

Whidden, Woodrow, Jerry Moon, and John W. Reeve. *The Trinity: Understanding God's Love, His Plan of Salvation, and Christian Relationships*. Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2002. 288 pp.

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These authors address their work to Seventh-day Adventists (SDA) and deal with three major issues: (1) the revival of anti-Trinitarianism in Adventism; (2) the neglect of the theology of the Godhead; and (3) renewed awareness of the pioneers' views on this doctrine (7-9). Their aim is to involve SDAs in a deep and honest discussion of the Trinity. Plain language, openness, and working tools (such as a glossary at the beginning of each section), make this dialogue possible.

The book is divided in four sections. In section one (15-119), Whidden explores the biblical data that provide information about the Trinity. He focuses, not on God the Father, but on Christ's eternity and deity, the personhood and deity of the Holy Spirit, and the mysterious unity of the three persons of the Godhead. In this enterprise, Whidden uses the NT as his starting point and works back to the OT, following links and allusions provided by the texts.

According to Whidden the strongest biblical evidence for Jesus' deity is the NT ascription to Him of OT titles and attributes of Yahweh. The better-than-creation Jesus of *Hebrews* is approached and worshiped as Yahweh of the OT; the Alpha and Omega—attributes of Yahweh in the OT—of the *Apocalypse* is Jesus who shares the throne with the Father; and Jesus of the Gospel of John introduces Himself as the great "I AM," nomenclature for Yahweh. The most straightforward evidence for the Holy Spirit's personhood and deity are found in texts that speak of grieving (Eph 4:30) or blaspheming (Matt 12:31,32) the Spirit who is equated with God by means of Hebrew poetic parallelism.

In section two (121-160) Reeve explores the historical dimension of the doctrine of the Trinity. He provides an overview of the development of the doctrine from the first to the sixteenth centuries and acknowledges that these times witnessed the unwarranted import of unbiblical concepts from Greek philosophy into theology. But this does not deny the fact that the doctrine of the Trinity emerged from intense and honest study of the Bible. During the Early and Medieval periods of church history, the doctrine of the Trinity may have been altered but was certainly not an invented or altogether imported teaching.

In section three (161-238), Moon continues this historical enterprise from the period of the Reformation up to the time of the discussion of the doctrine in Seventh-day Adventism. He asserts, "During the Reformation the varieties of belief on the Trinity reflected the range of attitudes toward the authority of Scripture"

(181). Though they believed that the Bible was the sole basis for theology, the Reformers unwittingly retained many elements of the earlier doctrine of Trinity in their teachings. It was only with the radical rejection of tradition by the Anabaptists that the doctrine of the Trinity pointed in the direction of being genuinely biblical. This phenomenon influenced American denominational development, ushering in both anti-Trinitarian and Trinitarian theologies.

Moon distinguishes five major periods in the development of Trinitarianism in Seventh-day Adventism. In the initial period (1846-1888), SDA teaching on the matter was dominated by the Unitarian and Restorationist (Christian Connexion) theology largely because several Adventist pioneers had come from these denominations. However, during the second period (1888-1898), because of the emerging Christ-centered theology, an increasing number of SDAs became dissatisfied with the earlier anti-Trinitarian trend. The years 1898-1915, the third period, witnessed a historic paradigm shift caused in part by Ellen White's clear Trinitarian statements in publications such as *The Desire of Ages*. The next period, 1915-1946, saw the decline of anti-Trinitarianism. The last phase, extending from 1946 to the present, has seen Trinitarianism dominate the Adventist theological scene.

In concluding section three, Moon provides an extensive study of Ellen G. White's role in the settlement of the doctrine of the Trinity among SDAs. He acknowledges that there was progression in her understanding of the doctrine but she never contradicted herself (206). It is also here that Moon deals with a crucial question that is at the heart of the Adventist Trinitarian debate: Does the shift from the anti-Trinitarian to Trinitarianism indicate apostasy, or is it the result of progress in Bible study? Moon argues for the latter position. Indeed, Adventist pioneers first rejected this doctrine because of its philosophical connotations acquired in the Early, Medieval, and Reformation periods of Christianity. But as SDAs advanced in their study of Scripture, its teaching on the Trinity became evident. The only remaining task then was to purge this teaching of its philosophical additions. In the second half of the twentieth century, this task was successfully accomplished and SDAs now adhere to a really biblical doctrine of the Trinity.

*The Trinity* would have been lamentably incomplete without section four (239-281) in which Whidden returns with some theological and practical reflections on the biblical and historical information previously discussed. Theologically, the doctrine of the Trinity touches on love, the essential characteristic of the nature of both God and humans. God's love is not only the model of our love but also the source of our love.

In addition, the concept of the Trinity is foundational to several crucial Christian doctrines such as Christology, Pneumatology, Anthropology, Revelation, Atonement, the Great Controversy, Judgment and Salvation. The doctrine of the Trinity constitutes the cornerstone of all Christian doctrines. Without it Christianity would lose its identity and uniqueness. In practical terms this doctrine deeply

influences several aspects of our existence such as ethics, home and church life, gender issues, and leadership.

Although not scholarly in approach, *The Trinity* is a valuable acquisition for all SDAs. With its openness and directness, accessible language and candid spirit, the book proves a profitable tool for Adventists in their encounter with anti-Trinitarians. It is also a reliable resource for teachers of Adventist history and theology. I would only suggest that such discussions will also be welcome on the scholarly level.

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