

[Names removed],

We have mixed emotions about our dialogue on the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses. Rather than relying on what detractors have written, at your request, we are trying to learn first-hand what you believe. It has been surprising how closely aligned our beliefs are on a number of points and not as surprising that we differ on others. Some of our differences are so great that we can find no middle ground. Both of our groups may be wrong, but we don't see how they can both be right. Since we all agree that truth is the goal of our discussions, we want to continue having fruitful dialog. However, we are having serious communication issues and want to bring those to your attention because of the frustration we feel.

Over the past months, we have spent literally hundreds of hours reading your emails and Watchtower literature trying to compare those to the Bible and to what we believe. Because we love you and respect your sincerity, we want to have a good understanding of what you claim to be a misunderstood religion. The dialogues have been a help, but we are still confused about a number of topics.

We have repeatedly asked several questions but you seem reluctant to address them. Perhaps it is from the difference in study styles that our problem arises.¹ Sometimes we receive answers to questions that we didn't ask instead of the questions that we did ask. We attribute that to your misunderstanding of what we believe and that may be a result of our organizational differences.² You seem to assume that our beliefs are identical to those in the sources you quote.³ This has been very frustrating for us because, out of love and respect for you, we are not relying

¹ What we have observed of your study style is Witnesses reading a paragraph from Watchtower publications and then answering questions taken directly out of the paragraph. Scripture, when used, is quoted in single or partial verses and almost never in context. Even then, Scripture is spiritualized or given a meaning that is not obvious from the writing itself. Our study method is much different. We read longer passages of Scripture and try to understand the author's writing as a whole and as supported by individual verses. After reading passages of Scripture, we often open resources written to help us understand the culture at the time of the writing or that help explain the original languages so that we can better understand the author's original intent. This leads us to what is considered a literal approach to Scripture. We want to understand what the author literally meant when he wrote.

This is not meant to be a criticism of the Jehovah's Witness study method; we are only pointing out why we may not be communicating effectively when we ask questions and you give us long answers that don't directly answer our questions.

² Our resources are produced by a variety of Christian organizations and authors that do not always agree with one another. Since we are all fallen creatures, we are not alarmed that there is not a one hundred percent consensus among scholars. Since all of the Jehovah's Witness study material is produced by a single source, it is not surprising that at any one time, all Jehovah's Witnesses are in agreement. Of course, as we have discussed, Watchtower teachings change periodically and Witnesses must adjust to new teachings.

³ Most of the references you use are Roman Catholic, extremely liberal, or secular and do not accurately reflect our beliefs as conservative, evangelical Christians.

on what others say you believe. Likewise, when we quote outside sources, it is because we have reviewed those sources and feel that they contribute to the discussion. While we do hope that your motivation is love, we don't feel that you are reciprocating the respect. At times you seem to slip from providing information to practicing indoctrination.

What we would like to do is to select one topic you initiated that we consider very important – the Trinity. We will use your emails and the brochure *Trinity*,⁴ (hereafter referred to as “the brochure”), as our sources of your views. We will point out where we think Witnesses mischaracterize our beliefs and try to clarify so that you can critique the beliefs we hold rather than the beliefs you think we hold. We will include references that you can examine and invite your critique of our understanding. We will also ask additional questions to help us clarify your beliefs, especially where they differ from ours. We have spent a long time putting this letter together. While it looks burdensome, it is just over half the size of your longest email to us! Please try to understand what we are asking before you respond.

Mischaracterizations

Throughout the brochure we are reminded of the difficulty in understanding the Trinity. We agree, even to the point that it is “confusing, contrary to normal reason, unlike anything in [our] experience.”⁵ But, does that make it impossible? Other than God, who or what in our experience is like Him? Do any of us really understand everything about God? Does God's incomprehensibility make the concept of the Trinity illogical? Bruce Ware explains it this way:

God is one in essence or nature, but God is three in person. There is no logical contradiction here even if the concept is beyond our comprehension. If God were one in essence and three in essence, or if he were one in person and three in person, then we would have a straightforward contradiction...⁶

The brochure asks, “Why would all the God-inspired Bible writers speak of God as one person if he were actually three persons?” Then it concludes, “... what the Bible writers did make abundantly clear is that God is one Person ...” Comparing Ware's quote to the brochure, do you

⁴ Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, *Trinity* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc, 1989).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶ Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 41.

see why we believe Jehovah's Witnesses have mischaracterized the argument, trying to say that Trinitarians illogically believe God is one person and three persons rather than one nature and three persons?

The conclusion drawn in the brochure quotes part of 1 Corinthians 14:33, "God is not a God of confusion." Here is that passage highlighted in context:

If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and one must interpret; but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; for **God is not a God of confusion** but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.⁷

Does this passage really describe our understanding of God's revelation of Himself as not being a God of confusion or does it address a controversial, disruptive practice in the early church?

The Bible actually contradicts the brochure's conclusion. For instance, what did God do in Genesis 11:7 with the language of the people at the Tower of Babel? Didn't He confuse their language? How does that compare to the brochure's claim that God is not a God of confusion? Another example is confusion over the Gospel in 1 Corinthians 1:18-31. Who is it that is confused? We see a similarity between people who are confused by God in the Old and New Testaments – they are in rebellion against God. Doesn't that describe us all to some extent, confused because we are Fallen?

The brochure attacks theologians, specifically "the educated Jewish religious leaders." The implication is that only "common people" can understand God and His revelation. Is that true? Didn't any of the Jewish religious leaders understand? What about Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea? Even more importantly, what about Paul, the author of much of the New Testament? In Acts 22:3 doesn't he say that he is well educated? In Acts 23:6, Acts 26:5 and Philippians 3:5, doesn't he say he is a Pharisee? Don't those facts make him an educated Jewish religious leader? Can you see why we think the brochure is unfair in its animosity toward education and toward Christian leaders?

Why didn't the majority of Jews, religious leaders and commoners alike, recognize Jesus as Messiah? Weren't they looking for the conquering King who would liberate them from Rome

⁷ New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), 1 Co 14:27-33.

and reestablish their kingdom? Did they understand the “suffering servant” passages about Messiah or did they overlook them because the idea of a Messiah who is both conquering king and suffering servant didn’t make sense to them? Wasn’t that “confusing, contrary to normal reason, unlike anything in their experience”? Now we can understand those confusing passages. Jesus first had to come as suffering servant and when He returns it will be as conquering King. Could the same lack of understanding apply to the doctrine of the Trinity? Even if we never understand, does that in any way change who or what God is?

The brochure asserts, “If the Trinity were true, it should be clearly and consistently presented in the Bible.”⁸ Although the word “Trinity” is not in the Bible, we believe the doctrine is clearly taught in God’s written revelation of Himself.⁹ But, the Bible is not a book of doctrinal statements. Doctrinal statements are man’s attempts to describe what God has revealed. The lack in Scripture of a doctrinal statement about the Trinity causes us no alarm just as the lack of Watchtower-unique doctrinal statements causes Jehovah’s Witnesses no alarm.

The pages in the brochure on the testimony of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures do not include a single quote from Scripture and what is quoted causes us concern. For example, the quote from the *Encyclopedia Britannica* article titled “Trinity” fails to mention the conclusion, “Thus, the New Testament established the basis for the doctrine of the Trinity.” Why would they leave out that quote? Can you see why their selective quoting leads us to question, if not distrust, the teachings of the authors of the brochure?

There are many pages in the brochure devoted to the developmental history of the doctrine with anti-Trinitarian quotes from the ante-Nicene Fathers. Here are additional quotes, highlighted, from some of those same Fathers:

⁸ We would point out that teachings on Michael/Jesus, stake vs. cross, intravenous blood transfusions, calculations of the date of Jesus’ return, and a host of other Watchtower teachings are also not found “clearly and consistently presented in the Bible.” In contrast with the doctrine of the Trinity, none of those were held until the late nineteenth or twentieth centuries.

⁹ “The term ‘trinity’ is not a Biblical term, and Scripture gives the doctrine not in formulated definition but in fragmentary units similar to many other elements of the Christian system of truth.” As quoted in Henry, C.F.H., *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney, Q-Z (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 823.

“The Trinity is a biblical concept that expresses the dynamic character of God, not a Greek idea pressed into Scripture from philosophical or religious speculation. While the term *trinity* does not appear in Scripture, the Trinitarian structure appears throughout the New Testament to affirm that God Himself is manifested through Jesus Christ by means of the Spirit.” As quoted in Henry, Jerry M., *Holman Bible Dictionary*, ed. Trent C. Butler (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991), 1372.

For they who affirm that the Son is the Father, are proved neither to have become acquainted with the Father, nor to know that the Father of the universe has a Son; who also, being the first-begotten Word of God, **is even God**. – Justin Martyr¹⁰

... in order that to Christ Jesus, our Lord, and **God**, and Saviour, and King, according to the will of the invisible Father ... – Irenaeus¹¹

Now, O you, my children, our Instructor is like His Father God, whose son He is, sinless, blameless, and with a soul devoid of passion; **God in the form of man**, stainless, the minister of His Father's will, **the Word who is God**, who is in the Father, who is at the Father's right hand, and with the form of God **is God**. – Clement of Alexandria¹²

... there is one only God, ... this one only God has also a Son, His Word, who proceeded from Himself, by whom all things were made, and without whom nothing was made. Him we believe to have been sent by the Father into the Virgin, and to have been born of her—**being both Man and God**, the Son of Man and the Son of God, and to have been called by the name of Jesus Christ... – Tertullian¹³

Do these quotes support the brochure's claims and conclusions listed below?

The modern popular doctrine of the Trinity... derives no support from the language of Justin [Martyr]: and this observation may be extended to all the ante-Nicene Fathers; that is, to all Christian writers for three centuries after the birth of Christ.

... the testimony ... of history makes clear that the Trinity was unknown throughout Biblical times and for several centuries thereafter.

Again, from their selective quoting, how can we trust what the brochure authors wrote? We did not examine all their sources, but the ones we did show that the authors of the brochure misrepresent the majority of sources they quote.

The brochure goes to great lengths to conclude that the doctrine of the Trinity is taken from the pagan idea of tritheism. In pictures and sidebars scattered throughout, this conclusion is emphasized repeatedly. Does the fact that both beliefs exist prove the cause and effect? Could there be other explanations? For instance, perhaps the Trinity is true and, because of fallen humanity's sinfulness, it has been changed over the centuries to the triad of gods. If the Trinity were true, wouldn't Satan have known from his beginning? Who could better influence fallen

¹⁰ Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. I: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325, The Apostolic Fathers With Justin Martyr and Irenaeus.*, (Oak Harbor, Logos Research Systems, 1997), 184.

¹¹ Ibid. 330.

¹² Alexander Roberts, et al. *Vol. II: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325, Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria.* 209.

¹³ Alexander Roberts, et al. *Vol. III: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325, Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian.* 598.

humans to denigrate the Trinitarian God than the one who influenced them to rebel against Him in the first place? Couldn't Adam and Eve have known it as well? Perhaps the story got passed on through their descendants with increasing inaccuracies. There are reports of a great flood story in cultures from around the world. The brochure makes a similar case for the doctrine of the Trinity. Neither story has come down through history unaffected by the Fall. Isn't it possible that both of them remain as a testimony to what the early members of our race would have accurately known? We are not arguing that this proves the Trinity is true, but it does allow for conclusions apart from those made by the Watchtower.

Our Trinitarian Beliefs

Here is our synthetic definition of God:

God is. God is the only true and living God. God is triune – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – three unique Persons and yet one God. In their diversity, the persons, or *hypostases*, are in eternal relationship with each other. In their unity, they share one essence, or *ousia*, equally, eternally, simultaneously, and fully. Proper worship is directed to the three persons of the trinity as creation worships God in Spirit and Truth.

God is infinite and eternal. He is both transcendent and immanent. God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. He is righteous, just, and merciful. God is truth, light, and love. Most of all, God is holy. All that God is, each of the Persons of the Trinity are.

God is Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer, Savior, Judge, and King. In the Old Testament, the primary names of God are *Adonai*, *Elohim*, and *YHWH*. In the New Testament, the primary names are *Theos* and *Kyrios*, translated God and Lord, respectively.

God is only known through His self-revelation. This revelation is progressive through the various dispensations. After the Fall, the Father was God's primary revelatory person. At the incarnation, the Son took center stage and made God known in the mystery of the hypostatic union. During the Church Age, the Holy Spirit has come to dwell in believers. During the Millennium, the Son will come a second time to dwell on the Earth.

Apart from the Trinitarian parts of the definition, is there anything in our definition with which you disagree? The remainder of this section clarifies our beliefs from the definition.

We are monotheists. Our belief is that God is one God.¹⁴ There are two words in Hebrew that mean one. *Yachid* means "one, only one, solitary"¹⁵ This word is never used of God. If the

¹⁴ "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!" Quoted from New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update.

¹⁵ The Lockman Foundation, *Hebrew-Aramaic Dictionary of the New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance*, Updated ed. (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1998).

writer wanted to be clear that God was a solitary one, he could have used *yachid*, but he didn't. Instead, he used *echad* which means one but often means a composite one. This is the word used in the *Shema* (Deut 6:4).¹⁶ The same word is used three times in Ezekiel 37:17. In that verse, what does the final occurrence mean to you? Did the two sticks become one stick? Or, is this a composite unity? *Echad* is also used in Genesis 2:24. What do you think it means there? Did the man and woman really become one body? Or, does this somehow mean a unity of two persons into one new something, something that God has joined and cannot be separated by man? With this understanding and the fact that *echad* is the word always used of the oneness of God, can you admit that there is at least a remote possibility that God could be a composite one? If not, from Scripture and a Hebrew dictionary, how do you deny the possibility? God is a single essence,¹⁷ but He is three Persons.

We know that you emphasize the name YHWH, translated either Jehovah or Yahweh. Our understanding is well stated by the following references:

Yahweh is the only truly personal name of God in Israel's faith; the others are titular or descriptive expressions. References to 'the name' or 'in the name' of God indicate this name.

The name consists of four consonants, YHWH (known as the tetragrammaton)...

... usually the divine name has been rendered by 'the Lord,' following the ancient Greek translations of the OT, which commonly rendered Yahweh by *kyrios*.¹⁸

...the name YHWH points to God's relationship to Israel in both His saving acts and His retributive acts, manifesting His phenomenological effectiveness in Israel's history. What God says, He will do. His Name promises that. And He will act on behalf of His people.¹⁹

This seems to follow your understanding. Do you disagree with either of the quotes?

¹⁶ This understanding of the Hebrew words for one is based on Peter Toon, *Our Triune God: A Biblical Portrayal of the Trinity* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1996), 98.

¹⁷ "It is important to note that the *homoousion* was neither a new truth nor a new revelation from God. What this teaching did and does it to reduce the multiplicity of scriptural truths concerning who Jesus is into the unity of a single affirmation: that the Son is *consubstantial* with the Father in the sense of everything that the Scriptures declare concerning the Son. However, to use such language is to state the truth of the Scriptures in a new mode of understanding. There has been a transition from a mode of understanding that is primarily descriptive, relational, historical-existential, and interpersonal (i.e., what Christ is to us) to a mode that is definitive, explanatory, absolute, and ontological (i.e., what Christ is in himself)." As cited in Peter Toon, *Our Triune God: A Biblical Portrayal of the Trinity* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1996), 40.

¹⁸ Wright, Christopher J.H., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia: Fully Revised*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 506-507.

¹⁹ Charles R. Gianotti, "The Meaning of the Divine Name YHWH," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142, no. 565 (Jan-Mar 1985): 48.

We believe that YHWH is God's name but the name applies equally to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That explains why Jesus prayed to Abba or Father. If He prayed to YHWH (or Adonai or Elohim) it would be illogical since He would be praying to Himself.²⁰ Instead He prayed to the One with whom He is in eternal relationship as Son to Father.

The English word "God" sometimes refers to the Godhead, but, as Stott points out, "... 'God' in the New Testament frequently means 'the Father'..."²¹ Look at the two uses of the word God in Hebrews 9:14, "... how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" Do you understand how we could see all three Persons of the Trinity mentioned in the first part of the verse, and then understand "the living God" to refer to the Trinitarian Godhead? Do you see how the New Testament usage could result in the wrong belief that only the Father is God?

In Matthew 28:19, "the name" is singular but is applied in parallel to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.²² There is only one name into which we can be baptized and it is the name of the Trinitarian God rightly understood to be shared by each Person of the Trinity. All three were present at the baptism of Jesus (Mt 3:16-17, Mk 1:9-11). All three are in the baptismal formula prescribed by Jesus.²³

With all of these occurrences, do you see how we can claim that the Bible does teach the doctrine of the Trinity? But, the brochure rightly asks if Jesus and the Holy Spirit are God.

Regarding Jesus, the brochure states, "God... transferred the life-force of Jesus to the womb of Mary." Where do you find that in Scripture? It is certainly not clearly stated in the referenced passage (Mt 1:18-25). Where was that life-force while He was in the grave after the crucifixion? Can you see why we find this "life-force" teaching confusing?

The brochure also claims, "... the Bible plainly states that in his prehuman existence Jesus was a created spirit being." Where in Scripture is that plainly stated? The brochure fails to reference any Scripture before reaching its conclusion, "Neither the angels nor Jesus had existed

²⁰ Peter Toon, *Our Triune God: A Biblical Portrayal of the Trinity* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1996), 155.

²¹ John R. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 155.

²² Barbieri, Louis A. Jr., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 1983), 2:93-94.

²³ H.D.M Spence-Jones, ed., *The Pulpit Commentary: St. Matthew Vol. II* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc, 2004), 645.

before their creation.” Obviously, if He was created, He would have had a beginning, but was He created?

The Greek word for “first created” would be *protoktisis*. This word is not used of Jesus. Instead, He is described as the *prototokos*, the first-born. As explained in Kittel and Louw & Nida:

In Col 1:15 the “for” clause brings out the meaning, namely, that all things owe their creation to Christ’s mediation. The point, then, is not that Christ is the first creature. This would demand a stress on the *-tokos* and would also bring birth into conflict with creation. What is stated is Christ’s supremacy over creation as its mediator. The term *prōtōtokos* is used, then, because of its importance as a word for rank. In spite of v. 4 it does not here denote Christ’s special relation to the Father. The twofold use does not necessarily derive from Gnostic ideas of the primal man or the redeemed redeemer. As the mediator of the first creation, Christ is also the mediator of the new creation with his resurrection from the dead (v. 18).²⁴

The figurative meaning of *prototokos* in the messianic title ‘firstborn of all creation’ may be interpreted as ‘existing before all creation’ or ‘existing superior to all creation’.²⁵

Even in the Old Testament, the term “first-born” didn’t always mean the obvious. In Ps 89:27 David is described as the first-born even though he was far from being Jesse’s oldest child.

The New World Translation inserts the word “other” in relating Christ to creation by rewording Scripture to say that through Him all other things were created. The Kingdom Interlinear makes clear that the word “other” is not in the original language. From the text and Greek grammar rules, why would the committee add that word? Do you see how misuse of the original languages can confuse people and why we have a hard time coming under the authority of an organization that would try to confuse its followers?

In another unique application of Greek, the brochure quotes Kittel’s definition of *monogenes* meaning “of sole descent.” What it fails to mention is that definition is taken from the section entitled “The Usage Outside the New Testament.” From that long article here is what Kittel concluded regarding the use of the word in the New Testament:

In John the Lord is always the Son. Because He alone was God’s Son before the foundation of the world, because the whole love of the Father is for Him alone, because

²⁴ Kittel, Gerhard, Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 968.

²⁵ Johannes P. Louw, Eugene Albert Nida, ed., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 1:116.

He alone is one with God, because the title God may be ascribed to Him alone, He is the only-begotten Son of God.

To be sure, John does not lift the veil of mystery which lies over the eternal begetting. But this does not entitle us to assume that he had no awareness of it. Johannine preaching and doctrine is designed to awaken faith not to give full and systematic knowledge. Hence it does not have to dispel all mysteries.²⁶

Do you see why we believe the Watchtower is misleading by quoting a single phrase and ignoring the actual content of the reference? How does this change the strength of the brochure's arguments about *monogenes*? Does Kittel's explanation support the brochure's claim, "...nobody in the first century ever thought of him as being God the Son"?

Consider these facts. In Isaiah 42:8, God declares that He will not give His glory to anyone else and yet Jesus is given that glory (Mt 16:27; Jn 1:14; 17:1-8; Act 7:55-56; Php 2:9-11; Tit 2:13; Heb 1:6). God, alone, is to be worshipped and yet Jesus is worshipped (Mt 14:33; Heb 1:6). God is the only King (Is 43:15; Je 10:10) and yet Jesus is King (1 Ti 1:17; Re 19:16) with His throne lasting forever (Heb 1:8). God is Judge, but both Lord and Jesus are identified as Judge (Ac 7:7; 17:30-31; Ro 3:6; 1 Co 5:13; 2 Ti 4:1; Heb 10:30; 13:4; Re 19:2, 11; 20:12). God is Creator (Ge 1-2), but Jesus is identified as Creator (Jn 1:3, 10; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2, 10). God is Redeemer (Ex 15:13) and Jesus is Redeemer (Ro 3:24; Gal 4:5). God is Savior (Is 43:3) and Jesus is Savior (Mt 1:21; Jn 1:29; 12:47; Ro 5:9; Tit 2:13; 1 Jo 4:14). The Spirit is God's Spirit and Christ's Spirit (Ro 8:9-11). To know either the Father or the Son is to know the other (Jn 10:30, 38; 14:7-13; 17:21). To have faith in one is to have faith in the other (Jn 14:7-13). The Son is the very image of God (Jn 12:45; Php 2:6; Col 1:15; 2:9; Heb 1:3). Do you see how we understand the Old Testament YHWH to be the New Testament Jesus? If Jesus is not God, then there are two Redeemers, Saviors, etc.

Titus 2:13 refers to "our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus." Here is how the translation of that verse is explained.

There is but one *Greek* article to "God" and "Saviour," which shows that both are predicated of one and the same Being. "Of Him who is at once the great God and our Saviour."²⁷

²⁶ Kittel, et al., 741.

²⁷ Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset, David Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc, 1997).

The A.V. makes “that blessed hope” and “the glorious appearing” to be two different things, whereas the Greek text requires that they be construed as one. We have Granville Sharp’s rule here, which says that when there are two nouns in the same case connected by *kai* (καί) (and), the first noun having the article, the second noun not having the article, the second noun refers to the same thing the first noun does and is a further description of it. Thus, that blessed hope is the glorious appearing of our Lord. The translation should read, “that blessed hope, even the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.” The same rule applies to the words, “the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” Both expressions refer to the same individual. The deity of the Lord Jesus is brought out here by a rule of Greek syntax.²⁸

In John 20:28 Thomas calls Jesus “My Lord and my God” without rebuke from Jesus. In fact, in verse twenty-nine Jesus commends him for his belief but says that those who believe without seeing Him will be blessed. Blum explains the meaning of this proclamation.

“Thomas’ response, My Lord and My God! is the high point of the Gospel. Here was a skeptical man, confronted by the evidence of Jesus’ resurrection. He announced that Jesus, the Man of Galilee, is God manifest in the flesh.”²⁹

And, Robertson explains why this is the correct translation of the verse.

“My Lord and my God (ὁ κύριος μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου [*Ho kurios mou kai ho theos mou*]). Not exclamation, but address, the vocative case though the form of the nominative, a very common thing in the *Koiné*. Thomas was wholly convinced and did not hesitate to address the Risen Christ as Lord and God. And Jesus accepts the words and praises Thomas for so doing.”³⁰

With such clear explanations, do you see why we disbelieve the brochure’s claim that none of the early Christians believed Jesus is God?

All three persons of the Trinity are again presented together in John 14:16-26 and Ephesians 4:4-13 where each of them is variously described as dwelling in us. That brings us to the disagreement on the Holy Spirit.

The brochure says the Holy Spirit “can be likened to electricity, a force that can be adapted to perform a great variety of operations.” Can electricity or a force know anything? In 1 Corinthians 2:11-12 He knows the thoughts of God. Who can know the thoughts of God except

²⁸ Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies From the Greek New Testament For the English Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973), 195.

²⁹ Edwin A. Blum, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 1983), 2:343.

³⁰ “My Lord and my God (ὁ κύριος μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου. Not exclamation, but address, the vocative case though the form of the nominative, a very common thing in the *Koiné*. Thomas was wholly convinced and did not hesitate to address the Risen Christ as Lord and God. And Jesus accepts the words and praises Thomas for so doing.” As cited in A.T Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1932).

God? In the next chapter (1 Co 3:16), the Spirit of God dwells in us, the temples of God. Who dwells in God's temple except God? The answer is in 1 John 4:12, God dwells in us. How can you lie to electricity or a force? In Acts 5:3, Ananias is accused of lying to the Holy Spirit and in Acts 5:4, Peter repeats the charge saying that Ananias lied to God. While the brochure uses select verses and the reasoning of fallen man to make its conclusions, do you see why we believe that the Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity and why we believe the Trinity is clearly and consistently presented in the Bible?

Consequences of the Differing Views of God

Is it really important, though, whether God is one-in-one or three-in-one? If we say we trust Christ, isn't that enough? This last section will examine what we conclude to be the logical consequences of the differing belief systems.

We agree with the brochure that we should "worship God on his own terms." In John 4:24 we are told to "worship in spirit and truth." What does that mean? Toon explains:

"True worship ... is in the sphere of 'Spirit.' Human beings who worship their Creator and Lord must worship 'in spirit [Spirit]...' Genuine worship must be prompted, energized, and brought to fulfillment by the presence and sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit worship by human beings remains merely a human activity which has no guarantee of reaching the Father... True worship is also "in truth." John's Gospel makes it very clear that the Spirit and the Word (the Son) exist and work in perfect harmony in God's economy of grace. Jesus as the Word (1:1) is also the Truth (14:6), who reveals the very reality of God (8:45; 18:37). In fact, the Spirit is 'the Spirit of truth' (14:17; 15:26; 16:13) in his relation to the Word made flesh, Jesus, the Son. And Jesus is the Truth, who reveals the Father, who does the will of the Father, and who makes access to the Father possible for sinners by his sacrificial death as the Lamb of God... [T]rue worship must be offered to the Father through (i.e., according to the Truth which is) Jesus and by/in the Spirit, who is given by the Father and who rests upon and takes from the Son."³¹

If God is Trinity, can we worship Him on His terms if we deny the Trinity? Is that "in truth" or even "in Spirit"?

Part of worship is prayer. What is the proper way to pray to God? Our understanding is that the right to pray is provided by Jesus and the power to pray is provided by the Holy Spirit, and normatively, prayer is directed to the Father as the head of the Godhead. Jesus prayed to the

³¹ Peter Toon, *Our Triune God: A Biblical Portrayal of the Trinity*, 32-33.

Father and we have always followed His model. But, surprisingly, we have come to appreciate your method of praying to Jehovah God. After extensive study, we have come to realize that prayer to the Triune God (Jehovah, YHWH *Elohim*, Lord God) is appropriate. If for no other reason, expression of adoration for each Person of the Trinity is an appropriate part of prayer and worship.

The next question is what did Jesus do for us and does that make Him part of a Trinity? We would really like to cover Jesus' works in detail in another letter, but feel we must touch upon them here.

In your June 24, 2006 email you wrote, "We agree that Jesus is a very important part of the picture. Without his ransom sacrifice, we would not have a chance to have life forever. We just keep him in his rightful place." The brochure expands on the theme:

"How much was the ransom? ... Jesus ... became a ransom that compensated exactly for what Adam lost – the right to perfect human life on earth... The perfect human life of Jesus was the 'corresponding ransom' required by divine justice – no more, no less. A basic principle even of human justice is that the price paid should fit the wrong committed ... It was only a perfect human, Adam, who sinned in Eden, not God. So the ransom, to be truly in line with God's justice, had to be strictly an equivalent – a perfect human..."

Here are a few phrases taken from the brochure which help us understand:

"... if we want God's approval ..."

"... we can avoid judgment that he will soon bring on apostate Christendom."

"... we can look forward to God's favor ..."

If we understand correctly, Jehovah's Witnesses are attempting to win God's approval or favor so that they can have the hope of everlasting life on the new Earth. Is that a fair summation? Is that why there is so much emphasis on service, meeting attendance, and Watchtower study? If so, it sounds like the Watchtower has replaced the first century Pharisees or the Pope as the final authority in Scripture interpretation and as the new source of man-made laws to appease God. It is as if Jesus, in his "rightful place," provides the sacrifice that provides the opportunity of everlasting life, but the opportunity is only realized if we earn it. The couple with whom we studied in Lexington told us that even on the New Earth if they ever became displeasing to God they could be annihilated. Is that true? In your system is there never absolute assurance of everlasting life? We would characterize that as a life consumed with service out of anxiety rather than a Christian life.

What is the Christian life supposed to look like? In Philippians 4:6-7, Paul writes, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Jesus is our peace according to Ephesians 2:14. Do Jehovah’s Witnesses really have that peace? Or, are they always working toward and hoping for a salvation that we believe is provided by Jesus alone.

How can Jesus effect our salvation? The key is found in comparing the atonement of the new covenant in Hebrews 9 to the atonement of the old covenant in Leviticus 16. One of the special parallels we find is in the blood offering taken into the Holy of Holies in Leviticus 16:15 which is fulfilled in Christ’s blood offering taken into the heavenly Holy of Holies in Hebrews 9:12. The other parallel is in the scapegoat of Leviticus 16:15 that bore all the sins of the people away to the fulfillment of that picture when Jesus bore all of our sins away in Hebrews 9:28.

Jesus can effect our salvation because He died as our substitute, bearing our sin, and shedding His blood for our atonement. We again turn to Stott for an applicable description:

“The concept of substitution may be said ... to lie at the heart of both sin and salvation. For the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man.”

“... since love is in its essence self-giving, then if God’s love was seen in giving his Son, he must thereby have been giving himself.” (Jn 3:16; Ro 8:32).³²

Jesus died as the substitute for all of us (Gal 3:13), not just Adam. If Adam were the only man alive the life of a single man would suffice to pay for his sin, but Adam is not the only person. Even in human justice when a man is found guilty of multiple murders, he can be sentenced to a life sentence for each murder, effectively one life given for each life taken. When calculating the effect of original sin and all subsequent sin, how can anyone but God provide the ransom sacrifice? In Acts 20:28, most translations capture the proper meaning in that God bought the church with His own blood. Who in the Godhead had blood except Jesus Christ? Do you see how our beliefs really hinge on our understanding of Jesus and our understanding of Jesus depends upon our understanding of the Trinity?

³² John R. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 160.

Without Jesus we are always concerned about violating rules because we do not have eternal life. That is true for most of the world's religions. It also seems true for Jehovah's Witnesses. What we have witnessed in Witnesses is the continuous fear that a rule may be violated that might lead to being disfellowshipped from "God's organization," resulting in the loss of opportunity for everlasting life. With Jesus we have peace because we already have eternal life (Ro 5:1; 1 Jo 5:11-13). That eternal life is immediate when we know Jesus (Jn 3:16-18; 5:24; Ro 8:1-2; 10:1-13). We never have to be worried about being condemned and annihilated (Ro 8:1-2). Is that the kind of assurance that Jehovah's Witnesses enjoy? Is that the kind of peace that you have? If not, is it because you do not properly relate to Jesus? Instead, do you "keep him in his rightful place" as defined by the Watchtower?

What about the Holy Spirit? As with Jesus, we would like to address the works of the Holy Spirit in another letter but feel we must briefly cover the consequence of the belief systems.

As discussed above, Jehovah's Witnesses see the Holy Spirit as God's impersonal, active force. Therefore, our understanding is that He holds no special place in your belief system. Are we correct in our understanding?

From our Trinitarian position, the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and is sent to us by Christ (Jn 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7) so that we can know God (1 Co 2:12). He convicts us of sin (Jn 16:7-11) and testifies about the source of our salvation, Jesus Christ (Jn 15:26). When we believe and place our faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes to permanently live in us (Jn 7:37-39; 14:16; Ac 2:38; Ro 8:9-11; Ga 3:2) and regenerates us so that we are "born again" (Jn 3:5; Tit 3:5). While living in us He sanctifies us, making us more like Christ (Gal 3:3; 2 Th 2:13; 1 Pe 1:2). In doing so, He reveals God's truths (Jn 16:12-14) as He teaches us (Jo 14:26; 1 Jo 2:27). The result of the Holy Spirit living in us is the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control). It is the Holy Spirit who gives us hope (Ro 15:13; Ga 5:5) by testifying in us that we are children of God (Ro 8:16) and by sealing us a pledge from God that our eternity is secure (2 Co 1:22; Eph 1:13-14). He is known by believers and unknown by unbelievers (Jn 14:17). We can say unequivocally that we are indwelt by Him and benefit from His presence.

Do you know the Holy Spirit personally because He lives in you? Do you have the hope that He brings that your eternity is secure because of what Christ did rather than what you can do

to make yourself acceptable to God? While none of us is yet perfected, do you experience a portion of the fruit of the Spirit?

The remainder of this section is modified from Ware.³³ We have examined the implications of the deity of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. What about God as the Trinity? Are there differences in our lives because of the differences in our beliefs?

Because God is Trinity, He is in eternal relationship with Himself. He did not need to create in order to experience relationships. In your beliefs, has God always been relational? If so, to whom did He have a relationship before creation? If not, where do you find Scriptural evidence that He has undergone the change from non-relational to relational?

Through relationships, we see God's Triune nature expressed in our lives. Because we are made in the image of a Triune God, we need relationships with God, with others, and with ourselves. None of us would deny our need to properly relate to God. But, what about our other relationships?

Do we need to form communities of believers? Understanding that God is a communal being, humans, made in His image, have a need for community, not of identical persons, but a unified community of diverse persons. Because we are fallen, none of us is perfect in our beliefs, knowledge, or any other aspect of our lives. Understanding the need for community that reflects the Triune God, we can accept others with whom we don't completely agree. We can love and forgive, even those who have hurt us deeply. We accept distinct roles of authority and submission in people who are equals because of those characteristics in the Godhead. What is the Jehovah's Witness rationale for forming communities? Is it because the community is "God's organization" and everlasting life is only found in it? In the community of believers, what is the rationale for coming under the authority of leaders? Is it a reflection of authority in the Godhead, or is it to remain acceptable to God in His organization? How far should that authority extend?

Our most intimate relationship with another human is marriage, which is a picture of Christ's relationship with His body and a reflection of a Triune God. Similar to community, marriage is made up of two people who are equal and yet different in their roles. Even though neither is superior or inferior, there is a biblical model for authority in the home that reflects the authority in the Godhead. To Jehovah's Witnesses, is marriage the result of obedience to

³³ Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance*, 132-155.

commands or is it somehow reflective of God? Based on your belief in the superiority of the Father and the inferiority of Jesus, do you extend that to marriage with the husband being superior and the wife being inferior? If not, what is the biblical rationale? On what do you base the authority in the home?

Since God relates to Himself and we are made in His image, in some way we must relate to ourselves. Believers can live free from guilt because we are forgiven by God through faith in Christ and His substitutionary atonement. We are also free from the need to save ourselves because we depend completely on the Triune God for our salvation. In short, we can live with ourselves with the peace that God provides believers. Do Jehovah's Witnesses live guilt-free lives of peace knowing that their salvation is secure? Do you think that the incidence of depression, anxiety, or stress-related illnesses is higher or lower for Jehovah's Witnesses than the population-at-large? If it is not significantly lower, can you say that Jehovah's Witnesses experience the peace of God?

From the consequences of the differing views of God, do you see why we say that our understanding of the Trinity is key to all of our beliefs? The difference comes down to putting Jesus in His "rightful place" as "a god" or putting Him in His rightful place on the throne of God.