



Roswell Fenner Cottrell (1814 –1892)

"The Trinity, or the triune God, is unknown to the Bible; and I have entertained the idea that doctrines which require words coined in the human mind to express them, are coined doctrines." R. F. Cottrell, *Review & Herald*, June 1, 1869

Cottrell continued to confess his own belief concerning the divinity and oneness of Christ and His Father.

"I believe all that the Scriptures say of him. If the testimony represents him as being in glory with the Father before the world was, I believe it. If it is said that he was in the beginning with God, that he was God, that all things were made by him and for him, and that without him was not anything made that was made, I believe it.

If the Scriptures say he is the Son of God, I believe it. If it is declared that the Father sent his Son into the world, I believe he had a Son to send. If the testimony says he is the beginning of the creation of God, I believe it. If he is said to be the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person, I believe it. And when Jesus says, 'I and my Father are one,' I believe it; and when he says, 'My Father is greater than I,' I believe that too; it is the word of the Son of God, and besides this it is perfectly reasonable and seemingly self-evident."

"If I be asked how I believe the Father and Son are one, I reply, They are one in a sense not contrary to sense. If the 'and' in the sentence means anything, the Father and the Son are two beings. They are one in the same sense in which Jesus prayed that his disciples might be one." *Review & Herald*, June 1, 1869.

The following month, Cottrell continued:

That one person is three persons, and that three persons are only one person, is the doctrine which we claim is contrary to reason and common sense. The being and attributes of God are above, beyond, out of reach of my sense and reason, yet I believe them: ***But the doctrine I object to is contrary, yes, that is the word, to the very sense and reason that God has himself implanted in us. Such a doctrine he does not ask us to believe.*** A miracle is beyond our comprehension, but we all believe in miracles who believe our own senses. What we see and hear convinces us that there is a power that effected the most wonderful miracle of creation. But our Creator has made it an absurdity to us that one person should be three persons, and three persons but one person; and in his revealed word he has never asked us to believe it. This our friend thinks objectionable....

But to hold the doctrine of the Trinity is not so much an evidence of evil intention as of intoxication from that wine of which all the nations have drunk. The fact that this was one of the leading doctrines, if not the very chief, upon which the bishop of Rome was exalted to popedom, does not say much in its favor. ***This should cause men to investigate it for themselves;*** as when the spirits of devils working miracles undertake the advocacy of the immortality of the soul. ***Had I never doubted it before, I would now probe it to the bottom,*** by that word which modern Spiritualism sets at nought.... Revelation goes beyond us; but in no instance does it go contrary to right reason and common sense. God has not claimed, as the popes have, that he could "make justice of injustice," nor has he, after teaching us to count,

told us that there is no difference between the singular and plural numbers. ***Let us believe all he has revealed, and add nothing to it.*** (R. F. Cottrell, July 6, 1869, *Review & Herald*)

He referred to the historical fact that it was this very issue of the Trinity that invoked the civil Roman power in 325 AD to once again enforce a religious doctrine of the emerging little horn power. Church and State had just united on the issue of Sunday observance when Constantine empowered the first Sunday law in 321 AD. So also it was over this same issue of the Trinity that the Roman Church waged battle with the three Sabbath-keeping non-trinitarian tribes during the 6th century that led to the State in giving to the Church "its seat, its authority and great power" in 538 AD.

While the development of the Trinity as the foundation of the Roman Church evolved over the span of several centuries following the death of the original apostles, likewise its development was recapitulated within the Advent movement over many decades following the deaths of the early Advent pioneers.

To these leaders in Adventism's early years, the number of beings in the Godhead was less contentious than the nature of Christ's divinity and His status within the Godhead. Even 30 years after the Disappointment, the pioneers were strong proponents of a Bible standard for faith and practice.

He proceeded to affirm that "man is a triune being," consisting of body, soul and spirit. I never heard a Disciple confess faith in the doctrine of the trinity; but why not, if man consists of three persons in one person? especially, since man was made in the image of God? But the image he said, was a moral likeness. So man may be a triune being without proving that God is. But does he mean that one man is three men? **I might say that a tree consists of body, bark and leaves, and no one perhaps would dispute it. But if I should affirm that each tree consists of three trees, the assertion would possibly be doubted by some.** But if all admitted that one tree is three trees, **I might then affirm that there were ninety trees in my orchard, when no one could count but thirty.** I might then proceed and say, I have ninety trees in my orchard, and as each tree consists of three trees, I have two hundred and seventy. So if one man is three men, you may multiply him by three as often as you please. But if it takes body, soul and spirit to make one perfect, living man; then separate these, and the man is unmade. (R. F. Cottrell, November 19, 1857, *Review & Herald*, vol. 11, no. 2, page 13, par. 13)

"But if I am asked what I think of Jesus Christ, my reply is, **I believe all that the Scriptures say of him.** If the testimony represents him as being in glory with the Father before the world was, I believe it. If it is said that he was in the beginning with God, that he was God, that all things were made by him and for him, and that without him was not anything made that was made, I believe it. If the Scriptures say he is the Son of God, I believe it. If it is declared that the Father sent his Son into the world, **I believe he had a Son to send.** ... Children inherit the name of their father. The Son of God "hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than the angels." — (R.F. Cottrell, *Review and Herald*, June 1, 1869)

"Men have gone to opposite extremes in the discussion of the doctrine of the trinity. Some have made Christ a mere man, commencing his existence at his birth in Bethlehem; others have not been satisfied with holding him to be what the Scriptures so clearly reveal him, the pre-existing Son of God, **but have made him the 'God and Father' of himself.**" (*Review and Herald*, July 6, 1869).

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