainty in the apostolic church of the Trinity and the divine-human nature of Christ was founded on the explicit teachings of Jesus (as we shall see below) and of the apostles. It was not many years after Jesus ascended to heaven that 'grievous wolves' began to emerge within the flock and wreak havoc, speaking 'perverse things' to draw disciples away after them (Acts 20.29-30).

*Docetism and Gnosticism.* The first error concerning the nature of Christ is generally referred to as 'Docetism'. This word comes from the Greek word 'to appear'. Docetism had various forms, but its basic idea was that Christ only appeared to have a body, that he was really a spirit or phantom, and had no physical body at all, i.e. He would walk the shores of Galilee and leave no footprints in the sand.

Docetism was prominent amongst the Ebionites and the Gnostics. Ebionites were Jewish Christians who adhered strictly to the rites and rituals of Judaism, and the latter were primarily Gentile Christians who mixed pagan philosophies with the Gospel. An early reference to Gnosticism and error concerning the person of Jesus Christ is Simon Magus (Acts 8.9-24). The epistles of John, particularly 1 John, and the Gospel of John, are partly written in response to Gnostic heresies that had come into the early church (see especially 1 John 2.18-26, 4.1-3, 2 John 7, 10). During his first imprisonment in Rome, Paul cautioned the believers in Colosse against Docetic error (Col. 2.4, 8-9, 18). Peter warned believers against Docetism (2 Peter 2.1-3), and even Jude refers to the Docetic heresy (Jude 4). The 'Nicolaitanes' of Rev. 2.6 were Gnostics, but not necessarily Docetists.

The Ebionites were not Gnostics but held similar views concerning the humanity of Christ. For them, Jesus was the literal son of Joseph, but He was selected by God to be the Messiah for His piety and observance of the Mosaic law, and was adopted by God at His baptism. One group of Ebionites, the Elkesaites, taught that Christ had been literally 'begotten' of the Father in ages past, before time created or began, and was thus inferior to the Father. As we shall see below in our discussion of the eternal divinity of Jesus Christ, Restitution Ministries are simply resurrecting this ancient idea of the Son being 'begotten' or 'brought forth' by the Father in eternity past.

In the early church era, Marcion was perhaps the most influential proponent of Docetic ideas, and in response to His writings, Irenaeus wrote 'Against Heresies', specifically the Gnostic heresy. Irenaeus' work is available today, and in it he championed the unity of God and refused the above mentioned heresies from Scripture.

*Monarchianism.* As the name indicates, Monarchianism stressed the unity of God (a 'monarch' is a sole ruler, taken from the words 'mono' meaning single / alone and 'arche' meaning head / ruler

/ source). It was, in effect, a reaction against the many gods of the Gnostics and the 2 gods of Marcion – the god of the OT, whom he considered an evil, malevolent being, and the god of the NT, whom he considered a god of love. As reactionary movements often do, monarchianism went to the opposite extreme, with 2 groups appearing: the dynamists taught that a divine power animated the human body of Jesus, who supposedly had no intrinsic deity of His own, and the Modalists, who conceived of one God who revealed Himself in different ways (e.g. in fire to Moses, as the Father in OT times, as the Son in NT times, as the Spirit in post-NT times). The most famous proponent of Modalist thought was Sabellius, who taught that the names of the Trinity were merely designations by which the same divine person performed various cosmic functions, e.g. prior to the incarnation the divine being was God the Father, in the incarnation the Father became the Son, and after His resurrection the same divine being became the Holy Spirit.

About the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, Origen advanced the theory of eternal generation or eternal ‘begottenhood’, in which the Father alone is God in the highest sense. According to Origen, the Son is coeternal with the Father, but is ‘God’ only in a derived sense, as He is ‘begotten’ of the Father. Distinguishing between *theos* (God) and *ho theos* (the God) in John 1.1, Origen concluded that the Son is not God in the primary and absolute sense, but God only by virtue of the ‘2<sup>nd</sup> grade’ of divinity that may be termed *theos* and not *ho theos*. Origen may be called the father of Arianism.

*Arianism.* Early in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, Arius, a presbyter in the church of Alexandria, adopted Origen’s theories, except that he denied any substance intermediate between God and created beings. From this he deduced that that Son is not divine in any sense of the word, but strictly a creature, though the very highest and first of all, and that therefore there was a time when the Son was not. He taught that there is only one being – the Father – to whom timeless existence can be attributed, that the Father begat the Son *ex nihilo*, and that prior to His begetting by the Father, the Son did not exist. To Arius, Jesus was neither truly human, for He was allegedly without a human soul, nor was He truly God, for He was without the essence and attributes of God. Rather, He was simply the most exalted of all created beings.

Arius was strongly influenced not only by Origen, but also by the pagan understanding of divinity and divine-man theories held in Graeco-Romano culture. Pagans understood that a man may become a ‘god’, generally upon death, although some Roman emperors such as Caligula and Domitian insisted that they had achieved ‘godhood’ during their lives. According to such pagan philosophy, such ‘gods’ have a beginning, are not necessarily omnipotent, omniscient nor omnipresent, and they don’t necessarily have life in and of themselves. Popular religion taught such concepts, and philosophers provided more sophisticated terminology. To the Greeks, only the universe – *kosmos* – was eternal. ‘Gods’ came into being, fought with each other, could be fooled, and had neither eternal pre-existence nor life in and of themselves. Arius was strongly influenced by this pagan philosophy, and such concepts of ‘godhood’ are also found in the ideas being circulated by Restitution Ministries.

At the first council of Nicaea, in 325AD, Athanasius defended the eternal existence of Jesus Christ against the teachings of Arius. He affirmed that Jesus Christ always was, that He came, not from the previously non-existent, but from the same essence as the Father. Applying the term *homoousios*, ‘one substance’, to Christ, the council affirmed its belief that He is of one and the same essence as the Father. The church council rejected both Arianism and Sabellianism, two

extremes that rejected the eternal divinity of Jesus Christ. However hard it is for one to understand with human logic, the council stated that in asserting the Trinity it was not denying the unity of the Godhead, and that in asserting the unity of the Godhead, it was not denying the Trinity. Thus the Nicene creed asserts that the Son is 'begotten of the Father, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance (*homoousios*) with the Father.

The Arians rejected the decision of Nicaea, and focused on the concept of *homoiousios* rather than *homoousios*, i.e. the Son being of 'like substance' rather than 'same substance' with the Father. These various problems led to another church council in Constantinople in AD381 when the council reaffirmed the Nicene Creed, clarified its meaning, and affirmed the presence of 2 real natures in Christ (divine and human).

After these struggles, the church focused on the nature of Christ – how He could in fact be both fully divine and fully human.

*Nestorianism.* Attempts were being made to define the nature of the divine and of the human elements in Christ, and to state how the relationship between these two could exist. There were 2 primary schools of thought: one in Alexandria, and the other in Antioch.

The Alexandrian school emphasized the unity of the two natures and stressed the importance of deity, and the Antiochian school emphasized the distinction between the two natures and focused on the humanity of Christ. The struggle between these 2 schools of thought came to a climax in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD with Nestorius of Antioch, who conceded true deity and humanity for Jesus, but denied their union in a single self-conscious person. The Nestorian Christ is really 2 persons enjoying a moral and sympathetic union, neither however being decisively affected by the other. Deity is not humbled: humanity is not exalted. There is God and there is man, but there is no God-man.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> ecclesiastical council was held in Ephesus in 41AD to settle the dispute. The council condemned Nestorius and his teachings, but did not replace the Nicene Creed. Nothing was really settled, and the ensuing bitter debates dominated all other doctrinal issues the church was facing.

*Monophysitism.* Following the Council at Ephesus, another theory, known as monophysitism or eutychianism, arose, which put forward a concept of Jesus Christ diametrically opposed to Nestorianism. Eutyches, the leading exponent of this new theology, argued that the original human nature of Jesus was transmuted into the divine nature at the incarnation, with the result that the human Jesus and the divine Christ became one person and one nature. Both the divine and the human lost their individual identity.

In response, the church convened another council, the Council of Chalcedon, in 451AD, which rejected both Nestorius and Eutyches and their ideas. Both left to form their own sects. The Council affirmed the perfect divinity and the perfect humanity of Christ, declaring Him to be of one substance with the Father as to His divine nature and of one substance with us as to His human nature, except for sin. The identify of each nature was preserved and the two were declared to be distinct, unmingled, immutable, indivisible and inseparable. Because the suffering of the God-man

was a union of 2 natures, it was truly infinite. He suffered in His human nature and not in His divine nature, but the passion was infinite because the person is infinite.

The result of the Council of Chalcedon was to intensify and perpetuate division within Eastern Christianity. Finally, the schools of Alexandria and Antioch were closed by the Emperor Justinian, and at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Council of Constantinople, in 553AD, the church forcibly repressed the monophysites, who formed other groups now known as the Jacobites, the Copts and the Abyssinians.

*Monothelism.* One question remained unsettled: were the two natures of Jesus Christ actuated by a common will, or by 2 separate wills? The monothelites argued that the divine nature was supreme and the human will was subordinate to the divine will. At the 3<sup>rd</sup> Council of Constantinople, in 680AD, the church decided that the will is a matter of the natures rather than of the one person, and pronounced in favor of two wills in one volitional person. This completed the orthodox definition of the person and nature of Jesus Christ for the Western Church. Around 730AD, John of Damascus recapitulated these doctrines for the Eastern Church, and for both East and West, these decisions became a matter of orthodox faith.

In Reformation times, Luther taught Christology as per the Nicene Creed, and the Reformation churches emphasized the fellowship of the divine and the human in Christ. Two minor Reformation groups differ from the Nicene position: firstly the Socinians, who revived the basic monarchian idea that a divine Trinity is inconceivable; secondly, there was a renewal of Arminian thought, essentially arguing that the Son was begotten literally, and is therefore subordinate to the Father.

After reflecting on the teachings against the Holy Spirit springing up among some members of our own communion of faith, these teachings are essentially a renewing of both of Socinian and Arminian positions (i.e. against the Trinity, and the begotten state of the Son leading to a time when the Son did not exist with the Father). Both of these ideas have been rejected repeatedly throughout church history from the time they arose until today, and these ideas will continue to struggle against the clear teachings of Scripture on both issues.

As a closing thought, before we conclude today, let us reflect on a basic conundrum. If there was a point when the Son did not exist, and there was only the Father, how then can the Scripture be true that “God is love?” Agape love presupposes 2 persons, to give and to receive such love. If though there was only the Father, and no Spirit and no Son, then God cannot intrinsically be agape love. His very essence / defining characteristic, is an afterthought in the aeons of eternity. He is not love, and must be something else. Thus, to accept these false teachings, one must deny the essence of who God is.

For now, have a blessed Sabbath!

Conrad.