



REVIEW

‘Defending the Godhead’

By Vance Ferrell

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Vance Ferrell has written a powerful book. He has done a great deal of study and research, and has presented his material in a clear, easy-to-understand manner. The book looks good, and it has an appealing cover of the starry heavens, an appropriate picture for the title. It has 208 packed pages, with 511 Bible references and 120 Spirit of Prophecy quotations.

A statement on the back cover is no doubt true, “This is the most complete defense of the Godhead available anywhere.”

But ---- is it a defense of truth?

This review has been written to answer this question and not to downgrade the author or his ministry, but simply to assess if the information it contains is in fact, the truth.

As the author of this review, it must be made clear that my belief about the Godhead is different from that of Vance Ferrell. I stand with those who Brother Ferrell refers to as ‘the other side’. This material will show that an alternate understanding is possible of the same texts and quotations, without stretching or hiding the evidence.

In the end, it is the Reader who will decide the answer to the question – is it the truth?

Margaretha Tierney
REMNANT MESSAGES

TERMINOLOGY

Firstly, it is important we understand the terminology used by Vance Ferrell in his book.

1. Godhead – three co-eternal, co-equal Persons

“We believe that there are three fully divine, separate persons in the Godhead. They are not one in person. However, they are one in character, purpose, eternity, and divinity.” Defending the Godhead p44. (Hereafter referred to as DG)

2. Trinity – Catholic dogma.

“God’s faithful ones do not believe in the Catholic ‘Trinity’ dogma. The term is not found in the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy.” Ibid p44. To Br. Ferrell, the Trinity is only a Catholic doctrine.

3. Trinity doctrine defined.

The Trinity is “.... one God in three appearances. That is an error. We do not worship a ‘one-in-three’ God”. Ibid p44. It appears that Br Ferrell does not see more than one version of the Trinity doctrine – to him it is only one God who became Jesus, then the Holy Spirit.

4. Our pioneers writings.

“ ‘Our pioneers’ did not write one word in opposition to the three-Person Godhead.” Ibid p82. To Br Ferrell, our pioneers believed as he does, the current teaching of the Seventh-day Adventist Church according to the ‘28 Fundamental Statements of Belief’.

5. The ‘other side’ (those who believe Jesus is literally God’s only begotten Son) believe the following:

- a. Christ is not divine.
- b. There is no Holy Spirit.

It would seem that Vance Ferrell wrote his book to deal with these two great errors, as he believes Christ is divine and there is a Holy Spirit. It is surprising to hear that ‘we’, the ‘other side’, do not believe in either of them. Of course, this is incorrect, but it would seem ‘Defending the Godhead’, was written to counter these supposed false views.

To understand his point of view, we need to know two things.

1. To believe Christ is not eternal, without beginning, means He cannot be divine.

“If Christ was actually born out of the Father, then there was a time when He did not exist and He could not therefore be eternal.” DG p17. (Implication from elsewhere – If He is not eternal, He cannot be divine)

Accepting this position means that texts and quotes showing the divinity of Christ, cannot be seen as such if He had a beginning in eternity. It is a closed case.

2. If the Holy Spirit is not the third God-Person of a three-fold Godhead, there is no Holy Spirit.

“It is a serious thing to grieve away the Holy Spirit; how much more serious to deny that He exists!... We dare not willfully reject the Spirit or, at the prompting of Satan, declare that the Holy Spirit does not exist!” DG p174.

Again, accepting this position means that texts and quotes given showing the presence of the holy Spirit of God, cannot be seen as such if the Spirit is not a third God-Being. It too is a closed case.

Of these two positions, Vance writes, “... if we view all the statements and hide none, we arrive at the obvious conclusions given in this present chapter. -- And, in this chapter, we are hiding none! (In striking contrast, the other side provides you with a few Inspired statements which seem to deny the Godhead while omitting the many others which support the Godhead. For example, not once do they mention that the Spirit of Prophecy repeatedly says there are three in the Godhead)

What I am doing here is piecing together information provided in the Inspired Writings. But please understand that I *am only doing it to counteract a terrible deception*, -- the degrading error, the false teaching – that one of the three does not exist and another is not eternal! It is my belief that we should stand in defense of the only Three who can deliver us from this evil world and take us to heaven!” DG p37.38. (Brackets and italics in quote) (The Spirit of Prophecy quotations relating to the ‘three’ of the Godhead are in the book Nothing to Fear. Book 3)

CASE 1 – CHRIST IS DIVINE

In chapter 9, Br. Ferrell quotes thirty two statements that to him say Jesus was without beginning. He gives them without comment. These include passages on the immortal life Christ possessed, His Creatorship, His self-existence, His unity with the Father, His being the ‘I AM’ and His divinity.

The very first quote is the well-known statement from ‘The Desire of Ages’, ‘In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived...’, followed by one that shows Christ had “...immortality, the life which is exclusively the property of God.” DA p530. 1 SM 296.7. DG p112.113.

Clearly, Vance Ferrell links Christ’s divinity to His being without beginning, based on the fact that He possessed immortal, original, unborrowed, underived life. But, does having this life mean Christ had no beginning? Can He be fully divine and yet begotten of His Father at some point in eternity?

When reading the full quote, it can be seen that the life of God and Christ is contrasted with the life given to man, a mortal life that can be taken at God’s will. The last part quoted by Br Ferrell is, “This life (Christ’s immortal, underived life) is not inherent in man. He can possess it only through Christ.” DG Ibid p113.

The promise being true, there will come a day when *we will receive* that wonderful original, unborrowed, underived, eternal life. Will it prove we have existed throughout eternity? No. But it will mean we have it for *the rest of eternity*.

It is ours now by faith, through the indwelling of Christ’s Spirit. “He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.” 1 John 5:12.13. At the return of Christ, “...this mortal must put on immortality... then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.” 1 Corinthians 15:53.54.

When the prophet uses the words “the eternal, self-existent Son”, we have two choices. We can believe Christ is one of three eternal God-Beings, or we can believe the prophet used the words purposely to impress upon our minds that Christ is the *eternal* Son of God, the One begotten in

eternity, and not a Son born only in the time-frame of humanity, as taught by many Seventh-day Adventists. (This does not deny Him being born a Son at Bethlehem)

If we consider Christ as the *eternal* Son in this way, we can be sure He is self-existent, the possessor of all the divine qualities or attributes of His Father, for the Son is "... the brightness of His (Father's) glory, and the express image of His (Father's) person..." Hebrews 1:3. As the divine, only begotten Son of God, Christ inherited (by 'birth') the same nature as His Father.

Sister White says that in His Incarnation, Christ "gained in a new sense the title of the Son of God.... While the Son of a human being, He became the Son of God in a new sense." 1 Selected Messages p226.227. Only by previously being a Son could Christ have become a Son 'in a new sense'.

To fulfil this inspired statement, and to still see Christ as without beginning, Br. Ferrell says Christ was already a Son in heaven, but not begotten of the Father.

He states, "The solution appears to be this: Christ has always been the Son of God; and there never was a time when He emerged from the Father." DG p17. He quotes one Spirit of Prophecy statement on Christ being begotten, together with another statement (three times) that appears to contradict it. Continuing the quote, "That statement appears to solve all the problems about Christ's Sonship." DG p16.17.

Below are the two statements he needed to resolve. "A complete offering has been made for 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son' – not a son by creation, as were the angels, nor a son by adoption, as is the forgiven sinner, but a Son begotten in the express image of the Father's person, and in all the brightness of His majesty and glory, one equal with God in authority, dignity, and divine perfection. In Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Signs of the Times. May 30. 1895. DGp16

"The Word existed as a divine being even as the eternal Son of God, in union and oneness with His Father. From everlasting He was the Mediator of the covenant Before men and angels were created, the Word was with God, and was God.... If Christ made all things, He existed before all things. The words spoken in regard to this are so

decisive that no one need be left in doubt. Christ was God essentially, and in the highest sense. He was with God from all eternity. God over all, blessed forevermore. The Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, existed from eternity, a distinct person, yet one with the Father. He was the surpassing glory of heaven. He was the commander of the heavenly intelligences, and the adoring homage of the angels was received by Him as His right. This was no robbery of God.” Review and Herald. Apr 5. 1906. Quoted in 1 Selected Messages p247.248, and quoted in 5 Bible Commentary p1126. DGp16.17. (Vance has divided the one quote into three, repeating portions more than once)

In the first quotation it says Christ was a Son, begotten in the express image of the Father’s person. This implies that there was a time when He did not exist. In the second quotation it says Christ was with God from all eternity. When you analyse the article, you see that the problem is mainly with the word ‘eternity’, especially when ‘all’ is linked to it as ‘all eternity’. If Christ was with the Father for all eternity, how can He have been begotten or ‘born’ in eternity?

We admit there is a difficulty for everyone. Vance has chosen to resolve the conflict in his own mind by saying that Christ was not begotten in eternity, but has existed from all eternity, without beginning.

Brothers and sisters on the ‘other side’ do not have a problem with the word ‘eternity’ (as “existed from eternity”) because Christ became God’s Son *in* eternity, rather than in our time. But the words ‘all eternity’ do cause concern at first glance. However, when analysing this section of the article, we see an emphasis on Christ’s pre-existence, rather than the length of that pre-existence. 1 SM 247.248.

Another statement says Christ was united with the Father “from all eternity”. ST Aug 2. 1905. 1 SM p228. The word ‘all’ is an emphasis, for the word ‘eternity’ can stand alone. It need not be defined by ‘all’.

Paul emphasised the gift of salvation by calling it “the free gift”, the word ‘free’ being an emphasis. All gifts are free or they cease to be gifts. Romans 5:15-18. Likewise, eternity is ‘all’ or it ceases to be eternity. Another statement says , “And although we may try to reason in regard to our Creator, how long He has had existence.... until we fall down

faint and exhausted with the research when there is yet an infinity beyond.” 7 Bible Commentary p919. 1888. (Emphasis added)

Two years later, Brother Waggoner wrote, “The Word was ‘in the beginning’. The mind of man cannot grasp the ages that are spanned in this phrase. It is not given to men to know when or how the Son was begotten... We know that Christ ‘proceeded forth and came from God’ (John 8:42), but it was so far back in the ages of eternity as to be far beyond the grasp of the mind of man.” Christ and His Righteousness. E.J. Waggoner. p9. 1890. Sr. White says similar words some years later. “The existence of Christ before His incarnation is not measured in figures.” Signs of the Times. May 3. 1899.

These statements are in contrast with the eternity of the Father who is eternal. There is no discussion on His existence. Why is it not the same for the Son? Because the Bible says He was begotten, but so far back in eternity that we, humanly speaking, cannot fathom it.

“In speaking of His pre-existence, Christ carries the mind back through dateless ages. He assures us there never was a time when He was not in close fellowship with the eternal God.” Signs of the Times. Aug 29. 1900. The word ‘never’ is relative to existence; even mortals can use the word.

Why this emphasis on Christ’s pre-existence? The prophet tells us it is because many denied His pre-existence, believing His life began at Bethlehem. To do this is to deny Christ’s divinity.

The words ‘eternal’, ‘everlasting’ and ‘forever’ should not cause a problem; they are used in the Bible three different ways.

- * without beginning or ending
- * with a beginning, but with no end
- * with a beginning, and an end

We can choose, like Vance Ferrell, to ignore that God’s Son was begotten in eternity, claiming the first possibility of ‘no beginning and no ending’ as correct. But to do this we must ignore hundreds of ‘begotten’ statements. On the other hand, we can choose to believe Christ was begotten in eternity, and accept the second alternative ‘with a beginning, but with no

end'. We can then, without difficulty, place the *few* 'eternal' statements in an understandable and acceptable context.

Vance's solution in making Christ a co-equal and co-eternal member of the Godhead, solves one problem, but it is also necessary to explain why Christ is called a Son prior to Bethlehem. He does this by limiting the title of 'Son' to His "work" saying, "The problem here is that these names (Father, Son or Christ, and Holy Spirit) identify Their work, not Their nature." DG p7.

Br. Ferrell believes that while each member of the Godhead is infinite, having all power, "each maintained a position and did a work which was different than the others. This was not difficult to do, since one was already the supreme One. Another was the beloved Son. The third was the Holy Spirit." DG p11.

(Think carefully about the conception of Christ to Mary, and ask yourself the question – Who of the other two God-Persons was the Father of Jesus – the First Person named the Father, or the Third Person named the Holy Spirit? Whom did Christ call His Father?)

Our brother believes Christ had the position of Son from eternity, willing to take the lowly place, first in the form of an angel (as Leader), then as a human being, suffering separation from God and finally death on the cross. DG p11-13.

He says further, that "for each member of the Godhead to maintain a different position and appearance, do a different work, and take a different name – was selflessness in the extreme on the part of each of Them!" DG p13.

"The One we call the 'Father' was the leader over all; yet He would not be able to save mankind and eventually be highly exalted as the Saviour. He would also suffer deeply in the sufferings and death of His Son." DG p13.

With due respect to our brother, the suggestion that the name 'Father' is simply the title of a co-equal God who would 'work' with another co-equal God under the title of a Son for our salvation, does not fulfil the "amazing love" revealed by the prophet in her writings. 1888 Materials p780.

Sister White says it was "a marvel with all heaven, that the Father suffered the Son of His bosom to lay aside His glory, and come down to earth, and submit to humiliation, and the agonizing death of the

cross to save fallen man.” 4 Spiritual Gifts p119. Only when we realise that the God of the universe actually bore, by some mysterious means, a beloved Son, can we appreciate the cost of that priceless gift for our salvation.

Enter into the councils of heaven and allow your heart to feel the intensity of the scenes the prophet pictures of the Father’s final decision to give His Son.

“The Son of God, heaven’s glorious Commander, was touched with pity for the fallen race. His heart was moved with infinite compassion as the woes of the lost world rose up before Him.... None but Christ could redeem fallen man from the curse of the law and bring him again into harmony with Heaven... Before the Father He pleaded in the sinner’s behalf, while the host of heaven awaited the result with an intensity of interest that words cannot express. Long continued was that mysterious communing – the counsel of peace – for the fallen sons of men. The plan of salvation had been laid before the creation of the earth.... yet it was a struggle, even with the King of universe, to yield up His Son to die for the guilty race.” Patriarchs and Prophets p63.

“The anxiety of the angels was intense while the Son was communing with His Father. Three times He was shut in by the glorious light about the Father, and the third time He came from the Father we could see His person. His countenance was calm, free from all perplexity and trouble, and shone with a loveliness which words cannot describe.

He then made known to the angelic choir that a way of escape had been made for lost man; that He had been pleading with His Father, and had obtained permission to give His own life as a ransom for the race, to bear their sins, and take the sentence of death upon Himself, thus opening a way whereby they might, through the merits of His blood, find pardon for past transgressions, and by obedience be brought back to the garden from which they were driven. Then they could again have access to the glorious, immortal fruit of the tree of life to which they had now forfeited all right.” Early Writings p126.

In case the prophet thought our heavenly Father did not have a difficult decision, her attending angel said, “Think ye that the Father yielded up His dearly beloved Son without a struggle? No, no.’ It was even a struggle with the God of heaven, whether to let guilty man perish, or to give His darling Son to die for them.” Early Writings p127.

Dear Reader, there is no comparison between God the Father sacrificing His precious Son – and -- three co-equal Gods performing a work for mankind. Only truth can call forth the expression, “Oh, what love, what inexpressible love!” 1888 Materials p780. 6 Manuscript Release 18.

Having put forth his premise that the Son was eternally chosen to do the work of a Son, Vance goes on to say, “...let us consider an example of how this suggested solution solves one of the problems of the Godhead, the position of Christ before His incarnation.” DG13.

He then says, “We are told that Christ has been eternal through all past time and that He has been the Son of God back into the most distant past, not only at His incarnation. We are told that there never was a time when He was not close to the Father. We are told that He is the ‘eternal Son of God’.” DG p13.14. These words are Br. Ferrell’s summary of the Spirit of Prophecy statements. He then lists further quotations which confirm his decision, satisfying his own mind that his ‘suggested solution’ is the truth.

You and I must weigh the evidence.

It was a surprise to learn that Br. Ferrell believes the angels did not know Christ was the Son of God. We would assume this is because He had the form of an angel, for it is stated in ‘Defending the Godhead’, that Christ “... apparently was in the form of an angel for ages after the initial creation of the universe.” DG p15.

He further states, “It appears that, at the time that Lucifer was in the process of developing his rebellion, the One on the throne ‘made known’ to the angels, *for the first time* – that Christ was equal with Himself.” DG p15.

We ask the question -- Does it ‘appear’ when reading the prophet’s writings that the angels had no idea who Christ was?

“The King of the universe summoned the heavenly host before Him, that He might in their presence set forth the true position of His Son and show the relation He sustained to all created beings... There had been no change in the position or authority of Christ. Lucifer’s envy and misrepresentation and his claims to equality with Christ had made necessary a statement of the true position of the Son of God; but this

had been the same from the beginning. Many of the angels were, however, blinded by Lucifer's deception." Patriarchs and Prophets p36.37.

All heaven understood that Christ shared the Father's throne, "and the glory of the eternal, self-existent One encircled (them) both." Ibid p36.

The angels saw Christ enter the councils of His Father, and they accepted His position without question. "His supremacy, so full of blessing to all who came under its benignant control had not heretofore been questioned." Ibid p38.

But Lucifer, "coveting the glory with which the infinite Father had invested His Son, this prince of angels aspired to power that was the prerogative of Christ alone." Ibid p35.

At times there may appear to be contradictions, but when all aspects are considered, the truth is clearly seen.

CASE 2 – HOLY SPIRIT

In chapter 11, 12, 13, 14, Br. Ferrell deals with the Holy Spirit, firstly according to the Bible, then from the Spirit of Prophecy.

Chapter 11 has verses that reveal the 'personality' of the Spirit, such as having 'intellect, knowledge, mind, a will'; His abilities, such as to 'testify, help, teach, guide, convince, convict, intercede'; to 'be obeyed, be resisted, be lied to' etc. He also lists deity texts that show the Holy Spirit is 'omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, eternal, holy, love and truth'. These are all well-known attributes.

The chapter is quite long, dealing with many thoughts on the Holy Spirit. We would deny none of them.

However, once again, it is possible to see many texts another way. The Holy Spirit is either the third God-Person in a three-fold Godhead, or it is God's holy omnipresent Spirit, which is His divine ability to be anywhere He chooses. As Christ is the divine Son of God, He has also received the ability to be everywhere by the Spirit.

"The greatness of God is to us incomprehensible. 'The Lord's throne is in heaven'. (Psalm 11:4); yet by His Spirit He is everywhere present. He has an intimate knowledge of, and a personal interest in, all the works of His hand." Education p132. (Further information see Who is the Spirit?)

It is not illogical to call the Holy Spirit the ‘third person of the Godhead’, even if it is God’s own personal Spirit. God the Father has the ability to speak for Himself from the heavenly throne (1); He can speak through His Son (2), and He can communicate by His Spirit in any part of the universe. (3)

Chapter 12 gives Spirit of Prophecy statements showing the divinity of the Spirit.

In his introduction, Br. Ferrell says, “In the following passage notice that the Holy Spirit is referred to as Christ’s ‘representative’ or ‘agent’. Both terms refer to a person, not an object.” DP p142. The quotations also call the Holy Spirit a ‘person’, a ‘comforter’, a ‘guest’, a ‘visitor’, a ‘counsellor’, and an ‘advocate’. “All names of a real person, not an object or inanimate nothingness.” DG p142.

There is no argument with any of these statements, nor is there any dispute that the Holy Spirit is a person. The difference is whether He is a third independent God-Being, or whether He is the person of God and Christ in Spirit.

The first quotation in this chapter is from Evangelism. “We need to realise that the Holy Spirit, who is as much a person as God is a person, is walking through these grounds.” Manuscript 66. 1890. Evangelism p616. (This is how the statement appears in Evangelism) DG p142. (Write for: Except We Forget. Book 2)

The problem with quoting portion of a paragraph is that it can be slanted to say what you want it to say. The above quotation is not complete, either at the beginning or the end. It actually says, “We have been brought together as a school, and we need to realize that the Holy Spirit, who is as much a person as God is a person, is walking through these grounds, that the Lord God is our keeper, and helper. He hears every word we utter and knows every thought of the mind.” From a talk to the students at Avondale College. Apr 15. 1890. Manuscript 66. 1899.

As you look at the passage, ask yourself if this is a study on the nature of the Holy Spirit, or an important message for the students to realise that God sees and hears every word they speak in the school? (Write for Trinity in Evangelism for further thoughts on the complete paragraph)

Later, another ‘school grounds’ quotation is given at length, in which Vance has underlined each time ‘He’ and ‘His’ are used. If you read the complete article in 8 Testimonies p61-66, and listen to the voice of God without prejudice, you will recognise the heavenly Visitor as Christ Himself in Spirit. Ask yourself these questions – Who is the Great Teacher? Who draws men to repentance? Who is the Lord? Who is pleading with the students? (Compare 2 Corinthians 6:16.)

Another article, written two years later from Cooranbong says, “I am pleased that the Lord is in mercy visiting the church. My heart trembles as I think of the many times He has come in and His Holy Spirit has worked in the church, but after the immediate effect was over, the merciful dealings of God were forgotten. Pride, spiritual indifference was the record made in heaven. Those who were visited by the rich mercy and grace of God dishonoured their Redeemer by their unbelief...

The Saviour has often visited you in Battle Creek. Just as verily as He walked in the streets of Jerusalem, longing to breathe the breath of spiritual life into the hearts of those discouraged and ready to die, has He come to you. The cities that were so greatly blessed by His presence, His pardon, His gifts of healing, rejected Him and just as great, yea, even greater, evidence of unrequited love has been given in Battle Creek.” 8 Testimonies p67.

When you recognise that Christ has an omnipresent Spirit, there is no problem understanding the Holy Spirit as a person, for Christ is present in Spirit.

“All professions of Christianity are but lifeless expressions of faith until Jesus imbues the believers with His spiritual life, which is the Holy Ghost.” 3 Spirit of Prophecy p242.

“The influence of the Holy Spirit is the life of Christ in the soul. We do not see Christ and speak to Him, but His Holy Spirit is just as near us in one place as in another.” 12 Manuscript Release 261. (Ms 41. 1897)

The problem with capitalising the word ‘Holy’ makes it more difficult to understand. Immediately our minds think it is part of a title. But the word ‘holy’ is an adjective. Read the passage without capitalisation. “The influence of the holy Spirit is the life of Christ in the soul. We do not see Christ and speak to Him, but His holy Spirit is just as near us in one place as in another.”

The Bible and Sister White do not always use capital letters, however, changes have been made in the books and many of them are now capitalised. Some brethren do not like to hear this, but if you are willing to compare the books, you will see it is so. For example, compare ‘The Desire of Ages’ over the years and you will see that the ‘third person of the Godhead’ is now ‘Third Person of the Godhead’. It was not so in the beginning. (See Except We Forget. Book 2)

Two words make the subject difficult. One is ‘representative’. “Jesus is present in the person of His representative, the Holy Spirit....” 12 Manuscript Release. 145. It sounds like another person and immediately the mind does a jump. But once we understand that Christ’s own omnipresent Spirit is the means by which He is present with His people, the problem is resolved. Christ represents Himself. (Write for His Own Representative)

The second word is the personal pronoun ‘He’ or ‘His’. Br. Ferrell has emphasised this as evidence for a third God-Person, however, the Bible also uses the word ‘it’ for the Spirit on a number of occasions. (Example: Romans 8:16.26. 1 John 2:27)

Likewise Sr White has used ‘it’ many times. Unfortunately we now read ‘He’ in the latest books because a change has been made. Notice the use of ‘it’ in the following passage. “On occasions when the Holy Spirit has manifested its power among our churches or in our schools, some have given it a mere formal acknowledgment; others have met it with unbelief and resistance; and still others have given the heavenly Guest a confined range, limiting its power and its operations. It has been looked upon as an element to be restricted, controlled. The Spirit of God has unconfined range of the heavenly universe; and it is not the province of finite human minds to limit its power or prescribe its operations. Let no one pronounce judgment upon the Holy Spirit, for it will pronounce judgment upon those who do this.” Review and Herald. Aug 25. 1895.

Compare the following ‘Review and Herald’ article with ‘Ye Shall receive Power’. “When the Holy Spirit came down on the day of Pentecost, it was like a rushing, mighty wind. It was given in no stinted measure, it filled all the place where the disciples were sitting. So will it be given to us when our hearts are prepared to receive it.. It means that the mind is divinely illumined, that the heart is emptied of self, and filled with the

presence of Christ.” Review and Herald. Jun 10. 1902 or The Upward Look p38. Compare with Ye Shall Receive Power p303, where the same article has ‘He’ and not ‘it’.

This is one of many examples. The changes are a total deception, as brethren and sisters use the word ‘He’ as an evidence for their faith in the Trinity.

Two points should be realised.

1. In John, chapter 14, 15, 16, Jesus is either speaking of another God-Person, or He is speaking of Himself in the third person.

In grammar, the first person is when you say ‘I’, ‘me’, and ‘my’; the second person is when you speak directly to someone else as ‘you’ and ‘your’. The third person is when you speak of a person not present and say ‘He’, ‘Him’, or ‘His’, or you refer to yourself as another person.

Br. Ferrell has chosen to believe that Christ is speaking of a third God-Person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit. However, the present writer, together with those on the ‘other side’ believe He was speaking of Himself in the third person. Note John 14:18.21.23. (It is of interest that the term ‘third person’ is used in this context)

This was not the first time Jesus used the third person when referring to Himself. He often spoke of the ‘Son of Man’. Matthew 12:8. 13:37.16:27.18:11. At one time it was queried, “Who is this Son of man?” John 12:34. Who indeed, but Christ Himself.

Even Sr. White used the third person when referring to herself. Two examples will suffice. “This is not the voice of Sister White, but it is the message to you from God. Will you heed it, both of you?” Christian Leadership p44. “Sister White is not the originator of these books.” Review and Herald. Jan 20 1903.

2. The second point is that there is nothing wrong with using the word ‘it’ for the Spirit. It is the same as using ‘it’ for the soul. A soul can be male or female, but when saying ‘the soul’, the gender is not defined. “As... the repentant soul offers its prayer, God sees its struggles, watches its conflicts, and marks its sincerity. He has His finger on its pulse, and He takes note of every throb.” Maranatha p85.

We can also speak of ‘the child’ or ‘the baby’, and could say to someone, ‘Give it to me’. This would be correct, especially if we did not know if it

was a girl or a boy. (Note Isaiah 51:10. Ask yourself why ‘it’ is used in this verse? See v9)

So to refer to the Spirit as ‘it’ is quite appropriate. It does not mean it is merely an influence or a ‘mindless nothingness’, any more than a soul is an inanimate entity. Instead it is God’s personal omnipresence, His personal, loving, feeling, eternal Spirit. The word ‘it’ is correct, so also is ‘He’, depending on the context, but to change the words of the prophet is not acceptable.

In chapter 13 of Br. Ferrell’s book, he makes a point about Sr White’s long passage regarding the name and work of the Holy Spirit in ‘The Desire of Ages’ (DA668-672), saying that it is “of the highest significance that in this passage she always speaks of the Holy Spirit as a person, as a fully divine person (the Third Person of the Godhead); and she does not once speaks [sic] of Him as ‘it’. Instead, twenty-three (23) times she refers to the Holy Spirit as ‘He’ or ‘Him’ – with a capital ‘H’. (The Bible passages she is referring to calls the Holy Spirit “He’ or ‘Him’ eight (19) [sic] times.)” DG p153. (Rounded brackets in quote. Note the capital letters of Third Person. It seems Br. Ferrell has made a mistake in the last line, and I am not sure if he means 8 or 19)

In this chapter, Vance quotes many passages in the Bible that state “He’ or ‘Him’ from John 14, 15, 16. He then deals with the Greek, showing that the word ‘paraclete’, translated Comforter, means literally ‘one called alongside (to help)’. He mentions the word ‘another’, showing that it means ‘another comforter of like kind with Myself (Christ)’, rather than ‘a different kind’ of Comforter.

Those who believe the ‘Spirit of truth’ is Christ’s own omnipresent Spirit, find no problem with this information, for the Spirit – the Comforter -- is certainly like Himself, not like someone else.

Sister White says, “There is no comforter like Christ, so tender and so true. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. His Spirit speaks to the heart... The influence of the Holy Spirit is the life of Christ to the soul. This Spirit works in and through everyone who receives Christ.” Review and Herald. Oct 26. 1897. 6 Bible Commentary 1112.

PIONEER BELIEF ABOUT TRINITY

It is clear from some of the statements of the pioneers that they were objecting to a particular version of the Trinity. Two are quoted, Joseph Bates and John Loughborough.

“Respecting the Trinity, I concluded that it was an impossibility for me to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, was also the Almighty God, the Father, one and the same being. I said to my father (who believed in the Trinity), ‘If you can convince me that we are one in this sense, that you are my father, and I your son; and also that I am your father and you my son, then I can believe in the Trinity.’”
Joseph Bates. *The Autobiography of Elder Joseph Bates* p 204. 1868. *Defending the Godhead* p84.

“Read the seventeen chapter of John, and see if it does not completely upset the doctrine of the Trinity. To believe that doctrine when reading the Scripture, we must believe that God sent Himself into the world, died to reconcile the world to Himself, raised Himself from the dead, ascended to Himself in heaven, pleads before Himself in heaven to reconcile the world to Himself, and is the only Mediator between man and Himself..... We must believe also that in the garden God prayed to Himself if it were possible, to let the cup pass from Himself, and a thousand other such absurdities.” *Review & Herald*. Nov 5. 1861. J.N. Loughborough. DG p83.84. (The last sentence is not quoted by Br. Ferrell, but was stated by Br. Loughborough. See *The Living Voice of the Lord’s Witnesses*)

Our brothers were not speaking of Tritheism or Consubstantialism, but of Modalistic Monarchianism, one God who became (changed into) the Son. This is why Br. Bates asked his own father to try and convince him that the Father is the Son and the Son is the Father, one God taking on a different form.

This version of the Trinity was condemned by the Catholic Church at the Council of Antioch in AD264, but continued in certain parts of the world for centuries. In medieval times it was illustrated by one head with three faces. In fact, this can still be seen today in modern form, but not necessarily illustrating Modalism.

It is obvious the Modalistic version of the Trinity was promulgated by the Catholic Church during the time of our pioneers, and it is no wonder our pioneers were opposed to it. It seems they did not know there were other versions.

Brother Loughborough stated that if “the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are each God, it would be three Gods, for three times one is not one, but three.” DG p83. This is Tritheism, obviously not being taught at the time, but certainly is today. (Some Trinitarians who believe this form of the doctrine make the equation $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$, rather than $1 + 1 + 1 = 3$)

Let us summarise again. Brother Ferrell believes our pioneers were opposed to the Trinity because it was a Catholic doctrine. Clearly that doctrine was Modalistic Monarchianism, or one sole God taking three forms or appearances in the salvation of humanity.

To sum up his chapter on the pioneers and their objection to the Trinity, Brother Ferrell writes, “*You do not believe in the Trinity. I do not believe in the Trinity -- And our pioneers did not believe in the Trinity either.*”

Are we not glad that our pioneers had enough sense to reject the Catholic Trinity and not oppose the Scriptural Godhead.” DG p86. (Italics in original quote)

Based on the above, Vance Ferrell claims to believe in the Godhead and be anti-trinitarian. It could become confusing with both sides using the same terminology.

PIONEERS AGAINST THE TRINITY

In ‘Defending the Godhead’ chapter 5, the author states that between 1855 and 1877, six of our pioneers wrote against the Trinity doctrine in the Review papers. (Originally Present Truth, then the Second Advent and Sabbath Herald, then Advent Review and Sabbath Herald)

He lists these six brethren – James White, J.N. Andrews, Uriah Smith, Roy F Cottrell, J.N. Loughborough and Joseph Bates. See p81. He also adds four other statements by Joseph Bates, James White and J.H. Waggoner

from their own books. (The statements are listed on DG p82, 83, 84, 85) These are all familiar quotations. (See The Living Voice of the Lord's Witnesses)

Brother Farrell states that when our pioneers wrote against the Trinity, they were writing against the Trinity doctrine of Catholicism, and "it was not the Godhead they were opposed to." DG p80.

According to our brother's own definition, our pioneers were writing against the "weird Catholic three-gods-in-one theory, called the 'trinity'." and "did not write one word in opposition to the three-Person Godhead." Ibid p82.

In chapter 6, Br. Ferrell looks at our doctrinal statements, saying that "a significant portion of the Trinity concept was gradually slipped into our Official Doctrinal Statements." p87. He deals with these statements of belief – 1889, 1931, 1980 – showing how in his mind each one contains some form of the 'trinity concept'. Ibid p87-91.

He says that the 1889 statement uses the words 'one God', who is a 'being'. "The statement is thus claiming that God is one being, when the Son and Holy Spirit are also God. It is indeed strange that this wording should appear, when nowhere in our doctrinal literature, back then, was anything similar mentioned." Ibid p88.

Remember, Br. Ferrell's belief about the Trinity is always one sole God.

Regarding the 1931 statement he says, "In the following quoted portion of that Statement, you will notice that the hints of Catholic Trinity error, which were in the 1889 Statement, were omitted. The 1931 phrasing is acceptable in what it says about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The word, 'Godhead' was correctly used; *but the word 'Trinity' was strangely linked to it!*

It is obvious that the four men who wrote that statement were ignorant of the vast difference between the Godhead and the Trinity! Historically, this 1931 statement was the first and only time in Seventh-day Adventist history that the word 'Trinity' was used in a Statement of Beliefs. Fortunately, it was removed from the next Statement of Beliefs." DG p89. (Italics in quote Some of Br. Ferrell's was bolded, but I have not done so.)

The next 'statement' was in 1980.

Although Br. Ferrell is thankful the word ‘trinity’ was not included in the 1980 statement, he believes No.2. “There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal persons” is incorrect, as it implies the ‘trinity concept’ of one sole God. Instead it should be worded, “God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are each eternal, and one in nature and purpose, but not in being a single person.” Ibid p91

Br. Ferrell’s position regarding our doctrinal statements might seem confusing, but it is of interest that he believes there has been an effort to bring the Trinity (sole God) teaching into the church.

He cites hymn No.73 (‘Holy, Holy, Holy’) as “the trinity song”, saying that “there are folk in our denomination who, ignorantly or otherwise, have slipped the Trinity error into our most recent official hymn book.” Ibid p93. (There are many other ‘trinity’ hymns, not just No.73. See ‘Give Him Glory’ No.16)

It is also interesting that the author quotes George Knight’s statement that most of our founders would not be able to join the church today, and William Johnson’s statement that the Trinitarian understanding of God was not generally held by early Adventists. His comment is, “What we have here is an effort by certain influential men to bring the Trinity into our church. Even though they have slipped it into our Doctrinal Statement, they have not yet brought it into the everyday thinking of our people.” Ibid p93.

HISTORY OF THE NICEAN TRINITY

In 1855, J.N. Andrews wrote the following. “The doctrine of the Trinity which was established in the church by the Council of Nice (Nicea) AD 325. This doctrine destroys the personality of God and His Son Jesus Christ.” Review and Herald . Mar 6 1855. DG p82. (The two sentences appear to have something missing. If the word ‘which’ is omitted, it is grammatically correct. It is quoted always as above)

Did Brother Andrews believe the Council of Nicea voted Modalistic Monarchianism? It would seem so. However, it is not correct.

The history of the council has been recorded by many historians, including A.T. Jones in his book 'The Two Republics'. This present writer, having read a number of historic works, including the above, notes that it is obvious the purpose of Nicea was to eradicate Arius and his followers, rather than bring harmony between the various factions. When the proposed creed was brought forward the first time, the Arians agreed to its wording, however, this infuriated the Catholic party, and they tore the document to pieces.

“As soon as it was read in the council, the party of Arius all signified their willingness to subscribe to it. But this did not suit the party of Alexander and Athanasius; it was rather the very thing that they did not want, for ‘they were determined to find some form of words which no Arian could receive’. They hunted about, therefore, for some point or some word, upon which they could reject it.” The Two Republics. A.T. Jones p348.

Eventually a letter was brought forth that Eusebius, chief of the Arians, had formerly written. In it he stated that “to assert the Son to be uncreated, would be to say that he was ‘of one substance’ – Homoosion – with the Father, and to say that ‘He was of one substance’ was a proposition evidently absurd.” Ibid p348.349.

Mention of the word ‘Homoosion’ (a Greek word meaning ‘one substance’, the same substance’ or ‘consubstance’), gave the Catholic party the opportunity they sought. As expected, the Arians refused to sign the document. If a word must be added, they preferred ‘Homoiosion’, meaning *like* substance, rather than ‘Homoosion’, *same* substance.

However, even within the Catholic sector, there was concern over the word ‘Homoosion’. This very word had been condemned at the council at Antioch (AD264) when Bishop Paul had been charged with teaching Modalistic Monarchianism, as it supported the belief that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were one substance, as a singular God.

“Those who objected to the word ‘consubstantial’ (Homoosion), conceded that those who approved it, favored the opinion of Sabellius and Montanus (both Modalistic Monarchianists, with slight differences); they therefore called them blasphemers, as subverters of the existence of the Son of God. And again the advocates of the term, charging

their opponents with polytheism, inveighed against them as introducers of heathen superstitions....

In consequence of these misunderstandings, each of them wrote volumes, as if contending against adversaries: and although it was admitted on both sides that the Son of God has a distinct person and existence, and all acknowledged that there is one God in a Trinity of persons....” Socrates. The Two Republics. A.T. Jones p335.

Thus the original Nicene Creed was formulated, and the emperor Constantine commanded all to sign it under penalty of banishment. All but five complied.

Brother Jones concludes his chapter with the following. “To say that the Holy Spirit had anything whatever to do with the council either in discussing or deciding the question in any other way, is but to argue that the Holy Spirit of God is but the subject and tool of the unholy passions of ambitious and wicked men.” Ibid p354.

I do not know how much study Br Andrews did on Nicea, but there is no question the council did not vote the version of the Trinity that was prevalent during the days of the pioneers. It could be termed Consubstantialism, but not Modalism.

THE CATHOLIC TRINITY TODAY

The wording of the Nicene Creed, both in its original form and that updated by Athanasius in a later century, is still the teaching of the Catholic Church today. It is not as believed during the time of the pioneers, but in that mysterious form of one God with three Persons. It is often shown as the Satanic tri-quetra, but can be illustrated as one large circle with three small circles within. (A number of our people have shown it in this manner)

In chapter 4, Br. Ferrell deals with the teaching of the Trinity he believes to be Catholic, with a number of references from Catholic writings. DG p71 I personally have read some of these same books, as well as others, and I possess one of them. I have also spent much time in the Catholic Bookshop and a Jesuit Library. My research has shown that you can read

statements in one book that appear to refer to the Trinity our pioneers opposed, in another book the Nicene Trinity, and in others that the Son of God was begotten in eternity.

The late John Paul II quoted the Nicene Creed in his book ‘Crossing the Threshold of Hope’, saying, “At Nicea... it was affirmed that Jesus Christ was “the only-begotten Son of God. Born of the Father before all ages... begotten, not made....” Crossing the Theshold of Hope p46.

What do these words mean?

According to the book ‘My Catholic Faith’ (which I possess), “God the Father eternally knows Himself; and thus continues to bring forth the Son in a continual birth.” My Catholic Faith. Louis Laravoire Morrow p31. (An excellent doctrinal book for Catholic students) Quoted in DG p72. Br. Ferrell has quoted this and made very specific the word ‘know’, saying it means ‘copula’, as in the marriage relation. The Catholic book does not explain it. The book says that the first act of God, who is a spirit was to “know and understand God, knowing Himself from all eternity, brings forth the knowledge of Himself, His own image... This is God the Son.” Ibid p31.

At times it *appears* that the Catholic teaching is of a Son who was ‘begotten’ in eternity, but elsewhere we read that He is “eternally begotten”.

After the council, Arius said, “He has even expelled us from the city as atheists, because we do not assent to... God is always, the Son is always. The Father and the Son are co-existent. The Son unbegotten, co-exists with God, and is always begotten without being begotten, He is **begotten....**” Letter by Arius to Eusebius, bishop of Nicomedia, ‘A Historical View of the Council of Nice, with a translation of Documents by Isaac Boyle. p39.40.

The updated Nicene Creed states the following, “.... the Father uncreated, the Son uncreated and the Holy Spirit uncreated; the Father infinite, the Son infinite, and the Holy Spirit infinite; the Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal....” Creed of Athanasius. Early fifth century.

“What the Apostles’ Creed was content to say, that Jesus was the only Son and Lord, the Nicene Creed accumulated convergent affirmations: he is ‘eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from light, true God from true God, of one Being with the Father’.” How to

Understand the Creed. Jean-Noel Bezancon, Philippe Ferley, and Jean-Marie Onfrey. A Roman Catholic book p53.

It seems the Catholic Church is doing everything in its power to comply with Scripture in its false teachings. Thus it says, ‘There is one God’. It cannot quote Scripture and say, ‘There are three Gods’. But as the Bible also speaks of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the church places the two truths together and says, ‘There is one God with three Persons’.

In Catholic words, “There are three Persons, but only one Being.” My Catholic Faith. Louis Laravoire Morrow p33. Again, “And the Catholic faith is this: We worship one God in Trinity.” The Practical Catholic Encyclopedia p32. And again, “In this one God there are three distinct Persons – the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, who are perfectly equal to each other.” Faith of our Fathers. Cardinal Gibbons. p1.

Reading the words of the updated Nicene Creed further. “So the Father is God, the Son God, and the Holy Spirit God; and yet not three Gods, but one God. So the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Spirit Lord; and yet not three Lords but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by Christian truth to acknowledge every Person by Himself to be both God and Lord; so are we forbidden by the Catholic religion to say, there be three Gods or three Lords.... And in this Trinity there is nothing before or after, nothing greater or less, but the whole three Persons are co-eternal together and co-equal. So that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Trinity in Unity and the Unity in Trinity is to be worshipped.” Creed of Athanasius. Early fifth century. To explain the Catholic version of the Trinity further is impossible because it is claimed to be “a supernatural mystery”. My Catholic Faith p38. (See details in The Trinity Confusion)

We need to be aware that the Catholic belief in an ‘eternally begotten’ Son is fulfilling the words of the apostle John, “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself; he that believeth not God hath made Him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son.” 1 John 5:5.10.

What does the Catholic Church officially teach about the Triune God? Listen to the words of the New Catholic Catechism, a book prepared by Cardinal Ratzinger prior to becoming the pope of Rome. “The Trinity is One. We do not confess three Gods, but one God in three persons, the ‘consubstantial Trinity’. The divine persons do not share the one

divinity among themselves, but each of them is God whole and entire.... Each of the persons is that supreme reality, viz., the divine substance, essence or nature.” 800-page Catechism p66.67. (Notice the word ‘consubstantial’ or ‘Homoosion’, referring back to the Nicene Creed)

Finally, so there can be no mistake. “The divine persons are really distinct from one another, ‘God is one, but not solitary’. (Encyclical Fides Damasi DS71) ‘Father’, ‘Son’, ‘Holy Spirit’ are not simply names designating modalities of the divine being, for they are really distinct from one another. ‘He is not the Father who is the Son, nor is the Son he who is the Father, nor is the Holy Spirit he who is the Father or the Son’. (Council of Toledo XI AD675) New Catechism p67.

Note the key word ‘modalities’. This specifically refers to the teaching of Modalistic Monarchianism, for as it says, ‘They are really distinct from one another.’ The wording could not be plainer, “God is one, but not in solitary.”

Vance Ferrell’s summary of his chapter on Catholic belief is, “Although Catholic theologians talk about ‘three Persons’ in their Trinity, *they do not really teach three persons!* The Son is something God keeps inventing out of His own ‘intellect’ (eternal generation’, it is called). The two of them exude, or float out, something called ‘the Holy Ghost’ which isn’t really there. It is only the expression of the ‘will’ of God.” DG p78.

Then his climax is reached. “*It is INSIDE Roman Catholic theology that we find the seeds of the modern errors that Christ had a beginning and is not eternal, and the Holy Spirit does not really exist.* Is this what you want to believe? Error originated by Catholic priests – or the Bible/Spirit of Prophecy truth that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct individuals who are fully separate, fully divine, and fully eternal?” DG p78.79. (Italics by Br. Ferrell. He has bolded them, but I have not. He had two paragraphs, but I have made one.)

Dear Reader, Br. Ferrell is entirely mistaken in his understanding of Roman Catholic belief. It is also possible he is just as mistaken in what he claims to be the truth of God Himself, His Son and the Spirit.

Chapter 15 of ‘Defending the Godhead’ is entitled ‘A Pattern of Deception’, which begins, “There are many who honestly believe that there is no Holy Spirit and that Christ is not eternal. But there are

some who make a living by teaching these points; they unfortunately are using deceptive ways to convince believers of their ideas.” DG p165.

This present writer cannot speak for all on the ‘other side’ however, I would like to say that there would be few who purposely use deception in putting forward their beliefs. Br. Ferrell says of one particular ministry, whose books he has read, that “it does not dare quote more than a few passages from the Inspired Writings relating to the Godhead – because most of God’s Word, strongly disagrees with its teachings.” DG p166.

Might I say that the majority of books written in defence of the ‘other side’ deal with specific aspects, rather than the whole subject. In this way, books remain small, taking only a portion of the subject. As a rule, texts and statements are chosen to reveal a certain message in a clear and simple manner. It is not to hide anything from the reader. All writers must do this, no matter what subject is presented, whether the Sabbath, the State of the Dead or the Destruction of the Wicked. Few give every verse immediately. This allows the learner to see the truth from clear texts, without encountering the difficult ones. Later these can be studied without problems.

Br. Ferrell has charged others with deception for not showing every text and statement, saying that his book “In contrast.... contains massive numbers of quotations or references to the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy.” DG 166. However, even hundreds of Bible texts and inspired statements can be arranged into chapters, with headings, sub-headings, underlining, bolding, italics and comments, to reveal error. Two things are always at play – the belief or bias of the writer and the belief or bias of the reader. This is why we must go back to the Word and ask God, by His Spirit, to teach us the truth.

It was very disappointing that Vance did not quote the “four special Spirit of Prophecy passages” he said are cited by the ‘other side’ as “evidence” for their belief. Instead, he gives his understanding of the content. Unfortunately, the reader cannot judge from the book if these four inspired statements are valid or not; nor can they be checked as there are no references. Br. Ferrell’s suggestion for the reader is simply to study the 2400 entries on the Holy Spirit in the Three Volume Index. He says it is

“an immense amount of information on the nature and activities of something that does not exist!” DG p167.

A paragraph is quoted from a book called ‘The Spirit of Antichrist’ (The author is not named), in which the writer says, “Sadly, most people think they are worshiping God when the reality is that they don’t even know what they are worshiping. Satan takes advantage of this ignorance and receives this worship. The majority of those who are called Christians are actually possessed [demon possessed], in this teaching, of the spirit of antichrist, including those who call themselves Seventh-day Adventists... God wants people who will stand up for His truth in this time, and if we don’t do something soon we just might be among the most enlightened people in the lake of fire.” The Spirit of Antichrist p21.22. (These brackets [] appear to have been added by Br. Ferrell) DG 169.

Br. Ferrell has commented on this quotation saying, “According to that author, what is it that will put you in hellfire? It is a belief in the Holy Spirit. Even if you love God and by faith in Christ obey His commandments, if you believe there is a Holy Spirit, God is going to burn you in hell.” DG p169.

Is this what the passage is saying? No. It is a warning to believers on the ‘other side’ to stand up for what they believe, or *they* will be in the lake of fire.

Br. Ferrell concludes this chapter with the Bible verse, “And he spake unto the congregation saying, ‘Depart, I pray you, from the tents of those wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins.’” Numbers 16:26. (Read the chapter and feel the strength of this verse)

There are certainly big differences in our understanding, but to liken the ‘other side’ to the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram is a very strong charge to make against those who, like Vance Ferrell, are standing for what *they* believe.

In your own studies, plead with God to reveal the truth about Himself, His Son and His Spirit. When He does, you will *know* it is the truth.

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