

Resurgence of the trinity controversy – who is Christ?

By the TRF Ministries

Most Christian denominations believe that the Bible teaches that God is one in three persons. For example, the main Seventh Day Adventist church has the following as one of its chief fundamental belief (Fundamental belief number 2).

“The Trinity – There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, **a unity of three co-eternal 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. God, who is love, is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation.”

This belief, that God is a unity of three persons, i.e. a trinity, can be traced back to the third century AD. Since the Council of Nicea in AD 325, much controversy has risen over the trinity doctrine in Christendom. In fact, it is not a secret that in the early days of the trinity doctrine, just after AD 325, much repression was used by the Catholic church to silence and persecute those who disagreed with the trinity doctrine. Commenting on this suppression of doctrines opposing the trinity doctrine and exaltation of the trinity doctrine, J. N. Andrews (a pioneer of the SDA Church) wrote:

“The doctrine of the Trinity which was established in the church by the council of Nice A. D. 325. This doctrine destroys the personality of God and his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. **The infamous, measures by which it was forced upon the church** which appear upon the pages of ecclesiastical history might well cause every believer in that doctrine to blush.” — (J.N. Andrews, Review and Herald, March 6, 1855)

It is no doubt that the trinity doctrine is divisive and causes much resentment, especially to those who feel their faith challenged by an opposing view of who the true God is contrary to their own. There is a reason why the trinity is so controversial. It is because the identity of the God you worship is of greater importance than how you worship him. The identity of the God worshipped is the foundational teaching of every religion and denomination. In fact, the identity of the God you worship is directly related to his very character.

In recent years, the trinity doctrine controversy has returned to Christendom. This trend has been observed by many writers including this one.

“In the **last decade or two**, there has been a resurgence of Arianism and anti-Trinitarianism, not only in Seventh-day Adventism but also in the wider Christian and Evangelical world.” (Fortin D. 2006. Journal of the Adventist Theological Society, 17/1 (Spring 2006): 4–10)

Many bible-believing Christians, across various Christian denominations have begun to question the biblical correctness of the trinity doctrine. However, this is not the disturbing part. There is nothing wrong with questioning any doctrine, in fact it is a good thing to do, so that we search the truth more. The merits of questioning the established doctrines is promoted by Ellen G White many times including these ones.

“Age will not make error into truth, and truth can afford to be fair. *No true doctrine will lose anything by close investigation*” (RH December 20, 1892, par. 1).

“If every idea we have entertained in doctrines is truth will not the truth bear to be investigated? Will it totter and fall if criticized? If so, let it fall, the sooner the better. *The spirit that would close the door to investigation of points of truth in a Christlike manner is not the Spirit from above.*” {1888 186}

“Point after point of truth should be investigated; for there is no limitation to the truth of God, and in its study a most lively interest should be felt by both teachers and pupils, that they may know what God hath said. For years the voice of God has been saying to us, “Agitate, agitate, agitate.” Study every point of truth, that you may know for yourselves what is truth in distinction from error. Let students search for themselves, that they may know the deep things of God. Let this work be done in the Spirit of Christ. *Put no restriction upon the students.*” {CSW 36.2}

The disturbing part is that the modern trinity controversy is often attended to by violence, resentment and very unchristian behaviour. Here are some examples of such.

- [3 Faithful SDA Members Disfellowshipped – Witness Account: Posted May 26, 2016 by Sharon Etmanok in Disfellowship Process](#)
- [Warning Against an Upcoming Meeting in Berrien Springs” April 7, 2019 NewsHound](#)
- [YouTube video: Cut off for Christ: Removed from the SDA Church for believing..... – LINE OF TRUTH MINISTRIES](#)
- [Disfellowshipped/excommunicated for not believing the trinity doctrine: Posted by Dan on March 8, 2017](#)

What is striking is that the very origin of the trinity doctrine was marked by the same violence, resentment, division and political expedience. Here is how it is said to have happened.

Sometime around AD 320, Emperor Constantine of the Roman empire was concerned that there was division in the Christian church. The division was over the doctrine of the nature of Christ. This division in the church was of great interest to the Emperor as a political leader because the division was also a division of his empire. But he wanted political unity in the empire. So, he called for a council of all bishops from across the entire empire to find political unity for the empire through church unity.

Immediately, there is a problem there. It is not the role of politics to solve the doctrinal problems in the church. Neither is it the role of politics to achieve unity through uniting the church on points of doctrine, or any other point. The church has its leader. His name is Christ, not Constantine.

But why controversy over the nature of Christ? Why in 325AD? You see, before Christ came as a man, who God is was very clear, just one God of Israel, the Father and the Creator. He was clearly declared so in Deuteronomy 6:4 which says “Hear O Israel, the Lord your God is one Lord [Jehovah]” (emphasis added). Then came Christ, clearly recognized as also as God (John 20:28; Isaiah 9:6; Hebrews 1:8) and claiming the very name of God as his name (I AM in John 8:58). So the question was, “how is there one God if both the Father and Christ are referred to as God?” “Is Christ another God, or what nature is he?” That was the issue that ignited the progression towards the trinity doctrine. It is still the same issue in the trinity controversy today.

Although the early church of the apostles had no questions about the nature of Christ, somehow, this became an issue towards the time of Constantine. So in AD 325, Emperor Constantine called for a

council of all bishops, which he presided over. It was at that council that the trinity doctrine won the day and was adopted as the official teaching on the identity of God in the Christian church, for the first time.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica says:

“Constantine himself presided, actively guiding the discussions, and personally proposed ... the crucial formula expressing the relation of Christ to God in the creed issued by the council ... Overawed by the emperor, the bishops, with two exceptions only, signed the creed, many of them much against their inclination” (1971 edition, Vol. 6, “Constantine,” p. 386).

So, here is a politician leading and guiding a discussion about the true nature of Christ for political gain. By whose authority and what qualified him to meddle in the affairs of determining such a crucial doctrine of the church is for you to judge. It is hard to believe that it was the will of God that the Emperor be the presiding power over matters of the doctrine of the God of the Bible. More so, given that his Christian standing was very much in question, and his political need for unity was the primary motive.

In fact, emperors were considered to be gods themselves, and so was Constantine. In taking over the role of directing the doctrine of the church, a role that God alone holds, he placed himself as the god for the church at that time. One could say this was in essence one of the steps in the fulfilment of the prophecies of Daniel.

Daniel 7:25 “And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time.”

Not just the Emperor’s Christian standing was in question, the biblical understanding of all the bishops, who even thought it was worth their while to attend a doctrinal discussion session presided over by a politician, was just as questionable. Bishops with a clear knowledge of their Bibles, and bishops with a clear knowledge of the God of the Bible would not have attended because the Emperor had no such authority over God’s house.

Thus, the trinity doctrine became a nearly universal Christian belief. As a result of adopting the trinity doctrine, a man named Arius and his followers who opposed the trinity doctrine were banished from the church, and their books were destroyed. Also, before the papal power could rise to its seat in AD 538, three Arian kingdoms were destroyed. It is said that violence ensued from both sides of the trinity controversy over many years until those who supported the trinity doctrine overcame those who opposed it.

The controversy over the nature and identity of Christ has always been accompanied by persecution, violence, and all unchristian behaviour. Even during the time of Christ himself we see this behaviour.

For example, in John 8, Christ repeatedly tells them who he is (nature and identity) from different angles, but they just could not accept it. In John chapter 8 from verse 12 through verse 58, we read selected verses as follows:

In verse 12, we read, “Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” Christ told them his identity and nature as the light of the world.

In verse 13, we see the controversy as we read, “The Pharisees therefore said unto him, Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true.”

The Pharisees and the Jews could not accept it, so they accused Christ of lying about his nature and identity. They knew that there is a promised one to come from God, but they did want him to be this lowly Jesus in front of them. They knew God would send His Son to them, one like God. Jesus standing in front of them did not suit their expectation of the Son of God.

We will see the same in verse 14 where Christ said “for I know whence I came” which shows his identity and nature as the promised one of God. The same is true in verse 16, “For I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me,” confirming himself as the one sent by God and with God.

In verses 18, 23, 24, 28, 42 and 56 Christ continues to emphasise his origin in heaven from the Father as evidence of his identity and nature, but as shown in verses 19 and 25 the Jews continued to disbelieve Christ own exposition of his nature and identity.

This controversy of Christ’s true identity climaxed when Christ claimed the title of the very God of the Jews, i.e. the title “I AM”. We read in verse 58, “Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.”

Notice how the Pharisees finally reacted with violence in verse 59 which says, “Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.”

“I AM”, that means the self-existent one i.e. God. So, they wanted to kill him because he told them his nature as God the self-existent one, and his identity as the Son of God, the promised one to come.

What we learn here is that Christ wanted the Jews to know who he is and his origin, which testify of his nature and identity as promised by the prophets before. He tried to make them see that he was the awaited Messiah, the Son of God. Isaiah 9:6 promised his coming with these words:

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, **The mighty God**, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

But they could accept that the one who stood before them was the mighty God (the Son of the Almighty God). Instead, they wanted to stone him and kill him for claiming this promise as his. They went on to kill not just to him, but his (Christ’s) followers as well. They did not want to hear of the true identity and nature of Christ as the Son of God by identity and hence God by nature. The very knowledge that would set them free is what they rejected.

Several times he tried to show them this truth, that he was the Son of God by identity and God by nature. Another time was this in Mark 12:35-37:

“And Jesus answered and said, while he taught in the temple, How say the scribes that Christ is the Son of David? For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The LORD said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool ;ref Psalms 110:1]. David therefore himself calleth him Lord; and whence is he then his son? And the common people heard him gladly.”

Again, Christ wanted them to know that Christ is above David, by nature and identity, even though he is referred to as a Son of David. In other words, he was both the Son and Lord to David. And people heard him gladly except the leaders.

So, the controversy was over

WHO CHRIST IS, HIS NATURE AND IDENTITY

right from the beginning.

The other time the controversy flared up was during the Protestant era. Why around that time? Long prophecy lesson, but the short of it is that at that time, the power of the Catholic system to control conscience of worship had been removed with the removal of the Pope in 1798. With the opening up of the free world, and the spread of the gospel to other lands, people once again could freely and openly explore the simple understanding of the Bible and once again, some found it to be in disagreement with the trinity doctrine.

We know that a number of Protestant non-trinitarian preachers rose up from the 1600s and that non-trinitarian denominations rose up into the 1800s including the Christian Connection, the pioneer Seventh Day Adventists and the Jehovah's Witnesses. Although their versions of non-trinitarianism were different, they all agreed that the trinity doctrine is unbiblical and only a catholic tradition. You do not need to look far to see that these groups were systematically vilified over the years. Again, as it was at the time of Christ, and at the time of Constantine and at the time of the Protestant movement, there is always resentment and violence whether physical or not accompanying the trinity controversy.

With that in mind, we can project into the future and say, the current resurgence of the trinity controversy will be accompanied by more of the same violence, bloodshed, persecution, resentment, division, etc. In fact, that has already started. In all that, the government forces are likely to pick one side and take part in persecuting the opposing side, just as it was in in the 4th century AD, as it was with Herod and Pilate at the time of Christ and thereafter. Again, for the sake of unity in the nations. History repeats itself.

Just to clarify, the controversy over the nature and identity of Christ was just the starting point of the trinity controversy. The trinity controversy stretched way beyond that, into tangible matters of our salvation in Christ and to the very character of God. In fact, the nature and identity of Christ is a controversy even between so-called Abrahamic religions, i.e. Judaism, Islam and Christianity.

If the controversy has always been about who Christ is, then that is a very important point. We need to be very clear about it, because, well, it is the truth that sets you free (John 8:32).

Next, we want to see how the trinity doctrine is derived from the Bible. So, we will explore the thinking behind the trinity doctrine and how the Bible is interpreted to formulate it.

God's blessings to you all.

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