

STATEMENT DJ535

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES AND THE TRINITY**A comparison of the historical Christian doctrine of the Trinity with the theology of the Watchtower**

The doctrine of the Holy Trinity has been consistently misunderstood, probably more than any other teaching of the Bible. Frequently investigation into the doctrine of the Trinity has been dismissed from serious discussion or study by invoking the time-worn assertions — "It's a great mystery" or "This is incomprehensible" — thus discouraging many from investigating the scriptural basis of the doctrine.

Due principally to this attitude as well as certain complex aspects of the Trinity doctrine itself, there has been a revival of anti-Trinitarian heresies during the past one hundred and fifty years, and they have gone largely unanswered. Prominent among those groups rejecting the historic doctrine of the Trinity are Mormonism, Christian Science, Unity, Spiritism, and Jehovah's Witnesses — i.e., The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.

According to Jehovah Witnesses, the Trinity is a satanic dogma of apostate Christianity that prevents people from knowing the true God, Jehovah. The Watchtower puts it this way:

"The doctrine in brief is that there are three gods in one: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. . .the Holy Spirit is not a person and is therefore not one of the gods of the Trinity. . .the Trinity doctrine was not conceived by Jesus or the early Christians. . .the obvious conclusion therefore is that Satan is the originator of the Trinity doctrine."¹

Since the Watchtower denies that the Trinity doctrine is biblical; and since they complicate the issue by defining it incorrectly — the task of true Christians is two fold: First, a definition in accord with historic Christianity must be given. Secondly, it must be shown that the doctrine of the Trinity is both Biblical and essential to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

THE HOLY TRINITY

Definition: Within the unity of the one God there are three Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; and these three share the same nature and attributes. In effect, then, the three Persons ARE the one God.

From this concise statement, similarly set forth in many theological texts,² it is clear that the Christian Church does not believe that "there are three gods in One." Quite to the contrary, we affirm that there is but one God, as Scripture repeatedly asserts (Deut. 6:4, Isa. 43:10; 1 Tim. 2:5).

Having defined the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, it becomes necessary, secondly, to demonstrate inductively from the Bible that it is true.

To accomplish this, we begin with one basic premise: If it can be shown from Scripture that there are three Persons, all of whom are called Jehovah (Isa. 44:6; 48:12), those three Persons are the one God. Things equal to the same thing are equal to each other.

Just how it is possible for three to be one and for that one to be three, will also be explained. But first, the evidence:

The Father is Jehovah

Jehovah's Witnesses are quick to agree with the Apostle Peter that the Father is called Jehovah. Moreover, Peter and many other biblical writers identify Him as a "person" (2 Peter 1:17). It is therefore unnecessary to press this point, the Witnesses having already conceded it.

However, we would point out that the word “person” is, by definition, descriptive of “ego” or “I.” Without “ego,” which distinguishes man from the beasts, personality as such would cease to exist. Any reputable lexicon or Greek dictionary will substantiate the fact that the Greek word “ego,” is the basis for our English term, “I.” Jehovah designates His Being as the great I AM (Exod. 3:14): So the Deity is Personal and possesses Ego, the hallmark of Personality.

We see, then, that one of the three “Persons” — the Father — is designated “God.”

The Son is Jehovah

A careful study of the first chapter of Revelation (vss.11-18) will show that Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, identifies Himself as “the first and the last” and “the one who became dead” and who now lives for all eternity.

It is of no small significance that in verse 13 of the last chapter of Revelation He confirms this title with great emphasis, identifying Himself in verse 16 as “I Jesus,” and declaring that He is “the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.” The context reveals that it is Jesus speaking (vs. 12), for He — not the Father — is coming “quickly” (Rev. 1:7; 1 Thess. 4:15,16).

It must never be forgotten that these titles (“the first and the last,” “The Alpha and the Omega,” “the beginning and the end”) belong only to Jehovah God (Isa. 44:6,8; Rev. 1:8; 21:6). But Jesus Christ claims them as His own because He, the Son, is also Jehovah!

We see, then, that there are either two firsts and two lasts (a hopeless contradiction of terms), or the Son is Jehovah, the one who was pierced for our sins (Zech. 12:10; Rev. 1:7, 11, 13) and who is truly “the fullness of Jehovah in flesh” (Col. 2:9).

The angel who showed John the wonder of Revelation forbade the apostle to worship him, for he was but a created being, a “fellow servant.” Quite properly, he declared, “worship Jehovah” (Rev. 22:9). Yet Jesus Christ, whom Jehovah’s Witnesses say is also a created being (i.e., Michael the Archangel), commended the worship of Himself as Jehovah (John 20:28, 29). This would have been a blasphemous act of presumption on His part and a direct violation of His Father’s commandments (Exod. 20:3, Deut. 6:17), unless He were in some mysterious sense one in nature and being with His Father. In such a case He would in truth be “equal with God” and entitled to receive worship as Jehovah (John 5:18,23).

Jehovah’s Witnesses have always taught that Jesus Christ was no more than a perfect man, “certainly not the supreme God Almighty in the flesh.”³ They state categorically that He was in no sense both God and man. “Some insist that Jesus while on earth was both God and man. This theory is wrong.”⁴ Jehovah’s Witnesses also maintain that our Lord was “the first and direct creation of Jehovah God,” and that prior to His earthly life He was an angel.⁵

In contrast to this teaching, Scripture and the Christian Church declare the full Deity of Jesus Christ, and His equality with God the Father.

In the first verse of John’s gospel, Christ is revealed as the eternal Word of God who became flesh (verse 14) — the “image of God” (2 Corinthians 4:4). Consider the emphasis. “In the beginning was the Word, and Word was with God, and Word was God” (John 1:1).

Note that John 1:1 states that the Word already was in the beginning — it does not say the Word “became” or “was created” by God, as Jehovah’s Witnesses teach. The Witnesses incorrectly translate this text to read “the Word was a god,” but their translation is by both context and grammar an impossibility according to all recognized authorities on Greek. No recognized translation bears out their error.

Moreover, the Scriptures proclaim that Christ made “himself equal with God” (John 5:18), and that “in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Deity bodily” (Col. 2:9). The Bible further states that Christ claimed to be the great I AM (Jehovah) of the Old Testament (cf. Exod. 3:13-16 with John 8:58), and the Jews understood Him so clearly during His ministry that they sought to stone Him to death for blasphemy (John 8:59; cf. 10:28-33).

Jehovah’s Witnesses pervert these texts and many others in their determined effort to demote our Lord from His position of God and Creator (Col. 1; Heb. 1); and they compound their error by translating the Greek of the New Testament, in many places, contrary to all grammatical authorities. It is certainly true that during His earthly life our Lord voluntarily limited

Himself as a man (Phil. 2:6-8) and thus He never strove to usurp the prerogatives of Deity; but one does not have to “rob” what is His by inheritance (Heb. 1). He was true Deity — “the great God” (Titus 2:13).

We must not forget that Christ humbled Himself, even to the death of the cross, and therefore, as a man, could say, “My Father is greater than I” (John 14:28). However, let us remember that Christ never said, “My Father is better than I.” “Better” is a term of comparison between natures (Heb. 1:4), while “greater,” as in the context of John 14, is a term of comparison relative to positions.

The President of the United States, for instance, is greater in position than any of his fellow-Americans by virtue of his office, but he would be the first to insist that he is not better than other human beings. So Christ was admittedly inferior to His Father positionally while on earth as a man, but the Scriptures clearly and unmistakably state that he was at all times His Father’s equal on the spiritual plane of Divine being or nature (Heb. 1:3; John 5:18). Note also that in 1 Corinthians 15:28 it is function that is dealt with — not Deity.

Jehovah’s Witnesses always point to Christ’s humanity in the Bible; they carefully omit mention of His claim to full Deity, and they thus “wrest . . . the . . . scriptures, unto their own destruction” (2 Pet. 3:16). The second Person, the Son, is also called God, then, despite the efforts of the Watchtower to prove the contrary.

The Holy Spirit is Jehovah

It is peculiar, to say the least, that Jehovah’s Witnesses can agree with the Apostle Peter when he declared that the Father is Jehovah — and then contradict his affirmation that the Holy Spirit is likewise Jehovah, as recorded in Acts 5:3 and 4.

No Christian theologian has ever denied either the Person or Deity of the Holy Spirit, for the evidence to substantiate both is abundant in Scripture. For instance, a thorough study of the book of Acts, chapter thirteen, reveals that the Holy Spirit is a Person, because He possesses “ego.” Luke records therein that the Holy Spirit as a Person has “ego” (13:2,4) and, furthermore, that He (not “it”) prophesies to His servants and commissions them, as well (21:11). See also such verses as John 14:26; 15:26; Acts 8:29; 13:2; Romans 5:5.

The Scriptures are clear that the Holy Spirit has a “will” (1 Cor. 12:11, Heb. 2:4), and since “will” denotes “ego” or personality, as opposed to the neuter (animals), obviously the Spirit is a person. We have also seen from Peter’s words that when Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit, he lied to Jehovah. (Acts 5:4). Both the thirteenth chapter of Acts and Isaiah 48 add to the proof that the Holy Spirit is God, since He answers the prayers of the Apostles (Acts 13:1-4) and is designated Deity by the prophet Isaiah (48:16). Even the Watchtower admits that God alone answers prayers.

The Bible, then, does indeed teach that the Spirit is a Person and that he is called God. It is therefore apparent that there are three Persons mentioned in Scripture and that they are all identified as God: Yet there is only one true God (Isa. 45:22).

“LORDS MANY AND GODS MANY”

There are two other important points that must be mentioned. First, Jehovah’s Witnesses claim that, because the Bible designates some beings and idols as “gods,” it is proper for them to call Jesus “a god” and worship him as the angels did (Heb. 1:6). This is an important point and must be clarified.

Of course, it is true that God made Moses appear as a god in Pharaoh’s eyes (Exod. 7:2). Moreover, Satan, certain of the judges of Israel, and pagan idols are described as “gods” in the Bible (John 14:30; Psa. 82:6; 1 Cor. 8:4; 10:19; 2 Cor. 4:4). Nevertheless, they are not deity by nature, as the Apostle Paul flatly states (Gal. 4:8). They are “gods” by angelic or human acclamation, and God addresses them in that context. Worshipping a thing can make it your god; but it is not God by nature — for by nature there is only one God (1 Cor. 8:46; Tim. 2:5).

When this cardinal distinction is made in Scripture, the Watchtower’s doctrine is refuted, and the problem of the usage of the term “gods” or “a god” disappears.

COMPOSITE UNITY AND THE TRIPLE POINT

The second important fact to be remembered is that of the meaning of the term “one.” “How is it possible,” say the Jehovah’s Witnesses, “for Jehovah to be three and one both at the same time? It is illogical, unreasonable and confusing; and God is not the author of confusion!”

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To answer this all-too-common objection, it should be kept in mind that the word “one” can denote composite as well as solitary unity. For instance, in Genesis (chapter 2), Adam and Eve are called one flesh; and Numbers (chapter 13) speaks of “one” when the context indicates that it was in reality a cluster of grapes hanging from one stem. Here are bona fide instances of composite unity.

The same Hebrew word, “echod” (one), is used in both cases, however, even as it is in Deuteronomy 6:4 where we are told that God is “one.” The evident composite unity indicated here is confirmed in the New Testament. Our Lord spoke of composite unity where marriage is concerned (Mark 10:8); so He, too, was aware of this important distinction. (See also Josh. 9:2; Judg. 20:1; 2 Chron. 30:12; Isa. 65:25; Neh. 7:66; and Ezra 6:20 for further instances of composite unity.)

Finally, let us illustrate how it is both logically and rationally possible for three to be one and one to be three simultaneously, since Jehovah’s Witnesses do NOT believe this is possible.

It is a well-known fact of chemistry that plain water, when placed in a vacuum under 230 millimeters of gas pressure and at a temperature of 0° Centigrade, solidifies into ice at the bottom of the container, remains liquid in the center and vaporizes at the top! At a given instant the same water is both solid, liquid, and gas, yet all three are manifestations of the same basic substance or nature: H₂O — hydrogen: two parts; oxygen: one.

If one of the simplest of all created substances can be three to manifested form and yet remain one in nature, then the Creator of that substance can surely be Father, Son and Holy Spirit — without any violations of logic of reason whatever if He so wills.

God is not triplex (1 + 1 + 1) — He is triune (1x1x1), and He has revealed Himself fully in the Person of our Lord, Jesus Christ (Col. 2:9; John 14:9).

Jehovah’s Witnesses are not confused by the doctrine of the Trinity; they are confused by the Watchtower Society, from whose power only the Son of God can liberate. It is our prayer that, in His own time, this will come to pass — “for ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free . . . and if the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:32,36).

Once the foregoing data have been understood, the following texts from the Old and New Testament confirm the doctrine of the Trinity. A prayerful reading of these passages will help strengthen your faith in this great and truly divine revelation of the nature of God. It will promote faith in Him “who is able to save to the uttermost all who come to Him by faith,” since He alone is “the Way,” (Heb. 7:25; John 14:6; Acts 16:31; 1 John 2:2; Rom. 10:9-13). — Walter Martin, Ph.D.

NOTES:

¹Let God Be True, Watchtower Society, Edition 1946, 18, 82, 87. Reconciliation, J.W. Rutherford, 115.

²“The Trinity,” Baker’s Dictionary of Theology, 531.

³Let God Be True, 87.

⁴The Truth Shall Make You Free, Watchtower Society, 49. The Harp of God, J.F. Rutherford, 101, 128.

⁵The Kingdom is At Hand, 46, 47-49.

⁶Let God Be True, 34, 35.

⁷Jehovah of the Watchtower, 142-162.

TRINITY TEXTS

1. Old Testament — Gen. 1:26; Gen. 3:22; Gen. 11:7; Isa. 6:8; 48:12; Zech. 12:9-10.
2. The Creation — Gen. 1:2; John 1:3.
3. The Incarnation — Luke 1:35.
4. The Baptism of Christ — Matt. 3:16,17.
5. The Resurrection of Christ — Acts 3:26; 1 Thess. 1:10 (The Father); John 2:19-21 (The Son); Rom. 8:11; 1 Pet. 3:18 (The Holy Spirit); Acts 17:31 (God). The Great Commission — Matt. 28:19.
7. The Divine Benediction — 2 Cor. 13:14. See also John 14:16,26; 15:26.