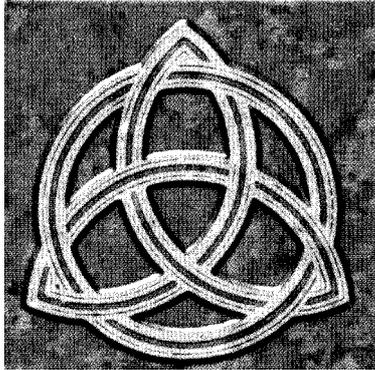


DODGERS OF THE TRINITY DOCTRINE IN HISTORY

(FROM THE TIME OF ISRAEL DOWN TO AND INCLUDING
THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH).

by Max Hatton



I haven't always been a Christian. I was raised a Methodist. My Dad was a Roman Catholic and my Mother a Methodist. I could just as easily have become a Roman Catholic. Dad was apparently happy to tell Mum that they would not argue over religion and that she should bring up my sister and I as Methodists.

Unfortunately, from age fifteen to twenty nine I became a real man of the world and drank, smoked, gambled, and you name it! I had very little respect for the Churches, I contended that they fight and argue among themselves yet each claims to teach the Bible but they all teach different things!

My experience has been that many people will dogmatically defend the religion they were raised in. This never made sense to me because there are so many different religions. So, when I

became interested in religion, I set out to discover what was truth. However, in my Scriptural immaturity I made a big mistake.

For nearly five years I followed the Jehovah's Witness religion having been tutored by a friend that I worked with. When it later became clear to me that the Watch Tower promoted fraudulent teachings I promptly ceased association with them.

About two years passed by before I became a Seventh-day Adventist. The first year was spent trying to understand things about God for I decided that I must go back to square one again. I entered the second year a strongly convinced Trinitarian. During that year I became convicted that the Law and the Sabbath were essential for Christians. Then, after studying other matters, I rejoiced in baptism and becoming an SDA.

The single thing that has astonished me most on my journey as a Christian is the length to which people will go in order to try and justify the course they have adopted even when the evidence shows them to be in error. They will do all sorts of things and say all sorts of thing to try and justify their error.

To me the absolute basic matter for me to come to terms with was Who and What God is. This paper will reveal some of the astonishing things Jews, Muslims, and Christians have said and done in order to dodge the truth of the Trinity doctrine or elements of it. They have deceived not only themselves but have kept millions in ignorance on the truth about God being a Trinity. My prayer is that you dear reader will be caused to rethink your position on the Trinity if you do not believe in it. On the other hand may my Trinitarian friends be strengthened in their faith in the subject as a result of what you read.

We necessarily commence our journey of discovery in Old Testament times.

THE OLD TESTAMENT:

Jesus is very much in the shadows in Old Testament times. He is very much there but, as it were, incognito. It is only in the light of the New Testament revelation that the shadows are dissipated. It is then that we are astonished at how much He had always been present with His people.

When God is first introduced to us in the opening verse of the Bible, He is described as *Elohim*. This is the plural of the word *El*. The title *Elohim* is used of false Gods but when the only true God is referred to it always has corresponding verbs which are in the singular. It seems clear enough that the One True God is both singular and yet, at the same time, plural. Here we have a hint of the Trinity, which would be later more clearly revealed, and of which Jesus is a Member.

If what we have just noted about the plurality of *Elohim* was an isolated instance of this sort of thing we might be content to just let it pass as an unusual peculiarity. However, it is far from being a lonely

example requiring us to accept that God is not just a solitary Being. Quite frequently we encounter other references to God and Lord in the Old Testament which are at the same time both singular and plural. Please note the following:

Genesis 1:26, 27 Here we find God saying, *Let us make man in our image, in our likeness (plural). . . .*
The record then says, *So God created man in his own likeness (singular).*
Genesis 3:22 *The man has now become like one of us.*
Genesis 11:7, 8 *let us go down and confuse their language. . . . So the LORD scattered them.*
Isaiah 6:8 *Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?'*

Many opponents of the Trinity doctrine suggest that God was talking to the angels in these references. Such an excuse for dodging the obvious cannot be accepted for man was made in the image of God – not the Angels. The same type of objectors usually try to dismiss the plural references as being merely the plural of majesty, but as G. A. F. Knight rightly observes:

That is to read into Hebrew speech a modern way of thinking. The kings of Israel and Judah are all addressed in the singular in our biblical records. A Biblical Approach to the Doctrine of the Trinity (Scottish Journal of Theology, Occasional Papers No. 1) Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh, 1953, page 20.

It is well known that those translations that describe God as LORD (all capitals) do this while recognising that the Tetragrammaton (Yahweh) is in the original. What can we say then when we read such verses as the following?

Genesis 19:24 *Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah – from the LORD out of the heavens.*
Zechariah 3:1, 2 *The LORD said to Satan, 'The LORD rebuke you, Satan!'*

We have to say that there are either two Yahweh's, or, that there are two involved in the complexity of Yahweh. Later revelation points us to the latter most definitely.

The Old Testament provides a very clear introduction to the complexity of God which culminates in the New Testament revelation of the Trinity doctrine.

THE JEWISH NEGATIVE RESPONSE TO THE OLD TESTAMENT REVELATION OF THE COMPLEXITY OF GOD:

It is enlightening to investigate the reaction of the Jews to material such as the above. The following comments have as their basis pages 32, 33 of Millard J. Erickson, *Making Sense of the Trinity*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids Michigan, 2000. But first of all a clarification on the terms "Talmud" and "Targum." **The Talmud** contained Jewish Commentary on the Old Testament and the **Targums** were paraphrases of the Old Testament.

Please get ready now for some examples of artful dodging among the Jews:

The *Book of Jubilees* (last half of second century B.C.) altered the reading of **Genesis 1:26, 27** in order to deal with the plurality displayed there. **Philo** claimed that God was merely addressing His subordinates, those He utilised in the creation process. The *Jerusalem Talmud* claimed that because **Genesis 1:27** referred to one God, **1:26** must do so also. Of course Trinitarians would have no argument with that except that we see clearly that the one God is shown not to be just a solitary Being.

Genesis 3:22 is where God says that "man has become like one of us." *The Book of Jubilees* deals with the problem by simply leaving the verse out. **Papias** (a Rabbi of Palestine – late first century) made the strange claim that Adam had become like an angel. *The Targum of Onkelos* (the earliest of the Targums) alters the passage considerably saying, "And the Lord God said, 'Behold, man is become singular in the world by himself.'" *The Palestinian Targum* and *the Jerusalem Targum* both claim that God was addressing angels.

Genesis 11:7 is the verse revealing that God said, "Let us go down and confuse their language." **Philo** gave a most amazing explanation of this verse. I quote from what Erickson page 32 says on this:

Philo's explanation was that God is surrounded by potencies, and when he said this, he was addressing those potencies. It was these powers who carried out the confusing of the languages, which God could not do himself, since that is an evil.

Erickson has a few more references on which he comments but the above is more than sufficient to show that the Jews just would not recognise the plurality of God despite the evidence. They were in no mind to accept the clearer evidence to come in *The New Testament* which enhances our understanding. It reveals more clearly the fact that the Holy Spirit is a person who is a member of the Trinity and also brings into clearer view the doctrine of the Trinity itself. The ability of people to dodge the obvious when it suits them is a source of complete amazement to those who have eyes to see.

THE JEWS FROM NEW TESTAMENT TIMES AND THE TRINITY:

With evidence like the above before us we can appreciate that it was not difficult for the first Christians to accept the Tri-unity of God, which was eventually formalised as the Doctrine of the Trinity. On the other hand resistance to the person of Jesus seems to have further hardened the Jews against such a teaching. The majority would not accept Jesus as the Messiah let alone Christian claims for His full Deity. Their resistance continued and later became further entrenched because of the influence of Moses Maimonides (1135-1204AD), a leading Jewish Philosopher of the Middle Ages. Loraine Boettner records some valuable information provided by Ex-Rabbi Leopold Cohn. He says:

*The reason that the Jews have become estranged from the doctrine of the Triune God is found in the teachings of Moses Maimonides. He compiled thirteen articles of faith which the Jews accepted incorporated in their liturgy. One of them is 'I believe with a perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be His name, is an absolute one' (Hebrew, 'Yachid'). This has been repeated daily by Jews in their prayers, ever since the twelfth century, when Moses Maimonides lived. This expression of an 'absolute one' is diametrically opposed to the word of God which teaches with great emphasis that God is not a 'Yachid,' which means an only one, or an 'absolute one,' but 'achid,' which means a united one. In Deuteronomy 6:4 God laid down for His people a principle of faith, which is certainly superior to that of Moses Maimonides, inasmuch as it comes from God Himself. We read, 'Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is ONE,' stressing the sense of the phrase 'one' by using not 'yachid,' which Moses Maimonides does, but 'achid,' which means a united one. **Studies in Theology**, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, Philadelphia, 1965, pages 152, 153.*

The plain facts are that Maimonides is quite out of harmony with *Deuteronomy 6:4* where God's oneness is revealed by the word *achid* which allows for a plurality in the oneness. A strict solitariness would require the word *Yachid* which Maimonides misleadingly uses. *Achid* is used of a husband and a wife becoming one flesh (*Genesis 2:24*), also of the two dreams of Pharaoh being one.

Maimonides was not the only Rabbi in the Christian era who tried to dodge or explain away the plural references to God, but he was without question the most influential.

Ex-Rabbi Leopold Cohn also draws attention to the Zohar (c.1290AD):

*It will interest the reader to know that the most sacred Jewish book, the Zohar, comments on Deuteronomy 6:4- 'Hear O Israel, Jehovah our God, Jehovah is one,' saying, 'Why is there need of mentioning the name of God three times in this verse?' Then follows the answer. 'The first Jehovah is the Father above. The second is the stem of Jesse, the Messiah who is to come from the family of Jesse through David. And the third is the way which is below (meaning the Holy Spirit who shows us the way) and these three are one.' According to the Zohar the Messiah is not only called Jehovah but is a very part of the Triune Jehovah. **Boettner Ibid.***

Obviously, some Jews have struggled to understand or accept the parts of their Scriptures where the complexity of God is clearly indicated. On the other hand some Jews have quite obviously dodged the evidence of Scripture and refused to accept that the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit form the Godhead or Trinity. It would not be fair to say that this denial is only on the part of the Jews. Some who call themselves Christian also have the same problem. Jehovah's Witnesses, Christadelphians, Mormons, Oneness Pentecostals, The United Church of God, are some notable examples of self-styled Christian groups dodging the Scriptural evidence.

THE EARLY CHURCH AND THE TRINITY:

In my book *Understanding the Trinity* on page 15, I provide a few references from early Church Fathers (Church leaders who followed on from the Apostles). I have two books in my library that provide many references to the Trinitarian style of comment by these men. I would recommend *God in Three Persons* by E. Calvin Beisner, Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton Illinois, 1984 and *The Triune God* by Edmund J. Fortman, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1972. I wish to give special mention to the book *The Trinity* by Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, and John W. Reeve, Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, 2002. The book contains about 26 pages on the Trinity in the 1st 2nd 3rd and 4th centuries. This is must reading for all those seriously wanting to understand the subject.

The early Church struggled to provide a complete definition of the Trinity that was satisfactory to all the evidence. No wonder for they were attempting to describe the indescribable God. The Bible nevertheless required an understanding and definition from the Scriptural evidence available. Because an acceptable description that satisfactorily embraced all of the Scriptural evidence had not been worked out many false concepts were proposed and defended stoutly by their advocates. Not the least of these was Arianism. This and other aberrations caused considerable dissension in the Church of the day. Nevertheless, the Trinity concept remained and was to triumph eventually into a formulation which too left much to be desired. R. A. Finlayson offers a concise explanation of the situation that developed:

*From the earliest extant records it is clear that the Church's doctrine taught that God made Himself known in the Person of Messiah Jesus, and that He had poured His Holy Spirit upon the Church. While no steps were taken in the earliest age of the Church to work these elements into a coherent doctrine of God as Trinity, there is the fact that when the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity came to be formulated, it was immediately accepted as an expression of what had been the faith of the Church from the beginning. One thing is clear, that the doctrine of the Trinity was not arrived at as a result of philosophic reasoning, but was due entirely to meditation on the facts of revelation given in the Scriptures of both the Old Testament and the New, and more especially on the facts concerning the Person of Christ, and God's relation to the world of men through His Spirit. It was indeed the denial of the doctrine through the rise of Gnosticism that shook the Church from its slumbers and compelled it to rethink and restate its dogma. **The Story of Theology**, The Tyndale Press, London, 1963, page 14.*

The doctrine of the Trinity has remained an essential foundation for Christian thinking and doctrine down to the present day. Unfortunately the traditional doctrine too contains elements of distortion which have created further problems in the Church. Other papers that I have made available have offered greater detail on the problems that I will outline here:

1. The Nicene Creed speaks of Jesus having been literally born from the Father.
2. This birth is said, in the doctrine acceptable at the time, to be an "eternal generation," meaning that Jesus is always being born from the Father.
3. The word *monogenes* which means *only* or *unique* was warped to mean *only begotten* in references that relate to Jesus – example **John 3:16**.
4. The early Latin versions of the Bible offered *unicus* where the Greek manuscripts had *monogenes*. The Latin Scholar Jerome offered in the *Latin Vulgate unigenitus* (meaning *Only begotten*) instead of *unicus* in references referring to Jesus in John's writings.
5. It is amazing how people will treat Scripture when it suits them!
There is no evidence that Scripture teaches that Jesus was born from God or that this process is continuing.
6. The evidence is that the Trinity doctrine that has come down to us via the Roman Catholic Church is a distorted version. It found its way through the Reformation and sad to say it became the Trinity doctrine of the Protestant Churches
7. *The Latin Vulgate* was **the** Bible of the middle ages and was influential in the preparation of the King James Version of 1611 A.D. This version was the Bible I first learned from and it, no doubt, has been, and still is, the Bible used by millions of Christians.
8. The consequence is that the majority of Christians today believe in the Roman Catholic version of the Trinity doctrine despite the fact that modern Scholarship has shown that the old renderings of verses like **John 3:16** are out of harmony with the facts. Modern translations

provide correct ways the verse should be rendered. Today, I normally use the *NewInternational Version*. I find it profitable however to use several versions in study.

Truth most certainly has its detractors and even the most religious people can become tools in the hands of the evil one even unwittingly.

The following discussions on the Muslims and the Seventh-day Adventists will reveal how the facts just presented impact upon their understanding of the Trinity doctrine.

THE MUSLIMS AND THE TRINITY DOCTRINE:

I think it might be beneficial to have a look at how the Muslims have related to the Trinity doctrine next.

Muhammad, the originator of the Muslim religion, lived from A.D. 570 to 632. Can you imagine the sort of Christianity that he encountered or heard of in his day? Let me recount some of the things he referred to that touch upon the Trinity doctrine so that we can see why he refused Christianity and was in many ways hostile to it.

“Apparently Muhammad had encountered certain Christians ... who taught something like this. God the Father had sexual intercourse with the virgin Mary, resulting in the conception of Jesus....it is not hard to see how an exaggerated devotion to Mary, together with Eastern portrayals of the Madonna and Child, might have reinforced Muslim misperception of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity....what is rejected in the Quran itself is not the proper Christian doctrine of the Trinity but rather a heretical belief in three gods.” Timothy George *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad?* Zondervan, 2002, pages 58, 59.

“Unbelievers are those that say: ‘God is one of three.’ There is but one God. If they do not desist from so saying those of them that disbelieve shall be sternly punished.” Surah 5:64, *The Koran* translated by N. J. Dawood, Penquin Books, 2003, page 87.

Obviously, Muhammad understood that Christians believed in Tritheism.

“Say: ‘God is One, the Eternal God. He begot none, nor was He begotten. None is equal to Him.’” Surah 112:1, 112:4, *The Koran*, page 434.

George *Ibid* page 76 advises, “Around the side of the beautiful Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, written in Arabic, are the words, God *has no son*.”

These words are obviously hostile and challenging to Christians.

“So believe in God and His apostles and do not say: ‘Three.’ Forbear, and it shall be better for you. God is but one God. God forbid that He should have a son!” Surah 4:171, *The Koran*, page 78.

In this brief encounter with the beliefs of Muslims it has become quite clear that their aversion to Christianity has been considerably reinforced by false portrayals of the Biblical doctrine of the Trinity. They despise the idea of God having a literal son, particularly do they shun the thought of God having sexual relationships with the virgin Mary. To them the Trinity is really Tritheism. None of these things is truly taught in the Word of God. What a shame that the vast numbers of Muslims in the world are scornful of Christianity at least partly because of misrepresentations of the Trinity doctrine. We have to conclude that Muhammad either dodged the truth about the Trinity or maybe he was misinformed about it. How these misconceptions can ever be rectified in the minds of Muslims today seems hardly possible. We must trust God to open up the way for us to accomplish this. Of course they have other wrong ideas beside the Trinity doctrine but these need not delay us here.

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND THE TRINITY:

Seventh-day Adventists are quite clearly Trinitarians. Item 2 of our Fundamental Beliefs reads as follows:

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. He is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation. (Deut. 6:4; 29:29; Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2; 1 Tim. 1:17; Rev. 14:6, 7.)”

It is unfortunately true that, as was stated by George Santayana, “*those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.*” His statement has sometimes been somewhat amended to something like “*Those who ignore the lessons of history are fated to repeat them.*” The experience of the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been that it developed its understanding of God moving through falsehoods such as Arianism to an eventual acceptance of the Biblical teaching on the Trinity. This was not without much pain but at least the lessons of history were learnt. Some groups never move forward from the aberrations they are involved with but this cannot be said of our Church. Sadly, while it cannot be said of our Church, it must be said of a small minority of our members.

These Non-Trinitarian members fall into the category of Semi-Arians. They believe that at some point in eternity Jesus was literally born from the Father. The Father is seen to be the supreme God and Jesus, it is claimed, is a lesser god. The point that cannot be denied is that they have two gods. This disqualifies them from being truly Adventist and more importantly from being true Bible believers for the Bible quite clearly teaches that there is but one True God – **James 2:19**, etc. You would think that the obvious fact that they are quite out of harmony with the truth about God would cause them to repent and turn back to faithfulness to God – their attitude and publications prove that this is not so. Their publications are deficient in that they rely very heavily on a twisted view of Ellen White’s writings. They are able to leave out evidence that does not suit them, apparently without shame. As already reported they seem to be quite happy to believe in two gods and when challenged by the fact, they just seem to retreat into silence. They reveal themselves to be experts at dodging. The truth is often cause for much sadness. Adventists sincerely regret the loss of these people to the service of God.

In the formative years of our Church we had no statement of beliefs but it gradually became apparent that such a statement was necessary. Some of our leading pioneers were quite vocally non-Trinitarian. They mostly came from a group that did not believe in the doctrine. They were initially quite Arian in their belief but gradually moved to Semi-Arianism and as the Church matured and settled down it became very clearly Trinitarian. The fact must not be overlooked that all the while other Trinitarian Christians were moving into our Movement in considerable numbers.

While there were still many Arians in the Church it was nevertheless moving into Trinitarianism in the late 1800’s but the matter was not settled in all minds. Samuel Spear, a non-Seventh-day Adventist had an article, ***Bible Doctrine of the Trinity*** published in the New York ***Independent*** on November 14, 1889. The Seventh-day Adventist Pacific Press published it as ***number 90 in the Bible Student Library series*** in 1892. The pamphlet is defective in some of its statements but this is not the important point. Obviously, to publish the pamphlet would be unthinkable if Trinitarianism was not acceptable among Adventists at the time.

In 1913 a statement of some of the points of our faith was published on page 21 of the October 9 edition of ***The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald***. The following is the section important for our study:

For the benefit of those who may desire to know more particularly the cardinal features of the faith held by this denomination, we shall state that Seventh-day Adventists believe, -

1. In the divine Trinity. This Trinity consists of the eternal Father, a personal, spiritual being, omnipotent, omniscient, infinite in power, wisdom, and love; of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the eternal Father, through whom all things were created, and through whom the salvation of the redeemed hosts will be accomplished; the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, the one regenerating agency in the work of redemption.

The ***Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*** for 1931 contained the following on page 377:

FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

2. That the Godhead, or Trinity, consists of the Eternal Father, a personal, spiritual Being, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, infinite in wisdom and love; the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Eternal Father, through whom all things were created and through whom the salvation

of the redeemed hosts will be accomplished; the Holy spirit, the third person of the Godhead, the great regenerating power in the work of redemption. Matt. 28:19.

Although written about 18 years apart the two statements are almost identical.

It cannot be disputed that Seventh-day Adventists have asserted their belief in the Trinity doctrine for many years now. However, in recent times, as reported above, a considerable amount of false information has been circularised by a few obviously misinformed disgruntled members who seem content to dodge the facts and maintain their error. This has created a small number of opposition groups here and there. Their intention is obviously to discredit the Church and to try and recruit further members in order to further their cause.

CONCLUSION:

Well there we have it. As Ripley said, "Truth is stranger than fiction." People who would claim to be stoutly defending the truth are all the while discrediting God and confusing His teachings. Jews, Christians, Muslims, some Seventh-day Adventists, none are immune from the "We are right at any cost," disease. Wars have raged over religious issues. This was another thing that turned me off religion in my early years and I think it is safe to say, it still turns many people away from considering any religion today. There is so much confusion caused by dodgers that it is quite disheartening to genuine seekers of truth. I sincerely grieve when I think of our lovely God surveying what his children have done with the truths of His word? How tremendously sad it must make Him.

It cannot be denied that there are literally billions of people on planet earth who are involved with false religion. Jesus asked the rhetorical question, "when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" – Luke 18:8. Praise God for we have the confidence to believe Jesus who said, "If you hold to my teachings, you are really my disciples, Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free" – John 8:31, 32. Yes, He will find faith on the earth among those who have sought and accepted the truth. Small in number perhaps but they will be there and they will honour Him. We will only be counted among them if we have put aside all tradition and error and accepted the truth. Please give us the grace and strength to do this Dear Lord.

What about me? Am I just a bigoted religionist too - one who is fascinated with error? Of course I believe that I am not. I invite anyone who would be willing to try me out to study my book *Understanding the Trinity* and other papers I can supply on the subject of the Trinity in order to see whether I am accepting the evidence or not. If you would like further information I can be contacted at my email address mhatton@bigpond.net.au

To all who truly believe I say:

Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the LORD our Maker,
for he is our God
and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock under his care.
Psalm 95:6, 7.