

This article re-confirms that this doctrine was brought in surreptitiously and in an underhanded manner.

<http://lenjason.com/gci-trinitarian-theology-history-as-i-experienced-it/>

MARCH 18, 2013 BY LEN JOSON

GCI Trinitarian Theology History As I Saw it

This is how the Trinitarian theology doctrine developed in the *Grace Communion International (GCI)* which was formerly called the *Worldwide Church of God (WCG)* from my own experience as a member of GCI in the Philippines for about 41 years now since 1972 and as a GCI pastor since 1985 to the present—28 years already. This is not a comprehensive history of how Trinitarian theology developed at GCI but rather **a brief overview of how I personally saw and experienced it.**

Trinity Doctrine Pagan

One of the major doctrines which I learned when I became a member of the *Worldwide Church of God* as a teenager in 1972 was that the Trinity doctrine was of pagan origin. It was heretical and a false doctrine. It had its roots from Nimrod I was told. I was also taught that 1 John 5:7 was bogus and was inserted to promote the false doctrine of the Trinity. We really believed we were right and I held on to that belief for some 18 years or so until a booklet was published around 1990 with the title, "God is..." That changed everything and many church members were shocked and outraged by it. Many left the church. It was a doctrine that introduced the Trinity doctrine as biblical truth which was totally contrary and opposite to the previous WCG belief taught by Herbert W. Armstrong.

Initial Exposure to Doctrinal Changes



My wife and I with Joseph Tkach Jr. in his home in Pasadena. He was then Director of Church Administration – US. He is the current president of Grace Communion International.

Back in 1987, as a young ministerial trainee, I and my wife had the privilege of attending a WCG ministerial conference in Pasadena, California. That was my very first exposure to the beginnings of various changes that would happen at WCG and that would

continue from then on. I had the privilege to go back to Pasadena for another ministerial conference two years later in 1989. I heard more changes that were going on in the WCG's faith and practice.

I remember that during that time, Dr. Mike Feazell was already explaining to us quite a number of errors in our *Plain Truth* magazine and in our other literature. He explained to us what we ministers ought to teach and preach instead. At that time, most of our WCG literature were all going through edits and revisions and some literature were pulled out of circulation.



The current GCI president, Dr. Joseph Tkach and me in Tagaytay, Philippines in February 2006.

As a minister, I also had the privilege of being informed regularly as to what really was going in the WCG ministry on a weekly basis more than the ordinary lay members were aware of. Dr. Joseph Tkach, our current GCI president, was quite diligent in informing us regularly back then as director of the WCG Church Administration at the world headquarters in Pasadena. He kept us informed of the latest developments in the WCG's faith and practice every week. Many members had left since then but I believed and embraced the changes that were being introduced. I knew what was really going on and the changes were sound and biblical to me.

Ministers Learn About Trinity Doctrine



Dr. Stavriniades with my wife and I in

Tagaytay, Philippines in 1994.

Sometime in 1993 and 1994, Dr. Kyriakos J. Stavriniades, a Greek theologian and classics professor from *Ambassador College* along with Dr. Joseph Tkach and others came to the Philippines for 2 consecutive years to explain to all of the WCG Philippine ministry the Trinity doctrine, the nature of God and what theology was all about. Most of us did not know about these things. Most of us did not go to seminaries. It was our first exposure to theology and the nature of God. It was a difficult time for many of the Philippine ministers. Many have left since then. It was my first time to hear that there was such a word as "*Hermeneutics*" which was introduced to us by Greg Albrecht of the Plain Truth Ministries. It was a challenging time for many of us trying to understand the new doctrines being explained.

How Doctrinal Changes Developed

As part of his lecture, Dr. Stavriniades explained to us how the doctrinal changes actually developed. Here is how it actually happened based on my notes from his lectures in 1994.

In our *Plain Truth* magazine and in our other publications, we have always said that the Trinity doctrine was false and was of pagan origin. **A priest from New Jersey reacted to this and wrote to the then Pastor General Joseph W. Tkach Sr. in 1988. Another priest from Spain also reacted to a WCG publication in 1989. In 1990 a book entitled, "*Another gospel*" came out attacking the WCG. Because of all these negative reactions, Dr. Stavriniades was asked to help in crafting an official church statement on the deity of God. As a result, the Worldwide Church of God was removed from the list of cults.** According to Dr. Stavriniades, WCG back then responded to critics by using weak and erroneous arguments.

In October 1990, a paper on the Trinity was published and the critics did not stop to criticize WCG. In November 1990, an article in the *Plain Truth* magazine was published with the title, "*Who Was Jesus' Father?*" According to Dr. Stavriniades, the content of that article was in error.



He also said that he did not write the booklet, "God is..." as some have wrongly supposed. People were upset about the booklet because it said that God is not as Herbert W. Armstrong (HWA) had thought of him. The booklet was right in saying that "*God is one being*" contrary to the old WCG belief that the Father and Jesus Christ are two God beings. Dr. Stavrinides added that the root of the problem was the **lack of education** of the readers regarding the subject.

Why WCG Changed its Doctrine

It was because of those priests, theologians and other critics who challenged the WCG view against the Trinity doctrine that made Pastor General Joseph W. Tkach Sr. respond by creating a doctrinal committee to refute them. At that point in time, he was sure that the WCG view was correct.

But as it turned out, the doctrinal committee found out from their studies that the critics were right about the Trinity doctrine after all! To be true and faithful to Scripture, that is why the doctrinal changes were made. Herbert W. Armstrong always taught: "*Don't believe me, believe the Bible!*" That is exactly what WCG did when the error was pointed out.

That started the changes in the *Worldwide Church of God*. That's how it happened as I learned it from others like Dr. Joseph Tkach, Dr. Mike Feazell, Dr. Dan Rogers as well as from Dr. Stavrinides. There was no conspiracy to change doctrine just for the sake of changing doctrine and stamping out the memory of HWA. We continue to love and respect HWA but he was not free from error too.

Personally, Dr. Stavrinides helped me a great deal in my initial understanding of the Trinity doctrine leading to more knowledge and understanding as I learned from others as well over the years. I heard he retired already and went back to Greece, his home country. I haven't heard about him since then.

Healing Doctrine Changed

Back in 1989, I can remember that one major doctrine that was changed was on our view on healing. We used to believe that going to doctors and taking medicine was a

lack of faith. A booklet, "*The Plain Truth about Healing*" was published and this was a major change already even before the bigger change which rocked the WCG in December 1994. It can still be found in our GCI website in several chapters. Church members in huge numbers left the church. They forgot or they didn't know that even HWA made changes in doctrine too. HWA changed the observance of Pentecost from Monday to Sunday in 1974. I was new in the church when it happened.



With Pastor General Joseph W. Tkach Sr. in Pasadena, 1987.

In December 1994, Pastor General Joseph W. Tkach Sr. announced the major doctrinal change regarding the Sabbath and the festivals. That's when the income and membership of the church dropped very drastically when a lot more members left causing a lot of hurts, misunderstanding, splits and the start of more splinter groups.

Forced to Study Again

Since we were told that we made errors in our doctrines because we did not know how to properly interpret Scripture, I thought it was a good idea to learn all about it. So I took a summer class in 1996 on *Hermeneutics and Theological Methods* at the *Asian Theological Seminary*. Regional Director Bill Sidney encouraged me to study further which led me to enroll as a student in *Biblical Studies* at the *Asian Theological Seminary* in 1997. Since I was an irregular student, I graduated after some five years in 2001. To me, it further confirmed my belief that the doctrinal changes in my denomination were on the right track. This interest in *Biblical Studies* eventually led me to get interested in *Theology*.

Personal Outlook on the Changes

Here's how I look at it. Where can you find a whole denomination that is willing to change to adhere to the biblical truth unmindful of the consequences namely: 1) loss of millions in income, 2) loss of thousands of members? That's my denomination, GCI, transformed by truth. We stand for the truth regardless of consequences. We were liberated from error. Thanks be to the Lord Jesus Christ!

The Gospel Really is Good News!

Back in 2001, Dr. Mike Feazell wrote the booklet, "*The Gospel Really is Good News.*" I was so influenced by this booklet I translated it into Cebuano sometime in 2005. He also published at about that same year the booklet, "*Getting A Grip on Repentance*" which really angered some church members in my congregation. These were highly controversial booklets back then at the start. Some reacted negatively to it. Dr. Mike Feazell also had a great influence in my understanding of the Trinity doctrine.

First-ever Trinitarian Theology Conference



After the first-ever Trinitarian Theology Conference, I visited the GCI world headquarters at Glendora in August 2007. Dr. Mike Morrison asked me to point where the Philippines is located on the world map. We began to learn more about *Trinitarian theology* in the years that followed. In 2007, I had the rare privilege of being able to attend the first-ever *GCI Trinitarian Theology Conference* in Palms Springs, California. That was my first time to hear Dr. C. Baxter Kruger in person. I was fascinated with what I learned there! (Sad to say, I lost all my photos of that conference! I accidentally deleted all of it from my computer!)

God surely was guiding and leading me along with the rest at GCI since the changes started for me in 1987. Beginning in 2007, I began to hear about Trinitarian theologians like Robert F. Capon, Thomas Torrance, Karl Barth and others. It was interesting for me to know that there were others who also believed in what we have newly-discovered to be the truth! We didn't know that the "*new truth*" that God was allowing us to see had a name! They call it "*Trinitarian theology!*" We called it the "*New Covenant*" because we came out of and were observing the "*Old Covenant*" practices. We followed Jewish practices of keeping the Sabbath and the festivals. Recently, our denominational leaders suggested we call it "*Incarnational Trinitarian Theology.*" Others call it as "Adoption theology" or Incarnational theology."

Orlando Conference, 2010

I regret that I was not able to attend last 2010 at the GCI Orlando Conference but I'm glad I was given videos and I was able to hear Gary Deddo's lectures. Gary Deddo, who is a known Trinitarian theologian recently joined us at GCI as our new GCI doctrinal adviser as Dr. Mike Feazell retired due to health reasons.

GCI Philippines Trinitarian Theology Conference, 2010



A photo of me and Dr. Mike Feazell, vice president of GCI in Tagaytay sometime in 2010.

I was glad though that during that same year in February 2010, just before the Orlando Conference in August 2010, Dr. Mike Feazell, vice president of GCI, visited us in the Philippines and he also explained to all the GCI Philippine ministry what Trinitarian theology was all about. He answered many questions from the pastors. I regret that he had to retire that soon. We're both retired now from full time ministry. I consider him as one of my mentors since 1987 along with Dr. Joseph Tkach. I learned a lot from their writings and from hearing from them personally.

GCI Philippines Trinitarian Theology Conference, 2012



Ted Johnston and me during a Trinitarian Theology Conference in Cebu in 2012.

Just recently last December 2012, Pastor Ted Johnston, GCI Ministry Developer and Communications Coordinator from GCI headquarters, also explained Trinitarian theology further to the GCI Philippine pastors and leaders gathered in three areas at Cebu City, Bicol and in Metro-Manila. I learned a lot as well from Pastor Ted Johnston

through his emails since 1995 and even up to now through his [blogs](#). I was glad to get to talk to him in person last December. I met him in 2007 in Palm Springs during the conference but he didn't know me then personally. He only knew about me through emails. I also consider him as one of my mentors in Trinitarian theology.



With Dan Rogers, director of GCI Church Administration during a Trinitarian Theology Conference in Baguio City in 2012. Back to back with Pastor Ted, Dr. Dan Rogers, the current director of GCI Church Administration also visited the GCI Philippine ministry last December 2012 and also explained Trinitarian theology to all the pastors and leaders gathered in Baguio City. He also related the historical development of our Trinitarian theology and I was glad to hear that it matched perfectly well with what Dr. Stavrinides related to us years ago. He even added more information leading to our current understanding of this doctrine.

“Theology is a Journey”

Well, it's been quite an exciting and challenging journey filled with both joy and sorrow. Despite the many explanations, seminars and lectures, some still continue to struggle to understand what *Incarnational Trinitarian Theology* is all about. It's been about 18 years now since 1995 (or about 26 years since 1987 for me) when the big change was publicly announced and the journey continues.

I thought I'd write my own version of what happened and hope this is worth something if not for many, at least for some.