

## Evaluation of the internal consistency of Gerhard's article "The Trinity in Scripture"

Preliminary Points

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### 1 Introduction

This writing is a critique of Gerhard Pfandl's article titled "THE TRINITY IN SCRIPTURE".

We state upfront that we have no negativity towards Gerhard or those who hold the same beliefs as him. Neither do we have anything less than love for the SDA church whose beliefs Gerhard was defending in his article.

In his article, Gerhard (the article) responds to presentations by Fred Allaback and others.

Allaback and other writers took the position that the trinity doctrine is un-Adventist and unbiblical. Thus, Gerhard wrote his article to prove the biblical basis of the trinity doctrine.

In responding to Gerhard's article "THE TRINITY IN SCRIPTURE", we do not purport to agree with ALL the specific reasoning that Allaback and others use to refute the trinity doctrine. Chances are that we take a very different view on some points, though we have arrived at some similar or identical conclusions, i.e., that it is not possible to find a non-speculative basis for the trinity doctrine in both the Bible and the writings of Ellen G White and the earliest pioneers of the SDA Church.

Thus, we respond to Gerhard only in as much as his views represent a widely held trinitarian view in Adventism. In responding to Gerhard, we also respond to other Adventist trinitarian thought leaders such as Conrad Vine, David Asscherick, Doug Batchelor, Ganoune Diop, George Knight, Glynn Parfitt, Steve Wohlberg, Ted Wilson, Ty Gibson, Walter Veith, Woodrow Whidden, and many others past and present. To request some of our writings on this topic, please write to us. Our email is below. Or otherwise simply search online for our key articles which include:

- Deconstructing the three-in-one god thought process
- A critique of George R Knight's article "Adventist and change"
- Tell me nothing but the truth
- Matthew 28:19 is Isaiah 48:16
- Trinitarian assumptions questioned
- How EGW could help Adventism to escape the Nicene Trap

And many more.

The article is made up of several sections namely Introduction, Mystery of the Trinity, Trinity in the Scripture (Old and New Testaments), The Witness of Ellen G White, Difficult texts, The Holy Spirit as the Third Person of the Trinity and the Summary. We have

chosen to respond through a series of papers. In this paper, the first of the papers, we address the preliminary sections of the article, namely Introduction, and Mystery of the Trinity.

In this critique, we analyse whether the article is not contradicting itself and whether its statements are true. We focus more specifically on whether there is a clear word to support the article's claims.

## 2 Preliminary points

### 2.1 Adventists questioning the trinity doctrine

The article wrote:

“However, in recent times some Adventists have begun to question its [trinity doctrine's] validity.”

The fact here is that the validity of the trinity doctrine was being questioned at the time the author wrote in response to Allaback and others (i.e., in 1995). However, we want to note here that the questioning of the validity of the trinity doctrine was not a recent occurrence in Adventism. We cite here a few notable Adventists who have questioned the trinity doctrine over the years since the founding of the Adventist movement. Note that most of the quotes are from 1930's and later.

1858

M. E. Cornell wrote:

“The mass of Protestants believe with Catholics in the Trinity, immortality of the soul, consciousness of the dead, rewards and punishments at death, the endless torture of the wicked, inheritance of the saints beyond the skies, sprinkling for baptism, and the PAGAN SUNDAY for the Sabbath; all of which is contrary to the spirit and letter of the new testament. Surely there is between the mother and daughters, a striking family resemblance.”

1936

Benjamin Wilkinson, the man who wrote the book entitled “Truth Triumphant,” wrote a letter to Dr. T.S. Teters saying:

“Replying to your letter of October 13 regarding the doctrine of the Trinity, I will say that Seventh Day Adventists do not, and never have accepted the dark, mysterious, Catholic doctrine of the Trinity.”

1939

J. S Washburn (a retired Adventist minister and contemporary of Ellen White—He was converted by J. N. Andrews at 11, baptized by James White at 12 and began preaching Adventism at 21) wrote:

“If we should go back to the immortality of the soul, purgatory, eternal torment and the Sunday Sabbath, would that be anything less than apostasy? If, however, we leap over all these minor, secondary doctrines and accept and teach the very central root, doctrine of

Romanism, the Trinity, and teach that the son of God did not die, even though our words seem to be spiritual, is this anything else or anything less than apostasy, and the very Omega of apostasy?"

1978

G. Grow wrote a letter to Robert Wieland about the trinity doctrine as the omega of apostasy saying:

"I feel that the Omega of apostasy [the trinity doctrine] started in earnest with the cooperation of our Washington brethren, with Drs. Martin and Barnhouse, the revising of Bible Readings and Daniel's Revelation, the Church Manual of 1951, and the writing of Question on Doctrine."

1987

M. D. Burt, professor of Church History, Director, Center for Adventist Research, Andrews Theological Seminary, affirms the change and the resistance to change of the SDA church from a non-trinitarian to a trinitarian belief. He wrote:

"The church gradually shifted during from the 1930s to 1950s to the 'orthodox' Christian view on the trinity and deity of Christ. . . . During the 1940s an ever-increasing majority of the church was believing in the eternal underived deity of Christ and the trinity, yet there were some who held back even actively resisted the change." (Merlin Burt, 'Demise of Semi-Arianism and anti-trinitarianism in Adventist theology, 1888-1957, pages 47-48)

1994

W. Johnson wrote:

"The Adventist beliefs have changed over the years. Most startling is the teaching regarding Jesus Christ. Many of the pioneers, including James White, J.N. Andrews, Uriah Smith and J.H. Waggoner, held to an Arian or semi-Arian view...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." (William Johnson, "Present Truth: Walking in God's Light", Adventist Review, January 6, 1994, p. 10)

2004

Robert Wieland, a renowned SDA theologian wrote this non-trinitarian statement:

"The Holy Spirit is Jesus Himself "abiding" with us, living with us as our Companion, unseen but no less real than when Jesus walked personally with the disciples by the Sea of Galilee." (Robert J. Wieland, "Dial Daily Bread" November 15, 2004 compare with EGW's statement in 14MR 23.3)

So, it is fact that the pioneers of the SDA Church did not believe in the trinity doctrine, and after that, many prominent SDA theologians wrote contrary to the trinity doctrine in the 1930s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s up to this very year. As it is a fact that some Adventists actively resisted the introduction of the trinity doctrine in 1980, how can questioning the trinity be a recent development in 1995? Clearly, the article's statement

that “in recent times some Adventists have begun to question its [trinity doctrine’s] validity” is not true. The article’s claims make it sound like Adventism was united on the trinity doctrine all along until 1995. The statement would hide the fact that resistance to the trinity doctrine has always been there in Adventism, since belief in the trinity came (by John Kellogg) into Adventism 50 years after the establishment of the movement in 1844.

In addition, we testify that we have known long time SDA members who have never believed in the trinity and have opposed it, though they did not have the means to publicly write against it.

What is true is that in Adventism, the trinity doctrine was not accepted by the all the earliest Adventists (from before the 1950) and has been actively resisted since it was adopted as the official doctrine of the SDA church in 1980.

## 2.2 Introduction of the trinity doctrine into Adventism

Next, the article wrote:

“At the 1995 General Conference in Utrecht, Fred Allaback distributed a paper entitled *No New Leaders No New Gods* in which he claims that “the Seventhday Adventist Church did not believe in the doctrine of the Trinity until long after the death of Ellen G. White.””

We point out here, as we did before, that it is true that Adventists did not believe in the trinity doctrine until after the death of the EGW and the early pioneers. The early pioneer Adventists did not believe in the trinity doctrine is a firmly established fact, often cited by some trinitarian SDA theologians and writers.

We ask the reader to refer to quotes given above from 1994 (W. Johnson), 1987 (M. D. Burt), 1978 (G. Grow), 1939 (J. S. Washburn), 1936 (Benjamin Wilkinson) and (1858) M. E. Cornell. They all testify that the SDA church changed its doctrine from a non-trinitarian to a trinitarian belief.

We quote more.

“The Development of the Trinity doctrine demonstrates that sometimes doctrinal changes require the passing of a previous generation. For Seventh-day Adventists, it took over 50 years for the doctrine of the Trinity to become normative.” Burt, Merlin D. (2006) “History of Seventh-day Adventist Views on the Trinity,” Journal of the Adventist Theological Society: Vol. 17 : Iss. 1, Article 9. (P. 139)

“That most of the leading SDA pioneers were non-Trinitarian in their theology has become accepted Adventist history” {Jerry Moon “The Trinity” p. 190}

“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.” — Jerry Moon, The Trinity, Chapter, Trinity and antitrinitarianism in Seventh-day Adventist history, p. 190

“One of the remarkable aspects of the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the development of the position of the trinity and the deity of Christ. These doctrines did not become normative in the church *until the middle of the twentieth century*”. (Merlin Burt, ‘Demise of Semi-Arianism and anti-trinitarianism in Adventist theology, 1888-1957 page iv ‘Preface’)

The fact that trinity doctrine was not generally held until the middle of the twentieth century is commonly agreed amongst Adventist theologians. That the doctrine was accepted into the SDA Church fundamental beliefs in 1980 is testimony that it was not widely held before. For a thorough timeline of the development of the trinity doctrine in Adventism, we refer you to the article by As It Reads available at

<https://asitreads.com/trinity-in-adventist-history/>

and,

<https://asitreads.com/adventist-timeline-of-change/>.

We also note that the number of members questioning the trinity doctrine may have increased in the last 10 or so years, after the article was written. We believe that as the writings of EGW have become more readily available to Adventists since 2014, through the internet, many believers have managed to search for themselves to find out what she really taught. Prior to 2014, access to EGW’s writing was more open to those who could visit the places where the documents could be accessed. After that, EGW’s writings have become more accessible to all who want them via software. Thus, it has become easy for anyone to search the writings of EGW for himself to find what she really said firsthand.

We note that the reformation and the end of the dark ages were sparked by a similar experience, i.e., that of increasing availability of the Bible to the common people resulting in more and more personal study and discovering the truth for themselves. Thus, one can identify several groups that have moved away from the SDA church as a result of rejecting the trinity teaching of the SDA as a result of the increased availability of EGW’s writings, which hitherto had been used to support the trinity doctrine by Adventist theologians.

More specifically, we note that beginning with Merlin Burt (1996), a narrative was created and sustained in Adventism which taught that EGW later became trinitarian in her later years. This teaching was strongly sustained by the mainstream Adventist theologians including Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, Gerhard Pfandll, Glyn Parfitt, George Knight and many others. We deal with the claims that EGW changed her mind about the trinity after 1897 in our articles titled “How EGW could help Adventism to escape the Nicene trap” and “Critique of George R Knight’s Article ‘Adventist and Change’”. In short, EGW says it herself that she never changed her teachings (1888 734.1) *as she was given by the Lord* (Letter 39, 1905).

### 2.3 One divine being had a son

Next, the article wrote:

“The Adventist Pioneers, “believed that in the eons of eternity only one divine being existed. Then this one divine being had a Son.” Thus, Christ had a beginning. In regard to the

Holy Spirit, Allaback believes that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God and Christ not another divine being.”

We note here that it is a fact that Adventist pioneers believed that the Son of God was begotten by the Father. We also agree that it is fact that the Adventist pioneers believed that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God and Christ not another divine being equal to the Father and the Son.

Our response concerning the begottenness of the Son of God is that there is neither biblical nor logical basis for placing the existence of God the Father and His Son in realm of time as we know it. We will dwell on this point more fully later in Part 2 and 3 of this series. But here is a short version.

Trinitarian thought relies on making proofs of divinity. There are several of these so-called traditional proofs of divinity. They include eternal, omnipresent, omniscient, and all-powerful. In the thinking of many (both trinitarians and some non-trinitarians alike), the meaning of eternal is understood within the bounds of time. Thus, eternal is understood as being time stretching backwards without beginning and forward without end. Thus, Christ is said to be God because he has existed for time without beginning and will exist for time without end. That’s where we see several problems that are not realised by many.

The first is that if time is the phenomenon that we use to prove that God is God, then time is above God. In this thinking, God owes his proof of existence to time. The second and related problem is the point that if God did not create time, then God did not create everything. But if God created time as well, then God’s existence cannot be reckoned within time. Thus, we can neither assert the non-trinitarian view that says “Christ was begotten in the eons of time past” nor can we assert the trinitarian view that says Christ is God because he has existed a time without beginning. Both place the existence of Christ within time as we know it. This is the Nicene Trap which we discuss in full in the article titled “How EGW could help Adventism to escape the Nicene Trap”. Neither the divinity of God nor that of Christ is to be proven by listing of attributes (such as time). God is declared to be God without need to understand His attributes first.

The third problem is that qualifying the divinity of Christ by any attribute presupposes that a human mind can understand what makes God god. It is stretching the human mind beyond its bounds into a realm not given to us to think about.

The fourth problem is that the concept of time without beginning is not explained anywhere and is impossible for a human mind to understand. What makes time to be time to us is that it is a sense that is demarcated by a beginning and an end. We can neither experience, nor understand, nor state a time that is not bound by a beginning and an end. Time by nature begins and ends.

Concerning the Spirit of God, we note that the Adventist pioneer position that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the God and of His Son is a simple quote from the Bible.

Romans 8:9 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the *Spirit of God* dwell in you. Now if any man have not the *Spirit of Christ*, he is none of his.

We can also compare a few scriptures and reach the same conclusion. In 1 Peter 1:10 and 11, we are told that the Spirit of Christ was in the prophets of the OT.

“Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit

of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.”

In the OT, that Spirit that was in them (the prophets) is clearly referred to as the Spirit of God (2 Chronicles 15:1; 2 Chronicles 24:20; Ezekiel 11:24). We therefore assert that there is no error in believing what is stated in the Bible, which is that the Spirit of God is the Spirit of Christ and is the Holy Spirit. In Part 3 of this series, we will deal with the question of whether the Spirit of God is another being like the God to whom it is of.

We note here that the article missed an opportunity to affirm what the Bible actually states. Considering that the article set forth to reveal that which is stated by the Bible, we think it was necessary that the article point out that Allaback’s belief that the Holy Spirit is a Spirit of God and a Spirit of Christ is in fact stated as such by the Bible.

We will deal with the begottenness of Christ and the Spirit of Christ in Part 3 of this series.

## 2.4 The word trinity

Next the article wrote:

“Although the word Trinity is not found in the Bible (neither is the word incarnation), the teaching it describes is clearly found there.”

There is no problem with the word trinity itself being used. If the word trinity is applied to mean that ‘the Father, the Son and the Spirit are in unity’, then we would have no issue with that at all. No-one could fail to count three and no one could expect that these three are dis-united. That is obvious. The problem is whether the Bible teaches the core concept of the trinity. The core concept of the trinity is not that The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God. That is only a step to the core concept of the trinity. Depending on what you mean by ‘GOD’, many non-trinitarians would agree that the Father is God, the Son is God (being the God the Father’s person’s express image (Hebrews 1:3)) and ONLY representative to man (John 14:9; 1 Timothy 2:5)) and the Spirit is God (being God the Father’s unseen presence (Psalms 139:11)). The core concept of the trinity is that One God is made up of three persons.

Thus, the challenge for many is to find where this concept is stated. More specifically, is there anywhere in the Bible where the idea of uniting three intelligences into one intelligence is stated? Does the Bible teach us to make a composite One God out of three persons? We have not seen any evidence that the Bible teaches the concept of the trinity. This is also observed by trinitarians themselves. We quote:

“While 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.” — (Adventist Review, Vol. 158, No. 31, p. 4) (emphasis added)

“The concept of the Trinity, namely the idea that the three are one, *is not explicitly stated but only assumed.*” — Fernando L. Canale, The Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology, Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia, Volume 12, page 138, ‘Doctrine of God’ (emphasis added)

To put it more simply, Deuteronomy 29:29 which requires that we accept only that which is clearly revealed, and EGW who said we must depend only on a “Thus saith the Lord” are not upheld in the process of crafting the trinity idea since the trinity idea is assumed (or implied) by the readers of the Bible, yet without a clear explicit statement of it found in the Bible.

But there are more problems with the trinity idea of assuming to make one entity out of three intelligences. As the article says elsewhere, and as anyone would agree, God is beyond our perfect understanding. The very words we read cannot, even when explicitly supplied, define God. How much more then can such a God be understood by assumption or implication of a human mind without explicit declaration from Him?

Let us make this point clearer. We ask the reader to understand how an assumption or an implication is reasoned by the human mind. The dictionary gives the word “hint” as associated with assuming and implying. So, suppose I hint on something that you have never explicitly heard of, will you be able to figure it out based on the hint alone?

Let us make this clear with an example. Let us take a person who has never seen a bus, neither heard about a bus, nor the very concept of a vehicle. We show that person a few pictures hinting on a bus. Say we show the person the pictures (with no text on them) of a wheel, the back of a bus, and a row of seats and we say, “What are these pictures hinting?” Do you think this person would say, “I have figure it out, you are trying to show me a bus”? We do not think such a person would ever figure out that the hints are pointing to a bus until a bus is known to him from elsewhere.

A hint can only trigger in your memory something that you know already. If a hint triggered something you do not know already, and you were right about it, then words like epiphany, psychic, miracle, and prophecy would apply to you. Thus, unless one has knowledge of the trinity already, i.e., they have an idea of an intelligent being that is made up of multiple other beings united in it, they can never see the Bible as hinting of such a thing. Thus, one can never assume the three-in-one person idea by reading the so-called assumptions of the trinity doctrine in the Bible except if the three in one person idea is already known from elsewhere.

On the other hand, if there was any such impossible case of anyone who does not know about a bus getting it right after seeing some hints of a bus, it remains that they still would need an explicit confirmation to ascertain that they got it right. We would have to open to them a full picture of a bus to confirm that they were right. Assumptions require verification and validation by explicit terms. Thus, if in the impossible event that somehow someone back then at the Council of Nicea after seeing the so-called hints of a three in one god in the Bible, happened to experience this epiphany moment, they still would need the Bible to confirm that in explicit terms. That brings us back to the obvious point that there is no explicit statement explaining the trinity in the whole Bible. To put the trinity doctrine explicitly as it is stated, is thus obviously not from the Bible.

If there is a time to depend only on what is explicitly stated, then that time is when learning who God is. In fact, we would go ahead and say that the audacity of reducing God’s identity to a matter of unverified assumptions and implications is, to us, astonishing. That one can go further to make an unintelligible mathematical equation ( $1+1+1=1$ ) on matters of the identity of the Holy God we worship is at very least jaw dropping to us. We would run out of words to describe the depravity of such an act of assumption on sacred and holy truths.

In addition, we question which one comes first? Was the trinity doctrine crafted first, then the evidence of it looked for in the Bible, or does the reading of the Bible reveal the concept of the trinity which the reader never had before they read the Bible? As we will demonstrate in this series of papers, there is not a single verse in the Bible that teaches the formation of a single intelligent entity by uniting of multiple intelligent entities. We



see that concept only in pagan thought, and works of fiction (e.g., Hollywood's Steven Universe cartoon series), but never in the Bible. We dwell on this point at length later.

The other problem with the use of the word trinity in the trinity doctrine is that it is applied to mean that the Spirit of God is just as much a being equal to the Father and the Son.

Again, we see nowhere in the Bible where the Spirit of God is made equal to the God to whom the Spirit belongs. We will deal with this point in Part 3 of this series.

## 2.5 Defining the Godhead

Next the article wrote:

“The word “Trinity” never appears in the writings of Ellen White, instead she uses the term “Godhead” which is found in Romans 1:20 and Colossians 2:9. Through the word “Godhead” she conveys the same idea as is expressed by the term “Trinity,” that there are three living persons in the Godhead. For example, There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers -- the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will co-operate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ.”

The fact is that EGW never used the word trinity with regards to who God is. It is also a fact that she wrote “...three living persons of the heavenly trio...”. That is as far as the facts go. However, the reasoning that EGW used the word Godhead instead of trinity is without merit. It is not a fact that EGW used the word Godhead instead of the word trinity. Let us dissect the reasoning.

We have no record of EGW saying or writing that she was using the word Godhead instead of the word trinity. Thus, when the article claims that EGW used the word Godhead for the word trinity, the article is at best making a logical deduction and at worst, speculating. In other words, the article read what EGW says, and based on a certain understanding of it, considered that to mean the same as the trinitarian statement. The speculation is based on the assumption that to say “...three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers -- the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit...” (and other such statements from EGW) is the same as saying “the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are three persons of One God” and hence an affirmation of the trinity doctrine.

However, the article does not explain how One God is the same as Godhead, such that the three persons of the One God (as per trinity doctrine) is the same idea as the three persons of the Godhead (as per EGW's statement). Thus, if the article was to be true to its promise, it would not say that EGW replaced the word trinity with the word Godhead. The article is supposed to tell us what is said, not what is assumed.

Let us consider whether the article's understanding of EGW's 'heavenly trio' quote is correct. In other words, is the reasoning that says the statement 'three living persons of the heavenly trio... three great powers – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit...' is the same as when the trinity doctrine says “three persons of One God” correct?

The full quote from EGW reads as follows:

“The Father *is all the fullness of the Godhead* bodily, and is invisible to mortal sight. The Son *is all the fullness of the Godhead* manifested. The Word of God declares Him to be “the express image of His person.” “God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten

Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Here is shown the personality of the Father.” The Comforter that Christ promised to send after He ascended to heaven, *is the Spirit in all the fullness of the Godhead*, making manifest the power of divine grace to all who receive and believe in Christ as a personal Saviour. There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will co-operate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ. (Special Testimonies, Series B, No. 7, pp. 62, 63. (1905))

EGW also wrote:

“The Godhead was stirred with pity for the race, and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit gave themselves to the working out of the plan of redemption.”—Counsels on Health, 222. {7ABC 442.1}

However, the SDA trinity doctrine states that:

“The Trinity – There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons.”

We want to establish if this is what EGW meant by ‘three persons of the Godhead’. In other words, does ‘three persons of the Godhead’ mean ‘three coequal persons united into one God’? We note that in all of EGW’s quotes concerning the Godhead, there is no ‘one God’ and no ‘unity of three co-eternal (including co-equal) persons’ as found in the trinity doctrine.

In EGW’s writing we see:

- three living persons of the heavenly trio,
- the three living persons are the three great powers,
- the three living persons which are three great powers are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,

and,

- that each of the three living persons is ‘of the Godhead’.

Let us return to EGW’s quote again. She writes that:

- “The Father *is all the fullness of the Godhead* bodily...”
- “The Son *is all the fullness of the Godhead* manifested...”

Notice that both the Father and the Son are “all the fullness of the Godhead”. How about the Spirit?

- “The Comforter...is *Spirit IN all the fullness of the Godhead*”

What does it mean that the Comforter is “Spirit IN all the fullness of the Godhead”? Well, we saw earlier that both the Father and the Son are “all the fullness of the Godhead”. So, we can simply replace either Father or Son with “all the fullness of the Godhead”. And this is what we get.

- The Comforter...is Spirit IN the Father.
- The Comforter...is Spirit IN the Son.

Just to be clear, we invite the reader to notice this. According to the quoted passage, EGW is saying two things about the Comforter. The Comforter is:

1. A Spirit

2. Is IN the Father and IN the Son.

The Comforter is not stated as being itself “all the fullness of the Godhead”. Thus, we see a clear distinction between who is “all the fullness of the Godhead”, and what is SPIRIT IN the that fullness of the Godhead.

Let us notice that EGW’s statement here is completely non-trinitarian. In the trinitarian thinking, the Spirit is not different from the Father and the Son in terms of what it is, but different only in role or function. But EGW’s statement is not about function only. EGW’s statement is about what IS the Father, the Son and the Comforter, i.e. identity. Thus, if EGW was supporting the trinity doctrine, the Spirit must also have been itself “all the fullness of the Godhead” like the Father and the Son since the trinity doctrine requires that the three be inherently equal.

Let us take this further looking at whether the word Godhead is substitute for the word trinity. Words that substitute each other can replace each other in a phrase or sentence and the phrase or sentence will retain the same meaning. So let us substitute Godhead for trinity in that quote by EGW.

- “The Father is all the fullness of the trinity bodily...”
- “The Son is all the fullness of the trinity manifested
- “The Comforter...is Spirit IN all the fullness of the trinity”

If the reader recalls what the word trinity means, then the reader can clearly sense the problem of replacing the word Godhead with the word trinity. Let us make it more obvious. Let us replace the word Godhead with the definition of the word trinity according to the trinity doctrine, i.e. “a unity of three co-eternal persons”.

- “The Father is all the fullness of the “unity of three co-eternal persons” bodily...”
- “The Son is all the fullness of the “unity of three co-eternal persons” manifested
- “The Comforter...is Spirit IN all the fullness of the “unity of three co-eternal persons””

You see the problem now, that the meaning of the word trinity does not agree with what EGW is saying in this passage. Let us start with the Comforter. Does it make sense to you, if the Comforter is another person just like the Father and the Son, that the Comforter would be Spirit IN the fullness of the three persons united? The Comforter, as a person equal to the Father, would have to be in the Father, and as a person equal to the Son, and in the Son as a person equal to the Son. Then the Comforter, to be in the three persons united, would also have to be a Spirit in himself as a person equal to himself.

Clearly, when the word Godhead is replaced by the word trinity, EGW’s statements cease to make sense.

Let us do another substitution. This time we replace the word Godhead with its true meaning, i.e. divinity or divine nature.

- “The Father is all the fullness of the divinity or divine nature, or deity bodily”
- “The Son is all the fullness of the divinity or divine nature, or deity manifested”
- “The Comforter...is Spirit IN all the fullness of the divinity or divine nature, or deity”

Do you see how it makes clear sense and does not change the meaning of the statements?

Obviously, there is a confusion in trinitarian thinking as to what ‘one God’ and Godhead mean. The confusion has its roots in the lack of clarity of who or what the three-in-one

god really is. The reader will agree with us that if we claim to believe in and worship one God, then that one God must be identified. Unfortunately, different trinitarians have different conceptualisations of what this one god in three persons is. Several opposing concepts arise when trinitarians try to define the one god in three persons. We give examples of some we have discussed with.

Some emphatically say the unity of three persons is a person. In other words, the three persons make up one person who is called the one God. Others note the obvious confusion and impossibility of making one person out of three persons. Thus, they say that the unity of three persons is just a one Purpose/Plan. In this case, the trinitarian is purely a tritheist. There is no one God, just three distinct persons with one PURPOSE. The one God is essentially a one Purpose.

Others say that the three persons just form one government, not one person called God. Thus, to them, the one God is just one government of three persons. This is still tritheism. Yet others say that the one God is the Father but the Son and the Holy Spirit are in Him. We have not been able to get an explanation as to how that is so. And yet others say that there are three persons united but the one God is a mystery. In this case the one God remains undefined, like the unknown god of Athens. It is interesting that to the Athenians, Paul ‘declared’ who God is and called worship of the unknown god to be ‘ignorant worship’.

We note here that the Bible does not define the one God as a mystery. The mystery of the unity of persons is created by human minds in the process of crafting a doctrine. We can never find in the Bible where it says, “the mystery of three persons in one God”. The Bible just teaches of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Then the Bible applies the term ‘one God’ to the Father only (Mark 12:32, John 17:3, 1 Corinthians 8:6, Ephesians 4:30).

The point we are making is that unless trinitarian thinking defines clearly whatever the unity of three persons in the trinity doctrine is, then there are no boundaries to what the term “unity of three persons” can mean. Thus, any mention of three persons by any writer will be considered to be the same trinity doctrine idea even if it is not. The concept of three in one person is so fluid that it can claim as its confirmation any statement that involves three persons doing something. In our experience, many who profess belief in the trinity have diverse conceptualisation of what it is and where it is assumed in the Bible.

It is in this confusion that the EGW’s statement “three persons of the heavenly trio” is considered trinitarian.

The bigger problem is this. The term Godhead is often used interchangeably as the term trinity. At least the two terms are considered to mean the same thing. Is there more evidence that they don’t mean the same thing?

The term trinity is defined as “a unity of three coeternal persons”. Is that what godhead means? The answer is no. A quick study of the word godhead as used in the Bible is as follows (from unknown source).

There are only three passages in Scripture that use the word “Godhead” and all three occurrences are translated from slightly different Greek words.

The first occurrence was written by the physician Luke in the book of Acts:

Acts 17:29, “Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device.”

In this case, “Godhead” is translated from the Greek word (Theios).

The SDABC, on Acts 17:29, states:

“Godhead, ‘divinity,’ ‘deity.’ is used by Josephus (Antiquities viii. 4. 2 [107]) and Philo (The Unchangeableness of God xxiii [105]) for the one true God, and is here employed by Paul as a term acceptable to his Greek audience.”

There are two other instances in which Theios is used. They occur in consecutive verses and are both translated as “divine”:

2 Peter 1:3, 4, “According as his divine [Theios] power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine [Theios] nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”

The second occurrence of “Godhead” was written by the apostle Paul in the book of Romans:

Romans 1:20, “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:”

In this case, “Godhead” is translated from the Greek word (Theiotes) and is used only this once in Scripture

The SDABC, on Romans 1:20, states:

“Godhead. , ‘divine nature,’ ‘divinity,’ ‘Godhood.’ This is the only occurrence of in the NT. The apostle here speaks of the divine essence and the manifestation of the divine attributes, not of the Trinity as such. Compare the word in Colossians 2:9, which properly means ‘Godhead.’”

The third and final occurrence of “Godhead” was also written by the apostle Paul but this time in the book of Colossians.

Colossians 2:9, “For in him [Jesus] dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.”

In this case, “Godhead” is translated from the Greek word (Theotes) and is also only used once in Scripture.

The SDABC, on Colossians 2:9, states:

“Godhead. , ‘Deity,’ ‘the nature of God.’ Compare , “the nature of God” (see on Romans 1:20).”

What can we get from these passages? “Godhead,” as used in the Scriptures refers to “divinity,” “deity,” “divine nature,” “Godhood” and “the nature of God.”

Let us re-read the three passages with the intended meaning of the words, but rather than arbitrarily substituting the meaning of the words, let us see how other English versions translate Theios, Theiotes and Theotes. That is not to say these translations as a whole are better or more accurate than the KJV. We are not advocating any translation over another, but this helps us to understand the passages better and gives us some perspective.

This is how some other translations render Acts 17:29:

English Standard Version (ESV), “Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.”

NASB, “Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man.”

NIV, “Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill.”

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), “Since we are God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals.”

RSV, “Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the Deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, a representation by the art and imagination of man.”

This is how some other translations render Romans 1:20:

ESV, “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”

NASB, “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.”

NIV, “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.”

NRSV, “Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse;”

RSV, “Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse;”

And finally, this is how some other translations render Colossians 2:9:

ESV, “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,”

NASB, “For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,”

NIV, “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,”

NRSV, “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,”

RSV, “For in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily,”

Thus, while the word trinity means “a unity of three co-eternal persons”, godhead means divinity, deity or the divine nature. Godhead is a nature of being god not a unity of persons. Thus, EGW’s statement should be understood as meaning three persons of divinity or of the divine nature. That statement is silent about how each one of them is of the divine nature. Neither does it assume that they must be equal persons to be of the divine nature.

Notice the following quotations.

“The word "Godhead" is a simple doublet of the less frequently occurring "Godhood." Both forms stand side by side in the Ancræn Riwele (about 1225 AD), and both have survived until today, though not in equally common use...” (Bible Study Tools).

“History and Etymology for godhead: Middle English godhed, from god + -hed -hood; akin to Middle English -hod -hood” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 1828).

“**godhead** c.1200, from **GOD** (Cf. *god*) + M.E. *-hede*, cognate with **-HOOD** (Cf. *-hood*) and Ger. *-heit*. Along with *maidenhead*, this is the sole survival of this form of the suffix. O.E. had *godhad* "divine nature.” (Etymology Dictionary)

The short of it is that the word godhead developed from the suffix “*-hede*” (godhede/godhod) or “*hood*” just like any other such word. Another example is maidenhood/maidenhead. The suffix ‘-hood’ simply implies the state or essence of an object/noun. For example, personhood is the essence of being a person.

What is clear is that personhood is not the person but is possessed by the person, maidenhood is not the maiden but is possessed by the maiden, manhood is not the man, but is possessed by the man. Similarly, godhood/godhead is not the God but is possessed by the God. Neither is there any meaning relating to a family or gathering of entities in the use of the suffix -hood/-head.

It is important to realise here that God, the source and possessor of all divine nature is described as follows in the Bible.

1 Timothy 6:16 Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.

This is direct reference to the Father. As we have seen before, only the Father cannot be seen and dwells in unapproachable light. The Father only has that immortality, the essence of the godhead, divinity or divine nature.

But more importantly for us, the Father can give His immortality. The Father has given that immortality to His Son and to the believers.

John 5:26 For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself.

2 Peter 1:4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these **ye might be partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Romans 2:7 To them who by patient continuance in well doing **seek for** glory and honour and **immortality**, eternal life:

1 Corinthians 15:53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this **mortal must put on immortality**.

Thus the very divine nature and immortality that belongs to the Father ONLY, the great source of all, is given by the Father to Christ, and through Christ is shared with us in the Spirit.

Therefore, while the word godhead in modern times is often used in place of god, and is also used with the concept of a family of three divine entities, in the past it was not like that at all. It is wise for us to retain the correct meanings of words as they were used in the Bible and in the writings of the past if we are to understand what those writers from the past were understanding. The modern spin of the word godhead is misleading many into believing a new concept of a family of three god-persons, which godhead did not mean before.

To conclude the discussion of the meaning of the word godhead, we note the following. It is surprising that the trinity doctrine is put together to explain the One God, and yet the doctrine never considers clearly what that one God, a unity of three persons, really is. That part is often left to the word mystery or to the multiple opposing conceptualisations. The result of this lack of clarity results in the confusion of terms as we saw above.

Thus, we can affirm that the word Godhead does not mean the same as the word God or phrase 'one God'. Therefore, EGW's statement cannot align with the trinitarian statement. In other words, when EGW says "three living persons of the heavenly trio" that cannot mean the same as 'One God – a unity of three co-eternal persons'. Clearly, EGW does not support the trinity by that phrase.

So is the Father all divinity? Yes.

Is the Son all divinity? Yes.

And as EGW wrote, is the Holy Spirit A SPIRIT IN all divinity? Yes.

Does this have anything to do with making one God out of three co-eternal persons? No.

Thus, the fact that EGW said "There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers -- the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" does not mean she was affirming the trinity. The word three does not belong to the trinity doctrine. It is a simple count to three. Thus, there is no argument that there are three, The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The article should not try to make the count of three to be a trinitarian idea. Neither is unity a trinitarian idea. The trinity doctrine claims far more than just counting three persons and knowing the concept of unity. The trinity doctrine purports to make One God out of three persons. We cover this from a different perspective in our book titled "Deconstructing the three-in-one god doctrine thought process".

There is another word that the article should have considered carefully, the word person. We know that during the time of the SDA pioneers, the word person was debated. Here is a quote from that time.

"There is one question which has been much controverted in the theological world upon which we have never presumed to enter. It is that of the personality of the Spirit of God. Prevailing ideas of person are very diverse, often crude, and the word is differently understood; so that unity of opinion on this point cannot be expected until all shall be able to define precisely what they mean by the word, or until all shall agree upon one particular sense in which the word shall be used. But as this agreement does not exist, it seems that a discussion of the subject cannot be profitable, especially as it is not a question of direct revelation. We have a right to be positive in our faith and our statements only when the words of Scripture are so direct as to bring the subject within the range of positive proof." (The Spirit of God; Its Offices and Manifestations, pp. 8, 9. 1877)



We note here that the meaning of the word ‘person’ as it relates to the identity of God is a subject of discussion. There are many ways the word ‘person’ can be understood. Not only that, careful reading of the EGW quote in question would leave the reader wondering what the word ‘person’ means. That is because EGW says that the Father and the Son are ‘all the fullness of the Godhead’ but the Comforter is the Spirit IN them. If so, how can one person of the Godhead, the Comforter, fully equal and of the same nature and existence as the other two, the Father and the Son, be a Spirit IN the other two persons of the same nature and existence? Can a person be inside two other persons who are just like him in every way? And even more baffling, can one person be simultaneously in two other persons at the same time? What does person mean in this case?

For a detailed study of the use of the words ‘person’ and ‘personality’ by EGW, we refer the reader to the writing found at this link (<https://asitreads.com/person-personality-problem/>).

## 2.6 Acceptance of the unintelligible

The article wrote: “God himself is a mystery, how much more the incarnation or the Trinity. However, that should not trouble us as long as the different aspects of these mysteries are clearly taught in Scripture. Even though we may not be able to comprehend logically the various aspects of the trinity, we need to try and understand as best as we can the scriptural teaching regarding it. All attempts to explain the Trinity will fall short, “especially when we reflect on the relation of the three persons to the divine essence ... all analogies fail us and we become deeply conscious of the fact that the Trinity is a mystery far beyond our comprehension. It is the incomprehensible glory of the Godhead.” Therefore, we do well to admit that “man cannot comprehend it and make it intelligible. It is intelligible in some of its relations and modes of manifestations, but unintelligible in its essential nature.””

In this statement, in reference to the trinity, the article uses the words:

“mystery” three times;

“not be able to comprehend logically”;

“far beyond our comprehension”;

“incomprehensible”;

“cannot comprehend it and make it intelligible”; and,

“unintelligible in its essential nature”.

We find a lot of issues with this reasoning. Firstly, by the statement “God himself is a mystery, how much more the incarnation or the Trinity” the article is comparing “God himself” to the trinity. But we understand that to mean that the trinity is more of a mystery than God himself? We wonder who is God himself, from a trinitarian point of view, if God himself is not the trinity. The article reveals that well-known trinitarian confusion in identifying who God is and what the trinity is. While the Trinity is by

definition the God, the article compares the Trinity with the God as if that is a different thing from the Trinity.

The trinity doctrine teaches that the one God of the Bible is “a unity of three co-eternal persons” which is the trinity or the triune God. If the article had taken time to think clearly, it could have easily seen that if God is one person whom it is referring to as “himself”, then he is a single individual not a composite of three persons. In other words, the article could have noted the confusion in its own words and meanings.

As pointed out before, trinitarian thinking does not identify clearly what its process of uniting three persons results in. Does it result in:

- A. a fourth intelligent person, speaking and acting on his own, but who has three intelligent persons inside him, or,
- B. an entity which is not an intelligent person, like a committee/government/family of three persons, or,
- C. just a concept of three individual intelligent persons united in thought and action, or,
- D. the one nature that all the three persons have that makes them one, or,
- E. some other idea?

It is essential that we know who the one God is in exact terms. The Bible requires that we know him and identify him (John 17:3, 1 Corinthians 8:6). Just to be clear, we are not discussing the nature of the One God, but the identity of the One God.

To put it more in perspective, let us think about the scene in heaven. On arrival in heaven, how many persons, addressed as One God and as ‘him’ will we see there? If we see three, which one of them is the One God? If none of them is the One God, then where is the One God?

There is no need for us to speculate what the scene in heaven is like. In all the visions of the scene before the throne of God, there is only One God on the throne, and that is God the Father.

Secondly, let us separate doctrine from biblical texts. If biblical text is a tree, then doctrine is piece of furniture such as a table. We mean that doctrine is created by people using biblical texts in a certain way just as much as a table is created from a tree by a carpenter using his skills. The process of forming doctrine includes the work of a mind that chooses to understand and connect verses in a certain way. The trinity as a doctrine, is crafted using biblical text according to the thought process of a trinitarian mind. We do not say this to mean that it is wrong to craft doctrine, but simply to isolate the nature of doctrine from the nature of biblical text. The trinity doctrine was worked out by people, like most doctrines, it is not a direct copy of any biblical text, not even a sum of any number of texts.

Thirdly, we submit that these two can be unintelligible (un-understandable), i.e. it is either the biblical text is unintelligible or the doctrine is unintelligible as follows.

**Firstly**, if the article’s point is that there are verses in the Bible about the identity of God that are hard to understand, then we agree. However, if that is so, it would be completely illogical to use the same verses that are not understood to craft a doctrine. Logically, one expects that the meaning of a biblical verse is clearly understood before it is used to craft or defend a doctrine. If the meaning of verses is speculated on, then the doctrine formed out of speculated verses is many more times a speculation.

Thus, we submit that if the article means that there are unintelligible biblical texts used to craft or defend the trinity doctrine, then the doctrine itself should not be crafted to start with. It is like using fouled ingredients in a recipe. The outcome will be just as fouled if not more fouled because of the combined effect of fouled ingredients.

At the same time, if the biblical text is clearly understood, then it follows that a doctrine built from them will also be well understood. Thus, one cannot make the claim that anything about a doctrine is unintelligible. Doctrine can only go as far as that which is intelligible.

**Secondly**, if the article's point is that the doctrine is unintelligible, whether wholly or in part, then we have no less a problem. Doctrine is a teaching. Teaching is transfer of understanding from one to another. It follows all logic that before one can teach, one has to understand what one wants to teach. Imagine your teacher saying before the class, "I am going to teach you mathematics, it is a mystery to me, I don't understand it, but just accept it to be correct, at least some parts of it we can understand". One would do well to advise the teacher to go back and understand what mathematics before teaching it. How then can followers of the Bible, the most enlightened book, make such unintelligible claims?

We are therefore surprised that the article tries to comfort the readers into reading ideas which the article clearly acknowledges that they are unintelligible. Moreso, the churches also claim that it is a must to accept the unintelligible doctrine of the trinity otherwise we will not receive salvation.

The Bible requires us to have sound doctrine (Titus 1:9; 2:1) not unintelligible doctrine. The God of the Bible is not the author of confused ideas, and neither can be his followers.

If we accept something that is unintelligible, then what is the safeguard against being foolish and confused? Please get the point straight. In any human endeavour that involves thought, when an idea is unintelligible that is considered an undeniable reason either to discard it or to reconsider it until it is clearly intelligible. If confusion becomes acceptable as normal, what will stop more confusion from being acceptable. Accepting only that which is understandable is the only safeguard against accepting total confusion.

Let us hear counsel from EGW about this.

"...Those Jewish teachers spoke in monotonous tones, and the plainest and most precious scriptures were made **uninteresting and unintelligible**, buried under such a mass of tradition and learned lore that after the Rabbis had spoken, the people knew less of the meaning of the Scriptures than before they listened..." {CE 142.2}

**While the Rabbis spoke unintelligible things, Christ taught intelligible things, easy to understand.** Many people, even those who accept the trinity doctrine as truth, will attest to the experience described here, i.e. they get no clear understanding of the trinity doctrine after the teacher of the doctrine is finished "teaching" it.

"And yet, though His doctrine seemed new to the people, it was in fact not a new doctrine, but the revelation of the significance of that which had been taught from the beginning. It was His design that His disciples should take the plain, unadulterated truth for the guide of their life. They were not to add to His words, or give a forced meaning to His utterances. They were not to put a mystical interpretation upon the plain teaching of the Scriptures, and draw from theological stores to build up some man-made theory. It was through putting a mystical meaning upon the plain words of God, that sacred and vital truths were made of little significance, while the theories of men were made prominent. It was in this way that men were led to teach for doctrines the commandments of men, and

that they rejected the commandment of God, *that they might keep their own tradition*” (The Review and Herald, June 2, 1896) {5BC 1089.1}.

Suffice to say that the idea of making three persons unite into one god is based on tradition of counsels which “add to His words”, “give a forced meaning”, “puts a mystical interpretation upon plain teaching” and is “man-made theory”. It is this confusion that man choose to believe than to believe the plain scriptures which clearly state that the One God of the Bible is God the Father only (John 17:3; Acts 3:13 read with 5:30; Romans 15:6; 1 Corinthians 8:5-6, Ephesians 4:6, 1 Timothy 2:5).

Another point is this. We know that the God of the Bible is more intelligent than we can even imagine. Not just that, we are also told that God gives wisdom to those who ask Him for it. If then the Spirit of God is in us, by which we receive his wisdom and sound mind, how can we be the authors of unintelligible doctrines? Again, we do not see how it is possible for the believers in the God of the Bible to author unintelligible doctrines, if indeed the infinitely intelligible Spirit of God is in them.

Take this for an example. Adventists do not believe in speaking in tongues as practiced in Pentecostal churches. One of the reasons is that the tongues spoken in the Pentecostal churches are unintelligible (Testimonies for the Church 1:411-414), but language, by definition must be intelligible. Thus, we know as Adventists that, that which is unintelligible is not acceptable by biblical standards, because it is unintelligible. How then can we reject one unintelligible then turn around and ourselves teach the unintelligible? For what reason should any man craft an idea that is unintelligible, or use a biblical verse they consider to be unintelligible to craft a doctrine?

We therefore see no biblical support nor logical reason for the article to persuade its readers into accepting an unintelligible doctrine. If the article knows, as it does, that what it presents is in part or completely unintelligible, then it would do well to write nothing about it until it can present intelligible ideas. If unintelligible be at all acceptable, then let it be acceptable in terms of verses that we cannot clearly understand and hence cannot use in doctrine, not in terms of unintelligible doctrines that are crafted based partially understood or completely un-understandable biblical texts.

Simply put, unintelligible ideas are confusing and confusion, which by definition are contrary to all scriptural revelation.

## 2.7 What is a mystery?

In relation to the so-called trinity mystery, the article wrote:

“Even though we may not be able to comprehend logically the various aspects of the trinity, we need to try and understand as best as we can the scriptural teaching regarding it.”

Thus, we see here that the article uses the word mystery to mean unintelligible or not able to be understood. The problem is that the Bible does not use the term mystery from that angle. What is considered a mystery in the Bible is that which has not been revealed. Since the article promised to stay away from that which has not been revealed, and a mystery is that which has not been revealed, then it follows that the article should not present to us a mystery trinity doctrine, because by presenting to us a mystery trinity doctrine, the article is presenting that which has not been revealed. Further, since the trinity doctrine, as the article says, is a mystery, it means it has not been revealed, and

hence the article has no reason to try to explain it, since the article's aim is only to present that which was revealed. No one can and should ever try to present that which was not revealed. If one presents that which was not revealed, it follows that the doctrine has another source other than the Bible. For we ask, who revealed what was not revealed in the Bible to you?

Let us consider what the word 'mystery' means in the Bible (KJV). The word 'mystery' occurs 22 times in the NT. The word 'mysteries' occurs 5 times in the NT. In both cases (plural or singular), it is the same Greek word "**μυστήριον *mysterion***" (moos-tay'-ree-on) described as "from a derivative of μύω *mýō* (to shut the mouth); a secret or "mystery" (through the idea of silence imposed by initiation into religious rites):—mystery".

Here are some verses showing that a mystery is known, spoken, kept (stewardship of the mysteries), and shown to some but not to all.

Mark 4:11 And he said unto them, Unto you it is *given to know the mystery* of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables:

Romans 11:25 For *I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery*, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

Romans 16:25 Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, *according to the revelation of the mystery*, which was kept secret since the world began,

1 Corinthians 2:7 But *we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom*, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:

1 Corinthians 15:51 Behold, *I shew you a mystery*; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

In addition, Colossians 2:2 is not saying God is a mystery, but that the mystery belongs to God.

In the NT, the word mystery is used to refer to that which is hidden to others, and yet known to those to whom the mystery has been revealed. Romans 16:25 makes the point very clear. The mysteries of Christ were kept hidden since the beginning of the world, but now are made known in the gospel that Paul preaches. So, mystery does not mean something that is unintelligible to you, but that which is not revealed to you. Thus, if the trinity was at all a mystery to all people, no man would have the capacity to say it means 'a unity of three persons' because that would not have been revealed to us. If any man could say that, then the trinity would cease to be a mystery to him, since it would be revealed to him.

In short, the article is simply claiming to know and explain that which was not revealed and at the same time claiming not to mention and explain anything that was not revealed.

Before we leave this point, it is important to note again that at no time does the Bible refer to the identity of God as a mystery whether as hidden or unintelligible.

## 2.8 Finding the elements of the trinity

The article wrote:2

“In studying the Trinity in scripture, we need to be aware that we can only ever achieve a partial understanding of what the Trinity is. As we listen to God’s Word, certain elements of the Trinity will become clear, others will remain a mystery.”

In the preceding section, we understood that a mystery is that which has not been revealed.

That raises a question here. If the entire trinity has not been revealed (made known), is it possible to know the elements of it without knowing what the whole is? Let us ask this question from different angles. Does the Bible tell anyone that ‘these are elements of a trinity, these are the intelligible ones and these are the unintelligible ones’? Or is it that one who already has the elements of a trinity goes looking for them in the Bible and finds them? If not all the elements of the trinity have been revealed, how does one know what the trinity is if one does not have its full picture?

Firstly, you may recall that we asked the question, “which one comes first”? Was the trinity doctrine crafted first, then the evidence of it looked for in the Bible, or does the reading of the Bible reveal the concept of making one god out of three persons which the reader never had before they read the Bible?

According to the article, elements of the trinity doctrine are found in the Bible, but only partially. That means, not all the elements are found in the Bible. There is enough for a partial understanding of the trinity doctrine, other elements remaining not clearly understood.

We see two ways of coming up with doctrine. The first is that as we study the Bible, the entire doctrine becomes clear. In other words, the entire truth about the doctrine must become clear as we study the Bible.

The second is the method that the article is using. In this method, we understand some elements of the truth but not others. The problem is this. If we have not understood all of the elements of the doctrine from the Bible, then how do we know what the doctrine is? In other words, the article is clearly admitting that it takes more than what is revealed in the Bible to make up the trinity doctrine, because some of the elements that make up the doctrine are not understood based on what is in the Bible.

We gave an example of a person who has never heard of or seen a bus and does not even know the term ‘bus’. We showed that such a person can never figure out a bus by being shown the hints of parts of a bus.

That’s the conundrum the article is in. You cannot build a complete view of the three in one god if you only have seen a few elements of it, unless you already knew what the trinity three in one god is in full or you fill in the blanks to make the rest of the idea. That’s the only way you can know that some elements are missing and some are revealed.

In other words, the article is saying we don’t know what elements of the trinity are missing but we know what they will be, thus we can define the whole trinity doctrine. We see lots of confusion in this thinking.

Let us make another analogy. Ever heard of the Piltdown man hoax made to support the evolution theory? It went like this. According to Wikipedia, a man named Charles Dawson and a colleague claimed to have found “a human-like skull” at one time and later found “a jawbone, more skull fragments, a set of teeth, and primitive tools” in some place near Piltdown, East Sussex. Out of these (let us call them hints), a whole ape-like man was constructed including eyes, ears, hairs, legs, height, width and everything that can be outwardly seen on an ape. The illustration of the apelike man even included the ape in a walking pose complete with the natural environment around it. All that was out of a few bones.

If you think that was going too far on the part of Charles Dawson, then try the Nebraska man. The Nebraska man, another complete ape-like man was constructed based on one tooth only, ye, you read right, just one tooth, which turned out later to be a pig’s tooth.

These two examples help graphically present our point. The reader will agree that it was impossible for Charles Dawson and colleague to build a whole animal based on a few bones, except as they had prior knowledge of the other missing elements of the animal, or except they made assumptions about those missing elements. In the same way, we see no way one can construct a complete identity of a three in one god where some elements of the three in one god are missing. Two things may happen. Either the doctrine is based on incorrectly understood verses plus a lot of imagination such as the Nebraska man was based on incorrectly identified tooth and a large dose of imagination. Or, the article already had a doctrine in mind as both ideas of the Piltdown and the Nebraska men were already in the minds of their makers well before any fossil was found. As such the trinity doctrine was itself existing long before the creator of it read the Bible, if he ever did.

To end this section, we propose that the very fact that some elements of the three in one god doctrine are unknown puts a stop to the construction of the doctrine. If the article fills in the gaps of the unknowns with speculation, then the article is contradicting itself. The article is supposed to tell the reader only that which is revealed and stop there.

## 2.9 Need for a clear word

Next, the article wrote;

“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deut 29:29).  
Where we do not have a clear word from Scripture, silence is golden.”

It is interesting that the article mentions Deuteronomy 29:29 immediately after claiming that the doctrine is partly unintelligible. The unintelligible part of the doctrine is obviously not revealed, but assumed. Is there a clear word to make one God out of three persons?

What one would expect is that a doctrine must be worded so that it starts and ends only with what is clearly stated in the Bible. Based on this intelligible information, i.e. the Bible’s own words and phrases, the doctrine formed thereof can never be unintelligible because the unintelligible concepts would be a part of it. Thus, using the Bible alone, at the very best, the doctrine would simply say that there is Father, Son and Spirit, but never be able to say the three are persons of one God. If at all it is true that “Where we do not have a clear word from Scripture, silence is golden” then silence is golden applies right here. Nobody has a clear word instructing anyone to make one god out of three persons. It is never possible to state that “God exists in three persons” based on what the Bible actually says. Nowhere is that clearly stated as required by Deuteronomy 29:29.

This fact is clearly found in Adventist trinitarian literature. Like the article, several other Adventist trinitarian articles agree that the idea of a three in one god is not stated clearly in scripture. It is an assumption.

“While 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.” — (Adventist Review, Vol. 158, No. 31, p. 4) (emphasis added)

“The concept of the Trinity, namely the idea that the three are one, *is not explicitly stated but only assumed.*” — Fernando L. Canale, The Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology, Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia, Volume 12, page 138, ‘Doctrine of God’ (emphasis added)

Thus the trinity doctrine in as far as it makes one god out of a unity of three persons has no clear word in the Bible, not even a suggestion.

Notice what the article wrote next:

“Several passages in the Old Testament suggest or even imply that God exists in more than one person, not necessarily in a trinity, but at least in a binary.”

To say “suggest or even imply” is the very language one uses when there is no clear word. The Bible does not ‘suggest or even imply’ that God sent his Son to the earth. There is a clear word for that. So, one cannot say that any part of the Bible ‘suggests or even implies’ that God sent His Son. We say ‘the Bible states that God sent His Son to us’ because we have clear word for it.

Therefore, we submit that a revelation is a not suggestion or an implication, but a clear statement, one that leaves no doubt. Logically, a revelation is clear, that’s what revealed means. Some of the synonyms for the word reveal are ‘make plain’, ‘bring to light’, ‘divulge’, ‘explain’, ‘expose’ and ‘let out’. All these are contrary to ‘assumption’. Some synonyms for assume are ‘hypothesise’, ‘theorise’, ‘speculate’, ‘suspect’, etc. Surely one would not want to build a salvational doctrine on speculation, theory, hypothesis or suspicion.

Secondly, if the OT texts do not make clear whether God exists as a trinity or at least binary, what is the benefit of assuming that it does?

We therefore conclude that while the article (and many other trinitarian articles) knows that the doctrine is not stated clearly, and that in presenting a biblical doctrine, one must present that which is clearly stated, the article goes ahead to present ideas which are not revealed in the Bible anyway. This is justified by saying the trinity is partly unintelligible, an argument which proves and certifies the very extra-biblical origins of the logic that makes three persons into one God.

Notice that while trinitarian writers clearly admit that the doctrine is not found explicit in the bible, they still argue for its acceptance as a rule of faith and a salvational fundamental belief. How can something that is assumed to be true be essential for salvation? Why would one assumption be considered true, if all are free to assume whichever way they like?



But we believe that there is no need to assume anything about the identity of God. In our article, “Tell me nothing but the Truth” we focus only on what was clearly stated about who the one God is.

### **3 Conclusion**

In this writing, we set out to review the initial statements found in Gerhard’s article titled “The Trinity in Scripture”. In doing so, we realised that the ideas in the article are commonly expressed by many Adventist trinitarians. Thus, we tried to review Gerhard’s article is as far as it represents trinitarian thought in general.

We did this review to find out if the article lives up to its claim to present that which is true and is revealed by a clear word. Our findings are summarised below.

### **4 Summary**

1. While the article claims that “in recent times some Adventists have begun to question its [trinity doctrine’s] validity”, this is not true. Questioning the validity of the trinity is neither a recent development nor one that has just begun in Adventism. It has been demonstrated that the validity of the trinity doctrine has been questioned continually since before the trinity doctrine was officially adopted by the Seventh Day Adventist Church in 1980.
2. The article does not clearly affirm the established knowledge that the trinity doctrine was recently accepted into Adventism. Contrary to this knowledge, the article makes the questioning of the validity of the trinity doctrine a recent occurrence.
3. The article makes the classical trinitarian thinking assumptions. The first is that divinity can be proven by listing some attributes of it. The Bible does not prove divinity, it just declares it to be so. Without considering His attributes, God is declared to be God. To enumerate the attributes of God is to purport to make a human mind capable of understanding divinity. If the attributes of God could be used to prove Him, then one would lose the grounds to claim that it is a mystery. The second assumption, which is not just confined to trinitarianism, is to think of time as the attribute that defines eternity, and hence the qualify the existence of God. If only
4. The article fails to identify the core concept of the trinity, which is that of making one God out of three persons. Thus, the article fails to objectively analyse the objections to the trinity concept.
5. The article assumes that EGW used the word ‘Godhead’ to express the same idea as the word ‘trinity’. However, a careful study of the meanings shows that the meanings of these two words are different and that if the word ‘godhead’ is substituted for the meaning of the word ‘trinity’, EGW’s statement do not retain the same meaning.
6. The article asserts that the trinity doctrine is at least partially unintelligible but must be accepted despite that some of its aspects cannot be understood. This is contrary to scripture and all logic. It is essential that teaching based on the Bible be clearly understood as the Bible demands that believers should have sound doctrine.
7. The article understands the word ‘mystery’ to mean unintelligible or not understood. This understanding of the word ‘mystery’ is incorrect. The scripture presents a mystery as something that is not revealed. Thus, if the trinity doctrine is at all a mystery to anyone, then it has not been revealed to that person. How then could it

have been known if it was not from the revelation of God? That confirms that the trinity doctrine has its source from outside of the Bible.

8. The article makes an important clarification which is that not all elements of the trinity doctrine can be understood from the Bible. According to the article, some elements of the trinity doctrine are understood and some are not understood in the Bible. This thinking does not add up because doctrine must be what is understood from the Bible only. It is a submission of this article that it takes more than what can be understood from the Bible to make up the trinity doctrine.
9. The article continuously flouts the boundaries of biblical interpretation set out in Deuteronomy 29:29 and its own claim that “Where we do not have a clear word from Scripture, silence is golden.” If only a clear word from the Bible is required to make doctrine, then there could never be the trinity doctrine. There is no clear word that requires us to make a one god out of a unity of three persons. Neither is there a clear word that makes the sonship of Christ metaphorical.

Thus, in conclusion, we find that, in its opening statements is setting a stage with ideas that do not line up with what the Bible says and requires. While the article claims to be presenting what is clear word, it actually makes one assumption after another. In some cases, the article totally contradicts the facts of the matter.

Above all, without clearly describing what the trinity is, there is now meaning to the defence of it. For one to defend the trinity, there is need to define the core concept first. The core concept of the trinity is that one god is of a unity of three persons. It follows from this concept that what or who that one god is needs to be defined with a clear word from the Bible. Such a clear word does not exist anywhere in the Bible.

In Part 2 of this series, we focus on the articles claims about the Old Testament’s hints of the trinity doctrine.

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