

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

By Terry Hill

Written to the glory of God the Father and His Son

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16

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Section one

An introduction

This research paper concerns both the history and the theology of the trinity doctrine. This is the doctrine that most Christians believe is the central belief of the Christian faith. Allow me to share with you now, in one brief statement, the overall purpose of this study.

If like me you are a Seventh-day Adventist, you will no doubt realise that within our denomination for many years (far too many some are saying), there has been an ongoing debate regarding the trinity doctrine. This is the reason for the publication of this study. It is to help those who are interested, which in the main will probably be Seventh-day Adventists, to understand the issues involved.

Like a jigsaw puzzle

These trinity issues are quite complex. This does not mean that they are difficult to understand, but rather that they are so closely interrelated they are inseparable. I liken these to the various pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. This is because when they are correctly portrayed and fitted together, a correct overall picture will be formed. In contrast to this, if any of the pieces (meaning the various issues involved) are not correctly depicted, a misrepresentative picture will be created. This is why each of these various issues must be dealt with in its own particular right. For this reason it is important that they are not misrepresented.

In this study the various issues in this trinity debate are investigated. This is why it is so lengthy. It also means that a great deal of incentive is required to read it but what price can be placed on the discovery of truth? As the wise man said

“Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.” Proverbs 23:23

Jesus told the story of a man (a merchant) who found a pearl of great price. This man’s desire was so great to possess this pearl that he sold all he owned to purchase it. The principle is very clear. The value we place on something will be shown by how much we are prepared to invest or even sacrifice in acquiring it.

It is no different regarding this trinity debate. The value we place on understanding it will be seen by the amount of time and effort we are prepared to

give in the study of it. If we are prepared to do our part in personal study, we can be sure that God will do His part in revealing the truth. God will always honour those who in sincerity seek for truth like looking for hidden treasure,

A divisive debate

In this trinity controversy, as happens in every dispute, people are taking sides. Some are saying that the trinitarian concept of God (the three-in-one idea) is a correct way of understanding how He has His existence whilst others, because they regard this teaching to be misleading, believe to the contrary. Taking a completely different tack, some are saying that because the Scriptures are silent on this mystery it is best to leave the entire subject alone. It is true to say that if this debate did not exist to the extent that it does today, this would have been the best advice to heed but unfortunately, because it has now permeated the length and breadth of Seventh-day Adventism, there is a decided need for the various problem areas to be defined. In brief, it is far too late in the day to be silent.

As to who is correct in this controversy and who is wrong, there are probably many that are still undecided. This is even though volumes have been written about it. This is one of the reasons why this study has been published. It is to help those who are interested to make intelligent, informed decisions. This paper is not intended as a Bible study although because we need to understand **why** this trinity controversy exists we do need to understand the theology involved in this debate. This is why throughout this paper the various beliefs are detailed. This includes my own personal thoughts and conclusions.

Personal details

My name is Terry Hill, and I live in the UK. This is where I was born and where for almost 33 years I have been a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. My initial encounter with our denomination was at the age of 30 in 1973. This happened when I met the young lady who was to later become my wife. At that time she had been a Seventh-day Adventist for about five years but as for me, I could only admit to being then of no religious persuasion.

Two years later this situation changed. This was when I was baptised into Christ and became a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This makes me today (in 2008) a person of 65 years of age, who, with regard to the Scriptures as well as to Seventh-day Adventism, has acquired more than 34 years of experience and knowledge. I have also spent the last 9 years in the study of this trinity controversy.

Allow me now to say something regarding the importance of knowing our denominational history.

The importance of our denominational history

In the past there have been those who, either intentionally or unintentionally, have misrepresented our church history. This is particularly as it relates to the

trinity doctrine and this present controversy. Some are still doing this today. This has led to a number of very serious misunderstandings, especially concerning the theology that was held by early Seventh-day Adventists. In later sections we shall consider these misrepresentations.

It should go without saying that it is of absolute necessity that these various misrepresentations are corrected. Today we need to face the future having a correct knowledge of the past. If in any way this knowledge is lacking, perhaps even misunderstood, then as sure as eggs is eggs we shall have a perverted view of this present trinity debate. Seventh-day Adventists cannot afford to be in that situation.

The truth of the matter is that throughout the entire time of Ellen White's ministry (1844 -1915), our denominational faith was strictly non-trinitarian but very soon after her death there was a decided push by some to change the beliefs that made us as such. This change did not take place overnight. It happened very gradually over decades. Particularly it was our beliefs concerning Christ and the Holy Spirit that underwent change. Needless to say this did eventually result in the acceptance of the trinity doctrine that is now currently professed by our denomination. This transition from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism was slow but sure.

Over the years and during my studies, I have developed a certain fondness for - also an admiration for - Benjamin Wilkinson's *Truth Triumphant*.

Benjamin Wilkinson (1872-1968) was a Seventh-day Adventist minister. He was also dean of theology at Washington Missionary College (later Columbia Union College – now Washington Adventist University). His latter named book was published by our denomination in 1944. He had previously written a much-debated book called *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated* (1930). In this publication, - also for various reasons - he decried certain versions of the Scriptures other than the KJV. Whilst we shall not pursue those thoughts here, this book, along with his *Truth Triumphant*, can be read online.

In this latter book a number of thought provoking statements are found. I will now share a few of these with you. They are very applicable to our present trinity controversy. In a chapter called: *What is the church in the wilderness?* he wrote

[“The present can never be properly understood without correct information concerning the past.” \(B. G. Wilkinson PhD, ‘Truth Triumphant’, page 11 chapter ‘What is the Church in the Wilderness? 1944’\)](#)

This is so simply said yet so very true. Those who fail to have a correct understanding of our denominational history, which will probably mean not having a correct understanding of our past theology, will certainly not understand anything of this trinity debate. The truth, whether it concerns the past or the present, is absolutely essential. This is why we cannot afford to be lacking in it or

misunderstand it. Wilkinson then went on to say

“Those who have been taught falsified history or who have had their minds filled with twisted interpretations of events gone by, stagger like the blind with a darkened mind” (*Ibid*)

Again this is very true. It is also very relevant to our present trinity debate. This is because many Seventh-day Adventists, regarding their denominational history, have been led to believe error. This is also why it is more than likely that many are wandering through Seventh-day Adventism having an incorrect understanding of this controversy. To continue this way could be fatal, hence a very good reason for understanding our denominational history. On the next page Wilkinson concluded

“It is equally true that a person who has distorted views of the present cannot build for a better future.” (*Ibid page 12*)

I would like to think that most Seventh-day Adventists agree that as a denomination we need to “build for a better future”. It follows therefore, regardless of whether we actually like our past history or not, we must face it with all honesty. Certainly there is no time remaining to pursue another course of action. In other words - to make our history more acceptable (meaning what we would like it to have been) - we must not in any way attempt to revise it. We must not make any attempts either to hide it.

Allow me to share with you now our very first quote from the writings of Ellen White. This is the lady whom Seventh-day Adventists believe was given the gift of prophecy. This is the very same gift that inspired the Bible writers. On a number of occasions, Ellen White told Seventh-day Adventists that they should regard their denominational history as being of the utmost importance. In one such often quoted statement she said

"The work is soon to close. The members of the church militant who have proved faithful will become the church triumphant. In reviewing our past history, having travelled over every step of advance to our present standing, I can say, Praise God!" (*Ellen G. White, General Conference Daily Bulletin 29th January 1893, see also General Conference Daily Bulletin 20th February 1899 'Extracts from Testimonies', also Review and Herald 12th October 1905 'Lessons from the Life of Solomon No. 5 (Order and Organization)' also Life Sketches page 196 'Burden Bearers' 1915*)

From the above references we can see how much this statement was quoted.

When Ellen White initially made this statement, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still a predominantly non-trinitarian denomination. In 1893, this was still part and parcel of its “present standing”. She went on to say

“As I see what God has wrought, I am filled with astonishment and with confidence in Christ as Leader.” (*Ibid*)

There was no doubt in Ellen White’s mind that God had been leading our pioneers. This is even though they were strictly non-trinitarian. She then added (this is the most often quoted part)

“We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and his teaching in our past history”. (*Ibid*)

Here, because it is a reminder of how God has led us in the past, we are told that every Seventh-day Adventist should regard their denominational history as being of paramount importance. For this reason it must not be misunderstood or forgotten. In the light of this statement it only stands to reason that we should not be afraid of being reminded of our history. We should therefore seek to have an unbiased knowledge of it so that in all good conscience we may face the future with confidence and with honesty.

To put all of this in a nutshell: If we correctly understand our denominational history it will more than likely be that we shall have a very good grasp of the present trinity debate within our denomination. On the other hand, if this history is not understood, then not only shall we be misinformed but also very confused. With the prophesied last-day events and the return of Jesus so very near, none of us can afford to be in that latter situation. Today, more so than ever before, is not a good time to be confused or misled. The devil is very active in preparing the world for his one last onslaught to deceive.

A once non-trinitarian denomination

Needless to say, the underlying reason for the present trinity rebellion within our denomination is because up to the time of Ellen White’s death (1915) and even beyond, we did not, as a denomination, profess, as one of our fundamental beliefs, the trinity doctrine. This means that during this same time period, by our own members and those of other denominations, we were considered a non-trinitarian denomination. This fact, coupled with the belief that it was God Himself who had given our pioneers their faith (beliefs), is the prime reason why today there are those amongst us who are urging a return to the early 1900’s faith of Seventh-day Adventism.

In other words, the non-trinitarians are saying that in the early 1900’s whilst Ellen White was alive, our denomination, regarding the Godhead, was teaching the truth. Needless to say the trinitarians disagree with this reasoning. They say that we were then teaching error. This is something else that in later sections we shall see very clearly.

These therefore are the various reasons for this present trinity debate within our denomination. The leading question is though: Who in this debate is correct and who is wrong? Answers must be sought. This is also where complexities arise.

Personal studies initiated by trinity - omega claims

Regarding this trinity controversy, there is one conclusion of which we can all be sure. This is that there is a very steady increase in the number of Seventh-day Adventists who believe that the trinity doctrine is an unscriptural view of the Godhead. There are even those who believe it to be *the omega* that Ellen White said in 1904 would eventually make its way into Seventh-day Adventism. This is when she warned the early 1900's Seventh-day Adventists

“Be not deceived; many will depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. We have now before us the alpha of this danger. The omega will be of a most startling nature.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B, No. 2 page 16, 'A Letter to Leading Physicians', July 24th 1904, 'Teach the Word'*)

The initiating factor behind the studies you are now reading was the claim that the trinity doctrine is this “omega” although I must admit that my first response to this was one of total disbelief. Without going into detail here, this constituted my very first encounter with our trinity debate. This eventually led me to write out various studies on this subject, one of which you are now reading. My prayer is that these will be a blessing to those who read them.

In the above *alpha and omega* testimony, Ellen White was warning Seventh-day Adventists not to depart from what was then, in 1904, their denominational faith. If this is not what she was doing then the warning does not make sense. I say this because whatever it was that Seventh-day Adventists were then teaching in 1904 - which is something we shall discover as we progress through these studies - it is only reasonable to conclude that Ellen White believed it to be the truth that God had given to His remnant people. If this had not been the case then it is only too obvious that neither she nor the other pioneers would have been teaching whatever it was they were then teaching. This I believe is a reasonable conclusion. Remember: When Ellen White said this in 1904 we were still a non-trinitarian denomination.

It should go without saying that Ellen White fully understood what constituted “the faith” of Seventh-day Adventists. It is also apparent that this was something she expected her readers to understand. If they did not understand it they would not have had a clue as to what she meant by this warning. This would not make any sense at all. Even more reasonable to conclude is that if Ellen White had not believed that this 1904 faith was a correct faith - meaning a faith that had been given to them by God - she would not have been warning Seventh-day Adventists not to depart from it. I would like to think that most would agree with this reasoning too because when all is said and done, it is only common sense. It behoves us therefore to understand from what it was that Ellen White was warning Seventh-day Adventists not to depart.

This having been said, it must be remembered that there is such a thing as a development (growth) of the truth. In other words, truth can be expanded and

magnified upon although being the truth it must always have been the truth. This would mean that even after being developed, it could still be said it always has been the truth. We shall return our thoughts to this in section ten because it is very important. It is also very relevant to our present denominational trinity debate.

It is because of these conclusions that throughout this study we shall be seeking to discover just what it was that constituted our once non-trinitarian 1904 denominational faith. In particular we shall be taking a look in detail as to what Ellen White said concerning it. This being done we can then move on to see if, by our changed theology, this same faith has been expanded and magnified upon or whether it has been rejected as error. As we have just noted, if it was **once** the truth then it is **still** the truth today. To put this in another way, if it was not the truth in 1904 it could never become the truth. This is because error, no matter how much it is developed, can never become the truth.

“The truth of God is not in harmony with the traditions of men, nor does it conform to their opinions. Like its divine Author, it is unchangeable, the same yesterday, today, and forever. Those who separate from God will call darkness light, and error truth. But darkness will never prove itself to be light, nor will error become truth.” (*Ellen G. White, 5th Volume Testimonies, page 62, ‘The Testimonies slighted’*)

Ellen White was here referring to the testimonies that God has seen fit to place in His church but the principle is very clear. Error can never become the truth – that would be impossible. As she explained

“Falsehoods are not changed into truth by being circulated for many years. In spite of their age, they are still falsehoods.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter to Bro. Evans, 8th July 1901, ‘Neglect of the Southern Field’*)

After we have completed our studies we shall be in a much better position to answer the question as to whether the trinity doctrine is “the omega” that Ellen White warned Seventh-day Adventists not to receive (see above). We shall also be in a much better position to see if Ellen White was a trinitarian or not. As most will realise, some Seventh-day Adventists (the trinitarians), are saying that she was a trinitarian whilst the non-trinitarians are saying that she was not. Within Seventh-day Adventism today this is a much-debated question.

If this “omega” is considered to be the trinity doctrine, then it must be concluded that Ellen White was not a trinitarian but if she is considered to be a trinitarian, then these trinity/omega claims need a very serious re-think. Whatever is decided regarding “the omega”, it must remain a very serious warning to every Seventh-day Adventist. This is why it needs to be thoroughly investigated.

The alpha of heresies and the omega

In the above warning, take particular note that Ellen White said the “omega”

(whatever it is) would be of “a most startling nature”. Clearly this reveals the seriousness of what this messenger of the Lord saw was coming upon Seventh-day Adventists. This “alpha” and “omega” warning was not the only one of its kind sent through her by God. There were other warnings - all of which, in one-way or another, were akin to it. All came during the early 1900’s. Note the following one. When warning Seventh-day Adventists of false sentiments concerning the presence and personality of God she wrote in 1904

““Living Temple” contains the alpha of these theories. I knew that the omega would follow in a little while; and I trembled for our people.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B, No. 2 ‘The Foundation of our Faith’ Page 53 1904*)

Here we are told that because of this coming “omega”, Ellen White “trembled for our people” (meaning Seventh-day Adventists). Notice too she said that this “omega” would appear within Seventh-day Adventism “in a little while”. This was in 1904, over 100 years ago. We must ask therefore, has this “omega” already arrived within our denomination, with most Seventh-day Adventists not even realising it, or is it still future? Some will reason that 100 years is a very long time and not just “a little while”. In continuing she wrote

“I knew that I must warn our brethren and sisters not to enter into controversy over the presence and personality of God. The statements made in “Living Temple” in regard to this point are incorrect. The Scripture used to substantiate the doctrine there set forth, is Scripture misapplied.” (*Ibid*)

To every Seventh-day Adventist today, these warnings should be regarded as a matter of extreme importance. This is because as most will realise, the trinity doctrine concerns the “the presence and personality of God”. Note too Ellen White said that regarding this matter the author of “Living Temple” was **misapplying Scripture**. It is therefore only reasonable to assume that this would also be happening with “the omega”. The misapplication of Scripture is very often the vanguard of false teachings. In the same year came another warning

“In the book “Living Temple” there is presented the alpha of deadly heresies. The omega will follow, and will be received by those who are not willing to heed the warning God has given.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B No. 2, page 50, letter, August 7th 1904 ‘Beware’*)

From the above, it is reasonable to conclude that Ellen White saw something theological coming upon Seventh-day Adventists that made her tremble with fear. This is why she gave these warnings with such clarity. We must ask therefore, as God’s remnant people, can we today afford to ignore them? From what we have just read it also appears that the “omega” does concern the Godhead. I say this because in an effort to justify what he had written in his book (*The Living Temple*), John Harvey Kellogg said that he had come to believe in

the trinity. There is therefore a connection.

The doctrine of the trinity appears to have been central to Kellogg's thinking. This was a doctrine that up to that time (early 1900's) was not professed by Seventh-day Adventists. There appears to be a link therefore between "the alpha", "the omega", "the presence and personality of God" and the trinity doctrine. More about Kellogg and his trinity views later.

For the moment though, note two very important things. The first is that Ellen White regarded Kellogg's views of God as the "alpha" (the first) of the heresies to come into Seventh-day Adventism. This tells us that she did not regard anything else being taught within Seventh-day Adventism prior to this time as being a heresy. We need to bear this in mind because there are many today who are saying that what Seventh-day Adventists were teaching at that time about Christ (that in eternity He was begotten of God) is heresy. Obviously Ellen White did not think so. She said that Kellogg's teachings were the first of the heresies to come into Seventh-day Adventism. Secondly, note that that Ellen White said that this "omega" would be received by those who are "not willing" to heed the warnings that had come from God. This means that it will be a matter of personal choice as to whether or not we allow ourselves to be deceived by it. For this reason we need to study and heed the warnings else we shall be amongst the deceived. This is the testimony of Jesus.

A serious denominational crisis

In later sections we shall see that there was, in the early 1900's within Seventh-day Adventism, a very serious crisis. This was when certain of our beliefs, particularly those constituting the pillars of our faith, came under attack from Satan. Listed briefly, these beliefs concerned the sanctuary, the separate personalities of God and Christ, also certain prophetic interpretations. The gift of the spirit of prophecy, as manifested in and through Ellen White, was also very seriously challenged. All of these attacks came not from outside of our church but from within it. This is why it was a crisis.

During the early 1900's, the warnings that came from Ellen White to Seventh-day Adventists were in abundance. To the delegates at the 1905 General Conference Session came this particular warning

"Let not any man enter upon the work of tearing down the foundations of the truth that have made us what we are. God has led His people forward step by step though there were pitfalls of error on every side. Under the wonderful guidance of a plain, "Thus saith the Lord," a truth has been established that has stood the test of trial. When men arise and attempt to draw away disciples after them, meet them with the truths that have been tried as by fire." (Ellen G. White to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Takoma Park, Washington D. C., May 24th 1905, "A Warning against False Theories," MR 760)

At this conference, Seventh-day Adventists were being told that the “foundations of the truth” that had made them what they were was the truth that had “stood the test of trial”. This is why Ellen White said that those who would attempt bring in wrong teachings that would lead our people astray, should be confronted with “truths that have been tried as by fire”. Note that this was in 1905. This was the year following the alpha and omega warnings. Then, after quoting Revelation 3:1-3 (which was God’s message to Sardis telling them to hold fast to their beliefs) came this further counsel

“Those who seek to remove the old landmarks are not holding fast; they are not remembering how they have received and heard. Those who try to bring in theories that would remove the pillars of our faith concerning the sanctuary or concerning the personality of God or of Christ, are working as blind men. They are seeking to bring in uncertainties and to set the people of God adrift without an anchor.” (*Ibid*)

Notice the two areas that Ellen White said were under attack. One was **the sanctuary** whilst the other was the **separate personalities of God and Christ**. This was when non-trinitarianism was the standard (regular) belief in Seventh-day Adventism. We shall show this very clearly in later sections. Notice too Ellen White said that the teachings some were attempting to bring into the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventism were “uncertainties”. These must be categorised as teachings that may or may not be true (speculation).

Amongst other things, this could have included teachings regarding the Godhead, or as some say the trinity. This is because as we shall see in section four, the trinity doctrine is only an assumed doctrine, meaning that in the Scriptures it is not explicitly stated. In other words, it is built on speculation. In the very same testimony in which she gave one of the alpha and omega warnings (see above) we find these words

“The enemy of souls has sought to bring in the supposition that a great reformation was to take place among Seventh-day Adventists, and that this reformation would consist in giving up the doctrines which stand as the pillars of our faith, and engaging in a process of reorganization.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B No. 2 page 54 ‘The Foundation of Our Faith’, 1904*)

This would constitute a very serious, and a very radical, reformation. In the mind of Ellen White, these “pillars” would have included the sanctuary, also that which Seventh-day Adventists believed about God and Christ. As she said (see previous quote), these were the two areas that in 1905 were under attack. Then came more details

“Were this reformation to take place, what would result? The principles of truth that God in His wisdom has given to the remnant church, would be discarded. Our religion would be changed. The fundamental principles that

have sustained the work for the last fifty years would be accounted as error. A new organization would be established. Books of a new order would be written. A system of intellectual philosophy would be introduced. The founders of this system would go into the cities, and do a wonderful work. The Sabbath, of course, would be lightly regarded, as also the God who created it." (*Ibid*)

Please note again. This was when non-trinitarianism was still our denominational faith - also when our entire system of beliefs was built on this foundation.

Ellen White warned that if this satanic reformation did take place, great changes would be made to the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. She even said that "Books of a new order" would be written. This is important because up to then (1904), no books supporting the trinity doctrine had ever come off our presses. Notice she said that the fundamental principles that up to then had sustained the work "would be accounted as error", also that "Our religion would be changed". This really was a very serious warning. It would be saying that what was believed and taught during the time of Ellen White's ministry was false doctrine. Notice too the warning about "intellectual philosophy". Many non-trinitarians regard the trinity doctrine as such. We shall see the reason for this in section four.

In a letter written February 24th 1915, W. C. White spoke of the health of his mother Ellen G. White. He reported her as saying

"I tell you now, that when I am laid to rest, great changes will take place.

I do not know when I shall be taken, and desire to warn all against the devices of the devil.

I want the people to know that I warned them fully before my death.

I do not know especially what changes will take place, but Satan's devices will be brought before the people. But they should watch every conceivable sin that Satan will try to immortalize." (*W. C. White reporting Ellen White's words, Letter, 24th February 1915*)

The White Estate has confirmed this report to be genuine. Five months later Ellen White died.

From within – not from without

From reading the above warnings it is clear that these satanic changes would be urged not from outside of our denomination but from **within**. This makes them even more deceptive and more serious. It would constitute an apostasy. Seventh-day Adventists cannot say that they had not been warned about this insider assault on their long held and established beliefs. In 1887, which was the year before the famous Minneapolis General Conference, they were counselled

“We have far more to fear from within than from without.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 22nd March 1887, ‘The church’s greatest need’*)

The apostle Paul said much the same. When referring to his own departing he said

“For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” Acts 20:29-30

Those outside of our faith have always challenged our distinctive doctrines. These doctrines were such as our once non-trinitarianism, the seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday), our sanctuary beliefs, including of course the investigative judgement, the state of the dead and the manifestation of the spirit of prophecy etc. This is why the attack on these beliefs, from those outside of our denomination, was never a crisis but rather the norm. It was the *internal attack* that was a very serious problem for Seventh-day Adventists. This was a crisis.

An ongoing crisis

This *internal crisis* is still in progress today. Satan, from within, is still doing everything he can to bring to nought the message that God has given to His remnant people. So what are God’s people to do in such a crisis?

In what we term Old Testament times - also in order to keep His people close to Him or even sometimes to bring them back from apostasy - God raised up prophets with messages of love, warning, reproof and counsel. Sin had often overtaken Israel yet continually they failed to realise their own sinfulness. In consequence of this, sin had crept upon them surreptitiously and by it they were often deceived.

“What astonishing deception and fearful blindness had, like a dark cloud, covered Israel! This blindness and apostasy had not closed about them suddenly; it had come upon them gradually as they had not heeded the word of reproof and warning which the Lord had sent to them because of their pride and their sins. And now, in this fearful crisis, in the presence of the idolatrous priests and the apostate king, they remained neutral.” (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies Volume 3, page 280, ‘The Laodicean Church’*)

At times, even to those called of God, sin is almost imperceptible. This is inasmuch as it has the ability to creep up unawares and deceive. This especially happens (as was said here by Ellen White) when the reproofs and warnings that God so graciously sends are consistently ignored. Those who fail to heed these admonitions will then adopt a “neutral” condition of the mind. They will develop either a ‘could not care less’ or ‘it does not matter’ attitude. Notice here we are told that this apostasy had not come upon God’s people suddenly but gradually. This was exactly the same way as the trinity doctrine was introduced within Seventh-day Adventism – very gradually.

In a crisis, especially with regards to the things of God, indifference is always deplorable. Unfortunately, even today it is found amongst God's people. I say this because regarding the trinity debate there are many it seems who adopt this same attitude. In other words, they are not concerned about it one way or the other. God cannot be pleased with this attitude.

“If God abhors one sin above another, of which His people are guilty, it is doing nothing in case of an emergency. Indifference and neutrality in a religious crisis is regarded of God as a grievous crime and equal to the very worst type of hostility against God.” (*Ibid*)

These are very strong words and they certainly show that in a crisis those who profess to be God's people are not to sit back and do nothing. Those who do so are just timeservers. Certainly they are not servants of the Most High God and certainly there is no fence to sit upon. In conclusion we are either on the side of truth (meaning on God's side) or we are not. Our outward actions will always reveal our inner attitude – and as we all know, actions speak louder than words. Regarding Israel's apostasy at Mount Sinai, this is found written in *Patriarchs and Prophets*

“Of all the sins that God will punish, none are more grievous in His sight than those that encourage others to do evil. God would have His servants prove their loyalty by faithfully rebuking transgression, however painful the act may be. Those who are honored with a divine commission are not to be weak, pliant time-servers. They are not to aim at self-exaltation, or to shun disagreeable duties, but to perform God's work with unswerving fidelity.” (*Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, page 323, 'Idolatry at Sinai'*)

At Sinai, those who were waiting for Moses to return from the mount grew impatient. This is why it was decided to make a representation of the One who had led them out of Egypt. God had already made it very clear that no such thing should ever be made as an object of worship (see Exodus 20:2-6, 29:46 etc) yet at the foot of Mount Sinai (Sinai was where these commandments had first been proclaimed by God), also upon manufacturing a golden calf, it was boldly proclaimed

“These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.” Exodus 32:4

This was outright idolatry. It was also only a very short time from when those that God had delivered from slavery had promised to unreservedly obey Him. This promise included not making idols of worship (for their promise see Exodus 19:8 and 24:1-8).

“The memory of their covenant with God, their terror when, falling upon their faces, they had exceedingly feared and quaked, all had vanished like smoke. Although the glory of God was still like devouring fire upon the top

of the mount, yet, when the presence of Moses was withdrawn, the old habits of thought and feeling began to assert their power. The people wearied of waiting for the return of Moses, and began to clamor for some visible representation of God.” (*Ellen G. White, Manuscript Release MR 109, written 10th May 1896*)

Here then is a very serious question to ponder. Could it be that “wearied of waiting” for the return of Jesus, also by reason of their acceptance of the trinity doctrine, that Seventh-day Adventists have manufactured a representation of God that they say is the One who has been leading them? This must be considered a very serious possibility but only an in-depth study of the facts will determine whether this is true or not. This is something about which we need to be very candid. History does have a habit of repeating itself. After quoting Ephesians 5:1, Ellen White penned these words

“Are we followers of God as dear children? or are we servants of the prince of darkness? Are we worshipers of Jehovah, or of Baal? of the living God, or of idols?

No outward shrines may be visible, there may be no image for the eye to rest upon; yet we may be practising idolatry. It is as easy to make an idol of cherished ideas or objects as to fashion gods of wood or stone. Thousands have a false conception of God and his attributes. They are as verily serving a false god as were the servants of Baal.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 3rd December 1908, ‘The Privilege and Duty of the Followers of Christ’, see also Signs of the Times 8th February 1883 and Testimonies Volume 5 page 173*)

In *The Great Controversy* we also find this interesting observation

“It is as easy to make an idol of false doctrines and theories as to fashion an idol of wood or stone. By misrepresenting the attributes of God, Satan leads men to conceive of Him in a false character. With many, a philosophical idol is enthroned in the place of Jehovah; while the living God, as He is revealed in His word, in Christ, and in the works of creation, is worshiped by but few. Thousands deify nature while they deny the God of nature.” (*Ellen White, The Great Controversy, page 584, 1911 edition, ‘The Impending Conflict’*)

Many say that the belief that God is a trinity (three-in-one) is only philosophical speculation – and who can blame them for saying such a thing? Nowhere in the Scriptures is God described in such a manner. We are left wondering if, when she penned the following words, Ellen White had the trinity doctrine in mind. It is quite possible.

“Though in a different form, idolatry exists in the Christian world today as verily as it existed among ancient Israel in the days of Elijah. The god of

many professedly wise men, of philosophers, poets, politicians, journalists - the god of polished fashionable circles, of many colleges and universities, even of some theological institutions -- is little better than Baal, the sun-god of Phoenicia." (*Ibid*)

As we shall see later in this study, believing that God is a trinity (as purported in the trinity doctrine) can lead to other errors being accepted. It certainly hides the risk taken by God and Christ in the plan of redemption. This in turn hides how much they both really love us. This will especially be seen in section thirteen. Note here that Ellen White says that the god of some "theological institutions" is nothing better than Baal. With reference to the words that the apostle Paul wrote to his young friend Timothy, Ellen White penned these words

"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron. Before the last developments of the work of apostasy there will be a confusion of faith. There will not be clear and definite ideas concerning the mystery of God. One truth after another will be corrupted. "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." (*Ibid*)

With the vision belonging only to one who is gifted with the spirit of prophecy, Ellen White saw the end of all things. She saw that at the end of time ("the last developments of the work of apostasy") there would be corruption and confusion concerning the "mystery of God", meaning God manifest in the flesh (see 1 Timothy 3:16). How true this is today, even amongst those within our own denomination. There is total confusion over it. How near therefore is the return of Jesus? How true also is that which Ellen White said next?

"There are many who deny the pre-existence of Christ, and therefore deny his divinity; they do not accept him as a personal Saviour. This is a total denial of Christ. He was the only-begotten Son of God, who was one with the Father from the beginning. By him the worlds were made". (*Ibid*)

Today we see around us many who profess to be Christians yet are denying the divinity of Christ. These include such as Christadelphians and Jehovah's Witnesses although we will not delve into their particular beliefs here. Notice here the stress that Ellen White places on Christ being "the only-begotten Son of God". Within this trinity debate, this is a very important issue. We shall be returning our thoughts to this over and over again.

The Omniscient One is above discussion

In 1905, which was 7 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*, Ellen White spoke the following words to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference Session

“Men may put their own interpretation upon God, but no human mind can comprehend him. This problem has not been given us to solve.” (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald. 1st June 1905, ‘The work in Washington’, see also 8th Volume Testimonies page 279*)

This was at the height of the early 1900’s Godhead crisis within Seventh-day Adventism. Ellen White was warning the conference delegates that no attempt should be made to explain God. This tells us just what the problem was that here in 1905 Ellen White was addressing. The non-trinitarians are saying today that the trinitarians, by their three-in-one reasoning and formulas, are attempting to achieve this end. This is one of the reasons why the non-trinitarians are so much against this teaching. Her counsel continued

“Let not finite man attempt to interpret Jehovah. Let none indulge in speculation regarding his nature. Here silence is eloquence. The omniscient One is above discussion.

Christ is one with the Father, but Christ and God are two distinct personages.” (*Ibid*)

Note first of all Ellen White’s reference to oneness (“Christ is one with the Father”). This is very important. It is central to trinitarian reasoning. Note too that in spite of this oneness (whatever constitutes it), Ellen White did emphasize that God and Christ are “two distinct personages”. If this is kept in mind it will, in this trinity debate, help us to maintain an even balance. This means that we need to remember that **God is an individual person** and that **Christ is an individual person. They are two distinct separate personages**. This will save us from all sorts of deceptions. In conclusion Ellen White said to the delegates

“The oneness of Christ's followers with him is to be the great, unmistakable proof that God did indeed send his Son into the world to save sinners. But a loose, lax religion leaves the world bewildered and confused.” (*Ibid*)

A fundamental part of our denominational trinity debate is whether or not Christ is truly the Son of God. We shall see more of this in later sections. Notice here again the stress that Ellen White places on Christ being a Son.

A closing thought

Before we conclude this opening section, there is one more quote from Ellen G. White that demands our attention. This is when she said

“We have many lessons to learn, and many, many to unlearn. God and heaven alone are infallible. Those who think that they will never have to give up a cherished view, never have occasion to change an opinion, will be disappointed. As long as we hold to our own ideas and opinions with determined persistency, we cannot have the unity for which Christ prayed.”(*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 26th July 1892, ‘Search the*

Scriptures')

Bearing the relevance of this statement in mind, I invite you to proceed to section two. This is where we shall take a look at what I believe are a number of necessary introductory notes and observations. Following this we shall then take note of what I personally describe as heaven inspired counsel. This counsel (advice) is how to deal with, when they arise within our church, theological disagreements. This is very relevant to our present trinity controversy. We shall then go on to discuss the trinity doctrine in detail. God bless you as you continue in this study.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section two

Notes and observations

This research paper concerns how the trinity doctrine became a part of the teachings of early Christianity. It also details how it became part of the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This was after it had been rejected all the time of Ellen White's ministry. In itself, this study is not exhaustive but it is a balanced synopsis to-date (2008) of the knowledge that its author has acquired during his 9 years of study of these subjects. His intent, by sharing this knowledge with others, is to help those who are interested, which in the main will probably be Seventh-day Adventists, to have a better understanding of the present trinity debate within Seventh-day Adventism. Certainly it will be an invaluable aid in making better-informed decisions.

I would like the readers of his study to become participants in it. This is why to all those who would like to comment or ask questions I say please email me. My email address can be found on the first page of this study. I gladly welcome all communications.

A lengthy study

From the onset, the one thing that some are going to say is that this study is very lengthy – which indeed is very true. It is also something for which no excuse is made. This is why the intent is to make it easy to read and easy to understand.

Regarding this trinity controversy there are many misconceptions. There are also many Seventh-day Adventists who are not aware as to what the trinity doctrine actually teaches. This is the reason why in the earlier sections of this study, particularly section five and section six, we shall be taking a look in detail at this teaching. It also appears that concerning our denominational history, there are those who have been led to believe in a revised version of it. Those who do not understand what this doctrine teaches will have an incorrect understanding of the present trinity debate. In other words, they will have a misconception of it.

This study is designed to correct these misconceptions. This is why there is the necessity of its very broad scope, which admittedly has made it rather lengthy. As my mother used to say though (this was when I said I wanted something but was too lazy to make the effort to get it): "If something is worth having it is worth fetching". We would do well to ponder this little saying. It is very big on meaning.

I have found, in my deliberations with others, that many have only a shallow understanding of the issues involved in this trinity controversy yet most seem satisfied with what they know. This is a very dangerous position in which to be found. As the famous poet Alexander Pope wrote

"A little learning is a dangerous thing; drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring: there shallow draughts intoxicate the brain, and drinking largely sobers us again." (*Alexander Pope, An essay on criticism, part ii*)

In Greek mythology the "Pierian Spring" is said to be an area on Mount Olympus where the Muses (Greek goddesses of inspiration – the daughters of Zeus) lived. It was also said to be a continuing source of knowledge and inspiration. Drinking sparingly of it is said to "intoxicate the brain" meaning to produce the sensation (effect) that a great knowledge is possessed whilst all the time it is only "a little learning". To drink largely of the spring is said to "sober us again" meaning to bring us to our senses and make us wise.

Pope's reasoning has a tremendous relevance to the present trinity debate within our denomination. This is because it is only when we fully appreciate the issues involved that we can truly see the bigger picture. We therefore must not be satisfied with "shallow draughts" but instead drink deep of the well of knowledge. As Alexander Pope said, either "drink deep" or leave it alone.

It is easy to be led astray by shallow knowledge. A little learning really is a dangerous thing. We must also remember that in this trinity controversy, eternal lives are at stake - not simply theology.

A red herring

It has become a popular belief within present-day Seventh-day Adventism that this current trinity debate only concerns two aspects of the Christian faith, namely the deity of Christ and the personhood the Holy Spirit. This is most definitely a very large red herring (a subterfuge). This debate is far more involved than these two issues although they are both very much an integral part of it. This trinity controversy involves the very gospel of Jesus Christ, meaning what was risked, sacrificed and achieved through God's one and only Son partaking of humanity. It also involves how Christians today are to overcome sin and how Seventh-day Adventists should regard the writings of Ellen White. We shall see this as we go along.

As has been said previously - and will also be seen more clearly in section four - the trinity doctrine is only an assumed (implied) doctrine, meaning that it is not explicitly expressed in the Scriptures. It is therefore possible that certain aspects of it, if not very careful, may be assumed in error. This is why, when attempting to delineate the relationship that exists between the three personalities of the Godhead, great care must be taken. In other words, if we do make an assumption (a speculation), which in reality is never a very safe thing to do concerning any doctrine, we must not go to extremes or be too dogmatic about

it. This is only common sense.

Although the trinity doctrine is only a speculative doctrine, those who believe it usually make the claim that it is built upon everything that the Scriptures tell us regarding God, Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is therefore imperative that concerning these three personalities, nothing is omitted that the Scriptures do tell us. If something is omitted, this will cause any conclusions to be distorted.

Some even go to the lengths of saying that if a person does not believe in the trinity doctrine then they are not a Christian: meaning that they are in danger of forfeiting their salvation. Most trinitarians will say that if the trinity doctrine is not professed then the deity of Christ is not correctly depicted. This of course is a matter of debate because none of our pioneers confessed the trinity. Are we to assume from this that none of them professed the deity of Christ correctly? Some Seventh-day Adventists are answering yes to this question. We shall see this in later sections. Those who believe that unless a person accepts the trinity they are not saved must ultimately believe that the majority of early Seventh-day Adventists are not saved.

As we progress through this study, it will be seen that the trinity doctrine seriously impacts the gospel. This is one of the major reasons why the non-trinitarians today are objecting to it as being part of the present beliefs of Seventh-day Adventism. Certainly this trinity debate does not just concern the deity of Christ and the personhood of the Holy Spirit. As I said, this really is a very large red herring.

The extensive use of the writings of Ellen White

Throughout this study, particularly as we attempt to rediscover the early 1900's faith of Seventh-day Adventists, this author draws extensively on the writings of Ellen White. This he does for two very good reasons. One reason is that along with many of his fellow church members, he firmly believes that God blessed this lady (and our church) with the gift known in Scripture as the gift of prophecy. This is the very same gift that enthused each of the Bible writers. In effect, this means that her writings, to those who hold to this belief, should be accepted as having a certain authority. The actual extent of this authority will only be in accord with the experience and understanding of the individual.

In other words, no one person can determine this authority on behalf of another, or, to put it another way again, no one person can tell another person how they should regard Ellen White or her writings. Just like the extent to which someone regards the Scriptures, the latter is a personal decision based on personal experience. Each will need to answer to God as to how they respond to what He has revealed through these two sources. They are not to be judged by erring mortals. As Ellen White once said to George Ide Butler who was then the General Conference President (this was at the time of the 1888 General Conference session)

“God has not committed to any finite man the work of judging others, for man's judgment would be biased by his peculiar traits of character. Neither had He laid it upon any man to bind the conscience of another, or to pass judgment upon His holy Word, defining what is inspired and what is human. Unless sanctified, soul, body, and spirit, man will be in danger of manifesting an unkindly spirit toward his brother who does not agree with his ideas. There is no such narrowness with God” (*Ellen G. White, Letter to G. I Butler, written from Minneapolis October 14th, 1888, Volume 12 Manuscript Releases, MR 998*)

To whatever extent Ellen White's writings are received, it is only reasonable to believe that they should be accepted as depicting a fair reflection of those things that during her lifetime happened within Seventh-day Adventism. In other words, what she wrote should be accepted as a genuine reflection of our denominational history.

The second reason for what some may describe as a copious use in this study of Ellen White's writings is because Seventh-day Adventists today are being continually told, through their own denominational publications, that it was the things that this lady wrote that led their denomination to become trinitarian. This is particularly they say regarding what she wrote in her book on the life of Christ (*Desire of Ages*). This is neatly summed up in an article appropriately called: *The use and abuse of authority* written by Andrew Bates and published in the Ministry magazine of June 2002.

“Church publications are now saying more clearly that only with the publication of *The Desire of Ages* (1898) did a full trinitarian theology burst upon the Adventist scene.”(*Andrew Bates, Ministry, June 2002, 'The use and abuse of authority'*)

Many Seventh-day Adventists today believe this statement to be true but as we shall see in later sections, the author of these notes does not agree with this conclusion. This is because no historical record can be found of this happening. When it was published in 1898, records show that Ellen White's *Desire of Ages* had no affect whatever on the theology of Seventh-day Adventism. It was only many years after Ellen White had died that this book was said to depict a trinitarian idea of God.

Note that during the early 1900's whilst Ellen White was alive, also for at least three decades after she had died, most regarded the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a non-trinitarian denomination. This was by members and non-members alike. This means that for decades after it was published, *Desire of Ages* did not change our professed denominational theology. This has led many people to wonder why we did not introduce this teaching whilst Ellen White was alive, or, to put it another way, why did our church wait until Ellen White was dead to say that her writings depict God as being a trinity. It must be admitted that this is a very interesting question. This is why today it demands our fullest

attention- also a very thorough investigation.

The claim that it was Ellen White's writings that led our denomination to become trinitarian makes it absolutely imperative for today's Seventh-day Adventist to meticulously investigate what this lady did write on the subject of the Godhead. This is only common sense. In fact when it is reasoned through, also in the context of our studies, this latter reason is far more important than the claim that she was gifted with the spirit of prophecy. Think it through and you will see what I mean.

A question of loyalties

As was said in the previous section, it is inevitable that in this trinity dispute, people will take sides. It must be asked therefore, what is it that will determine which side you the reader will take? In other words, wherein lay your own personal loyalties?

As we progress through this study, it will become abundantly clear that the 1904 Seventh-day Adventist Church was predominantly a non-trinitarian denomination. This remained the same for decades beyond the death of Ellen White (remember she died in 1915). We shall also take note that when there was a denominational crisis regarding our Godhead beliefs in the early 1900's, Ellen White very clearly warned Seventh-day Adventists not to change from what they believed, which was then based on non-trinitarianism. We were warned though, again through Ellen White, that there would be attempts to change this faith. We noted this in the previous section. In later sections we shall return our thoughts to these warnings.

On the face of it therefore, it certainly does appear that those today giving their support to the trinity doctrine are neither upholding the beliefs of the pioneers nor are they heeding the advice given by Ellen White. This must lead us to ask if there can be found today amongst us adequate license for adopting a set of beliefs concerning the Godhead that was not generally held by our pioneers.

This demands a very careful consideration of the facts. This is because as we shall see later, Ellen White did clearly say, in 1904, that the beliefs and teachings of Seventh-day Adventists was the truth that God had given to His people. This is why the pioneers were teaching it and why Ellen White warned our people not to depart from it (remember the alpha and omega warnings in the previous section). We can only conclude therefore that unless we have a desire to find ourselves at variance with God, we do need to adopt extreme caution as to how we regard these 1904 beliefs - albeit they were non-trinitarian.

As we also noted in the alpha and omega warning, it was the 1904 faith of Seventh-day Adventists from which Ellen White said that there would be a departing. We must ask in consequence therefore, was this non-trinitarianism a correct faith – a faith that had been substantiated by the Holy Spirit of God, or was it something that was not biblically sound? This is the issue at stake.

A calling together of the remnant

In the early 1800's, God led his people out of confusion (out of Babylon) and into the light of His glorious truth. This was when to proclaim a message that would cut through the deceptions of Satan that for so many centuries had been effectively interwoven with the truths of the Scriptures, He ordained into being the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It was also to Seventh-day Adventists that God gave the responsibility, also the privilege, of sounding the final trumpet call of salvation. They were the ones He appointed to say to His people

“ ... Come out of her [Babylon], my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double.” Revelation 18:4-6 (see also Revelation 14:8)

God's intent was that the Seventh-day Adventist Church should be the **visible remnant** of His people. It was to them that He gave the last day message of salvation. This is why the one thing that must be realised in this trinity debate is that since the death of Ellen White, God has either advanced the thinking of His people (in their adoption of the trinity doctrine) or they are in a state of apostasy (returned to the teachings of Babylon). Certainly it can only be one or the other. There are no other alternatives.

As we shall see in later sections, our church today is saying that the Godhead beliefs of our pioneers were false doctrine and not biblical truth. This is why we cannot say, as a denomination, that the trinity doctrine is a magnification or an advancement of what these early Seventh-day Adventists believed. This is because error can never develop into truth or vice versa. We noted this in the previous section. We shall return our thoughts to this in section ten. It really is very important.

Apostasy or advance?

Current non-trinitarians are making certain claims that are diametrically opposite to those being made by the trinitarians. This is because the former are claiming that our church is now in a state of apostasy (regarding our Godhead beliefs) whilst the latter, which includes the leadership of our church, are saying that we have advanced in the knowledge of God. Whichever is true, it can be seen that this trinity dispute is extremely serious.

It was because our pioneers believed that the trinity doctrine was unscriptural, also detrimental to the gospel, that they firmly rejected it. This is why this very same teaching, in the early days of Seventh-day Adventism, was often spoken out against. To a great extent, this was accomplished through our denominational publications. This is something else we shall see in later sections (particularly section twenty).

As do many present-day Seventh-day Adventists, our pioneers believed that the Seventh-day Adventist Church was the final segment of the reformation begun in the 16th century by Martin Luther. In the ongoing of this reformation, through God revealing certain Scriptural truths, these same pioneers rejected such teachings as the immortality of the soul, Sunday sacredness, infant baptism and the like. They also, regarding it as a leftover from the reformation, rejected the doctrine of the trinity. As James White, the husband of Ellen White once said

“The “mystery of iniquity” began to work in the church in Paul’s day. It finally crowded out the simplicity of the gospel and corrupted the doctrine of Christ, and the church went into the wilderness. Martin Luther and other reformers, arose in the strength of God, and with the Word and Spirit, made mighty strides in the reformation. The greatest fault we can find in the Reformation is, the Reformers stopped reforming. Had they gone on, and onward, till they had left the last vestige of Papacy behind, such as natural immortality, sprinkling, the trinity, and Sunday-keeping, the church would now be free from her unscriptural errors.” (*James White, February 7, 1856, Review & Herald, Vol. 7, No. 19, page 148-9 ‘The Word’*)

Notice particularly James White’s remarks concerning “the gospel”. As we noted above, this is what the non-trinitarians say today is being affected by the trinity doctrine. This was only the same as he said two years previously

“As fundamental errors, we might class with this counterfeit sabbath other errors which Protestants have brought away from the Catholic church, such as sprinkling for baptism, the trinity, the consciousness of the dead and eternal life in misery.” (*James White, Review and Herald, September 12 1854, ‘The position of the remnant. Their Duties and Trials Considered!’*)

This was also much the same as the vast majority (if not all) of our early pioneers believed. We must ask therefore, were these pioneers correct in their conclusions or were they wrong?

Looking at this from another angle we could ask this question: By our present acceptance of the trinity doctrine, are we, as Seventh-day Adventists, now continuing the reformation or are we returning to apostasy? If as James White said that the pioneers were correct, then today we must be doing the latter. As has been noted previously, this question of the trinity is indeed a very serious one. We must not attempt to sweep it under the carpet. It is not a matter to be ignored.

Note James White said that because of the original apostasy from the Christian faith, the true church was driven into the wilderness. This is with reference to the 1260 years of papal supremacy (AD 538-1798) that Christians endured during the dark and the middle-ages (see Daniel 7:25 and Revelation 12:14 etc).

It was shortly after this time period that God raised up the Seventh-day Adventist

Church. This He did to proclaim the truth that throughout these thirteen centuries had been perverted by Satan. The question must be asked therefore, are we about to see a repeat of when Christians were persecuted by the church for not believing such as the trinity doctrine and not accepting the so-called authority of the church etc? This must be a very pertinent question because Ellen White once said

“Again and again I have been shown that the past experiences of God's people are not to be counted as dead facts. We are not to treat the record of these experiences as we would treat a last year's almanac. The record is to be kept in mind, for history will repeat itself” (*Ellen G. White, letter 238 1903 to A. G. Daniells, November 1st 1903.*)

An overview of history

The ultimate intent of this research paper is an appraisal of **the history** of how why and when the trinity doctrine became an integral part of the fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventism. In the process it will show just what it was that our pioneers, especially Ellen White, believed concerning the three personalities of the Godhead. It will also show us how the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church have developed (changed) over the years, especially from what they were in the early 1900's. This was as Ellen White's ministry drew to a close. She died in 1915.

This study will also give an insight as to how the trinity doctrine itself became a part of the beliefs of Christianity. The latter is integral to our study of how this teaching eventually became a part of the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventism. It will also reveal what our beliefs were, as a denomination, when Ellen White gave the alpha and omega warnings (see previous section).

In this study, just as there is in all the other studies this author has undertaken, there will be seen the **implications** of trinity theology. It is these implications that help provide the very reasons why today there is a growing number of Seventh-day Adventists who are coming to believe that the theology of the trinity doctrine is detrimental to the gospel. For this reason they are returning to a Bible based understanding of the Godhead, which, as my studies have led me to realise, does appear to best describe the early 1900's faith of Seventh-day Adventists. I say this because as many Christians will no doubt realise, the trinity doctrine is only an assumed (implied) doctrine, meaning that it is not explicitly expressed within the Scriptures. As we shall discover in section four, even the Seventh-day Adventist Church admits to this much being true. This is why some Seventh-day Adventists are saying that this matter of how God exists, which is what the trinity doctrine concerns, should have been left alone and not conjectured upon.

Please accept, as I do, that with respect to the history of the trinity controversy within Seventh-day Adventism, I do not have all the answers. It is for this reason that I am quite willing to listen to anyone who may have anything relevant to say on this very important subject. For whatever reason, please feel free to email

me. Please note also that I am only a layperson with a very basic education and have not been educated in the complexities of Hebrew, Greek or Aramaic, therefore for an understanding of these as well as other languages I am completely dependant on those who do have these skills. I do though, very importantly, have complete confidence in the testimony of God's Spirit as manifested in and through the writings of Ellen White although whichever is believed to be of the greater advantage (meaning the greater value) is something for you the reader to decide.

I would also like to point out that as new information comes to hand, these studies are updated. This is because my only purpose from the very beginning was to discover the truth concerning the trinity doctrine. It was also to discover the truth concerning this present trinity debate within our denomination. This being accomplished, my intent was to share it with others.

In itself, this history study should not be taken as simply establishing a theology. This is because the latter can only be established by comparing Scripture with Scripture. As the Bible says

“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them”. Isaiah 8:20

An indisputable yet startling and challenging fact

It is an indisputable fact of history that it was only after the death of Ellen White (1915) that the trinity doctrine was introduced into the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Whilst she was alive it certainly did not exist within the declared beliefs of our church – which some years were listed in our Yearbook. This is why today our pioneers could not become church members. Their beliefs were decidedly non-trinitarian. We shall see in section ten that our church today admits this to be true. This must be regarded as a rather startling fact. This is why it does demand us, as God's remnant people, to discover not only the truth concerning our history but also who is right and who is wrong in this trinity affair. Were our pioneers correct in what they believed (a non-trinitarian faith) or is our present trinitarian faith correct? Perhaps there is even middle ground to be found. As we seek to re-discover our history, these are questions we need to bear in mind.

So how are we to establish who is right and who is wrong in this trinity dispute? This can only be decided upon by the weight of evidence that is found when making a reasonable study of the issues involved. This is the purpose of this study. Before we begin however, I do believe that it is necessary to give due consideration to what I term some heaven inspired counsel. This is the advice that Seventh-day Adventists have been given through the spirit of prophecy on how to deal with disagreements regarding doctrine when they arise in the church. We shall consider this counsel in the next section. Regardless of whether we count ourselves as being amongst the trinitarians or the non-trinitarians, this advice will also show us what our attitude should be towards

those who differ from us in our beliefs.

The one thing that we know for sure is that in spite of any reservations that we may have concerning this trinity dispute (or any other dispute for that matter), God will surely bless those who continue to sincerely seek for the truth. He will also bless abundantly those who wish to share what they find with others who are also sincerely seeking it.

“The harmonious relation of truth, like links in a chain, will, just as fast as the mind is quickened by the Spirit of God to comprehend light and in humbleness of mind appropriate it, be dispensed to others, and give the glory back to God. The development of truth will be the reward to the humble-hearted seeker, who will fear God and walk with Him. The truth which the mind grasps as truth is capable of constant expansion and new developments. While beholding it, the truth is seen in all its bearings in the life and character, and becomes more clear and certain and beautiful. As the mind grasps it in its preciousness, it becomes elevated, ennobled, sanctified.” (*Ellen G. White, Ms 143, 1897, December 9th 1897, ‘Christ’s mission to earth’*)

One final word from Ellen White: The following was published in Testimonies Volume 5 (1889). It was later included in Gospel Workers (1915). In the former, under the subheading *The Danger of rejecting light*, Ellen White wrote

“Peter exhorts his brethren to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." [2 PETER 3:18.] Whenever the people of God are growing in grace, they will be constantly obtaining a clearer understanding of His word. They will discern new light and beauty in its sacred truths. This has been true in the history of the church in all ages, and thus it will continue to the end. But as real spiritual life declines, it has ever been the tendency to cease to advance in the knowledge of the truth. Men rest satisfied with the light already received from God's word, and discourage any further investigation of the Scriptures. They become conservative, and seek to avoid discussion.” (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies Volume 5 page 706, ‘The Mysteries of the Bible a Proof of its Inspiration’, see also Gospel Workers page 297, ‘Dangers’*)

“The fact that there is no controversy or agitation among God's people, should not be regarded as conclusive evidence that they are holding fast to sound doctrine. There is reason to fear that they may not be clearly discriminating between truth and error. When no new questions are started by investigation of the Scriptures, when no difference of opinion arises which will set men to searching the Bible for themselves, to make sure that they have the truth, there will be many now, as in ancient times, who will hold to tradition, and worship they know not what.” (*Ibid, page 707*)

The question is today, in this trinity debate, are the non-trinitarian Seventh-day

Adventists failing to walk in the light or are the trinitarians, in returning to a doctrine traditionally held for centuries by the fallen churches, worshipping “they know not what” – and how do we decide which way it is?

We shall now proceed to section three. This is where we shall be taking a look at some heaven inspired counsel that in this debate will help us to make up our mind.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section three

Heaven inspired counsel

It is more than likely that there will be those who fail to regard this section as being very important. Some may even say it is unnecessary. This though is far from the view of its author. With respect to the present trinity debate within our denomination, also with regard to this study, he regards it as absolutely indispensable. This is because in this section we shall pay particular attention to the counsel we have received, through the spirit of prophecy, on how to deal with doctrinal disagreements when they arrive amongst us.

I believe it is absolutely imperative, as and when necessary, to implement this counsel. I believe also that if we fail to implement it there will be a very real danger of developing a narrow-minded and intolerant (bigoted) attitude towards those who disagree with our personal beliefs. This especially can be said of the church leadership. If they disregard this counsel, likewise too they will become the same. At all costs we must seek to avoid narrow mindedness and intolerance like seeking to avoid the plague.

Prove all things

In all of our deliberations concerning the trinity doctrine, we must heed the one counsel of Scripture that is applicable to everything we are asked to believe. This counsel is

“Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21

God is telling His people never to shun investigation. It is also counsel not to disregard anything that we are told, at least not without first checking it out to see how much truth there is in it. We are also admonished to hold on tight to any truth that we find. The Word of God demands an attitude of candid investigation. If this is absent we shall never know the truth, neither shall we ever possess the freedom that Jesus wishes for us to experience (see John 8:32). This is why we each need to study for ourselves. This is how we become strong in the faith. In the *Review and Herald* in 1899, the prolific Baptist preacher Dr. J. A. Broadus was quoted as saying

“Independent thinking, more than anything else, will develop, discipline, and strengthen the mind.” (*Review and Herald*, July 25th 1899)

Not everyone likes independent thinkers – especially those whose desire it is to control the thinking of others. The item continued

“In the manner of mental development, it must never be forgotten, the hardest way is the easiest way, the slow way the swiftest. If it be possible, let us persuade ourselves to much of independent and patient thinking’, otherwise we shall never be men. — Dr. Broadus.” (*Ibid*)

This is the attitude taken by the author of this study. Regarding our history, especially concerning our once rejection and now acceptance of the trinity doctrine, he has not sought to cut corners. Instead he has earnestly sought to establish the truth, even though it has meant going the long way around. In the finality, this will be seen to be the swiftest and the surest way to accomplish the task. In our understanding of this history, we shall then be “men”.

In Volume 5 of the Testimonies to the Church, Ellen White addressed herself to controversy – also to investigation of the Scriptures

“Whenever the people of God are growing in grace, they will be constantly obtaining a clearer understanding of His word. They will discern new light and beauty in its sacred truths. This has been true in the history of the church in all ages, and thus it will continue to the end. But as real spiritual life declines, it has ever been the tendency to cease to advance in the knowledge of the truth. Men rest satisfied with the light already received from God's word and discourage any further investigation of the Scriptures. They become conservative and seek to avoid discussion” (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies to the Church, Volume 5, page 706, ‘The mysteries of the Bible a proof of its inspiration’*)

Whenever we hear someone say that it is best not to discuss a certain doctrine, we know that this is not the counsel we have received from God. The counsel continued

“The fact that there is no controversy or agitation among God's people should not be regarded as conclusive evidence that they are holding fast to sound doctrine. There is reason to fear that they may not be clearly discriminating between truth and error. When no new questions are started by investigation of the Scriptures, when no difference of opinion arises which will set men to searching the Bible for themselves to make sure that they have the truth, there will be many now, as in ancient times, who will hold to tradition and worship they know not what.” (*Ibid page 707*)

Candid investigation, also independent thinking, involves both the study and the weighing up of evidence. This is something that Ellen White so very strongly endorsed. We shall look at this counsel now.

Weight of evidence - not perfect knowledge

We are counselled with regard to Biblical truth and the weight of evidence

“Let all who are convicted by the light of the truth, cherish every ray of light which comes from the Source of all light. Do not hesitate to decide from the weight of evidence. Do not enlist on the side of error, but wholly and entirely on the side of truth.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 21st July 1891, ‘At Willis, Mich.’*)

“The word of the Lord, spoken through His servants, is received by many with questionings and fears. And many will defer their obedience to the warning and reproofs given, waiting till every shadow of uncertainty is removed from their minds. The unbelief that demands perfect knowledge will never yield to the evidence that God is pleased to give.” (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies volume 3, page 25, ‘The Laodicean Church’, see also Review and Herald 16th September 1893, ‘The Laodicean Church’*)

Reference is made here to believing the testimonies of God’s Spirit but the principle itself is wide and deep. As God imparts truth, we are to walk in its light (see Isaiah 2:5, John 12:35, Ephesians 5:8 and 1 John 1:7 etc). Ellen White then refers back to the weight of evidence by saying

“He [God] requires of His people faith that rests upon the weight of evidence, not upon perfect knowledge. Those followers of Christ who accept the light that God sends them must obey the voice of God speaking to them when there are many other voices crying out against it. It requires discernment to distinguish the voice of God. Those who will not act when the Lord calls upon them, but who wait for more certain evidence and more favorable opportunities, will walk in darkness, for the light will be withdrawn. The evidence given one day, if rejected, may never be repeated.” (*Ibid*)

This is a very serious warning. It behoves us to believe “the light” as God chooses to reveal it. We are then to walk in it. We are not to pile up the evidence before we say, “I believe”. If something is the truth, then we must walk in its light. This is the responsibility of each and every Christian. Wherever the truth leads, it is our responsibility to follow. As John the gospel writer in one of his pastoral letters wrote

“This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” 1 John 1:5-7

An integral part of God’s clean up campaign for our lives is walking in the light. It is also the way He develops each individual character and increases a person’s

spiritual knowledge. A failure to heed this advice will cause God's purposes for our redemption to be thwarted although it must be said that His overall purpose of allowing us to make our own decisions, also reap the ensuing consequences, will certainly be realised. It is like a plant. To grow it must turn to the light. If the light is refused it will die. This is a simple teaching of nature.

The whole truth not revealed

Never once did Ellen White say that the Seventh-day Adventist Church of her time had the whole truth. Likewise today none of us should take the position that today there is no more truth to be had. As we have been told in *Gospel Workers* (this was when our denomination was still non-trinitarian)

“We must not for a moment think that there is no more light, no more truth, to be given us. We are in danger of becoming careless, by our indifference losing the sanctifying power of truth, and composing ourselves with the thought, “I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.” [REV. 3:17.]” (*Ellen G. White, Gospel Workers, 1892 edition, page 310, ‘The Missionary’*)

Look very carefully at what she then added.

“While we must hold fast to the truths which we have already received, we must not look with suspicion upon any new light that God may send.” (*Ibid*)

In 1892, Ellen White regarded certain doctrines as being “truths” that Seventh-day Adventists had “already received”. This means that whilst these truths may be expanded upon and magnified, they can never be reduced to error. This is because truth can never become error and error can never become truth. Truth like error never changes. We are also told not to be suspicious of “new light” but it must be said that to establish whether it really is the truth does demand a spirit of investigation. In other words, we need to check out what we are told, not reject it because it does not meet with what we already believe. What we believe may be wrong. As we shall also see in future sections, this holding to truth “already received” is exactly what Ellen White said concerning our early 1900's faith (see section one). This was even though it was a non-trinitarian faith. She again said in 1900 (remember we were still then a non-trinitarian denomination)

“When new light is presented to the church, it is perilous to shut yourselves away from it. Refusing to hear because you are prejudiced against the message or the messenger will not make your case excusable before God. To condemn that which you have not heard and do not understand will not exalt your wisdom in the eyes of those who are candid in their investigations of truth. And to speak with contempt of those whom God has sent with a message of truth, is folly and madness.” (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies on Sabbath School work, page 60, ‘The teacher must be a learner’, 1900*)

How true is this statement! When she made it Ellen White must have had in mind where the Scriptures say

“He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.” Proverbs 18:13

If we have failed to take the time and make the effort to understand a matter (whatever it is), how can we condemn it as error? Certainly it would be an extremely unwise thing to do. We must learn to always check what we are told. Seventh-day Adventists, because we are God’s remnant people, cannot afford to accept error or reject truth. Our salvation is at stake. Investigation therefore is imperative. Needless to say it would be “**folly and madness**” to speak with disparagement about the one whom God sends with a message. It must follow therefore that if we reject the messenger we must reject the one who is doing the sending. This will always be the case (see Luke 20:9-16). The youth were instructed

“If our youth are seeking to educate themselves to be workers in His cause, they should learn the way of the Lord, and live by every word that proceedeth out of His mouth. They are not to make up their minds that the whole truth has been unfolded, and that the Infinite One has no more light for His people. If they entrench themselves in the belief that the whole truth has been revealed, they will be in danger of discarding precious jewels of truth that shall be discovered as men turn their attention to the searching of the rich mine of God's Word.” *Ellen G. White, Testimonies on Sabbath School work, page 60, ‘The teacher must be a learner’, 1900)*

This “**more light**” - whatever it is - would never contradict truths “**already received**”. It is the latter therefore that needs to be substantiated. In other words, as far as our trinity study is concerned, we need to establish just what was it that Seventh-day Adventists had established as truth. This we shall be seeking to discover in future sections. Remember however, as Ellen White said in 1892 (this was when explaining how God had progressively led Seventh-day Adventists in their understanding of Scripture)

“We have many lessons to learn, and many, many to unlearn. God and heaven alone are infallible. Those who think that they will never have to give up a cherished view, never have occasion to change an opinion, will be disappointed. As long as we hold to our own ideas and opinions with determined persistency, we cannot have the unity for which Christ prayed.” (*Ellen White, Review and Herald, 26th July 1892, ‘Search the Scriptures’*)

As far as this trinity debate is concerned, this admonition goes across the board to the non-trinitarian and trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists alike. I say this because as we have already noted, truth can certainly be expanded and magnified upon but in this process of development it can never become error. Truth will always remain what it is, the truth.

So, in our denominational changeover from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism, what actually happened? Have we expanded upon and magnified the truth or have we rejected the truth by replacing it with error? As we shall see in section ten, our church today is saying that what the pioneers believed about God, Christ and the Holy Spirit (non-trinitarianism) is not the truth so it had to be rejected and replaced with trinitarianism. This means that what they taught (if it was error) could never be expanded upon to produce the truth.

How it used to be (establishing the truth)

In the article from which we have just read, Ellen White writes of **how** the truth was established within Seventh-day Adventism. We shall now see she said that the pioneers established it point by point with weeping and tears.

“We sought most earnestly that the Scriptures should not be wrested to suit any man's opinions. We tried to make our differences as slight as possible by not dwelling on points that were of minor importance, upon which there were varying opinions. But the burden of every soul was to bring about a condition among the brethren which would answer the prayer of Christ that his disciples might be one as he and the Father are one. Sometimes one or two of the brethren would stubbornly set themselves against the view presented, and would act out the natural feelings of the heart; but when this disposition appeared, we suspended our investigations and adjourned our meeting, that each one might have an opportunity to go to God in prayer, and without conversation with others, study the point of difference, asking light from heaven. With expressions of friendliness we parted, to meet again as soon as possible for further investigation. At times the power of God came upon us in a marked manner, and when clear light revealed the points of truth, we would weep and rejoice together. We loved Jesus; we loved one another.” (*Ellen White, Review and Herald, 26th July 1892, ‘Search the Scriptures’*)

In the above article we also find these words

“Those who sincerely desire truth will not be reluctant to lay open their positions for investigation and criticism, and will not be annoyed if their opinions and ideas are crossed.” (*Ibid*)

Jesus never taught in secret. Neither should we. If on a point of belief we differ with the body of the church (on whatever point it may be), we should always take it to the brethren to see if there is any light in it. They in turn should respond by clearly showing the rights and the wrongs of whatever it was that was presented to them. As well as this being the bounden duty of the layperson, it is also the bounded duty of the leadership.

Jesus often encountered those who disagreed with what He taught but never once did He lose His divine composure. For everything He taught He pointed His listeners to the Scriptures. As Seventh-day Adventists we must follow His

example. Never should we become angry with those who disagree with our beliefs.

In this same article, Ellen White also explained the attitude of the pioneers as they came together in study.

“This was the spirit cherished among us forty years ago. We would come together burdened in soul, praying that we might be one in faith and doctrine; for we knew that Christ is not divided. One point at a time was made the subject of investigation. “Solemnity characterized these councils of investigation. The Scriptures were opened with a sense of awe. Often we fasted, that we might be better fitted to understand the truth. After earnest prayer, if any point was not understood, it was discussed, and each one expressed his opinion freely; then we would again bow in prayer, and earnest supplications went up to heaven that God would help us to see eye to eye, that we might be one, as Christ and the Father are one.” (*Ibid*)

Notice that Ellen White’s mind was returning “forty years ago” to the 1840/1850’s. This was when the doctrines of our church were initially being hammered out. Notice more particularly what she said was the spirit (attitude) of the pioneers in study. As we strive to understand the great truths of the Bible today - particularly as we grapple with the deep truths concerning the Godhead and the incarnation etc - this should also be our spirit (attitude). Certainly without it there will not be the unity that God desires should be seen amongst His people. Note above, as she often did, Ellen White spoke of God the Father and Christ being “one” but does not mention the Holy Spirit. This we shall see over and over again.

When it came to those difficult texts (and this is very important), Ellen White counselled

“We did not generally study together more than four hours at a time, yet sometimes the entire night was spent in solemn investigation of the Scriptures, that we might understand the truth for our time. On some occasions the Spirit of God would come upon me, and difficult portions were made clear through God's appointed way, and then there was perfect harmony. We were all of one mind and one Spirit.” (*Ibid*)

Notice Ellen White’s remarks concerning how God *explained* some of these difficult passages of Scripture. She said that they were “made clear through God's appointed way”. As we shall see later, one of these ways was when God gave to Ellen White visions in which He gave explanations of these matters.

Note too Ellen White’s remarks concerning “perfect harmony”. As far as doctrine is concerned, she regarded herself and the early pioneers as being such with each other. This, as we shall also come to realise, is where the reasoning of our present leadership and Ellen White part company. This is because our

leadership today is continually presenting the idea that Ellen White was out of step with Seventh-day Adventist theology, which as we shall see later is far from being the truth. We shall also realise that this entire matter really is becoming a question of loyalties. This is why there remains an ongoing controversy within our denomination concerning the trinity doctrine. In other words, it is a case of who is telling the truth and whose side are we on? These are the important questions! People are taking sides.

Personal obligations and responsibility

In the *Review and Herald* in 1889, Ellen White spoke of the pharisaic attitude of some who were saying that they had the truth - also that there was no more truth to be had

“Truth is eternal, and conflict with error will only make manifest its strength. We should never refuse to examine the Scriptures with those who, we have reason to believe, desire to know what is truth as much as we do. Suppose a brother held a view that differed from yours, and he should come to you, proposing that you sit down with him and make an investigation of that point in the Scriptures; should you rise up, filled with prejudice, and condemn his ideas, while refusing to give him a candid hearing? The only right way would be to sit down as Christians, and investigate the position presented, in the light of God's word, which will reveal truth and unmask error. To ridicule his ideas would not weaken his position in the least if it were false, or strengthen your position if it were true.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 18th June 1889, ‘The necessity of dying to self’*)

She went on to say

“If the pillar of our faith will not stand the test of investigation, it is time that we knew it. There must be no spirit of Phariseeism cherished among us. When Christ came to his own, his own received him not; and it is a matter of solemn interest to us that we should not pursue a similar course in refusing light from heaven.

We must study the truth for ourselves. No living man should be relied upon to think for us. No matter who it is, or in what position he may be placed, we are not to look upon any man as a perfect criterion for us.” (*Ibid*)

After saying that we should take counsel together she said

“Each one of us must look to God for divine enlightenment. We must individually develop a character that will stand the test in the day of God. We must not become set in our ideas, and think that no one should interfere with our opinions.” (*Ibid*)

In 1890 Ellen White wrote in the *Review and Herald*

“Our brethren should be willing to investigate in a candid way every point of controversy. If a brother is teaching error, those who are in responsible positions ought to know it; and if he is teaching truth, they ought to take their stand at his side. We should all know what is being taught among us, for if it is truth, we need to know it. The Sabbath-school teacher needs to know it, and every Sabbath-school scholar ought to understand it. We are all under obligation to God to know what he sends to us. He has given directions by which we may test every doctrine, -- "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." But if it is according to this test, do not be so full of prejudice that you cannot acknowledge a point when it is proved to you, simply because it does not agree with your ideas.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 25th March 1890, ‘Open the heart to light’*)

She concluded the article by making this very important observation

“No matter by whom light is sent, we should open our hearts to receive it in the meekness of Christ. But many do not do this. When a controverted point is presented, they pour in question after question without acknowledging, without admitting a point when it is well sustained. O may we act as men who want light! May God give us his Spirit day by day, and let the light of his countenance shine upon us, that we may be learners in the school of Christ.” (*Ibid*)

No condemnation without investigation

All too often, simply because their views are considered unorthodox, some Seventh-day Adventists are condemned as heretics. This is even without their views being investigated. Regarding this happening, Ellen White wrote in *Testimonies on Sabbath School Work*

“There is no virtue or manliness in keeping up a continual warfare in the dark, closing your eyes lest you may see, closing your ears lest you may hear, hardening your heart in ignorance and unbelief lest you may have to humble yourselves and acknowledge that you have received light on some points of truth. To hold yourselves aloof from an investigation of truth is not the way to carry out the Saviour's injunction to "search the Scriptures.” (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies on Sabbath School Work, 1900, page 65, ‘The spirit of investigation essential’*)

She then asks the question

“Is it digging for hidden treasures to call the result's of some one's labor a mass of rubbish, and make no critical examination to see whether or not there are precious jewels of truth in the collection of thought which you condemn? (*Ibid*)

I have read a tremendous amount on this trinity debate within Seventh-day

Adventism, and whilst I may not agree with everything that I have read, I have certainly found those “precious jewels of truth” that Ellen White speaks of here. Herein therefore we see the beauty and the wonder of honest investigation. The counsel of the Holy Spirit is clear. We are not to call someone’s views “a mass of rubbish” without first making a “critical examination” of them. If we do this it is not “digging for hidden treasures”. Ellen White then asks

“Will those who have almost everything to learn keep themselves away from every meeting where there is an opportunity to investigate the messages that come to the people, simply because they imagine the views held by the teachers of the truth may be out of harmony with what they have conceived as truth? (*Ibid*)

This is exactly what some people do! They either dislike the person who is preaching the message or they differ from certain of his views, so they stay away from meetings where he might be presenting them. Is it the leading of the Spirit of Christ to do such things? Is this searching for the truth? The counsel concluded

“Thus it was that the Jews did in the days of Christ, and we are warned not to do as they did, and be led to choose darkness rather than light, because there was in them an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. No one of those who imagine that they know it all is too old or too intelligent to learn from the humblest of the messengers of the living God.” (*Ibid*)

When revealing truth to those who are earnestly and sincerely seeking it, God often bypasses the so-called intellectuals. Instead He uses the most humble of His servants to do it. Concerning this, Ellen White is a good example.

A letter to a General Conference president

In closing this section I would bring to your attention a letter that Ellen White wrote to G. I. Butler who at that time in 1888 was the General Conference president. I do this because I believe that the major problem in this trinity debate is not simply who is right and who is wrong but more so how we are treating each other because of it. In other words, are we treating each other in the Spirit of Christ or in the spirit of another? This was the problem in the 1880’s within Seventh-day Adventism. This eventually came to fruition in the wrong attitude taken towards the two main speakers at the 1888 Minneapolis Conference, namely Ellet Waggoner, Alonzo Jones. This same intolerant attitude was taken towards Ellen White. Even before the conference this same attitude towards them was very noticeable. This was the backdrop to the letter that Ellen White wrote to G. I. Butler in 1888.

Butler, because of a sickness that he said had been caused by Ellen White sending a testimony to him regarding his attitude at a previous conference, did not attend the Minneapolis General Conference Session. Instead, when attempting to invalidate the influence of Jones and Waggoner at the conference,

he sent out letters to the various delegates. In Ellen White's letter to him, which was a reply of a letter that he had sent to her, she rebuked him for what he was doing. She wrote to him saying

"I fail to discover in your letter the right ring. I do not see in your expressions in regard to others the love and respect that should exist between brethren. If you think you can indulge in feelings of contempt for men whom God has been raising up to fill important places in His work for this time because you are the president of the General Conference, you do not understand your true position. We all need, rather, to encourage these men who are evidencing that they are bearing burdens in the work—even if they are younger men in years and in experience, even if they were mere children when we were active in the work and standing in the forefront of the battle." (*Ellen White, Letter 21 1888 to G. I Butler, written from Minneapolis October 14th, 1888*)

She also said to Butler (referring also to Uriah Smith)

"You must not think that the Lord has placed you in the position that you now occupy as the only men who are to decide as to whether any more light and truth shall come to God's people. The spirit and influence of the ministers generally who have come to this meeting is to discard light. I am sorry that the enemy has power upon your minds to lead you to take such positions.... "Why is it that our personal feelings are stirred up so easily? Why do we cherish suspicion toward each other? One of the terrible fruits of sin is that it separates very friends, puts brother at variance against brother, and neighbor against neighbor. Those who have enjoyed sweet union and love become cold and indifferent toward each other because they do not hold, in all points, ideas alike. Our blessed Lord came into the world to bring peace and good will to men, and prayed that His disciples might be one as He was one with the Father." (*Ibid*)

She continued later

"I have felt so grateful to God that He was qualifying men to carry the heavy burdens which have tested with crushing weight upon a few men who have been the standard bearers. Shall not we, my brother, acknowledge that God in mercy has been raising up other workmen besides ourselves to devise, and plan, and gain experience? And shall we regard them lightly because they may differ with us, honestly and conscientiously, upon the interpretation of some points of Scripture? Are we infallible? The spirit that controls the attitude of a large number at this meeting evidences that they are led by another spirit." (*Ibid*)

Notice it is our attitude towards each other and not our theology that Ellen White said will serve to identify whose spirit is leading. She also said to Butler

"Let all search the Scriptures diligently for themselves, and not be satisfied to have the leaders do it for them, else we shall be as a people in a position

similar to that of the Jews in Christ's time--having plenty of machinery, forms, and customs, but bearing little fruit to God's glory. It is time for the church to realize her solemn privileges and sacred trust, and to learn from the great Teacher." *(Ibid)*

Concerning the pervading spirit manifested at Minneapolis she wrote

"The spirit which has prevailed at this meeting is not of Christ. There is not love, there is not sympathy or tender compassion one toward another. Dark suspicions have been suggested by Satan to cause dissension. Roots of bitterness have sprung up whereby many will be defiled. Christians should harbor no jealousies or evil surmisings, for this spirit is of Satan. There must be no strife between brethren. God has made this people the repository of sacred truths. Ye are one in faith, one in Christ Jesus. Let there be no lording it over God's heritage. Let there be no such oppression of conscience as is revealed in these meetings. It is God that scrutinizes every talent, and it is He who will judge every man's work. He has not laid this work of judging upon any man; they have mistaken their calling. There must be no exalting one's self above others." *(Ibid)*

"Let no man feel that his position as president, either of the General Conference or of a State conference, clothes him with a power over the consciences of others that is the least degree oppressive, for God will not sanction anything of this kind. He must respect the rights of all, and all the more because he is in a position where others will pattern after him. Your position binds you under the most sacred obligations to be very careful what kind of spirit you entertain towards your brethren. They are acting a part in God's cause as well as yourself. Will not God teach them and guide them as well as yourself? You are not even to allow yourself to think unkindly of them, much less to climb upon the judgment seat and censure or condemn your brethren, when you may be yourself, in many respects, more deserving of censure than they. Your work is bearing the inspection of God. *(Ibid)*

Ellen White then spoke to Butler of those who differ on certain points of view (this is very relevant to this present trinity debate within Seventh-day Adventism)

"If a brother differs with you on some points of truth, do not stoop to ridicule, do not place him in a false light, or misconstrue his words, making sport of them; do not misinterpret his words and wrest them of their true meaning. This is not conscientious argument. Do not present him before others as a heretic, when you have not with him investigated his positions, taking the Scriptures text by text in the spirit of Christ to show him what is truth." *(Ibid)*

This is extremely important, especially in regard to this trinity debate within our denomination. Ministers and laity alike should always be willing to sit down and investigate "text by text" the views of those who differ from them in their beliefs. If

they fail to do this, then this is the evidence that a spirit other than that of God is leading them. We shall see later that she said that people of this attitude should never be allowed to teach in the work.

“Take your Bible, and in a kindly spirit weigh every argument that he presents and show him by the Scriptures if he is in error. When you do this without unkind feelings, you will do only that which is your duty and the duty of every minister of Jesus Christ.” (*Ibid*)

If we have not studied with someone whom we think is in error, we are not to present that person to others as “a heretic”. If we do this - and in the process only condemn - how can we say that we love the brethren? We cannot! God’s purpose in Christ was to save not to condemn (John 3:17). It is all too easy to do the latter and forget the former. Notice Ellen White’s remarks with regard to weighing “every argument” presented. This is also really very important. It is part and parcel of weighing up **all** of the evidence. It is with this heaven inspired counsel in mind that we should study with all candidness the issues involved in the trinity debate within Seventh-day Adventism.

In the above heavenly inspired counsel, we have seen that when a brother or a sister in Christ takes a doctrinal position to which others disagree, these others ought to go to the person involved and in a kindly Christ-like spirit show where they think that error is being believed. Again this is a God-given bounden duty. The person who is supposedly in error is not to be left alone to continue in his or her heretical ways. Error is never not dangerous. This is no matter how small it may be. A person’s salvation is at stake. What price will be placed on it? Will we, as shepherds of the flock, not try to bring someone back on course when we believe they have gone astray? Will we not be like the Good Shepherd who seeks to bring his sheep home? If not, how can we be considered to be like Christ in what we do – and how can we consider ourselves as being led by the Spirit of Christ if we fail to heed this counsel? Obviously we cannot. As Ellen White said of Jesus washing the feet of Judas

“Though Jesus knew Judas from the beginning, He washed his feet. And the betrayer was privileged to unite with Christ in partaking of the sacrament. A long-suffering Saviour held out every inducement for the sinner to receive Him, to repent, and to be cleansed from the defilement of sin. This example is for us. When we suppose one to be in error and sin, we are not to divorce ourselves from him. By no careless separation are we to leave him a prey to temptation, or drive him upon Satan's battleground. This is not Christ's method. It was because the disciples were erring and faulty that He washed their feet, and all but one of the twelve were thus brought to repentance.”(*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 655, 'In remembrance of me' 1898*)

Concerning those who would not sit down and study with a brother or sister that held a difference in opinion of doctrine from themselves, Ellen White had some

very definite counsel. She said that this kind of person should never be allowed to teach in the church

“The light of the glory of God must fall upon us. We need the holy unction from on high. However intelligent, however learned a man may be, he is not qualified to teach unless he has a firm hold on the God of Israel. He who is connected with Heaven will do the works of Christ. By faith in God he will have power to move upon humanity. He will seek for the lost sheep of the house of Israel. If divine power does not combine with human effort, I would not give a straw for all that the greatest man could do. The Holy Spirit is wanting in our work. Nothing frightens me more than to see the spirit of variance manifested by our brethren. We are on dangerous ground when we cannot meet together like Christians, and courteously examine controverted points. I feel like fleeing from the place lest I receive the mold of those who cannot candidly investigate the doctrines of the Bible” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 18th February 1890, ‘How to meet a controverted point of doctrine’*)

Very interestingly she concludes

“Those who cannot impartially examine the evidences of a position that differs from theirs, are not fit to teach in any department of God's cause. What we need is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Without this, we are no more fitted to go forth to the world than were the disciples after the crucifixion of their Lord. Jesus knew their destitution, and told them to tarry in Jerusalem until they should be endowed with power from on high. Every teacher must be a learner, that his eyes may be anointed to see the evidences of the advancing truth of God. The beams of the Sun of Righteousness must shine into his own heart if he would impart light to others.” (*Ibid*)

Conclusion

In conclusion we need to ask: - Have we who have been involved with this trinity debate been mistreating the brethren? In other words, have we failed to go looking for the sheep that we believe has gone astray – and have we, instead of studying with those who differ in their views from ours, gossiped about them to others? Have we also, without thoroughly investigating what they actually believe, labelled these same brethren as heretics (or as such)? Have we, by what we have said and done, attempted to weaken their influence amongst the rest of the brethren? We must also ask: Have we condemned others without really understanding **why** they believe as they do? If we have done any of these things, then it is the evidence that we have not been led by the Spirit of God but by another spirit therefore before it is too late, we must, by the grace of God, seek to remedy this situation. How else are we going to be in accord with the Spirit of Christ?

In this trinity debate, it is not simply a doctrine that is at stake but the honour and

glory of our Saviour. If we say He is leading us, but by the way we are treating others we are not manifesting His Spirit, then we shall bring reproach upon His wonderful name. This was **the** problem in 1888 at the Minneapolis General Conference session. Let not history repeat itself today by making it **the** trinity problem in 2008 and onwards.

We shall now go to the next section. This is where we shall take particular note that the trinity doctrine is only an assumed (implied) doctrine. Certainly it is not one that is explicitly stated. This should be of great significance to us. God bless you as you continue in this study.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section four

The trinity - an assumed doctrine

As we enter into this study regarding the history and the theology of the trinity doctrine, particularly as it pertains to Seventh-day Adventism, there are a number of very important observations that need to be mentioned. Some of these are with regard to the various terminologies and expressions that are used when speaking of the trinity. If these are not clearly explained they can be very misleading.

Speaking from personal experience, I must also say I have found that many Christians, Seventh-day Adventist and otherwise, although having professed the trinity doctrine for most or all of their Christian life, do not really understand what this teaching entails. This means that just as it is with the trinity terminologies, the teaching itself (meaning the trinity concept) needs to be explained in detail.

Even before this is done we need to realise that whilst the majority of Christians regard the trinity doctrine as being the central belief of the Christian faith, the truth of the matter is that it cannot be found in the Scriptures. In other words, it is only an assumed doctrine. This is something we shall discover in this section. It will set the scene for the observations of subsequent sections.

The trinity teaching an assumed doctrine – official Seventh-day Adventism

Most Christians realise that the word *trinity* cannot be found in the Scriptures. In itself this is not a problem because we use many non-scriptural words to define doctrine. What many may not know is that neither is found in the Scriptures, at least not explicitly stated, the trinity three-in-one concept of God. This is a very real problem. In fact it is **the** problem.

Throughout the Bible, God and Christ are always spoken of as individual personages. To an extent, even the much-debated Holy Spirit is spoken of as such. Never though - as the trinity doctrine purports - are the three depicted together as one composite entity, meaning three-in-one or triune etc (the one God) as is suggested by the trinity doctrine.

Within the official *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (the twelfth volume of the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia) there is, regarding God, a section that deals with our current theology. It is called *The Doctrine of God*. This includes the idea of God being a trinity (three-in-one). Fernando L. Canale wrote

this particular section. He is professor of theology and philosophy at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. Here are a few of his observations

“Because human philosophy is called to be subject to the Bible, and since divine philosophy is already available in the Scriptures, our understanding of God must stand free from human speculations.” (*Fernando L. Canale, the Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology, Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia Volume 12, page 105, ‘Doctrine of God.’*)

“What we can know about God must be revealed from the Scriptures.” (*Ibid*)

“In short, true knowledge about God can be attained only on the basis of Biblical revelation.” (*Ibid page 106*)

“Care must be taken to avoid crossing the limit between the revealed and hidden (Deut. 29:29) facets of the mystery, particularly in discussing issues like the Trinity, foreknowledge, and eternity. (*Ibid, page 108*)

Having made it clear that everything that is believed about God “**must stand free from human speculations**” (see above), Canale later says with reference to the Scriptures where Father, Son and Holy Spirit are mentioned together such as at the baptism of Jesus (these are such as Matthew 3:16-17, Mark 1:10-11, Luke 3:21-22 etc)

“The concept of the Trinity, namely the idea that the three are one, is not explicitly stated but only assumed.” (*Ibid, page 138*)

This is not only very true but also very much to the point. The trinity concept is only “**assumed**”. Why therefore, as a denomination, do we make it a test of fellowship (see No. 2 of the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church)? It also appears contradictory to what he has said previously (see the three previous statements). With reference to the same scriptures Canale then says

“Consequentially, these passages cannot be taken as Trinitarian formulas but rather as references to the doctrine of the trinity.” (*Ibid*)

The passages of Scripture (such as referred to above) are those that by one designation or another include the three personalities of the Godhead but as Canale admits, they do not express the idea that God is a trinity – at least not as purported by the trinity doctrine. At the very best they only speak of three divine personalities. This is why the Seventh-day Adventist Church today, even in its encyclopaedia of theology, freely admits that the trinity teaching is only an assumed doctrine. Later in this section we shall return our thoughts to this trinity oneness. This is because it is only reasonable to believe that in some way or another, there is a certain oneness that does exist between the divine

personalities.

As do trinitarians in general, Canale professes that the trinity teaching, although only assumed, is based on everything concerning the Father, Son and Holy Spirit that the Scriptures collectively say. Needless to say, the non-trinitarians would disagree. They would say that certain things have either been omitted or misunderstood, perhaps even misapplied. We shall return to this thought later. Whatever else is concluded, Canale is confirming here that the trinity is only ***an assumed doctrine***.

In 1981, in a special issue of the *Review and Herald* dedicated to detailing what were once our 27 fundamental beliefs (now 28), the doctrine of the trinity was given an explanation. One particular statement said

“While no single scriptural passage states formally the doctrine of the Trinity, it is assumed as a fact by Bible writers and mentioned several times”. (*Review and Herald, Special issue, Volume 158, No. 31 July 1981, ‘The Trinity’*)

Here again it said that the trinity doctrine is only an assumed doctrine. We can also see it said that nowhere in the Scriptures is the trinity doctrine explicitly stated. Strange to relate though, the article does say that it is “mentioned several times”. I would not agree with where it says that the Bible writers “assumed” the trinity doctrine “as a fact”. There is no evidence from the Scriptures. This is an assumption in itself. It has no basis in the Bible.

We must also remember that the trinity doctrine was not even formulated until late in the fourth century, so how could the Bible writers accept it as a fact? Even then, also during the centuries that followed, many Christians would not accept it. This led to very serious division in the Church. It also led to the persecution of those who would not accept it. We shall cover this in section nine.

History strongly suggests that in the 4th century, Christians far and wide knew that the trinity doctrine was not expressed in Scripture. This is the reason why there was such a major controversy about it. This is something else we shall see in later sections.

In the *Signs of the Times* in 1985, Pastor Frank Holbrook wrote (this was in response to a readers question regarding the trinity)

“The Scriptures were designed by God for practical living and not for speculative theorizing. Hence, they contain no systematic exposition on the nature of the Godhead. The Christian statement regarding the Trinity is an attempt to state the biblical paradox (which Scripture never attempts to resolve) that there is one God (see Deuteronomy 6:4: James 2:19), yet existing in three Persons (see Matthew 28:19: 2 Corinthians 13:14).” (*Frank Holbrook, Signs of the Times, July 1985, ‘Frank answers’*)

We can see here that the Seventh-day Adventist Church admits that the trinity doctrine is absent from Scripture therefore it is only speculation (intellectual philosophy). In the special issue of the *Adventist Review* in 1981 spoken of above, which was published specifically to explain the fundamental beliefs held by Seventh-day Adventists, this statement can be found

“Only by faith can we accept the existence of the Trinity.” (*Review and Herald, Special issue, Volume 158, No. 31 July 1981, ‘The Trinity’*)

Faith is spoken of here as believing something that is not explicitly revealed in the Scriptures. This type of faith is only another name for speculation. In other words it could easily be said that only by accepting certain speculations as being true can we accept the doctrine of the trinity.

Whichever way the trinity formula is expressed, there is **always** the need of speculation. This is because it cannot be proven from the Scriptures. This is why, when drawing a conclusion on this matter, we need to be very careful. As Alister E. McGrath in his classic *Christian theology: An introduction* noted

“The doctrine of the trinity is unquestionably one of the most perplexing aspects of Christian theology, and requires careful discussion.” (*Alister E. McGrath, Christian theology - An introduction, page 319, ‘The doctrine of the trinity’*)

The trinity – a speculative construction

H. Maldwyn Hughes was the very first principal of Wesley House - a Methodist theological College at Cambridge. In the early 1900’s he wrote a book called *Christian Foundations - An introduction to Christian doctrine*. In this book he explains the basics of the Methodist faith. In the chapter where he deals with the doctrine of the trinity he says

“The doctrine of the Trinity is not primarily a speculative doctrine. It is a speculative construction of materials provided by revelation and Christian experience. The definition has stood the test of time, mainly because it is believed that the Church was divinely guided in framing it.” (*H. Maldwyn Hughes, M. A., D. D. Christian foundations, An introduction to Christian doctrine, page 141, fourth edition, July 1933*)

This is putting a different slant on things but it is still saying that the trinity doctrine is an assumed doctrine. By saying that the trinity is “not primarily a speculative doctrine” but “a speculative construction”, Hughes appears to be saying that albeit speculative in itself, the trinity doctrine is the inevitable conclusion of all that the Scriptures say about God the Father, Christ and the Holy Spirit. This is much the same as said by most trinitarians.

Whichever way that this is viewed, it is still saying that the trinity doctrine is an assumed doctrine (a “speculative construction” as Hughes put it). We know that

the Scriptures speak of three divine personalities but nowhere does it say that they are united in the way as expressed in the trinity doctrine (God three-in-one – a tri-unity of beings – the one indivisible being of God etc). This is only an assumption. What could be done is to just accept what the Scriptures say concerning the three personalities of the Godhead and leave it there without the three-in-one trinity speculating. If this were done though there would be no such thing as a trinity doctrine, at least not as we know it today.

Regarding what the Scriptures alone say concerning the three personalities of the Godhead, there was an excellent article written by the Rev. Samuel Spear D. D. It was published in the *New York Independent* (a weekly religious journal) in 1889 whilst three years later in 1892 it was included in the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Students Library*. The latter was a series of tracts explaining what Seventh-day Adventists believed. This reveals the faith of Seventh-day Adventists at that time (1892) - which was four years after the now famous 1888 Minneapolis General Conference. We shall return to this article later. To read it now, go here

[http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Articles\(others\)/Speararticle.pdf](http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Articles(others)/Speararticle.pdf)

As originally published in the *New York Independent*, Spear's article was called *The Subordination of Christ* but when reprinted and included in the Bible Students Library in 1892 it was given the title, *The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity*. Under its original title (*The Subordination of Christ*) it was also published over two weeks (in 2 parts) in the *Signs of the Times* of December 7th and 14th of December 1891. It appears therefore that the next year when it was accepted as a tract for the Bible Students Library it was thought best to give it another title. Samuel Spear was not a Seventh-day Adventist. He was a Presbyterian minister. He died in 1891. It should go without saying that the belief that the trinity doctrine is only "speculative construction" is also the opinion of the non-trinitarians. They say that it disparages (belittles) the gospel. We shall see later why they make this claim.

Notice that Hughes says that this doctrine has existed for the time that it had because it is believed that "the Church was divinely guided in framing it". Again the non-trinitarians would not admit to this being true but most trinitarian theologians appear to see it this way.

These remarks were with reference to when and where this doctrine was initially formulated, meaning the 4th century ecumenical councils of Nicaea and Constantinople. This is the subject matter of later sections. It is usually claimed by orthodoxy that the formation of the trinity doctrine was the work that God left the church to do. This is what Hughes is saying.

"But the definition, in its terminology and in its description of processes in the internal life of the Godhead, goes beyond New Testament teaching. These may, of course, be legitimate developments, but it is impossible to

deny the speculative elements present.” (*Ibid*)

The non-trinitarians would only agree to certain parts of this statement. They certainly would not agree that the trinity doctrine is born of “legitimate developments” but would say that this teaching “goes beyond New Testament teaching”. They would also agree that it contains “speculative elements”. Hughes concluded

“For this reason there are many who, while holding firmly to the Tri-unity of God, think it best to go no further in the way of definition than the use of New Testament terms.’ (*Ibid*)

Our pioneers would have been the foremost amongst the “many” mentioned here. They certainly believed in a tri-unity in God but not as generally expressed by the trinity doctrine. They believed that because of its various speculations, this latter teaching goes to unnecessary extremes and so results in a perversion of the gospel. Samuel Spear reasoned exactly the same (see above).

The trinity doctrine – not an Old or a New Testament teaching

In 1983, Roy Allan Anderson wrote an article for the *Review and Herald* called *Adventists and the Trinity*. It had as a sub-heading

“Explicit in the New Testament, implied in the Old, the doctrine of the Trinity is fundamental to Adventist faith.” (*R. Allan Anderson, Review and Herald, September 8th 1983, ‘Adventists and the trinity’*)

The one thing we know for sure is that for the entire time of Ellen White’s ministry, also for decades immediately following her death, the trinity doctrine was definitely not, as Anderson says here, “fundamental to Adventist faith”. During this time period we rejected the trinity doctrine. This is why we were then a non-trinitarian denomination.

In his article, Anderson makes no mention of this side of our history. This is why his statement is very misleading. He does say though that when two evangelicals challenged our church, they did accuse us, because of what they had found written in certain of our books, of being Arian (Anderson does not name these two evangelicals but he must be referring to Barnhouse and Martin when they challenged the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists in the 1950’s), Anderson does not elaborate further concerning these meetings, only that he ‘showed’ the evangelicals our fundamental beliefs. This led them to believe we were trinitarian. It is possible that he withheld the information that we were once a predominantly non-trinitarian denomination. In later sections we shall cover this 1950’s meeting of the evangelicals with our leadership.

By 1983, the situation within Seventh-day Adventism had changed dramatically from what it was when Ellen White was alive. It had even changed from what it had been in the 1950’s when challenged by the evangelicals. By 1980, just as it

is now, the trinity doctrine had become fundamental to Seventh-day Adventism although from personal studies I would say that its theology is ever evolving. The trinity doctrine was first voted into our fundamental beliefs at the 1980 General Conference held at Dallas, Texas. In his article, Anderson wrote

“The doctrine of the Trinity is found in many places in the Old Testament and is prominent in the New Testament.” (*Ibid*)

When this was written in 1983, trinitarianism had generally become established within Seventh-day Adventism but as we shall see as we continue, not everyone would agree with Anderson’s conclusions that the trinity doctrine can be found in the Scriptures. We shall come back to his article in later sections because it is important to our studies. As a matter of passing interest here, when Anderson wrote this article, he was a retired worker. He had been a secretary in the Ministerial Department of the General Conference.

In complete contrast to Anderson’s remarks, the following comments can be found in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*

“Exegetes and theologians today are in agreement that the Hebrew Bible does not contain a doctrine of the Trinity, even though it was customary in past dogmatic tracts on the Trinity to cite texts like Genesis 1:26, “Let us make humanity in our image, after our likeness”(see also *Gn. 3:22, 11:7, Is. 62-3*) as proof of plurality in God.” (*Encyclopedia of Religion, Trinity, Volume 15, page 54, 1987*)

“Further, exegetes and theologians agree that the New Testament also does not contain an explicit doctrine of the trinity.” (*Ibid*)

“In the New Testament there is no reflective consciousness of the metaphysical nature of God (“imminent trinity”), nor does the New Testament contain the technical language of later doctrine (*hypostasis, ousia, substantia, subsistentia, prosopon, persona*).” (*Ibid*)

As can be seen from the above, trinitarians certainly need to go outside of Scripture in attempting to prove their doctrine. This is particularly so with regard to their trinity language. After saying that some theologians have said that the trinity doctrine is arbitrary, the encyclopaedia goes on to say

“While it is incontestable that the doctrine cannot be established on scriptural evidence alone, its origins may legitimately be sought in the Bible, not in the sense of “proof-texting” or of finding metaphysical principles, but because the Bible is the authoritative record of God’s redemptive relationship with humanity..... What the scriptures narrate as the activity of God among us, which is confessed in creeds and celebrated in liturgy, is the wellspring of later trinitarian doctrine” (*Ibid*)

Again like most trinitarian viewpoints, the encyclopaedia does say that the trinity doctrine itself is assumed but says also that it does have its source in the Bible. The same was said in the book *God in the New Testament*, written by A. W. Argyle.

“The fully developed Christian Doctrine that God is three Persons in one Godhead is nowhere explicitly stated in the New Testament. But there is to be found in its language concerning the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit what may be described as *the first germinations of that doctrine.*” (A. W. Argyle, *God in the New Testament*, page 173, chapter ‘*The beginnings of the doctrine of the Trinity in the New Testament*’)

The New Catholic Encyclopedia puts the same truth this way

“The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is not taught in the OT. In the NT the oldest evidence is in the Pauline epistles, especially 2 Cor 13:13 and 1 Cor 12:4-6” (*New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume 14 page 306, ‘*Trinity, Holy (in the Bible)*’)

Here is the point blank denial of the trinity doctrine being found in the Old Testament. This is even though some trinitarians maintain that there is evidence of it there. Notice here that what is said to be found in the New Testament is not the trinity doctrine itself but “evidence” of it. As we shall now see, the same is said with regard to this teaching being found in the gospels. The encyclopaedia continues

“In the Gospels, evidence of the trinity is found explicitly only in the baptismal statement.” (*Ibid*)

This is quite a remarkable statement, particularly as it was the Roman Catholic Church that made it. This is because they regard their rendition of the trinity doctrine as the central belief of their denominational faith (also of Christianity). Notice it says that even then it is only “evidence” that can be found in Matthew 28:19 and not the trinity doctrine itself. This is the only text in the Scriptures where it actually names Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Ghost) together as such. We can see therefore that even the Roman Catholic Church admits that the trinity teaching is only an assumed doctrine, not one that is explicitly stated in Scripture.

In the *Australasian Record* in 1959, Harry W. Lowe, with respect to the Sabbath School lesson for July 11th of that year wrote (this was under the sub-heading of *The Trinity in Unity*)

““Trinity” is not a Bible word, nor is any theological definition of it given in Scripture.” (*Harry W. Lowe, Australasian Record, June 15th 1959, Sabbath School lesson help, ‘God’s transcendent and mysterious nature*’)

How very true indeed. He then adds

“Nevertheless, the doctrine is clearly set forth. The incarnation, the virgin birth, the divine Sonship, were fundamental to Christian teaching on the Trinity. The apostles, following the example of Jesus in His baptismal formula (Matt. 28: 19), incorporated the threefold name into the typical New Testament blessing: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with you all" (2 Cor. 13: 14, R.S.V.). The fatherhood of God (2 Cor. 1: 3; Eph. 4: 6), the sonship of Jesus (Matt. 3: 17; John 1: 1, 14), the divinity of the Spirit (Acts 13: 2, 4, 9; Rom. 8: 26, 27; 1 Cor. 3: 16), are major New Testament doctrines. See 1 Cor. 6: 11, where washing, sanctification, and justification are said to come "in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." (*Ibid*)

It needs to be pointed out here that to say, “Father, Son and Holy Spirit” does not constitute a trinity doctrine. Much more is involved. Notice thought that Lowe refers to “the divine Sonship” of Christ and the “fatherhood of God”.

Three years later regarding the three personalities of the Godhead (again this was under Sabbath School Lesson Help) it said in the same publication

“The expression "the Godhead" is often used to refer to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit as a unit. The word itself is an English term meaning "Godhood" or "divine nature," "divine essence," "Godship." Godhead is used as an equivalent of "the deity" when indicating the quality, the condition, and dignity of being God. Also the doctrine of the Godhead is sometimes referred to as the doctrine of the Trinity.

1. Peter 1:2. The belief in *the Godhead, Trinity*, is a fundamental belief of the church.” (*Australasian Record, 19th March 1962, 'Sabbath School Lesson Help*)

The unfortunate part of this trinity debate is that as here in this statement, there is a confusion of words. This is because the words “Godhead” and “Trinity” are used as though they mean exactly the same. This is far from being true. The word *trinity* depicts the three-in-one concept of God but the various Greek words from which ‘Godhead’ (KJV) is derived do not. There is nothing in these Greek words that is suggestive of this three-in-one concept. They simply have their application to divinity and nothing else. This means that the oft-used phrase ‘*Godhead or Trinity*’ is very misleading. The article continued

“There are certain aspects of this great subject that must remain as an unexplained part of the mystery of salvation. It is impossible for human minds to explain with finality the union of the divine and the human in Christ. Also there are mysteries involving the relationships of the Father and the Son that are beyond human comprehension. There is an eternal and absolute relationship between the two that has existed from eternity. We

cannot understand it.” (*Ibid*)

This is very true. As we progress through this study we shall see that Ellen White said much the same. How therefore, if we cannot understand this oneness of relationship between the persons of the Godhead can we invent a teaching such as the trinity doctrine to explain it? We shall see also that in this oneness, just as in the paragraph above, that Ellen White only mentions the Father and Son. She makes no mention of the Holy Spirit. This is exactly the way that our pioneers reasoned. This is because although they came to regard the Holy Spirit as a personality, they did not regard Him as a person exactly like God and Christ. This is something else we shall realise later. The article concluded concerning the three personalities of the Godhead

“This is a non-speculative doctrine that does not permit "private interpretation" or human deductions beyond that which is revealed. Its vital importance to the salvation of man does not permit speculation.” (*Ibid*)

The remark here about the trinity being a “non-speculative doctrine” is incorrect. Nowhere in the Scriptures is it stated. If it were stated there would be less of a problem. It is purely speculative. This is why our salvation does not depend upon believing it. This is why to say it is of “vital importance” to a person’s salvation is only what I would term scare-mongering tactics. No one’s salvation is dependant upon believing it. It is only an assumed doctrine.

When Wadie Farag was an evangelist in the Nile Union he wrote an article called: *What think ye of Christ?* It was published in the *Ministry* magazine. In this article he spoke much concerning the trinity. We shall quote from this article again in later sections. After saying that a Moslem believes in the one God because he believes in the inspiration of the Koran, Farag wrote

“Similarly, those who believe in the doctrine of the Trinity do so because Inspiration teaches this doctrine. We need not prove the Trinity; all we need to do is to prove the inspiration of the Bible and then accept the revealed doctrine of the Inspired Book. It would be impossible for finite man to conclude anything about God's nature, whether He is one person or whether He is one God in three persons, without the aid of revelation.” (*Wadie Farag, Ministry, November 1961, 'What think ye of Christ'*)

Interestingly, earlier in the article Farag had made this observation

“Those who claim that it is illogical for God to have a Son, and those who reason that if God has a Son it follows that He must have a wife, confine their thinking within the precise limitations of the meaning of the word Son. It must be admitted that man's knowledge and comprehension of ideas is dependent upon words. To try to portray the relationship between the three persons of the Godhead, using any of the some five hundred thousand words of our dictionary, would be an impossibility. In all probability, if the

average man used a vocabulary of some 500 billion words (in which his comprehension would be proportionately enlarged), inspiration would have used a different term than Son to portray the fine relationship of Christ to the first person of the Godhead.

In accepting the doctrine that Christ was the Son of God we do not accept the fact that God had a wife; we only accept what revelation says about the Deity. This doctrine, though inscrutable because there are no analogies to it in our finite experience, is yet definitely not self-contradictory” (*Ibid*)

It is evident that in 1961, it was still believed by Seventh-day Adventists that Christ, in His pre-existence, really was a Son. Three years later in the *Ministry* magazine of November 1964, R. M. Johnston, who was then Bible teacher at the Korean Union College, wrote

“The term "Trinity" is nowhere to be found in the Bible. But the doctrine is there -- this conclusion is inescapable.” (*R. M. Johnston, Ministry, November 1964, What Can We Know About the Holy Trinity?*)

Again not everyone accepts this to be true. He later said

“For while it is true that no formal statement of the doctrine can be found in the most reliable Biblical manuscripts, nevertheless a comparison of Scripture with Scripture makes any contrary teaching untenable.” (*Ibid*)

Notice very carefully what Johnston is saying. He is saying that the trinity doctrine is concluded because of a “comparison of Scripture with Scripture”. This is the same way as almost all doctrines are formulated. This includes ‘Sunday keeping’, the ‘immortality of the soul’, a ‘forever burning hell’ and the like. This statement therefore, in itself, proves nothing. Certainly what the Scriptures say do not make any other understanding of the Godhead apart from the trinity doctrine “untenable”. All during the time of Ellen White’s ministry, the Seventh-day Adventist Church rejected the trinity doctrine. Literally tens of thousands never believed that their alternative beliefs were wrong. Johnston then stated

“Many an undisputed doctrine rests on less ample direct scriptural evidence than that of the Trinity. After all, in the Bible we cannot find even one single formal argument to prove the existence of God - for that we must look to the systematic theologians and philosophers. Rather, His existence is taken for granted without any formal proof being considered necessary; contrary ideas are simply dismissed as foolish, the fruit of sin. It is the same with the doctrine of the Trinity.” (*Ibid*)

This is a very weak argument. I would also say that not everyone believes that a denial of the trinity doctrine is “the fruit of sin”, neither would they believe that “formal proof” of it was unnecessary to believe it. Certainly the non-trinitarians would not say that their beliefs should be “simply dismissed as foolish”, neither

would they refer to them as being “**untenable**”. To say that any teaching contrary to the trinity is “**untenable**” - as claimed here by Johnston - is one huge misstatement of the facts.

Needless to say, not everyone believes that Johnston’s statement is true. In the study you are now reading, this will be seen over and over again. For the moment though we shall consider the thoughts of someone whom I admire for a book he wrote regarding the trinity doctrine. He is the late Edmund J. Fortman who, for something like 40 years, was a Jesuit teacher.

Philosophical reasoning versus the gospel

Fortman’s book is called *The Triune God*. As a Jesuit, Fortman believed that the trinity doctrine is central doctrine of the Christian faith but he also felt that it was not as appreciated as it should be. I am sure that many trinitarians feel the same way. In the introduction to his book, after saying that the trinity doctrine has had “an amazing history”, also that it could only have originated from “divine revelation” (but not stated in Scripture), he asks a very simple question. That question is

“What does the Old Testament tell us of God?” (*Edmund J. Fortman, The Triune God, Introduction, page XV, 1972*)

Fortman then wrote of the Old Testament

“It tells us there is one God, a wonderful God of life and love and righteousness and power and glory and mystery, who is the creator and lord of the whole universe, who is intensely concerned with the tiny people of Israel. It tells us of His Word, Wisdom, Spirit, of the Messiah He will send, of a Son of Man and a Suffering Servant to come.” (*Ibid*)

He admits though

“But it tells us nothing explicitly or by necessary implication of a Triune God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” (*Ibid*)

Even as an avid supporter of the trinity doctrine, Fortman admits that nowhere in the Old Testament does it even imply that God is a trinity let alone explicitly say it. He also says much the same regarding the New Testament Scriptures.

“If we take the New Testament writers together they tell us there is only one God, the creator and lord of the universe, who is the Father of Jesus. They call Jesus the Son of God, Messiah, Lord, Savior, Word, Wisdom. They assign Him the divine functions of creation, salvation, judgment. Sometimes they call Him God explicitly.” (*Ibid*)

He then says of what the New Testament writers say of the Holy Spirit

“They do not speak as fully and clearly of the Holy Spirit as they do of the Son, but at times they coordinate Him with the Father and the Son and put Him on a level with them as far as divinity and personality are concerned.”
(Ibid)

Again this is being very honest. The Scriptures are not as informative concerning the Holy Spirit as they are of the Son. This is probably why over the centuries there have been so many disputes regarding this mysterious divine personality. After saying that the New Testament provides what he terms “a triadic ground plan and triadic formulas” Fortman said

“They [the New Testament writers] give us no formal or formulated doctrine of the Trinity, no explicit teaching that in one God there are three co-equal divine persons. But they do give us an elemental trinitarianism, the data from which such a formal doctrine of the Triune God may be formulated.”
(Ibid)

Fortman agrees that the trinity doctrine cannot be found in Scripture. This is why it will always remain an assumed man-made teaching. He is saying though that when considered together, the information (data) in the Scriptures does lend itself to believing that God is a trinity – also that it was on this basis that the trinity doctrine was formulated. This is the usual confession of trinitarians.

As we shall see later though, it is my candid opinion that not all the information is used when formulating this teaching. This is because it leaves out the possibility of the incarnate Christ sinning – and that if He had sinned He would have lost His eternal existence. This reasoning is prohibited by the trinity doctrine. This is one of the reasons why the Creed at the Council of Nicaea was formulated. It was to so say prove that it was not possible for Christ to sin and undergo change because of it. We shall see this in later sections – particularly section seven and section eight. This risk belief is also dealt with in great length in section twelve and section thirteen. In summary Fortman said on page 32

“There is no formal doctrine of the Trinity in the New Testament writers, if this means an explicit teaching that in one God there are three co-equal divine beings” *(Ibid, Chapter 2, ‘The New Testament Witness to God’, page 32)*

Fortman also says on page 35 (this was after explaining in the first two chapters what the Scriptures say of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit)

“The Biblical witness to God, as we have seen, did not contain any formal or formulated doctrine of the trinity, any explicit teaching that in one God there are three co-equal divine persons. Rather it contained the data from which a doctrine of this kind could be formulated. And it would take three centuries of gradual assimilation of the Biblical witness to God before the formulation of the dogma of one God in three distinct persons would be

achieved.” (*Ibid*, ‘*The Triune God in the Early Christian Church*’, page 35)

It is true that the trinity doctrine was not formulated until the 4th century AD – meaning that it was not an original belief of Christianity. It was one that was formulated as the established Christian Church declined into apostasy.

A glorious doctrine perverted by speculation (a non-Seventh-day Adventist perspective)

Samuel Spear can be described as a non-orthodox trinitarian. He was also a non-Seventh-day Adventist. He wrote an article regarding the folly of believing in the extreme speculations of the orthodox trinity doctrine. You can read it here

[http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Articles\(others\)/Speararticle.pdf](http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Articles(others)/Speararticle.pdf)

We shall now consider some of Spear’s remarks.

In 1889, which was the year following the famous Minneapolis Conference, his article was printed in the *New York Independent* whilst three years later in 1892 it was included in the Seventh-day Adventist’s Bible Students Library. The latter was a series of tracts on Bible doctrines believed by Seventh-day Adventists. The fact that Spear’s article was included in the Bible Students Library, does contribute to showing how, at that time, our church regarded the trinity doctrine. Certainly it reveals just what it was, concerning the Godhead, that at that time Seventh-day Adventists actually believed and taught. This is because it was saying to all who would read these tracts (because it was a tract explaining our beliefs) this is what Seventh-day Adventists believe.

Note the title of Spear’s article. This is very important. As was said above, when it was published in the *New York Independent* it was called *The Subordination of Christ* whilst when reprinted and included in the Bible Students Library it was called *The **Bible Doctrine** of the Trinity*. Note my emphasis. It appears to have been given this title because it was opposed to, as held by many Christian denominations, the orthodox version of the trinity doctrine. In other words, it was **a non-trinitarian article** – at least as far as orthodox trinitarianism is concerned.

The fact that it was given this title shows that this article was meant to portray what the **Bible alone** has to say concerning the three personalities of the Godhead, meaning minus the non-biblical extreme speculations of the trinity doctrine. This is why it was reprinted and included in the Bible Students Library in 1892. It was in harmony with what was then, in the 1890’s, believed by Seventh-day Adventists. In reality, when compared with traditional trinitarian theology, it was decidedly non-trinitarian. In fact I would say that the vast majority of trinitarians would say that it was decidedly anti-trinitarian. At the very beginning of his article Spear said

“The Bible, while not giving a metaphysical definition of the spiritual unity of God, teaches His essential oneness in opposition to all forms of polytheism,

and also assumes man's capacity to apprehend the idea sufficiently for all the purposes of worship and obedience." (*Samuel T. Spear, D. D., published in the New York Independent on November 14th 1889 as 'The Subordination of Christ' and by the Pacific Press in 1892 as 'The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity'. The latter was in pamphlet form as a tract and included in the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Students Library*)

This is very true indeed. Nowhere in the Scriptures is given an explanation of **how** God exists although as Spear said, they do teach "His essential oneness". This is the reason why it has been said in this study that to speculate concerning this oneness, especially as is done so in the trinity doctrine, is not a very sensible thing to do. It must also in all honesty be asked, is this something really necessary to do? This is because although it may be sincerely meant, this type of speculation may be wrong and therefore lead to serious erroneous conclusions. This is particularly as it affects other aspects of the Christian faith. As Spear said, to enable us to worship God effectually (adequately), the Scriptures do reveal enough of His "spiritual unity". This is very much the same as was said by a Seventh-day Adventist minister by the name of William T. Hyde. He was one of the people who contributed to the compilation of the 1966 Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedias. Under the sub-heading of "Essential Nature Unknown" he wrote

"The essential nature of God which corresponds to the physical nature in man -- what God is made of, how He exists, how He can be eternal -- has not been revealed." (*William T. Hyde, Theology of an Adventist, A Biblical theology, 1965*)

Here the entire problem is precisely summarised because with respect of *divine being* - meaning what God is and the way that He eternally exists (metaphysically or ontologically speaking) - the Scriptures are totally silent. The author continued

"It may be that it would be beyond our finite comprehension even if it were revealed to us." (*Ibid*)

Again this statement is very true. Our human understanding is very limited, especially when it comes to things of a spiritual nature. At times we have problems understanding what God has revealed, let alone speculate about the things He has chosen to keep silent upon, This is particularly as purported by the trinity doctrine. As we shall see later in this section - and will refer to it a number of times throughout this study - these sentiments, as expressed by Hyde, were very much the same as those expressed by Ellen White although she did phrase it a little bit differently than he did here. Returning our thoughts to Spear and his article - after showing what the Bible alone says about the three personalities of the Godhead he continued by saying

"It is only when men speculate outside of the Bible and beyond it, and seek

to be wiser than they can be, that difficulties arise; and then they do arise as the rebuke of their own folly.” (*Samuel T. Spear, D. D., published in the New York Independent on November 14th 1889 as ‘The Subordination of Christ’ and by the Pacific Press in 1892 as ‘The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity’. The latter was in pamphlet form as a tract and included in the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Students Library*)

Spear is here speaking out against the extreme speculations made by the trinitarians. He then concluded concerning the three divine personalities as revealed in the Bible (this was again in opposition to the doctrine of the trinity)

“A glorious doctrine then becomes their perplexity, and ingulfs them in a confusion of their own creation. What they need is to believe more and speculate less.” (*Ibid*)

This “glorious doctrine” is that which Spear says that the ***Bible alone*** says concerning the three personalities of the Godhead. If everyone believed this only (no more no less), then perhaps there would be far more harmony amongst Christians - particularly amongst Seventh-day Adventists. Spear, as a non-Seventh-day Adventist, probably did not take into account what Ellen White had written and said but this is understandable.

Speculation unsafe

Thirty years previous to this in 1858, in a book called *The Higher Christian Life*, William Boardman wrote with respect to what he terms the persons of the Holy Trinity

“Upon this subject flippancy would border upon blasphemy. It is holy ground. He who ventures upon it may well tread with unshod foot, and uncovered head bowed low.

Speculation here, too, is entirely out of place, unsafe, not worth the ink used in the writing. The lamp of human reason is a light too dim to guide us through the profound mysteries of the mode of the divine existence and the methods of the divine manifestation and working. God alone knows what God is. And God only can communicate to man what man can be made to know of God, especially of the personalities of the Godhead, and of their relations to each other and to us.” (*William Boardman, the Higher Christian Life, part II ‘How Attained, page 99-100, chapter I, ‘For me: then what must I do?’*)

Boardman, as did Spear, appears somewhat unimpressed with the speculations of the trinity doctrine although as we shall see later, Ellen White did condemn the three-in-one speculations that he used in his book to describe God’s being. This should be telling us something very significant. Boardman concluded

“Revelation must be our guide. Beyond what God has revealed, we know

nothing. The sacred Word is all the light we have in this matter.” (*Ibid*)

As we shall now see, this is much the same as said by Ellen White.

A clear warning

In the early 1900's when the Godhead crisis was at its height within Seventh-day Adventism (we shall cover this more fully in later sections), Ellen White wrote extensively concerning wrong views that were being expressed with regard to both God and Christ. As we shall now see, she also wrote with regard to the folly of speculating about what God, concerning His own being, has chosen to keep secret (silent) upon. To the delegates at the Lake Union Conference at Berrien Springs in 1904 she said

“There are some things upon which we must reason, and there are other things that we must not discuss. In regard to God -- what He is and where He is -- silence is eloquence. When you are tempted to speak of what God is, keep silence, because as surely as you begin to speak of this, you will disparage Him. ” (*Ellen G. White, Sermons and talks Volume one, 'The foundation of our faith', MS 46, 1904, manuscripts Release 900*)

This is much the same as said by Boardman (see above).

“Our ministers must be very careful not to enter into controversy in regard to the personality of God. This is a subject that they are not to touch. It is a mystery, and the enemy will surely lead astray those who enter into it. We know that Christ came in person to reveal God to the world. God is a person and Christ is a person.” (*Ibid*)

Whatever is unknown about **how** God exists, the one thing that over and over again Ellen White stressed (we shall see that she emphasised this throughout the entire time of the Godhead crisis within Seventh-day Adventism) was that it should not be forgotten that “**God is a person and Christ is a person**”. We shall see more of why she did this in later sections. Notice very importantly the next words of Ellen White

“Christ is spoken of in the Word as "the brightness of His Father's glory, and the express image of His person” (*Ibid*)

Regarding what the Scriptures reveal concerning Christ, this is extremely important. It is with reference to Hebrews 1:3.

Revelation only

Speculation may not always be wrong in itself but the dangers must be recognised. This is why, rather than to speculate about that which God has chosen to keep silent upon, especially as it concerns His very being, it is so much better to stay within the boundaries of what He has chosen to reveal. It

must also be recognised that to a degree, to speculate concerning things that God has not revealed, is akin to presumption. In summary therefore, as Seventh-day Adventists, we need to be very careful indeed in what we presume to be true. As it says in the Scriptures

“The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.” Deuteronomy 29:29.

As noted previously, the trinity doctrine is not essential to salvation. If it had been essential then God would have revealed it. As it is, He has said nothing about Himself being a trinity of persons; - only that He and Christ are two separate personalities.

“There is everything plainly revealed in God's Word which concerns the salvation of men, and if we will take that Word and comprehend it to the very best of our ability, God will help us in its comprehension.” (*Ellen G. White, Sermons and Talks Volume 1, 1990, 'The Minister's Relationship to God's Word', A sermon preached in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Des Moines, Iowa, December 1st 1888, Text 2 Timothy 4:1-11*)

Speculation unnecessary and dangerous

In the midst of the Godhead crisis, also under the subheading of *A False and a True Knowledge of God - Speculative Theories*, Ellen White penned these words (this was after quoting Deuteronomy 29:29)

"The revelation of Himself that God has given in His word is for our study. This we may seek to understand. But beyond this we are not to penetrate. The highest intellect may tax itself until it is wearied out in conjectures regarding the nature of God; but the effort will be fruitless." (*Ellen G. White, 8th Volume Testimonies, page 279, 'The essential knowledge'*)

It is more than likely here that Ellen White had in mind, as well other assumptions concerning God, the speculations of the trinity doctrine. Certainly she was not ignorant of these things. Whatever she had in mind she wrote

“This problem has not been given us to solve. No human mind can comprehend God. Let not finite man attempt to interpret Him. Let none indulge in speculation regarding His nature.” (*Ibid*)

The conclusion was – rather inevitably

“Here silence is eloquence. The Omniscient One is above discussion.” (*Ibid*)

It goes without saying that Ellen White was addressing her remarks to the speculations regarding the Godhead (or as some say the trinity), which in the

early 1900's were permeating Seventh-day Adventism. She did realise though that between God and Christ, there was a certain *oneness* - albeit she said it was something that was incomprehensible to the human mind.

“There are light and glory in the truth that Christ was one with the Father before the foundation of the world was laid. This is the light shining in a dark place, making it resplendent with divine, original glory. This truth, infinitely mysterious in itself, explains other mysterious and otherwise unexplainable truths, while it is enshrined in light, unapproachable and incomprehensible.”
(*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 5th April 1906, 'The Word made flesh'*)

Note first of all that Ellen White did not include the Holy Spirit in this oneness. Throughout the entire time of her ministry, Seventh-day Adventists did not regard the Holy Spirit as a person like God and Christ. This was even after Ellen White had stressed that in His own right, the Holy Spirit is a personality. Our pioneers believed that the Holy Spirit was the personal presence of both God and Christ when the latter two were not bodily (physically) present. By the early 1900's, Seventh-day Adventists believed the Holy Spirit to be God and Christ omnipresent - yet a divine personality.

Note that regarding this oneness, whatever may have constituted it, Ellen White did say that it was “unapproachable and incomprehensible”. This can only be with respect to our human understanding of it. Note also, again very importantly, that she did say that it did explain “mysterious and otherwise unexplainable truths”. I would think that more so than anything else, this included how God the Father and the Son could both be termed God. We shall return our thoughts to this statement on a number of occasions because it should go without saying that it is very important to our studies.

From the above we can see that neither within the Scriptures or within the writings of Ellen White has God revealed anything about His being as three-in-one, at least not as purported in the trinity doctrine. It must be said therefore that to believe this teaching, whichever way it is explained, is pure speculation. In an attempt to prove it to be true, as I have seen so many people endeavour to do, it also necessitates a never ending round of explanations. It is to these types of explanations that I believe E. J. Waggoner was addressing when in defending the non-trinitarian faith of Seventh-day Adventists regarding the divinity of Christ he said (note this was in 1889, one year after the Minneapolis Conference and the same year that Samuel Spear's article was published in the New York Independent)

“We have no theory to bolster up, and so, instead of stating prepositions, we shall simply quote the word of God, and accept what it says.” (*E. J. Waggoner. Signs of the Times, March 25th 1889, article 'The Divinity of Christ'*)

This was exactly the same as Samuel Spear in his article said was best to do

(see above). It is unfortunate that in the Seventh-day Adventist publication *The Trinity*, it says under the sub-heading of *The Bible, Our Primary Authority* (this was in the *Introduction* to the book)

“In the spirit of the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the authors of this book firmly hold the following conviction: if we cannot support any teaching biblically, we do not want it. We humbly take up this project in the spirit of John Nevins Andrews (1829-1883), one of the most able of our pioneer scholars, who exclaimed, “I would exchange a thousand errors for one truth”. (*The Trinity, Woodrow Whidden and Reeves, Introduction, ‘The Bible our Primary Authority’ page 11*)

John Nevins Andrews was indeed one of our best theologians (perhaps the best) but like all the other early Seventh-day Adventists he was also an anti-trinitarian. The reason why he rejected the trinity doctrine was because it was a teaching that he believed could not be supported from Scripture. He even said that it destroyed the personality of God. I say that it was unfortunate that the authors of *The Trinity* used his statement (as above) because they did so to sustain the belief that this teaching is Scriptural. In 1855 J. N. Andrews wrote

“This doctrine [the trinity] destroys the personality of God and his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. The infamous, measures by which it was forced upon the church which appear upon the pages of ecclesiastical history might well cause every believer in that doctrine to blush.” (*J. N. Andrews, Review and Herald, March 6th 1855, ‘The Fall of Babylon’*)

A confusion of words

In sections seven, eight and nine, we shall be taking a look at the 4th century dispute that eventually led to the original formation of the trinity doctrine – particularly as to how it was made into a creed. We shall see that it was indeed a war of words – words that attempted to explain and define God.

In 1897, A. T. Jones published a series of articles called: *How the Catholic Creed was made*. As most will realise, the trinity doctrine became the central belief of the Roman Catholic Church. In his fifth article called ‘The Great Trinitarian Controversy’ (this was under the sub-heading of “TRYING TO PUT GOD INTO A FORMULA”) he wrote about the dispute at the Council of Nicaea (AD 325). This is where it was attempted to define the ontological relationship that exists between the Father and the Son. As Jones explained, there was no doubt on either side of the debate that there was a trinity but how to explain it was the problem. After speaking of how there was a debate over the words offered to explain whether Christ was of the same substance of the Father or a different substance - these two words being *Homoousion* and *Homoiousion* – Jones wrote of this confusion

“It could not possibly be otherwise, because it was an attempt of the finite to measure, to analyse, and even to dissect, the Infinite. It was an attempt to

make the human superior to the Divine. God is infinite. No finite mind can comprehend Him as He actually is. Christ is the word—the expression of the thought —of God; and none but He knows the depth of the meaning of that word. "He had a name written that no man knew but He Himself; . . . and His name is called the Word of God." Rev. 19 :12, 13. Neither the nature nor the relationship of the Father and the Son can ever be measured by the mind of man. "No man knoweth the Son but the Father, neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him." Matt, 11:27.'" (A. T. Jones, *Bible Echo*, September 13th 1897, Series 'How the Catholic Creed was made'. Article 'The Great Trinitarian Controversy')

The problem is with trinitarianism is that it seeks to precisely define how God exists – which as Jones said is something that cannot be done. To do this is only human speculation. It is simply making a formula to define God. As Jones so aptly put it, the debate “was an attempt of the finite to measure, to analyse, and even to dissect, the Infinite”. This is what the trinity doctrine does. It attempts to define God by using a formula. This may satisfy the intellectual cravings of the human mind but as we shall see, there are implications to this trinitarian theory that seriously denigrate the Gospel. Jones concluded

“Therefore, no man's conception of God can ever be fixed as the true conception of God. God will still be infinitely beyond the broadest comprehension that the mind of man can measure.” (*Ibid*)

We shall see in section nine how the trinity doctrine became established within Christianity – also how it became the central doctrine of the Christian church. This was as the latter rapidly declined into apostasy.

In the next section (section five) we shall see that regarding the trinity doctrine there are differing concepts.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section five

The trinity doctrine - differing views and concepts

In the previous section we took note that the trinity doctrine is only an assumed doctrine. Certainly it is not a teaching that is explicitly stated in the Scriptures. Regarding the Godhead, this has led to all sorts of differing beliefs being formulated, some of which are very conflicting. We shall now see that unless the word *trinity* is explained each time it is used, it could mean a number of different concepts. To put this in another way, unless the word *trinity* is explained, it will mean different things to different people.

A multitude of views

Unfortunately, but also very interesting, is that whilst many Christians describe God by using the terminology *the trinity*, their views regarding this teaching are many and varied. This I find is even amongst Seventh-day Adventists. These differing concepts of the trinity were duly recognised by one of the very early pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism - namely R. F Cottrell. In referring to the trinity doctrine he said

“This has been a popular doctrine and regarded as orthodox ever since the bishop of Rome was elevated to the popedom on the strength of it. It is accounted dangerous heresy to reject it; but each person is permitted to explain the doctrine in his own way.” (R. F. Cottrell, *Review and Herald*, 1st June 1869, ‘*The Doctrine of the Trinity*’)

Cottrell’s words are just as applicable today as they were 140 years ago when he wrote them. This is inasmuch as most Christians believe that they should confess to God being a trinity (three-in-one) yet all seem to have their different ways of explaining it. This is mainly because nowhere in Scripture is this teaching specifically stated. We took note of this in the previous section. This would not then have had any reference to Seventh-day Adventists. From the beginning, as a denomination, they had rejected the trinity doctrine. In this series we shall see this over and over again. Referring to trinitarians and the doctrine of the trinity, Cottrell then went on to say

“All seem to think they must hold it, but each has perfect liberty to take his own way to reconcile its contradictory propositions; and hence a multitude of views are held concerning it by its friends, all of them orthodox, I suppose, as long as they nominally assent to the doctrine.” (*Ibid*)

Even in 2008 it must be admitted that to be considered orthodox, a person must make a confession of believing in *the trinity*. Strange as it may seem however, as Cottrell says here, to be considered as such a nominal assent to this teaching will usually suffice. Cottrell also correctly observes, perhaps even more strangely really, that with respect to the trinity doctrine, Christians hold to “a multitude” of different views yet because they make a confession of this belief, regardless of **how** they explain their particular understanding of it, they are usually considered orthodox. In other words, as long as a person describes God by using the terminology *the trinity*, then regardless of what is actually believed, it is more than likely that he or she will be classified as being part of orthodoxy. It is strange really how people can believe so many different things about the very same doctrine, especially when its whole focus is on the very being of God, yet still be termed as orthodox. This is the way it is though with the trinity.

Notice above that Cottrell claims that the trinity doctrine has what he terms, “**contradictory propositions**”. This was the view that was generally held by most (if not all) of the early pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism. In continuing his thoughts just 5 weeks later he said

“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. I do not purpose to add much to the barrels of ink that have been wasted on both sides of this question. I would simply advise all that love our lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to believe all that the Bible says of him, and no more. Then you will have the truth, and not occupy either of these extremes.” (R. F. Cottrell, *Review and Herald*, July 6th 1869, ‘The Trinity’)

Cottrell concluded his article

“Let us believe all he has revealed, and add nothing to it.” (*Ibid*)

The reason why he wrote this second article (5 weeks after the first we mentioned) is very interesting. It was because his first article had been commentated on in the *Baptist Tidings*. Cottrell began his article by saying

“The Baptist Tidings has noticed some remarks of mine on this subject, not long since published in the REVIEW. He says, "A writer in the Advent Review, in speaking of the trinity, gives his reasons why he never adopted or tried to explain the doctrine. Some of his views are very sensible and logical. He by no means denies the full character, and works, and worship ascribed to Christ in the Bible. These are indorsed and unequivocally acceded to.” (*Ibid*)

It is quite apparent that the *Baptist Tidings* did not regard Cottrell as undermining

the deity of Christ or His true position of the Godhead. The article continued

“The question with him [Cottrell] seems to be solely in the use of the word trinity, as applied to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. His objection is that it is nonscriptural. That the term 'trinity,' or 'triune God,' does not occur in the Bible.” (*Ibid*)

Cottrell denied this claim by replying

“The use of an unscriptural term is not my sole objection. A term not found in the Scriptures may truly express a scriptural idea. But when no term can be found in the Scriptures that will convey the idea, it looks suspicious, at least, that the idea, as well as the term, is unscriptural.” (*Ibid*)

Cottrell’s objection was not simply that the word *trinity* is not in found the Bible but that the concept itself is absent. He is correct. Nowhere in the Bible does it convey the idea that God is three-in-one as in the trinity doctrine. Interesting also is that Cottrell relates to the readers of the *Review and Herald* the *Baptist Tidings* understanding of the trinity

“The Tidings defines the "trinity of God" as "the three offices of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in one divine and eternal Person." This we take as his explanation of the doctrine.” (*Ibid*)

This is very important. Cottrell says that this was not his (Cottrell’s) understanding of the trinity but that of the *Baptist Tidings*. He then says

“We understand that the term trinity means the union of three persons, not offices, in one God; so that "The Father, Son and Holy Ghost, Are three at least, and one at most.” (*Ibid*)

The words “We understand” here can be taken to mean Seventh-day Adventists. Cottrell then refers to the *Baptist Tidings* understanding by saying

“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.” (*Ibid*)

In summary of his reasoning he wrote

“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.” (*Ibid*)

Remember, Cottrell is referring to the *Baptist Tidings* explanation of the trinity (three persons in one person), not the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of it.

By 1880, Cottrell had not changed his mind about using words not in Scripture to explain doctrine

“The doctrines of the Scriptures are best expressed in Scripture language; and a doctrine that necessitates the use of other terms, is not to be accepted as a Bible doctrine. Such terms as trinity, transubstantiation, indulgence, penance, and purgatory, are not necessary to express any Bible doctrine. We can believe all that the Scriptures say of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and yet not believe the strange and contradictory ideas which men-wish to convey by the term triune God.” (R. F. Cottrell, *Review and Herald*, April 22nd 1880, ‘Bible terms for Bible doctrines’)

From the above we can see that indeed there are many differing views regarding the trinity doctrine. This is what makes this terminology almost meaningless. I say ‘almost’ because all trinitarian doctrines have one common factor. This is the oneness (unity) in this teaching. As we continue this will become more and more evident.

The trinity – an almost meaningless terminology

In a very real sense, unless an explanation is given each time it is used, the terminology *the trinity* is almost meaningless. This is possibly why Ellen White never used it (at least in relation to the Godhead). It means so many different things to so many people that in itself it has no real value. This is even though at onetime in its history it did have a specific meaning. Today there are a number of different views. It simply depends on who is using the terminology.

Another probable reason for Ellen White never using the term *trinity* is because she realised that it did not correctly portray what God had revealed to her. It may have even been that God told her never to use it. The latter must be considered a very serious possibility.

Regardless of Ellen White’s reason for never once using this word (trinity) to describe the relationship of the three persons of the Godhead, the fact that she didn’t use it is amazing. I say this because as most Seventh-day Adventists will realise, she spent 70 years writing about the things that God had shown her. She produced something like 25 million words doing it. We must ask therefore, how many other Christian authors like her could make the claim that at no time in their writings did they use the word *trinity*. Not very many I would think because for one reason or another, the vast majority have employed it. On Ellen White’s part therefore, the very fact that she did not use this word must be considered a very significant realisation, perhaps even supernatural.

As we shall see in section twenty-seven, it is also interesting to note that in the *Testimonies to The Church* in the early 1900’s, Ellen White did condemn all illustrations that depicted God’s being – as in the trinity doctrine - as three-in-one. This should be telling us something very important. This is why it was previously said that it is quite possible that God told her never to use the word

trinity. Its use immediately brings to mind the concept of God being three-in-one. What else can it do?

Look at this from an entirely different angle. In her writings concerning the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Ellen White never used the word *trinity* - and yet she wrote under the inspiration of God (plus she condemned all three-in-one illustrations of God), so why should Seventh-day Adventists today be felt compelled to use this terminology? Remember also that the Bible writers themselves, also whom were God inspired, never specifically stated that God is three-in-one as in the trinity doctrine. We noted this in the previous section. Notice again that whilst the concept of God being a trinity is not explicitly expressed either within the Scriptures or in the writings of Ellen White, the Seventh-day Adventist Church today, as do the vast majority of major Christian groups, now insist that it is the only correct way to describe God. They also expect their members to follow their example but some, meaning the increasing number of non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists, firmly refuse to do so.

Regarding these dissenters or non-conformists, some Seventh-day Adventist churches prohibit them from preaching or taking Sabbath School classes. Some non-trinitarians are also prohibited from holding offices in the church. Such is the way it is today within Seventh-day Adventism. This I know from personal experience. Some who have refused to profess 'the trinity' have even had their name removed from the Seventh-day Adventist Church membership, meaning they have been disfellowshipped for their faith. Others I hear have been told that they are no longer welcome in Seventh-day Adventist Churches. This objection to non-trinitarians appears to be an increasing occurrence within Seventh-day Adventism. Needless to say, this is a massive change from how it was when Ellen White was alive. During the time of her ministry, making a profession of the trinity doctrine would certainly have caused eyebrows to be raised. Certainly it was not then the faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This reveals that since Ellen White's death, the beliefs and attitude of the Seventh-day Adventist Church has changed dramatically.

It is often said today, by Seventh-day Adventists, that if the trinity doctrine is not professed then the deity of Christ is not correctly professed but this cannot be so. I say this because if it expressed as in the Scriptures – which do not contain a trinity doctrine – then this is enough to express it correctly. In other words, we only need the Bible to express the deity of Christ correctly and not the trinity doctrine. Ellen White never used the terminology *the trinity* neither did she depict God's being as three-in-one, yet it goes without saying that she stated the divinity of Christ correctly. This is something that should be very seriously considered, especially by the trinitarians amongst us. In other words, to correctly express the divinity of Christ, there is no need to use the word trinity.

In conclusion of the above, I would strongly suggest that if someone does ask you if you believe in the trinity, then regardless of any urge you may have to say either yes or no, first acquaint yourself with what it is that you are really being

asked. This is because the person who is asking the question may hold to an entirely different view of this teaching than you. If you wish to answer the questioner intelligently, you will need to clearly understand just what it is you are being asked.

Differing trinity views amongst today's Seventh-day Adventists

In my studies of the past eight years, I have been brought into contact with many Seventh-day Adventists (countless numbers now), most of whom regard themselves as trinitarian. In consequence of this, I have found that each can be placed into one of two basic groups. These two groups are as follows:

- Those who **do not understand** what the trinity doctrine teaches (the majority group)
- Those who **do understand** what the trinity doctrine teaches (the minority group)

The vast majority of the Seventh-day Adventists to whom I have spoken constitute the first group. This means that they fail to understand what the trinity doctrine teaches. Strange as it may seem, most of these profess to be trinitarian. I have also found that many in this group hold to beliefs that no true trinitarian would ever hold. This means that without even knowing anything else about their beliefs, it must be concluded on these two counts alone, they are not really trinitarian. If this analysis is representative of our global church membership, which it probably may be, it can only be concluded that the majority of Seventh-day Adventists today professing to be trinitarians are not really trinitarian at all.

This leaves us with the second group, meaning those Seventh-day Adventists who **do understand** what the trinity doctrine teaches.

Some in this group (which I have found to be very much a minority of the minority group) do believe what this doctrine teaches. These are the genuine Seventh-day Adventist trinitarians. In my experience, this is a very small number of people, most of whom are of the ministry. In contrast to this minority, most in this second group, again understanding what the trinity doctrine teaches, do not believe it. These are the non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists. As has been said previously, this is an increasing number of people. Rightly or wrongly, this analysis has led me to conclude that if the average Seventh-Adventist understood exactly what the trinity doctrine does teach, they would probably reject it.

The non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists to whom I have spoken appear to me to be representative of Seventh-day Adventists throughout the world. I say this because from what I can gather is happening today globally (unless I have been misinformed), many of our members are becoming aware of what it is that the trinity doctrine does teach and for this reason are rejecting it. This is definitely a growing group within Seventh-day Adventism but when compared to all those

who still profess to be trinitarian, it still constitutes a very small number.

At this point, you may quite justifiably be thinking that we have covered all who are in this second group (those who do understand what the trinity doctrine teaches) but you would be mistaken. There is a remainder. Like the rest of the group, this remainder do understand what the trinity doctrine teaches and like the non-trinitarians do not believe it, yet, strange as it may possibly seem, they still insist on referring to themselves as trinitarians. Now this may seem a very odd thing to do but I believe that in their eyes there is a very good reason for them doing it. We shall look at this reason now.

Non-trinitarianism – a stigma (a shame and disgrace)

It is a well-known fact of history that the majority of trinitarians regard non-trinitarians as *something less* than truly Christian. In other words, trinitarians tend to 'look down' upon the non-trinitarians. Some trinitarians even regard the non-trinitarians as cultish. This is how it has been for centuries and probably will be until Jesus returns.

History attests that ever since the 4th century when the trinity doctrine was first introduced into the Christian faith, there has been a zealous exhortation, by the established church, for every Christian to accept and believe it. This was initially carried out by the added persuasion of state decrees from a Roman Emperor (we shall see this in section nine) and as most Christians will realise, has ever since been a mandatory confession of faith for all who would care to be thought of as being part of what is known in Christianity as orthodoxy. We shall see this more clearly in section seven.

The majority of the major denominations that exist today have always espoused the trinity doctrine. This is even though they do not all hold to exactly the same version of it (we shall see later what makes any trinity doctrine truly trinitarian). The remainder such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Christadelphians and Mormons etc, meaning those who do not accept the traditional trinity teaching, are therefore not considered to be part of this orthodoxy. It is also true to say that any denomination that does not teach the trinity is usually classified by Christian orthodoxy as a non-Christian cult or sect (or something to that effect). Prior to their acceptance of this teaching, this is how it was with Seventh-day Adventists. They were termed a cult or sect.

Reinder Bruinsma is the president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Holland. In the *Review and Herald* of August 23rd 2007 he made this observation

"By 1900 church membership stood around 75,000. Adventists were long regarded as a strange sub-Christian sect, and honesty demands to add that, though we have now grown into a significant worldwide movement, we are still regarded as a sect in many places around the world." (Reinder Bruinsma, Review and Herald, August 23rd 2007, 'The Babylonian temptation')

Usually, by the trinitarians, all professed Christian groups that do not declare a belief in the trinity are called either a sect or a cult. This is the reason why some to whom I have spoken, even though they do not believe what is taught by means of the trinity doctrine, still insist on calling themselves trinitarian. They know that to do otherwise (meaning to be termed non-trinitarian) would bring the trinitarians to look upon them as falling short of being true and valid exponents of the Christian faith. Hence the remainder in this latter group of Seventh-day Adventists, even though at heart they are really non-trinitarian, would rather be termed trinitarian than suffer the shame and embarrassment (stigma) of being thought of as being outside of orthodox (mainstream) Christianity. To put this in another way again, there are some in this latter group who understand what the trinity doctrine teaches but hold to beliefs that no trinitarian would believe yet they still term themselves trinitarian. Some of these I have encountered personally.

To summarise briefly it can be said that regardless of what else is believed by those who claim to be a Christian, if they wish to be considered orthodox there is definitely a need to make a profession of believing in the trinity. If this is not done, then mainstream Christianity will undoubtedly dub them as being sub-Christian. However, the real question is not one that concerns embarrassment. It is rather: Is the trinity doctrine in harmony with what the Bible teaches or not? This is the all-important question that should pervade and captivate the attention of every Christian, particularly Seventh-day Adventist Christians.

If it is found that the trinity teaching is not supported in the Scriptures (remember, as we noted in the previous section it is only an assumed or implied doctrine) it should be rejected. This is regardless of what others may think of us or how long we have professed this belief.

We now need to note something very important regarding the uses of two terminologies in this study. These are non-trinitarianism and anti-trinitarianism.

Non-trinitarianism and anti-trinitarianism

Whilst the terms of non-trinitarianism and anti-trinitarianism are tantamount to saying that the trinity doctrine is error, in this study they are used in two different senses.

The terminology *anti-trinitarianism* will generally be used with reference to the actual speaking out against the trinity doctrine whereas the term *non-trinitarianism* will be used to denote any theology not in keeping with the three-in-one concept of God. As we shall see in later sections, there were those of our ministry who were once quite vocal in their anti-trinitarianism whilst the overwhelmingly vast majority of our members were strictly non-trinitarian. This is how it was all during the time of Ellen White's ministry. This is one of the reasons why throughout her ministry, also for decades after she died (1915), orthodox Christianity regarded the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a non-Christian cult or sect. These non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists, because they believed

that theirs was a God given faith, did choose to suffer the stigma (shame and disgrace) of being termed as such rather than make a profession of something they did not believe. Concerning their faith, they were very much convicted.

Let us now give consideration to what a person must believe to be said to be truly trinitarian. I term this essential trinitarianism.

Essential trinitarianism

To be a genuine trinitarian, a person must believe that there are three divine personalities (or as some trinitarians prefer to say, three personal distinctions) in the one indivisible substance of God (the one being of God). This is the three-in-one concept of God. If either of these two factors is missing (meaning the threeness or the indivisible oneness) then regardless of what else a person may believe, he or she is definitely not a trinitarian – at least not in any sense that can be termed orthodox.

There is also something else to consider. This is that in *essential trinitarianism*, all three personalities must have co-eternally existed together. In other words, none of the three could be said to exist before the other two. All must be coeval (of the same age). In 1945, W. H. Branson said in the *Australasian Record* (this was during the time when trinitarianism was still in the early days of being established within Seventh-day Adventism)

“The everlasting gospel teaches of one God in three persons, existent from eternity. He is before all things, and is the Author of life and the universe.”
(*W. H. Branson, Australasian Record, October 1st 1945, ‘The everlasting Gospel’*)

This is the basic trinity belief. This “He” spoken of here is the trinity (tri-unity) three-in-one God, not the Father as an individual person. Eleven years previously in 1934, the same author had written

“For instance, we find in the Bible that the gospel teaches us of one God in three persons; that this God is existent from eternity; that He is before all things; and that He is the author of all things.” (*W. H. Branson, Review and Herald, February 1st 1934, ‘The faith of Jesus concluded’*)

Again we see that “this God” (the one God) is the three-in-one trinity or triune God. This was three years following the first time in our history that the word trinity was included in any of our published fundamental beliefs although it was used rather ambiguously. We shall cover this in a later section so we will not comment here albeit important to note is that in 1934, trinitarianism was far from being established within Seventh-day Adventism although some were pushing for it to be so.

In 1964, R. M. Johnson wrote an article concerning the trinity. We noted this article in the previous section. This was when he said that although the word

trinity is not in the Bible, it was an inescapable conclusion that the doctrine was there. The non-trinitarians would disagree. Johnson, in his article, also made these comments

“The basic definition of the Trinity is "One God in three persons. This definition contains two elements that seem contradictory to our finite minds. First it says there is one God. Then it says the one God is somehow three. There are three persons in the one " (*R. M. Johnson, Ministry, November 1964, 'What Can We Know About the Holy Trinity?'*)

“The Bible clearly teaches that there is only one God....At the same time, the whole Bible teaches the threeness of God — that He is three in one....The first fact already has been noted. God has one essence but three distinct persons (see John 10:30; 14:16, 17; 17:5, 11, 21, 22, 23). We had better not say "three bodies"; such wording is not founded on Scripture, not supported by the Spirit of Prophecy, and detracts from the Deity.” (*Ibid*)

By the trinitarian, the three divine personalities are not regarded as separate individuals such as you and I. Instead they are thought of as three personal distinctions in “one essence”. This is as said by Johnson above. We shall cover this in more detail in the next section. Note that this article was published in the *Ministry* magazine. This is a publication that is designed for both the Seventh-day Adventist ministry and non Seventh-day Adventist ministry. This was when Roy Allan Anderson was its editor. LeRoy Froom was its originator (its founder).

Johnson said that the terminology “three bodies” of this trinity God is “not founded on Scripture” or “supported by the Spirit of Prophecy”. He offers no further explanation but his meaning is clear. He is saying that none of the three of the Godhead have a separate bodily presence from each other. This again is basic trinitarianism. As many Seventh-day Adventists will appreciate, this is also very much out of harmony with what God has revealed about both Himself and His Son - not only through the Scriptures but also through the spirit of prophecy. We shall see this later in this study. It is too much to detail here in this section. Johnson followed his previously quoted remarks by saying

“The second fact is that all the Persons are coeternal. That is, all of them have always existed, and the Father cannot be said to have been in existence before the Son or the Spirit. All are timeless (see Col. 1:17; John 1:1, Rev. 22:13; compare Isa. 41:4).” (*Ibid*)

All of the above is basic trinitarianism. This is why it has been said previously that essential trinitarianism is both the *threeness* and the *indivisible oneness*, also the *co-eternity* of the three. Without any of these concepts there can be no trinitarian doctrine. All three personalities together make up the *one God* (the trinity triune God). This is why one divine personality cannot come before (have existed prior to) the other two. It is because in trinitarianism, all three make the one God. Whilst the *threeness* may be patently obvious to have in a trinity

doctrine, it is the *indivisible oneness* that many professed Seventh-day Adventist trinitarians fail to understand. Without it though, God cannot be considered to be a trinity (three-in-one). It is also this *indivisible oneness* that brings a number of problems in its wake. These problems are the knock on effects or implications of the trinity doctrine.

As we briefly noted in section two, the current trinity debate in Seventh-day Adventism does not simply concern the deity of Christ or the personality of the Holy Spirit. This particular reasoning is just a very big red herring. This is inasmuch as this trinity teaching does affect other biblical doctrines. We shall pursue this thought in later sections. For now we shall consider the trinity doctrine itself and a person's salvation.

The trinity, trinitarians and salvation

As expressed in the 5th century Athanasian Creed, trinity three-in-one orthodoxy says

“Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith.” (*The Athanasian Creed*)

This introduction follows by saying (this is with reference to this orthodox trinity faith)

“Which Faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the Catholic Faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity. Neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance.” (*Ibid*)

Apart from expressing the orthodox trinity faith itself, this creed clearly depicts, by those who believe it, their attitude regarding *how* a person is saved (soteriology). It also depicts their attitude towards those who refuse to believe this creed. What I mean by this is that all who accept this creed believe that those who do not accept it will never receive eternal life. To put it in another way: according to the creed, for a person to be saved, he or she must believe, as the creed says, that God is a trinity. Apart from anything else, this reasoning of ‘believing in certain set of doctrines and you will be saved’ is a total misrepresentation of the biblical teaching of how a person is saved but this would be too much to go into here. This comes under the heading of righteousness by faith.

As has been previously stated, trinitarians do not generally accept as orthodox those who do not confess a belief in the trinity. Most trinitarians would even doubt that a non-trinitarian was a Christian. One such prominent Seventh-day Adventist who appears to have believed this is J. R. Spangler. In an article called “I believe in the Triune God” he wrote in the *Review and Herald* in 1971

“If Christ is fully God and the Holy Spirit is fully God, then the Godhead

must be a trinity.” (J. R. Spangler, *Review and Herald*, October 21st 1971, *I believe in the triune God*)

This is a massive over-simplification of the complexities of this trinity debate but it does reveal trinitarian reasoning. Spangler then went on to say

“Through the centuries untold numbers of minds have clashed over this point. Even today there are pockets of so-called Christians who will not accept the triune-God concept. Still this truth furnishes the key to all the essential doctrines of the Christian faith.” (*Ibid*)

By calling certain “pockets” of non-trinitarians “so-called Christians”, Spangler gives the very strong impression that he very much doubts that a person is a Christian if they not profess the trinity doctrine. This is typical trinitarian reasoning. Interesting is Spangler’s idea that all the “essential doctrines of the Christian faith” are built upon the trinity doctrine. I say this because this is the claim of the Roman Catholic Church. As we say though (as Seventh-day Adventists), the Papacy has all the essential doctrines wrong. Seeing that as a denomination we now profess the trinity doctrine, albeit it is not exactly the same as the Roman Catholic Church, this is something for all Seventh-day Adventist trinitarians to ponder.

There is also something else to ponder. If it were true that a person who does not believe in the trinity doctrine is not a Christian and are therefore not saved, then what is this saying about our pioneers? I say this because as we have noted in the previous sections, none of them were trinitarian. In fact they consciously and deliberately rejected this doctrine. We shall establish this point later. It must also be reasoned that if what Spangler said is true, it would also have to be said that our pioneers did not have the “key to all the essential doctrines of the Christian faith”. This is quite an allegation. It must also be said, if it was true, where would this leave them as individuals and what does it say about what they were teaching?

We can even ask what does this say about past Seventh-day Adventism. I say this because not only did our pioneers reject the trinity doctrine, the entire denomination was once non-trinitarian. It would mean in fact, if what Spangler said is true, that everything we taught during the time period of Ellen White’s ministry was suspect. This is because all during this time, we were a non-trinitarian denomination.

What also does Spangler’s statement say about God leading our pioneers? I ask this because as we noted in section one, Ellen White clearly said that God had led them. We shall see in later sections that Ellen White did not share Spangler’s reasoning. She regarded the pioneers, albeit they were all non-trinitarian, as teaching the truth about God and Christ. This was as well as saying that they were teaching the truth about all of our other major beliefs. Certainly she regarded her fellow pioneers as Christians. She considered them as children of

the Most High God.

Another statement, made with respect to the trinity doctrine and soteriology, was made in 2007 by Merlin Burt. He is director of the Ellen White Estate. He said

“The most recent major theological shift for Seventh-day Adventists was the formal adoption of the doctrine of the Trinity. It was a renewed emphasis on soteriological and Christological themes and particularly the relationship between gospel and law during the 1890s and early 20th century that led to a new appreciation of the full equality, personality, and unity of the Godhead.” (*Merlin Burt, ‘Ellen G. White and Sola Scriptura’, August 23 2007*)

A definition of the word *soteriology* is salvation through Christ – or to put it another way – How a person is saved.

A non-Seventh-day Adventist perspective

One non-Seventh-day Adventist who wrote with reference to the trinity doctrine being the foundation of the Christian faith is F. E. Mayer of the Lutheran Church. He was Professor of Systematic Theology at the Concordia Seminary of St. Louis. Having in mind here the Jehovah’s Witnesses – who do not accept the trinity doctrine or the deity of Christ - he said

“The Christian’s salvation is based upon the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. God the Father has planned our salvation from eternity, the Son has carried it out in the fullness of time, and the Holy Spirit creates faith and brings to fruition the gracious work of God. The Athanasian Creed correctly states that except a man believe the doctrine of the Trinity, he cannot be saved.” (*F. E. Mayer, Jehovah’s Witnesses, page 17, ‘Undermining the foundations’*)

This does not leave very much to the imagination but as we shall take note of in more detail in the various sections that follow, if the above statement were true then the vast majority of the Seventh-day Adventists who lived during the time of Ellen White (and even many who lived decades beyond) would not be saved. This is because almost all of them were non-trinitarian. Some even spoke out sharply against the trinity doctrine. Even today there is a growing number of Seventh-day Adventists who do not accept this trinity teaching. This means of course that if the Athanasian Creed were true, they too would not be saved. Mayer’s type of reasoning can be termed creedal reasoning. This is a reasoning that seriously impacts what I believe to be a correct understanding of righteousness by faith but this is a topic for another study.

Alfred Pask seemed a little mellower in his approach to the relationship between a belief in the trinity doctrine and salvation but he appears to end up believing the same as Mayer. He says

“Of course, we can be saved before we understand the full meaning of that doctrine—before we even know of it as a doctrine, just as the early Christians were. But we cannot progress far in Christian belief or worship before we become aware that such a doctrine is necessary to our further growth in the Christian life.” (*Alfred H. S. Pask, An approach to Christian doctrine, edited by Greville P. Lewis, B.A., BD., page 146, ‘God the Holy trinity’*)

Pask admits that early Christians were not trinitarians. This would take in such as the apostle Paul, the gospel writer John, as well as the other three gospel writers. In fact it would take in every single one of the Bible writers. It would also take in many of their converts to Christianity, also the very early church fathers that wrote on behalf of the church. Innumerable thousands of early Christians were not trinitarian. Non-trinitarianism was the purest Christian faith as it came from the apostles. Notice too that Pask says that the trinity doctrine (as he puts it) is “**necessary to our further growth in the Christian life**”. This is referring to sanctification. It is the same as saying that a person who does not accept the trinity doctrine is not a growing Christian. He later says something that is very important. Please read it very carefully. He says

“Many people would say that the central theme of the Gospel is not the doctrine of the Trinity, but our experience of God’s salvation.” (*Ibid*)

I would profess to be one of these “**Many people**”. As has been said above, our salvation is not based on believing any particular doctrine (or any set of doctrines) but it does have its basis in our relationship with God. Jesus said that for a person to enter into the kingdom of God, he or she must be born again (see John 3:3-7). This is the one criterion that is paramount to anyone’s salvation. He said nothing about believing that God is three-in-one. In fact He said

“And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” John 17:3

As professing Christians, we can believe all sorts of teachings but a belief in any doctrine or any amount of them, no matter what it is or what they are, does not determine our salvation. Our salvation is determined by whether we are born again of God – whether we have chosen to trust God for our salvation or not. This should be the focus of our attention. Pask continues by strongly implying that if a person does not believe in the trinity doctrine then he or she is not saved. He says

“Properly understood, however, our experience of salvation involves the belief in God as Three in One.” (*Alfred H. S. Pask, An approach to Christian doctrine, edited by Greville P. Lewis, B.A., BD., page 146, ‘God the Holy trinity’*)

There is nothing Scriptural about this statement. There is nothing in the Bible

about God being a trinity (as in the trinity doctrine) let alone the necessity of believing it to be saved. On the next page Pask says (thus seeming to return to the same reasoning as found in the Athanasian Creed and Mayer)

“Thus the doctrine of salvation involves, and is indeed almost identical with, the doctrine of the Trinity.” (*Ibid Page 147*)

Again this is a non-Scriptural statement but it does appear that most trinitarian denominations take the stand that a profession of God being a trinity is essential and equivalent to salvation although none of them seems to expect its adherents to necessarily have an in-depth understanding of this teaching. Neither does it seem they expect all of its devotees to explain it in the very same way, hence the superficial and differing views concerning the trinity that exists today amongst Christians.

Never must it be taught that in order to be saved a person must believe in the trinity. Jesus did not teach it neither did the apostles, neither did any of the Bible writers. We can also say assuredly that this reasoning is not found in the spirit of prophecy. As well as anything else it gives a wrong impression of righteousness by faith. This is because as has already been said, a belief in any one doctrine or even a number of doctrines is not enough to secure salvation for anyone. It is only as we have attributed to ourselves, through faith, the righteousness of Christ, that we can experience salvation. Everything from that time on is our sanctification, meaning God's clean up campaign for our lives. It is God that justifies. It is God that sanctifies.

A belief in the trinity - not a requirement of salvation

In this trinity dispute within Seventh-day Adventism, the problem area is speculation. This is because God has not revealed anything concerning the ontology of His existence (meaning the reality of how He physically exists). He has kept this totally a secret so why should we, as His remnant people, enter into speculation about it? This is especially in the light of the warnings that have been given to us through the spirit of prophecy (see previous section).

Needless to say, when all is said and done, the trinity doctrine is built upon speculation. It is this that is causing the present day rift within Seventh-day Adventism. The only conclusion that can be drawn is that because God has chosen to keep silent about this matter (His being or how He exists) then He has done so for a very good reason. As Ellen White wrote (see previous section), even if God did tell us we would still not be able to understand it. For whatever reason, God has deemed it unnecessary for us to know it. We therefore should be silent on this matter.

In conclusion therefore, to believe that God is a trinity is neither a requirement of Scripture nor a requirement of salvation. This much is only too obvious because after all, the trinity doctrine is only an implied (assumed) doctrine. Certainly it is not one that is explicitly stated in scripture. In other words again, whatever

speculation we employ in formulating this doctrine, it may be entirely wrong or lead us to draw wrong conclusions, particularly regarding other aspects of the Christian faith. In 1912 in the *West Indian Messenger*, Ellen White penned these words

“Matters of vital importance have been plainly revealed in the Word of God. These subjects are worthy of our deepest thought. But we are not to search into matters concerning which God has been silent. May God help His people to think rationally. When questions arise upon which we are uncertain, we should ask, “What saith the Scriptures?”

Christ withheld no truths essential to our salvation. Those things that are revealed are for us and our children, but we are not to allow our imagination to frame doctrines concerning things not revealed.” (*Ellen G. White, West Indian Messenger, 1st July 1912, ‘Be not troubled over minor matters’*)

This sums up the entire trinity controversy. The trinity doctrine is not something that God has revealed therefore it is not essential to believe as far as salvation is concerned. Ellen White was primarily referring here to matters of unimportance but the principle is wide and deep. Nothing concerning our salvation has been left to speculation. We must also reason that if we have been told (because we may get them wrong) not to speculate concerning the less important things of the Scriptures, it should go without saying that we should not speculate on the major issues. To get these wrong would be even worse – fatal even. We can be assured that if God wanted us to believe that He was a single entity (three-in-one) as purported by the trinity doctrine, He would have told us. As it is He has been silent on this matter. We therefore should also be silent. We have no right to speculate. Ellen White would no doubt agree. A belief or confession of God being a trinity (three-in-one) is definitely not essential to salvation. Ellen White also said in 1908

“The Great Teacher held in his hand the entire map of truth, but he did not disclose it all to his disciples. He opened to them those subjects only which were essential for their advancement in the path to heaven. There were many things in regard to which his wisdom kept him silent.

As Christ withheld many things from his first disciples, knowing that then it would be impossible for them to comprehend them, so to-day he withholds many things from us, knowing the capacity of our understanding.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 23rd April 1908, ‘Ministering with faithfulness and simplicity’*)

The latter would include where she said that regarding the nature of God, silence was eloquence and that the Omniscient One was above discussion (see previous section). The servant of the Lord then said

“When we are tempted to climb above the simplicity of the truth, we need to

study Christ's method of teaching. We need to learn to talk as simply as Christ talked,-- so simply that the little child and the unlearned can understand us. It was the simplicity with which Christ presented the word that drew hearts to him. Yet he spoke with assurance and power. Noblemen and some of the chief priests and rulers believed on his word." (*Ibid*)

Can we say that the trinity doctrine is so simple that a child can understand it? The majority of the trinitarians of whom I have encountered say that it is a mystery that even they cannot understand. Ellen White concluded

"We are to work as Christ worked. We are to move carefully. We are not to pour out ideas that contradict the light that God has given; neither are we to follow methods that are opposed to his will. Let us tread in Christ's footsteps. As we follow him, we may know that we are walking in the pathway of light." (*Ibid*)

We must also ask here, does the trinity doctrine "contradict the light that God has given" to past Seventh-day Adventists or not? We shall consider this when we take a look later at other teachings that are affected by the trinity doctrine.

For now we shall proceed to section six. This is where we shall be taking a closer look at what is known as trinity orthodoxy. As we shall see, this is not the trinitarianism as is currently espoused by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They hold to a different version of this teaching. By reading this section through though, it will help us to understand what constitutes essential trinitarianism, meaning, what a person must believe to be called a true trinitarian. It will also show us what the Seventh-day Adventist Church professes today. Working on the basis of *essential trinitarianism*, also by the profession of our fundamental beliefs, we shall see in the next section that we are indeed a truly trinitarian denomination – even though we were not as such during the time of the pioneers and the time of the ministry of Ellen White.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section six

The trinity doctrine explained - orthodoxy and non-orthodoxy

We noted in section four that the trinity doctrine is only an assumed (implied) doctrine, meaning that it is not explicitly stated in the Scriptures. Even so, trinitarians believe it is the inevitable conclusion of everything that the Bible has to say concerning the three personalities of the Godhead. It goes without saying that the non-trinitarians reason differently.

We need now to give consideration to the trinity doctrine itself. This will be to discover its basic tenets. In doing so we shall see that there is more than one version of this teaching. The trinity principle though, meaning trinity essentialness, is exactly the same in every version - else it would not be a trinity doctrine

There are two basic trinity views that pervade Christianity. One is known as orthodoxy whilst the other is the version held by both the Seventh-day Adventist Church and various evangelical denominations. In the finality, the implications of believing God to be a trinity, meaning how other biblical teachings are affected by the trinity doctrine, are exactly the same. It is just a case of using two different routes to arrive at the same destination.

Trinity Orthodoxy

In this study, the term orthodox trinitarianism is used to denote the **original** trinity doctrine. This is the formula that was eventually decided upon at the second Christian ecumenical council held at Constantinople in AD 381 to explain how God has His existence. This was when it was declared that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit each have their subsistence in the *one and the same substance*. Theologically speaking, this oneness of substance is known as consubstantiality and is the same as that which constitutes, according to trinitarians, *the one being of God* (the one God). This is very concisely explained in the Wikipedia online encyclopaedia. This is where it says

"Consubstantiality" describes the relationship between the three Divine Persons of the Christian Trinity and conotes that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are "of one Being" in that the Son is "generated" ("born" or "begotten") "before all ages" or "eternally" of the Father's own Being, from which the Spirit also eternally "proceeds."

(Wikipedia online encyclopaedia, 'Consubstantiality)

This same orthodoxy also includes the belief that the Son is not only begotten of God the Father but is **eternally begotten** (continually sourced) with the Holy Spirit continually proceeding.

With regard to the procession of the Holy Spirit, there are varying views. Some maintain that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son (the latter is known as the filioque clause) whilst others say that this procession is from the Father through the Son. All versions of the trinity regard the Holy Spirit as a divine personality. If this were not the case, then it would not be trinitarian. We shall say more about the word *personality* or *person* later in this study. It is not as straightforward as it may first appear.

Understanding the basics

An understanding of the basics of any trinity faith is of prime importance. If they are not understood then the objections to the trinity doctrine will not be understood.

We shall look at these basics by using a number of explanations from various Christian authors. One is H. Maldwyn Hughes whilst another is a Methodist by the name of Alfred Pask. We quoted from both of these sources in the previous section. We shall also be taking note of the thoughts of Alister McGrath, professor of theological history at Oxford University. This will be as well as taking into account what is said in the Athanasian Creed. This is a creed that a number of different denominations, including the Roman Catholic Church, say depicts a correct view of the orthodox trinity doctrine although it does seem that it is not used as much today as it was in the past. In passing, we shall also be mentioning the difference in beliefs between the orthodox version of the trinity and the current version held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This gives us a great deal to cover in this section.

Trinity basics - three personalities in one God (three-in-one)

In his book *Christian Foundations*, Hughes outlines what he regards as the basic tenets of Christianity. This is as seen through the eyes of a Methodist. In the chapter in which he deals with the trinity doctrine he asks

“What is meant by the Holy Trinity?” (H. Maldwyn Hughes, M. A., D. D. Christian foundations, An introduction to Christian doctrine, page 137, ‘The Holy Trinity’ fourth edition, July 1933)

He answers this question by stating

“We learn from the New Testament that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, three Persons are one God. That is a statement of the materials out of which the doctrine of the Trinity has been fashioned.” (Ibid)

Notice the “one God” part of this statement. This is very important. This is the trinity God. In a book called *Catholic Belief*, which needless to say expounds the faith (beliefs) of Roman Catholicism, it says

“There is but one God, the Creator of heaven and earth, the Supreme, incorporeal, uncreated Being, who exists of Himself, and is infinite in all His attributes and perfections, such as Holiness, Power, Wisdom, justice, Mercy and Truth.” (*Rev. Joseph Faa Di Bruno, DD, Catholic Belief, page 1, ‘A short and simple exposition of Catholic doctrine’, thirtieth edition, 1884*)

As we shall now see, this is the three persons-in-one God to which Hughes referred to above. It says on the same page regarding the trinity doctrine

“This is a profound mystery, revealed to us by God” (*Ibid*)

The “us” is usually deemed to be the church itself rather than Roman Catholics as individuals. The book continues

“The Catholic Church teaches that in one God there are three persons; the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost; really distinct one from the other, and equal in eternity, power, immensity, and all other perfections; because all the three Persons have one and the same divine nature or essence.” (*Ibid*)

Here in one single statement is trinity essentialness. It is the “three Persons” possessing and existing in the “one and the same” nature or essence (threeness and oneness). Trinity essentialness is also the three having been “equal in eternity”, meaning that none of the three existed prior to the other two. As we noted in the previous section, without any of these principles there can be no trinity doctrine. In other words, if a person does not believe in any of these trinity principles then he or she is not a trinitarian. This is regardless of whatever else may be believed. This same trinity belief continues

“It would be a contradiction to assert that there are three Gods and one God, or that there are three Persons and one Person; but it is no contradiction to affirm that God is one in essence and three in personality.” (*Ibid, pages 1 and 2*)

Again this is a clear explanation of trinity essentialness. The author concludes on page two

“We are not able to understand how each of the three Persons can be God, and yet that there is but One God” (*Ibid*)

The Seventh-day Adventist trinity God

From the above, we have seen how the trinity doctrine is expressed in orthodoxy. This was through the eyes of Methodism and Roman Catholicism. We shall now see that the same trinity essentialness is also the official belief of

Seventh-day Adventism. In a denominational book that officially expresses the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church it says

“There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe ... A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines, page 16*).

It then describes this unity (trinity) “one God” by explaining

“God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. He is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation” (*Ibid*)

Here is officially expressed the current (2008) Seventh-day Adventist understanding of God. This is exactly the same as is said by orthodox trinitarians (see above), at least as far as trinity essentialness is concerned. This is that in God there are three persons and that together they make the “one God”. Notice it says that this unity trinity three-in-one God (the “one God”), is immortal. This again is exactly the same as believed by Roman Catholicism, also any other denomination that holds to a trinity doctrine (any version of it).

This is where current Seventh-day Adventist theology harmonizes with the orthodox trinity creed. It is on the very basics. This is inasmuch that as a denomination, they insist that each of the three personalities have their subsistence in the one and the same being of God, meaning that all three divine personalities make up the one trinity structure of God (or the one God or one indivisible substance of God). This is the one aspect of their trinity doctrine that makes it truly trinitarian. Without a profession that the three personalities are of the one being of God (meaning together constituting the one God) also that the three are co-eternal, it would not be a trinity doctrine. In other words - and as far as trinity essentialness is concerned - this Seventh-day Adventist declaration of belief is on an exact par with the orthodox trinity creed. This is very important to remember.

Quite recently (July 2008), in the Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Research Institute newsletter *Reflections*, our official current understanding of the trinity doctrine was defined. This was in the form of a Bible Study by Ekkehardt Mueller, Associate Director of the Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Research Institute. Under the heading “One God and Three Persons” he wrote

“There is only *one* God (Deut. 6:4), however, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all called God (Matthew 27:46, John 20:28: Acts 5:3-4). Consequently, we do not worship three Gods, but one God who reveals Himself in and consists of three “persons”. The three persons share one indivisible nature.” (*Ekkehardt Mueller, Biblical Research Institute, Reflections newsletter, July 2008, Page 9, ‘Scripture Applied, - A Bible Study’*)

This is typically trinity reasoning. It goes beyond what God has revealed in Scripture but without it (this one substance reasoning) there would be no such thing as the trinity doctrine, at least not as it is generally known today. Mueller also said

“Each person of the Godhead is by nature and essence God, and the fullness of the deity dwells in each of them. On the other hand, each person of the Godhead is inseparably connected to the other two.” (*Ibid*)

As far as the gospel is concerned, this teaching that each of the three personalities is “inseparably connected to the other two” has horrendous implications. This is because it denies that it was possible for the divine Son of God, even though He became incarnate, to have sinned and thus become lost because of it (if He had sinned). This deprives the gospel of the risk taken, in the plan of redemption, by both the Father and the Son. This in turn conceals to a great extent the love that God has for fallen humanity. It obscures that in attempting to save mankind from sin, God was willing to allow His own Son (as we would say of ourselves – His own flesh and blood) to go out of existence. This is covered in more detail in section thirteen of this series. This section is called: *The power of the gospel (Infinite risk, infinite sacrifice, infinite love)*. Mueller also said

“We do not believe in three Gods but one God in three persons. These three personalities participate in one substance. In the divine unity there are three coeternal and coequal persons, who, though distinct, are the one undivided God.” (*Ibid*)

Notice particularly the last words of Mueller. He says that the “three coeternal and coequal persons ... are the one undivided God”. This is the *one substance of God* reasoning. It is this reasoning that leads to the belief that it was impossible for the divine Christ, even if He had sinned, to lose His eternal existence. Some trinitarians even believe that it was impossible for Christ to sin (which we know is not true) (see Hebrews 4:15). These are amongst the various implications of the trinity doctrine. Under the heading of *A Model of the Trinity*, Norman Geisler wrote in an article I found of his on the Internet

“By saying God has one essence and three persons it is meant that he has one “What” and three “Whos.” The three Whos (persons) each share the same What (essence). So God is a unity of essence with a plurality of persons. Each person is different, yet they share a common nature. God is one in his substance. The unity is in his essence (what God is), and the plurality is in God’s persons (how he relates within himself).” (*Dr. Norman Geisler, The Trinity - Part Two, ‘A Philosophical Defense of the Trinity’.*)

Under the heading of *Some Illustrations of the Trinity*, also having said that whilst no analogy of the Trinity is perfect some are better than others, he also said

“The Trinity is not like a chain with three links. For these are three separate and separable parts. But God is neither separated nor separable. Neither is God like the same actor playing three different parts in a play. For God is simultaneously three persons, not one person playing three successive roles. Nor is God like the three states of water: solid, liquid, and gaseous. For normally water is not in all three of these states at the same time, but God is always three persons at the same time.” (*Ibid*)

No division in the substance of God

In 1939, this was when the trinity doctrine was making inroads into Seventh-day Adventism, it said in an article in the Australasian Record (no author is cited so it may have been the editor Reuben E. Hare)

“One of the mysteries of the Bible is that it teaches that God is a Trinity.

There is one God, and yet He exists in three persons. This does not mean that God is one and three in the same sense, which is impossible. God is one in respect to substance, or nature, but in three persons.” (*Australasian Record, January 23rd 1939 ‘The mystery of the trinity’*)

This type of statement was not common during the time of Ellen White’s ministry. This was when the Seventh-day Adventist Church was a non-trinitarian denomination. By 1939 though, it was becoming more commonplace to make it. Trinity essentialness is where Seventh-day Adventists agree with the Athanasian Creed. This is where it says in the creed.

“Neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance.” (*The Athanasian Creed*)

The Westminster Confession summarizes the orthodox trinity doctrine this way

“In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.” (*The Westminster Confession of Faith (2:3)*)

Note particularly again here the oneness (“of one substance”). This is of paramount importance. It is trinity essentialness.

Three divine personalities but only one God

In his explanation of the trinity doctrine, Maldwyn Hughes continued

“This doctrine is not the outcome of mere speculation. It is an effort to do justice to the facts recorded in the New Testament, namely, that God has revealed Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” (*H. Maldwyn Hughes, M.*

A., D. D. Christian foundations, An introduction to Christian doctrine, page 137, fourth edition, July 1933)

This is only the same as is said by the vast majority who are truly trinitarian but by saying that the trinity doctrine was not “mere speculation”, Hughes is admitting that in it there is involved a certain amount. He is also saying that this speculating is the inevitable outcome of believing everything that the Scriptures have to say concerning the personalities of the Godhead. Most trinitarians would agree to this reasoning.

Hughes claims the trinity doctrine is doing justice “to the facts”. In other words, what the Scriptures say concerning the three personalities of the Godhead makes it compulsory to speculate that God is a trinity. This is even though it is not expressed in Scripture. Whichever way this is looked at, it is still speculation. He then adds

“Once these facts were accepted, the Church was bound either to develop a doctrine of the Tri-unity God, or to accept Tritheism (i.e. the belief in three gods). But Christianity is monotheistic; consequently the Church developed the doctrine of the Trinity in order to safeguard its monotheism.” (*Ibid*)

This statement is exaggerating the facts. This is because the “facts” concerning God the Father, Christ the Son and the Holy Spirit were well known by the apostles but they never felt “bound” (compelled) to make any attempts to formulate a trinity doctrine. They preached the Scriptures without any speculative trinity embellishment. It must also be said that they did not teach tritheism (three Gods).

The trinity problem began when attempts were first made to put together a systematic theology of God. To create a trinity doctrine, this necessitated a going-beyond what God has revealed in the Scriptures. This came to a head in the 4th century. This was when the Bishop of Alexandria attempted to explain Christ in a trinity framework. One of his presbyters, namely Arius, made objections to it. This brought about a massive dispute within Christianity, which in one way or another is still going on today. In the next three sections we shall be taking a look in more detail at this aspect of trinity history.

On the next page of his book, Hughes says that the New Testament shows a clear relationship between the three personalities of the Godhead. By way of explanation he says

“The Son is the Son of the Father, and the Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Son. Sometimes all three are mentioned together as in Matt. Xxviii. 19:” (*Ibid, page 138*)

This is only the same as was said by the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism, albeit they did not profess this in a trinitarian framework. Current (2008)

Seventh-day Adventist theology does not profess this at all. We shall return to this thought later. In an exposition of the trinity doctrine, Hughes later says

“God is one. There are not three Gods but one. The Godhead is one Being, consisting of three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” (*Ibid* page 140)

This is basic trinitarian theology (essential trinitarianism). Note the emphasis on the “one being” of God. This is very important. This is the one God, meaning the trinity or triune God (see above). This is the very crux of the trinity debate. Hughes adds

“The Son is from the Father by eternal generation, the Spirit is from the Father and the Son by eternal procession” (*Ibid*, pages 140-141)

Again this is basic trinity orthodoxy although there are varying views regarding the procession of the Holy Spirit. It is this difference that did – and to an extent still does today - separate the western (Roman Catholicism) and eastern (Orthodox) churches. This is known as the filioque controversy. Note here that it says the Son is being **eternally** generated by the Father. This is something that our pioneers did not accept. It is one of the **extreme speculations** of the trinity doctrine. Later, when we consider current Seventh-day Adventist theology, we shall return to this thought. In another Methodist book of Christian doctrine (this was authored by ten separate theologians) it says

“The doctrine of the Trinity, preserving and making clear the New Testament insights, emphasises that Father, Son and Spirit are all truly God, and equal to each other; that there never was a time when Christ did not exist, or the Spirit did not exist; that there is no difference in importance between the Three, for they are together One God.” (*Alfred H. S. Pask, An approach to Christian doctrine, edited by Greville P. Lewis, B.A., BD., page 151, ‘God the Holy Trinity’*)

Notice again essential trinitarianism (threeness and oneness). As Pask says, “they are together One God”. In the same paragraph it says

“So the New Testament speaks of Christ as ‘coming’ from the Father, and the Nicene Creed preserves this idea in the phrase ‘Only-begotten Son. . . begotten of His Father before all worlds’.” (*Ibid*)

Here again is trinity orthodoxy. It is that the Son is begotten (sourced) of the Father.

During the time of Ellen White’s ministry, this was basic Seventh-day Adventist theology but it stopped short of saying that Christ was **eternally** begotten of the Father. This is why the Father was regarded as older than the Son (not coeval) although Seventh-day Adventists certainly regarded the Son as being God essentially (God Himself begotten). We shall see this very clearly in later

sections. To our pioneers, this happening of being begotten was so far back in eternity it is incomprehensible to the human mind. In fact it was almost forever.

Pask then goes on to explain that with reference to the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul used such phrases as the *Spirit of God*, the *Spirit of Christ* and the *Spirit of the Father and the Son*. Again this was as believed by the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism. As Pask further explains

“The Creed again puts this into words:’. . . the Holy Ghost... Who proceedeth from the Father and the son...’ This way of expressing the dependence of the Son upon the Father, and of the Spirit upon both, is termed the Generation of the Son and the Procession of the Spirit.” (*Ibid*)

Again, whilst Ellen White was alive, this was generally the same belief as was held by Seventh-day Adventists, although they did not confess the extremes of the trinity doctrine.

Co-eternal and co-equal (no subordination in the trinity)

Concerning trinity orthodoxy, Maldwyn Hughes had this to say

“The Father is the unoriginate source of the Godhead. The Son is begotten of the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. But only in this sense is there first, second, or third. The subordination of the second and third Persons does not involve an essential inequality for all three Persons possess the same essence. The three Persons are co-eternal and co-equal.” (*H. Maldwyn Hughes, M. A., D. D. Christian foundations, An introduction to Christian doctrine, page 141-2, fourth edition, July 1933*)

This is standard orthodox trinitarianism but so as not to be thought of as depicting the Son as subordinate to the Father (because the Son is said to be begotten of the Father). Trinitarians believe that within the trinity of God, any subordination of one hypostases (personal distinction) to another is only in an economic sense, meaning that it is only because of the purposes of the carrying out of the plan of redemption. Otherwise - so they say - the three are all equal, all coeval (of the same age) and all of one will. To put this in another way, within trinitarianism the Son is not really subordinate to the Father but has only taken on that role (subordination) for the sake of redeeming mankind. Note the remark regarding “**the same essence**”. This is very important. It is basic trinity orthodoxy. Hughes continues

“The three Persons equally possess the fullness of the Godhead. Each Person by Himself is God and Lord, and in each Person the other divine Persons exist in inseparable unity, although without confusion of persons. The act of each Person is, in a real sense, the act of all three” (*Ibid*)

Here it is said that each of the three in this trinity are within each other. Note too

the remark about the “inseparable unity” of the three. This unity is the same as the *one substance or essence or one (triune) being* of God (see above). The non-trinitarians say that this is one of the aspects of the trinity doctrine that serves to derogate the gospel. This has been mentioned before in this study and we shall return our thoughts to it later. We have also seen above that this is the profession within Seventh-day Adventism today (see *Ekkehardt Mueller, Biblical Research Institute, Reflections newsletter, July 2008*).

Our pioneers did believe in a unity in God but not as expressed in the extremes of the trinity doctrine. This unity was as in Samuel Spear’s article as mentioned in section four. You can read the article here.

[http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Articles\(others\)/Speararticle.pdf](http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Articles(others)/Speararticle.pdf)

As will be seen throughout these studies, if the Son (or second person of the Godhead as current Seventh-day Adventists like to call Him) is considered to have been brought forth of the Father sometime in eternity (no matter how far back in the past), then the trinitarians will say that this is not depicting His full and complete deity (or divinity). They will reason as Froom did in his *Movement of Destiny* that

“From the strict Trinitarian view, the eternal pre-existence of Christ is absolutely essential to His Godhood. Self-existence can brook no intimation of beginning or derivation. If there was any point in eternity when Christ came forth from the Father, then He had a beginning, and is less than complete Deity — no matter how “far back in the days of eternity” this may have happened.” (*LeRoy Froom, Movement of Destiny, page 292, ‘Retrospective Look at Waggoner’s Minneapolis Message—No. 2’*)

This is using human logic and not Scripture. There is one more thing that is necessary to be noted here. This is that Hughes said

“The word Person was, therefore, not used in its full modern sense. But that does not mean that the term is to be emptied of all personal significance.” (*H. Maldwyn Hughes, M. A., D. D. Christian foundations, An introduction to Christian doctrine, page 141, fourth edition, July 1933*)

We shall consider these thoughts now because within trinity theology, they are very important.

Persons or not persons

Interesting to note is that there are trinitarian theologians who say that the terminology person (as in three persons in one indivisible substance or essence) can give the wrong impression. This they say is because it can promote the idea that the three are individual persons like you and I who can subsist independently from each other. This says orthodox trinitarianism is something that the three divine personalities are definitely not (meaning individual persons

like you and I) and cannot do (meaning subsist independently from each other). See Maldwyn Hughes above. Millard J. Erickson, put it this way

“The Trinity is a communion of three persons, three centers of consciousness, who exist and always have existed in union one with another and in dependence on one another. Each is dependent for his life on each of the others. They share their lives, having such a close relationship that each is conscious of what the other is conscious of. They have never had any prior independent existence and will not and cannot have any such now or in the future. Each is essential to the life of each of the others, and to the life of the Trinity.” (*Millard J. Erickson, 'God in Three Persons', page 331, 1995*)

As can be seen here, it is said that in order to exist, all three personalities need each other. Again this is much the same as was said by Ekkehardt Mueller (see above) although not exactly the same. He wrote in support of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of God being a trinity

“Each person of the Godhead is by nature and essence God, and the fullness of the deity dwells in each of them. On the other hand, each person of the Godhead is inseparably connected to the other two.” (*Ekkehardt Mueller, Biblical Research Institute, Reflections newsletter, July 2008, Page 9, 'Scripture Applied, - A Bible Study'*)

Another reason for not using the word person (so it is said by trinitarians) is that the three in the trinity must not be regarded like you and I as having separate modes of thinking patterns. This say the trinitarians is impossible because the thinking pattern of each of the three is always in absolute harmony with the other two. In other words, one of the three can never reason differently or contrary to, the other two.

Trinitarians believe that any one of the three can only think and do the other two. In this sense, none of the three can act separately or independently from the other two. This is one of the reasons why the trinitarians say it is best not to regard the three as individuals like you and me. In the light of this reasoning, some trinitarian theologians strongly suggest that instead of using the term persons or personalities to describe the three, it is much better to use the terms hypostases or personal distinctions. This is why it is sometimes said that the three hypostases or three personal distinctions in one indivisible substance constitute the being (the *one being*) of God. It is to remove the idea that there are three individuals of the Godhead, at least individuals such as you and me.

The meaning of person

In the trinitarian sense, the meaning of person is explained in a book called *Christian Doctrine*. J. S. Whale (D. D.) wrote it in 1941. It contains a series of lectures that was given by him to undergraduates at the University of Cambridge. This was in 1940. In the chapter he calls *Mysterium Christi* he says

"Our recent question is the crucial one: What is the meaning of Person in the doctrine of the Trinity? The answer is that it does not mean what we mean by 'Personality'. If you convert the Three which compose the Trinity into three subjects, Tritheism is inevitable. The Greek' Fathers struggled to guard against this misinterpretation." (J. S. Whale, *Christian Doctrine*, page 118, 'Mysterium Christi', 1941)

Tritheism is the belief in three Gods, not one God in three personal distinctions as in the trinity doctrine. Whale then adds by way of explanation

"According to Dr. Prestige the patristic doctrine of the Trinity means that God is 'One object in himself, and three objects to himself'. In the one God whom we worship, there are 'three divine organs of God-consciousness, but one centre of divine self-consciousness. That is, as seen and thought, God is three; as seeing and thinking, he is one.'" (*Ibid*)

In other words, God, to Himself, is one, but known He is as three. Speaking of a number of the areas in which theologians who specialise in trinitarianism need to focus their attention, the Encyclopedia of Religions says

"Fourth, to speak of God as "three persons" always has been problematic and remains the same today. In the modern framework, "person" means "individual center of consciousness". (*The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 'Trinity' Volume 15 page 57, 1987)

"To avoid the tritheistic implications of positing three "persons" in God, the relational, or "toward-the-other" character of "person" should be re-emphasized." (*Ibid*)

Regarding the concept of person, Alfred Pask in his book: *An approach to Christian doctrine* says that in the trinity doctrine, an additional difficulty was that some theologians wrote in Latin whilst others wrote in Greek.

"Another difficulty arose when words had to be translated from one language into another, for some theologians wrote in Latin and others in Greek. There were no exact equivalents. This is particularly true of the Latin word *persona*, which was used to refer to each of the Three in the Godhead." (*Alfred H. S. Pask, An approach to Christian doctrine*, edited by Greville P. Lewis, B.A., B.D., page 149 'God the Holy trinity')

Note here the phrase "in the Godhead". This makes the word *Godhead* to appear the same as the word trinity. The truth of the matter is that these two words are not even similar. The word Godhead - as translated in the KJV (Acts 17:29, Romans 1:20 and Colossians 2:9), - means pertaining to divinity but does not include the idea of three in one as does the word trinity. I have never found anywhere in the writings of Ellen White where she uses the phrase in the Godhead. All that I can find is where she says of the Godhead (of divinity). We

shall remind ourselves of this in some of the future sections. This is again where the phrase “in the Godhead” is used.

“The word used by the Greek-speaking theologians as their nearest equivalent to *persona* was *hypostasis*—but it did not mean exactly the same. The confusion became worse when *persona* was translated into English as *person*; and has become worse still in the last hundred years or so, during which time the study of human personality has changed the meaning of ‘*person*’ even in our own language.

The result of all this is that when we speak today of ‘One God in Three Persons’, the idea that most of us have in mind when we say ‘Persons’ is one which would have deeply disturbed the Christians gathered at the Council of Chalcedon. Most certainly God is personal, whether He is encountered by the prophets, by the disciples in Capernaum or at Pentecost, or by you and me. But the word ‘*person*’ has come to carry for us all a suggestion of separate, independent existence which the 5th century theologians were anxious to avoid when they spoke of God in His Threeness.” (*Ibid*, pages 149-150)

Note here the problem with the word *person*. It is said to suggest “independent existence”. Pask concludes concerning the word *person*

“It would really seem as though there is no better word in our language than ‘*person*’ by which we can do justice to all that we know through Christ about the Threeness in the Godhead; but we must always make it clear that, when we say ‘One Divine Nature, Three Persons’, we do not mean, any more than the New Testament or the Fathers meant, that God is ‘three people’. This limitation of language, after all, is what we might expect. We are trying to express what is beyond human understanding — even though, by the grace of a Revealing God, He has been known in Christ to human experience, and is known in the Spirit in our experience today (*Ibid*, page 150)

As can be seen here, the three in the trinity, according to orthodox trinitarians, are not “three people”. Pask also says that the New Testament writers did not mean it to mean as such. This is standard trinity orthodox reasoning. Note again the phrase “in the Godhead”.

In principle, the above is no different than was said by Calvin Bollman (1853-1943). This was when as associate editor of the *Review and Herald* he wrote in 1930

“We are too prone to think of the three infinite persons of the Godhead much as we think of three finite beings co-operating together closely for the accomplishment of the same purpose. But the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, while not a single person in three different manifestations, as Sabellius

taught in the second century, are three persons in the one Godhead, having *one will, one mind, coeternal, and inseparable in nature, character, and purpose — indivisible.*" (Calvin P. Bollman, *Review and Herald*, February 6th 1930, *Bible questions answered*)

It appears that Bollman was not very happy in regarding the three personalities of the Godhead in the same way we regard individuals who can think differently from one another. It also appears that Bollman was once a non-trinitarian. I say this because of the remarks he made at the 1919 Bible Conference. We shall take note this in section thirty-five and section thirty-six. Note he says here of the three personalities that they are "indivisible" in their oneness. This is where the non-trinitarians will begin to make objections. They say that it is this reasoning that destroys the gospel. We shall see why this is later.

It is also interesting to remind ourselves of something we noted in the previous section. This was that in an article in the *Ministry* called "What can we know about the holy trinity", R. M. Johnson made the following observation (this was after saying that there is one God in three persons)

"The first fact already has been noted. God has one essence but three distinct persons (see John 10:30; 14:16, 17; 17:5, 11, 21, 22, 23). We had better not say "three bodies"; such wording is not founded on Scripture, not supported by the Spirit of Prophecy, and detracts from the Deity." (R. M. Johnson, *Ministry*, November 1964, 'What Can We Know About the Holy Trinity?')

Not every Seventh-day Adventist would agree with the implications of this reasoning, particularly the non-trinitarians. As can be seen, much of what we have seen said by the trinitarians is rather philosophical.

The trinity God - no body or parts or, alternatively, not a form like ours

Orthodox trinitarianism tends to regard their unity trinity God as not having body and parts. Perhaps some have even asked what He would look like if He did possess them. The Methodist discipline says (this is in article *No. 1 The Holy Trinity*)

"There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body or parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the maker and preserver of all things, both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there are three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." (*The book of Discipline*, 1992)

According to Methodism, the trinity God does not have a tangible being, maybe even something like nothingness, yet it is still said that all three personalities are "of one substance". This leads to asking what constitutes this substance. One is left to wonder. It also says in article No. 4 (Of the Holy Ghost)

“The Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, is of one substance, majesty, and glory with the Father and the Son, very and eternal God.” (*Ibid*)

Here we can see expressed again the orthodox trinity doctrine but current Seventh-day Adventism appears to hold to a different reasoning. In their expressed theology, their trinity God does have a form of sorts.

In the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* it was Fernando Canale who wrote the current Seventh-day Adventist explanation of God. He wrote in reference to God’s form

“In Himself He [God] is real and has a form, yet that divine reality and form completely surpass the reality and capability of comprehension of the highest intelligences.” (*Fernando L. Canale, Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology, Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia Volume 12, page 113, ‘Doctrine of God’*)

According to this reasoning, the **one trinity God** has a form but it is beyond human comprehension to even imagine it. It must be asked though - when saying this was even beyond the “comprehension of the highest intelligences” - was Canale referring here to heavenly beings such as the angels? If it is then this begs a lot of questions. This is because Jesus did say that the angels in Heaven beheld the face of His Father (Matthew 18:10).

Immediately previous to this latter statement, Canale explained that although God can perform tasks such as can you and I can perform them, He does not have like body members (arms etc) as we do. He says

“Only God can use analogy to reveal Himself without involving vain speculations. Some of the analogies God draws are called anthropomorphisms, that is, they attribute to God characteristics belonging to human beings.” (*Ibid*)

He explains (note that anthropomorphisms are ascribing the characteristics of humanity to something or someone that is not human)

“In biblical anthropomorphisms, God reveals what He is and what He can do in terms of human realities. For instance, when God says that He has an arm (Exodus 15:16; Psalm 89:13), He does not mean that He has exactly or univocally what we call an arm. The expression signifies that God’s reality is capable of performing all that can be performed by a human arm and infinitely more.” (*Ibid*)

“We cannot conceive or imagine the actual structure of God’s reality that allows Him to perform these acts. Yet the analogical language reveals to us aspects of God’s being and divine capabilities, while at the same time

guarding the mystery of His divine nature.” (*Ibid*)

If this one God is a union of three persons in one indivisible substance as in the trinity doctrine, then it must be agreed that is very difficult to “[imagine the actual structure](#)” of His being. Certainly it cannot be said that He looks like us or vice versa. This would mean that He (the trinity God) has to be explained as having different body members than us (if He is purported to have a form as Canale says) or it must be said that He does not have any form at all (like the Methodist discipline says). If God is described as a trinity, then this type of explanation is absolutely necessary. Never though, to our pioneers, was this type of explanation necessary.

There is something else to consider here that is really very important. In this current (2008) Seventh-day Adventist interpretation of God as a trinity as stated here by Canale, why stop at saying that this trinity God does not have an arm like we do. In other words, why not say He does not have legs like we do or a body or even a head, face, neck or shoulders like as us? In this philosophical reasoning, we cannot just stop at saying that God does not have an arm similar to ours. That would not make any sense at all. So if this Seventh-day Adventist trinity God does not have face, arms, legs and body etc like as we do, then what does He look like? Again one is left to wonder.

It must be admitted that Canale’s reasoning does seem a far cry from what we have been led to believe through the spirit of prophecy. This is when with respect to the original creation of man in God’s image Ellen White explained

“Man was to bear God's image, both in outward resemblance and in character. Christ alone is "the express image" (Hebrews 1:3) of the Father; but man was formed in the likeness of God.” (*Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, page 45, 'The creation'*)

On the same subject she said in *The Great Controversy*

“In the beginning man was created in the likeness of God not only in character but in form and feature”. (*Ellen G. White, Spirit of Prophecy, Volume 4 page 463, 'God's people delivered, see also 'The Great Controversy, page 644)*

This is straightforward talking. No need for anthropomorphisms here. Ellen White was not here referring to God as a trinity of beings. She regarded Him as a personal being, just like she regarded the Son as a personal being. Never did she describe God in the way that is depicted by current Seventh-day Adventist trinitarians. Ellen White regarded God as the Father. Note here that she uses the expression “[outward resemblance](#)”. It goes without saying (for very good reasons) that no one expects God to look exactly like us in every aspect of our human anatomy but according to what we have been told in the Scriptures, also through the spirit of prophecy, there has to be a certain “[outward resemblance](#)”.

If Canale's reasoning is heeded, I cannot see how we can even think in these broad terms. William Hyde (a Seventh-day Adventist minister who contributed to writing the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia) quoted the latter statement of Ellen White in a thesis on the Godhead. He then said

“Jews and Arabs especially deny that God has any form or features. All mention of the ears, eyes, and hands of God are called anthropomorphisms which have no reality.” (*William Hyde, Theology of a Seventh-day Adventist, section iii, 'The Godhead, 1965'*)

With their current reasoning that God is a trinity, meaning a three-in-one entity, Seventh-day Adventists need to be very careful that they do not make God as having “no reality”. I say this because what would this three-in-one God look like? Certainly not like us.

We need to remember here that when we refer to God as a trinity, we are not referring to the Father, Son or Holy Spirit but are referring to a **single unit combination God** of all three of these divine personalities. As it says in our fundamental beliefs (as we noted above)

“There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons (*Seventh-day Adventists believe ... A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines, page 16*).

It then says of this same trinity God

“God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. He is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation” (*Ibid*)

Note the use of “He” in this fundamental belief. This is speaking of the three-in-one trinity God **as one personal being**. It is not describing the individual personalities of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As individual personalities, these are described in belief numbers three, four and five. The above is belief number two explaining the trinity three-in-one (triune) God. So what sort of appearance has this three-in-one entity God? No wonder we now talk in terms of “anthropomorphisms”.

In 1977 – also in answer to the question of what Seventh-day Adventists taught concerning the trinity - Don Neufeld said concerning the statement of belief in our church manual (please note that this was in 1977, before our present statement of beliefs was formulated)

“Worthy of note is the fact that this statement makes no comment on whether the members of the Godhead have physical or material bodies. Adventists have been reticent to speculate as to this aspect of God's

nature. Speaking of Him, they emphasize His attributes, such as personality, self-existence, transcendence, immutability, omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, holiness, and love. It is true that in the Bible, God is represented as having ears (Ps. 17:6), nostrils (2 Sam. 22:9), a mouth (Deut. 8:3), a hand (Zech. 2:9), feet (Ps. 18:9), but these are usually considered as being anthropomorphisms, that is, expressions attributing to God human characteristics. They are attempts, it is claimed, to help human beings understand God, who is much above them.” (*Don F Neufeld, Review and Herald, October 6th 1977, ‘Bible questions answered’*)

This is much the same as was said by Canale. The last sentence is very interesting. Who is it that is being here to be making the attempt to describe God by using human characteristics? According to Neufeld it is the Bible writers so because they were inspired of God, is it not God Himself who is doing the attempting?

Philosophical reasoning

As most theologians will confess, this three-in-one trinity formula (the trinity concept of God) cannot be found expressed in the Scriptures. This is why in the fourth century when attempts were made to define the relationship that exists between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which ultimately resulted in the formulation of the trinity doctrine, mere speculation or as some say intellectual philosophy (Greek philosophy mainly) was employed to accomplish it. As was said by J. W. C. Wand, who was once Bishop of London, also Archbishop of Brisbane (here he was referring to the fact that the unbiblical word Hoomosious was used in the Creed of Nicaea to denote that God the Father and Christ were of the one and the same substance)

“It has often been pointed out that with the Council of Nicea Christianity had entered upon a new stage in its development. It was now officially linked with Hellenic philosophy. Metaphysics had been brought in to assist religious faith, and in an authoritative formula it had been found necessary to employ a terminology coined in paganism.” (*J. W. C. Wand DD, A History of the Early Church to AD 500, page 159, ‘The Progress of Arianism’*)

According to the reasoning of many theologians, this trinity formulation was the work that God left the church to do. As Maldwyn Hughes said (see section four) “the Church was divinely guided in framing it”. (*H. Maldwyn Hughes, M. A., D. D. Christian foundations, An introduction to Christian doctrine, page 141, fourth edition, July 1933*)

With regard to the actual formulation of the trinity doctrine, Whale quite rightly points out

“The Christian thought, working with the data of the New Testament and using Greek philosophy as its instrument, constructed the doctrine of Trinity in Unity. It acknowledged in the Godhead, not one Individual nor three

Individuals, but a personal unity existing eternally in three eternal modes or functions:” (J. S. Whale, *Christian Doctrine*, page 118, 'Mysterium Christi', 1941)

Indeed it was “Greek philosophy” that originally helped formulate the trinity doctrine. This is an undeniable fact. Again the phrase “in the Godhead” is used, making *Godhead* to appear to be the same as the word *trinity*.

Current Seventh-day Adventist theology

In current Seventh-day Adventist theology, as held by various evangelical denominations, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are each, in their own right, regarded as separate personalities. It is also said that the One spoken of as the Son is not really a Son, at least not in His pre-existence but only took on this role in the plan of salvation. Current Seventh-day Adventist theology says that this is because contrary to the orthodox trinity doctrine, this second person of the trinity is not begotten (sourced) of the Father therefore He is not truly the Son of God. They say instead that the terms ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ are only employed by God (in the Scriptures) in order to help people understand the closeness in the relationship of these two divine beings.

Much the same is said of the Father. Seventh-day Adventists say that because the one referred to as the Son is not sourced (not really a son) of the One we call the Father, the latter is not really a father, thus too like the Son, He is said to have only took on His father role for the salvation of mankind. In other words, according to current Seventh-day Adventist theology, these two divine personages are not really father and son but for the sake of the redemption of mankind are role-playing (play acting) the parts.

This reasoning was not the views of our pioneers (this would include Ellen White), neither is it the views of the author of these notes. Like the pioneers he believes that Christ, in His pre-existence, is truly the Son of God, meaning that He is begotten (sourced) of the Father who really is a father. He reasons that if it were any other way, Christ could not be truly God. In other words, the author of these notes regards the Son having been begotten of God as essential to believing that the Son is God Himself. He believes therefore in Christ’s pre-existent Sonship.

As a detailed explanation of this current Seventh-day Adventist reasoning would make this section too lengthy, we shall deal with it in detail in a later section. For now we must close with one important realisation.

Each the whole of the substance

Before we close this section, which I know has been somewhat lengthy, also very heavy, there is one more thing that is needful to be mentioned. This is that these *three hypostases* or *three personal distinctions* (commonly said three persons), according to trinitarian reasoning, do not each have their subsistence

in just one third of the substance. Rather they are said to each have their subsistence in the entirety (whole) of it. This is why it is said that the three are in each other (see above). This is also why a three-sectioned pie chart, often used as an illustration to depict God as being a trinity, can be very misleading. In other words in trinitarianism, each individual personality is the whole. The substance is not divided. This means it cannot be dismembered or dissected into three parts. This needs to be remembered because it is very important to our studies.

In spite of the lack of evidence from the Scriptures for any such oneness, trinitarian theologians maintain that their three-in-one concept of God is the ultimate conclusion of all that the Scriptures reveal concerning the three personalities of the Godhead, albeit as they will also agree, it is a man-made formula comprising of both Scripture and speculation (human philosophy). They tend to say, as did Maldwyn Hughes above, that the witness of the Scriptures compel the formulation of such a doctrine, either that or accept tritheism (three Gods).

My personal opinion, which I firmly believe is supported by the spirit of prophecy, is that in the Scriptures, also in contrast to the way that He is described in this trinity formula, God is never depicted as a composite entity but is always depicted as an individual personal being.

Christ too is always spoken of as an individual personality, who, although depicted as separate from God, is said to be God essentially. Some argue that because the Holy Spirit has activities that are never seen in a normal person, then it is doubtful whether He can be termed as a person, at least in exactly the same way as both God and Christ are regarded persons. We shall see more of this as we progress through these studies.

Avoiding confusion

It may be that at this point you are feeling confused. If so we need to remember here what was said in the first section about keeping balanced in this dispute. We noted there that in 1905 at the General Conference Session, Ellen White spoke these words to the delegates

“Men may put their own interpretation upon God, but no human mind can comprehend him. This problem has not been given us to solve. Let not finite man attempt to interpret Jehovah. Let none indulge in speculation regarding his nature. Here silence is eloquence. The omniscient One is above discussion.” (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald. 1st June 1905, ‘The work in Washington’, see also 8th Volume Testimonies page 279*)

She added as a matter of clarification

“Christ is one with the Father, but Christ and God are two distinct personages.” (*Ibid*)

As long as this is remembered, we shall keep a correct balance in this trinity dispute. This is why it must be stressed that the trinity doctrine, as was stated by Maldwyn Hughes, is “a speculative construction” (see section four) that was also, as Whale said above, formulated “using Greek philosophy as its instrument”.

We now need to move on to section seven. This is where we shall see that this trinity theology was born out of two 4th century ecumenical councils.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section seven

Councils and creeds

In the continuation of this study of the history of the trinity doctrine, particularly as it relates to Seventh-day Adventism, there are two terminologies that are necessary to be explained. These are Arian and Arianism. I say necessary because throughout my studies I have made the observation that both of these terms are very much misunderstood. This has led to quite an abuse of them.

Arian and Arianism

The terms Arian and Arianism originate from the fact that when a 4th century bishop called Alexander was attempting to promote what we would now call trinitarian concepts of Christ, one of his presbyters, a man by the name of Arius, objected to what was he was teaching. This led to a dispute that not only resulted in Arius being exiled for his faith but also divided the entire Christian Church. Admittedly this elderly and much-loved presbyter was eventually reinstated to his former position but this was not before a great deal of theological wrangling had taken place. Even after his death the dispute still continued – even as much as when he was alive.

It was this dispute that brought about the very first ecumenical council. This was held at Nicaea in AD 325. It eventually led to the second held at Constantinople in AD 381. This was where the orthodox trinity doctrine was formulated. The latter was a confirming and embellishing of the creed formulated at Nicaea. Later we shall deal with this in more detail. The Roman Emperor Constantine, newly converted to the Christian faith, did all that he could to bring about a compromise between the two disputants (the presbyter Arius and the Bishop Alexander) - even sending them letters saying that both were making a great deal of fuss over nothing. This actually resolved nothing. The dispute only worsened.

Regarding Arius, it is because his beliefs are very much misrepresented that the same has happened to the man himself. Many say that he was a heretic, meaning that he believed that God literally created Christ out of nothing (like an angel was created) but as we shall see in the next section, Arius believed no such thing. Like the vast majority of Christians living at that time (AD 318), also like the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism including Ellen White, Arius believed that the Son was begotten of God and was therefore God essentially. This reasoning made the Son a separate personality from the One of whom He was begotten, namely the Father but not a lesser being. The Father is the One whom

Ellen White often referred to as the infinite God. This was to distinguish Him from the Son. J. W. C. Wand, in his book *A History of the Early Church*, offers a description of Arius. After saying that he was “in charge of the suburb Baucalis” (an important charge because the granaries were there that shipped corn to Rome) he wrote

“There was much to commend Arius for such a position: he was a person of commanding presence, tall, grave, and with a great reputation for asceticism.” (*J. W. C. Wand D. D., A History of the Early Church to A. D. 500, page 149, ‘chapter ‘Ecclesiastical troubles’*)

In the book *The Story of the Church* it says regarding Arius (this was after saying that this controversy came to its height in Alexandria and that there was no church like the one at Alexandria for the learning of its scholars or the power of its preachers)

“Of its many great preachers none was more striking than Arius (265-336), a tall man with a stoop, with wild, blazing eyes, and with a capacity for terrific outburst. No man could sway the hearts of his hearers as he did. He was eloquent, learned and sincere. But the doctrine which He preached cut at the very roots of the Gospel.” (*The Rev. J. Aulay Steele M.A. and the Very Rev. A. J. Campbell D.D., The Story of the Church, page 102, Chapter ‘Nicaea’*)

So what was the crime of Arius? Why was he considered so heretical? The book goes on to say

“Arius said that God the Father and God the Son were separate beings.” (*Ibid*)

In trinity theology, the Father and the Son are not “separate beings”. With the Holy Spirit they are said to be of the one indivisible substance of God. This is trinity oneness. In 1897 Ellen White made this statement.

“As the disciples comprehended it, as their perception took hold of God's divine compassion, they realized that there is a sense in which the sufferings of the Son were the sufferings of the Father. From eternity there was a complete unity between the Father and the Son. They were two, yet little short of being identical; two in individuality, yet one in spirit, and heart, and character.” (*Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor 16th December 1897 ‘The New Commandment part 1’*)

We can see again from this that Ellen White clearly says that the Father and Son are **two separate individuals**. She also says that they are “little short of being identical”. In other words, the Father and Son are almost the same but not quite.

In brief, unlike those who would eventually take the title of trinitarians, Arius did

not believe that the Son was of one indivisible substance with the Father (meaning belonging to the one substance). He did not believe either that the Son is eternally begotten of the Father. He believed that as a separate personality from the Father, there was a time when the Son did not have an existence.

All the time that Ellen White was alive (she died in 1915) this was also the generally accepted belief of Seventh-day Adventists. Today this is often termed semi-Arianism although I do not like giving a set of beliefs a name. This often leads to misunderstandings.

From all of the evidence that I have found, I have drawn the conclusion that in keeping with the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism, Arius believed that the personality of the Son came into visible existence (from God the Father) in eternity although unfortunately, because his writings were ordered to be destroyed at the Council of Nicaea (AD 325), a detailed explanation of his beliefs is not today available to us. This means that much of what Arius is alleged to have believed, as well as his reasons for believing it, is what others claim he believed, many of whom were his sworn enemies – which in reality is not a very good source of information on which to judge a person's beliefs. This is because these witnesses would be very biased against him and more than likely would have spread rather exaggerated reports concerning what he believed. This is normal human behaviour. We shall see in the next section just what it was that Arius did believe, or at least what today we can know of it. The end result of not knowing exactly what was believed by Arius is that the terms Arian and Arianism are often used today to denote any belief, regardless of what it is, that is not in harmony with the three-in-one substance theory of God (trinity essentialness). This is why I have said that the name of Arius, as well as his faith, is very much maligned.

To put this in another way, the name of Arius, as seen in the terms Arian and Arianism etc, is often associated with all sorts of different beliefs concerning Christ that more than likely this presbyter never even contemplated being true. This really is the unfortunate part of his writings being destroyed. From what I have read concerning this man – also his beliefs - I would conclude that misinformation is being circulated in abundance.

One Seventh-day Adventist minister who thought along these very same lines was Benjamin G. Wilkinson. We first mention him in section one. In his *Truth triumphant* – also with respect to the 4th century Council of Nicaea he wrote

“At that famous historic assembly the church at Rome and the emperor rejected the view of Arius, and condemnation was pronounced upon those who recoiled from accepting the council's decision.” (*Benjamin George Wilkinson Ph.D, Truth Triumphant, page 142, 'How the church was driven into the wilderness', 1944*)

It is the Roman Emperor Constantine who is spoken of here whilst the

condemnation was the anathemas against Arius and those of like faith. It was at Nicaea that Arius was officially exiled for his faith but in AD 336, eleven years after Nicaea, Constantine ordered the church to allow him back into full fellowship. Sad to relate, before the actual ceremony took place (a re-admittance to full communion), Arius died under rather strange circumstances. Some, the enemies of Arius, say that this was divine judgement but others believe that it was brought about by human assistance. In other words, it is thought that someone took the life of Arius, probably by poisoning him. Wilkinson explained

“Whether the teachings of Arius were such as are usually represented to us or not, who can say? Phillipus Limborch doubts that Arius himself ever held that Christ was created instead of being begotten.” (*Ibid*)

Wilkinson here is referring to a remark made by the Dutch theologian Philipp van Limborch (1633-1712) in the book *The History of the Inquisition (Historia Inquisitionis)*. As will be realised, the above views are also the views of the author of this study.

A difference in beliefs

At the time of the Council of Nicaea (AD 325), the commonly held belief in Christianity was that Christ was a begotten Son. This was the very early Christian faith. This is why there is no reason to believe that this was not the belief of the vast majority (if not all) of the attendees at this council. Certainly they all believed Christ was literally the Son of God and therefore was God Himself. As the Rev. A. Whitham said in his book detailing the history of the Christian Church

“The church had always believed in and worshipped Jesus Christ as God, who for man’s salvation had become man, but without in any way impairing His essential Godhead. That this was from the beginning the normal and dominant belief there can be no reasonable question.” (*Rev. A. R. Whitham, History of the Christian Church. page 184, ‘Arianism’*)

This is how it was in very early Christianity. It was believed, as the Scriptures say, that Christ is God, albeit He is not the Father - but no hard and fast confession was made by these early Christians as regards to explaining **how** this could be. It was John the gospel writer who around the end of the first century of the Christian era emphasised the Sonship of Christ. This he did in his gospel – also in his pastoral letters (his epistles).

Whitman says clearly here that there is no reasonable doubt that the Christian Church has always believed that Christ was God Himself manifest in the flesh. This is exactly the same as can be said of early (original) Seventh-day Adventists. They too believed exactly the same. As will be seen, there is a parallel between how early Christianity progressed and how Seventh-day Adventism progressed. Both went from a very simple Biblical faith of the Godhead to one that was philosophical (trinitarianism).

At Nicaea there were differences of opinion regarding this begotten concept although all believed that Christ was begotten of God. The belief of Arius and his followers was that the Son was begotten of God at a point in eternity (the same belief as our pioneers) whilst those who opposed this theology (later the orthodox trinitarians) believed that Christ was *everlastingly* begotten. These were then - and still are today - two entirely different concepts. This means that the Arians (this is what we shall call them to differentiate them from what was to later become the trinitarians) did not believe that the Son was coeval (of the same age) as God the Father; neither did they believe that the Father and the Son were of the same substance (meaning belonging to the same substance – comprising the one being of God). The latter was believed by the up and coming trinitarians (refer to the previous section for detailed beliefs regarding trinitarianism).

The vast majority of the bishops at Nicaea appear to have been middle of the road meaning that they were quite content to leave it that Christ was divine, also that He was begotten. This was without stressing any particular extremes. This means that they were content to not strictly insist, as did the Arians, that there was a time when the Son, as a separate personality from God, did not have an existence, also that they were quite happy not to dogmatically stress, like the up and coming trinitarians, that He was everlastingly begotten and of the very same substance as the Father. As Benjamin Wilkinson wrote concerning those who refused to accept the speculations of the creed drawn up at Nicaea

“Those who recoiled from the extreme speculations and conclusions of the so-called Trinitarians believed Deuteronomy 29:29: "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever." (*Benjamin G. Wilkinson, Truth Triumphant, pages 93-94, 'Patrick, organiser of the church in the wilderness in Ireland'*)

At Nicaea

So what was the initial problem that brought about this very first ecumenical council held at Nicaea? The answer to that question is that it was the same as brought about the present trinitarian dispute within Seventh-day Adventism. History is simply repeating itself. As Whitham explains

“It was on the question of the eternity of Christ that the quarrel first arose. Arius, with his favourite affectation of logic, seized on the title 'Son of God,' and asked how can a son be as old as his father?' From the human impossibility of this, he proceeded to argue that the Son of God cannot be eternal.” (*Rev. A. R. Whitham, History of the Christian Church. page 184, 'Arianism'*)

This is very much the truth of the matter. There are those who misrepresent what happened at Nicaea. They say that at this council the divinity of Christ was in question. This was not the case. What was being contested was whether or not

the Son was coeternal with the Father, also whether they were of the same substance or not. These were the issues at stake. Trinitarians will say that if the divinity of Christ is not expressed as in the trinity doctrine then this is not being correctly depicted but this is merely a matter of their opinion. Certainly it is not Scriptural. The trinity doctrine cannot be found stated in Scripture therefore the divinity of Christ, by using Scripture only, can be correctly depicted – that is without the trinity embellishments.

That Christ is divine and is God essentially had always been the belief of Christianity. It is this that the Scriptures say of Him. It was not this that was being questioned at Nicaea. The problem was how to explain it in understandable human terms (that which we term today, systematic theology). The way that the up and coming trinitarians wanted to explain it was that the Son was of one substance with the Father therefore was coeternal with him. This would make the Son eternally begotten of the Father. Arius and his followers reasoned differently. They said there was no Scriptural support for such reasoning which strictly speaking they were correct in saying. Nowhere in Scripture does it say that the Son is of one substance with the Father or that they are coeternal. This was purely human speculation. It is going beyond what God had revealed. These are the extremes as mentioned above.

Arius was a presbyter in the church at Alexandria in Egypt. He objected to what his Bishop - a man by the name of Alexander - was saying concerning Christ. This was when Alexander attempted to explain the personality of Christ in terms of what we would now call trinitarian reasoning although then there was no such thing as a creed or doctrine.

As we noted in Section four, A. T. Jones wrote a series of articles in 1897 called: *How the Catholic Creed was made*. As most will realise, the trinity doctrine became the central belief of the Roman Catholic Church.

In his fifth article called *The Great Trinitarian Controversy* (this was under the sub-heading of "TRYING TO PUT GOD INTO A FORMULA") he wrote about the dispute at the Council of Nicaea (AD 325). This was where it was attempted to define the ontological relationship that exists. Under the sub-heading of *Warring about human definitions* he wrote concerning the beginning of the Arian dispute

"A certain Alexander was bishop of Alexandria. Arius was a presbyter in charge of a parish church in the same city. Alexander attempted to explain "the unity of the Holy Trinity." Arius dissented from the views set forth by Alexander. A sort of synod of the presbyters of the city was called, and the question was discussed. Both sides claimed the victory, and the controversy spread. Then Alexander convened a council of a hundred bishops, by the majority of which the views of Alexander were endorsed. Upon this, Arius was commanded to abandon his own opinions, and adopt Alexander's. Arius refused, and Alexander excommunicated him and all who held with him in opinion, of whom there were a considerable number of

bishops and other clergy, and many of the people.” (A. T. Jones, *Bible Echo*, September 13th 1897, Series ‘How the Catholic Creed was made’. Article ‘The Great Trinitarian Controversy’)

It was not because Alexander was saying that Christ was God that Arius objected. Arius believed this to be true. What he did not believe was that as a separate personality from the Father, the Son had always had an existence of being. In other words according to Arius, Christ was God Himself begotten but begotten at a point in eternity therefore there must have been a time when as a separate personality from the infinite God He did not externally exist from God (or as Arius so famously put it, there was a time when the Son was not). This is what mostly aggravated the situation. In his book *The Two Republics*, Alonzo T. Jones explains it this way

“There was no dispute about the fact of there being a Trinity, it was about the nature of the Trinity. Both parties believed in precisely the same Trinity, but they differed upon the precise relationship which the Son bears to the Father.” (A. T. Jones, *The two republics*, pages 332 – 333 ‘Establishment of the Catholic faith’)

Jones is saying here that all at Nicaea believed in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as a unity but not all held the same theology concerning how the three were united. Speaking of the very beginning of the Arian controversy, L. E. Kimball wrote

“Alexander, the primate, called a conference of the clergy under his immediate jurisdiction, to discuss certain theological questions. He broached the subject of the Trinity, gave his views, and asked for an expression of opinion with reference to it.

Arius, a young man of thirty years, gifted, highly educated, who had been ordained presbyter, and appointed to take charge of the Alexandrian School of Theology, where Cyprian and Origen had formerly distinguished themselves, was against the primate. To Alexander's opinion that there is but one Deity, who appears sometimes as the Father, and again as the Son, or as the Holy Ghost, or, if not exactly this, that three persons existed in one God, distinct, and yet of the same substance and the same eternity, Arius rejoined that, although the Son was of the same or like substance, yet he was the off-spring of the Father, and had a beginning.” (L. E. Kimball, *Signs of the Times*, June 25th 1894, ‘The Arian Controversy’)

This was the basic difference between the beliefs of Alexander and the beliefs of Arius. It was also the difference in theology between the Alexandria school of thinking (philosophical) and Antiochene thinking (literal). In the context of this debate, the former is trinitarian whilst the latter is non-trinitarianism. Both theologies said that Christ was begotten of the Father. Kimball continued

“The conference came to no decision. Councils were convened, Arius and his adherents condemned, excommunicated, and Arius banished. Lest the pestiferous doctrine go farther, they decreed that none but the primate should preach in Alexandria. Soon every district and church blazed with the excitement of the contest. Arius, who had fled to Palestine with many adherents, sent confessions of their faith to the Eastern bishops, who quite generally accepted them, and acknowledged Arius as one of the communion, notwithstanding the anathemas of Alexander.” (*Ibid*)

What Kimball said next was very interesting. He wrote

“Among the Eastern bishops, one suspicious as a favorer of Arius was Eusebius of Nicomedia. "Every bishop in the East but three," wrote Arius to Eusebius, "have taken my part." "Their views are mine," wrote Eusebius to Arius, "and as thou thinkest what is right, pray that all may think likewise." (*Ibid*)

Notwithstanding the number of Bishops that supported Arius, especially those of the East, the end result of Nicaea was that Arius and his beliefs were condemned but this was not until a great deal of theological wrangling had taken place. Under the persuasion of the Roman Emperor Constantine (newly espoused to the Christian faith), the majority of the bishops at the council signed a creed that said that the Son belonged to the one and the same essence (or same substance) of God. This is the one being of God (the one indivisible substance). It was also said that the Son was everlastingly begotten of the Father. This creed acted as the basis of the trinity affirmation that came 56 years later at the Council of Constantinople (AD 381) and was also endorsed (and further embellished) by later creeds.

A much-disputed concept

It was the word *homoousios* that in this dispute was the all-important word. It still is today. Everything hinges upon it. This is because it carries the meaning **of the one and the same substance** or as applied to divinity - of the **one being** of God. This was the cause of the controversy at Nicaea. As Benjamin Wilkinson noted in his *Truth Triumphant*

“However, a great trouble arose, since there are two terms in Greek of historical fame. The first, *homos*, meaning "identical," and the second, *homoios*, meaning "similar" or "like unto," had both of them a stormy history. The spelling of these words is much alike. The difference in meaning, when applied to the Godhead, is bewildering to simplehearted believers. Nevertheless, those who would think in terms of *homoiousian*, or "similar," instead of *homoousian*, or "identical," were promptly labeled as heretics and Arians by the clergy.”(*Benjamin Wilkinson, Truth Triumphant, Chapter 7, 'Patrick, organizer of the church in the wilderness in Ireland'*)

It was the use of a Greek word to suggest a concept concerning God and Christ

not revealed in Scripture that caused the dispute amongst the attendees. This is when the promoters of this creed, to form a belief that has ever since been a matter of dispute, went outside of Scripture to do it. There was also another reason for the dislike of the use of “homoousios”. This was because a man by the name of Sabellius had used it. He is reputed to have taught that there was only one person of the Godhead. He is therefore reported to have believed that this one person manifested Himself in the Old Testament as the Father (the Creator and lawgiver), in the New Testament as the Son (the redeemer) and after the ascension as the Holy Spirit (the presence of God within a person). Sabellius is said to have depicted the one God in three modes using three different names but his theology did not allow for (meaning contain) three personalities. This type of belief is referred to as modalism or modalistic monarchianism. Today it is much the same belief as what is termed Oneness Pentecostalism or Jesus only theology.

As a matter of passing interest, I must say that before I could bring myself to judge the beliefs of Sabellius, I would need to read them very carefully. This would be to see what he did actually believe. Unfortunately, just as it is with Arius, it seems that most of what we know of him we obtain from his enemies, which, when all is said and done, is not really a very good source of information. Regarding the word *homoousion* Whitham wrote

“The word [homoousion] certainly marked the fundamental difference between the Catholic conception of the Son of God, and all Arian teaching. But it was not accepted without a struggle. A large number were opposed to it for various reasons; it was suspected of being Sabellian; it was not found in Scripture; philosophically it was thought to imply a ‘substance’ prior to both Father and Son in which they both shared, and historically it was under a cloud as having been proposed and rejected in the previous century at a council at Antioch, when Paul of Samosata had astutely suggested that it implied that the Father and Son were the same person.” (Rev A. R. Whitham, *The history of the Christian Church, page 198, ‘The Council of Nicaea’*)

In spite of all of the dislike for the word *homoousioun*, it was as Whitham said next

“Nevertheless, the fathers of Nicaea ultimately accepted it.” (*Ibid*)

It is very true to say that although the majority of the bishops at Nicaea did not like using this word - also that they did not agree in totality with its concept - they did eventually succumb to its usage.

Arius more than likely objected on the grounds that it went outside of Scripture, thus it was entering into the realms of speculation and philosophy. This was just as did the term everlastingly begotten. This was another expression that is used to define what was decreed at Nicaea to defeat the Arians. This is what Arius viewed as causing the problems. This is one of the reasons why he stood his

ground and would not be shaken from his faith in Scripture alone. Those who formulated the creed went outside of Scripture to accomplish their ends.

After Nicaea

Following the Council of Nicaea (AD 325) there was a great deal of theological unrest (dispute/controversy) within the church. This was because the creed that was finally approved at this council was not accepted by much of Christianity. In other words although the majority of the bishops (church leadership) may have signed this creed - so say showing their acceptance of it - there were many (the majority it seems), when they eventually became aware of it, who did not accept it. It also appears that those who signed the creed did not support it in practice. In other words, they had signed the creed but they continued to teach what they had been teaching prior to Nicaea. As Whitham explained with respect to the council of Nicaea

“The council, though apparently final, was only the beginning of the battle. The great majority of the orthodox bishops, though at the crisis of decision they had accepted the homoousion, had not reached a clear grasp of its necessity.” (Rev. A. R. Whitham, *History of the Christian Church. page 203, ‘Arianism after Nicaea’*)

Here is the implication that the “great majority” of the Bishops who had signed this creed at Nicaea were not readily promoters of it, or as Whitham says here, did not really see the importance of it. These bishops were still promoting ideas contrary to the Creed of Nicaea.

History does attest that for decades after the Council of Nicaea, it was not the concepts of this creed that was the predominant faith in Christianity but what some term today as semi-Arianism. We shall see in section nine that because of the non-acceptance of this creed by Christianity in general, trinitarianism was established by state decrees and threats from a Roman Emperor. This should tell us a great deal about the initiating of trinitarianism into Christianity.

Following the council of Nicaea, many of the bishops who had been in attendance began to meet in various other councils disputing this issue. In their reasoning they often fluctuated between the concepts of the creed and the less extremes of it. It is quite apparent - because of the unrest and the general non-acceptance of the creed by so many after Nicaea - that many of these bishops rejected what the creed stipulated.

It must never be thought that it was the divinity of Christ that was in question. This was definitely not the case. Everyone accepted it. It was the **one substance** concept that was, and still is today, the problem area. In brief, Arius did not reject the divinity of Christ. He rejected the trinitarian way of explaining it. This is much the same as was done by the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism. Whitham then goes on to correctly say

“The Arians were only checked not crushed. The next half-century shows a strong reaction, during which they used all their efforts to undo work of Nicaea.” (*Ibid*)

History attests that during the 50 years following Nicaea, it was undoubtedly what some term as semi-Arianism that was the predominant faith within Christianity. Certainly it was definitely not the *homoousios faith* that was predominant. In fact within the church the debate itself openly continued for many more years.

Some do not see this 4th century situation in exactly the same way. They appear to play down this part of Christian history, even making it look as though the victory went to the Creed of Nicaea. Notice the way that Alister McGrath put it

“By the second half of the fourth century, the debate concerning the relation of the Father and the Son gave every indication of having been settled. The recognition that Father and Son were “of one being” settled the Arian controversy, and established a consensus within the church over the divinity of the Son.” (*Alister McGrath, Christian Theology – An introduction, page 324, ‘The doctrine of the trinity’*)

A consensus is an agreement or majority opinion. Certainly this could not be said of how the church at large responded to the creed formulated at Nicaea. In itself, this creed did not settle anything. We know this because the majority of Christians did not accept it. In fact for a period of time they openly rebelled against it.

The dispute at Nicaea was not regarding the divinity of Christ. As we have noted before, true Christians have always deemed the Son to be God Himself in the flesh. It was over the coeternity of the Son. It was also over, as some saw it, His inability to change from what He had been in His pre-existence. Arius reasoned that the Son could change. This is still very much the crux of the trinity problem today. We shall see this more clearly in the next section.

Arius did believe that Christ was God essentially but what he did not accept was as this was explained in the extreme speculations of what we now term the trinity doctrine. This is exactly the same with the majority of the Seventh-day Adventist non-trinitarians. In contrast, the trinitarians maintain that unless the divinity of Christ is articulated as in the trinity creed, which as we know is not stated in Scripture, it is not correctly expressed - hence another major difference of opinion.

In conclusion it can be said that prior to these first two ecumenical councils (Nicaea and Constantinople), the Christian Church had always accepted the complete deity of Christ but they did not have a set creed or a formula to explain it. Certainly they did not have anything like a trinity doctrine. In other words, it was just accepted by them, as the Scripture say, that Christ was God Himself

manifest in the flesh.

In the aftermath of Nicaea there was also physical confrontation. Whilst we cannot go into all of this history here, it was neatly summed up by Ellen White's son James Edson White and Alonzo Baker. In a book they authored called *The Coming King* it said

“Early in the fourth century there began the famous controversy over the nature of the Trinity. Two great parties arose, known respectively as the Arians and the Athanasians. Other controversies characterized that troublous period. Councils were held to determine which party was orthodox, and to pass decisions on what was heresy. In the settlement of these disputes, both sides at times resorted to violence, even to the shedding of blood.” (*James Edson White and Alonzo Baker, The Coming King, page 100, chapter 'Destruction of Jerusalem', 1932*)

The Council of Rimini

Thirty-three years after Nicaea in AD 358, the Roman Emperor Constantius II ordered two councils. This was in an attempt to settle the ongoing dispute. One council, a gathering of the western bishops, was held in Rimini in Italy whilst the other, a gathering of the eastern bishops, was held at Seleucia in Mesopotamia. Apparently, one of the reasons for the two separate councils was to help alleviate the language problem. Bishops from the British church attended the Council of Rimini.

At Rimini, a new creed was formulated. This one opposed the Creed of Nicaea. The terms of same or similar substance were avoided. In fact no reference was made to substance. Thus it was that the use of the word homoousios that had caused all the fuss at Nicaea was completely circumvented. Not everyone agreed with this new creed therefore they protested about it. Nevertheless it was sent out and it was circulated within Christianity. At Rimini, trinitarianism was opposed. So it was that the dispute did not lessen but deepened. Certainly the Creed of Nicaea did not settle the dispute. It only seemed to heighten it. History will attest to this being true.

The Council and the creeds of Nicaea

No one really knows who presided over the council of Nicaea (AD 325) although J. W. C. Wand does provide these thoughts

“On the first day of the Council the gathering was held in the large hall of the imperial palace. After the Emperor's impressive entrance a congratulatory address was given in his honour, probably by Eustathius. The Emperor replied briefly in Latin, and then publicly burnt a number of letters that the bishops had written to him incriminating each other. His small knowledge of Greek made it impossible for him to preside at the meetings of the Council. Who did preside is not clear.” (*J. C. Wand, A*

History of the Early Church to A.D. 500, pages 155-156, 'The Progress of Arianism')

In the dispute hammered out at Nicaea, there were three parties involved. There were those whom we shall term the Arians, meaning those opposed to the new theology (eventually trinitarianism), there was also the promoters of the new theology which was the smallest of the three groups whilst the third party was by far the largest group (the vast majority). This third part was the middle of the road group. As Benjamin Wilkinson wrote (this was when discussing the beliefs of Patrick of Ireland in relation to the Creed of Nicaea)

“Usually when violent controversy rages, there are three parties. In this instance there were the two extremes, one of which was led by the Papacy, the second by the Arians, and the third party was the middle-of-the-road believers whose viewpoint was the same as Patrick's.” (Benjamin Wilkinson, Truth Triumphant, page 86, Chapter 7, Patrick, organizer of the Church in the wilderness in Ireland)

This is the truth of the matter. This “middle-of-the-road” group, led by Eusebius of Caesarea, was representative of the church as a whole. They were happy to leave things as they were - meaning without going to the extremes of the other two parties. As we shall see, this desire never materialised.

During the Council of Nicaea, also in an attempt to bring peace between both of the opposing parties, Eusebius of Caesarea submitted a creed based on what some believe was probably an old Palestinian baptismal confession. This creed satisfied the vast majority of the attendees (those middle of the road and the Arians) but it did not suit those who wanted to defeat the Arians. This is because this creed was too elastic, too all embracing, too generous, although it did clearly say that the Son was begotten of God (God from God). This particular confession stated (we shall compare it later with the finally accepted creed)

“We believe in one only God, Father Almighty, Creator of things visible and invisible; and in the Lord Jesus Christ, for he is the Word of God, God of God, Light of Light, life of life, his only Son, the first-born of all creatures, begotten of the Father before all time, by whom also everything was created, who became flesh for our redemption, who lived and suffered amongst men, rose again the third day, returned to the Father, and will come again one day in his glory to judge the quick and the dead.” (Eusebius of Caesarea, creed presented at Nicaea as found in Epistle to his diocese; vide: St. Athanasius and Theodoret)

Notice that this profession of belief said that Christ is “God of God”. Notice too it says of Christ that He is “begotten of the Father before all time” also the “first born of all creatures”. There is no stipulation here that at some point in eternity the Son did not exist; neither does it say that there never was a time when He did not exist. It simply says that Christ is begotten of God meaning God from

God, true God from true God “before all time” (in eternity). Arius and his followers would have definitely accepted this creed.

Eusebius of Caesarea submitted this creed. Whilst it portrayed the faith (belief) of Christianity at that time (AD 325), it certainly did not suit those who opposed Arius (the up and coming trinitarians). Not that they disagreed with anything that it said but as far as they were concerned it just did not say enough. This is because in this creed, there was nothing to defeat the Arians. In his book *A History of the Early Christian Church*, J. W. C Wand makes these observations (this was after saying that the Arian bishops nodded their acceptance of the creed submitted by Eusebius)

“The rest of the bishops realised that, as it stood, Eusebius’s creed was thoroughly unsatisfactory. We have it on the authority of Eusebius himself that they thereupon decided to make it clearer by the addition of certain clauses. They substituted the word Son for Logos, and they added to the definition of the Son the phrases ‘of the substance of the Father’ and ‘of one substance with the Father’ (the famous homoousios). This gave a positive definition of the faith which preserved at once the unity of the Godhead and the distinctions within it, and so completely excluded Arianism.” (*J. W. C. Wand, A History of the Early Christian Church to A. D. 500, page 156-157, ‘The Progress of Arianism’*)

“But in order to make assurance doubly sure they added a series of negative clauses to the end of the creed in the shape of anathemas against those who used certain well-known Arian phrases.” (*Ibid page 157*)

“This was a new use for creeds, and it was the first time that bishops had had such a test of orthodoxy imposed them. Who actually proposed it in this form is not known, but probably it was either Hosius or the Emperor himself prompted by Hosius.” (*Ibid*)

So it was that with the rejection of this effort on the part of Eusebius to bring about an end to this dispute, another creed was submitted that the majority of bishops were seemingly not very happy in accepting, although for reasons not clearly determinable (and probably rather varied) the majority did eventually sign it. This does not mean that they believed what they were signing. It simply means that they signed the creed.

As to regard this finally accepted creed, there is ambiguity as to who is thought to have actually submitted it although the consensus belief appears to be that it was Hosius. He was the Bishop of Cordova in Southern Spain. It seems that he was a close friend and advisor to the Roman Emperor Constantine. Hosius was also the one who delivered letters from Constantine to both Arius and Alexander attempting to pacify the dispute. As LeRoy Froom put it in *Prophetic Faith of our Fathers*

“Hosius, bishop of Cordova, Spain, bore a letter from Constantine to Alexander and Arius, fruitlessly entreating both parties to make peace. (LeRoy Froom. *Prophetic Faith of our Fathers, Volume 1, page 389, ‘Post Nicene reversal on interpretation’*)

The finalised creed is based upon the one that Eusebius initially suggested but was further embellished to defeat the Arians (I have highlighted the embellishments). It said

“We believe in one God the Father, all powerful, maker of all things both seen and unseen. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten begotten from the Father, *that is from the substance of the Father*, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father, through whom all things came to be, both those in heaven and those in earth; for us humans and for our salvation he came down and became incarnate, became human, suffered and rose up on the third day, went up into the heavens, is coming to judge the living and the dead. And in the Holy Spirit.” (*The finally accepted creed of Nicaea*)

Notice too in the above statement that in similar fashion to the confession that Eusebius of Caesarea presented (see above), it said that Christ is “true God from true God, begotten not made”. This apparently was never in dispute. Note here also the “consubstantial” (of one substance) part of the creed. This is one of the concepts that the Arians would have refused to accept. This is because it went beyond what is revealed in Scripture. This was the controversial part. It is this that caused the divide. It was also this that was urged upon the attendees to accept. This is also where a non-Scriptural concept was introduced and a Greek word was used to denote that the Son was of the very same substance as the father. This was the Greek word homoousios. We noted in the previous section that J. W. C. Wand wrote

“It has often been pointed out that with the Council of Nicea Christianity had entered upon a new stage in its development. It was now officially linked with Hellenic philosophy.” (J. W. C. Wand DD, *A History of the Early Church to AD 500, page 159, ‘The Progress of Arianism’*)

Very importantly he then explains

“Metaphysics had been brought in to assist religious faith, and in an authoritative formula it had been found necessary to employ a terminology coined in paganism” (*Ibid*)

This shows that up to that time, this one or same substance (homoousios) reasoning had not been prominent in Christianity. Certainly it had not been considered heretical not to believe it. Wand did add later

“The traditional faith had been compelled to express itself in rational terms,

and the period of definition had inevitably begun.” (*Ibid* page 160)

From my studies, I have concluded that this is something of an exaggeration. If this had been the “traditional faith” then it would have not caused such dissention amongst the bishops – neither would they have been so reluctant to sign the creed. History also attests that after Nicaea, the majority of the bishops continued to teach that which they had been teaching previously – which was not that which had now been put into creedal form. Wand even said himself that at Nicaea “Metaphysics had been brought in to assist religious faith”. He then said

“Further, the Nicene victory had been a little too speedy; there had been no time for a wide general discussion.” (*Ibid*)

This is very true. What they had decided upon at Nicaea and put in a creed was not the consensus of Christianity but was rather the philosophy of just certain of the bishops in attendance. As Wand said

“The Council had judged the question; it still remained for the Church to judge the Council.” (*Ibid*)

This is the same old story that has been repeated throughout the centuries. It is the few dictating what they feel should be believed by the many. As has been said already, the evidence of history is that what was written in the creed was not readily accepted by the masses – exactly the opposite in fact. It is now wonder that Wand said next

“Some hesitation and even reaction were inevitable. But such reaction seemed likely to be of a conservative type: it would express itself in a dislike of the new tests.” (*Ibid*)

Later in his book, Wand refers to the time period 30 years following the Council of Nicaea. This was when Arianism (albeit in varying concepts) was in the ascendancy within Christianity – not the Creed of Nicaea. Wand said (this was after saying that even the aged Hosius who had been so involved at Nicaea had now rejected *homoousios* and had sided with the Arians)

“Then, it is said, there remained not a single bishop in possession of his see who had not taken up a position against the homoousios.” (*J. W. C. Wand DD, A History of the Early Church to AD 500, page 164, ‘The Progress of Arianism’*)

As can be seen from these remarks, 30 years after the Council of Nicaea it was not the creed of Nicaea that was in the ascendancy within Christianity but Arianism. This shows that at that time, the bishops did not generally accept this creed. Of Hosius it is said by some that on his deathbed he recanted of his rejection of *homoousios* but how much truth there is in this belief is unsure.

It was upon the word *homoousios* that the entire issue balanced. It was all a case of whether the Son of God was of the same substance as the Father, of similar substance, or of like substance. As it is, in His word, God makes no mention of this at all so why therefore should we speculate either one way or another. Certainly the church should not be dogmatic about it or make it a test of Christian orthodoxy or church fellowship – which they often do – even within Seventh-day Adventism. The latter do appear to hold that if it is not professed that God is an indivisible trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, then baptism is not available and church membership is not permitted.

Anathemas

The real reason why the majority of bishops signed the Creed of Nicaea is still a matter of conjecture. This is because no minutes can be found of the proceedings. In other words, no record can be found of the discussions. They were either kept but lost to antiquity - deliberately destroyed - or were never recorded.

The creed itself could have been signed simply as a means to bring an end to this dispute - believing that it was erring on the side of good judgement (discretion) – or it could have been signed to satisfy the wishes of a Roman Emperor (diplomacy). It could have been signed to avoid more persecution (ten years of Roman persecution had only ended twelve years previously) or it may have been that it was thought that Arius was correct in principle but that he was unnecessarily stressing to an extreme the point he was making. It may even have been a combination of all of these things. Today it is impossible to determine with any exactness.

Perhaps we will never know the real reason why most signed the creed (if there was only one reason) but what we know for sure is that even though the one substance (*homoousion*) part of it was disliked they did sign it. We also know that those who did not sign it, along with Arius, were exiled for their faith. Note here that Arius was not a bishop therefore not officially a delegate at the council. It is also reported that the day after the creed was signed, some of the bishops recanted of their signing. The finally accepted creed also said

“And whosoever shall say that there was a time when the Son of God was not, or that before he was begotten he was not, or that he was made of things that were not, or that he is of a different substance or essence [from the Father] or that he is a creature, or subject to change or conversion — all that so say, the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes them.” (*The Creed of Nicaea*)

These were the anathemas pronounced against Arius and all who would dare to believe as he did. Primarily, these were against all those who would say that prior to the Son being begotten, He did not exist. It was also against those who said that the Son and the Father were not of (meaning belonging to) the one and the same substance (same essence). Remember here that the Holy Spirit was

not included in this one substance theory (formula) of God. Could this have been because He was not thought of then, in AD 325, as being a person like God and Christ are persons? It is quite possible.

I would also ask you to note, really very importantly, the final part of the anathema. This was against all those who said that the Son was subject to “change or conversion”. Why I say this is really important is because the reasoning that the Son is unchangeable (immutable) is a primary belief in trinitarianism. This is why orthodox trinitarians do not believe that in the incarnation the Son actually left His Father’s side, meaning that He never actually vacated Heaven, came to earth and became flesh. They believe instead that whatever the circumstances, the Son maintains His eternal existence in the one substance of God therefore He did not suffer change when He became flesh. This to some may seem rather strange, especially Seventh-day Adventists, but this is really what trinitarians believe. If you do believe that the Son can undergo change, meaning that He is not immutable like His Father, you are not an orthodox trinitarian. As was said to me by one orthodox trinitarian

“We [orthodox trinitarians] maintain rather the invariability of the Godhead (its simplicity and unity) in the sense that no action can lead to ontological change; namely in this case that the Word, one ousia with the Father and the Spirit, never leaves the Father's side even when He joins with our human nature in the Incarnation.” *(Email, Father Gregory Hallam, Orthodox Priest, to Terry Hill, 16th May 2007)*

We shall also see that a major objection to Arius was that he believed that Christ could have fallen (could have sinned) and therefore would have changed. This is one of the reasons (perhaps the main one) why the immutability clause was inserted into the creed.

Eusebius attempts to justify (and pacify)

The creed of Nicaea was a totally new concept to Christianity. It was not something that was generally believed prior to this first ecumenical Council. Certainly prior to this it was never put in writing as such. This was now creedal Christianity. This is why there was such controversy about it. This was not only at the council itself but also afterwards.

It is only reasonable to believe that Christians in general would want to know what happened at this council. After all, it was a very high profile gathering of church leaders (bishops). Eusebius of Caesarea - in explaining to his parishioners what had transpired at Nicaea - wrote to them these words (this was after quoting the creed in its completed form as above)

“On their suggesting this formula, we did not let it pass without inquiry in what sense they used the expressions ‘of the substance of the Father’ and ‘Consubstantial with the Father.’ Accordingly, questions and explanations took place, and the discussion tested the meaning of these phrases.”

(Eusebius of Caesarea, letter to his parishioners on the Creed of Nicaea)

Eusebius says that this new perception of Christ's relationship with the Father, as it is explained in the finalised Creed of Nicaea, did not "pass without inquiry". He says that the various phrases were "tested". In other words, explanations were demanded as to what it really was that these expressions meant. Eusebius then says of those who were presenting these *one substance* concepts

"And they professed that the phrase 'of the substance' was indicative of the Son's being indeed from the Father, yet without being as if a part of him."
(Ibid)

Here then is what Eusebius told his parishioners that the bishops understood at Nicaea. It was that this phrase "of the substance" of the Father only meant that the Son's existence was "from the Father" not that He was "part of Him". Was Eusebius here making excuses for signing the creed? Was it believed by the bishops, as said here, that they believed what they had signed? One is left to wonder but I would not think so. Certainly later it was not promoted as such as Eusebius explained. It was promoted later as literally meaning of *one being* (belonging to one substance), just as it is usually meant today. Eusebius concluded

"And with this understanding, we thought good to assent to the meaning of the pious teaching suggesting that the Son was from the Father, not, however, a part of his substance. On this account, we assented to the meaning ourselves." *(Ibid)*

Again Eusebius says that the bishops signed the creed on the understanding that the Son was not "part of" the "substance" of the Father. This was very important to him. He was also making sure that in the eyes of his parishioners, the bishops at Nicaea had not gone to extremes, meaning agreeing to teach something that cannot be substantiated by Scripture. This shows that Eusebius was saying that at Nicaea, the bishops did not agree to anything that was not then generally believed in Christianity – which was far from being true. This is why there was controversy about it. This is also why the majority of bishops were reluctant to sign the creed.

Eusebius was being his usual diplomatic self but was he telling the exact truth? This really is a matter of debate but we can see that this *one substance* or *one being* concept of God and Christ (the trinity idea) was not then something that was generally believed in Christianity. If it had been taught as such, it would not have been needful for Eusebius to write in the way that he did to his parishioners. That much is reasonably obvious.

Person or personality versus nature

When speaking of the incarnation, orthodox trinitarians often talk in terms of a *hypostatic union*. This is not as Seventh-day Adventists would normally think of

the Son becoming flesh.

Historically, the latter have believed that the person of the Son did undergo change at the incarnation. This is even though the two divine natures (human and divine) maintained their separate states meaning that they never fused together making another (a third) type of nature. This is because they would believe that in His pre-existence, Christ would have His existence in one nature whilst from the incarnation He had His existence in two natures.

Christ's divine nature is not to be confused with the Son **as a personality**. These are two entirely different things. In other words, person or personality must not be taken as constituting the same as nature. The person (as we commonly say) of the Son of God, in His pre-existence, was of one nature (divinity) but when He became flesh, this same personality (the Son) possessed two natures (divinity and humanity). Yet this dual natured person was only the one and the same individual personage of the pre-existent Son. This was now the man Jesus.

The belief of trinitarians, because they say that the Son can never undergo change, is the same belief that says that under no circumstance, even though He became flesh, can He actually die or lose His eternal existence. As will be repeatedly said in this study, this is one of the major objections that many of the non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists have against the trinity doctrine. In this respect it does not make any difference which version of the trinity doctrine is held, either the orthodox one or the one held by Seventh-day Adventists, the conclusion is exactly the same. Both say that the possibility of the pre-existent Son of God actually dying or being lost was impossible.

It does appear that currently, the Seventh-day Adventist Church still believes that Christ could have sinned but not that He could die. In the *Ministry* magazine of March 2003, Woodrow Whidden stated with reference to the events at Calvary

“Since deity cannot die (1 Tim. 6:16), it was absolutely necessary for Christ to take on human nature if He was to offer Himself in death as a sacrifice for sin. This unique combination of deity and humanity formed the basis of a powerful sin offering: Though His deity did not literally die, it consented to His human death every step of the way. Therefore Christians can truly confess that, in a very special sense, "God died." The sacrificial death of the Man was given divine value because of the constant consent of His deity.” (Woodrow Whidden, *Ministry*, March 2003, ‘*Why should Jesus be both divine and human*’)

Notice here what is said to be the sacrifice made at Calvary. It is the death of “the Man” not the death of a divine person. Notice he says also that this sacrifice was “given divine value” only “because of the constant consent of His deity”. This is where there is confusion over nature and person or personality. Admittedly divine nature cannot die but a divine person can. This is why the Son of God became flesh. It was so that He could die. As Ellen White once put it

“Jesus Christ laid off His royal robe, His kingly crown, and clothed His divinity with humanity, in order to become a substitute and surety for humanity, that dying in humanity, He might by His death destroy him who had the power of death. He could not have done this as God, but by coming as man, Christ could die. By death He overcame death. The death of Christ bore to the death him who had the power of death, and opened the gates of the tomb for all who receive Him as their personal Saviour.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 97, 1898, To "My Brethren in North Fitzroy", November 18th 1898*)

To say that the pre-existent divine person did not die at Calvary would be to make nonsense of this spirit of prophecy statement. As Ellen White said here, the entire point in the Son of God becoming flesh was so that He “could die”. This was not a make belief death. He really did die. He died in His humanity. This means that He needed someone outside of Himself to return Him to life (to resurrect Him). The belief that the divine person did not really die is something that some of the Seventh-day Adventist anti-trinitarians had against the trinity doctrine. They reasoned that this teaching leaves Christianity with only a human sacrifice and not one that is divine. We shall return to this thought later.

As real as was the death of the Son of God, so too were His temptations. As Woodrow Whidden said when continuing his article

“Adventists have consistently made two key points: (1) The temptations of Jesus were as real as His humanity (with the possibility of His yielding to them); and (2) the key issue in all His temptations was whether He would rely on His deity or trust solely in the imparted power of His Father. His inherent divine power made the temptation to trust self (the heart of all temptation) much more difficult to resist.” (*Woodrow Whidden, Ministry, March 2003, 'Why should Jesus be both divine and human'*)

Concerning the implications of Christ becoming human, this is a correct summary of what Seventh-day Adventists have always believed. This is even though orthodox trinitarianism would not usually agree to such a belief. Perhaps if we could see what Arius wrote we would see that what Whidden wrote was also his own reasoning. It may have even been that Arius believed that if Christ had sinned, then He would have forfeited his eternal existence. As the writings of Arius were destroyed at the Council of Nicaea, we can only conjecture.

Whidden makes no mention of what would have happened to Christ if He had sinned. This is even though he was expounding the implications of Christ becoming human. Is it possible here that there was an attempt to amalgamate what many see to be a non-trinitarian perspective of Christ with one that is trinitarian or was it perhaps that the consequences were not even considered?

In their justifications and explanations of the trinity doctrine, the trinitarian leaders and theologians of the Seventh-day Adventist Church never appear to openly address the issue of the possibility of Christ losing His eternal existence. This is

even though it is a major bone of contention with many of today's non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists. This is why it is about time that this issue was addressed. Perhaps when this is done, there will be seen more clearly the dispute between the trinitarians and the non-trinitarians. At least everyone would know where he or she stood in this controversy. To say that Christ could have sinned is one thing but what about the consequences of that having happened? This issue must be clearly addressed. We shall return our thoughts to this in later sections. There is also a series of articles on this website called *The Unaddressed Issue*. They can be read here

<http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/SBUI.htm>

In section eight we shall pick up on again on the theological differences between Alexander and Arius. We shall also see that Arius did believe that Christ was God Himself begotten. To do this we shall take a look at what Theodoret the historian recorded.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section eight

Two schools of thought – two opposing theologies

In the previous section we discussed the councils and creeds that helped develop the trinity doctrine. In this section we shall see that the entire dispute at Nicaea was between two schools of thought. One was that of Alexandria in Egypt whilst the other was of Antioch of Syria. We shall also see that the antagonism between the two was clearly manifest in the beliefs of the Bishop of Alexandria (appropriately named Alexander) and one of his presbyters named Arius. We shall also see that the thinking of Arius was very similar, if not the same in a number of respects, as Ellen White.

Alexander versus Arius

For our understanding of the thinking behind the dispute at Nicaea, which eventually resulted in the production (formulation) of the very first trinity doctrine, we shall look first at the writings of Theodoret (c. AD 393-457). He wrote an ecclesiastical history following on from Eusebius of Caesarea (c. AD 260-339). Sozomon (c. AD 380-450) and Socrates of Constantinople (c. AD 380-?) did the same. Theodoret wrote regarding the time period between the beginning of the dispute of Arius (AD 318) and AD 428.

In Theodoret's history there is included a letter in which Alexander explained both his own beliefs and those of his followers. It was these beliefs that later formed the basis of the original trinity doctrine. We shall see also that this history contains a letter from Arius explaining why he and his followers were called heretics. By comparing these two letters we can see the difference in beliefs of the two opposing parties. This Bishop of Alexandria (Alexander) wrote

“We have learnt that the Son is immutable and unchangeable, all-sufficient and perfect, like the Father, lacking only His “unbegotten.” He is the exact and precisely similar image of His Father. For it is clear that the image fully contains everything by which the greater likeness exists, as the Lord taught us when He said, ‘My Father is greater than I.’ (The Ecclesiastical History of Theodoret, Book 1, Chapter 3, ‘The Epistle of Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria to Alexander, Bishop of Constantinople’)

Immutable means fixed, permanent, unalterable and unchangeable. This is saying that the Son, even by reason of the incarnation, was not subject to or capable of change. As we shall see later, Alexander of Alexandria said the

same. This was in opposition to Arius who said that the Son could change. Alexander's reference to Jesus saying, "My Father is greater than I" was regarded by him as confirmatory of this begotten concept. As we have noted in previous sections, this same concept regarding Christ was the preponderant belief of early Christianity. Notice Alexander says that the only difference between the Father and Son is that the Son is "lacking only His [Father's] unbegotten". In other words, the only difference between the Father and the Son is that the Son is begotten whilst the Father is not begotten (unbegotten). This would mean that apart from this one aspect of their existence, both of these divine personalities are exactly the same. This is much the same as we have been told through the spirit of prophecy. In 1897, Ellen White wrote for the youth of her day

"From eternity there was a complete unity between the Father and the Son. They were two, yet little short of being identical; two in individuality, yet one in spirit, and heart, and character." (*Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor 16th December 1897, 'The new commandment part 1'*)

We can see here that Ellen White says that the Father and the Son were not exactly the same. We shall see again later in this section that she said that the Son of God is begotten of the Father. Alexander continued his letter by saying

"And in accordance with this we believe that the Son always existed of the Father; for he is the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His Father's Person. But let no one be led by the word 'always' to imagine that the Son is unbegotten, as is thought by some who have their intellects blinded: for to say that He was, that He has always been, and that before all ages, is not to say that He is unbegotten." (*The Ecclesiastical History of Theodoret, Book 1, Chapter 3, 'The Epistle of Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria to Alexander, Bishop of Constantinople'*)

Note the emphasis here "always existed of the Father". Along with his famous presbyter Athanasius, Alexander was a major implementer regarding the introduction of the trinity doctrine into Christianity. Here he is saying that the Son has **always** been begotten of the Father. This has always been a major tenet of orthodox trinitarianism. Note importantly that Alexander said that even though the Son is said to have always existed, He was still begotten of the Father. As a matter of passing interest, Athanasius is said to be the brains behind the trinity doctrine and not Alexander.

This begotten concept concerning Christ is also the belief of many who are non-trinitarian, although having said this, the latter make no claim that Christ is **everlastingly** begotten. This is because their belief is that no support for such reasoning can be found in the Scriptures. They believe that this is one of the extreme speculations upon which the original trinity doctrine was founded.

Note too that Alexander says that those who believe that the Son is not begotten

(as is being said today by many Seventh-day Adventists) “[have their intellects blinded](#)”. This was probably because it could then be reasoned (if the Son is not begotten) that there are two Gods. By saying that the Son is begotten of the Father, the Son is said to be God begotten, although a separate personality from the Father.

Interesting to note is that in a rendering of Alexander’s letter cited in *The Two Republics* (this is a book that was written by A. T. Jones who was one of the main speakers at the famous Minneapolis Conference of 1888), this same sentence is translated as saying (Theodoret’s history needed to be translated into English therefore there are different translations available)

“But let no one be led from this to the supposition that the Son is unbegotten, as is believed by some who are deficient in intellectual power: for to say that He was, that He has always been, and that He existed before all ages, is not to say that He is unbegotten.” (*Letter from the Bishop of Alexandria to Alexander of Constantinople from an Ecclesiastical history by Theodoret as quoted in A. T. Jones ‘The Two Republics Page 333*)

Whichever translation is read, it is evident that the bishop of Alexandria had no regard for those who reason that the Son is not begotten.

Who are the heretics?

In the very same ecclesiastical history, Theodoret includes a letter from Arius. He had written it to his friend and fellow believer Eusebius of Nicomedia. In this letter, as did Alexander in his letter, Arius explains his own – also his follower’s - beliefs. By comparing these beliefs with those of Alexander’s (see above), we can readily establish between the two schools of thought the differences between those who are now the non-trinitarians and those who are now the trinitarians.

Very interestingly is that in his letter regarding the beliefs of Alexander and his followers (the principles of which are those depicted in Alexander’s letter above), Arius says

“These are impieties to which we cannot listen, even though the heretics threaten us with a thousand deaths.” (*The Ecclesiastical History of Theodoret, Book 1, Chapter 3, ‘Letter of Arius to Eusebius of Nicomedia’*)

Take careful note of those whom Arius is calling “[the heretics](#)”. This really is very important. Arius is calling heretics those who believe the same as Alexander (now the trinitarians). He was saying that Alexander’s beliefs were not in keeping with what he believed was then commonly taught within 4th century Christianity (see previous section where it is said that the majority or middle of the road belief of early Christianity was that the Son was begotten). It does appear therefore that a begotten Christ, without the extreme view of everlastingly begotten, was the early Christian faith.

Both Alexander and Arius agreed that Christ is begotten. This was never an issue in the disputes in early Christianity. This can be seen in Alexander's remarks regarding those who do not believe this as having "their intellects blinded". Interesting to note is that in his book on Christian history, the Rev. Whitham says

"First of all, Arianism claimed to represent the original faith the Church, and maintained that its opponents were the real innovators." (A. R. Whitham, *The History of the Christian Church, page 187, 'Arianism'*)

From what we have just read was said by Arius regarding "heretics", it does appear that this is what this presbyter did believe thus it would be that his faith would not have been a new belief but a defence of original Christianity. This is borne out by the fact that trinitarianism - which is what this dispute eventually developed into - was a new belief to the Christian faith. It certainly was not something that was already established within Christianity. This is why there was such controversy at Nicaea. If this is doubted, it must only be asked why the vast majority of bishops in attendance at this council were so reluctant to sign the creed. If at that time what was written in the creed had been the generally accepted faith of Christianity, not only would there not have been such a dispute about it but also the bishops would have signed the creed without protest. As it was they balked at signing it, although they were eventually persuaded to do so.

A study of the writings of the early church fathers will show that whilst they all said that Christ was begotten, there was no stress that He was everlastingly begotten. This view only later developed. This was until at Nicaea it built into a crescendo. Following Nicaea it was not the beliefs of the creed that was the preponderant faith of Christianity but what is often termed today as semi-Arianism although I do not believe it wise to give any set of beliefs a title.

Defending the faith

Just as Arius did in his time, the non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists are doing today. They are simply defending the original faith of the Seventh-day Adventist Church before it developed its trinitarianism. This again is history repeating itself.

In later sections we shall see that in 1919 - which was just 4 years after the death of Ellen White - there was a decided push by some of the leaders of Seventh-day Adventism to rid our church of the belief that Christ was begotten at a point in eternity. The latter had been long held belief by our denomination. In other words, just after Ellen White died, some of our leadership pushed for a Christ that was coeternal with the Father. This is just as in any trinity doctrine. This was the very first step in developing a trinity faith.

Coming from the viewpoint that Arius was wrong in his beliefs, the Rev Whitham (also in attempting to justify his own belief that trinitarianism is correct) seeks to discredit Arius.

It is quite possible by judicious manipulation of texts of Scripture, or of the simple, unguarded statements of early Christian writers, to make out a plausible case for this statement.” (*Ibid*)

Arius is being accused here of misusing Scripture. Notice Whitham says “quite possible” meaning that it is only conjecture on his part (we have already noted that the vast majority of the writings of Arius were ordered destroyed at Nicaea).

Most histories I have read say that Arius not only had an upright Christian character but also that he was a brilliant student of the Scriptures. They also say that by using Scripture alone, no one could refute his theology. This is why to make him appear to be in error at Nicaea, it was found necessary to use words and concepts that could only be found outside of the Scriptures (see previous section). These were the main objections at Nicaea to the creed, not just by Arius but also by most of the bishops in attendance. To put all of this in another way, to defeat Arius, the eventually accepted creed went outside of what is revealed in the Scriptures.

Here Whitham is attempting to say that by a well thought out management of Bible texts, also perhaps deftly using loosely phrased statements from early Christian writers, Arius was trying to make it look as though his views were the “original faith of the Church”. Whitham offers no proof for these accusations. He also says

“The Deity of Christ was only gradually apprehended by the Apostles themselves while the Master was on earth. In their appeal to Jews, after His Ascension, they naturally laid stress on the humanity of Christ, as the chosen and anointed Saviour of Israel and the world” (*Ibid*)

This is very true indeed but reading between the lines and not wishing to misrepresent what is being said by Whitham, it does appear that he is presenting the idea that the deity of Christ was not so stressed by the apostles as some may think.

It was the overstressing of Christ’s divinity at the expense of the possible consequences of the incarnation that caused the original dispute between Alexander and Arius. This is no different today within Seventh-day Adventism. It appears that when the trinitarians draw conclusions regarding the pre-existence of Christ, not enough consideration is given to the incarnation or the possible consequences of it. Perhaps no consideration is given to it at all. We shall see that is a repeat of what happened in the 4th century at Nicaea.

The entire problem with this trinity debate is that the trinitarians seem to ignore in their theology the possible consequences of the incarnation. In other words, they have invented their trinity formula without reasoning Christology. This is inasmuch as they have noted all that the Scriptures say concerning the divinity of Christ but have not taken into account that Christ could have sinned and have

lost His existence. To put it another way again, they have accentuated on the divine at the expense of the human. As E. Glenn Hinson put it in his book *The Early Church*

“The “schools” in Alexandria and in Antioch approached the doctrine of Christ quite differently, with Alexandria doing it “from above” - that is, emphasizing the divine - and Antioch “from below” - that is, accentuating the human.” (E. Glenn Hinson, *The early Church*, page 230-231, ‘A people rent by strife’)

If the writings of Arius had been preserved, it is more than likely we would have seen in them that he reasoned much the same way as did Ellen White. We can see this by what was written by others about his beliefs. This means that because they called Arius a heretic, so too they would say the same of Ellen White. This is something for Seventh-day Adventists today to consider. Alexander would obviously have disagreed with Ellen White although they both believed that Christ was the natural Son of God. We shall see this in later sections.

According to what we have been told through the spirit of prophecy, the fact that Christ is the Son of God did not make Him incapable of sin. Ellen White did say very clearly that because of the incarnation, unlike He was in His pre-existence), He could have fallen (could have sinned). This is dealt with in detail in section thirteen.

This shows us the unrivalled love that God has for humanity. To save mankind from sin, He was willing to place His Son in a position where He could be tempted and could sin, also allowing Him, if He had sinned, to go out of existence. What matchless love! We will contemplate this more fully in later sections.

A conflict of views

In his letter found in Theodoret’s history, Arius went on to say about his own and his follower’s beliefs

“But we say and believe, and have taught, and do teach, that the Son is not unbegotten, nor in any way part of the unbegotten; and that He does not derive His subsistence from any matter; but that by His own will and counsel He has subsisted before time, and before ages, as perfect God, only begotten and unchangeable, and that before He was begotten, or created, or purposed, or established, He was not. For He was not unbegotten.” (The *Ecclesiastical History of Theodoret*, Book 1, Chapter 3, ‘Letter of Arius to Eusebius of Nicomedia’)

Just as did Alexander, also as did the vast majority of Christians living at that time, Arius believed that Christ was the Son of God – meaning that He was begotten of the Father. We can also see again that just like Alexander believed,

Arius believed the Son to be God although he did not express it in exactly the same terms (explain it the same way) as did Alexander.

In opposition to what many say that he believed, Arius does not say that the Son was a created being. He makes this very clear because he does say that “**by His own will and counsel He [the Son of God] has subsisted before time, and before ages, as perfect God, only begotten and unchangeable**”.

Arius believed that the Son of God is God Himself begotten, not that He was a created being. This is why I say that very often today, Arius and his beliefs are very much abused. Certainly they are very much misrepresented.

Note Arius says that in His pre-existence the Son was “**unchangeable**”. Arius was not referring here to the incarnate Christ. He was just establishing to all who would read his letter what he believed concerning the Son *before* He vacated Heaven. Arius believed in the divinity of Christ, meaning that Christ was God. This is the only reason why he would say that the Son, in His pre-existence, was unchangeable. If he had thought Christ to have been created like an angel, then he would have believed Him to be capable of change in His pre-existence (as Lucifer was capable) not as he says “**unchangeable**”. Sozomon (c. AD 380 - 450), in his church history says regarding Arius

“A most expert logician (for he is said to have been not without proficiency even in such studies) he plunged headlong into absurd arguments, and had the audacity to preach in church what no one before him had ever suggested, namely, that the Son of God has come into existence ‘out of the non-existent’ and that ‘there was when he was not’, that as possessing free will he was capable of virtue or of vice, and that he was created and made, and he gave voice to many other similar assertions which one professing such views might utter.” (*Sozomon, taken from A New Eusebius by J. Stevenson, revised by W. H. C. Frend*)

We need to realise here that Sozomon never met Arius; neither had he read a detailed explanation of the beliefs of this presbyter. This is because all of the writings of Arius were ordered destroyed at Nicaea. For what was believed by Arius therefore, Sozomon was relying on what he had been told by others. By his use of words, it can also be seen that he was very biased toward (in favour of) what had now become trinitarianism and as we shall see in the next section, what had by then, during his lifetime, become the state religion of Rome. This was the Papacy in the making.

Note very importantly that according to Sozomon, Arius believed that Christ possessed “**free will**” and in consequence could have sinned (“**capable of virtue or of vice**”). Sozomon regarded this particular outcome of the incarnation as one of the “**absurd arguments**” of Arius. In other words, Sozomon was saying that Arius believed the Son to be capable of change. This was by reason of the incarnation. These words of Sozomon are very similar to what Alexander said in

his letter (quoted above). This is when the bishop said

“And do not these words, I begot thee ‘from the womb before the morning plainly show the natural sonship of the paternal birth of One whose lot it is, not from diligence of conduct, or exercise in moral progress, but by individuality of nature? Hence it ensues that the filiation of the only-begotten Son of the Father is incapable of fall; while the adoption of reasonable beings who are not His sons by nature, but merely on account of fitness of character, and by the bounty of God, may fall away, as it is written in the word, ‘The sons of God saw the daughters of men, and took them as wives,’ and so forth.” (*Alexander of Alexandria to Alexander of Constantinople, Theodoret’s History, Book 1 chapter 3 page 38*)

Alexander believed, as do many trinitarians today, that the Son of God “is incapable of fall” meaning that it was impossible for Him to sin. This was the same as was said by Sozomon (see above). Alexander was refuting the beliefs of Arius. In a letter that Alexander wrote to his clergy, he more or less expressed the very same sentiments. He said

“Some one accordingly asked them [the Arians] whether the Word of God could be changed, as the devil has been, and they feared not to say ‘Yes: he certainly could; for being begotten and created, his nature is susceptible of change.’ We then, with the bishops of Egypt and Libya, being assembled together to the number of nearly a hundred, anathematized Arius for his shameless avowal of these heresies, together with all such as have countenanced them.” (*Alexander to his clergy, c. AD 319, taken from A New Eusebius by J. Stevenson, revised by W. H. C. Frend*)

Here we can see just why it was that Arius was first “anathematized”. He believed that Christ (“the Word of God”) could have changed. As this is compared with how “the devil” changed, it does appear that Arius believed that like Satan, Christ, in becoming incarnate, could have fallen (sinned). Alexander is referring to this reasoning as heresy.

Alexander was referring here to the time period just a few years after the very beginning of the controversy. This was when Arius first went into exile (c. AD 321). Approximately 100 bishops at a synod took this decision at a synod called by Alexander around 14 years before the Council of Nicaea.

Alexander reasoned that the Son could not sin neither could He undergo change. This is in contrast to what was believed by Arius and his followers. Here therefore we can see the very crux of the debate. The Arians believed that even though Christ was the Son of God, the incarnation made Him susceptible to sin and change. On the other hand, the Alexandrians (those whose theology became what we now know as trinitarianism) disagreed with this reasoning.

At the time of the Council of Nicaea, Athanasius was presbyter to Bishop Alexander. He was also said to be a greater theologian than the bishop, also the contributor of much of the thinking of Alexander and the up and coming trinitarians. Athanasius was the archenemy of Arius. Speaking of the beliefs of Arius, Athanasius wrote (quoting portions from *The Thalia* by Arius)

“And by nature, as all others, so the Word Himself is alterable, and remains good by His own free will, while He chooseth; when, however, He wills, He can alter as we can, as being of an alterable nature. For 'therefore,' saith he [Arius], 'as foreknowing that He would be good, did God by anticipation bestow on Him this glory, which afterwards, as man, He attained from virtue. Thus in consequence of His works fore-known, did God bring it to pass that He being such, should come to be.’” (*Athanasius, Discourses against the Arians, Discourse 1, chapter 2, 'Extracts from the Thalia of Arius'*)

Alexander and Athanasius were the thinkers behind the production of trinitarian reasoning. Athanasius is said to be the greater. He took over as Bishop of Alexandria when Alexander died. As can be seen here, Athanasius claimed that Arius had believed that the Son “the Word Himself is alterable” and had only remained free from sin by His own choice. This was not believed by Athanasius who is given a great deal of the credit for the eventual formulation of the trinity doctrine. The Athanasian Creed is named in honour of him but not written by him.

This concept that the Son of God could not have sinned, as held by those such as Alexander, Athanasius, Sozomon, also perhaps all those who at that time held to the *one substance* theory of God, is not in harmony with what we have been told through the spirit of prophecy. In other words, whilst all of these were out of harmony with the spirit of prophecy, Arius was in agreement with it. We shall see this more clearly in section thirteen. At Nicaea, it appears that to defeat Arius and his followers the finally accepted creed said

“And whosoever shall say that there was a time when the Son of God was not, or that before he was begotten he was not, or that he was made of things that were not, or that he is of a different substance or essence [from the Father] or that he is a creature, or subject to change or conversion — all that so say, the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes them.” (*The finally accepted creed of Nicaea*)

Again this is out of harmony with what we have been told through the spirit of prophecy. This is that Christ could have sinned and therefore would have forfeited His attributes of deity. We shall note this very briefly now although in later sections we shall deal with it in far greater detail.

Unrivalled love

When speculating concerning God being a trinity, the trinitarians usually ignore

the possible consequences of the Son taking into Himself human nature. In other words, they ignore the incarnation and its possible consequences for Christ. This is where it must be remembered that although the trinity doctrine is supposedly based upon all that the Scriptures say about the three personalities of the Godhead, at the end of the day it is only speculation. It must also be said that if the possible consequences of the Son becoming human are ignored (like His possibility to sinning and lose His eternal existence) then everything is not taken into consideration. This much is only reasonable to conclude. With regard to the incarnate Christ, the Scriptures say

“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”
Hebrews 4:15

We are tempted with the possibility of sinning. If this was not the common lot of Jesus then He certainly was not “tempted like as we are”. The end result of Jesus sinning, if He had sinned, must be that He would have forfeited His attributes of deity and thus would have lost His eternal existence.

Like the orthodox version of the trinity doctrine (the one that Alexander heralded), the version held today by the Seventh-day Adventist Church says that all three personalities make up the one indivisible being of God. This means that this one God (the trinity or triune God) is immortal. This also means that in this theology, it is impossible for the second person of the Godhead, even by becoming incarnate, to go out of existence.

This today is one of the main objections that the non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists are making to the trinity doctrine although equally as serious there is another objection concerning the atonement. This is because within trinitarian theology, the divine Son of God did not die at Calvary. We have mentioned this previously and will do so in more detail later. You may like to read the article *Who or what died at Calvary*. In section twelve we shall speak more of how the trinity doctrine impacts the incarnation and the atonement.

With regard to what Arius said about the Son in His pre-existence being “unchangeable” (see above), note these words of Ellen White. I am sure that Arius would have agreed with them. This is when she said

“As God, Christ could not be tempted any more than He was not tempted from His allegiance in heaven. But as Christ humbled Himself to the nature of man, He could be tempted.” (*Ellen G. White, Manuscript Releases Volume 16, MR 1211 The Humiliation of Christ, Diary 1890*)

Here we are told that as Christ was in His pre-existence, meaning as God, He could not be tempted to sin but by becoming incarnate this situation became changed. This means that in the incarnation, the divine Son of God had put Himself into a position where He could fall. This is only the same as was said by

Arius. Ellen White also made this important comment

“Our Lord was tempted as man is tempted. He was capable of yielding to temptations, as are human beings. His finite nature was pure and spotless, but the divine nature that led Him to say to Philip, “He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father” also, was not humanized; neither was humanity deified by the blending or union of the two natures; each retained its essential character and properties.” (*Ibid*)

Here now is the difference made by the incarnation. In this latter condition, Christ could be tempted and He could sin whereas prior to this, meaning in His pre-existence, He could not sin. Ellen White then went on to say that we must not think that in His human nature Christ possessed the sinful propensities of fallen humanity but by repeating what she had said previously she did emphasise

“The divine nature, combined with the human, made Him capable of yielding to Satan's temptations.” (*Ibid*)

This was the direct result of the incarnation. The divine Son of God had put Himself in our place in all things.

“To suppose He was not capable of yielding to temptation places Him where He cannot be a perfect example for man, and the force and the power of this part of Christ's humiliation, which is the most eventful, is no instruction or help to human beings.” (*Ibid*)

Ellen White also spoke of the consequences of Christ yielding to temptation.

“Remember that Christ risked all; “tempted like as we are,” he staked even his own eternal existence upon the issue of the conflict.” (*Ellen G. White, General Conference Bulletin 1st December 1895 ‘Seeking the Lost’, Week of Prayer reading for Sabbath December 28th 1895*)

“Heaven itself was imperiled for our redemption. At the foot of the cross, remembering that for one sinner Jesus would have yielded up his life, we may estimate the value of a soul.” (*Ibid*)

There can be no mistaking what Ellen White is saying here. Christ could have lost His existence. Note the reference here to Hebrews 4:15 (see above)

Not of one substance

Returning our thoughts to the letter that Arius wrote to Eusebius of Nicomedia he added

“We are persecuted, because we say that the Son has a beginning, but that God is without beginning. This is the cause of our persecution, and likewise, because we say that He is of the non-existent. And this we say, because

He is neither part of God, nor of any essential being. For this are we persecuted; the rest you know. I bid thee farewell in the Lord, remembering our afflictions, my fellow-Lucianist.” (*The ecclesiastical history of Theodoret, Book 1, Chapter 4, ‘The letter of Arius to Eusebius, Bishop of Nicomedia’*)

The difference in beliefs between Arius and Alexander was that Arius believed that the Son was begotten at a point in eternity, therefore believing that as a separate personality from God the Father (although believing He was God essentially) He had a beginning. Alexander believed that the Son was everlastingly begotten of God and of (meaning belonging to) the same substance of God. Arius could not accept that the Son was part of God. This he could not do and reason at the same time that the Son could sin and could change. These two beliefs were in conflict with each other (as they still are today). In other words, because God is immortal, if it is said that the Son is part of that immortality then it is impossible for Him to sin or change, or cease to exist (cease to be).

In contrast to all of this, Alexander believed that the Son was eternally begotten and belonging to the one substance of God (the one being of God) and was therefore, as separate personality from the Father, without beginning. The latter - which has now become basic trinity orthodoxy means that that the Son could not have forfeited His deity or lost His eternal existence. This is why trinitarians are so keen on saying that it was impossible for Christ to sin. If they say that He could have sinned, they then would need to try to amalgamate this belief with the belief that He could not go out of existence (if He had sinned) which would bring about a great deal of theological contradiction. It would necessitate saying that the Son could have sinned but this would not have affected His eternal status. This of course would mean that Christ would not have been made like one of us, also that God has one rule for us and another rule for His Son. This would put God’s character in a very bad light. It would certainly make God look very unfair.

Both Arius and Alexander believed that the Son was begotten of God, although Alexander believed - because Arius did not express it in the same way as he did - that his opponent was wrong in his theology. This is no different than what trinitarians say today of those non-trinitarians who hold to similar beliefs as Arius.

Note again, very importantly, that Arius did not say that he was being persecuted because he did not believe that the Son was God but as a son His personality had a beginning of existence. Note too that Alexander never accused Arius of denying the divinity of Christ. This is very important to remember. Never either, as a denomination, even when they were non-trinitarian, did the Seventh-day Adventist Church deny Christ’s divinity. It was just that they did not express it in terms that were trinitarian. As James White (the husband of Ellen White) once wrote

“The principal difference between the two bodies [Seventh-day Baptists and Seventh-day Adventists] is the immortality question. The S.D. Adventists

hold the divinity of Christ so nearly with the trinitarians that we apprehend no trial here.” (*James White, Review and Herald, Oct 12th 1876, ‘The two bodies - The Relation Which the S.D. Baptists and S.D. Adventists Sustain to Each Other’*)

Arius did deny that the Son, as a separate personality from God, is coeval with (of the same age as) the Father meaning that he denied orthodox trinity essentialness. This is because he rejected the extreme speculations of eternally begotten and of one substance etc (one being) that make any Godhead teaching truly trinitarian.

The beliefs of Arius appear to be very similar (if not the same) as was generally believed by the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism. On the other hand (in one sense), the beliefs of Alexander are very similar to current Seventh-day Adventist theology, meaning that they believe in the coeternity of Christ and the Father although they do not accept the begotten concept. Instead of the latter they say that God and Christ are both unbegotten. This means they deny that Christ, in His pre-existence, is truly the Son of God. As we noted above, Alexander would have ridiculed this belief.

A begotten Christ

In later sections we will discuss the generally held beliefs of our pioneers but here we shall only quote Ellen White. We shall see that as did early Christianity, she did believe that Christ is a begotten Son. In 1895 after receiving revelation from God for over 50 years she said

“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.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 30th May 1895, ‘Christ our complete salvation’*)

Here can be seen, according to the spirit of prophecy, why Christ is called God’s “only-begotten Son”. It is because He is begotten of God. Note here that Ellen White compares the reason for Christ being the Son of God with the reason why within the Scriptures others are called sons of God - like the sinner who is an adopted son and an angel who is a created son. She says He is a Son because He is “begotten in the express image of the Father's person”. These are three different acts of God (creation, adoption and begetting).

This word “[person](#)” is very important. We shall return our thoughts to this later. It actually means of what something consists meaning its substance or undergirding etc.

Christ a created or adopted Son was amongst the heretical teachings in the first

and second centuries. Ellen White is here denying both of them. She says that Christ is a Son because He is begotten of God. If it is doubted that Ellen White meant this literally, we only need to read what she said 6 weeks later. This is when she wrote in the *Review and Herald*

“The Eternal Father, the unchangeable one, gave his only begotten Son, tore from his bosom Him who was made in the express image of his person, and sent him down to earth to reveal how greatly he loved mankind.” (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald 9th July 1895 ‘The Duty of the Minister and the People’*)

This is not what is said today in current Seventh-day Adventist trinitarian theology. This is because in the latter it is said that Christ is **not begotten** of the Father therefore He is not really a son - at least not in His pre-existence. As we noted above though, the bishop Alexander described those who believe such things as being “deficient in intellectual power” or to put it another way, having “their intellects blinded”.

Note here that Ellen White was substituting the word “begotten” (as used in her previous statement) with the word “made”. In other words, she said here that Christ “was made in the express image of his [the eternal Father’s] person” whilst previously she said that He was “begotten in the express image of the Father’s person”.

Four years later in the *Signs of the Times* with reference to Christ saying, “Before Abraham was I am” (note very importantly that this was written by Ellen White the year following the publication of her supposedly trinitarian *Desire of Ages*), Ellen White said

“Here Christ shows them that, altho they might reckon His life to be less than fifty years, yet His divine life could not be reckoned by human computation. The existence of Christ before His incarnation is not measured by figures.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times. 3rd May 1899 ‘The Word made flesh’*)

There is a very strong implication here that in accord with Arius, Ellen White was saying that as a separate personality from God, the personality of the Son of God had a beginning of existence.

Shortly following the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference session, Ellen White preached a sermon in which she said

“Angels of God looked with amazement upon Christ, who took upon Himself the form of man and humbly united His divinity with humanity in order that He might minister to fallen man. It is a marvel among the heavenly angels. God has told us that He did do it, and we are to accept the Word of God just as it reads. And although we may try to reason in regard to our Creator,

how long He has had existence, where evil first entered into our world, and all these things, we may reason about them until we fall down faint and exhausted with the research when there is yet an infinity beyond.” (Ellen G. White, Sermon, December 1st 1888, The Des Moines Seventh-day Adventist Church, Iowa, *‘The minister’s relationship to God’s Word’, Sermons and talks, Volume 1 page 65*)

From the context, when Ellen White spoke of “our Creator” and “how long He has had existence”, it can be taken that she was referring to Christ and not God the Father. Some may disagree with this reasoning. Whatever is concluded concerning this last statement, we can see from what we have previously read that we have been told through the spirit of prophecy that Christ is begotten, also that He is the “express image” of everything that makes God to be God. This means that the only difference between the Father and the Son, as was said by the bishop Alexander (see above), is that the Father is unbegotten and the Son begotten. This reminds us of what we noted previously was said by Ellen White.

“From eternity there was a complete unity between the Father and the Son. They were two, yet little short of being identical; two in individuality, yet one in spirit, and heart, and character.” (Ellen G. White, *Youth’s Instructor 16th December 1897, ‘The new commandment part 1’*)

Official Seventh-day Adventism does not teach today as was said above by Ellen White. Since her death they have adopted trinitarian concepts of Christ.

Current official Seventh-day Adventist theology

In keeping with trinity essentialness, trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists today believe that all three divine personalities, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, all make up the one unity God they call a trinity. In contrast to orthodoxy though, also in contrast to what we have been told through the spirit of prophecy, they say that all three personalities are all exactly the same, meaning amongst other things that they are each not begotten (unbegotten). Whilst this may border on tritheism (three gods), they do say that they each have their subsistence in one trinity structure they call God. This is what makes our denomination currently trinitarian. Seventh-day Adventists, in their book *Seventh-day Adventists believe* maintain

“There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons (*Seventh-day Adventists believe ... A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines, page 16,*).

This book then describes this unity “one God” by explaining

“God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. He is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation” (*Ibid*)

Note here that this unity “one God” (the trinity) is said to be “immortal”. This is very important because it is saying that this “one God” (this trinity God) can never cease to be. This is why within trinitarian thinking, it is impossible for the Son to lose or forfeit his eternal existence - or even that He could die. Would Ellen White have agreed with this reasoning? From what we have just read above, also in previous sections, the answer must be no, hence a chasm between the present theology of Seventh-day Adventists and the writings of Ellen White. We shall speak more of this in later sections.

A. T. Jones summarises

In his book *The Two Republics*, A. T. Jones summarised the difference of beliefs between Arius (now the non-trinitarians) and Alexander (now the trinitarians) as shown in their letters as quoted in Theodoret’s history (see above). He says

“From these statements by the originators of the respective sides of this controversy, it appears that with the exception of a single point, the two views were identical, only being stated in different ways. The single point where the difference lay was that Alexander held that the Son was begotten of the very essence of the Father, and is therefore of the same substance with the Father, while Arius held that the Son was begotten by the Father, not from his own essence, but from nothing; but that when he was thus begotten, he was, and is, of precisely the like substance with the Father.

Whether the Son of God, therefore, is of the same substance, or only of like substance, with the Father, was the question in dispute. The controversy was carried on in Greek, and as expressed in Greek the whole question turned upon a single letter. The word which expressed Alexander's belief, is Homoousion. The word which expressed the belief of Arius, is Homoiousion. One of the words has two "i's" in it, and the other has but one; but why the word should or should not have that additional "i," neither party could ever exactly determine.” (A. T. Jones, *The Two Republics*, page 160, Chapter xiv, ‘Establishment of the Catholic Faith’)

Here according to Jones is the difference in beliefs between Arius and Alexander. It was whether the Father and the Son were of exactly the same substance (essence). This is something concerning which the Scriptures are totally silent. Any conclusions therefore can only be assumptions. Perhaps E. J. Waggoner summarised the whole situation correctly

“In the fourth century the Trinitarian controversy arose in Alexandria. Arius, a presbyter of that city, held views contrary to those held by Alexander, the bishop of the city. It is perhaps safe to say that neither party was correct, since the controversy was over the nature of GOD, which cannot be defined by man.” (E. J. Waggoner, *Bible Echo*, 15th October 1893, ‘Religious boycotts’)

Perhaps this says everything, especially to Seventh-day Adventists today. In

other words, we should only believe what God has revealed and not conjecture about that which He has chosen to maintain silence.

Antioch versus Alexandria

The difference in beliefs between Arius and Alexander is the basic difference between what is often called Antiochene theology and Alexandrian theology. The first is what might be termed a down to earth, literal, Scripture only, non-allegorical theology whilst the second was philosophical allegorising speculation. It also appears that those of the Antiochene school of thought, being guarded as to regard going to extremes in their thinking concerning the oneness between the three personalities of the Godhead, took into consideration how their conclusions would affect other biblical teachings. These would have been such as the consequences of the incarnation. The Antiochene theology accented much on the humanity of Christ and the incarnation.

In speaking of Lucian of Antioch whose translation and understanding of the Bible is said by many to be of the purist origins, Benjamin Wilkinson noted

“What must have stirred the mind of Lucian, however, who at this time was about twenty-five years of age, were the philosophical speculations offered to sustain the theological viewpoint held by the bishop of Rome concerning the Godhead.” (*Benjamin George Wilkinson Ph.D, Truth Triumphant, page 48 'Lucian and the church in Syria', 1944*)

It is these same “philosophical speculations” held by “the bishop of Rome” that are the same speculations that have now developed into the orthodox doctrine of the trinity. This involves the eternal begetting of the Son and the reasoning that they are both of the same indivisible substance. The begotten concept, as we have seen from the above, was the one common denominator between both sets of the beliefs of the non-trinitarians and the up and coming trinitarians although there was a difference within that concept. Both sides accepted that Christ truly was the pre-existent Son of God.

This is also how it was in pre-trinity Seventh-day Adventism. It was only with the acceptance of the evangelical type of trinity doctrine (three unbegotten persons in the one being of God) that our denomination lost sight of the true Sonship of Christ. Prior to that time, Christ’s Sonship was held in the highest of esteem. We shall see this later when we take a closer look at the early 1900’s faith of Seventh-day Adventists.

Lucian was head of a theology school in Antioch. He is remembered for his accuracy of Scripture translation – also for expressing a literal, no frills interpretation. He did in fact make a translation of the whole Bible known as *the Lucian Recension* - which as well as being commonly used by Christians living in his time was also used by Jerome in his compilation of the Latin Vulgate. What we also know for sure is that Arius was a pupil of Lucian, hence the reason for Arius calling his friend Eusebius of Nicomedia “my fellow Lucianist” (see above).

During the ten year persecution (AD 303-313) of Christians begun by Diocletian, Lucian was arrested and tortured but would not give up his faith. Eventually he was put to death and became a martyr. During his lifetime he was also temporarily excommunicated from the church but as was to later happen to Arius, he was eventually reinstated. It does appear that his beliefs were mistakenly associated with those of Paul of Samosata, Bishop of Antioch from 260-269 AD. Wilkinson had also written in the chapter he called *The apostolic origins*

“In these words, the historian Newman aptly describes the difference between the theology of Antioch and that of Alexandria: “In the great Christological controversies of the fourth and following centuries Alexandria and Antioch were always antagonists. Alexandria representing a mystical transcendentalism and promoting the allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures: Antioch insisting on the grammatical historical interpretation of the Scriptures, and having no sympathy with mystical modes of thought.” (Benjamin George Wilkinson Ph.D, *Truth Triumphant*, page 25 ‘*The apostolic origins*’, 1944)

He also said in the next chapter

“In their stand for the pure doctrines of Christianity, the churches of Syria were horrified at the license which many so-called Christian teachers took with the Scriptures, and they rebelled against the doctrines of Gnosticism which arose in the corrupted Christianity of the church in Alexandria. The school of Antioch led a revolt against the Alexandrian exegesis of Holy Scriptures, and founded a more critical method.” (Benjamin George Wilkinson Ph.D, *Truth Triumphant*, page 48 ‘*Lucian and the church in Syria*’, 1944)

In the online Wikipedia encyclopaedia this comment is made

“Even today there are those that follow the same basic beliefs and ideals as Lucian and today they carry on his legacy of promotion of proper bible study and accuracy. They too throw out completely the Alexandrines teachings along with the concept of a trinity that from his teachings and that of Arius, his pupil, clearly shows he was against.” (Wikipedia encyclopaedia, *Lucian of Antioch*)

The online Roman Catholic encyclopaedia puts it this way

“Very little is known about the life of Lucian, though few men have left such a deep print on the history of Christianity. The opposition to the allegorizing tendencies of the Alexandrines centred in him. He rejected this system entirely and propounded a system of literal interpretation which dominated the Eastern Church for a long period. In the field of theology, in the minds of practically all writers (the most notable modern exception being Gwatkin, in

his "Studies of Arianism", London, 1900), he has the unenviable reputation of being the real author of the opinions which afterwards found expression in the heresy of Arius." (*The Roman Catholic online encyclopaedia New Advent 'Lucian of Antioch'*)

On page 50 of his *Truth Triumphant*, in a chapter where he speaks of Lucian, Benjamin Wilkinson makes this observation

"The Protestant denominations are built upon that manuscript of the Greek New Testament sometimes called Textus Receptus, or the Received Text. It is that Greek New Testament from which the writings of the apostles in Greek have been translated into English, German, Dutch and other languages. During the dark ages the Received Text was practically unknown outside the Greek Church. It was restored to Christendom by the labours of that great scholar Erasmus. It is altogether too little known that the real editor of the Received Text was Lucian. None of Lucian's enemies fails to credit him with this work. Neither Lucian nor Erasmus, but rather the apostles, wrote the Greek New Testament. However, Lucian's day was an age of apostasy when a flood of deprivations was systematically attempting to devastate both the Bible manuscripts and Bible theology" (*Benjamin Wilkinson, Truth Triumphant, page 50, 'Lucian and the church in Syria' 1944*)

Wilkinson continued by explaining to his readers

"Origen, of the Alexandrian college, made his editions and commentaries of the Bible a secure retreat for all errors, and deformed them with philosophical speculations introducing casuistry and lying. Lucian's unrivalled success in verifying, safeguarding, and transmitting those divine writings left a heritage for which all generations should be thankful." (*Ibid*)

Another author who caught the spirit of what happened in this theological contest was S. N. Haskell.

"The Christian world was torn asunder by theological factions. Alexandria, the center of all philosophical study, was also the center of theological activity. Here is where the Greek influence was most forcibly felt. Athanasius, the leader of one faction, was archdeacon, and afterward bishop of Alexandria, and his opponent, Arius, was presbyter in the same city.

Paganism and Christianity met on the battle field when Constantine contended for the throne of Rome; paganism and Christianity met in more deadly conflict in Alexandria, where Christian and pagan schools stood side by side. Here it was that such men as Origen and Clement, recognized Fathers of the church, adopted the philosophy of the Greeks, and applied to the study of the Bible the same methods which were common in the study

of Homer and other Greek writers. Higher criticism had its birth in Alexandria. It was the result of a mingling of the truths taught by Christ and the false philosophy of the Greeks. It was an attempt to interpret divine writings by the human intellect, a revival of the philosophy of Plato. These teachers, by introducing Greek philosophy into the schools which were nominally Christian, opened the avenue for the theological controversies which shook the Roman world, and finally established the mystery of iniquity." (S. N. Haskell, *The Story of Daniel the Prophet*, page 261, Chapter 16, 'The Mystery of Iniquity', 1908)

It was this initial Alexandrian corruption of the Scriptures that led to what was to later become the extreme claims of the trinitarians. It was also this same theology (complete with its extremes) that was to form the basis of the beliefs of the fast becoming Roman Catholic Church. This is how it developed into apostate Christianity. It is only when we understand these things that we can fully appreciate the prophecies of the book of Daniel, especially that of Daniel chapter eight where it speaks of the rise of the little horn out of Greece. It was this human philosophy (Greek philosophy really) that corrupted the truth of the Word of God (the Holy Scriptures). As we shall see in the next section, those who opposed these corruptions had to be removed (uprooted).

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section nine

The establishing of trinitarianism within Christianity

In the previous sections we have taken note that the creed formulated to defeat Arius and his followers at Nicaea (AD 325) actually settled nothing. We know this because history attests that through to the Council of Constantinople (AD 381) and even the years beyond, it was not the beliefs of this creed that was the preponderant faith of Christianity but what is generally termed semi-Arianism. We shall see in this section that it was only when a Roman Emperor issued a series of edicts enforced by threats and punishment that the belief we now term trinitarianism began to hold sway within Christianity. Even then it did not happen overnight. It took time and death to be established.

The latter was much the same as happened within Seventh-day Adventism, meaning how we changed from being a non-trinitarian denomination to one that was trinitarian. Those who once held to the old theology of non-trinitarianism did one of two things. They either died still holding on to these long-held beliefs or they changed their thinking. At the same time, by the progressives, trinitarian concepts of the Godhead were increasingly promoted. So it was also that as new Seventh-day Adventists joined our church, they too became more and more subject to the new theology changeover (metamorphosis) did not take place overnight. As with the original trinity doctrine it took time and death to do it. Again this is a repeating of history. How this change came about we shall discover in later sections.

We shall look now at how trinitarianism was established within Christianity. In particular we shall take note of the role that was played by Theodosius the Great (Theodosius I). He was the Roman Emperor that enforced trinitarianism by state decrees. His was quite a substantial contribution.

The Holy Spirit completes the trinity

In the Creed of Nicaea, it was only said “we believe in the Holy Spirit” whilst 56 years later at the Council of Constantinople (AD 381), the Holy Spirit was also deemed consubstantial (of the same substance) with the Father and the Son. In his well-read book “Christian Theology – An introduction”, Alister McGrath noted

“By the second half of the fourth century, the debate concerning the relation of the Father and the Son gave every indication of having been settled. The recognition that Father and Son were “of one being” settled the Arian

controversy, and established a consensus within the church over the divinity of the Son.” (Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology – An introduction*, page 324, ‘The doctrine of the trinity’)

We shall see later that during this time period mentioned here by McGrath, this controversy was far from being settled. I can find no evidence of this in history. The creed itself settled nothing. The fact is that it was not the divinity of Christ that was in question at Nicaea but His coeternity with the Father and His immutability. Regarding the latter, we noted in the previous section that the creed was formulated in such a way that it was made to appear impossible for the Son of God to experience change or cease to exist. We noted also that the Christian church had always worshipped Christ as God, also that it was the “of one being” part of the creed that was reluctantly agreed to by the bishops at Nicaea (this is the part of the creed that was included to defeat Arius). Even though most of the bishops at the council signed the creed, in the Christian Church as a whole there was no consensus over it. McGrath explained

“But further theological construction was necessary. What was the relation of the Spirit to the Father? And to the Son? There was a growing consensus that the Spirit could not be omitted from the Godhead.” (*Ibid*)

At the Council of Constantinople, the Holy Spirit was included in the “one being” of God thus was formed the trinity doctrine. The latter was a new concept in Christianity. Certainly it was not something that had been held previously as standard (the norm). This is why it caused so much controversy and rebellion. McGrath concluded

“The Cappadocian fathers, especially Basil of Caesarea, defended the divinity of the Spirit in such persuasive terms that the foundation was laid for the final element of Trinitarian theology to be put in its place. The divinity and coequality of Father, Son, and Spirit had been agreed; it now remained to develop Trinitarian models to allow this understanding of the Godhead to be visualized.” (*Ibid*)

Regarding the Holy Spirit, the Rev. A. R. Whitham said the same.

“The question of the divinity of the Holy Spirit had not been raised at Nicaea; but it called for definition, as to deny it would be a logical deduction from Arianism.” (A. R. Whitham, *The History of the Christian Church*, page 232, ‘Julian and the pagan reaction’)

The Council of Constantinople was held to reaffirm and substantiate, as well as to further elaborate, the creed previously formulated at Nicaea. The latter was where the Son was deemed consubstantial and coeternal with the Father. Those who objected to this creed are generally known as Arians although all too often this terminology is very much misused and abused. This we noted in the previous two sections.

History again has repeated itself. I say this because within Seventh-day Adventism, the very first move to introduce trinitarianism into its ranks was by bringing in trinitarian concepts of Christ (as at Nicaea). The next move was to make the Holy Spirit a person like God and Christ (as at Constantinople). Concerning the changed Holy Spirit within Seventh-day Adventism, we shall see how this happened in future sections – in particular section forty-four.

It is very interesting to note that during the latter part of the 4th century, which was shortly after the Council of Constantinople, the Roman Emperor Theodosius made the Christian religion, complete with its newly formed trinity doctrine, the state religion of Rome.

“Theodosius promoted Nicene Trinitarianism within Christianity and Christianity within the empire. In 391 he declared Christianity as the only legitimate imperial religion, ending state support for the traditional Roman religion.” (*Wikipedia free online encyclopaedia, ‘Theodosius 1’*)

This was one huge step in taking away from the Roman Empire what Christianity generally terms paganism. This was achieved by substituting in its place a philosophical/speculative brand of Christianity. In other words, during the 4th century, one form of paganism was taken away and another form instituted. This included the trinity doctrine. It was also the first time that any type of official alliance between the state and the Church was formed although the Emperor Constantine had previously paved the way for it. This establishing of the trinity doctrine was an integral part of the establishing of the Roman Catholic Church (the Papacy). This teaching of the trinity is its central belief.

For today’s Seventh-day Adventist, all of this should prompt a study of the little horn and the daily of the prophecy of Daniel chapter eight but this is something that is beyond the scope of this paper. This move by Theodosius to rid paganism from the Roman Empire is an integral part of what was once the accepted understanding, within Seventh-day Adventism, of the taking away of the daily (see Daniel 8:11-13). This can be seen in S. N. Haskell’s *The Story of the Prophet Daniel*.

“Paganism — the "daily" of Dan. 8:12 — was taken away, it is true, and Rome became nominally a Christian empire. Her emperor professed the name of Christ, and carried before his army the banner of the cross. Decrees were issued causing men to worship according to the dictates of Rome. Then it was that man — the emperor — and the empire attempted to exalt themselves above the God of heaven. The principles of Lucifer himself had crowded out the truth of Christ, and, as was shown to Daniel, the truth was cast down to the ground.” (*S. N. Haskell, The Story of the Prophet Daniel, page 128, Chapter 9, ‘The eighth chapter of Daniel’ 1908*)

In the early 1900’s another understanding of the daily was introduced. A minister by the name of Conradi (1856-1939) initially promoted it. At the age of 76 (1932)

he left Seventh-day Adventism to become a minister in the Seventh-day Baptist Church.

The Roman Emperor Theodosius

Often referred to as Theodosius the Great, the Roman Emperor Theodosius 1 was brought up in the Christian faith. He was an avid supporter of the Creed of Nicaea. Along with the Emperor Gratian (AD 359-383) who had promoted him to emperorship, he decreed that all the churches be handed over to those who upheld it. These today we would call the trinitarians. This is how trinitarianism was initially inculcated into the Christian Church. It was accomplished by order of the state. This was an amalgamation of church and state. Within Christianity it was also the beginning of state decreed religious intolerance. As is taught within Seventh-day Adventism, this is how it will be in the last days immediately before Jesus returns. This again will be a repeating of history.

As a matter of passing interest here, Theodosius was the first Roman Emperor not to take to himself the pagan title of 'Pontifex Maximus'. Gratian took it but relinquished it.

The Pontifex Maximus was the high priest of the College of Pontiffs. This was the most important priesthood of Roman State religion (paganism). They were overseers of the entire Roman religious system. After publicly professing Christianity, the emperor Constantine had retained this title. The 'college' itself was regarded as adviser to the state in matters of religion and was therefore very powerful. The Pontifex Maximus was a very powerful man.

It is also interesting that Pontifex Maximus is one of the titles of the Pope. Some say that during the transitional period of Rome from paganism to Christianity, Pope Damasus 1 (c. AD 305-383) was the first Bishop of Rome to assume it although others say he only took the title of 'Pontifex'. It certainly appears that Pope Gregory 1 (c. AD 540-604) was the first to officially employ it to the head of the Roman Catholic Church. Since that time, this has been the title of all the popes. Unusual for a Roman Emperor, Theodosius was baptised early in life. This was in AD 380. It appears that this is because he had contracted a life-threatening illness. Generally speaking, baptism was 'deferred' (postponed) until death was thought to be imminent. Needless to say, Theodosius was baptised by what we would term today a 'trinitarian' bishop.

Theodosius ordered that to all who would not submit to the Creed of Nicaea, certain *incentives* would be given. This was in order to persuade them to accept it. These incentives came in the form of threats of limited privileges. In his *Decline and fall of the Roman Empire*, Edward Gibbon quoted the words that Theodosius spoke immediately following his baptism (this was regarded as an edict). He said

“We authorize the followers of this doctrine [the trinity] to assume the title of Catholic Christians; and as we judge, that all others are extravagant

madmen, we brand them with the infamous name of Heretics; and declare that their conventicles shall no longer usurp the respectable appellation of churches." (*Edward Gibbon, The Decline and fall of the Roman Empire, Volume 3 page 8*)

Here we can see that "Heretics" and "extravagant madmen" were the names given to all who would not profess the trinity faith. We shall see later that their meetings were condemned. Notice Theodosius said that from that time on (AD 380), all trinitarians should be called "Catholic Christians". Theodosius added

"Besides the condemnation of divine justice, they [the non-trinitarians] must expect to suffer the severe penalties, which our authority, guided by heavenly wisdom, shall think proper to inflict upon them." (*Ibid*)

This combination of church and state (a religio-political power) is depicted here as being correctors of those who would not accept the Christian (trinity) faith, eventually known as the true faith. It seems that for a while, Theodosius was happy to tolerate paganism within his empire but gradually deemed it illegal. Thus he paved the way for Roman Catholicism to become the dominant religion. In AD 391 he decreed trinitarian Christianity to be the state religion of Rome. This is a very important date and happening in Christian history.

After his triumphant entry into Constantinople in AD 380, one of the first things that Theodosius did was to expel a non-Nicene bishop by the name of Demophilus. The latter was someone whom the non-conformists had elected to office ten years earlier although it must be said that the emperor did give this bishop the opportunity to repent and change his faith. Nevertheless, Demophilus bravely resisted the offer and was subsequently deposed. The emperor immediately handed over the churches to Gregory of Nazianzus. He was the leader of a small group who had been upholding the creed of Nicaea. Later at the Council of Constantinople, he in turn was deposed and Nectarius was elected as bishop. Regarding the words of Theodosius at his baptism Gibbon said

"The Catholics of Constantinople were animated with joyful confidence by the baptism and edict of Theodosius; and they impatiently waited the effects of his gracious promise. Their hopes were speedily accomplished; and the emperor, as soon as he had finished the operations of the campaign, made his public entry into the capital at the head of a victorious army. The next day after his arrival, he summoned Damophilus [Demophilus] to his presence, and offered that Arian prelate the hard alternative of subscribing the Nicene creed, or of instantly resigning, to the orthodox believers, the use and possession of the episcopal palace, the cathedral of St. Sophia, and all the churches of Constantinople." (*Gibbon, The decline and Fall of the Roman Empire", Volume 5 page 9*)

Gibbon later said

*“The zeal of Damophilus, which in a Catholic saint would have been justly applauded, embraced, without hesitation, a life of poverty and exile, and his removal was immediately followed by the purification of the Imperial city.”
(Ibid)*

For over 50 years, the churches of Constantinople had been predominantly non-trinitarian but because of the edict of AD 380, they soon came to be known as orthodoxy (trinitarian) or Catholic. This was Roman Catholicism in the making.

“About six weeks afterwards, Theodosius declared his resolution of expelling from all the churches of his dominions the bishops and their clergy who should obstinately refuse to believe, or at least to profess, the doctrine of the council of Nice.” (Ibid)

The Council of Constantinople

In the summer of AD 381, Theodosius ordered the Council of Constantinople. This was where the Creed of Nicaea was endorsed and the Holy Spirit was officially included as part of the consubstantiality of God.

From that time on, only trinitarians were welcome in the churches. All who opposed this creed were classified as heretics. Certainly they were not allowed in the pulpit. Any opinions other than that of trinitarianism were not tolerated. Only those who were prepared to confess a belief in the consubstantiality of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were regarded as truly Christian (this is they actually believed this newly formed teaching or not). All others were considered heretics. Hence we have in a nutshell how the trinity doctrine was initially formulated and enforced. These same principles appear to be within Seventh-day Adventism today. Again this is a repeating of history.

It does appear that up to this time (the 4th century), the Holy Spirit was not considered a person like God and Christ. I say this because if He had been regarded as such, it is more than likely He would have been included in this consubstantiality at Nicaea.

The semi-Arian churches were handed over to what had become to be known as the Catholics although it has been reported that the latter were so small in number when compared with the semi-Arians that they found difficulty in filling very few of the churches let alone all the ones that were handed over to them. Time changed this situation. Under the auspices of Rome, the Catholics grew in numbers.

All the meetings of the non-trinitarian (so called heretics) were officially banned. This was whether these meetings were private or public. Any buildings used for this purpose were immediately confiscated. The non-trinitarians were also banned from holding civil office. Such was the venom of the now Catholic Church against those who would oppose their new trinitarian theology. This excommunication was not only religious but also civil.

Much more legislation was decreed against the heretics but enough has been given here to show how trinitarianism was established within what had now become the state religion of Rome. In the form of Catholicism, Christianity had now become a religio-political power. The Encyclopedia of Religion sums up this history this way (reflecting on the edicts of Theodosius)

“Those who hold the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to be one godhead in equal majesty are catholic Christians. Others are heretics who will be struck by the divine vengeance as well as by the imperial action undertaken according to heaven’s arbitration.” (*Encyclopedia of Religion, Theodosius, Volume 14 page 444*)

After saying that on January AD 381 the emperor had issued a law stipulating that the name of the one true God was to be upheld as well as the Nicene faith, it says

“A person of Nicene faith and a true catholic is one who confesses the omnipotent God, and Christ His Son, God under one name, and who does not violate the Holy Spirit by denial” (*Ibid*)

Gibbon, in his appraisal of the same part of Christian history added

“His [Theodosius’s] lieutenant, Sapor, was armed with the ample powers of a general law, a special commission, and a military force; and this ecclesiastical revolution was conducted with so much discretion and vigor, that the religion of the emperor was established, without tumult or bloodshed, in all the provinces of the East.” (*Gibbon, The decline and Fall of the Roman Empire”, Volume 3 page 9*)

This same historian concluded

“The writings of the Arians, if they had been permitted to exist, would perhaps contain the lamentable story of the persecution, which afflicted the church under the reign of the impious Theodosius; and the sufferings of their holy confessors might claim the pity of the disinterested reader.” (*Ibid*)

Notice here the remark regarding the destruction of the writings of those who opposed the trinity (“the Arians”). This is why the precise details of their beliefs and their reasons for holding them are today not very well known to us. If they had not been destroyed, then we would have a far different picture of what was really believed. It may even have been seen that they were very much in harmony with the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism - including Ellen White. With respect to the results of the Council of Constantinople Gibbon said

“The decrees of the council of Constantinople had ascertained the true standard of the faith; and the ecclesiastics, who governed the conscience of Theodosius, suggested the most effectual methods of persecution.” (*Ibid*)

Here we come back to the thought of correctors of the faith. The trinity doctrine had now become “the true standard” of the Christian faith, meaning that by which everything else would be judged. This was the trinity doctrine. He then explains

“In the space of fifteen years, he [Theodosius] promulgated at least fifteen severe edicts against the heretics; more especially against those who rejected the doctrine of the Trinity; and to deprive them of every hope of escape, he sternly enacted, that if any laws or rescripts should be alleged in their favor, the judges should consider them as the illegal productions either of fraud or forgery. The penal statutes were directed against the ministers, the assemblies, and the persons of the heretics; and the passions of the legislator were expressed in the language of declamation and invective.”
(*Ibid*)

Following this statement, there followed the results of implementing these edicts but it is too much to quote here. I will allow the readers of this paper to conduct their own research and therefore draw their own conclusions. E. Glenn Hinson summed up the situation this way

“Theodosius himself, therefore, deserves credit for turning the empire into a fully Christian state. Invited by Gratian to share the rule in 379, he did not take long to act. In February 380, he issued the edict *Cunctos populos* commanding all the peoples under his rule to follow the form of religion handed down by the apostle Peter to the Romans and followed by Damasus, Bishop of Rome, and Peter, Bishop of Alexandria. In sum, that would mean to believe in “the doctrine of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one deity of equal majesty and pious trinity.” Those who adhered to such faith could call themselves Catholic Christians, but others must be designated demented and barbarian and heretical and be stricken first by divine vengeance and then by imperial action in accordance with the will of heaven (*Cod. Theod. XVI.1.2.*). (*Ibid*)

On the same page Hinson wrote

“Shortly after his arrival at Constantinople, at any rate, Emperor Theodosius began to remove Arians and replace them with bishops who accepted the Nicene Creed. In Constantinople itself, Arianism had gotten a strong grip, and Theodosius had to weather a popular storm against his replacement of Demophilus with Gregory of Nazianzus. Soldiers had to protect the saintly Gregory on his way to the Church of the Apostles. The empire, still unsettled by controversy between Arians and Nicenes, Theodosius convened the Second Ecumenical Council at Constantinople to ratify conclusions he had already reached. In a special rescript in January 381, he denied heretics any place to celebrate the mysteries and prohibited their assembly. The name of the one supreme God alone was to be celebrated everywhere in accordance with the Nicene faith.” (*Ibid*)

In his *Truth Triumphant*, Benjamin Wilkinson noted

“The burning question of the decades succeeding the Council of Nicaea was how to state the relations of the Three Persons of the Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The council had decided, and the Papacy had appropriated the decision as its own. The personalities of the Trinity were not confounded, and the substance was not divided. The Roman clergy claimed that Christianity had found in the Greek word homoousios (in English, "consubstantiality") an appropriate term to express this relationship.

Then the papal party proceeded to call those who would not subscribe to this teaching, Arians, while they took to themselves the title of Trinitarians. An erroneous charge was circulated that all who were called Arians believed that Christ was a created being. This stirred up the indignation of those who were not guilty of the charge.” (*Benjamin Wilkinson, Truth Triumphant, Chapter 7, 'Patrick, organizer of the church in the wilderness in Ireland'*)

It is very true to say that trinitarians today still maintain that those who do not believe in the tenets of the trinity doctrine believe that Christ is a “created being”. This again is history repeating itself. The trinity doctrine was brought in under a very dark cloud of decrees, persecutions and lies. It is no wonder that J. N. Andrews, whom many believe was perhaps the ablest theologian ever seen in the Seventh-day Adventist Church (he was an anti-trinitarian) said regarding the trinity doctrine

“This [trinity] doctrine destroys the personality of God and his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. The infamous, measures by which it was forced upon the church which appear upon the pages of ecclesiastical history might well cause every believer in that doctrine to blush” (*J. N. Andrews, Review and Herald 'The Fall of Babylon' March 6th 1855 Vol. 6 No. 24 page 185*)

The aftermath

History attests that throughout the centuries following the Council of Constantinople there was an ongoing dispute between the trinitarians and the non-trinitarians. This was as the trinitarianism, established and embellished at Constantinople, became the centrality of faith of the Roman Catholic Church. This in turn became the recognised orthodoxy of Christianity although not all Christians accepted it.

The history of these centuries would be far too much for this paper to detail, suffice to say that the Roman Catholic Church regarded itself as the upholders of this trinity faith, also the correctors of those who did not hold to it. They continually persecuted those who would not submit to it. So it was that during those years we call the dark and middle ages, this same denomination became the greatest power on earth. With a Pontifex Maximus as its head, it became the

scourge of all who for their beliefs would adhere to Bible alone (Sola Scriptura). The latter in principle were the true Protestants. Regarding those who would not accept this new trinitarian faith, it says in the Encyclopedia of Religion

“Trinitarian heretics, like the various followers of Arius, were cajoled and coerced.” People who in the minds of the legislators insulted God by apostatising from Christianity or following the teachings of Mani were fiercely attacked.” (*Encyclopedia of Religion, Volume 14, page 444, Theodosius*)

The “Christianity” mentioned here was trinitarian Christianity. As the 5th century approached, this was the situation within Roman Empire Christianity. All of this paved the way in the development of Roman Catholicism. In his book *The two republics* A. T. Jones said

“On his part Theodosius was all this time doing all he could to second the efforts of the church to secure unanimity of faith, and to blot out all heresy.” (*A. T. Jones, The Two republics’, page 193, Chapter XVI, ‘The Catholic Faith re-established*)

Jones then quotes the historian Gibbon from his *Decline and fall of the Roman Empire* (we noted this above)

"In the space of fifteen years he promulgated at least fifteen severe edicts against the heretics, more especially against those who rejected the doctrine of the Trinity." (*Ibid*)

“In these edicts it was enacted that any of the heretics who should usurp the title of bishop or presbyter, should suffer the penalty of exile and confiscation of goods, if they attempted either to preach the doctrine or practice the rites of their "accursed" sects. A fine of about twenty thousand dollars was pronounced upon every person who should dare to confer, or receive, or promote, the ordination of a heretic.” (*Ibid*)

Such was the way that the trinitarian faith was established within Christianity. This was the taking away of pagan Rome (the daily of Daniel chapter eight) and the establishing of Papal Rome.

The trinity in prophecy

We now need to spend a little time with regard to the trinity doctrine and Bible prophecy. This is particularly as it concerns the Roman Catholic religion. This is because as we have seen from the above, the establishment of both trinitarianism and the papacy went hand in hand.

The prophecy in question here is the one found in Daniel chapter seven. This is where, as it came up amongst the other ten horns (divided Europe) of the fourth beast (Rome), we see the activities of its little horn. This will help us to

understand a little bit more of the development of the trinity doctrine - also more about the development of the Papacy. As we have seen above, the church at the time of Theodosius was the Papacy in the making.

Seventh-day Adventists have historically identified this little horn of Daniel chapter seven with the Papacy although it must be said that they do not believe this to be representative of Roman Catholics as individuals. Rather they see this as both the organisation itself and its beliefs (Seventh-day Adventists regard the Roman Catholic teachings as a substitute for the true gospel of Jesus Christ).

So what does this little horn of Daniel chapter 7 have to do with the doctrine of the trinity and persecution? In Daniel 7:8 it says

“I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things.” Daniel 7:8

In their understanding of Bible prophecy, Seventh-day Adventists have always recognised that the ten horns of this beast are the divisions of the Roman Empire. This they say was the outcome of the break up, by AD 476, of this great iron monarchy. Notice here that this “[little horn](#)” and the plucking up by the roots of “[three of the first horns](#)” are associated together.

Many historians I have read have agreed that these three horns were the Germanic tribes of the Vandals, the Heruli and the Ostrogoths. These were the three that were “[plucked up by the roots](#)”, meaning their power and influence taken away. This was when the Papacy ascended to power during the fifth and sixth centuries. So why did these three horns get “[plucked up](#)”? What did this have to do with the rise of the Papacy and the trinity doctrine?

Regarding their Christian beliefs, these Germanic tribes were Arian or perhaps better said semi-Arian (non-trinitarian), meaning of like faith of Arius (maybe even exactly the same) who himself was of the school of Lucian (see previous section). This means that these three tribes were standing in the way of the advancement of the Roman Catholic Church whose main belief was, and still is today, trinitarianism (think back to Theodosius and the making of the Papacy in the previous century). As it says with reference to the plucking up of these three tribes in the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary

“Among the principal obstructions to the rise of papal Rome to political power were the Heruli, the Vandals, and the Ostrogoths. All three were supporters of Arianism, which was the most formidable rival of Catholicism.”
(*Seventh-day Adventist Bible commentary, Volume 4, page 826, 1966*)

Notice here the use of the word “[Arianism](#)”. As has been said before, anything that is not in harmony with the trinity doctrine is generally attributed to Arius and

is therefore labelled as such. This is regardless of what it may be.

Whilst we may not know precisely what these Arian tribes believed, we do have a very good idea of what constituted this particular part of their faith. This is because they derived their faith from Ulfilas (c. AD 310-388) who lived during the time period when the semi-Arian faith was most dominant within Christianity (mid to the late 4th century). As Whitham says in his history of the Christian Church

“Christianity had already reached the earliest of the new invaders. The Goths, though Arians, as taught by Ulfilas, had a profound respect for Christianity, and they were to some extent permeated by Roman civilisation.” (Rev. A. R. Whitham, *The history of the Christian Church*, page 296, ‘*The fall of the western Empire*’)

Most historians agree that Ulfilas, also called the apostle to the Goths, created the Gothic alphabet. He also translated the Scriptures from the Greek for the Goths. He was also of the school of Lucian, the same school of thought from where Arius derived his beliefs (see previous section where Arius described his friend Eusebius of Nicomedia as a “fellow-Lucianist”).

There is no doubt that these Germanic tribes held beliefs concerning God and Christ that were not trinitarian. Many even believe that they were seventh-day (Saturday) Sabbath keepers. Up to this time, Romanism would not have affected the beliefs of these people. In other words, the Christian faith that these Arian tribes espoused would have been far removed from the Greek philosophy (human reasoning) that had been introduced into Christianity. This is especially with respect to the personalities of the Godhead. Ulfilas would have taught these tribes what is said in the Scriptures alone (*Sola Scriptura*) without the speculative trinitarian philosophy. In his *Truth Triumphant* Benjamin Wilkinson explains

“Lucian of Antioch was at the height of his career when Ulfilas was a lad. Asia Minor, the homeland of his ancestors, was, in the early years of the church, the scene of strong opposition to the allegorizing ecclesiastics who had been loaded with imperial favours by Constantine, and who were antagonistic to Lucian’s translation of the Bible and his system of teaching.” (Benjamin George Wilkinson Ph.D, *Truth Triumphant*, pages 140-141, ‘*How the church was driven into the wilderness*’, 1944)

Wilkinson also said on page 141 of his book

“Ulfilas was called to take his choice. He decided not to walk with the allegorizers.” (*Ibid*, page 141)

We too today have to make our choices. Will we walk with the allegorizers or not? Wilkinson also said on the page following

“Because Ulfilas belonged to the church which had refused to accept the

extreme speculations concerning the Trinity, there was a gulf between his converts and those who followed Rome.” (*Ibid*)

By the late 5th century and early 6th century, the trinity doctrine had certainly become the central (cardinal) belief of the Roman Catholic Church. It is also true to say that all those who opposed it were counted as enemies to the Christian faith (in other words, they were considered heretics). This is why the three horns of Daniel 7 were “plucked up” (see above). It was to remove this non-trinitarianism (the so-called heretics). It was also to make the way for advancement of both trinitarianism and the Papacy. It was AD 538 that was the beginning of the 1260 years of domination by the Roman Catholic Church. Wilkinson wrote in the final chapter of his book

“When the prophet previously (Daniel 7:25) dealt with this same treading underfoot of the saints, he began the 1260-year period with the plucking up of the third of three horns which were to be plucked up.” (*Benjamin George Wilkinson Ph.D, Truth Triumphant, page 382, ‘The remnant church’, 1944*)

This plucking up of the third horn was in AD 538. This was when the Ostrogoths were driven from Rome although they did live to fight another day.

This leaves us with just one more question to answer. Is it possible that this great power (the Papacy) actually managed to get the most important doctrine correct (meaning the trinity doctrine) and yet managed to get the majority (if not all) of its other teachings wrong? Read now what the Roman Catholic Church says about the trinity doctrine. They tell their adherents

“The mystery of the trinity is the central doctrine of Catholic faith. Upon it are based all the other teachings of the church.” (*Handbook for Today’s Catholic, page 16*)

This tells us that what we as Seventh-day Adventists consider to be the erroneous and non-Christian doctrines held by the Roman Catholic Church (these are such as the immortality of the soul, Sunday Sacredness, the sacrifice of the mass, the punishment of eternal burning, purgatory, Mariology and the immaculate conception etc), Roman Catholicism says that they all have their basis in the doctrine of the trinity. This is something to which Seventh-day Adventists today should be giving very careful consideration - even if their understanding of the trinity is not exactly the same as the one espoused by the Roman Catholic Church. At least the basic principles are exactly the same, meaning trinity essentialness (three co-eternal divine personalities in the one being of God). See section six for more details. In 1888, J. H. Waggoner wrote

“The Gothic kings were Arians; and in those days the people professed the faith of their kings. But the Church of Rome was the representative of the Trinitarian faith. This faith was indorsed by the Council of Nice, where the primacy was conferred upon the bishop of Rome. This forever bound the

bishop of that see to that faith. The primacy and the doctrine of the Trinity were inseparable. That church was the chief support of what was then called the orthodox faith, while the Goths were held to be heretics.” (J. H. Waggoner, *Eden to Eden – A historic aid prophetic study*, 1888)

The establishing of the Papacy

From its beginnings, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has always associated the plucking up of the three horns with the Papacy. As early as 1854, James White wrote

"In the year of our Lord 493, the Heruli in Rome and Italy were conquered by the Ostrogoths. In 534, the Vandals, who were under Arian influence, were conquered by the Greeks, for the purpose of establishing the supremacy of the Catholics. The Ostrogoths, who held possession of Rome, were under an Arian Monarch, who was an enemy to the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome; hence, before the decree of Justinian, (a Greek emperor at Constantinople,) could be carried into effect, by which he had constituted the Bishop of Rome head of all the churches, the Ostrogoths must be plucked up. This conquest was effected by Justinian's army in the month of March, 538; at which time, the Ostrogoths, who had retired without the city, and besieged it in their turn, raised the siege and retired, leaving the Greeks in possession of the city; thus the third horn was plucked before Papacy, and for the express purpose too of establishing that power.” (James White *Review and Herald*, 14th November 1854, ‘Exposition of Daniel VII or The vision of the fourth beast’)

Uriah Smith had also said in his commentary on the book of Daniel

“The edict of the emperor Justinian, dated A. D. 533, made the bishop of Rome the head of all the churches. But this edict could not go into effect till the Arian Ostrogoths, the last of the three horns that were plucked up to make room for the papacy, were driven from Rome, and this was not accomplished, as already shown, till A. D. 538. The edict would have been of no effect had this latter event not been accomplished; hence from this latter year we are to date, as this was the earliest point where the saints were in reality in the hands of this power.” (Uriah Smith, *Thoughts critical and practical on the Book of Daniel*, chapter vii page 169, ‘The four beasts’ 1883, second edition)

It was also said in 1898 in the Seventh-day Adventist publication *The American Sentinel*

“In attaining to supremacy the little horn was to uproot or subdue three of these kingdoms. Chap. 7:9, 24.

Very plain is the prophecy concerning this matter; equally plain is the history showing the fulfillment.

The Roman Empire was divided into ten kingdoms between the years 356 and 476 A.D. Between 476 and 538 A.D. three of these kingdoms were plucked up, and this was done by the papacy — the Roman Catholic Church. And as a testimony to this fact the pope to this day wears on his tiara a triple crown.” (C. H. Keslake, *American Sentinel*, March 10th 1898, page 149, ‘Whose is the “Mark”?’)

This was much the same as Haskell wrote in his book *The Story of the Prophet Daniel*. He said with reference to the work of the little horn of Daniel chapter 7

“Justinian, the emperor, whose seat was at Constantinople, working through his general Belisarius, was the power that overthrew the three kingdoms represented by the three horns, and the reason for their overthrow was their adherence to Arianism in opposition to the orthodox Catholic faith. The details of the overthrow,” (S. N. Haskell, *The Story of the Prophet Daniel*, page 117, Chapter 8, ‘The Seventh Chapter of Daniel’. 1908)

He later commented

“The contest between Arianism and the orthodox Catholicism was the means of enthroning the papacy.” (*Ibid* page 266, Chapter 16, ‘The Mystery of Iniquity’, 1908)

LeRoy Froom also wrote in *The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers*

“Then Justinian passed his edict constituting the Bishop of Rome the head of “all the holy churches.” Three of the ten horns -- the Arian Heruli, Vandals, and Ostrogoths--were plucked up before him. As long as they held Rome, the decree “could not be carried into effect.”” (LeRoy Froom. *The prophetic faith of our fathers*, Volume 4, pages 593-594, ‘Momentum increases as conferences progress’)

Froom also said on page 505 of Volume 1 concerning Justinian

“His [Justinian’s] achievements profoundly affected the whole future of Europe, and his intervention altered the entire status of the bishops of Rome. His victories were gained over people who to a large extent adhered to the teachings of Arius. Being subjugated by the sword, they foreswore Arianism and became followers of ‘the doctrine of Athanasius, thereby enhancing the power of the bishop of Rome as they came automatically under his authority. And they found it to their interest to yield to the ecclesiastical leadership of the Roman pontiff. So the misfortunes of the times, however calamitous to others, were in all respects favorable to the papal ambitions.” (LeRoy Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers*, Volume 1, page 505, ‘Gradual emergence of the papal power’)

Note that this was in the 6th century AD. Later in the same chapter Froom wrote

“The beginning of the era of the headship of the Roman bishop over all the churches was not marked by some overmastering event in papal advance, or by an assumption of supreme ecclesiastical control; at that time the pope was hampered by the fact that Arian Ostrogoths were ruling Italy. Rather, it was only by the removal of the impediment of the Ostrogothic control, as their besieging forces were cleared away from Rome, that the Roman pontiff was free to exercise the jurisdiction now legally provided for through the imperial code of Justinian.” (*Ibid page 514-515*)

We find this in a report of the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Conference held in 1952

“The Ostrogoths under their king Theodoric had been very tolerant in Italy. But the Papacy could not endure the rule of an Arian king. It disapproved Theodoric's kindly treatment of the Jews. It urged upon Justinian the importance of taking away all political power from the Goths. In sending Belisarius, Justinian was making a reality of his theoretical rule of Italy and of Western Europe, and of his sincere desire to suppress Arianism, which he hated. For Justinian was a theologian in his own right and an avowed extirpator of heresy” (*Frank H. Yost, Our Firm Foundation, A report on the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Conference held between September 1-13, 1952, at the Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church, Takoma Park, Maryland, Volume 2 page 668, 'AntiChrist in history and prophecy*)

In *The Message* in January 1948 we find this observation

“Perhaps no other truth in all of Holy Scripture comes to us so marked with the blood of controversy as does the Bible doctrine of the Trinity. History records that ancient nations staked their very existence upon their conception of the Godhead.” (*Robert H. Pierson, The Message, January 1948, 'God the Father'*)

The author Robert Pierson then said

“Three kingdoms, the Heruli, the Vandals, and the Ostrogoths, were blotted from existence during the latter part of the fifth and the early part of the sixth centuries because they refused to accept the orthodox teaching of the ruling church concerning this dogma. Clergymen have been persecuted, exiled, and slain as the tide of favor regarding certain aspects of this subject ebbed and flowed in the early church.” (*Ibid*)

An interesting conversation

Interesting to note is a stenographer's report of a sermon preached by E. W. Farnsworth. This was at a camp meeting in 1904. He related that when he was in a Roman Catholic bookshop enquiring for a book that outlined a “Fair

representation of the Catholic doctrines”, a bishop overheard his request and gave him a gift of a book. Striking up a conversation, Farnsworth asked the bishop if he could relate some of the history of the Roman Catholic Church of the late 4th century. This was when the Arian controversy was still at its height. The stenographers reported

“Then we [Farnsworth and the bishop] engaged in conversation. I asked him to tell me something of the history of the Roman church during the latter part of the third and fourth centuries after Christ, and about the Arian doctrine.” (*W. E. Farnsworth, Australasian Signs of the Times, 20th June 1904, 'History in symbols' Stenographer's report of a sermon preached at the Bathurst camp meeting'*)

Farnsworth continued

“He [the bishop] said "the Aryans were heretics; they were followers of Arius, who preached what was known as the Unitarian doctrine. This doctrine spread quickly amongst the Heruli, the Ostrogoths, and the Vandals. Then the Council of Nice was called, and Arius was condemned as a heretic. Then these three kingdoms were rooted up, through the power of the civil authorities, at the dictation of the church, because they were united in one. These three kingdoms then ceased to exist as independent governments. "The bishop then told me that the pope, when in his official robes, wears a crown which consists of three crowns in one. He said "this triple crown is worn to commemorate the fact that by the Papacy three kingdoms were overthrown. The prophet, speaking of the little horn, said that he should be diverse from the others, and should subdue three kings". (*Ibid*)

Persecution

In one way or another, ever since the inception of the trinity doctrine into Christianity in the 4th century, trinitarians have consistently persecuted those who did not hold to the trinity faith. They generally regarded them as heretics. The record of Christian history shows this much. In *The Great Controversy*, Ellen White penned these words

“When the early church became corrupted by departing from the simplicity of the gospel and accepting heathen rites and customs, she lost the Spirit and power of God; and in order to control the consciences of the people, she sought the support of the secular power. The result was the papacy, a church that controlled the power of the state and employed it to further her own ends, especially for the punishment of "heresy" (*Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy page 443, 'God's law immutable'*)

She also said in the next paragraph

“Whenever the church has obtained secular power, she has employed it to

punish dissent from her doctrines.” (*Ibid*)

We must ask ourselves here, does the spirit of persecution belong to Christ or does it belong to another? The answer I believe is quite apparent.

On the other hand, it does not necessarily follow that the trinity teaching is wrong simply because trinitarians have persecuted those who do not believe it but it does show that there is something very much amiss here. First of all why create a doctrine that is not explicitly stated in Scripture and then proceed to persecute those who refuse to accept it? Is this the Spirit of Christ? Is it the leading of the Holy Spirit? Perhaps we should ask ourselves here, if Christ was with us today in person, would He tell His followers to stigmatise and persecute those who do not believe in this three-in-one trinity theory concerning God? The answer again is reasonably apparent.

It appears therefore that back of it all there is a cunning mastermind who is using the trinity as a covering of so-called Christianity to achieve his ends. In this respect it seems that Christians are not only allowing their common adversary to have his own way but that they are also helping him to achieve his objectives. In 1869, R. F. Cottrell wrote an article called *The Trinity*. His words sum up what should be our attitude towards this doctrine. He wrote (this was after saying that he had never believed the trinity doctrine or ever professed to believe it)

“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 the 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.” (*R. F. Cottrell, Review and Herald, July 6th 1869, ‘The Trinity’*)

We shall now go to section ten. This is where we shall see that because of its changeover to trinitarianism, the Seventh-day Adventist Church today freely admits that its non-trinitarian pioneers could not now join the church that they once pioneered into being. This must be classed as a shocking realisation. We shall also see how the author of these notes first came to a knowledge of this trinity debate and how he also came to realise, much to his surprise and disappointment, that the denomination to which he belonged had not always been trinitarian.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section ten

Rude awakenings

We noted in the previous section that in the 4th century when the trinity doctrine was first introduced into Christianity, it took very heavy persuasion from the state of Rome to establish it. This initially came from the Emperor Theodosius the Great. He was the one who declared this new trinitarian brand of Christianity to be the state religion of Rome. The eventual outcome was that this trinity faith became an integral and indispensable part of the beliefs of what we know today as the Papacy whilst many protestant denominations, although over the years breaking away from some of the beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church, have retained the trinity doctrine.

Some protestant denominations - including the Seventh-day Adventist Church - hold to a modified view of this teaching although the basic premise of God being a trinity (three persons in one indivisible substance) is common to all versions. If it wasn't then it would not be a trinity doctrine – at least not in the accepted theological understanding of it.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has not always been a trinitarian denomination. From its beginnings and throughout its formative years, it was strictly non-trinitarian. It was not until after Ellen White had died (1915) that the trinity doctrine was first introduced into Seventh-day Adventism. It took decades to become established. This is exactly how it initially was within early Christianity – although in the latter it took almost four centuries to become established. It is simply history repeating itself.

When I realised 10 years ago (2000) that the church to which I belonged had not always been a trinitarian denomination, not only did it leave me very confused but also very dismayed. We shall see the reason for this now.

Misconceptions

I can honestly say that up to the year 2000 I had considered myself a confirmed trinitarian but upon beginning my trinity studies that year, I soon came to realise that not only had I misunderstood what was involved in this teaching but also that I held to beliefs that no trinitarian would ever hold. We shall see what these were later.

Up to that time, I had believed that the trinity doctrine was a well-established

teaching - held as a bulwark of the Christian faith to refute the beliefs of those who taught that Christ was not God. The latter were such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Christadelphians etc. I believed also that anyone who did not accept this teaching was probably not even a Christian. Certainly I believed that any denomination that did not teach the trinity was not a Christian denomination. This I have found is as believed today by many pro-trinitarians - even Seventh-day Adventist trinitarians.

Whilst I regarded the trinity doctrine as imperative to upholding the divinity of Christ, I must admit that I did have reservations concerning the Holy Spirit being a person (too much to detail here) but I still taught that He was such. This was because of my dogmatic belief in the trinity. We shall discuss this further in later sections - particularly regarding what was believed by the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism. This includes Ellen White.

I believed also that the Seventh-day Adventist Church had always been a trinitarian denomination. When I found out that this had not been the case I was shocked. This discovery is what prompted me to study this part of our history for myself. I wanted to find out why our pioneers had rejected the trinity doctrine – also how it had eventually become part of the fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventism.

During the early part of my trinity studies (this was after I had been a Seventh-day Adventist for about 25 years) I quickly came to realise that up to the early 1900's, none of our pioneers, including Ellen White, had ever publicly confessed a belief in God being a trinity – at least not as depicted in the trinity doctrine. Upon speaking to other Seventh-day Adventists about my discovery, I soon came to realise that even those who had been church members for a greater length of time than me also had great difficulty in believing it. It appears therefore that up to the 1990's, our church has been somewhat economical in bringing this part of our denominational history to the attention of its members. We shall come back to this point later.

The overall problem is, as we noted in section one, if as Seventh-day Adventists we do not have a correct understanding of our history, then we will not have a reasonable grasp on why, within our denomination today, there is a trinity debate. We also noted in the same section that Ellen White said it was imperative for us to remember how in the past that God had led us. The leading question is - how can we do this if we do not understand our history - or if we have a perverted view of it? We cannot! As we have previously noted, Ellen White did say

“We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and his teaching in our past history”. (Ellen G. White, General Conference Daily Bulletin 29th January 1893, see also General Conference Daily Bulletin 20th February 1899 ‘Extracts from Testimonies’, also Review and Herald 12th October 1905 ‘Lessons from the Life of

*Solomon No. 5 (Order and Organization)' also Life Sketches page 196
'Burden Bearers' 1915)*

Our denominational history should be of the utmost importance to every Seventh-day Adventist. We need to know our roots. This does not only apply to the non-trinitarian/trinitarian issue but also to every other aspect of our faith.

When I began my trinity studies, I was met with many surprises. I came to realise that within our publications, many of our most prominent pioneers had given vent to what can only be described as very strong feelings against the trinity teaching. This indeed was anti-trinitarianism. It was also for me a very rude awakening.

Rude awakenings

The first of my rude awakenings came when I read two articles regarding our non-trinitarian history - both of which were written by those of our leadership. In both of these articles attempts were made to justify our denominational acceptance of the trinity doctrine. This it appears was the purpose of these articles.

George Knight wrote the first article. He is Professor of church history at the Theological Seminary at Andrews University. It was published in the Ministry magazine of October 1993 and was called *Adventists and Change*. Note this title well. In this article George Knight said

“Most of the founders of Seventh-day Adventism would not be able to join the church today if they had to subscribe to the denomination's Fundamental Beliefs. More specifically, most would not be able to agree to belief Number 2, which deals with the doctrine of the Trinity.” (George Knight, 'Ministry' magazine, October 1993, page 10, 'Adventists and Change')

I must admit that when I first read these words I was shocked (remember that up to that time I had believed that an acceptance of the trinity doctrine was essential to being a Christian, also I believed that the denomination to which I belonged had always been trinitarian). Even today I still find George Knight's remarks to be a truly amazing realisation. In order to sense the enormity of its implications, I would ask you to re-read his statement.

George Knight is saying that even if our pioneers wished to do so, they would today be prohibited from becoming Seventh-day Adventists. This he says is because since their death, our denominational beliefs have changed so much that they (the pioneers) would find them unacceptable. As George Knight confesses, this is with particular regard to our present beliefs concerning *“the doctrine of the trinity”*.

To bring this more in keeping with the present attitude of the Seventh-day Adventist Church towards non-trinitarians, allow me to put this another way.

Regarding God, Christ and the Holy Spirit, the beliefs that were once held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church were so much different to what they are now that even if our pioneers wanted to join our church today (which because of our trinitarian beliefs they probably would not want to do so anyway) permission would not be granted to them. This is a most amazing realisation. It has probably even led some Seventh-day Adventists - particularly if they are staunch trinitarians - to wonder if God was actually leading our pioneers.

Whatever else may be gleaned from George Knight's words, we can readily see that one of our current and prominent church historians is freely admitting that the ***vast majority of our pioneers were non-trinitarian.***

Just in passing and from a personal point of view, I would say that George Knight's assessment regarding "most" of our founders not being able to join our church today is rather understated. This is because during my 10 years of study of this subject, I have not found one pioneer, at least not during the time of Ellen White's ministry (1844-1915), who within our publications confessed a belief in the trinity doctrine – although now and again some did use the word trinity to describe the three personalities of the Godhead. From this we can reason that the vast majority of early Seventh-day Adventists – and not just the early pioneers themselves whom we generally think of as a small number of people - would also not wish to join our church today. This is because all of them would have been non-trinitarians. We were a decidedly non-trinitarian denomination.

The first Seventh-day Adventist that I have come across to confess a belief in the trinity - albeit it was done in a private conversation with a conference president - was John Harvey Kellogg. This was in 1903 - which was almost 60 years after our beginnings (1844). For various reasons that we shall deal with later, his beliefs brought a barrage of condemnation from Ellen White.

In speaking out against Kellogg's beliefs, we shall see that there were also warnings from Ellen White not to describe God by using three-in-one trinity illustrations. We know therefore that Ellen White was speaking out against the trinity doctrine although as we noted in section five, never once in her writings did she use the word trinity. We shall look in detail at Kellogg's *conversion* to trinitarianism in section twenty-five.

Another startling statement

The year after George Knight made the above remarks, another leading figure in Seventh-day Adventism made very similar types of statements. This was William Johnsson, then editor (now retired) of the *Advent Review*. In a 1994 article called *Present Truth – Walking in God's light* he boldly asserted

["Some Adventists today think, that our beliefs have remained unchanged over the years, or they seek to turn back the clock to some point when we had everything just right. But all attempts to recover such "historic Adventism" fail in view of the facts of our heritage.](#)

“Adventists beliefs have changed over the years under the impact of present truth. Most startling is the teaching regarding Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord.” (*Ibid*)

Note certain of the observations that William Johnsson makes here.

First of all he says that some Adventists today “think” that over the years our beliefs have remained unchanged. One is left to wonder if this is a confession that in the past, as a denomination, we have not previously made our history very clear to our members. On the other hand it could be being said that this lack of knowledge is because our church members have not studied their denominational history very well. At one time this was quite applicable to me. My misconceptions can also be contributed to believing what someone else had told me. This was when I read LeRoy Froom’s *Movement of Destiny* – believing that this book had revealed the truth concerning our history.

There were two very good reasons why I believed that Froom’s book was an accurate account of our denominational history. One was that Froom himself was considered such a well-respected Seventh-day Adventist (particularly as far as our denominational history and theology was concerned) whilst the other was that as an authentic representation of our history, his book came so highly promoted by our church that I could not fail to be convinced of its accuracy of content. As it was (particularly we shall see this in section fifty-two) the non-trinitarian part of our history was very much misrepresented. This is because the book makes it appear that we had always been a majority trinitarian denomination – which we had not been.

This idea that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has always been a majority trinitarian denomination is totally refuted by William Johnsson. As did George Knight, he is admitting that our church was once predominantly (majority) non-trinitarian.

Later we shall return our thoughts to what William Johnsson describes as the “most startling” change of all that was made to the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. This change concerned our once-held beliefs about Christ. We shall even see that this same author goes to the length of saying that these beliefs were not biblical but false doctrine. This is a very serious allegation. It is also one that before it is believed, does need thorough investigation.

Note that William Johnsson clearly states that the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists “have changed over the years” and - as he puts it - accomplished “under the impact of present truth”. This is why his article is called *Present Truth - Walking in God’s Light*.

It is to this latter thought that we shall now turn our attention. This is because I sincerely believe that it is a very misleading statement - at least with respect to our changeover to trinitarianism. I will now explain why!

Truth never changes

The terminology 'present truth' is usually reserved to describe a happening that is applicable to a particular point of time. This is like the flood in Noah's time, the going into Babylon in Jeremiah's time, also the first advent of Christ at the time of John the Baptist. It is also like the investigative judgment in our time etc. It is also true to say that whichever way 'present truth' is perceived, truth, in itself, never changes. This means that what was true yesterday must be true today therefore it will still be true tomorrow. As it said in the *Review and Herald* of September 23rd 1902

"A TRUTH never derives force by being uttered by any man, however great he may be; nor is it any less weighty when declared by the weakest. Truth, like God, always is, and it always is just what it is, and must be accepted for just what it is, wherever we find it." (*Review and Herald, 23rd September 1902*)

On this basis, it can only be reasoned that non-trinitarianism can never develop into trinitarianism. This is no more than the seventh-day Sabbath (God's designated day of rest) can develop into Sunday. It is like the belief of the immortality of the soul can never develop into the belief of the non-immortality of the soul. The reason for this is because in each of the stated cases, the principles of each of these beliefs, meaning what makes each belief what it is, is diametrically opposed to the other.

What can happen is that a denomination itself can develop. This means that a one-time Sunday-keeping church can develop into a Sabbath-keeping church (or vice-versa) whilst a church that once believed in the immortality of the soul can develop into one that believes in its non-immortality. What can happen also is that a once non-trinitarian denomination can develop into one that is trinitarian. This is exactly what has happened to the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

To put this in another way again - also as far as the Seventh-day Adventist Church is concerned - it was not the belief that developed over the years but the denomination itself, all being accomplished by changing its faith (fundamental beliefs). This is extremely important for us to recognise, therefore we must admit that as a denomination and since the time of our pioneers, we have literally changed our beliefs (changed our faith). This is a fact of history that must never be denied else we shall be ultimately proven to be intending to deceive. This is exactly what William Johnsson was saying.

We can say therefore that whilst the trinity doctrine was not new to Christianity, to Seventh-day Adventists it did become their new theology.

The most startling change of all

To summarise what has been said so far in this section, we have seen that since the time of our pioneers, the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

concerning God, Christ and the Holy Spirit have undergone such a dramatic change that it can only be termed a **complete reversal** of beliefs. This therefore is not a gradual development of truth but rather a startling **change of faith**. Note just what it is that William Johnsson says is the “**Most startling**” change of all. In his article in the Adventist Review (as quoted above) he said

“Most startling is the teaching regarding Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord.” (*William Johnsson, Adventist Review, January 6th 1994, Article ‘Present Truth - Walking in God’s Light’*)

This really is a remarkable statement. I say this because here it is being admitted that what was once our denominational belief concerning Christ, by 1994 it had **been accounted as error and discarded**. Is this a “startling” realisation or not? What is even more startling is that these very same beliefs were those held by our denomination during the time of Ellen White’s ministry. This really is startling. So what were these beliefs? William Johnsson answers this question by saying

“Many of the pioneers, including James White, J. N. Andrews, Uriah Smith and J. H. Waggoner held to an Arian or semi-Arian view - that is, the Son at some point in time, before the creation of our world, was generated by the Father.” (*Ibid*)

If it is going to be called anything at all (although it is not really a very good idea to give it a label), the term semi-Arianism does seem to best describe the preponderant faith of Seventh-day Adventists – at least whilst Ellen White was alive – also for the decades immediately following her death. This is the belief that way back in eternity - too far back for the human mind to comprehend it - the Son of God came forth of the Father. This is the begotten concept. This has been termed as meaning God from God, true God from true God. This belief does not teach that Christ is a created being. The latter is a belief never held as part of the preponderant beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. William Johnsson then said of this begotten belief

“Only gradually did this false doctrine give way to the Biblical truth, and largely under the impact of Ellen Whites writings in statements such as “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. (Desire of ages p 530)” (*Ibid*)

Here we have the very bold claim that concerning the Son of God, our pioneers had been teaching **not “Biblical truth”** but **“false doctrine”**. The man who made this claim was then the editor of the Advent Review. The latter is the flagship publication of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This really is a startling claim to make because all the time that these pioneers were teaching what they believed to be the truth about Christ, they were under the auspices of God’s messenger to the remnant (Ellen White). This would mean - if what William Johnsson is saying is true - our pioneers were teaching error concerning the most important aspect of the Christian faith (who Christ is) but God’s messenger never once said that they were wrong.

This of course leads to asking a very pertinent question. If these beliefs of our pioneers were so very wrong (as was said here by William Johnsson), then why did God allow His people to continue teaching them for such a long period of time? After all, this was taught by our denomination for something like 100 years. It was believed by hundreds of thousands of Seventh-day Adventists all over the world. It was also being taught as the truth to non-Seventh-day Adventists – and promoted in our publications. People were joining the church believing it. The other denominations recognised that this was our denominational belief.

The correcting of God's people on doctrine is one of the major reasons for the manifestation of the spirit of prophecy?

“I recommend to you, dear reader, the Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice. By that Word we are to be judged. God has, in that Word, promised to give visions in the “last days”; not for a new rule of faith, but for the comfort of His people, and to correct those who err from Bible truth. Thus God dealt with Peter when He was about to send him to preach to the Gentiles. (Acts 10)” (*Ellen G. White, Early Writings, page 78, ‘Experience and views, 1882)*

Now you may say that William Johnsson did say that Ellen White corrected the beliefs of the pioneers but you would be wrong. Notice his words very carefully. He says that the beliefs of the pioneers were corrected “[under the impact of Ellen Whites writings](#)” - not by Ellen White herself - and then only “[gradually](#)”. In other words, this change was not made whilst Ellen White was alive but after she was dead. Whilst she was alive, without rebuke from her, Seventh-day Adventists continued to teach their so-called semi-Arianism. This means that whilst Ellen White was alive, she did not see fit to correct the pioneers with respect to their beliefs about Christ. As we shall discover later, she did in fact uphold them in their beliefs. Does this say anything to us today?

Gerhard Pfandl, who is the Associate Director of the Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Research Institute, wrote a paper on the history of the doctrine of the trinity among Seventh-day Adventists. In referring to the statement made in *Desire of Ages* where Ellen White says, “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived” he comments

“These statements clearly describe Christ as God in the highest sense. He is not derived from the Father as most Adventists up to that time believed, nor has divinity been bestowed upon him.” (*Gerhard Pfandl, Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Institute, ‘The doctrine of the trinity among Adventists’ 1999)*

By saying “[derived](#)”, Pfandl is making reference to the begotten Son concept that Seventh-day Adventists held during the time that Ellen White was alive. By the words “[that time](#)”, he is referring to when Ellen White first made this statement (1897). In the next paragraph he says

“In spite of these clear statements from the pen of Ellen White, it took many years before this truth was accepted by the church at large.” (*Ibid*)

The “truth” referred to here is the belief of the co-eternity of Christ with the Father as portrayed in the trinity doctrine (the version held by Seventh-day Adventists) whilst the statements of Ellen White referred to include the one quoted above from *Desire of Ages*. We shall discuss this in later sections. The “many years” part of his statement is correct. After Ellen White had died, trinitarianism took decades to become established within Seventh-day Adventism. Certainly it did not happen overnight. Pfandl continued

“Not only did Uriah Smith, editor of the *Review and Herald*, believe until his death in 1903 that Christ had a beginning, but during the first decades of this century there were many who held on to the view that in some way Christ came forth from the Father, i.e., he had a beginning, and was therefore inferior to Him” (*Ibid*)

Pfandl is referring here again to the belief that Christ is begotten of the Father (God from God as the creeds say) but as we shall see later, although our pioneers certainly did hold to this belief, they did not believe (as Pfandl purports) that the Son of God was inferior to the Father. This is just a straw man that many pro-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists seem to delight in setting up and knocking down. They do so to attempt to make it look as though our pioneers were wrong in what they believed. This is a very unfair and dishonest attack on their beliefs. They believed that Christ was God in the person of His Son. They did not believe Him to be a second or a secondary god.

The truth of the matter is that our non-trinitarian pioneers believed that Christ was equal to the Father. Note that Pfandl says that for the first decades of the 20th century, meaning perhaps 1900 – 1930, “many” as he puts it still held on to this begotten belief. From my own personal studies I would say that this even extended into the 1940’s whilst even in the 1950’s some still held on to it. Seventh-day Adventist ministers can be counted amongst the latter. We shall see this in later sections – especially section forty-eight. Referring to certain discussions that took place at the 1919 Bible Conference, Pfandl also says

“This discussion indicates that twenty years after Ellen White’s clear statement on the eternal divinity of Christ and his absolute equality with the Father, many in the church still held on to the idea that Christ, although divine, had a beginning.” (*Ibid*)

At this 1919 Bible Conference 4 years following the death of Ellen White, W. W. Prescott, a leading administrator in our church, attempted to present ideas of Christ that were not then generally held by Seventh-day Adventists. In the main, this was the view that the Son was co-eternal with the Father. This brought about objections from some (not all) of the delegates. They believed in what was still then the preponderant belief of the church. This belief was that the Son was

begotten of God in eternity, too far back for the human mind to comprehend it (almost forever). As Pfandl points out, this was 20 years after Ellen White made such statements as the one he had quoted from *Desire of Ages*. By this time it is quite apparent that they had not changed their views. As a matter of passing interest here, the discussions of the 1919 Bible Conference, relevant to our trinity studies, are dealt with in sections thirty-five and thirty-six.

All of this begs a question. That question is, did Ellen White believe that the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism were teaching error about Christ?

In the sections that follow, we shall see that during the latter part of her ministry (this was in the early 1900's when attempts were made to change the faith of Seventh-day Adventists) she made it abundantly clear that we should hold on tight to what was then our denominational faith. This was particularly our faith concerning God and Christ. This was when our denominational faith was still non-trinitarian - or as some say today semi-Arian. Ellen White did not regard the beliefs of the pioneers concerning Christ to be in error (false doctrine as William Johnsson put it) else she would not have told them to hold on to their faith. If she had thought that they had been wrong in this respect, she certainly would have corrected them. That much really is a certainty.

There is one more statement from William Johnsson's 1994 article that needs to be noted here.

“Likewise, the trinitarian understanding of God, now part of our fundamental beliefs, was not generally held by the early Adventists. Even today, a few do not subscribe to it”. (*Ibid*)

The term “early Adventists” is not here assigned a time period but as we go through these studies, we shall see that all through the time period of the ministry of Ellen White (1844-1915) and even for decades beyond, this non-trinitarianism was the standard belief of Seventh-day Adventists. Throughout our studies, this one realisation should stand out as a shining beacon. In a similar vein, Angel Manuel Rodriguez, the Director of the Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Research Institute wrote in 2002

“Some Adventists have discovered that practically all of our pioneers were anti-Trinitarian and have concluded that the church today should reject the doctrine of the Trinity. The truth is that the Lord guided this movement to a more biblical understanding of God. Today, based on the Bible, we affirm the truth of one God in a plurality of Persons.” (*Angel Manuel Rodriguez, Article, 'The Holy Spirit and the Godhead, 11th July 2002*)

As we shall discover later, this leading did not take place whilst Ellen White was alive. It is claimed rather that after she died it was realized she had spoken of God as a trinity. This has led many Seventh-day Adventists to ask why this was not realized whilst Ellen White was alive. No satisfactory answer seems to be

forthcoming. Note here that Rodriguez admitted that “practically all of our pioneers were anti-Trinitarian”- also that the Lord guided our denomination to a “more biblical understanding of God”. This is much the same as was said by William Johnsson – that what the pioneers were teaching concerning Christ was not Biblical. This today is the claim made by our church leadership. This is what, as Seventh-day Adventists today, we are being asked to believe. Not all believe it – including the author of these notes.

A changed attitude

Along with this change of beliefs from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism, there also came a change of attitude. This can clearly be seen in an article written by in 1961 by Wadie Farag - published in the *Ministry* magazine. Farag was an evangelist for the Nile Union. By 1961 - more or less - trinitarianism had become established within Seventh-day Adventism. He said

“While one's belief in the historic doctrine of the deity of Christ may seem to some a matter of little consequence, it did not seem so to Christ; and neither does it seem so to the people of God today. Of the twenty-two "fundamental beliefs" found on pages 29-36 of the Church Manual, two of these fundamentals deal with the doctrine of God emphasizing the doctrine of the Trinity. No person refusing the belief in these doctrines could be permitted to become a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Furthermore, any member who denies the Trinity and the divinity of Christ, advocating contrary beliefs, disqualifies himself from membership, and the church has full authority to disfellowship him (see Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine, pages 42-46).” (Wadie Farag, *Ministry*, November 1961, ‘What think ye of Christ?’)

This is quite a statement. Not only is it a far cry from what was once the denomination faith of Seventh-day Adventists but also a far cry from what was once their attitude. It is in fact an intolerant attitude. Notice the reference here to Questions on Doctrine. This was in a section in the book that dealt with the question of what would happen if someone was seeking permission to join the church who denied the trinity, or if someone who is already a member denied it. On page 46 of *Questions on Doctrine* it says (note the chapter title)

“Salvation, then, comes about solely through “faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.” One who refuses to recognize the deity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ can, therefore, neither understand nor experience that divine re-creative power in its fullness. Not only is he disqualified for membership by his very unbelief, but he is already outside the mystic body of Christ, the church. And there would be nothing else for the church to do but to recognize this separation through unbelief, and to act in harmony with the instruction already referred to in the Church Manual.”(Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine, page 46, ‘Deity of Christ and Church Membership’)

This is saying that anyone who does not believe in the deity of Christ is “already outside the mystic body of Christ”. It then relates what it says in the manual

“Section 5 of the reasons given for disfellowshipping a member reads:

Persistent refusal to recognize properly constituted church authority or to submit to the order and discipline of the church.” (*Ibid*)

It later adds

“The historic doctrine of the deity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is a cardinal belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.” (*Ibid*)

Whilst it is true that as a denomination we have never denied the deity of Christ, it must be said that throughout the time of Ellen White’s ministry we did not accept the trinity doctrine. In fact we firmly rejected it. No mention of this is made here in *Questions on Doctrine*. It is also true to say that during the time of Ellen White’s ministry, no one was ever disfellowshipped because they rejected the trinity doctrine. The same could be said of the decades immediately following her death. If it had been the ruling (that non-trinitarians were to be disfellowshipped), then during that time period, the vast majority of Seventh-day Adventists would needed to have been disfellowshipped. This is because during Ellen White’s time and even beyond, our denominational faith was strictly non-trinitarianism. Wadie Farag continued his article by saying

“Those who refuse the doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ claim that these doctrines are illogical and that they are not Biblical. These claims, however, are made abortive from the study of God’s Word, as we shall endeavor to briefly elucidate.” (*Wadie Farag, Ministry, November 1961, ‘What think ye of Christ?’*)

Here we can see it said that the trinity doctrine is directly related to the divinity of Christ. In other words, deny the trinity and it will be said, by the trinitarians, that the divinity of Christ is being denied. This is how it was by the 1960’s. It is still much the same today within Seventh-day Adventism although it is usually said that those who reject the trinity doctrine reject the **full and complete divinity** of Christ. This was a far cry from how it was in Seventh-day Adventism during the ministry of Ellen White (1844-1915). This was when the divinity of Christ was correctly expressed without the use of the trinity doctrine. As J. H. Waggoner once said (he was the Father of E. J. Waggoner of Minneapolis fame)

“Many theologians really think that the Atonement, in respect to its dignity and efficacy, rests upon the doctrine of a trinity. But we fail to see any connection between the two. To the contrary, the advocates of that doctrine really fall into the difficulty which they seem anxious to avoid. (*J. H. Waggoner, ‘The Atonement in Light of Nature and Revelation’, 1884 Edition, chapter ‘Doctrine of a Trinity Subversive of the Atonement’*)

Note specifically here the reference to Christ's death (the atonement) and the trinity. We mentioned this in section seven. Trinitarians do not believe that the divine person of Christ died at Calvary. Waggoner then went on to say concerning the trinitarians

“Their difficulty consists in this: They take the denial of a trinity to be equivalent to a denial of the divinity of Christ. Were that the case, we should cling to the doctrine of a trinity as tenaciously as any can; but it is not the case. They who have read our remarks on the death of the Son of God know that we firmly believe in the divinity of Christ; but we cannot accept the idea of a trinity, as it is held by Trinitarians, without giving up our claim on the dignity of the sacrifice made for our redemption.” (*Ibid*)

As can be seen here, early Seventh-day Adventists did not deny the divinity of Christ. Neither did they think that the value of the atonement rested on the trinity doctrine. In fact they believed that the trinity doctrine derogated the atonement, meaning brought the atonement into disrepute.

During Waggoner's time, an acceptance of the trinity doctrine would have been considered heretical. To some trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists today this may seem an amazing realisation, yet it is true. In *Questions on Doctrine*, just two pages on from where we have just quoted (see above) it said

“Today probably only a minute portion of our membership has ever even heard of any dispute as to whether Christ once had a beginning in the unmeasured aeons of the past. And even the few so-called ‘Arians’ among us - though erring in their theoretical theology of the nature of the relationships of the Godhead - have been as free as their more orthodox brethren of any thought of detracting from the glory and divine lordship of Jesus as Creator, Redeemer, Saviour, and Advocate.” (*Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine, page 48, ‘Deity of Christ and Church Membership’*)

This was in the late 1950's. It does appear from this that the Seventh-day Adventist Church had done a good job of hiding their history. It then said

“Our people have always believed in the deity and pre-existence of Christ, most of them quite likely unaware of any dispute as to the exact relationships of the Godhead. Nor has our public preaching discussed Christology, but has placed the emphasis on the distinctive message of the Lord's coming.” (*Ibid*)

Here again it is said, in the late 1950's, that the majority of Seventh-day Adventists were unaware of their history. I find this a truly amazing statement. It is also said that “Christology” has never been discussed in the preaching of Seventh-day Adventism but rather our whole emphasis had been on the return of Jesus. I will not comment any more on this statement. Christ being God has

always been the centrality of the preaching of Seventh-day Adventism. This is not in question. It was even at the centre of discussions at the famous 1888 General Conference session held at Minneapolis and the 1919 Bible Conference. The article continued

“However, we have statements from Ellen G. White, at least from the 1870’s and 1880’s, on the deity of Christ, and on His oneness and equality with God; and from about 1890 on she expressed herself with increasing frequency and positiveness in an endeavor to correct certain erroneous opinions held by some - such as the literalistic notion that Christ as the “only begotten” Son had, in the remote ages past, had a beginning.” (*Ibid*)

We have noted previously that Ellen White never said that the pioneers were wrong in their beliefs concerning Christ. We have also noted in section eight that she did specifically say that Christ was “a Son begotten in the express image of the Father's person” (*Signs of the Times*, 30th May 1895) also that He was “was made in the express image of his person” (*Review & Herald* 9th July 1895). This was in harmony with the beliefs of her brethren. Here the writers of *Questions on Doctrine* are calling this belief “erroneous opinions” and a “literalistic notion”.

We also noted in section eight that she said that “His divine life could not be reckoned by human computation”, neither could it be “measured by figures” (*Signs of the Times*, 3rd May 1899, ‘*The Word made flesh*’). This latter remark was made by her the year following the publication of the supposedly trinitarian *Desire of Ages*. The writers of *Questions on Doctrine* then asked

“Why did she not make her stronger emphasis from the beginning?” (*Ibid*)

They give as an answer

“Doubtless for the same reason that she advised against pursuing theological controversy with respected but mistaken brethren – for the sake of unity on the main features of our message of the imminent return of Christ, which they all felt called of God to proclaim to the world. No matter how right you are, do not stir up the subject at the present time because it will cause disunity.” (*Ibid*)

There are no quotations given from Ellen White so this information cannot be checked. All that I can say is that I cannot recall reading any such advice by her - particularly concerning the Godhead. Contrary to what some may try to have people believe, Ellen White was in harmony with the beliefs of the pioneers - especially regarding the Godhead. We shall briefly discuss this here although we shall return to this thought in later sections. Before we do this though, I would like to quote the end of this reading.

“Quite possibly our toleration of a few variant theories has not been too high a price to pay for freedom from creedal dogmatism and controversy, and for

unity of spirit and effort in our world task.” (*Ibid*)

These “few variant theories” was the belief that Christ is begotten of the Father. As it was there was nothing “few” about it. This was the preponderant view of Seventh-day Adventism as a whole. This was not disclosed in *Questions on Doctrine*.

In harmony with the church

Regarding her views on Christ, Ellen White was not out of harmony with the denominational faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This is regardless of what some may say to the contrary.

In 1888, at the Minneapolis General Conference, Waggoner had expressed the denominational faith. In a book he wrote called *Christ and His Righteousness* (this book is said to depict his message at Minneapolis) he said

“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; but we know that He was the Divine Word, not simply before He came to this earth to die, but even before the world was created. Just before His crucifixion He prayed, "And now, O Father, glorify thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was." John 17:5. And more than seven hundred years before His first advent, His coming was thus foretold by the word of inspiration: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity." Micah 5:2, margin.” (*E. J. Waggoner, 'Christ and His Righteousness', page 9, 1890*)

Notice here that Waggoner, although quoting from the KJV, did not quote the words “from everlasting” as in the KJV but instead used the margin notes (“from the days of eternity”). This was in keeping with what Seventh-day Adventists then believed concerning Christ. This was that He was begotten (brought forth) of God in eternity. As we shall see in later sections (see section fifteen and section sixteen in particular), Ellen White also quoted the margin notes. In conclusion Waggoner added

“We know that Christ “proceeded forth and come 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.” (*Ibid*)

No matter what version it may be, Waggoner is here denying the trinity doctrine. This is because all versions say that the Son is coeval (of the same age) as the Father. On page 21 he also said

“There was a time when Christ proceeded forth and came from God, from

the bosom of the Father (John 8:42 and 1:18) but that time was so far back in the days of eternity that to finite comprehension it is practically without beginning. But the point is that Christ is a begotten Son and not a created subject.” (*Ibid* pages 21-22)

It can only be asked how much different was this to what Ellen White said (see above)? There is no difference at all. She and Waggoner were in total agreement with each other. Did they both believe that Christ was God? Most assuredly they did. In the same book Waggoner wrote

“Christ “is in the bosom of the Father;” being by nature the very substance of God and having life in Himself, He is properly called Jehovah, the self existing one and is thus styled in Jer. 23:56, where it is said that the righteous Branch, who shall execute judgment and justice in the earth, shall be known by the name of Jehovah-tsidekenu--THE LORD, OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.” (*Ibid* page 23)

Ellen White wrote with respect to John 1:1-3 in 1906

“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.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 5th April 1906, ‘The Word made Flesh’*)

The faith of Seventh-day Adventists, including that of Ellen White, was that Christ is a begotten Son but that did not stop them from believing Him to be God, in fact it enhanced this belief. The Son of God was said to be God in the person of His Son.

We shall now go to section eleven. This is where I will share with you something else that I consider amazing. This was part and parcel of my rude awakenings.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section eleven

Understanding the issues

We noted in section five that as depicted in the trinity doctrine, the three persons (hypostases or personal distinctions) in their oneness are completely inseparable. In brief the three constitute the one trinity God (three-in-one). This lends itself to all sorts of implications that readily constitute the major reason for the present anti-trinitarian movement within Seventh-day Adventism. In this and following sections I shall refer to these implications as startling realisations.

As previously confessed, I once considered myself a passionate trinitarian. This was inasmuch as not only did I believe that the trinity doctrine was the central belief of the Christian faith but also that anyone who did not believe it was probably not even a Christian. Certainly I once said that any non-trinitarian denomination was not part of what is generally termed mainstream Christianity. These outcast denominations would have included such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons and Christadelphians etc. This is also the reasoning of the majority, if not all, of the trinitarian churches.

Study brings a change of thinking

From the very beginning of my studies, I quickly came to realise that although confessing to be a devotee trinitarian, my understanding of this teaching was sadly lacking. I also came to realise that as a Seventh-day Adventist of 27 years experience, I was holding to beliefs that no genuine trinitarian could possibly hold. These were beliefs that from the beginning of my Christian experience (1973) I had regarded as being in harmony with the Scriptures although having said that, I do not know how many Seventh-day Adventists today would confess them. This is particularly so in the light of our trinitarian theology. These were beliefs that Seventh-day Adventists have been led to believe through the spirit of prophecy. Briefly stated these are: -

- By becoming incarnate, the pre-existent Son of God literally vacated Heaven, meaning that He bodily exiled Himself from His Father, also from the companionship of the holy angels. It also means He became subject to all the limitations and liabilities of humanity. This is denied by orthodox trinitarians. They say that in His divinity, the Son (or whatever terminology they use to describe this divine personage), in the substance of the trinity, is always with the Father. Certainly they say that as a divine personality He was never, or even ever could be, subject to the same liabilities as we sinful humans are subjected.

- In the incarnation, the pre-existent Son of God underwent a change of being, meaning a change of existence. This does not mean that in the incarnation His divine nature underwent change, neither does it mean that this nature was mixed with His human nature to form a third nature. What it does mean is that the being of the person - meaning how He exists - became changed. This is inasmuch as because of His adoption of human nature into His divine personality, the Son of God became an individual personality of two natures. By adopting human nature, unlike His existence had been in His pre-existence, this placed the Son of God, for His continued eternal existence, on probation. This meant that although in His pre-existence He had been God essentially, meaning that in the form of God He could not be tempted to sin, die or go out of existence, He did by agreeing to become incarnate, voluntarily choose to forfeit these divine prerogatives. The consequence of all this was that whilst He was in this incarnate condition, He could sin and could die. It also means that if He had sinned, He would have forfeited His attributes of deity - thus He would have lost His eternal existence. Trinitarians would deny that this is even thinkable.

- At Calvary, it was the pre-existent Son of God who died. This is denied by trinitarians. They say that it was only His human nature that died and not the divine personality (person) Himself. This say the trinitarians is because whatever the circumstances, the person of the Son is always alive in the substance of the trinity (meaning in His divinity). The trinitarian will say that because the Son subsists in the one being of God - meaning the indivisible trinity substance (or essence) - He is immortal therefore can never be subject to death. By death, this author means a cessation of interaction with the living, also a total ceasing of all knowledge of everything that is happening in Heaven and on earth. He also means that just as we cannot awake ourselves from death, neither could the Son of God awake Himself from death. In other words, for a resurrection from the grave, the pre-existent Son was totally dependent on someone other than Himself. The orthodox trinitarian will deny that the divine Christ was ever in this condition.

- In His pre-existence, the second person of the Godhead was truly (literally) the Son of God. By this it is meant that in eternity past, too far back for the human mind to even comprehend it, the Son came forth of the Father. This means that He is God overall yet a distinct and separate personage from His Father. Orthodox trinitarians will deny this type of Sonship. This is because according to their reasoning (theology), the Son is **continually** sourced (begotten) of the Father - also that along with the Holy Spirit and the Father, He subsists with them in one indivisible substance (essence).

- Orthodox trinitarians also believe that each personality is the whole of the substance and not just one third of it although they will admit that Christ, because He is sourced (begotten) of the Father, is a true Son. This is somewhat different to the Seventh-day Adventist version of the trinity doctrine. This is

inasmuch as the latter profess that the divine personage known as the Son is not begotten of the Father. This is why they often refer to Him as the Second Person of the Godhead. Like the other two divine personages, He is said by Seventh-day Adventists to have His subsistence in the one being of God (trinity oneness). To put this in another way, current Seventh-day Adventist theology denies that Christ, in His pre-existence, was ever a son. They say that for the sake of the redemption of mankind, He was only role-playing (play-acting) this part, just like the Father is only play-acting the role of a father. The latter is the official position today of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

- In becoming incarnate - also to accomplish His work for the redemption of mankind - the divine Son of God forwent His prerogative of the free and independent use of the powers of deity. In other words, for what He needed to accomplish here on earth, Christ accessed divine power only through the Holy Spirit. This is in exactly the same way as we are called to accomplish what God calls us to do. This means that in the very same way that we need to overcome, so too Christ overcame. This also means that He walked this earth in faith, not depending on Himself for divine power but upon His Father. To put this in another way again, to accomplish the work He came to do on earth, the Son of God did not depend on His independent use of His powers of divinity (as He would have done in His pre-existence) but depended instead upon receiving them from His Father via the Holy Spirit. Trinitarians believe differently. They say that there was a direct communication of properties between the person of Christ and His divine nature. Generally speaking, trinitarians do not believe that the Son had to depend on someone other than Himself for divine power.

In the following sections, as expressed above, these beliefs will have the focus of our attention. This will reveal how a denial of the non-trinitarian view of God drastically affects the gospel. This of course will also reveal why today within Seventh-day Adventism, many of its members are objecting to the trinity doctrine. Certainly this trinity debate is not just a controversy over the divinity of Christ or a debate on the personhood of the Holy Spirit. As has been said previously, that reasoning is just one massive red herring.

First we shall be taking a look at what I term the strength (the power) of the gospel. This we shall do in section twelve. We shall then continue in subsequent sections to take a look at the other aspects mentioned above.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section twelve

The trinity doctrine impacts both the incarnation and the atonement

As was said in section ten, at the beginning of my trinity studies I encountered a number of startling realisations. Perhaps the most startling one is that the trinity doctrine has a very serious impact on both the incarnation and the atonement. This is why this section is probably the longest one that I have written. A wrong understanding of this subject will actually destroy the gospel. Certainly it will destroy what Christ achieved in becoming incarnate.

This sacrifice is for us to contemplate. It is the key to understanding just how much God and Christ love fallen humanity. We cannot afford to get this wrong. Please study this section very carefully.

Standard trinitarian theology

In trinitarian theology, as we have noted in previous sections, the Son always has His existence in the one singular indivisible substance of God. This means that He is always alive within this substance - regardless of the circumstances.

It is because of this *one substance* belief that the orthodox trinitarians do not believe that Christ actually left the bosom of the Father. They say instead that in the mysterious union of divine and human natures (the incarnation), the Son remained alongside the Father. They refer to the uniting of these two natures as the hypostatic union.

During my recent studies, one person who has helped me to understand the concepts of the trinity teaching - at least those of orthodoxy - is an orthodox priest by the name of Father Gregory. He became what I would term an Internet friend. Whilst we both knew that we did not hold to each other's beliefs (amongst other things he upholds the orthodox trinity doctrine whilst I did not), for two years we amiably exchanged emails.

In this dialogue, Father Gregory agreed that I had correctly understood orthodox trinitarianism. This is inasmuch as the three divine personalities have their entire being in the one indivisible substance of God. This is what makes God a trinity – according to trinitarians. In one of his emails explaining this to me he wrote

“We [orthodox trinitarians] maintain rather the invariability of the Godhead

(its simplicity and unity) in the sense that no action can lead to ontological change; namely in this case that the Word, one ousia with the Father and the Spirit, never leaves the Father's side even when He joins with our human nature in the Incarnation." (Email, Father Gregory Hallam, Orthodox Priest, to Terry Hill, 16th May 2007)

Here we can see it very plainly said that within the theology of trinitarianism, "no action", whatever it is, can lead to an "ontological change" in God (this is the trinity God) therefore the "Word" (meaning the only begotten Son of God) "never leaves the Father's side". This is basic trinitarian theology. It has its foundation in the 'in-one' part of the three-in-one belief, meaning the part of the doctrine that says the three personalities have their being (belong to) the **one indivisible substance of God** (the one being of God).

This very same theology can be seen in a hymn that was written by a 7th century trinitarian monk named St. Germanus. It is called *A Great and Mighty Wonder*. It is a Christmas carol sung by trinitarians. The second verse says (this is with respect to the incarnation of Christ and the trinity belief)

"The Word becomes incarnate and yet remains on high,
And cherubim sing anthems to shepherds from the sky.
Repeat the hymn again: "To God on high be glory
And peace on earth to men!"
(St. Germanus, 'A Great and Mighty Wonder')

Here in song is trinity theology. It is saying that whilst Christ was here on earth, He also remained "on high". This was in keeping with what Father Gregory had said to me (see above). It is basic trinity theology.

We need to remember here why Arius was exiled for his faith and excommunicated. It was because he believed that by becoming incarnate, the Son of God could have sinned and become changed (see section eight). This was denied by the up and coming trinitarians. This is one of the things that they held against this presbyter. It is also one of the reasons why the trinity doctrine was created. It was to deny this belief. Arius believed in the reality of the gospel. This was as the writer of Hebrews said

"For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."
Hebrews 4:15

Arius must have believed that Christ, like us, could have sinned and if He had would have reaped the same penalty as Adam. This much we have been told through the spirit of prophecy. As Ellen White put it the very same year that *Desire of Ages* was published

"Could Satan in the least particular have tempted Christ to sin, he would

have bruised the Saviour's head. As it was, he could only touch His heel. Had the head of Christ been touched, the hope of the human race would have perished. Divine wrath would have come upon Christ as it came upon Adam. Christ and the church would have been without hope." (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, June 9th 1898, see also Selected Messages Book 1 page 256, also Manuscript Release Vol. 16 No. 1201, 1897*)

The reality of the gospel

To keep the gospel within the confines of reality, it must be believed that when the divine Son of God was here on earth He had literally vacated heaven. Certainly Ellen White and the other pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism believed this to be true. As can be seen above, this is not believed by orthodox trinitarians. Their reasoning is philosophical.

Our pioneers gave no credence to philosophical reasoning. Theirs was a faith that was down to earth and in keeping with sound biblical exegesis. As did Lucian of Antioch, they believed in a literal interpretation of the Scriptures not in allegorical interpretation (see section eight – Two schools of thought – two opposing theologies).

Through the spirit of prophecy, meaning through the writings of Ellen White, Seventh-day Adventists have been given wonderful insights into the things of God. We should treasure the truths that for these last days God has so graciously revealed. It is these writings that bring both stability and sanctified reasoning into a very confused Christian world. Especially they will keep us from believing every wind of doctrine that blows. This was one of the purposes of the gifts of the Spirit. As the Apostle Paul wrote to the believers at Ephesus

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.” Ephesians 4:11-15

We will now look at just some of the statements that Ellen White made regarding Christ vacating Heaven. These are found in abundance but because of the limitations of space, we can only here quote a minimal amount.

The Son of God vacates Heaven

To the Seventh-day Adventist youth of her day, Ellen White wrote in 1897

“It is important that we each study to know the reason of the life of Christ in

humanity, and what it means to us, -- why the Son of God left the courts of heaven,-- why he stepped down from his position as Commander of the heavenly angels, who came and went at his bidding,--why he clothed his divinity with humanity, and in lowliness and humility came to the world as our Redeemer.” (Ellen G. White, *Youth’s Instructor*, 21st January 1897, ‘*Christ’s Mission to Earth*’)

Through Ellen White, the Seventh-day Adventist youth were clearly counselled to understand just **why** it was that the Son of God vacated Heaven and came to earth. This very same counsel is just as applicable to us today. As we shall see, it was

- To show us what God is really like
- To show us how much God loves us
- To provide for our atonement and secure salvation for mankind
- To be our example in all things

The next quote from Ellen White tells us that the Son of God literally exiled Himself from His Father.

“A way is opened before everyone in the office to engage from the heart directly in the work of Christ and the salvation of souls. Christ left heaven and the bosom of His Father to come to a friendless, lost world to save those who would be saved. He exiled Himself from His Father and exchanged the pure companionship of angels for that of fallen humanity, all polluted with sin.” (Ellen G. White, 3rd Vol. *Testimonies* page 190, ‘*Laborers in the Office*’).

In helping us to understand that the Son of God literally (bodily) vacated Heaven, how much stronger and plainer language could have been employed? Clearly we have been told that the Son of God “exiled Himself from His Father”. There is certainly no intimation here that the Son can never be separated from the Father. In the book *Desire of Ages*, Ellen White again made special reference to the Son being exiled from Heaven.

“It would have been an almost infinite humiliation for the Son of God to take man's nature, even when Adam stood in his innocence in Eden. But Jesus accepted humanity when the race had been weakened by four thousand years of sin. Like every child of Adam He accepted the results of the working of the great law of heredity. What these results were is shown in the history of His earthly ancestors. He came with such a heredity to share our sorrows and temptations, and to give us the example of a sinless life.

Satan in heaven had hated Christ for His position in the courts of God. He hated Him the more when he himself was dethroned. He hated Him who pledged Himself to redeem a race of sinners. Yet into the world where Satan claimed dominion God permitted His Son to come, a helpless babe,

subject to the weakness of humanity. He permitted Him to meet life's peril in common with every human soul, to fight the battle as every child of humanity must fight it, at the risk of failure and eternal loss." (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages. Page 48-49 'Unto you a Saviour'*)

In another place she wrote

"Never can the cost of our redemption be realized until the redeemed shall stand with the Redeemer before the throne of God. Then as the glories of the eternal home burst upon our enraptured senses we shall remember that Jesus left all this for us, that He not only became an exile from the heavenly courts, but for us took the risk of failure and eternal loss." (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages. Page 131 'The Victory'*)

Again we see Ellen White stressing that the Son literally vacated Heaven and became involved - as she put it - with "the risk of failure and eternal loss". If the Son did not bodily and physically leave Heaven then this statement would not make any sense. Clearly Ellen White did not prescribe to the trinitarian type of three persons in one indivisible substance (three-in-one) theology. We shall return our thoughts to this statement in the next section. It is very important to our studies. In 1891 she penned these words

"Christ stepped down from his exalted throne, left the royal courts, clothed his divinity with humanity, and became a man among the children of men; he humbled himself even to the suffering and death of the cross, that man might be exalted, that man might become a partaker of the divine nature, be an overcomer, and have a place with Christ upon his throne in glory." (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times. 15th June 1891 'He that Hath an Ear, let Him Hear'*)

Over and over again, Ellen White said that in taking to Himself human flesh, the Son of God needed to literally vacate Heaven. Note well the following statement

"If Christ had studied his convenience, he would never have left heaven to come to our world to die, to hang upon the accursed tree for us." (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald, 10th June 1890, 'Conditions for Obtaining Eternal Riches'*)

Would this have been reasonable for Ellen White to say if she believed as do orthodox trinitarians that the Son of God, even in the incarnation, was still on high with His Father? Certainly she was not a trinitarian, at least not in the usually accepted sense of the term. Later in that same paragraph she gave advice that we would all do well to heed. She said

"God has given us reasoning faculties, and he wants us to use them." (*Ibid*)

In that same year (1890) Ellen White wrote

“The salvation of our souls was purchased by the infinite gift of the Son of God. Jesus left heaven, laid aside his glory, left the communion and adoration of the sinless angels, and for our sake humbled himself, even to the death of the cross.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 22nd December 1890, ‘Are We Representatives of Christ?’*)

Could this be any clearer? According to what we have been told through the spirit of prophecy, the Son of God literally (bodily and physically) vacated Heaven. There is no philosophical reasoning here. All of the above is in keeping with what the Scriptures reveal. They reveal that Jesus said to those who sought Him

“For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.” John 6:38

Many of the Jews did not like these words of Jesus. They reasoned amongst them selves

“... Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven?” John 6:42

Nearing the end of this discourse Jesus said

“What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?” John 6:62

From beginning to end a sacrifice

In the Third volume of the Testimonies, Ellen White refers to Christ vacating Heaven as a sacrifice.

“His sacrifice consisted not merely in leaving the royal courts of heaven, in being tried by wicked men as a criminal and pronounced guilty, and in being delivered up to die as a malefactor, but in bearing the weight of the sins of the world.” (*Ellen G. White, 3rd Vol. Testimonies page 407 ‘Tithes and Offerings’*)

How often do we think of Jesus leaving Heaven as making a sacrifice? Not too often I would reason because we usually think of His sacrifice in terms of what took place at the cross.

Orthodox trinitarians do not believe that Christ actually vacated Heaven therefore they do not regard this particular happening as a sacrifice. We can see from what Ellen White said here though that at Bethlehem (at the incarnation) the sacrifice of God had already begun. In Patriarchs and Prophets she wrote these words

“It was the marvel of all the universe that Christ should humble Himself to

save fallen man. That He who had passed from star to star, from world to world, superintending all, by His providence supplying the needs of every order of being in His vast creation -- that He should consent to leave His glory and take upon Himself human nature, was a mystery which the sinless intelligences of other worlds desired to understand." (*Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, page 69, 'The Plan of Redemption' 1890*)

She later went on to speak of the death of the Son of God

"The great contest that had been so long in progress in this world was now decided, and Christ was conqueror. His death had answered the question whether the Father and the Son had sufficient love for man to exercise self-denial and a spirit of sacrifice." (*Ibid*)

Notice here - as she does in many places - that she mentions the sacrifice made by the Father and Son but makes no mention of any sacrifice on the part of the Holy Spirit. We shall see in the next section the sheer depths of this sacrifice. Regarding the Son vacating Heaven, the same writer also said in 1899

"He resigned his position as commander in the heavenly courts, and for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich. He did his glory under the guise of humanity, that his divine, transforming power might touch humanity." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald 24th October 1899 'Our Example'*)

This is the reality of the gospel.

Welcomed back

In the next statement, Ellen White relates how, after the resurrection, the angels welcomed Christ back into Heaven. This really is very interesting.

"The angels were waiting to welcome Jesus as He ascended after His resurrection. The heavenly host longed to greet again their loved Commander, returned to them from the prison house of death." (*Ellen G. White, 6th Vol. Testimonies page 309 'Medical Missionary Work', see also Review and Herald 5th Jan 1905 'Called to Service'*)

The angels had missed the companionship of Christ. He had vacated Heaven. As Ellen White had said just 6 years earlier (this was with reference to His return to Heaven and His glorification by the Father)

"The heavenly host prostrate themselves before Him, and raise their song of triumph and joy. Glory encircles the King of heaven, and was beheld by all the heavenly intelligences. No words can describe the scene which took place as the Son of God was publicly reinstated in the place of honor and glory which He voluntarily left when He became a man." (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 10th May 1899, 'Christ Glorified'*)

The next statement is extremely relevant to our study. Please read it very carefully. It says

“But when he ascended up on high, and led a multitude of captives, escorted by the heavenly host, and was received in through the gates of the city, with angelic songs of triumph and rejoicing, I beheld with admiration and wonder, that he possessed the same exalted stature that he had before he came into the world to die for man. Said the angel, God, who wrought so great a miracle as to make Christ flesh to dwell among men, and will with his almighty power lift up fallen, degenerate, and dwarfed man, and after they are redeemed from the earth, make them "grow up as calves of the stall," could in his infinite power return to his dear Son his own exalted stature, which was his before he left Heaven, and humbled himself as a man, and submitted to the death of the cross.

It is no marvel with the angelic host that their loved Commander, after he had carried out the plan of salvation, and ascended up to Heaven, should take his own exalted stature, and be clothed with majesty and glory, which was his before he left Heaven. But 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.” (*Ellen G. White, Volume 4A Spiritual Gifts page 119, ‘The Messiah’*)

Ellen White here refers to the “exalted stature” that the Son of God possessed prior to Him vacating Heaven. She compares this with the degenerate and dwarfed stature of humanity that Jesus possessed as a man. She also says that on the return of the Son to Heaven, God used His power to return Him to His former exalted stature. Seeing that at the ascension Christ carried His humanity into Heaven, I find this very interesting.

Regarding Christ being welcomed back into Heaven, this previous quote ties in with our penultimate statement, which is

“Before Christ left Heaven and came into the world to die, he was taller than any of the angels. He was majestic and lovely. But when his ministry commenced, he was but little taller than the common size of men then living upon the earth. Had he come among men with his noble, heavenly form, his outward appearance would have attracted the minds of the people to himself, and he would have been received without the exercise of faith.” (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald 31st December 1872 ‘The Life of Christ’*)

Whatever it was that constituted Christ’s exalted stature before He vacated Heaven, here we are told that to become human, it was greatly reduced in size. In other words to become human, Christ had to be literally reduced in stature. This shows emphatically that Ellen White believed that in His pre-existence, the Son of God was a physical, bodily person.

Now note something else very interesting. Ellen White said concerning Christ becoming human

“The work of redemption is called a mystery, and it is indeed the mystery by which everlasting righteousness is brought to all who believe. The race in consequence of sin was at enmity with God. Christ, at an infinite cost, by a painful process, mysterious to angels as well as to men, assumed humanity. Hiding His divinity, laying aside His glory, He was born a babe in Bethlehem. (MS 29, 1899)” (*Ellen G. White, as quoted in the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary Vol. 7, page 915*)

Adopting into Himself human nature was no make-believe act of Christ. He endured real pain to accomplish it. In other words - as a divine being - He experienced suffering, even **before** being born into this world. This refutes the idea that a divine person cannot experience pain.

I can find no other reference to this event, at least not with reference to the pain that Christ experienced. Ellen White also reveals that Christ did this at “**infinite cost**”. One would assume that this was to Himself and to His Father.

The consistent message that has come to us through the spirit of prophecy could not be any clearer. The Son of God is a separate personality from the infinite God. He also has a physical body separate from God the Father. This is not believed by orthodox trinitarians - in fact a vast amount of them do not even believe that God, Christ or the Holy Spirit have any type of physical being. We have also been clearly told that at the incarnation, the Son literally vacated Heaven and came to earth. This means that He separated Himself from both His Father and the immediate presence of the angels.

The conclusion is that in Ellen White’s writings, there is not even an implication that the divine Son of God is a part of (belonging to) an indivisible triune substance (a trinity of beings) or that whilst He was here on earth He was still on high with His Father. Those who believe this sort of thing are not in harmony with what God has revealed through Ellen White. It is just philosophical speculative reasoning that has no substance in Scripture. Ellen White took no part in it.

Trinity reasoning

Some have said that the words of Jesus, found in John chapter 3:13, say that Christ was in Heaven whilst He was here on earth. This is when He said to Nicodemus

“And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.” John 3:13

Some commentators say that these words cannot be found in certain manuscripts, therefore there is strong reason to suggest that they should not be in the Scriptures. Some translations do not include them. Interesting to note is

that the reasoning that the Son was also in Heaven when He was here on earth was mentioned in a confession of the Catholic faith that Pope Damasus sent to the Bishop Paulinus. This was in AD 382, the year following the Council of Constantinople. It is recorded in Theodoret's Ecclesiastical History. After setting out a series of anathemas with respect to those who would not accept the trinity faith, the Pope wrote

“We anathematize also them that say that the Word of God is separated from the Father by extension and contraction, and blasphemously affirm that He is without essential being or is destined to die.” (*Pope Damasus to Bishop Paulinus, Theodoret's Ecclesiastical History, Book 5, chapter XI*)

Here we can see the *one substance* part of the trinity doctrine. According to its theology, the Son can never be separated from the Father. Pope Damasus also said

“If any one denies that the Father is eternal and the Son eternal and the Holy Ghost eternal, let him be anathema. If any one denies that the Son was begotten of the Father, that is of His divine substance, let him be anathema. If any one denies that the Son of God is very God, omnipotent and omniscient, and equal to the Father, let him be anathema.” (*Ibid*)

Again this is pure orthodox trinity theology. It is that all three personalities are coeternal with each other and the Son being begotten of the substance of the Father. He then added (this was with reference to John 3:13)

“If any one says that the Son of God, living in the flesh when he was on the earth, was not in heaven and with the Father, let him be anathema” (*Ibid*)

This was the same as was later said by St. Germanus (see above). It is the reasoning that when Christ was on earth in human flesh, He was also with His Father in Heaven. Again this is orthodox trinitarian theology. Concerning the Holy Spirit, the Pope said (this is what was decided at the Council of Constantinople)

“If any one denies that the Holy Ghost is to be worshipped by all creation, as the Son, and as the Father, let him be anathema.” (*Ibid*)

Now note that the Pope said that a belief in the trinity doctrine was essential to salvation. He wrote saying (this became the essence of the Athanasian creed)

“This is the salvation of the Christians, that believing in the Trinity, that is in the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, and being baptized into the same one Godhead and power and divinity and substance, in Him we may trust.” (*Ibid*)

We will now note that Ellen White, with apparent reference to John 3:13,

although she did not quote it, did say

“Though Christ humbled Himself to become man, the Godhead was still His own. His Deity could not be lost while He stood faithful and true to His loyalty.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 10th May 1899, ‘Christ glorified’*)

Here it can be seen that we have been told that even though Christ was part of the Godhead, He could have lost His deity. We shall return to this thought in the next section. She then said

“Surrounded with sorrow, suffering, and moral pollution, despised and rejected by the people to whom had been intrusted the oracles of heaven, Jesus could yet speak of Himself as the Son of man in heaven. He was ready to take once more His divine glory when His work on earth was done.” (*Ibid*)

It is reasonable to believe that although she does not actually quote John 3:13, Ellen White’s remarks are with reference to this verse. Note she was saying that when Jesus spoke these words He was referring to “**when His work on earth was done**”. This is in keeping with the words of Jesus when He said to His disciples

“What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?”
John 6:62

The atonement

Quite recently I had a conversation with a Seventh-day Adventist minister. He had attempted to convince me (quite unsuccessfully I should add) that if Christ had sinned it would only have been His humanity that would have been lost, not the divine person Himself (we shall discuss this more fully in the next section). He also tried to convince me that the divine person did not really die at Calvary but only human nature died. He also referred to the pre-existent Christ as the Second Person of the trinity. This is because he did not believe that in His pre-existence that Christ had really been a son.

When I challenged his beliefs concerning who or what died at Calvary, I did reason with him that his conclusions would only give to Christianity a created human sacrifice. He replied by saying that for atonement for sin, this was all that fallen humanity needed. Needless to say I disagreed with his reasoning although it is quite possibly that this is not only this minister’s personal opinion but also current Seventh-day Adventist trinitarian theology. I say this because on quite a number of occasions, I have encountered other trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists who have reasoned in exactly the same way. Some of these have been of the ministry. This is totally opposite to how our pioneers reasoned. We shall see this now. This will show us the difference between their non-trinitarian theology and the present trinitarian theology.

To read an article called *Who or What died at Calvary* please go here

<http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Subwhoorwhatdied.htm>

You will also find some very interesting comments from the spirit of prophecy here

<http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Hatton/MHDOJEGW.pdf>

The early pioneers, the trinity and the atonement

The belief that trinitarian theology undermined the atonement was noted very early within Seventh-day Adventist literature. When speaking out against the trinity doctrine, D. W. Hull wrote (note the date)

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus; who being in the form of God (very God, our opponents would read it) thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant and was made (not his humanity, but he himself was made) in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death (No, says the Trinitarian, his body became obedient unto death, but the divine part never suffered) even the death of the cross." (*D. W. Hull, Review and Herald, November 17th 1859, 'Bible doctrine of the divinity of Christ'*)

Note particularly Hull's remarks regarding what trinitarians believe concerning the atonement. He said that they believe that Christ's human "body became obedient unto death, but the divine part never suffered". This is standard trinitarian reasoning. I wish that we had more space here because I would show that during the early centuries in which Christian systematic theology developed, this was part and parcel of the reasoning of some of the church fathers.

To a degree, this latter reasoning is correct, at least as far as divine **nature** is concerned. Certainly divine nature cannot suffer or die. Trinitarians are not simply saying that divine nature never suffered. They equate divine nature with divine person and say that the **divine Son of God** never suffered or died. This is making a dichotomy of Christ. It is like saying that the person of the Son was not an integral part of His two nature being. This is philosophical reasoning.

It is also exactly the opposite of what happens to us humans. What I mean by this is that when my body suffers I suffer. When my body dies I will die. What the trinitarians say is that when Christ died He (the pre-existent Son of God) did not die, only the human flesh. If this is true - which I do not believe that it is - then the pre-existent Son of God, either in suffering or in death, did not take my place. In reality, all that trinitarians have as atonement is created human flesh. It is entirely a human sacrifice and not one that is divine. This is exactly the same as reasoned by Hull. With reference to Christ crying out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me", he said

“We not only find that our Saviour calls his Father his God but that God had forsaken him. It is here asserted by Trinitarians that the Godhead had left him. If this is the case then Christ was alive after the Godhead had left him. Then it was only the humanity that died and we have only a human sacrifice.” (*Ibid*)

Again, if it were true, this trinity reasoning would be making a dichotomy of Christ. It is saying that Christ in His divinity lived on whilst His humanity died. This is a form of dualism. Hull concluded his article

“We trust we have now fairly investigated this subject having examined a majority of the scriptures referring to it. We have found positive testimony to show

1. That God is a personal being.
2. That Jesus Christ was his Son.
3. That he and his Father were distinct persons having one common interest, and
4. That Jesus Christ died soul and body and rose again.” (*Ibid*)

Almost 20 years later, the very same in principle was also noted by Ellen White. In Volume 3 of the spirit of prophecy she wrote

“Jesus said to Mary, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father." When he closed his eyes in death upon the cross, the soul of Christ did not go at once to Heaven, as many believe, or how could his words be true--"I am not yet ascended to my Father"? The spirit of Jesus slept in the tomb with his body, and did not wing its way to Heaven, there to maintain a separate existence, and to look down upon the mourning disciples embalming the body from which it had taken flight.” (*Ellen G. White, Vol. 3 Spirit of Prophecy page 203, 'The women at the tomb' 1878*)

There were not two persons in Christ – only one. There were two natures but each nature was not a person. She then added

“All that comprised the life and intelligence of Jesus remained with his body in the sepulcher; and when he came forth it was as a whole being; he did not have to summon his spirit from Heaven. He had power to lay down his life and to take it up again.” (*Ibid*)

Here we are told that **everything** that comprised of the life of Christ was in the tomb. Twenty years later, this same thought was transposed into *Desire of Ages*. This is when its author said with respect to the promise of Jesus to the thief on the cross

“Christ did not promise that the thief should be with Him in Paradise that day. He Himself did not go that day to Paradise. He slept in the tomb, and

on the morning of the resurrection He said, "I am not yet ascended to My Father." John 20:17." (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages page 751, 'Calvary'*)

In this respect, whilst Ellen White was alive, there was no change in theology within Seventh-day Adventism. It was said that since Christ had vacated Heaven something like 34 years previously, He had not returned to Heaven - that is until the day of His resurrection.

John Loughborough was the longest serving pioneer of Seventh-day Adventism. He also realised that trinitarians only have a human sacrifice for atonement. In answering with regards to what objections do Seventh-day Adventists have to the doctrine of the trinity he noted (this was amongst other objections)

"It will not do to substitute the human nature of Christ (according to Trinitarians) as the Mediator; for Clarke says, "Human blood can no more appease God than swine's blood." Com. on 2 Sam. xxi, 10." (*John Loughborough, Review and Herald, November 5th 1861, 'Questions for Bro. Loughborough'*)

I believe there is no need for further comment. You will find an article based upon John Loughborough's reasoning here

<http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Godhead/Swinesblood.pdf>

Heretical beliefs

As the first century of the Christian era ebbed away, attempts were made to bring wrong teachings (heresies) into the church. These were mainly to do with the person of Christ and the two natures of His being.

One group who taught error was the docetae. They were people who in keeping with the meaning of their name believed that the divine Christ only 'appeared' to suffer and only 'appeared' to die. Some say that this was due to them believing that the divine Christ only 'appeared' (seemed to) have a real body. His body therefore, according to the reasoning of the docetae, was like a phantom. As said here by J. W. C. Wand (who was once Archbishop of Brisbane and Bishop of London)

"A third widely prevalent type of heretical thought was that of Docetism (from the Greek verb *dokein*, to seem). The Docetics taught that while Jesus was truly God His appearance as man was merely phantasmal. It is against such a view that the Johannine gospel and epistles emphasise over and over again the flesh-and-blood reality of the incarnate Son of God." (*J. W. C. Wand, A History of the Early Church to A. D. 500, page 21, 'The Sub-Apostolic Church'*)

Some have reasoned that certain of the docetae did believe that Christ had a

real body but because it was believed by them that all physical matter was sinful, they reasoned also that the divine Christ would not have literally been part of sinful human flesh. They would have taught therefore that in some way or another He was separate from the human body. Certainly the Docetae - whatever their particular persuasion - did not believe that the divine Christ had literally taken on flesh or that He had actually suffered or died. They reasoned that a divine person could not suffer or die. As has already been said above, this belief, when systematic theology began to emerge in Christianity, appears to have been believed by some of the church fathers.

After speaking of the first century persecution, the authors of a book called *The Story of the Church* wrote under the sub-heading of *Dangers within*

“Through all this long period of persecution the real peril to the Church came, not from the persecutors, but from within. ...The danger came for the Gnostics. The Gnostics were the Men who Knew – for that is what the word means. They spoke about a Gnosis, or Knowledge, of such a kind that whoever found it was thereby delivered from this present evil world.” (*J. Aulay Steele M. A. and A. J. Campbell D. D., Volume III The Story of the Church, Pages 94-95, Chapter ‘The Days of the Gnostics’*)

The Docetae belonged to those called *The Gnostics* - although amongst this latter group there were varied beliefs. After saying that the world was “in its essence an evil thing” the authors wrote (this was again with respect to the beliefs of the Gnostics)

“But Christ came, a visitant from the world of unclouded light, to communicate the saving Secret, and to deliver the spirit of man from its bondage. Though visible to the eye, He was no real man, for that would imply that He was part of the material world which is evil and hateful to God.” (*Ibid*)

They added concerning how the Gnostics regarded Christ

“He was but a phantom.” (*Ibid*)

On the next page, under the sub-heading *A reply to Gnosticism*, the authors explained

“The Gospel according to St. John was published partly to defend the Christian religion against the subtle infection of Gnosticism; and the First Epistle of St John comes from the same hand, and aims at the same end as the Gospel.” (*Ibid, pages 96-97*)

After explaining that John wrote his gospel to set forth the glory of the Son of God – also after quoting John 1:1 and 14, it said on the same page

“The first great victory that the Christian religion had to win was over those who, regarding themselves as its friends, were ready to explain it away by minimising, and even denying, the fact that our Lord was truly Man.” (*Ibid*)

On page 99 the authors said

“The Gnostics denied that Christ was truly man. Some said that there was no connection of any sort between Jesus of Nazareth and the being to whom they gave the title of the Son of God. Some said that the Son of God was in the man Jesus only for the time between His baptism and His arrest. The Church on the other hand believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God.” (*Ibid, page 99-100*)

Concerning the docetae, the online Roman Catholic Encyclopaedia describes them as being

“A heretical sect dating back to apostolic times. Their name is derived from *dokesis*, "appearance" or "semblance", because they taught that Christ only "appeared" or "seemed to be a man, to have been born, to have lived and suffered. Some denied the reality of Christ's human nature altogether, some only the reality of His human body or of His birth or death.” (*New Advent online Catholic Encyclopaedia, article 'Docetae'*)

During the latter part of the 1st century, attempts were made to bring various false teachings into the church. Amongst these was one that said that Christ was not divine. Some believed that He was ordained and chosen by God but that He was just a man born of the union of Joseph and Mary. Some who believed this also believed that at some point in his earthly life, the divine Christ had entered into the human Christ but had departed prior to His suffering and the crucifixion. This was said in the above-mentioned book *The Story of the Church*.

There is one thing that all the above heretical views have in common. This is that at Calvary, a divine person never suffered or died. This was the very belief that Satan tried to inculcate into the beliefs of the early Christian church. What better way to invalidate the Christian faith - meaning to obscure what God had really accomplished through His Son?

In John's day, the teaching that the divine person did not really suffer or die at Calvary may have only had a limited success but later it had far more success. This was with the introduction of the trinity doctrine. In this teaching, it is impossible for the divine person to die or even suffer.

Whilst it is true that divine nature cannot die, we must not confuse nature with personality. When the Son of God adopted human flesh into Himself, He did not become a different personage other than what He had been previously in Heaven. He was the same Son of God but now an individual person of two natures. As Ellen White put it so plainly

“While upon this earth, the Son of God was the Son of man; yet there were times when His divinity flashed forth. Thus it was when He said to the paralytic: "Be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee." Matthew 9:2.” (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies to the Church, Volume 8 page 202, letter to Medical Missionaries October 30th 1903, 'Letters to Physicians'*)

It must constantly be remembered that the divine nature is not a divine person. It was in His human nature that the person of the divine Son of God died. We shall see this more clearly as we go along.

The anti-Christ

In section nine we noted that in its rise to fame, the little horn of Daniel chapter 7 uprooted three of the little horns of the fragmented Roman Empire. Seventh-day Adventists identify this little horn as the Papacy. This is the organisation that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has historically recognised as the anti-Christ of Bible prophecy.

The three uprooted horns were the Arian tribes of the Heruli, the Vandals and the Ostrogoths. These were uprooted because they were impeding the advancement of the papacy. They were also opposing the establishing of the trinity doctrine within Christianity. These tribes did not believe the trinity doctrine but believed the same or similar to Arius (for the beliefs of Arius see section eight).

As we have spoken of the beliefs of Arius at length in section eight, we shall not do so again here suffice to say that by reason of the incarnation, he did believe that the divine Christ could sin and therefore undergo change. This is what led to the controversy that resulted in the calling of the Council of Nicaea. It is also that which led to the trinity doctrine being formulated. This teaching denies that Christ actually vacated Heaven and thus ensures that it is taught that the divine Son can never, under any circumstances, die or lose His eternal existence. This is very interesting because concerning the anti-Christ, the gospel writer John says.

“And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.” 1 John 4:3

“For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. 2 John 1:7

The trinity doctrine denies that the Son of God actually came in the flesh. It talks instead of a hypostatic union. These are philosophical sentiments that cannot be found either in the Scriptures or in the writings of Ellen White. They teach that whilst Christ was here on earth, He was also on high with His Father. It does not teach that He physically and bodily vacated Heaven. It does not even teach that He had a body of His own separate from the Father.

This same teaching denies that the divine person of the Son of God actually died at Calvary. Instead it says that only human nature (the human part of Him) died. This is an outright denial of the gospel. It is also the core teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. In other words, the teachings of the Papacy, as expressed in their understanding of the Godhead (i.e. the trinity doctrine) deny that the divine Son of God died at Calvary therefore they deny the atonement. This indeed is anti-Christ. It has also been reasoned by some that this teaching is the omega that Ellen White said was coming upon Seventh-day Adventists (for the warnings of the omega see section one).

More on the atonement

Another pioneer to realise the problem of the trinity doctrine in respect to the atonement was J. H. Waggoner. He was the father of E. J. Waggoner of Minneapolis fame. He said in an article appropriately called *The Atonement*

“THE great mistake of Trinitarians, in arguing this subject, seems to be this: They make no distinction between a denial of a trinity and a denial of the divinity of Christ. They see only the two extremes, between which the truth lies; and take every expression referring to the pre-existence of Christ as evidence of a trinity.” (*J. H. Waggoner, Review and Herald, November 10th 1863, ‘The Atonement –part II, The doctrine of a trinity degrades the atonement’*)

How true this is today. Most trinitarians still see the divinity (pre-existence) of Christ as proving God to be a trinity. Joseph Waggoner then said

“The Scriptures abundantly teach the pre-existence of Christ and his divinity; but they are entirely silent in regard to a trinity.” (*Ibid*)

This is also very true. We noted this in section four. Waggoner also added with respect to the teaching of trinitarians

“The declaration, that the divine Son of God could not die, is as far from the teachings of the Bible as darkness is from light. And I would ask the Trinitarian, to which of the two natures are we indebted for redemption?” (*Ibid*)

There is confusion here between nature and personality but the point is clear as to what Waggoner actually meant. He is simply asking, are we indebted to human nature for redemption or do we have a sacrifice that is divine? In reply to this question he said

“The answer must, of course, be, to that one which died or shed his blood for us; for “we have redemption through his blood.” Then it is evident, that if only the human nature died, our redeemer is only human, and that the divine Son of God took no part in the work of redemption, for he could neither suffer nor die.” (*Ibid*)

Again we see confusion between nature and person but the point that is being made is very clear. We shall see later what Ellen White had to say concerning this problem. Waggoner concluded

“Surely I said right, that the doctrine of a trinity degrades the atonement, by bringing the sacrifice, the blood of our purchase, down to the standard of Socinianism.” (*Ibid*)

He ended that section by saying

“Of course we cannot believe what men say about his being co-equal with God in every respect, and that the Divine Son of God could not suffer nor die. These are mere human words. But that the Word, or Logos, was the Son of God, that he was before all things, that he was made flesh, that he was seen and handled of men, that he was put to death, that he was raised from the dead; these are the words of inspiration.” (*Ibid*)

Interesting to note is that for **over 20 years** between 1863 and 1884, Waggoner’s published work on the atonement was circulated amongst Seventh-day Adventists. This shows not only the popularity of his work but also what was believed and taught during that time by them. We shall cover this more fully when later we discuss Seventh-day Adventist non-trinitarian publications. With regards to the Unitarian view of Christ, Waggoner also said in 1867

“I believe the Trinitarian views are unscriptural, and greatly disparage the atonement by denying that the Son of God died; and if the Unitarians were endeavoring to shield the plan of salvation from such violence we could joyfully bid them Godspeed. But they run to the opposite extreme, and are full as far from a scriptural view of the atonement as the Trinitarians, and I think farther.” (*J. H. Waggoner, Review and Herald, November 19th 1867, ‘What think ye of Christ?’*)

The same year, H. C. Blanchard had written regarding the trinity doctrine

“They [the trinitarians] tell us that Jesus died for us, but you ask them if Christ really died, and they will answer, that the God part did not. Then ask if the man part died. No, the soul is immortal and is not subject to death. What then did die? The body of Christ. But we are told that the body is nothing but the house man dwells in. What then was the offering which was made for us? (*H. C. Blanchard, Review and Herald, September 10th 1867, ‘The Son’*)

The latter is indeed a very good question. The only answer that the trinitarian can give is that the only thing that died at Calvary was the human nature of Christ, certainly not the divine person. This is a very serious misunderstanding of what really happened at Calvary.

We shall mention just one more person who spoke of the trinity doctrine as degrading the atonement. This was a man by the name of Judson Washburn. In 1939 he wrote a letter to the General Conference objecting to the trinity doctrine making its way into Seventh-day Adventism. Note the date very well. It was 1939. Note too his reference to the omega.

1939 objections regarding the trinity atonement

Washburn initially wrote his letter to the General Conference with regards to a sermon that had been preached by W. W. Prescott. Washburn believed it to reveal trinitarianism. In his letter regarding the trinity doctrine he wrote

“This monstrous doctrine transplanted from heathenism into the Roman Papal Church is seeking to intrude its evil presence into the teachings of the Third Angel’s Message.” (Judson Washburn, ‘The Trinity’, letter to the Seventh-day Adventists General Conference, 1939)

It does not take much to realise that Washburn did not regard the trinity doctrine with very much esteem. Note very importantly the date of this letter. It was 1939. This means that by 1939, trinitarianism had not taken such a hold within Seventh-day Adventism as many Seventh-day Adventists believe. Washburn said that it was, at that time, “seeking to intrude its evil presence” into the teachings of Seventh-day Adventism.

In this same letter, Washburn also spoke of a communication that he had from Elder J. F. Anderson, a former pastor of the Takoma Park Church. Washburn quoted Anderson as saying

“In answer to your question as to my conversation with Eld. Prescott, it was after I had spoken on the vicarious sacrifice of Christ, that he called me and wanted to talk with me about it. He tried to convince me that Christ did not die as the Son of God, as I had preached. And when he could not convince me, he said, ‘I do not appreciate your leaving me without a Christ for three days and nights’” (Elder J. F. Anderson, as quoted by J. Washburn in his 1939 ‘Trinity’ letter to the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference)

Washburn also quotes Anderson as saying

“And remember, Eld. Washburn, this statement was made after he [Prescott] had taken the position that the Son of God did not die but only the Son of Man.” (Ibid)

Assuming it is true what Anderson was saying, then like all trinitarians, Prescott was making a dichotomy of the incarnate Christ. It is like saying that there were two persons in the one being of Christ. In his letter Washburn also made these various comments

“As stated in the letter from Eld. Anderson, we have the logical bold denial

of the death of Christ, the very foundation of the Gospel - "the son of God did not die," only the son of man, only a human atonement." (*Ibid*)

"This is the only logical position any man can take who believes the heathen Roman doctrine of the Trinity, which is a twin sister of eternal torment and as true and logical as purgatory and the Sunday Sabbath. No wonder that the Roman papacy is the original teacher of both doctrines of the Trinity and eternal torment." (*Ibid*)

"Any doctrine that leads a man to deny that the Son of God died must be an evil doctrine, an anti-Christian doctrine, not from God but from Satan." (*Ibid*)

"Seventh-day Adventists claim to take the word of God as supreme authority and to have "come out of Babylon," to have renounced forever the vain traditions of Rome. If we should go back to the immortality of the soul, purgatory, eternal torment and the Sunday Sabbath, would that be anything less than apostasy?" (*Ibid*)

"If, however, we leap over all these minor, secondary doctrines and accept and teach the very central root, doctrine of Romanism, the Trinity, and teach that the son of God did not die, even though our words seem to be spiritual, is this anything else or anything less than apostasy? and the very Omega of apostasy?" (*Ibid*)

Washburn had known James and Ellen White very well. He had been baptised by the former and wherever he travelled as an evangelist he kept Ellen White informed of how the work was progressing. He also knew very well the message of Seventh-day Adventism. He knew all the reasons why Seventh-day Adventists had rejected the doctrine of the trinity. Above he articulated some of those views.

By the time that Washburn wrote his letter (1939), trinitarianism was making very strong inroads into Seventh-day Adventism but by then it still had not become established. We can see this by reason of his letter.

What the Scriptures say concerning the death of Christ

The one noticeable thing that the Scriptures say concerning the actual death of Christ is that it is free from all unnecessary dramatics. In fact the authors of the gospels were very low key in their description of it. No greater economy of words could have been employed by them to state this magnificent truth.

"Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost."
Matthew 27:50

"And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost." Mark 15:37

"And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost."

Luke 23:46

“When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.” John 19:30

All of these writers said that Jesus really did die. There is no sham or make believe about it.

If the Bible is to be believed, there were many witnesses to the death of Jesus - far too many to note here in detail. These were such as the Roman soldiers who drove in the nails, the Jews who stood beneath the cross mocking, Mary the mother of Jesus, John the beloved disciple and many more. The soldier who thrust the spear into the side of Jesus would surely testify to His death. John who witnessed the scene reported

“Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water.” John 19:32-34

That Jesus was really dead there is no doubt. If He had not been dead already then the spear thrust would have achieved it. There are also numerous passages of Scripture that tell of His resurrection from the grave. Perhaps the one that encapsulates them all are the words of the apostle Paul. This is when he wrote

“For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.” 1 Corinthians 15:3-6

Over and over again the Scriptures testify to the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is the main thrust of the gospel. This is why the angel said to the disciples “... He is not here: for he is risen ... go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead...” (See Matthew 28:6-7).

How a divine person can die

Ellet J. Waggoner was the son of J. H. Waggoner. In his book *Christ and His Righteousness*, which is said to depict his message at Minneapolis (1888), he noted the problems involved of a divine person dying.

“If anyone springs the old cavil, how Christ could be immortal and yet die, we have only to say that we do not know. We make no pretensions of fathoming infinity.” (*E. J. Waggoner, Christ and His righteousness, page 23*)

1890)

After listing a number of other divine mysteries (these are such as God Himself, Christ, the incarnation as well as the resurrection etc) Ellet Waggoner concluded

“It should be sufficient for us to accept as true those things which God has revealed without stumbling over things that the mind of an angel cannot fathom. So we delight in the infinite power and glory which the Scriptures declare belong to Christ, without worrying our finite minds in a vain attempt to explain the infinite.” (*Ibid*)

Ten years after the Minneapolis Conference in 1898, Ellen White answered the question as to **how** a divine person could die. She said

“Jesus Christ laid off His royal robe, His kingly crown, and clothed His divinity with humanity, in order to become a substitute and surety for humanity, that dying in humanity He might by His death destroy him who had the power of death.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 97, 1898, p. 5. To "My Brethren in North Fitzroy," November 18, 1898*)

This is how a divine person can die. It is by surrendering His divine personage to His human state. In other words, by the acquiescing **of Himself** to His human nature, Christ was able to do that which He could not do in His pre-existence as God. This was when He had His existence only in divine nature. By taking on human nature, He could die. As Ellen White went on to say

“He could not have done this as God, but by coming as man, Christ could die. By death He overcame death. The death of Christ bore to the death him who had the power of death, and opened the gates of the tomb for all who receive Him as their personal Saviour.” (*Ibid*)

Whether they are of the Seventh-day Adventist variety or otherwise, trinitarians who say that the pre-existent Son of God did not die at Calvary are totally at variance with that which was said here by Ellen White. She said that the entire point of the Son becoming flesh was to do something that He could not do whilst residing only in His divinity. This was to die.

What is death?

When the body expires, the human spirit ceases to be active. This means that the entirety of the person ceases to function. This is death. This is how it is with every human being in death and how it was with Christ when He died.

Death is the inability to have any more dealings with life. It is also the condition in which without aid outside of one's self, dead people cannot again experience life. This is also how it was with Christ. By allowing Himself to die in His humanity, He had voluntarily rendered Himself incapable of living again - except that is by being called from the grave by His Father. This means that whilst He was in the

grave, He was unconscious to what was happening around Him. It also means that He was totally dependant on His Father for life therefore whilst in death He was in exactly the same state as is every other person who is dead. He was what we might term lifeless although His divine nature was still very much alive.

This is what I mean by death. It is also my reason for saying that Christ, if He had sinned, would have forfeited his eternal existence. This is because if He had done the unthinkable and had sinned, the outcome of His attempt to save mankind would have been that His Father (God) would not have called him from the grave. His divinity (divine nature) would have continued to exist because that has its source in the Father but the Son, as a personality, would have ceased to exist. We shall see this again in the next section. Divine nature cannot die. As a divine personality, the Son of God died in His humanity. He really did die.

The death of the pre-existent Son of God (the witness of the spirit of prophecy)

Through the Spirit of Prophecy, God has revealed that

“Jesus had united with the Father in making the world. Amid the agonizing sufferings of the Son of God, blind and deluded men alone remain unfeeling. The chief priests and elders revile God's dear Son while in his expiring agonies. Yet inanimate nature groans in sympathy with her bleeding, dying Author.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times. 21st August 1879 'The Sufferings of Christ'*)

Here we are told very plainly who died at Calvary. It was the one through whom the Father had created the world. It was the divine Son of God, the “Author” of creation. She then said

“The earth trembles. The sun refuses to behold the scene. The heavens gather blackness. Angels have witnessed the scene of suffering, until they can look on no longer, and hide their faces from the horrid sight. Christ is in despair! He is dying! His Father's approving smile is removed, and angels are not permitted to lighten the gloom of the terrible hour. They could only behold in amazement their loved Commander suffering the penalty of man's transgression of the Father's law.” (*Ibid*)

Here we must ask a question. How could the Father's approving smile be removed from His Son or how could the angels desire to help their creator - if He was not really suffering or not really dying at Calvary, or as trinitarians say, He was still alongside His Father in the triune substance of God? This would make no sense at all. Ellen White was definitely not a trinitarian. Eighteen years later in the *Review and Herald* she wrote

"Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour." Human passions were raging at the foot of the cross when the earth was bereft of the light of the sun. The Sun of Righteousness was

withdrawing his light from the world, and nature sympathized with her dying Author." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald 28th December 1897 'He was Wounded for our Transgressions'*)

Again Ellen White said it was the "Author" of nature that died. How could nature itself sympathize with its Author if only the human body of Jesus died and not the person of the Son of God? A few paragraphs later Ellen White wrote

"Again came the cry, as of one in mortal agony, "It is finished." "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost." Christ, the Majesty of heaven, the King of glory, was dead. The Jewish leaders had crucified the Son of God, the long-expected Messiah, him (so the people had hoped) who was to bring about so many reforms. They refused the only One who could save them from national ruin." (*Ibid*)

Here we are told that it was the divine Son of God, "the Majesty of Heaven" that died. This could not be made any clearer than it is here. In the second volume of the Testimonies to the church, Ellen White wrote

"Nature sympathized with the suffering of its Author. The heaving earth, the rent rocks, proclaimed that it was the Son of God who died." (*Ellen White, 2nd Vol. Testimonies page 211, 'The sufferings of Christ'*)

This is plain language that none can deny. Ellen White says that it was the pre-existent Son of God (our Creator) that died.

In conclusion it must be said that if we do not believe that the Son of God literally separated (exiled) Himself from His Father, then how can we appreciate just what He sacrificed or what He experienced? How can we appreciate either (if it is said that the Son, as a personality, was still with the Father as part of the substance of God) just what the Father experienced when He saw His own Son suffering under the responsibility of making the atonement for mankind? Would this make any sense at all? Definitely not!

Confusion between nature and person

It appears to me that there is a great deal of confusion within Seventh-day Adventism as to whom or what died at Calvary. The trinitarians are saying that the divine pre-existent Son of God could not die and therefore did not die whilst the non-trinitarians are saying that there cannot be atonement for sin without a divine sacrifice. So why does this disharmony of perspectives exist? Prior to the introduction of the trinity doctrine into the fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists, this lack of harmony never existed but since its inception confusion has been rife.

As usual, the trinitarians have appealed to the spirit of prophecy writings but in doing so they are misinterpreting them. We shall now look at one of these misinterpreted quotes. As will be seen, there is confusion between person and

nature. In the *Youth's Instructor* in 1898 (the year that *Desire of Ages* was published), after quoting the words of Jesus "I am the resurrection, and the life", Ellen White wrote

"He who had said, "I lay down my life, that I might take it again," came forth from the grave to life that was in himself. Humanity died: divinity did not die. In his divinity, Christ possessed the power to break the bonds of death. He declares that he has life in himself to quicken whom he will" (*Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor 4th August 1898, see also Youth's Instructor 3rd January 1905*)

This is the quotation, used by trinitarians, to supposedly show that at Calvary the pre-existent Son of God did not die and that only humanity died. It is quite apparent here that when speaking of divinity, Ellen White was not making reference to a divine person but **to divine nature**. In other words, she was not saying that a divine person did not die at Calvary but that **divine nature did not die**. How we know this is easily proven. Just a few months after she made this "divinity did not die" statement, she wrote a letter saying (this would have answered the question as to what she meant by divinity not dying)

"Jesus Christ laid off His royal robe, His kingly crown, and clothed His divinity with humanity, in order to become a substitute and surety for humanity, that dying in humanity He might by His death destroy him who had the power of death." (*Ellen G. White, Letter 97, page 5, To "My Brethren in North Fitzroy," November 18th 1898*)

Note here who died in His humanity. It was the pre-existent Christ. This is how a divine person can die. It is by surrendering His divine personage to His human state (His human nature). In other words, by the acquiescing of Himself to His human nature, the person of Christ (the divine Son of God) was able to die. As Ellen White went on to say

"He could not have done this as God, but by coming as man, Christ could die. By death He overcame death. The death of Christ bore to the death him who had the power of death, and opened the gates of the tomb for all who receive Him as their personal Saviour." (*Ibid*)

It is quite clear, even to a novice in the reading of the spirit of prophecy writings, that Ellen White was saying here that in His pre-existence, because He was divine, the Son of God could not die. This is why to achieve this end (meaning so that He could die) He became human. This really is a very plain statement. It is one that does not require a lot of explanation. Yet the strange thing is that when the previous statement is read ("divinity did not die"), it is said by the trinitarians that even though He did become flesh, the divine Son of God still did not die. This is a total contradiction to what we have noted that Ellen White so plainly did say - meaning that by becoming human, the divine pre-existent Son of God could die.

The reason why this confusion exists is because the trinitarians are becoming confused between person and nature. These two statements (“divinity did not die”, also that by becoming human “Christ could die”), are not contradictory to each other. The first is referring to nature whilst the second is referring to person. In other words, the divinity that did not die was not a person but a nature whilst the one who could die was the person of the divine Son of God who died in His humanity. This is why Ellen White said that whilst being divine only, Christ could not die but by becoming human He could die. This brings these two statements in harmony with each other. All of this is very similar to two other statements of Ellen White that some have said are contradictory. One of these was in the *Review and Herald* in 1899 - the year following the publication of *Desire of Ages* - whilst the other was in a letter. The one in the *Review and Herald* is when Ellen White wrote

“Teach the great, practical truths that must be stamped upon the soul. Teach the saving power of Jesus, "in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins." All should be made to comprehend the power of the truth to those who receive it. "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. Men need to understand that the Deity suffered under the agonies of Calvary. The Majesty of heaven was made to suffer at the hands of wicked men, -- religious zealots, who claimed to be the most enlightened people on the face of the earth. Men claiming to be the children of Abraham worked out the wrath of Satan upon the innocent Son of the infinite God." (Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, 4th April 1899, ‘After the camp meeting’)

When speaking of suffering “Deity”, Ellen White was talking in terms of **a divine person** suffering (the divine Son of God in whom “dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily”). Certainly she was not making reference to divine nature. Notice in passing that Ellen White referred to Christ here, as she did so many times, as the “Son of the infinite God”. In this way she maintained a clear distinction between these two divine personalities.

Now take note of this next quote. This is from a letter written in 1904 to "Ministers, Physicians, and Teachers". Some say that Ellen White was contradicting her previous statement but this she was definitely not doing. She wrote

“During the past night many things have been presented to me, and I am firmly decided that the great work for these last days will soon be finished.

Was the human nature of the Son of Mary changed into the divine nature of the Son of God? No; the two natures were mysteriously blended in one person -- the Man Christ Jesus. In Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” (Ellen G. White, *September 3rd 1904, Letter 280a to ‘Ministers, Physicians, and Teachers’*)

She then explained (here is the so-called contradictory statement)

“When Christ was crucified, it was His human nature that died. Deity did not sink and die; that would have been impossible. Christ, the sinless One, will save every son and daughter of Adam who accepts the salvation proffered them, consenting to become the children of God. The Saviour has purchased the fallen race with His own blood.” (*Ibid*)

Here we must ask a question. Are the two statements (“the Deity suffered under the agonies of Calvary” and “Deity did not sink and die”) contradictory to each other? Of course not! The contexts supply the explanation. The first is referring to deity as a person whilst the second is referring to deity as a nature. The two statements are not contradictory at all - at least not when read as they should be read. As Ellen White went on to say though (this was after saying that this great mystery will not be understood in its greatness until after the resurrection)

“But the enemy is determined that this gift shall be so mystified that it will become a nothingness. If believers only knew what this means, the work would be done in our churches that must be done if the members ever enter the kingdom of heaven. But when men in responsible positions pervert their reason and give themselves up to Satan's way of thinking, they will surely stand before the world on Satan's side, however great their influence may have been and still is, doing the work that Satan did, led and inspired by his spirit.” (*Ibid*)

This is how it seems to be becoming today within Seventh-day Adventism. Ellen White's statements are being perverted to say something that she did not mean to say. We should be very guarded over these things. We should not listen to those who say that at Calvary the divine Son of God did not die. This is the reasoning of the enemy. It makes the atonement “nothingness”.

We need to capture again what the Son of God did at Calvary - also what it was necessary for Him to experience to achieve it. In the 3rd Volume of the Spirit of Prophecy Ellen White penned this description of our Saviour's sufferings

“Satan, with his fierce temptations, wrung the heart of Jesus. Sin, so hateful to his sight, was heaped upon him till he groaned beneath its weight. No wonder that his humanity trembled in that fearful hour. Angels witnessed with amazement the despairing agony of the Son of God, so much greater than his physical pain that the latter was hardly felt by him. The hosts of Heaven veiled their faces from the fearful sight.

Inanimate nature expressed a sympathy with its insulted and dying Author. The sun refused to look upon the awful scene. Its full, bright rays were illuminating the earth at midday, when suddenly it seemed to be blotted out. Complete darkness enveloped the cross, and all the vicinity about, like a funeral pall. There was no eclipse or other natural cause for this darkness,

which was deep as midnight without moon or stars. The dense blackness was an emblem of the soul-agony and horror that encompassed the Son of God. He had felt it in the garden of Gethsemane, when from his pores were forced drops of blood, and where he would have died had not an angel been sent from the courts of Heaven to invigorate the divine sufferer, that he might tread his blood-stained path to Calvary." (*Ellen G. White, Spirit of Prophecy Volume 3, page 163, 'Calvary'*)

As we have seen from the above (from scripture and the spirit of prophecy) the divine Son of God, the Author of creation, did die at Calvary. This is our assurance of salvation. A sacrifice of mere humanity would not have been sufficient to pay the price.

Only divinity can provide atonement

In trinitarian theology, whether it is that of orthodoxy or that of the trinity doctrine held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, only humanity died at Calvary. This is not adequate for atonement. After saying to the youth in 1900 that Christ was not compelled to undertake the role of the saviour of mankind but that it was on His part a voluntary decision Ellen White wrote (note well the title of the article)

"Not one of the angels could have become surety for the human race: their life is God's; they could not surrender it. The angels all wear the yoke of obedience. They are the appointed messengers of Him who is the commander of all heaven. But Christ is equal with God, infinite and omnipotent. He could pay the ransom for man's freedom. He is the eternal, self-existing Son, on whom no yoke had come; and when God asked, "Whom shall I send?" he could reply, "Here am I; send me." He could pledge himself to become man's surety; for he could say that which the highest angel could not say,--I have power over my own life, "power to lay it down, and . . . power to take it again." (*Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor, 21st June 1900, 'The price of our redemption part IV'*)

In 1908, 10 years following the publication of the supposedly trinitarian *Desire of Ages*, Ellen White repeated this one great truth. This is that no one except the divine Son of God could pay the penalty for man's transgression. She wrote

"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. But divine love had conceived a plan whereby man might be redeemed. The broken law of God demanded the life of the sinner. In all the universe there was but One who could, in behalf of man, satisfy its claims. Since the divine law is as sacred as God Himself, only one equal with God could make atonement for its transgression. None but Christ could redeem fallen man from the curse of the law, and bring him again into harmony with Heaven. Christ would take upon Himself the guilt and shame of sin--sin so offensive to a holy God that it must separate the Father and the Son. Christ would reach to the depths of misery to rescue

the ruined race.” (Ellen G. White, *Signs of the times*, 4th November 1908, ‘When sin entered’, see also, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 63, ‘The Plan of Redemption’)

Thirteen years earlier Ellen White had said

“The condescension on the part of the Son of God was included in the plan of God for the unfolding of divine wisdom to fallen men. Divinity united with humanity could alone reach humanity, and impart spiritual life to those who were "dead in trespasses and sins.” (Ellen G. White, *Sabbath School Worker*. 1st November 1895, ‘The Divine Character Exemplified in Christ’)

Humanity alone could not pay the price of our redemption. Only the death of a divine person could secure it. This is one of the main reasons why the theology of the trinity doctrine is error. Certainly it is not as said to me by that Seventh-day Adventist minister (see above) that all that was needed for atonement for sin was a human sacrifice. All of the above is only in keeping with what was said by Ellen White in *Early Writings*. This is when under the sub-title *The plan of salvation* she wrote

“The angels prostrated themselves before Him. They offered their lives. Jesus said to them that He would by His death save many, that the life of an angel could not pay the debt. His life alone could be accepted of His Father as a ransom for man.” (Ellen G. White, *Early Writings, Spiritual Gifts*, Page 150, 1882)

She also wrote the year after the publication of *Desire of Ages*

“Nothing less than the life of Christ would atone for man's transgression. He must restore man by placing on vantage ground every one who would believe in Him as a personal Saviour.” (Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, 15th November 1899, ‘The Law Revealed in Christ’)

She later wrote of Christ’s acceptance of being the Saviour of mankind

“The Son of God accepted the work joyfully, becoming man's substitute and surety, that He might save him from his sin, and call him from transgression to obedience. He pledged Himself to take man's nature, and stand at the head of the human race, to satisfy every claim made against them as a people bound in the slavery of sin. Through this gift of God to the world man has been given every opportunity of knowing God and the laws of His government.” (*Ibid*)

Notice here who it was that accepted the responsibility of redeeming mankind from sin. It was the divine Son of God. She then said

“The truth could come to man only through Christ, for He was the image of

the invisible God. He represented the power and glory of the Father, and the divine signature was upon all His words and works.” (*Ibid*)

There is no way that these words could be referring to the incarnate Christ – the man Christ Jesus. This was referring to the divine Son of God – prior to the incarnation.

In the light of all that we have been told above, I would ask all who subscribe to the trinity doctrine to remember this one thing. To whom does this world owe its redemption? To whom does the forgiven sinner owe his or her salvation? If a divine person did not die at Calvary then it is not to a divine person that I owe my salvation and allegiance. Whoever or whatever died at Calvary paid the penalty for sin. Whoever or whatever died at Calvary made the atonement. We need to think on these things.

Serious implications not being addressed

As was previously said in section five, the implications of these oneness issues that have been mentioned in this and in the previous section, I have never seen specifically addressed by the pro trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists but these implications are the very reasons why today there is an anti-trinitarian movement within Seventh-day Adventism. Perhaps we have reached the point in this controversy where our church leaders should be addressing these issues. If this were done, then it is quite possible that this would help alleviate much of the misunderstandings that are presently in vogue as to what Seventh-day Adventist really are supposed to believe. Everyone in this debate would then know exactly where he or she stood. Seventh-day Adventist leadership and theologians please take very serious note.

In section thirteen we shall be taking a look at what would have happened if Christ had sinned.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section thirteen

The power of the gospel (Infinite risk, infinite sacrifice, infinite love)

Even when confessing to be a trinitarian, I had always held the belief that the strength (power) of the gospel is found not only in the death of Jesus on the cross but also in the realisation that in order to save mankind from sin, God was willing to put at risk the eternal existence of His Son. In other words, I believed that the risk taken in redeeming mankind from sin revealed the true depth of the love that both God and Christ have for fallen humanity.

In the year 2000 when I began my trinity studies, I quickly came to realise that within trinitarian theology, this risk scenario is not only absent but also totally impossible. As any trinitarian will profess, the belief that Christ could go out of existence is nothing but anathema. They would probably think of those who believe it as being sub-Christian (cultic).

Trinitarians will say that this reasoning invalidates God's unchangeable and eternal purposes in Christ. They will also say that because He is of the *one being* of God, meaning having His subsistence in the one substance (or essence) of the trinity, His possible ceasing to be is impossible theology. They say that their trinity God is of one being (one existence), immortal and immutable (unchangeable) therefore none of the three personalities can ever undergo change or become separated from one another. This is no matter what may be the circumstances.

This reasoning is the same in current Seventh-day Adventist theology. Just like orthodoxy, it prohibits the possibility of the Son literally dying or ceasing to be. This is because they maintain also that their trinity God is immortal and unchangeable. Their fundamental belief No. 2 clearly says

“There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons (Seventh-day Adventists believe ... A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines, page 16,).

It then describes this unity “one God” (the trinity God) by explaining

“God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-

revelation. He is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation” (*Ibid*)

According to Seventh-day Adventist theology, a non-existent divine Son of God is a complete and total impossibility. This is where we have an immediate conflict between trinitarian and non-trinitarian reasoning. We shall come back to this point later.

Regarding the trinity doctrine, I recently had a conversation with a retired Seventh-day Adventist minister. I mentioned this in the previous section. The minister had been energetically extolling the virtues of the trinity teaching - at least as Seventh-day Adventists understand it. In his explanation he said that if Christ had sinned (which he freely admitted had been possible), His humanity would have been lost but not the divine personage. He then went on to say that this is because the Son subsists as an ***inseparable part of the trinity*** and is therefore immortal.

In other words, according to the reasoning of this minister, if the incarnate Christ had sinned, the divine personage would have survived the disaster but the human part of Him would have paid the penalty. I reasoned with him that this was making a dichotomy of Christ, also that because His human nature was only something created by God, it would not be much of a loss to anyone – particularly not to God.

Since beginning my trinity studies 10 years ago (2000), I have often encountered this same trinity reasoning. It does appear therefore that within Seventh-day Adventism, this has now become standard thinking.

Those who adhere to the reasoning usually fail to realise that although the two natures in the one person of Christ maintained their individual states, they were inseparably entwined. There is also the failure to understand that the two natures make up the one personality of Christ and yet He remains the very same personality as He was in His pre-existence. In other words, it is not a case of a divine person subsisting within a body of flesh and bones - also manipulating its actions like a puppeteer working a puppet - but is rather one single personality (the divine Son of God), with a dual nature. As we shall see later, Ellen White said that the Son had taken humanity into Himself.

This puppeteer/puppet manner of thinking was the reasoning of that previously mentioned Seventh-day Adventist minister. In other words, according to him, even if sin did damage the puppet, the puppeteer was safe. This is far from what Seventh-day Adventists have been told through the spirit of prophecy. We shall see this as we progress through this section.

An inseparable blending

Take note of this observation in a letter written by Ellen White in 1890

“The divine nature in the person of Christ was not transformed in human nature and the human nature of the Son of man was not changed into the divine nature, but they were mysteriously blended in the Saviour of men. He was not the Father but in Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and yet He calls to a suffering world, “Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Ellen G. White, Letter 8a, 1890, pp. 2, 3. To M. J. Church, July 7, 1890 Manuscript Release Volume 6, No. 356)

The same author also said of the incarnate Christ

“By his obedience to all the commandments of God, Christ wrought out a redemption for man. This was not done by going out of himself to another, but by taking humanity into himself.” (Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 5th April 1906, ‘The Word made flesh’, see also Signs of the Times April 26th 1899)

Here we are told that humanity (human nature) was taken *into* Christ, meaning that once a divine personality of one nature, He did by reason of the incarnation become one personality of two natures. In other words, He was the same personage in His incarnation as He was in His pre-existence - the difference being that in the incarnation He had two natures and not just one (as He had in His pre-existence).

As has been said previously, the trinity idea of a divine being in a covering of humanity like a puppeteer with his hand inside of a puppet is an incorrect view of the incarnation. The divine Son of God changed from having been a single personality with one nature to the very same personality with two natures. Regarding the relation of the two natures in Christ Ellen White said

“Satanic agencies confederated with evil men to lead the people to believe that Christ was the chief of sinners, and to make Him an object of detestation. But the priests and rulers failed to realize that in Christ divinity was enthroned in humanity.” (Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 14th April 1898, ‘Christ and the law’)

She then added

“Christ's humanity could not be separated from His divinity.” (Ibid)

The next year in the *Signs of the Times*

“This is the mystery of godliness. The two expressions human and divine were, in Christ, closely and inseparably one, and yet they had a distinct individuality.” (Ellen G. White Signs of the Times, 10th May, 1899, ‘Christ glorified, see also the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Volume 5 page 1129)

Ellen White would not have agreed with the reasoning that the humanity and the divinity of Christ could be separated. We shall also see later that she disagreed with those who say that if Christ had sinned (which she did say was possible) only the humanity of Christ would have paid the penalty. According to Ellen White's reasoning, the pre-existent Son of God would have been lost along with His humanity. This is one of the main reasons why today we know that she was not a trinitarian - at least not in the accepted use of the term. Her beliefs were totally incompatible with standard trinitarian theology. Throughout this study, we shall see this over and over again.

Impeccability – the trinity viewpoint

Throughout the centuries, the question of whether Christ could have sinned has been a much-debated topic although it must be said that amongst the majority of non-Seventh-day Adventist Christians, it has been the consensus of opinion that this was not possible.

Most non-Seventh-day Adventists appear to believe in the impeccability of Christ, meaning that, not only did He refrain from sin but also that He was **unable** to sin. This of course takes away the reality of the temptation. Certainly it is not the same as when we are tempted with the possibility of sinning. Generally speaking, non-Seventh-day Adventist trinitarian theology prohibits the possibility of Christ sinning (see previous section).

Those who believe in the impeccability of Christ speak out strongly against those who do not believe it, even referring to them at times as heretics. One example of this was in a book I found on the web called *Christ Could not be Tempted*. In the chapter *The doctrine that Christ was peccable is heresy*, the author W. E. Best stated

“Religious institutions that embrace the doctrine that Christ was peccable (capable of sinning) are Laodicean organizations. Like the Laodicean Church of Revelation 3:14-22, they may be rich, increased with goods, and feel they have need of nothing. But they are spiritually wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.” (*W. E. Best, 'Christ could not be tempted', Chapter 3 'The doctrine that Christ was peccable is heresy'*)

It appears that the author does not have very much regard for those who believe that Christ could have sinned. He then went on to explain

“They are Laodicean because they have closed the door to the impeccable Christ of Holy Scripture. Hence, the impeccable Christ of the Bible is standing at the door of those religious institutions knocking for entrance. Christ's knocking is not at the door of unregenerate hearts but upon the door of regenerate hearts to repent and come out as witnesses against the apostates — those who have turned their backs on the Biblical truth of Christ's impeccability. It is absolutely unthinkable to imagine that the Holy Spirit who regenerates the elect would lead the regenerated to embrace a

peccable Christ.” (*Ibid*)

This conclusion was drawn

“No one can have a true conversion experience by believing in a peccable savior. Jesus Christ comes into and has fellowship with only those who embrace Him as the impeccable Savior.” (*Ibid*)

These indeed are very strong words. It must also be said that they would have been very applicable to Seventh-day Adventists whilst Ellen White was alive, particularly to Ellen White herself. They would also be applicable to many Seventh-day Adventists today, particularly the non-trinitarians amongst us. They all believe that Christ could have sinned. We shall see this now.

A peccable Christ and cults

In a paper called *The impeccability of Christ* (later produced as a book), Dr. J. W. McCormick wrote

“Another fact should be soberly considered in discussing this rather moot question, namely, that every major cult which is active today takes the open position that Jesus was entirely capable of committing sin - although in all fairness it must be pointed out that most of them will say that He did not sin.” (*Dr. J. W. McCormick, 'The impeccability of Christ'*)

Again these are very strong words. According to McCormick, it is “every major cult” that believes Christ could have sinned. As we shall see now, he had Seventh-day Adventists in mind.

“For example, Ellen G. White, great high-priestess of the Seventh Day Adventist cult, in her book *The Desire Of Ages*, actually teaches that the entire earthly ministry of Christ was marked by a constant struggle on His part to avoid sinning.” (*Ibid*)

Here the Seventh-day Adventist Church is termed as a “cult”. We were even regarded as such for decades after Ellen White had died. Needless to say is that there were a number of reasons why we attained to this classification - one of which is duly noted here. Orthodox trinitarians would never even consider it possible for Christ to sin. Needless to say, McCormick did not think very much of Ellen White. He then said

“Moreover, she [Ellen White] teaches that His refusal to commit sin was due to the enabling grace of God, rather than to the Impeccability of His Person.” (*Ibid*)

This is very true indeed. This is exactly what Ellen White did believe and teach. This we have mentioned above. We shall see this very clearly in later sections. As was said above, in the same manner that we need to overcome, meaning

through the Holy Spirit, so too Christ overcame. McCormick concluded

“To this most other cults, and even some groups who are considered fundamental in theology, would voice a hearty “Amen!”” (*Ibid*)

All of this has to do with kenosis. This is the belief that by reason of the incarnation, Christ, in some way or another, limited Himself to the liabilities and limitations of fallen humanity. We shall see in section seventeen that there are different understandings of kenosis.

McCormick recognized that in her book on the life of Christ, Ellen White depicted the Saviour as peccable (able to sin). He also must have realised that in this same book she said that in coming to earth, the pre-existent Son of God took the risk of failure and eternal loss (we shall see this later). It follows therefore that McCormick must have realized that in *Desire of Ages*, Ellen White did not depict God as a trinity. Strange really is that our church leadership today is saying that it was what Ellen White wrote in this very same book that led our denomination to become trinitarian. This is quite a contrast of perspectives. With respect to the peccable view of Christ (meaning that Christ could have sinned) McCormick said

“As already stated this view holds to the idea that it was entirely within the range of possibility that the Lord Jesus Christ could have succumbed to temptation, and thus could have stepped outside the will of His Father at any time between His birth and His death on the cross.” (*Ibid*)

This is indeed what we have been told through the spirit of prophecy. He then says

“This means that during the whole earthly ministry of our Lord the eternal purpose of God was “up for grabs,” and that the redemptive plan hung in the balance while Jesus faced the tempter in the wilderness. This view further represents the earthly sojourn of Christ as having been one long, constant struggle on His part to avoid yielding to the enticements of Satan. It pictures the matchless Son of God as being on a constant alert in order to escape being tricked by Satan into departing from the perfect will of His Father.” (*Ibid*)

This is only partly true. This is inasmuch as the salvation of humanity did for a while hang in the balance - also that Christ did need to be on a constant alert from the devices of Satan. It must not be believed though that Christ did not delight in living out His Father’s law. In one sense He must have regarded this not as a struggle but a privilege and a pleasure. He came to glorify His Father. In other words it was a delight for Him to keep His Father’s law. McCormick concluded

“We therefore take a bold stand upon the facts set forth in the Bible, namely, that in the Incarnation of Christ, no change was effected in the

trinity as such, and that He Who was born of the Virgin was no less God as to His nature than the other members of the Godhead. Therefore, to even suggest that He could have sinned is to fly into the face of every truth set forth in the Word of God with regard to the absolute Impeccability of the Divine nature.” (*Ibid*)

Here we see the crux and the core problem of trinitarianism. It all has to do with the immutability of the nature of its trinity God (we noted in section eight that this was part and parcel of the problem in the controversy regarding the beliefs of Arius).

To the orthodox trinitarian, their trinity understanding of God denies that it was possible for the divine Son of God to have even sinned let alone be lost because of it. I also see confusion between divine nature and divine personality. Admittedly divine nature cannot sin but nature, whether human or divine, is not a personality. We shall return to this thought later.

To a very great extent, especially where the peccability of Christ is concerned, McCormick spoke the truth concerning the beliefs of Ellen White therefore it is certain that he must have realized she was not a trinitarian. This is more than can be said of many Seventh-day Adventists today. We shall note her views now.

Ellen White and the peccable Christ

In 1890 Ellen White wrote in her diary

“Our Lord was tempted as man is tempted. He was capable of yielding to temptations, as are human beings.” (*Ellen G. White, MS 57, Diary 1890, ‘The Humiliation of Christ’, Volume 16 MR No. 1211*)

Note here she says, “as are human beings”. She was identifying the divine Christ (the pre-existent Son of God) with us. She later said

“The divine nature, combined with the human, made Him capable of yielding to Satan's temptations. Here the test to Christ was far greater than that of Adam and Eve, for Christ took our nature, fallen but not corrupted, and would not be corrupted unless He received the words of Satan in the place of the words of God.” (*Ibid*)

Notice here that the “Him” is with reference to the divine Christ.

According to Ellen White, the Son of God’s only hope of avoiding corruption was obedience to God’s revealed will. This is not believed by orthodox trinitarians. They say He cannot cease to be because He is of the trinity structure of God. She concluded

“To suppose He was not capable of yielding to temptation places Him

where He cannot be a perfect example for man, and the force and the power of this part of Christ's humiliation, which is the most eventful, is no instruction or help to human beings." (*Ibid*)

Again we are referring to the divine Christ (note the reference to "man" and "human beings").

Regarding Christ being our "perfect example", the entirety of section eighteen is devoted to it. This is because this author regards it as being of the utmost importance.

"The Son of God was assaulted at every step by the powers of darkness. After his baptism he was driven of the Spirit into the wilderness, and suffered temptation for forty days." (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald 18th February 1890, 'How to meet a controverted point of doctrine'*)

This was totally in keeping with what McCormick said was believed by Ellen White (see above). Notice she says that it was the "Son of God" who was "assaulted at every step" not just human flesh (human nature). Ellen White then said with regards to her previous remark

"Letters have been coming in to me, affirming that Christ could not have had the same nature as man, for if he had, he would have fallen under similar temptations. If he did not have man's nature, he could not be our example. If he was not a partaker of our nature, he could not have been tempted as man has been. If it were not possible for him to yield to temptation, he could not be our helper. It was a solemn reality that Christ came to fight the battles as man, in man's behalf. His temptation and victory tell us that humanity must copy the Pattern; man must become a partaker of the divine nature." (*Ibid*)

We shall return to the latter thought ("a partaker of the divine nature") in a later section, suffice to say here that Christ is being said to be our example in the way, meaning the manner, He overcame. This is very important to our understanding of what Christ achieved in His humanity. This remark of Ellen White's is also very interesting. I say this because E. J. Waggoner, in an article published in the *Signs of the Times* one year previous, had said that it was impossible for Christ to sin. He wrote

"One more point, and then we can learn the entire lesson that we should learn from the fact the "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." How was it that Christ could be thus "compassed with infirmity" (Heb. 5:2), and still know no sin? (*Ellet J. Waggoner, Signs of the Times, January 21st 1889, 'God manifest in the flesh'*)

He also made these various comments

“Some may have thought, while reading this article thus far, that we were depreciating the character of Jesus, by bringing him down to the level of sinful man. On the contrary, we are simply exalting the "divine power" of our blessed Saviour, who himself voluntarily descended to the level of sinful man, in order that he might exalt man to his own spotless purity, which he retained under the most adverse circumstances. "God was in Christ," and hence he could not sin.” (*Ibid*)

“His humanity only veiled his divine nature, which was more than able to successfully resist the sinful passions of the flesh. There was in his whole life a struggle. The flesh, moved upon by the enemy of all righteousness, would tend to sin, yet his divine nature never for a moment harbored an evil desire, nor did his divine power for a moment waver.” (*Ibid*)

“Having suffered in the flesh all that all men can possibly suffer, he returned to the throne of the Father, as spotless as when he left the courts of glory. When he laid in the tomb, under the power of death, "it was impossible that he should be holden of it," because it had been impossible for the divine nature which dwelt in him to sin.” (*Ibid*)

"Well," some will say, "I don't see any comfort in this for me; it wasn't possible that the Son of God should sin, but I haven't any such power." Why not? You can have it if you want it. The same power which enabled him to resist every temptation presented through the flesh, while he was "compassed with infirmity," can enable us to do the same. Christ could not sin, because he was the manifestation of God.” (*Ibid*)

We can clearly see that Ellen White totally disagreed with Waggoner. Whilst she agreed that Christ was God manifest in the flesh, she also said that it had been possible for Him to sin. Three years later she wrote

“Those who claim that it was not possible for Christ to sin, cannot believe that He took upon Him human nature. Christ was actually tempted, not only in the wilderness, but all through his life. In all points He was tempted as we are, and because He successfully resisted temptation in every form, He gave us a perfect example.” (*Ellen G. White, Bible Echo 1st November 1892, 'Tempted in all points like as we are'*)

Ellen White would have applied these sentiments to both Waggoner's and McCormick's reasoning (see above). Again this was in keeping with McCormick's realisations of Ellen White's beliefs. Notice how again she returns to the thought of Christ being our “perfect example”.

Returning our thoughts to Waggoner's article in the *Signs of the Times (God manifest in the flesh)*, it is very interesting to note that in the main it comprises the section in his book *Christ and His Righteousness* that carries the same title (*God manifest in the flesh* pages 24-31) but in his book, all the references to the

impossibility of Christ sinning - as above - is not there. Instead Waggoner wrote

“His humanity only veiled His Divine nature, by which He was inseparably connected with the invisible God and which was more than able successfully to resist the weaknesses of the flesh.” (*E. J. Waggoner, Christ and His Righteousness, page 28, ‘God manifest in the flesh’*)

Like the trinitarians, Waggoner appeared to hold to the belief that because Christ could not be separated from God, He can never cease to be. Did this stem from His reasoning that Christ could not sin? He also said later (very similar to as in his article above)

“But someone will say, "I don't see any comfort in this for me. To be sure, I have an example, but I can't follow it, for I haven't the power that Christ had. He was God even while here on earth; I am but a man." Yes, but you may have the same power that He had if you want it. He was "compassed with infirmity," yet He "did no sin," because of the Divine power constantly dwelling within Him.” (*Ibid, page 29*)

Waggoner did not exactly say in his book that Christ could not sin but he came very close to it. His remarks, saying that Christ did not sin “because of the Divine power constantly dwelling within Him” could easily be taken as saying so. In reality, Christ did not sin because He chose not to do so – not that He could not sin.

In 1893, which was three years after Waggoner’s book *Christ and His Righteousness* had been published, Ellen White wrote

“The point you inquire of me is, In our Lord's great scene of conflict in the wilderness, apparently under the power of Satan and his angels, was He capable, in His human nature, of yielding to these temptations?”

I will try to answer this important question: As God He could not be tempted: but as a man He could be tempted, and that strongly, and could yield to the temptations. His human nature must pass through the same test and trial Adam and Eve passed through.” (*Ellen G. White, Ms 94, 1893, pp. 1-3. "Could Christ Have Yielded to Temptation?" June 30, 1893, 6MR 112.2*)

In a letter she wrote to two conference workers in Australia (this was when she was still residing in Australia), the Lord’s messenger said

“Be careful, exceedingly careful as to how you dwell upon the human nature of Christ. Do not set Him before the people as a man with the propensities of sin.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 8, 1895. written to Brother and Sister W. L .H. Baker, North American workers in Australia, probably from Sunnyside, Cooranbong, New South Wales*)

In counterbalancing this statement she said in the very same paragraph

“He could have sinned; He could have fallen, but not for one moment was there in Him an evil propensity. He was assailed with temptations in the wilderness, as Adam was assailed with temptations in Eden.” (*Ibid*)

In confirmation of this she wrote 4 years later in the *Youth's Instructor*

“The temptations to which Christ was subjected were a terrible reality. As a free agent He was placed on probation, with liberty to yield to Satan's temptations and work at cross-purposes with God. If this were not so, if it had not been possible for Him to fall, He could not have been tempted in all points as the human family is tempted.” (*Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor, 26th October 1899, 'Against principalities and powers'*)

On this same subject she said in a General Conference Bulletin that when Adam was assailed by the tempter he “stood before God in the strength of perfect manhood”, also that he was “surrounded with things of beauty, and communed daily with the holy angels”. She then said

“What a contrast to this perfect being did the second Adam present, as he entered the desolate wilderness to cope with Satan. For four thousand years the race had been decreasing in size and physical strength, and deteriorating in moral worth; and in order to elevate fallen man, Christ must reach him where he stood. He assumed human nature, bearing the infirmities and degeneracy of the race. He humiliated himself to the lowest depths of human woe, that he might sympathize with man and rescue him from the degradation into which sin had plunged him.” (*Ellen G. White, General Conference Bulletin, 25th February 1895, 'Extracts from Life of Christ'*)

Then, after quoting Hebrews 2:10, 5:9, 2:17-18 and 4:15 she said that Satan finds a foothold in human hearts but in Christ he could find none. She then said

“Jesus did not consent to sin. Not even by a thought could he be brought to the power of Satan's temptations. Yet it is written of Christ that he was tempted in all points like as we are. Many hold that from the nature of Christ it was impossible for Satan's temptations to weaken or overthrow him. Then Christ could not have been placed in Adam's position, to go over the ground where Adam stumbled and fell; he could not have gained the victory that Adam failed to gain. Unless he was placed in a position as trying as that in which Adam stood, he could not redeem Adam's failure. If man has in any sense a more trying conflict to endure than had Christ, then Christ is not able to succor him when tempted. Christ took humanity with all its liabilities. He took the nature of man with the possibility of yielding to temptation, and he relied upon divine power to keep him.” (*Ibid*)

This is rank anti-trinitarianism, at least as far as orthodoxy would regard it. Very few trinitarians - if any - would believe any of these things. Certainly the belief that Christ could have sinned is not simply hypothetical. To the divine Son of God it was as said here by Ellen White, “a terrible reality” (see above). This is the very same reality that just as we need to do, He had to face every day of His life on earth.

It is so different for us. We are told in the Scriptures that if as Christians we sin, we are to remember that in Christ we have an advocate (1 John 2:1). It was not so with Jesus. If He had sinned - even just once - He would have been lost. Christ had no safety net such as we have. This is why it can be said that He walked a tightrope that we never need to walk or ever could ever walk. Strange really that some people say that Jesus had an advantage over us. I certainly would not reason it that way.

“Christ bore the sins of the whole world. He endured our punishment, -- the wrath of God against transgression. His trial involved the fierce temptation of thinking that he was forsaken by God. His soul was tortured by the pressure of a horror of great darkness lest he should swerve from his uprightness during the terrible ordeal. He could not have been tempted in all points like as man is tempted had there been no possibility of his failing. He was a free agent, placed on probation, as was Adam and as is man.

Unless there is a possibility of yielding, temptation is no temptation. Temptation comes and is resisted when man is powerfully influenced to do a wrong action, and knowing that he can do it, resists by faith, with a firm hold upon divine power. This was the ordeal through which Christ passed. In his closing hours, while hanging upon the cross, he experienced to the fullest extent what man must experience striving against sin. He realized how bad man may become by yielding to sin. He realized the terrible consequence of the transgression of God's law; for the iniquity of the whole world was upon him.”

She concluded by saying

“By giving his only begotten Son to die on the cross, God has shown us the estimate he places on the human soul. All that the world admires, all it calls precious, sinks into insignificance when placed in the balance with one soul; for a matchless ransom has been paid for that soul. All heaven has been given in one gift.” (*Ibid*)

We shall now see what Ellen White had to say about the consequences of Christ yielding to sin - meaning if He had sinned. It will also be seen that this theology becomes even more anti-trinitarian than ever.

The ultimate risk

In her supposedly trinitarian book *Desire of Ages*, Ellen White wrote

“Satan in heaven had hated Christ for His position in the courts of God. He hated Him the more when he himself was dethroned. He hated Him who pledged Himself to redeem a race of sinners. Yet into the world where Satan claimed dominion God permitted His Son to come, a helpless babe, subject to the weakness of humanity. He permitted Him to meet life's peril in common with every human soul, to fight the battle as every child of humanity must fight it, at the risk of failure and eternal loss.” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages. Page 49 'Unto you a Saviour'*)

Who was it here that God allowed to come into the world to face life's peril as every human being to face it, meaning “at the risk of failure and eternal loss”? It was God's own Son. This again shows that Ellen White was not a trinitarian. No true trinitarian could possibly believe such a thing. Trinity theology forbids this reasoning. She also wrote in the same book

“Never can the cost of our redemption be realized until the redeemed shall stand with the Redeemer before the throne of God. Then as the glories of the eternal home burst upon our enraptured senses we shall remember that Jesus left all this for us, that He not only became an exile from the heavenly courts, but for us took the risk of failure and eternal loss.” (*Ibid page 131, 'The victory'*)

It is only when we realise what was risked and given up by Christ that we can truly appreciate the depth of the gospel. Please take careful note of what Ellen White actually said here. She said that when the redeemed stand “with the redeemer” we shall “remember” that Christ “took the risk of failure and eternal loss”. If we are to “remember” this truth at the time that we enter Heaven, then we must have known it before we got there. Again this is only reasonable thinking.

The very same year that *Desire of Ages* was published Ellen White wrote

“Could Satan in the least particular have tempted Christ to sin, he would have bruised the Saviour's head. As it was, he could only touch His heel. Had the head of Christ been touched, the hope of the human race would have perished. Divine wrath would have come upon Christ as it came upon Adam. Christ and the church would have been without hope.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, June 9th 1898, see also Selected Messages Book 1 page 256*)

This is very plain speaking. It is not easily misunderstood. It is also something that no true trinitarian believes. This is because in trinity theology, Christ losing His existence is a total impossibility. We can see therefore that in *Desire of Ages* as well as in other places, Ellen White never spoke of Christ in a trinitarian sense but one that was non-trinitarian (trinitarians would even say anti-trinitarian). This is just one of the reasons why neither she nor *Desire of Ages* can ever be termed trinitarian - at least not in the accepted sense of the term. Three years

previous to the publication of *Desire of Ages* Ellen White wrote

“Who can estimate the value of a soul? Go to Gethsemane, and there watch with Jesus through those long hours of anguish when he sweat as it were great drops of blood; look upon the Saviour uplifted on the cross; hear that despairing cry, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Look upon that wounded head, the pierced side, the marred feet.” (*Ellen G. White, General Conference Bulletin 1st December 1895 ‘Seeking the Lost’*)

She then added this very important observation

“Remember that Christ risked all; "tempted like as we are," he staked even his own eternal existence upon the issue of the conflict. Heaven itself was imperiled for our redemption. At the foot of the cross, remembering that for one sinner Jesus would have yielded up his life, we may estimate the value of a soul.” (*Ibid*)

Notice here, in this General Conference Bulletin (a week of prayer reading for December 28th 1895) what it was that Ellen White was asking of Seventh-day Adventists. It was not just to “Remember” that Christ could have sinned but also that in the consequence of this happening, He could have lost His “own eternal existence”.

At that time therefore, this appears to have been the generally accepted belief within Seventh-day Adventism. This was certainly not a trinitarian faith. It seems that in our haste to adopt the trinity doctrine, many Seventh-day Adventists have already forgotten this wonderful truth concerning what Christ risked. This is even before they get to Heaven. In other words, for the sake of speculative philosophy, we have forfeited one of the most important aspects of the gospel.

Interesting is that the above week of prayer reading was later edited and transposed into the chapter in *Christ's Object Lessons*. It is called: *This man receiveth sinners*. What is interesting is that the words "tempted like as we are," he staked even his own eternal existence upon the issue of the conflict” was omitted. Why this happened I have not yet discovered. Perhaps a reader of this study knows. If so, perhaps he or she would like to email me.

The year following the publication of *Desire of Ages* Ellen White wrote in the *Signs of the Times*

“But although Christ's divine glory was for a time veiled and eclipsed by His assuming humanity, yet He did not cease to be God when He became man. The human did not take the place of the divine, nor the divine of the human. This is the mystery of godliness. The two expressions human and divine were, in Christ, closely and inseparably one, and yet they had a distinct individuality. Though Christ humbled Himself to become man, the Godhead was still His own. His Deity could not be lost while He stood faithful and true

to His loyalty. Surrounded with sorrow, suffering, and moral pollution, despised and rejected by the people to whom had been intrusted the oracles of heaven, Jesus could yet speak of Himself as the Son of man in heaven. He was ready to take once more His divine glory when His work on earth was done." (*Ellen G. White, The Signs of the Times, 10th May 1899, 'Christ glorified'*)

We can only reason here that Ellen White was saying that if Christ had not been faithful and true, He would have lost His deity. How else can it be reasoned? In a letter written the following year - now **two years after** *Desire of Ages* had been published - Ellen White wrote of Christ

"He became subject to temptation, endangering as it were, His divine attributes. Satan sought, by the constant and curious devices of his cunning, to make Christ yield to temptation." (*Ellen G. White, Letter 5, 1900, as quoted in the Seventh-day Adventists Bible Commentary Volume 7 page 926*)

From all of the above, we can readily see that not only did Ellen White believe that Christ was a separate personality from God but also, if He had sinned, He would have lost His "divine attributes". This was even though He was, in His pre-existence, God essentially. This is only the same as saying that if He had not been loyal and faithful He would have lost His deity. Again we see that in 1900, Ellen White was not a trinitarian. Seven years earlier in 1893 she had also written

"To the honor and glory of God, His beloved Son -- the Surety, the Substitute -- was delivered up and descended into the prisonhouse of the grave. The new tomb enclosed Him in its rocky chambers. If one single sin had tainted His character the stone would never have been rolled away from the door of His rocky chamber, and the world with its burden of guilt would have perished." (*Ellen G. White, Ms. 81, 1893, p. 11, Diary entry for Sunday, July 2, 1893, Wellington, New Zealand*)

This is a mind-blowing realisation. Can we possibly imagine how God would have felt if His Son had sinned and He would have needed to leave the stone of His tomb in its place? This is especially so when we need to realise that He had the power to remove it and to call His Son back to life. How would we feel if we were placed in this position?

It must be remembered here that there were not two Christ's. There was only one. If that one Christ had not come out of the tomb, the divine pre-existent Son of God would have ceased to be. This was no different than what Ellen White wrote two years later. This is when she said

"Christ has found his pearl of great price in lost, perishing souls. He sold all that he had to come into possession, even engaged to do the work, and run

the risk of losing his own life in the conflict. How then should man regard his fellow man? Christ has demonstrated the way. He says, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." (*Ellen G. White, Letter 119, 1895*)

Four years later Ellen White made this observation

"In the grave Christ was the captive of divine justice. To the Judge of the universe He had made Himself responsible for the transgression of the law." (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 15th November 1899, 'The Law Revealed in Christ'*)

There is no doubt that Ellen White would not have subscribed to the trinitarian view of the Son of God which says that it was not possible for Him to lose His eternal existence, neither would she have agreed with present day Seventh-day Adventist teaching that says that even if He had sinned He would not have lost His eternal existence. This shows us that she could never have believed the trinity doctrine. She certainly was not a trinitarian – not in any sense of the word."

Some may say that over the years Ellen White changed her mind regarding this risk scenario but there is nothing in her writings to suggest such a thing. In fact in 1905, in a letter written to her grand-daughter, she said (this was 7 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*)

"I am now looking over my diaries and copies of letters written for several years back, commencing before I went to Europe, before you were born. I have the most precious matter to reproduce and place before the people in testimony form. While I am able to do this work, the people must have these things to revive past history, that they may see that there is one straight chain of truth, without one heretical sentence, in that which I have written." (*Ellen G. White, Letter to Mabel White, Letter 329a, pages 1 and 2, November 16th 1905, Manuscript Releases MR No. 532*)

Ellen White did not see herself as changing her mind about that which she had previously written. This risk to Christ was not some small side issue but something very important. Under the sub-title *The Risks Involved*, the notes in the Sabbath School lesson quarterly said (this was a quote from the book *The I Ams*)

"Christ assumed, not the original unfallen, but our fallen humanity. In this second experiment, He stood not precisely where Adam before Him had, but, as has already been said, with immense odds against Him — evil, with all the prestige of victory and its consequent enthronement in the very constitution of our nature, armed with more terrific power against the possible realization of this divine idea of man — perfect holiness." (*SS Lesson Quarterly, 1st quarter 1921, Our Personal Saviour Jesus Christ, page 14, Lesson 5 for January 29th 1921, 'The Purpose of the Incarnation'*)

The study then said

“All this considered, the disadvantages of the situation, the tremendous risks involved, and the fierceness of the opposition encountered, we come to some adequate sense both of the reality and greatness of that vast moral achievement;. human nature tempted, tried, miscarried in Adam, lifted up in Christ to the sphere of actualized sinlessness.”—“The I Ams of Christ,” pages 248, 249.” (*Ibid*)

Although these “risks” themselves are not mentioned, to describe them as “tremendous” does tell their own story. Not that this study in 1921 was contrasting the sinless humanity of the pre-fall Adam with the “fallen humanity” of which Christ partook.

Immutability

In a sermon preached on January 7th 1855, the minister C. H. Spurgeon said regarding his chosen text “For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed” (Malachi 3:6)

“I shall offer some exposition of my text, by first saying, that God is Jehovah, and he changes not in his essence. We cannot tell you what Godhead is. We do not know what substance that is which we call God. It is an existence, it is a being; but what that is, we know not. However, whatever it is, we call it his essence, and that essence never changes.” (*C. H. Spurgeon, Sermon preached at the New Park Street Chapel in Southwark on January 7th 1855*)

This I believe was a misunderstanding of what God was actually saying through Malachi. This is because God is referring here to His character and purposes – not to His essence of being (how He exists). This is why He is saying that the “sons of Jacob are not consumed” (Malachi 3:6). It was because of the character of God, meaning that He is compassionate, full of mercy and longsuffering that Israel was “not consumed”. This Scripture is also saying they were not consumed because God’s eternal purposes for His people have never changed. God is not saying here that the children of Israel were not consumed because of His three-fold (trinity) structure (essence).

Nevertheless, we can see the point that Spurgeon was trying to put across which was that he believed that the essence of God never changes. In other words, in His divine being (in His divinity), this trinity God is immutable. This of course is only another way of saying that because the Son of God belongs to this three-fold essence of God, He cannot undergo change therefore He cannot die or cease to exist.

You may be saying at the moment that this belief is not taught within Seventh-day Adventism but you would be wrong. We shall see this now.

Current Seventh-day Adventist theology

In Volume 12 of the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia - which is the volume that deals with the official theology of our denomination (Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist theology) - there is a section devoted to the doctrine of God. We noted this in section four. Fernando Canale wrote this thesis. He is Professor of Theology and Philosophy at Andrews University. On page 109 (this is under the heading of immutability) Canale says

“Immutability is another characteristic of God’s being that has been an important component of the Christian doctrine of God through the centuries.” *(Fernando Canale, The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia Volume 12, ‘The Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist theology’ page 109, ‘The Doctrine of God’)*

He then adds

“Immutability refers to the absence of change in God. The Bible straightforwardly declares that God does not change (Mal. 3:6; James 1:17).” *(Ibid)*

Notice that as proof of his conclusions, as does Spurgeon (see above), Canale quotes Malachi 3:6. If you take a look at James 1:17 you will see that the context is the same. It is not referring to the being (essence) of God but to His character and purposes etc - the latter in relation to fallen humanity. Canale also makes these comments

“The immutability of God – understood not as an impassibility but as the eternal identity of God’s being with itself and the historical faithfulness, constancy, and consistency of His relation, purposes, and actions toward us - is the necessary presupposition for theological ideas such as typology, incarnation, cross, and great controversy between God and Satan as presented throughout the Bible.” *(Ibid page 110)*

“Since God is eternal and immutable, His trinitarian nature has never changed or come into being.” *(Ibid page 120)*

“The “oneness” of God refers to the singleness of His being.” *(Ibid page 121)*

“The oneness of God plays a decisive, systematic role in determining the referent for the biblical revelations about God. In other words, since the God of the Bible is one and not many, all the various revelations about Him presented throughout the Bible refer to the same, one divine reality and not to a plurality of divine beings.” *(Ibid)*

This is trinity ‘oneness’ theology. It is the indivisible singleness of being, meaning the ‘in-one’ part of the three-in-one theory. Taken to its ultimate conclusion, this

theology must intend to mean that the pre-existent Son of God, because He is a part of this trinity oneness (the one being of God), cannot go out of existence. Obvious to relate, if He did go out of existence, this would bring about a change in God - which in this trinity reasoning is deemed impossible. This latter Seventh-day Adventist theology is typically trinitarian and is the same as held by orthodoxy. In other words the two beliefs, meaning (a) that the Son of God could have lost His eternal existence and (b) that God's being as a trinity is immutable (unchanging), are totally incompatible with each other. To put this in another way again, both beliefs cannot be held simultaneously. One of them must be error.

The strange thing is, at least it seems strange to me, is that it is still being taught today within Seventh-day Adventism that Jesus could have sinned. As associate editor of the Adventist Review, Roy Adams recently wrote

“To say there was no risk in the Incarnation is to argue the biblically untenable position that it was impossible for Jesus to sin. If that were the case, then we'd be into divine playacting of the most cynical kind. And Jesus' 40-day fast in the desert, His all-night prayer vigils, and His agony in Gethsemane would all amount to a cruel farce.” (Roy Adams, *Advent Review*, April 17th 2008, 'An impenetrable mystery')

After saying that the life of Jesus on earth could have turned out differently he added

“Reality is not all cut and dried. And if Jesus was at all an example for us, He had to have come with the same freedom we all have as humans to choose God's will or to reject it.” (*Ibid*)

His conclusion was

“To say there was no risk would be to say that Jesus could not sin just because God knew that He *would not*.” (*Ibid*)

I say this is strange because if Christ could have sinned and the trinity God taught by Seventh-day Adventists is unchangeable, what then are Seventh-day Adventists teaching would have happened to the divine Son of God if He had sinned? As of yet I have never seen this issue addressed within Seventh-day Adventist literature. It is now the time to do so.

Charles S. Longacre was a stalwart figure in Seventh-day Adventism. He is often remembered for the stand he took and the work he did regarding religious liberty but he was also very strong regarding the begotten concept of Christ - meaning that he believed that because Christ was begotten of the Father, He was truly the Son of God.

Longacre well knew of the dangers of the trinity doctrine - particularly the concepts of its indivisibility of the three personalities, also their immutability. In a

paper he wrote for the Bible Research Fellowship (the paper was called *The Deity of Christ*) he did on a number of occasions return to the thought that these trinity concepts deny that Christ could have lost His eternal existence. We shall see more of his reasoning in section forty-eight.

Using much the same argument, also the same spirit of prophecy statements that have been used above, he repeatedly emphasises that the risk taken by both God and Christ in the plan of salvation shows the love they have for fallen humanity. In summary of his reasoning he said

“If it were impossible for the Son of God to make a mistake or commit a sin, then His coming into this world and subjecting Himself to temptations were all a farce and mere mockery. If it were possible for Him to yield to temptation and fall into sin, then He must have risked heaven and His very existence, and even all eternity. That is exactly what the Scriptures and the Spirit of Prophecy say Christ, the Son of God did do when He came to work out for us a plan of salvation from the curse of sin.” (*Charles S. Longacre, ‘The Deity of Christ’, paper presented to the Bible Research Fellowship Angwin, California January 1947, page 13*)

Then, after quoting a number of Ellen White quotations (as we have done above) showing that Christ could have lost His eternal existence he said

“If Christ "risked all," even His eternal existence in heaven, then there was a possibility of His being overcome by sin, and if overcome by sin, He would have gone into Joseph's tomb and neither that tomb nor any other tomb would ever have been opened. All would have been lost and He would have suffered "eternal loss," the loss of all He ever possessed - His divinity and His humanity and heaven itself would have been "lost - eternally lost." (*Ibid page 14*)

Longacre added in the next paragraph

“If He had failed, His immutability as well as His eternity would have been forfeited and eternally lost.” (*Ibid*)

His conclusion was

“It was possible for one of the God-head to be lost, and eternally lost - and if that had happened, and it was possible to happen, God, the Father, would still have remained as the One and only absolute and living God, reigning supreme over all the unfallen worlds, but with all the human race blotted out of existence on this earth.” (*Ibid*)

There was no doubt in Longacre’s mind that the trinity doctrine eclipsed (darkened/obscured) the love that God has for humanity. It is unfortunate that not many Seventh-day Adventists today see it that way.

For many of our members, especially our theologians, the introduction of the trinity doctrine into Seventh-day Adventism has changed this reasoning. This is because this triune theology denies there was a risk to the eternal existence of the Son.

Quite recently (July 2008), in the Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Research Institute newsletter *Reflections*, our official current understanding of the trinity doctrine was defined. This was in the form of a Bible Study by Ekkehardt Mueller, Associate Director of the Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Research Institute. We noted this in section six so we will not detail it all here. What we will recall is that under the heading “One God and Three Persons” Mueller wrote that “The three persons” of the trinity “share one indivisible nature.”, thus he concluded

“Each person of the Godhead is by nature and essence God, and the fullness of the deity dwells in each of them. On the other hand, each person of the Godhead is inseparably connected to the other two.” (*Ekkehardt Mueller, Biblical Research Institute, Reflections newsletter, July 2008, Page 9, ‘Scripture Applied, - A Bible Study’*)

As we have previously noted, this teaching that each of the three personalities is “inseparably connected to the other two” has horrendous implications as far as the gospel is concerned. It denies that even though the Son of God became incarnate, He could not have forfeited (even if He had sinned) His eternal existence. This would make God look as though He has one rule for humanity but another for His own Son. This, if it were true, would depict a very serious inconsistency in His character. Mueller concluded

“In the divine unity there are three coeternal and coequal persons, who, though distinct, are the one undivided God.” (*Ibid*)

Notice particularly the last words of Mueller. He says that the “three coeternal and coequal persons ... are the one undivided God”.

This is the one substance of God reasoning. It is this reasoning that leads to the belief that it was impossible for the divine Christ, even if He had sinned, to lose His eternal existence. Some trinitarians even believe that it was impossible for Christ to sin; which we know is not true (see Hebrews 4:15). These are amongst the various implications of the trinity doctrine.

Detracting from the love of God

As we can see from trinity theology, the *one substance* (one being of God) theory does lead to the belief that it is impossible for the Son to lose either His attributes of deity or His eternal existence. This is something that Ellen White said our Saviour would have done if He had sinned. It also leads to the belief that Christ, in the incarnation, did not actually vacate Heaven or become changed in any way (see previous section). On this basis alone I cannot see how

anyone can regard Ellen White as a trinitarian.

From the above, we can also see that the trinity doctrine not only affects our beliefs as to regarding the deity of Christ but also has a very serious impact on other beliefs that we as Seventh-day Adventists have previously held.

It is this speculating concerning the oneness of substance (the one being of God) that is **the** problem area. This very clearly shows that by speculating about something that God has chosen to keep silent upon does lead to conclusions that are not entirely wholesome. Certainly they are not in keeping with what God has revealed to His remnant people. As Ellen White once said (we noted this in section two)

“While we must hold fast to the truths which we have already received, we must not look with suspicion upon any new light that God may send.” (*Ellen G. White, Gospel Workers, 1892 edition, page 310, ‘The missionary’*)

Ellen White regarded certain doctrines as being “truths” that Seventh-day Adventists had “already received”. This means that whilst these truths may be elaborated and magnified upon, they can never develop into error.

In promoting a concept that says that the pre-existent Son of God could not be lost, we are certainly not exalting what Christ has achieved in becoming flesh but rather we are detracting from it. This is perhaps the worse part of trinity reasoning. It detracts from the one thing that brings about a life changing response from the hardened sinner. This is the amazing love of God, seen not only in the death of His Son on the cross but also in the risk that was taken in Him becoming incarnate.

Yet needless to say, without this one indivisible substance theory (essential trinitarianism) there is no trinity doctrine (three-in-one) therefore this is just as necessary as are the three individual personalities - at least to trinitarian theology. In other words, if there is no trinity oneness, then there is no trinity doctrine.

One final thought

In an article called *The Great Sacrifice*, we find these words

“Christ could not see through the portals of the tomb. Bright hope did not present to Him his coming forth from the grave a triumphant conqueror, or tell Him of the Father's acceptance of his sacrifice. All He could realize during this time of amazing darkness was the heinousness of sin that was laid upon Him, and the horror of its penalty, death. He feared that sin was so offensive in the sight of his Father that their separation was eternal. The temptation that his own Father had forever left Him, caused that fearful cry from the cross, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (*Ellen G. White, Bible Echo, 15th September 1892, ‘The Great Sacrifice’*)

Christ's dying thoughts were that what He had done at the cross might forever separate Him from His beloved Father. Such was the love that the Father and the Son have for each other.

When my trinity studies began ten years ago (2000), this trinitarian belief that Christ could not have lost His eternal existence was the very first of these startling realisations but there were more to follow. We shall take a look at two of these in the next section (fourteen).

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section fourteen

A real Father and Son sacrifice

This section reveals another of the startling realisations I encountered at the beginning of my trinity studies. This realisation was that in current Seventh-day Adventist trinitarian theology, the divine personality that became flesh and dwelt amongst us is not considered to be, in His pre-existence, a real Son. This is even though throughout the time period of Ellen White's ministry and beyond, the pre-existent Sonship of Christ was the standard belief amongst Seventh-day Adventists. It was also regarded as of the utmost importance.

As we have noted previously, Ellen White did warn in 1904 that there would be a very serious departing from the faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This is when she said

"Be not deceived; many will depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. We have now before us the alpha of this danger. The omega will be of a most startling nature." (Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B, No. 2 page 16, 'Letter to Leading Physicians', July 24th 1904, 'Teach the Word')

The faith she referred to here was the faith held by Seventh-day Adventists in 1904 (see section one). This was the faith that said Christ is the literal Son of God. This was not by means of the resurrection but in His pre-existence. This was the begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventists. It was also the faith that said that because He was the only begotten Son of God then He must be God. As John Matteson, a prolific Seventh-day Adventist minister and evangelist put it in 1869 (this was after saying that the resurrection cannot make any one a literal child of God, any more than the creation could make Adam a literal child of God)

"Christ is the only literal Son of God. "The only begotten of the Father." John i, 14. He is God because he is the Son of God; not by virtue of his resurrection. If Christ is the only begotten of the Father, then we cannot be begotten of the Father in a literal sense. It can only be in a secondary sense of the word." (J. G. Matteson, Review and Herald, October 12th 1869, 'Children of God')

Here is the confirmation that within early Seventh-day Adventism, the belief was that Christ is truly God. This is not in a trinitarian sense but one that is non-

trinitarian. It was the begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventists. Note that Matteson emphasises that Christ is God “because he is the Son of God”.

In 1895, 26 years after Matteson had penned these words, Ellen White made much the same comment. This is when she said that Christ is the only begotten of the Father whilst we as Christians are adopted sons (and daughters) of God. She actually wrote

“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.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 30th May 1895, 'Christ our complete salvation'*)

This just about summarises what Seventh-day Adventists believed concerning Christ - at least it was during Ellen White's ministry. It was that Christ is literally the Son of God therefore He is God.

Alonzo T. Jones was one of the preachers at the famous 1888 Minneapolis General Conference session. Like Waggoner, the other main speaker at Minneapolis, also along with Ellen White, he upheld this very same begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventists. In a sermon he preached at a General Conference in 1895 he said

“He who was born in the form of God took the form of man." In the flesh he was all the while as God, but he did not appear as God." "He divested himself of the form of God, and in its stead took the form and fashion of man" "The glories of the form of God, he for awhile relinquished." (*A. T. Jones, General Conference Bulletin, March 4th 1895, 'The Third Angel's Message – No. 23'*)

Here again we see the begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventists. It was that Christ was “born in the form of God” and that in His pre-existence He was God. Regarding the latter, there has never been any doubt within Seventh-day Adventism. Note that A. T. Jones had preached this (March 4th 1895) shortly before Ellen White's previously quoted statement in the *Signs of the Times* (30th May 1895). We can see why Ellen White never objected to the begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventists. She believed and supported it.

Rumblings and dissatisfaction

In 1919, which was 15 years after the above alpha and omega warning was given, also only 4 years after the death of Ellen White, the question was beginning to be debated (it seems in our schools and colleges) as to whether Christ, in His pre-existence, really was begotten, meaning was He really a Son. This was even though this concept had been the standard belief of Seventh-day

Adventists throughout the entire 71 years of Ellen White's ministry. How we know this debate was in existence by 1919 is because during a Bible Conference held that year at Takoma Park (the first of its kind ever held by Seventh-day Adventists), a very perplexed John Isaac - then a teacher at the Clinton Theological Seminary in Missouri - asked

“What are we Bible teachers going to do? We have heard ministers talk one way. Our students have had Bible teachers in one school spend days and days upon this question. Then they come to another school, and the teacher does not agree with that. We ought to have something definite so that we might give the answer. I think it can be done. We ought to have it clearly stated. Was Christ ever begotten, or not, or this thing, or that thing.”
(John Isaac, Notes on the discussions of July 6th of the 1919 Bible Conference and Teachers Meeting held at Takoma Park)

We can see that by this time (1919), some within Seventh-day Adventism were dissatisfied with its denominational begotten belief. It does not appear that this came to the surface whilst Ellen White was alive, at least as yet I can find no record of it.

There would have been more to this objection than Christ just being begotten. I say this because orthodox trinitarianism says that Christ is begotten and they maintain that He is God essentially, although having said that, their understanding of it is entirely different than is that of Seventh-day Adventism. This is inasmuch as orthodoxy says that as a Son, Christ is **eternally** begotten of the Father whilst early Seventh-day Adventists said that He was begotten at a point in eternity. This was a major difference between the two theologies. Seventh-day Adventist reasoning made the Father older than the Son whilst orthodoxy said that the Father and Son were coeternal. This would mean of course that they are coeval (of the same age)

Up to the time of the 1919 Bible Conference, the prevalent belief in Seventh-day Adventism had been that the divine Christ, as a separate personality from the Father, had a beginning of days. Needless to say, those who were making the objections to this long held faith must have realised that if they retained this begotten concept, also if they brought in the view that Christ was coeternal with God the Father, then what they would have would be the very same belief as orthodoxy (an eternally begotten Christ). This was as held by the Roman Catholic Church and other denominations. The latter belief, meaning trinity orthodoxy, was something that Seventh-day Adventists had objected to in principle since its beginnings (1844).

This eternally begotten concept would have been a non-starter with Seventh-day Adventists. Perhaps this is one reason why a begotten belief concerning Christ was not pursued. Whatever the reasoning, the present day theology within Seventh-day Adventism is that there are three unbegotten personalities in the one being (one substance) of God (three-in-one). The latter, the one substance

or one being of God, is the trinity structure. As it is purported today in our fundamental beliefs

“There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons (Seventh-day Adventists believe ... A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines, page 16).

It then describes this unity (trinity) “one God” by explaining

“God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. He is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation” (Ibid)

Mixed reactions

During that 1919 Bible Conference, a man by the name of W. W. Prescott - then one of the leading administrators in Seventh-day Adventism - presented a daily discourse on the person of Jesus Christ. In his presentations he depicted a view of Christ that during the ministry of Ellen White had not generally been held by Seventh-day Adventists. This view was that Christ was co-eternal (coeval) with the Father - a distinct trinitarian view.

Prescott's presentations brought about a mixed reaction from the especially chosen delegates. I say especially chosen because everyone in attendance had been hand picked to be there - meaning that they had been specifically invited to attend. There were those who wanted to attend but were not allowed to do so. These were of the ministry and not just laity. This means that the average everyday Seventh-day Adventist minister was not invited, neither was he permitted to be there.

All in attendance were those holding leading positions in our church. This means that regarding what might be decided at this conference with respect to doctrine, these chosen delegates were in a very favourable position to influence others to believe the same. We shall cover this Bible Conference in section thirty-five and section thirty-six. It is very relevant to our studies.

Needless to say, some of the delegates were in favour of dropping the old theology (a begotten Son) whilst others, opposed to the new theology (coeternal with the Father), said that a begotten Son was biblical. This brought about tension and discord amongst the delegates. In fact during the proceedings at one stage, because of the fears and anxieties of some that a vote was being pursued to adopt trinitarianism, the meeting was called to a halt. Such was the fear of some of the delegates.

By 1919 with regards to whether Christ was a true Son (begotten) or not, there was division amongst both the ministry and the teachers of our colleges. We can also see that trinitarianism was then raising its head. This begotten debate did

not end in 1919. It continued for decades after Ellen White had died until eventually, as a denomination today, we say that Christ, in His pre-existence, is not begotten, therefore concluding that He is not truly a son.

Recent unbegotten views

In our literature in more recent times, statements have been published to the effect that Christ is not begotten of God therefore He is not really the Son of God - at least not in His pre-existence.

J. R. Hoffman wrote in the *Ministry* magazine of June 1982 (note that this was two years after the trinity doctrine was first officially voted into our fundamental beliefs at a General Conference Session – this was at Dallas Texas in 1980)

“The Father, Son relationship in the New Testament, must always be understood in the light of the event of Bethlehem. The only child born into this world with a divine rather than a human father is Jesus. The title ‘son’ refers to His entry into time and does not deny at all His eternal origins. There are references in the Old Testament to ‘Sonship’ but these are always in anticipation of the incarnation” (*J. R. Hoffman, Seventh-day Adventist Minister, Ministry Magazine article ‘Is Jesus Jehovah God?’ June 1982 page 24*)

Here we have the belief that Jesus is called the Son of God only because of what happened at Bethlehem (meaning the incarnation). As we shall see more clearly in the next section, this was not in keeping with what God has revealed through Ellen White. Hoffman later went on to say

“John 3:16 clearly states that the Son was "begotten" (K.J.V.). This is the same word used to convey the idea of giving birth or existence. This unfortunate translation of the word monogenes is one that no modern translation of the Bible has perpetuated. Monogenes means "unique, one of a kind." "To be only begotten" would call for using a different Greek word.” (*Ibid*)

Unfortunately, Hoffman does not say what this “different Greek word” is so we cannot check it out. What we know for a certainty is that the word begotten (monogenes) has everything to do with a parent/child relationship. This concept can be clearly seen in the way this word is used by the gospel writer Luke (see Luke 7:12, 8:42 and 9:38) who was in fact a doctor. The gospel writer John was the only one to use it with reference to Christ (see John 1:14, 1:18, 3:16, 3:18 and 1 John 4:9). He used it to show the reality of the pre-existent relationship between God and Christ, conveying the thought in the process that they were a real father and a real son.

John wrote his gospel at a time when concerning Christ there were many types of heresies creeping into the early Christian church. By the writing of his gospel (more of a theology really) he sought to eradicate and dispel these heretical

views. John therefore would have been very careful indeed in his selection of words to describe the pre-existent relationship that Christ had with God. This I believe is very important to remember. It should have quite a significant bearing upon what we eventually conclude. He wrote his gospel with the sole intent to show that Christ was indeed the Son of God. As John said

“And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.” John 20:30-31

As well as what Christ had said concerning Himself, John would have also reported with great accuracy what others said of Him.

A role-playing father and son

Almost 14 years ago (1996) in a week of prayer reading, Seventh-day Adventists were led to believe that to secure the salvation of mankind, two of the divine persons of the Godhead began to role play (pretend or play act) a father and a son. Gordon Jenson wrote

“A plan of salvation was encompassed in the covenant made by the Three Persons of the Godhead, who possessed the attributes of Deity equally. In order to eradicate sin and rebellion from the universe and to restore harmony and peace, one of the divine Beings accepted, and entered into, the role of the Father, another the role of the Son. The remaining divine Being, the Holy Spirit, was also to participate in effecting the plan of salvation. All of this took place before sin and rebellion transpired in heaven.” (Gordon Jenson, *Adventist Review*, October 31, 1996, p.12 *Week of Prayer readings*, ‘article ‘Jesus the Heavenly Intercessor’)

Nothing is said about the Holy Spirit role-playing (pretending to be) anything. Did He play Himself? One is left to wonder.

This role-playing Godhead was not in 1996 a new thought in Seventh-day Adventism. Eleven years previously in 1985, Pastor Frank Holbrook also spoke of it. He did this because a reader of the *Signs of the Times* had written asking

“I am a fledgling Christian and am mystified by the doctrine of the Trinity. To whom should I address my prayers?” (*Signs of the Times*, July 1985, ‘Frank answers’)

Frank Holbrook answered saying

“The term *Trinity* is applied to the Christian doctrine of God. A simple dictionary definition is that the word denotes the union of three Persons (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) in one Godhead, so that all three are one God as to substance or essence, but three Persons as to

individuality.”(Pastor Frank B. Holbrook, *Signs of the Times*, July 1985, ‘Frank answers’)

This is trinity essentialness. It is “three Persons” (or personalities) in one single “substance or essence”. Without this essentialness there would be no trinity doctrine (see section six). With respect to these three personalities role-playing the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Holbrook later wrote

“It may be inferred from the Scriptures that when the Godhead laid out the plan of salvation at some point in eternity past, They also took certain positions or roles to carry out the provisions of the plan.” (*Ibid*)

Here it is said that one person of the Godhead took the role of the Father, one the role of the Son and the other the role of the Holy Spirit. There is speculation when it is said “It may be inferred from the Scriptures”. Holbrook also said

“God the Son agreed to step down from His exalted position to be man’s Saviour by becoming incarnate. God the Son is truly God, but He became truly human, as well. He is the God-Man. By so doing He became a kind of “second” Adam (see Romans 5:14, last part), the representative head of the race. In this position He could rightfully bear the liabilities of humanity.” (*Ibid*)

The term “God the Son” is not a biblical term neither can it be found in the writings of Ellen G. White. The same can be said of the terminology “God-man”. Notice that Holbrook says of the incarnate Son that He is “a kind of “second” Adam”. No explanation is given of this remark but what we do know is that our Saviour is called in the Scriptures “the last Adam” - not something like one (see 1 Corinthians 15:45). Holbrook again uses unscriptural language when he says

“God the Holy Spirit is the one who applies to the individual mind the redemption Christ worked out by His life and death.” (*Ibid*)

Nowhere is found in Scripture or in the writings of Ellen White the term “God the Holy Spirit”. Like “God the Son” and “God-man”, this is purely invented trinity language. In the light of the above reasoning, the conclusion is reached regarding the readers question (see above)

“Since the Trinity is active in behalf of man’s redemption, it is really not out of place to address any member of the Deity in prayer.” (*Ibid*)

Nowhere in Scripture is it recorded that anyone held a conversation with the Holy Spirit but here it is said that it would be appropriate to do so.

One well-known minister who spoke of what he termed the “interchangeableness” of the three personalities of the Godhead (this is the very same concept as role-playing) was J. R. Spangler. He wrote in 1971 (this was in

an article called *I believe in the Triune God*)

“The gospel commission commands surrendered souls to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.” (*J. R. Spangler, Review and Herald, Oct. 21, 1971, ‘I believe in the Triune God’*)

Spangler - then an associate secretary of the General Conference Ministerial Association - was referring here to Matthew 28:19. He then says with respect to 2 Corinthians 13:14

“The apostolic benediction lists the Three and names Christ first. Paul usually places God the Father first, but here it is reversed. To me this signifies the interchangeableness of the members of the Godhead since they are one in action and purpose.” (*Ibid*)

In other words, Spangler is saying, it would not have made any difference which one of the three divine personalities had come to earth. He would have still been called the Son of God. This thought was reiterated in the Seventh-day Adventist Sabbath School Lesson Study for the second quarter of 2008. The principal contributor was Roy Adams. It says

“But imagine a situation in which the Being we have come to know as God the Father came to die for us, and the One we have come to know as Jesus stayed back in heaven (we are speaking in human terms to make a point).” (*Seventh-day Adventist Sabbath School Quarterly, page 19, Thursday April 10th 2008, ‘The Mystery of His Deity’*)

Here is an interesting question. Why did the author say “speaking in human terms to make a point”? Was this a reference to the trinitarian belief that the Son never actually vacated heaven or never really died for us? This is more than likely (see section eight, section eleven, section twelve and section thirteen). The lesson study concluded

“Nothing would have changed, except that we would have been calling Each by the name we now use for the Other.” (*Ibid*)

This was exactly the same as was said by Spangler (see above). – meaning that no matter which one of the three had come He still would have been termed the Son of God. This is only the same as saying that in reality there is no real Son of God. It added

“That is what equality in the Deity means.” (*Ibid*)

Here we have the thought that regardless of which one of the three personalities of the Godhead came to earth we would still be calling all three by the same names. In other words, even if the One we know now as the Holy Spirit came to earth and was made flesh we would still call Him the Son of God. There is here a

confusion regarding the personalities of the Godhead. This reminds me of when Ellen White said

"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron. Before the last developments of the work of apostasy there will be a confusion of faith. There will not be clear and definite ideas concerning the mystery of God. One truth after another will be corrupted. "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 28th May 1894, 'Delusions of the last days'*)

In the same lesson study (as above), there is another statement that is contrary to what we have been told through the spirit of prophecy. This one concerned the pre-existence of Christ. It said

"John 1:1–3, 14. The text marks out four points. The Word (i.e., Jesus, vs. 14) independently and eternally existed." (*Seventh-day Adventist Teachers Sabbath School Quarterly, page 25, Wednesday April 9th 2008, Teacher's comments, 'The Mystery of His Deity'*)

Here the Teacher's Edition of the lesson study leads its readers to believe that Christ existed independently from God the Father yet again we have been told through the spirit of prophecy

"The world's Redeemer was equal with God. His authority was as the authority of God. He declared that he had no existence separate from the Father. The authority by which he spoke, and wrought miracles, was expressly his own, yet he assures us that he and the Father are one" (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald 7th Jan 1890, 'Christ revealed the Father'*)

What we have seen here is that the lesson study has led its readers to disbelieve what God has told us through Ellen White. She also said in 1890 (this was the month after the previous statement)

"Christ came to reveal the Source of his power, that man might never rely on his unaided human capabilities." (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald 18th February 1890, 'How to meet a controverted point of doctrine'*)

Christ's source of power on earth was the same as it was when He was in Heaven. This source was His Father.

One recent Seventh-day Adventist publication explaining the trinity is appropriately called *Understanding the Trinity*. Just like J. R. Hoffman, its author (Max Hatton) claims that Christ **became** the Son of God at the incarnation (see

page 34 of *Understanding the Trinity*). This seems to me to be a type of adoptionism. This is even though the author never disputes that the pre-existent Son is fully divine.

On page 97, the same author states emphatically that Jesus is not the literal pre-existent Son of God (not begotten). On the same page he also says (similar to what was said by Jenson above) that the terms Father and Son should only be understood in a metaphorical (figurative) sense - not one that is literal. He also says on the same page that the words only begotten do not belong in any English translation of the Bible. Hatton's book has been advertised within Seventh-day Adventism as the best defence of the trinity doctrine in fifty years. It was published in 2002.

Another Seventh-day Adventist publication (this one was written to specifically address the present trinity debate within Seventh-day Adventism although the author of these notes you are now reading believes it to miss completely the objections made by the non-trinitarians) is the book *The Trinity*, co-authored by Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon and John Reeve. This book says (similar to Jenson and Hatton) that the Father/Son relationship is only metaphorical (figurative) and not one that is real (ontological). Whidden says

“Is it not quite apparent that the problem texts become problems only when one assumes an exclusively literalistic interpretation of such expressions as “Father,” “Son,” “Firstborn,” “Only Begotten,” “Begotten,” and so forth? Does not such literalism go against the mainly figurative or metaphorical meaning that the Bible writers use when referring to the persons of the Godhead?” (*Woodrow Whidden, The Trinity, 'Biblical objections to the trinity' page 106, 2002*)

Here we are led to believe that the mentioned terminologies which include “Father”, “Son” and “Only Begotten” were only meant to be, by the Bible writers, figurative expressions. The same author then says

“Can one really say that the Bible writers meant such expressions as “the only true God” and “one God the Father” to exclude the full deity of the Son, Christ Jesus?” (*Ibid*)

As of yet, I have not yet found one early pioneer who said that Jesus was not fully divine. Like Ellen White they maintained that He was God essentially. They took care though to differentiate between Him and the Father. This we also need to do today because if we do not, we will cause confusion.

As we have seen in previous sections (and will see again later), although our pioneers were not trinitarians they certainly upheld the biblical fact that Christ was fully divine. This is even though they believed Him to be a true Son (begotten of God). In fact the belief that Christ was begotten of God emphasised this belief. The implication here is that if we take these terminologies literally, we

deny or exclude Christ as fully divine. Our pioneers certainly did not see it this way – neither did Ellen White. Whidden goes on to say with reference to the word begotten

“Far from suggesting that the Father generated or begat the Son as some sort of derived or created semigod, the imagery of Father and Son points to the eternal and profound intimacy that has always existed between the first and second persons of the Godhead as divine “equals” through all eternity (past, present, and future)” (*Woodrow Whidden, ‘The Trinity’ page 97, chapter ‘Biblical Objections to the trinity’*)

Here is the denial of Christ being a literal (real) Son. This is because the begotten concept is denied. We can see this because on page 101 with regards to such terms as God calling Christ ‘My Son’, ‘begotten’ and ‘firstborn’, Whidden says

“The anti-Trinitarians are quick to give these terms a very literal interpretation in the sense that Christ is a ‘truly’ “begotten, firstborn Son” generated by the Father. Thus they conclude that Christ is a “god” of lesser deity and dignity than the eternal Father.” (*Ibid 101*)

This is not the truth because our pioneers who were mainly non-trinitarian never believed such a thing. Never did they believe that Christ is a “god” of lesser deity and dignity than the eternal Father”. They believed He was equal with the Father although a separate personage from Him.

I would regard Whidden’s remarks as a needless and unfounded slur. This is not only regarding the beliefs of our pioneers but also on the pioneers themselves. It is also a slur on those who believe in trinity orthodoxy. Non-trinitarians may have certain objections to the trinity doctrine that are espoused by orthodoxy but they would never deny that Christ was fully God. The entire point of the original trinity doctrine was to affirm that Christ is God. They too took great care to differentiate between the Father and the Son.

As we shall see in the next few sections, our pioneers did believe that Christ was a real son but they did not regard Him as “some sort of derived or created semigod” neither did they believe that He was “a “god” of lesser deity and dignity than the eternal Father”. Such is the way though that the leaders of our denomination today are treating our pioneers and their beliefs.

Particularly Whidden’s remarks are a slur against Ellen White. This is because as we have already seen and will see again in future sections, she was emphatic that Christ, in His pre-existence, is a truly begotten Son. Certainly she did not regard the Son as some sort of lesser god than the Father.

Those Seventh-day Adventist who deny the one time faith of Seventh-day Adventists (the begotten faith) very often attempt to make it appear that to say

that Christ is begotten is to say that He is created (like God created angels or Adam and Eve etc). This appears to have been done in the Sabbath School Lesson Study for the 2nd quarter 2008 (we mentioned this set of studies above). This is when it said

“The expression “only begotten” is one word in the Greek language: *monogenes*, occurring nine times in the New Testament, with five of those references applying to Jesus and all five in the writings of John (*John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9*). It is significant that all five references occur in the writings of the very author who from the start of his Gospel seeks to establish the deity of Jesus Christ. Indeed, he commences precisely on that point: “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (*John 1:1*).” (*Seventh-day Adventist Standard Sabbath School Quarterly, page 17, Tuesday April 8th, ‘The Mystery of His Deity*)

This is partly true. John did write His gospel to establish the deity of Christ but it was also to show that a divine person had truly become flesh (truly human). This was in opposition to many at the time of his writing who said that Jesus only appeared to be human. John wrote his gospel to show that Christ really is the Son of God. As he said concerning what he had written concerning Christ

“And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.” John 20:30-31

The above lesson study then leads its readers to believe

“It would have been incredible that this Jewish writer would have attributed the title of Deity to someone he considered a created being.” (*Ibid*)

As we will see throughout this presentation, begotten does not mean created - like God created angels or Adam and Eve. It means that at some point in eternity Christ came forth from the bosom of the Father (for an in-depth study of monogenes see section four of: *The Begotten Series*). To those who accept this begotten faith it means that Christ is God Himself in the person of His own Son. This was once the preponderant faith of Seventh-day Adventists. At least it was all during the time of Ellen White’s ministry. See section nine of *The Begotten Series*.

In 1898, the year that *Desire of Ages* was published Ellen White wrote

“In the person of his only begotten Son, the God of heaven has condescended to stoop to our human nature.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 8th November 1898, ‘The Revelation of God’, see also Review and Herald 17th March 1904*)

She also said in 1904

“God in human nature is the mystery of godliness. Christ, the only begotten of the Father, was the express image of his Father's person, the brightness of his glory, and he came to the world not to condemn the world but to save it. God was in Christ in human form, and endured all the temptations wherewith man was beset; he participated in the suffering and trials of sorrowful human nature in our behalf.” (*Ellen G. White, Sabbath School Worker, 1st November 1895, ‘The Divine Character Exemplified in Christ’*)

We shall see in the next section that Ellen White did say that Christ really is the Son of God.

Official current Seventh-day Adventism

The current official Seventh-day Adventist view of Christ can be seen in Volume 12 of the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia. This is our official Handbook of Theology. This is where all of our denominational fundamental beliefs are set out and explained in detail. Fernando Canale who wrote the section on the theology of God says with reference to the begotten concept of Christ

“There is, therefore, no ground within the biblical understanding of the Godhead for the idea of a generation of the Son from the Father.” (*Fernando Canale, Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia, Volume 12, page 125, Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist theology, ‘The doctrine of God’*)

As can be seen here, the official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is that in His pre-existence, Christ is not begotten therefore He is not a real son. In fact Seventh-day Adventists today say, as does Canale here, that this idea isn't even biblical.

I must say that I find this statement truly amazing. This is because as were a great many of very early Christians, the early church fathers were mainly Greek speaking. This means that because the New Testament was originally written in Greek (their own language) there was no need for them to translate it from one language to another. They also had the earliest of copies to read with some possibly even reading the originals.

Why I bring this to your attention is that all of the early church fathers that I have read say that the Son was literally begotten of the Father, so how is it reasoned that these Greek speaking/thinking people came to misunderstand their own language and why do we say today that we have a better understanding of this language than they did? This is indeed something of a mystery, perhaps even more mysterious than the trinity doctrine itself.

If you remember, we did in section five point out that ALL of the attendees at the Council of Nicaea (where the deity of Christ was discussed) would have believed that Christ was the begotten Son of God. As we also noted, Alexander (one of

the main early instigators of the trinity doctrine) did say that anyone who did not believe it had “their intellects blinded” or as one translation has it, they are “deficient in intellectual power” (*Letter from the Bishop of Alexandria to Alexander of Constantinople from an Ecclesiastical history by Theodoret*). Just previous to his previously quoted remarks, Canale had said

“In a similar vein, *monogenes* does not contain the idea of begetting but rather of uniqueness and, when applied to Christ, emphasizes His unique relationship with the Father” (*Ibid*)

To say that this Greek word (*monogenes*) does not even “contain the idea of begetting” is extremely misleading. Whilst this word may not actually mean to beget the inference is decidedly there. Who would deny that conclusion? Allow me to explain.

In the New Testament Scriptures, this very same word (*monogenes*) is **only** used with respect to parent/child relationships. Never is it applied otherwise. In fact John alone is the only Bible writer to apply it to Christ. Whilst agreed that the word does not literally mean to generate, ***the idea*** of begetting a child is there. To say that it is not there is to belie the senses. This usage in respect of parent/child relationships can be seen in Luke 7:12, Luke 8:42, Luke 9:38, John 1:14, 1:18, 3:16, 3:18, Hebrews 11:17 and 1 John 4:9.

There is also something else to think about here. This is that if *monogenes* was only used to emphasise Christ’s “unique relationship with the Father” (and remember here we are talking in terms of pre-existence), then how was this relationship different than Christ had with the Holy Spirit or even different than the Holy Spirit has with the Father? I say this because unique does mean ‘the only one of its kind’ which is what the Son would be if He is the only-begotten of God. This is why there is no plural to unique. We must ask therefore, if this word only means unique, what was it in Christ’s relationship with the Father that was unique to Him alone? In other words if *monogenes* has only to do with relationships, then why did He not have the same relationship with the other divine being (the Holy Spirit) and why did not the Holy Spirit have the same relationship with the Father as did the Son?

There is also something else to consider here. This is that if the Son is only a metaphorical son (figurative therefore not real) and the word ‘begotten only means unique, is it being said that He is a ***unique metaphorical son***? This really does not make any sense at all. It sounds more like an abuse of the English language than anything else.

At this time of writing (2010), this author has not found anywhere in the present writings of Seventh-day Adventism where they actually express a belief as to who exactly was Christ in His pre-existence. This is except to say that He is God. It seems that there is a failure here to delineate the specific relationships between these three different personalities. In other words, whilst Seventh-day

Adventists do say clearly that in His pre-existence Christ is not the Son of God, they are very quiet as to His actual relationship to the other two personalities of the Godhead. Again allow me to explain.

It is because they do not regard Christ as the literal pre-existent Son of God that Seventh-day Adventists do not believe either that God is a father. This much is reasonably apparent. It remains to be asked therefore, what do Seventh-day Adventists believe is the relationship between these two divine personalities? By this I mean, do they believe that the two are just good friends or close companions? Are they just co-workers or coequal and coeval divine beings? Whilst this questioning may seem to some to be rather facetious, it does serve to highlight the problem. If one divine person is not really a father and the other divine person not really a son, then what is the relationship between the two?

Whilst we are on this subject, what about the Holy Spirit? If He is said to be a person like the Father and Son, then what is His relationship to the other two? These are very important questions. They need answers.

Current Seventh-day Adventism out of harmony with the spirit of prophecy

From the above we can see that the Seventh-day Adventist Church today denies that Christ is truly the Son of God. They say instead that He is one of three unbegotten coeval beings of the Godhead (of divinity). This, according to the non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists, is that which they maintain destroys the gospel. This is because the non-trinitarians regard God the Father as literally giving of His own self (as we say as humans, giving of our own flesh and blood).

These current views within Seventh-day Adventism (Christ not a true Son) were not the views of Ellen White. She consistently maintained that Christ, in His pre-existence, is begotten of God and is therefore truly a Son. We have seen this before and will see it again in the next section. This we know because of the multitude of statements she made concerning God and Christ that spoke of them as a real father and a real son. These were such as

“It was necessary that the Son of the infinite God should come to be the light of the world, to be the fountain of healing mercy to a lost race.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 20th January 1891, ‘Co-operation with Christ’*)

The Son here is spoken of as being a son **in His pre-existence** meaning before He came to earth. Note she refers to the Father as “the infinite God” thus clearly delineating between the two divine personalities. She also said

“The One appointed in the counsels of heaven came to the earth as an instructor. He was no less a being than the Creator of the world, the Son of the Infinite God.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies on Education, page 173, 1897*)

Again Ellen White clearly delineates between the “Son” and the “infinite God”.

This is the same as she does in this next statement. Nine years after the publication of her supposedly trinitarian *Desire of Ages*, she continued to say (note the title of the article)

“The Son of the infinite God came to this earth, and honoured it with His presence.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 6th June 1907, ‘No other Gods before me’*)

Note that the above statements all speak of Christ as being a Son **before** He came to earth - also that as the Son He is a separate personality from the One whom Ellen White terms “the infinite God”. Numerous other statements like these can be found. This is no different than when Ellen White said

“In His incarnation He [Christ] gained in a new sense the title of the Son of God. Said the angel to Mary, “The power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). While the Son of a human being, He became the Son of God in a new sense. Thus He stood in our world -- the Son of God, yet allied by birth to the human race. (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times August 2nd 1905, ‘Christ our only hope’, See also Selected Messages book 1 page 226*)

As we can see from the above, even after the publication of *Desire of Ages*, Ellen White still believed that Christ, in His pre-existence, was truly the Son of God. She had not changed from that which she had said or had previously believed.

In 1879, Ellen White wrote of the efforts of the unfallen angels to reconcile Lucifer with God. After saying that the angels had attempted to persuade him (Lucifer) of the justification of God in conferring honour upon Jesus Christ she wrote

“They [unfallen angels] clearly set forth that Jesus was the Son of God, existing with him before the angels were created; and that he had ever stood at the right hand of God, and his mild, loving authority had not heretofore been questioned; and that he had given no commands but what it was joy for the heavenly host to execute. They had urged that Christ's receiving special honor from the Father, in the presence of the angels, did not detract from the honor that he had heretofore received.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 9th January 1879, ‘The Great Controversy: The Fall of Satan: The Creation’*)

Eight years later, which was the year previous to the famous Minneapolis General Conference, Ellen White had expressed the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. This was that

“When Satan led man to sin, he hoped that God's abhorrence of sin would

forever separate him from man, and break the connecting link between Heaven and earth. When from the opening heavens he heard the voice of God addressing his Son, it was to him as the sound of a death-knell. It told him that now God was about to unite man more closely to himself, and give moral power to overcome temptation, and to escape from the entanglements of Satanic devices." (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 4th August 1887, 'Christ's Triumph in our Behalf'*)

Notice particularly the next words of God's messenger.

"Satan well knew the position which Christ had held in Heaven as the Son of God, the Beloved of the Father; and that Christ should leave the joy and honor of Heaven, and come to this world as a man, filled him with apprehension. He knew that this condescension on the part of the Son of God boded no good to him." (*Ibid*)

There can be no doubt that Ellen White believed that God had revealed that Christ in His pre-existence was a true son. The next year she wrote (this was just a few months previous to the 1888 General Conference session)

"The plan of salvation is not appreciated as it should be. It is not discerned or comprehended. It is made altogether a cheap affair; whereas to unite the human with the divine, required an exertion of Omnipotence. It was necessary that a great condescension should be made on the part of God in behalf of fallen man, who had transgressed the unchangeable law of Jehovah. Christ, by clothing his divinity with humanity, elevates humanity in the scale of moral value to an infinite worth. But what a condescension on the part of God, and on the part of his only begotten Son, who was equal with the Father! All this had to be done because God's law had been transgressed." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 24th July 1888, 'How do we stand?'*)

She also said to the Seventh-day Adventist youth seven years later

"The more we think about Christ's becoming a babe here on earth, the more wonderful it appears. How can it be that the helpless babe in Bethlehem's manger is still the divine Son of God?" (*Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor 21st November 1895, 'Child life of Jesus No. 1'*)

These statements show unequivocally that Ellen White spoke of Christ, in His pre-existence, as a true son. With regards to Jesus saying that He must be "about His Father's business" (Luke 2:49), Ellen White wrote (note the ellipsis, meaning that for the sake of brevity I have condensed this paragraph)

"In the answer to His mother, Jesus showed for the first time that He understood His relation to God ... she did not understand His words; but she knew that He had disclaimed kinship to Joseph, and had declared His

Sonship to God.” (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 81, ‘The Passover visit’)

This was no different than what she had said 25 years previous which was that

“And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them.” Jesus claimed his sonship to the Eternal. He informed Mary that he must be about his Father's business, and that his obligation to his Heavenly Father was above every other claim.” (Ellen G. White, ‘Youths Instructor’ 1st September 1873 ‘The Life of Christ No. 9’)

All the above statements, as well as countless others not quoted here, show that Ellen White believed that Christ, in His pre-existence, truly is the pre-existent Son of God. Certainly they cannot be referring to the incarnation or the resurrection, neither can they be said to be metaphorical (figurative).

Note well the last two highlighted statements concerning Jesus claiming “His Sonship to God” also “His sonship to the Eternal”. Ellen White regarded “God”, “the eternal”, “the infinite God” as being the Father.

Michael the archangel - the divine Son of God

For those who still doubt that Ellen White believed that the pre-existent Christ really was the Son of God, allow me to share with you just one more of her statements. This is with reference to Moses being resurrected from the grave and Satan’s objections to this happening. The Scriptures say

“Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.” Jude 1:9

Ellen White in commenting on this verse said

“Moses passed through death, but Michael came down and gave him life before his body had seen corruption. Satan tried to hold the body, claiming it as his; but Michael resurrected Moses and took him to heaven.” (Ellen G. White, *Early Writings, Spiritual Gifts*, page 164, 1882, see also *Signs of the Times*, 31st March 1881, ‘The death of Moses, also *Spiritual Gifts Volume 1*, 1858, also *Spiritual Gifts 4A* 1864, also *Spirit of Prophecy Volume 1* 1870)

Christ (Michael) here is the life-giver. Now note very carefully her next words. She said

“Satan railed bitterly against God, denouncing Him as unjust in permitting his prey to be taken from him; but Christ did not rebuke His adversary, though it was through his temptation that the servant of God had fallen.” (Ibid)

So why did not Christ rebuke Satan? Ellen White explained of Michael (Christ)

“He meekly referred him to His Father, saying, “The Lord rebuke thee.” (*Ibid*)

Michael was indeed, according to what we have been told through the spirit of prophecy, the life giver. We have also been told that He is the ***literal Son of God***. This is why, as a dutiful Son, instead of rebuking Satan He meekly referred him “to His Father” (the Lord).

A parallel experience

All of us are aware of the story of how God instructed Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. We are all aware also that if God had not stopped him he would have carried out the instruction. How many realise though that this was God’s way of having Abraham realise what He (God Himself), as a father, was going to do to His own Son? Ellen White explained

“Isaac was a figure of the Son of God, who was offered a sacrifice for the sins of the world. God would impress upon Abraham the gospel of salvation to man. In order to do this, and make the truth a reality to him as well as to test his faith, He required him to slay his darling Isaac. All the sorrow and agony that Abraham endured through that dark and fearful trial were for the purpose of deeply impressing upon his understanding the plan of redemption for fallen man. He was made to understand in his own experience how unutterable was the self-denial of the infinite God in giving His own Son to die to rescue man from utter ruin. To Abraham no mental torture could be equal to that which he endured in obeying the divine command to sacrifice his son.” (*Ellen G. White, Volume 3 Testimonies, page 369, ‘An appeal to the young’*)

Ellen White then went on to explain that unlike the experience of Abraham and Isaac, there was no last minute reprieve for God and His Son. For the salvation of mankind, God had to put His one and only Son to death. What mental torture for them both! She then said

“Could God give us any greater proof of His love than in thus giving His Son to pass through this scene of suffering?” (*Ibid*)

The answer is so obvious that we will refrain from comment.

By the year 1900, Ellen White had not changed her views. We know this because in an article called *Justification by Faith* she wrote almost identical words in the *Youth’s Instructor* of 1st March. She said

“The offering of Isaac was designed by God to prefigure the sacrifice of his Son. Isaac was a figure of the Son of God, who was offered a sacrifice for the sins of the world. God desired to impress upon Abraham the gospel of

salvation to men, and in order to make the truth a reality, and to test his faith, he required Abraham to slay his darling Isaac.” (Ellen G. White, *Youth’s Instructor*, 1st March 1900, ‘Justification, Part 1’)

Notice particularly what she said about making “the truth a reality”. According to current Seventh-day Adventist theology God did not sacrifice His Son because He never had a son to give. She also wrote in *Christian Education* in 1893

“O how wonderful, how almost incredible it is, that the infinite God would consent to the humiliation of his own dear Son! Let every student of the Scriptures contemplate this great fact, and he will not come from such a contemplation without being elevated, purified, and ennobled.” (Ellen G. White, *Christian education*, page 107 ‘The book of books’, 1893)

Very often, God is presented as being void of feelings but note now these words of Ellen White

“Said the angel [to Ellen White], "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 beloved Son to die for Him." (Early Writings, page 151, see also Volume 1 *Spiritual Gifts* page 26)

“The Father did not yield up his dearly beloved Son without a struggle, whether to let guilty man perish or to give his Son to die for the lost race. It was impossible for God to change his law, or give up the smallest part of its claims, in order to save man; therefore he suffered his Son to die for man's transgression.” (Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, 30th January 1879, ‘The great controversy: The plan of salvation’)

“The plan of salvation had been laid before the creation of the earth; for Christ is a lamb "foreordained before the foundation of the world"; yet it was a struggle, even with the King of the universe, to yield up His Son to die for the guilty race. But "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." O, the mystery of redemption! the love of God for a world that did not love Him! Who can know the depths of that love which "passeth knowledge"? Through endless ages, immortal minds, seeking to comprehend the mystery of that incomprehensible love, will wonder and adore.” (Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, 4th November 1908, ‘When sin entered’, see also *Patriarchs and Prophets*, ‘The plan of redemption, page 63, 1890)

Summary conclusion

As can be seen from the above, Ellen White firmly believed and consistently maintained that Christ, in His pre-existence, was indeed the Son of God. Even after the publication of *Desire of Ages*, she was still saying exactly the same.

Without this truth the real gospel is lost to vain meaningless philosophy

In section fifteen we shall see that she stated very clearly that Christ, in His pre-existence, was literally begotten of God. This is one of the reasons why she regarded Him as both God essentially and a true Son.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section fifteen

Ellen White and the begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventism

Like most of the other major Christian denominations, Seventh-day Adventists today maintain that the only correct way to express the divinity of Christ, or as they often say His full and complete divinity, is by saying that God is a trinity.

Whilst their particular version of this teaching differs from the original (orthodoxy) that came out of the 4th century councils of Nicaea (AD 325) and Constantinople (AD 381), they do in harmony with the latter strictly maintain that the three personalities of the Godhead all have their existence in the *one being* of God. This is what makes their belief truly trinitarian. If this was not believed, meaning holding to the belief of the indivisible oneness as well as the threeness, they would not be such. This is even though they may believe in the co-eternity of the three personalities. The latter belief, without the oneness, could be interpreted as tritheism (three Gods)

In contrast to the original (orthodox) trinity doctrine (see section four), the Seventh-day Adventist Church today does not teach that Christ is eternally begotten or even begotten of the Father but that he is unbegotten. For this reason they do not believe that in His pre-existence He was really the Son of God (see previous section). They say instead that for the purposes of the plan of redemption He just role-played the part.

As we have seen already, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, whilst Ellen White was alive, believed that the pre-existence Christ really was a son. In other words they believed that Christ was begotten of the Father (brought forth of God). This meant that whilst He was considered to be a separate personality from God, He was also considered to be God essentially. There is no mistaking that the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism believed in the full and complete divinity of Christ. This was even though they were not trinitarian.

Their teaching was not exactly the same as orthodoxy (the original trinity doctrine). This is inasmuch as the orthodox belief is that the Son is **eternally** begotten of the Father whereas in historic Seventh-day Adventism, the belief was that there was a time when as a separate personality from God, the Son did not have an existence.

We shall now see what Ellen White had to say about Christ being the literal

begotten Son of God, also about what she said concerning the duration of His existence prior to becoming incarnate. We shall also see in later sections that this was the early 1900's faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This was the faith from which we noted a number of times that Ellen White warned there would be a departing. It was this begotten faith that at that time (early 1900's) appears to have been the generally accepted belief within Seventh-day Adventism.

Ellen White and the word begotten

Regarding the relationship between God and Christ there is no record of Ellen White ever saying that the beliefs of the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism were wrong. In fact she herself maintained, just as did the pioneers, that the Son is begotten of the Father (meaning begotten of the infinite God). In future sections, we shall see how Ellen White supported the beliefs of the pioneers.

In 1890, the Seventh-day Adventist Church published a book called *Christ and His Righteousness*. It was written by Ellet Waggoner and was said by him to depict the message he had preached two years earlier at the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference. His message carried the endorsement of Ellen White. She said that it had come from God. We shall return to this thought in section twenty. In this book Waggoner had said

“It is true that there are many sons of God, but Christ is the “only begotten Son of God,” and therefore the Son of God in a sense in which no other being ever was or ever can be. The angels are sons of God, as was Adam (Job 38:7; Luke 3:38), by creation; Christians are the sons of God by adoption (Rom. 8:14, 15), but Christ is the Son of God by birth. The writer to the Hebrews further shows that the position of the Son of God is not one to which Christ has been elevated but that it is one which He has by right.” (*E. J. Waggoner, 'Christ and His Righteousness', page 12, 1890*)

By the other ministers at the 1888 Conference there was plenty of disagreement with Waggoner's message, the pros and cons of which we cannot go into here. Nevertheless, no one argued about this part of his message meaning Waggoner's Godhead theology. This shows us that at this time, this was the accepted faith of Seventh-day Adventists.

In 1894 when in Australia completing the manuscripts for *Desire of Ages*, Ellen White asked the youth of her day

“Who is Christ? -- ...” (*Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor, 28th June 1894, 'Grow in grace'*)

The answer she gave was

“He is the only begotten Son of the living God” (*Ibid*)

Notice very importantly that Ellen White differentiates between whom she terms

“the only begotten Son” and “the living God”. If you missed this point then please read it again. She is speaking here in terms of pre-existence. She then added

“He is to the Father as a word that expresses the thought, -- as a thought made audible. Christ is the word of God. Christ said to Philip, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father." His words were the echo of God's words. Christ was the likeness of God, the brightness of his glory, the express image of his person." (*Ibid*)

This can only be with reference to Christ’s pre-existence – not the incarnation. Again, as does the Scriptures, she emphasises that the Son is the “**express image**” of God’s “**person**”. Notice also her opening thought. This is that just like a word expresses a thought - so Christ is to the Father. In other words, Christ is an expression of the Father. As Jesus said to Philip

“...Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? (see John 14:9)

The next year (1895), Seventh-day Adventists were also told through the spirit of prophecy

“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.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 30th May 1895, 'Christ our complete salvation'*)

Compare this statement with Waggoner’s (see above from his book *Christ and His Righteousness*). Notice how very similar it is. This was the greatest endorsement that Ellen White could give to this particular aspect of Waggoner’s message. She was using his terminologies to express what God had shown to her. Certainly she copied it thought for thought even though she did not use it word for word.

One of Waggoner’s terms she did not use was “**birth**” (see above). It could be that she realised that there were implications of this word that were open to misinterpretation. She maintained though the very same begotten principle that Waggoner had expressed. Compare the two statements and you will see what I mean. Here Ellen White distinctly shows **the reason** behind the Son’s being. His source is the Father (the infinite God or eternal God or living God). Never, as some say, is the incarnation spoken of as a begetting. We are talking here, in this statement, in terms and context of origins. Note that Ellen White made this statement after having received revelation from God over 50 years.

Ellen White maintained, as well as repeatedly made clear, that the eternal (infinite) God and Christ as personalities were two separate individual beings (see above and the previous section). She also maintained that in His pre-existence Christ was “begotten in the express image of the Father’s person” (also see above). We shall return to this thought later. It is crucial to understanding who Christ really is.

For those who find it difficult to accept that Ellen White meant that Christ was literally begotten of the Father, I would ask you now to consider a statement that she wrote 6 weeks after the one that we have just read above from the *Signs of the Times*, 30th May 1895 (*Christ our complete salvation*). This is when she wrote in the July of that same year

“The Eternal Father, the unchangeable one, gave his only begotten Son, tore from his bosom Him who was made in the express image of his person, and sent him down to earth to reveal how greatly he loved mankind.” (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald 9th July 1895 ‘The Duty of the Minister and the People’*)

Here we can see that instead of using the word begotten to explain Christ’s source of being as a separate personality from God (the Father), Ellen White says that He was “made in the express image” of his Father’s person. Her previous statement had said “begotten in the express image of the Father’s person”. In her mind, the word “begotten” was synonymous with “made”.

This expression is with reference to Hebrews 1:3. This is where it says that the Son is “the express image” of God’s person. This leaves us to conclude that just as did Waggoner, Ellen White certainly regarded the Son, as a separate personality from the infinite God (or the living God), as having a beginning, albeit she maintained that He is “God essentially” (see above). The “Eternal Father”, the “unchangeable one”, is the same personality as “the living God” (see above)

These “begotten” and “made” statements were made by Ellen White just as the 20th century was drawing to a close (it was also as *Desire of Ages* was being completed). This means that by this time that she had been a messenger of the Lord for over 50 years and was therefore drawing upon that same amount of revelation from God. We shall be taking a look at these two statements again in the next section. This is because they are crucial to understanding what was believed not only by Ellen White but also by her brethren. It is also crucial to identifying the personage of the Son of God.

Some may say that Ellen White changed her mind regarding this begotten concept but there is nothing in her writings to suggest such a thing. In fact in 1905, in a letter written to her granddaughter, she said

“I am now looking over my diaries and copies of letters written for several years back, commencing before I went to Europe, before you were born. I

have the most precious matter to reproduce and place before the people in testimony form. While I am able to do this work, the people must have these things to revive past history, that they may see that there is one straight chain of truth, without one heretical sentence, in that which I have written.” (Ellen G. White, *Letter to Mabel White, Letter 329a, pages 1 and 2, November 16th 1905, Manuscript Releases MR No. 532*)

It goes without saying that Ellen White did not see herself as changing her mind.

Begotten in eternity

In the book he wrote called *Christ and His Righteousness* (which is said to depict his message at Minneapolis) Ellet 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; but we know that He was the Divine Word, not simply before He came to this earth to die, but even before the world was created. Just before His crucifixion He prayed, "And now, O Father, glorify thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was." John 17:5. And more than seven hundred years before His first advent, His coming was thus foretold by the word of inspiration: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity." Micah 5:2, margin.” (E. J. Waggoner, *‘Christ and His Righteousness’, page 9, 1890*)

Although Waggoner quoted this from the KJV, he did not quote the words “from everlasting” as in the KJV but instead used the margin notes (“from the days of eternity”). This was totally in harmony with what was then believed by Seventh-day Adventists. This was that Christ was begotten (brought forth) of God in eternity therefore He was truly the Son of God – also God in the person of the Son. In conclusion Waggoner added

“We know that Christ “proceeded forth and come 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.” (*Ibid*)

No matter what version it may be, Waggoner is here denying the trinity doctrine. This is because all versions say that the Son is coeval (of the same age) as the Father. On page 21 he also said

“There was a time when Christ proceeded forth and came from God, from the bosom of the Father (John 8:42 and 1:18) but that time was so far back in the days of eternity that to finite comprehension it is practically without beginning. But the point is that Christ is a begotten Son and not a created subject.” (*Ibid pages 21-22*)

Waggoner was here maintaining that at a given point in eternity, Christ was begotten of God the Father but that this was so far back in ages past that it was impossible for the human mind to comprehend it. He was therefore very clearly expressing the belief that there was a time when the Son, as a separate personality from the Father, did not have an existence.

In my 10 years of study on this subject, I have never found anywhere where Ellen White actually said this as pointedly as did Waggoner but I must also say that I cannot find anywhere either where she actually said that there never was a time when the Son did not exist. She did definitely say, as we have just seen, that He is a begotten Son therefore if it is insisted that she says that there never was a time when He did not exist, then this is only the same as the original (orthodox) trinity belief (everlastingly begotten). The Roman Catholic Church, along with other denominations, holds to this latter belief.

As we have seen from the above, Ellen White did say that Christ was “begotten in the express image of the Father's person” (*Signs of the Times*, 30th May 1895), also that in His pre-existence He “was made in the express image of his [God's] person” (*Review & Herald* 9th July 1895) but the conclusion that she believed that Christ was eternally begotten as in the orthodox trinity doctrine (see section six) does not seem to best fit this next statement. This is when with reference to Jesus saying, “Before Abraham was I AM” (John 8:58) she said

“Here Christ shows them that, altho they might reckon His life to be less than fifty years, yet His divine life could not be reckoned by human computation. The existence of Christ before His incarnation is not measured by figures.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times*. 3rd May 1899 ‘*The Word made flesh*’)

Here we can see it said that as regards to the personality of the Son (this is as a separate personality from the Father), His pre-existent life is immeasurable - at least by any standard known to humanity. This is the same view as held by Waggoner (see above). This was when he said that the mind of man could not “grasp the ages” that were spanned in the phrase “In the beginning” of John 1:1. Ellen White's statement therefore is only another way of expressing the belief of Waggoner. Even if not word-by-word she again appears to be copying his statement thought by thought. It does appear therefore that with respect to **when** Christ was begotten of God, both Waggoner and Ellen White believed much the same.

There is no doubt that Ellen White believed, as did Waggoner, that Christ is a begotten Son but if she had believed like the original and orthodox trinity doctrine says that He is *eternally* begotten of the Father, then here would have been the place to say it but she did not. Instead she simply maintained that His pre-existent life “could not be reckoned by human computation” and that it “is not measured by figures”. Ellen White was not depicting a trinitarian view of the Son and yet this was written by her the year following the publication of *Desire of*

Ages (1898). This is the book that Seventh-day Adventists today say led their church to become trinitarian.

Ellen White was saying here that the Son's pre-existence, **as a separate personality** from the living God (as Ellen White called God the Father), could be measured by means known to divinity but that it was beyond human know how. Thus it appears that just as did Waggoner, Ellen White did believe that there was a point in eternity, completely unknown to humanity and too far back in eternity to even imagine it, when the Son was brought forth of God. This was just like saying from eternity. We shall see the relevance of this in the next section.

This quoting of the KJV margin notes for Micah 5:2, as was done by Ellet Waggoner (see above) was also done by Ellen White. In *Desire of Ages* with reference to Jesus saying "Before Abraham was I am" (John 8:58) she wrote

"Silence fell upon the vast assembly. The name of God, given to Moses to express the idea of the eternal presence, had been claimed as His own by this Galilean Rabbi. He had announced Himself to be the self-existent One, He who had been promised to Israel, "whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity." Micah 5:2, margin. (*Ellen White, The Desire of Ages, page 469, 'The light of Life'*)

This again was in keeping with what was then (1898) believed by Seventh-day Adventists. This was that Christ was begotten (brought forth) of God from "the days of eternity". We shall return our thoughts to this in the next section (see also *The Begotten Series* section seven). It was also in keeping with where Ellen White said that Christ's pre-existent life "could not be reckoned by human computation", also that it "is not measured by figures" (see above). This is because the words "days of eternity" do not depict a specific length of time.

Begotten in eternity - not from the incarnation or the resurrection

The above "begotten" and "made" remarks of Ellen White are not as some may suggest meant by her to be applicable only from the incarnation or the resurrection. How we know this is because she did say to the Seventh-day Adventist youth of her day

"Before Christ came in the likeness of men, he existed in the express image of his Father. He thought it not robbery to be equal with God. Nevertheless he voluntarily emptied himself, and took the form of a servant." (*Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor, 20th December 1900 'Christ's humiliation'*)

As she also said in her previously quoted statements, Christ was "a Son begotten in the express image of the Father's person", also that He was "made in the express image of his person" (see above). As has been said, these were with reference to Christ's pre-existence, not to His earthly beginnings at Bethlehem. In conclusion she said

“He was the incarnate God, the light of heaven and earth. In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” (*Ibid*)

This is with particular reference to what the Scriptures tell us in Philippians 2:5-8 and Hebrews 1:1-3. We can also see the same in the penultimate statement. This is when Ellen White said that Christ was “made” and then “sent” by God (His Father) down to earth. Note she also stressed that Christ “was the incarnate God”. Ellen White had said more or less the same 4 years previously.

“God in human nature is the mystery of godliness. Christ, the only-begotten of the Father, was the express image of his Father's person, the brightness of his glory, and he came to the world not to condemn the world, but to save it. God was in Christ in human form, and endured all the temptations wherewith man was beset; in our behalf he participated in the suffering and trials of sorrowful human nature.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 2nd January 1896, 'Christ Revealing the Character of the Law'*)

She also said to the youth the next year

“Because divinity alone could be efficacious in the restoration of man from the poisonous bruise of the serpent, God himself, in his only begotten Son, assumed human nature, and in the weakness of human nature sustained the character of God, vindicated his holy law in every particular, and accepted the sentence of wrath and death for the sons of men.” (*Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor, 11th February 1897, 'The mind of Christ'*)

First of all notice that it is said here that divinity alone can be “efficacious” in the salvation of mankind. This invalidates the trinitarian idea that the death of human nature would suffice. We covered this in section twelve. This is when we showed that in trinitarianism, the divine person does not really die – which has a drastic effect on how the atonement is viewed.

Notice also whom it was that Ellen White said was “in His only begotten Son”. It was none other than “God himself”. This is the mystery of Godliness. In the person of Jesus the Christ, God Himself was manifest in the flesh. This was no different than she had said 7 years previously.

“Christ came to represent the Father. We behold in him the image of the invisible God. He clothed his divinity with humanity, and came to the world that the erroneous ideas Satan had been the means of creating in the minds of men, in regard to the character of God, might be removed. We could not behold the glory of God unveiled in Christ and live; but as he came in the garb of humanity, we may draw nigh to our Redeemer.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times', 20th January 1890, 'God made manifest in Christ'*)

She then said

“We are called upon to behold the Lord our Father in the person of his Son. Christ came in the robe of the flesh, with his glory subdued in humanity, that lost man might communicate with him and live.” (*Ibid*)

To Ellen White, Christ was God the “Father in the person of His Son”. As we have noted above, five years later in 1895 she did say that He was “begotten” (“made”) in the “express image” of the person of the Father. In *Desire of Ages* Ellen White also wrote

“The dedication of the first-born had its origin in the earliest times. God had promised to give the First-born of heaven to save the sinner.” (*Ellen G. White, ‘The Desire of Ages’, page 51 ‘The dedication’*)

It appears that this phrase “the First-born of heaven” has a dual application; once in eternity and once on earth. I say this because of what Ellen White said next She wrote

“This gift was to be acknowledged in every household by the consecration of the first-born son. He was to be devoted to the priesthood, as a representative of Christ among men.” (*Ibid*)

Ellen White was talking here in terms of God’s original requirements of the descendants of Abraham. They were under obligation to dedicate their first-born male to the priesthood of their family. After the apostasy of Israel at Sinai when the priesthood was handed over to the Levites, they were still to consecrate their firstborn to God. They were also to pay for him a redemption price.

In eternity, this is what God had done with His own Son. He had dedicated Him to the priesthood. When God smote the first born of the Egyptians it was only the same as He was to do to His one and only own Son. Christ was smitten. He also paid the price of redemption and transgression but not His own. He is our redemption price. No greater price could have been paid. Our value to God therefore is of infinite worth. It is equal to the life of His one and only Son. As Ellen White said on the same page

“Thus the law for the presentation of the first-born was made particularly significant. While it was a memorial of the Lord's wonderful deliverance of the children of Israel, it prefigured a greater deliverance, to be wrought out by the only-begotten Son of God. As the blood sprinkled on the doorposts had saved the first-born of Israel, so the blood of Christ has power to save the world.” (*Ibid*)

Christ the wisdom of God “brought forth” (Proverbs chapter 8)

There is no doubt that in keeping with historic Christianity (the early Christian faith), Ellen White did believe that the wisdom brought forth of Proverbs chapter eight is the pre-existent Son of God. In the opening chapter of Patriarchs and Prophets she wrote

“The Sovereign of the universe was not alone in His work of beneficence. He had an associate -- a co-worker who could appreciate His purposes, and could share His joy in giving happiness to created beings. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God." John 1:1, 2". (Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 33 'Why sin was permitted?' 1890)

Notice here that she refers to God as being “the Sovereign of the universe” and the Son as “an associate -- a co-worker”. As we noted in the previous section, she took care to differentiate between the Son and the One whom she often termed the infinite God.

We shall now see that *Patriarchs and Prophets* was one of the books that Ellen White said in 1903 was “especially adapted” for newcomers to the faith. This she said was to establish them in the truth and keep them from taking “strange paths”. This was when in a letter she wrote to her son Edson she said (note that this was 5 years following the publication of *Desire of Ages*)

“Many will depart from the faith and give heed to seducing spirits. *Patriarchs and Prophets* and *The Great Controversy* are books that are especially adapted to those who have newly come to the faith, that they may be established in the truth. The dangers are pointed out that should be avoided by the churches. Those who become thoroughly acquainted with the lessons in these books will see the dangers before them and will be able to discern the plain, straight path marked out for them. They will be kept from strange paths. They will make straight paths for their feet, lest the lame be turned out of the way.” (Ellen G. White, *Letter written from St. Helena, California to Edson White and W. C. White*, 27th September 1903, manuscript releases Volume 21 No. 1594, see also ‘Evangelism’ chapter 10 page 366)

She followed this by saying

“In *Desire of Ages*, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, *The Great Controversy*, and in *Daniel and the Revelation*, there is precious instruction. These books must be regarded as of special importance, and every effort should be made to get them before the people.” (*Ibid*)

We can see from this that Ellen White saw no difference between the decidedly non-trinitarian books of *Patriarchs and Prophets* and *Daniel and the Revelation* with her supposedly trinitarian *Desire of Ages*. This is very important because it shows that in 1903, Ellen White was promoting to be read by Seventh-day Adventists, books that were definitely non-trinitarian. As we have already seen in previous sections, there is no way that Ellen White would have classified *Desire of Ages* as being trinitarian. This evidence we have seen over and over again. Returning our thoughts to *Patriarchs and Prophets* she then added

“Christ, the Word, the only begotten of God, was one with the eternal Father -- one in nature, in character, in purpose -- the only being that could enter into all the counsels and purposes of God. "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6. His "goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." Micah 5:2." (*Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, page 33 'Why sin was permitted?' 1890*)

Here it is said very clearly of the Son that He is “the Word, the only begotten of God”. This is not a denigrating of the Son of God but a showing of His true relationship with God. We shall return our thoughts to this in the next section. Take note also that she says that the Son is “one in nature, in character, in purpose” with God. Here again is mentioned the oneness that the Son had with the Father. She also said that He was “the only being that could enter into all the counsels and purposes of God”. No mention is made of the Holy Spirit.

Notice too her use of the word “begotten”. Some say today that the original Greek word translated begotten (monogenes) simply means unique or one of a kind (see previous section) but obviously Ellen White did not use it here in that sense. She used it in the literal sense of its meaning (i.e. that He was born of or came forth from God). Later we shall see this even more clearly.

Note here also the wording in the KJV of Micah 5:2. This is where it says that the coming Messiah was “from everlasting”. Does this convey the idea that Christ never had a beginning? On the face of it, certainly it does but later when we discuss the other terms that Ellen White used that suggest eternal existence we shall see that this is not really the case. Ellen White then wrote

“And the Son of God declares concerning Himself: "The Lord possessed Me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting. . . . When He appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him: and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him." Proverbs 8:22-30.” (*Ibid*)

Note very importantly that we are told here that in these verses quoted (Proverbs 8:22-30), it was the Son of God that spoke through Solomon “concerning Himself”. This means that it was Christ that was doing the speaking – through Solomon – and talking of Himself. What else can it mean? Again we see Ellen White referring to Christ as being the wisdom of Proverbs chapter eight “brought forth”. It is also important to note the word “everlasting”. Again we shall come back to this thought later.

All of this in *Patriarchs and Prophets* is much the same as she wrote 16 years later in the article *The Word made flesh*. We shall see this in the next section (too much for this section). Between times, meaning between 1890 and 1906, Ellen White and Seventh-day Adventists did not have a change in theology. This was even though the latter was 8 years **following** the publication of *Desire of*

Ages. This is the book that our leadership is saying today led our denomination to become trinitarian.

It is not surprising therefore **that ten years after** the publication of *Patriarchs and Prophets*, meaning in 1900, which was **two years after** the publication of *Desire of Ages*, Ellen White said exactly the same thing. This is when she wrote in the *Signs of the Times*

“Through Solomon Christ declared: "The Lord possessed Me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth. . . . When He gave to the sea His decree, that the waters should not pass His commandment; when He appointed the foundations of the earth; then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him." (*Ellen G. White, The Signs of the Times, 29th August 1900 'Resistance to Light'*)

Again we see Ellen White saying that these verses in Proverbs chapter eight are directly applicable to the Son of God. In fact just as she did previously, she again says that through Solomon Christ was speaking of Himself. Note very importantly that this means that Christ Himself was saying that prior to anything being created, He is the one “brought forth” and “as one brought up” with God. Again many believe this to be with reference to the original begetting of the Son. Notice too the title of the article.

Some claim that these verses found in Proverbs chapter 8 are only symbolic or allegorical language but here we can see that Ellen White never used them in that sense. She took them to be literal. She continued

“In speaking of His pre-existence, Christ carries the mind back through dateless ages. He assures us that there never was a time when He was not in close fellowship with the eternal God. He to whose voice the Jews were then listening had been with God as one brought up with Him.” (*Ibid*)

Needless to say, these words of Ellen White are used by the Seventh-day Adventist trinitarians to show that she believed that Christ has always existed meaning that He is co-eternal with God. Is this though what she was really saying? Personally I would not think so because she had previously said that He was the wisdom of God that had been “brought forth”. She was saying that since that time (being “brought forth”) there never was a time when He was not in close fellowship with “the Eternal God”. Note again her differentiating between Christ and “the eternal God”. Note also the reference to the time factor again. She says “dateless ages” not forever. There is an inference here that this time period, although incalculable, was limited.

The trinitarians Seventh-day Adventists do not usually quote the preceding paragraph. They are usually content with saying that she said “there never was a time when He was not in close fellowship with the eternal God”. This though is removing the statement from its context. Ellen White’s remarks just one year previous where she said that Christ’s divine life could not be “reckoned by human computation” or “measured by figures” (see above) comes to mind. They are very relevant to her statement here.

Note well the last sentence in that previous quote. Ellen White said again that Christ was “as one brought up with Him”, meaning as one brought up with “the Eternal God”. Here she was differentiating again with respect to personality. Christ was one personality whilst “the eternal God” was another. The entire language of Proverbs chapter 8 is birth or parent/child language.

In terms of personality, it is quite apparent that Ellen White was saying that Christ is not “the eternal God”. This is exactly the same as was said by the early pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism. This is because like Ellen White, they too differentiated between these two divine personalities. This is why they objected so much to the trinity doctrine. Some of their thoughts are detailed in later sections

Here is a very important question. If the current Seventh-day Adventist trinity theology is correct - meaning that there are three co-equal, co-eternal and coeval beings making up the one God - then why does Ellen White differentiate between them by saying here that one of them, not the Son, is “the eternal God”? If all three are coeternal and make up the one God they would all be the eternal God. That much is reasonably patent. It is also what trinitarians believe. The year previous in the *Signs of the Times* (this time it was in an article called *The measure of God’s love*) Ellen White wrote

"The Lord possessed Me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old," Christ says. "When He gave to the sea His decree, that the waters should not pass His commandment; when He appointed the foundations of the earth; then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him." But the only-begotten Son of God humbled Himself to come to this earth." (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 22nd February 1899, 'The measure of God’s love'*)

Again we see Ellen White referring to the Son of God as being the wisdom of Proverbs chapter eight. Note that this was the year **following** the publication of *Desire of Ages*.

At the time of the Kellogg crisis (early 1900’s) Ellen White did say concerning the Son

“The Son is all the fullness of the Godhead manifested. The Word of God declares Him to be “the express image of His person.” "God so loved the

world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Here is shown the personality of the Father." (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B No.7, page 62 1906 'Come out and be Separate'*)

Here it is said that the Son is the "personality of the Father" shown (made visible). This should tell us a great deal about the Son being God begotten and the identification of the wisdom of chapter eight. This brings to mind when Ellen White said

"Who is Christ? -- He is the only begotten Son of the living God. He is to the Father as a word that expresses the thought, -- as a thought made audible. Christ is the word of God. Christ said to Philip, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father." His words were the echo of God's words. Christ was the likeness of God, the brightness of his glory, the express image of his person." (*Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor, 28th June 1894, 'Grow in grace'*)

Ellen White also said in 1901 concerning Jesus

"He was God in human flesh, and He could not but work the works of God. Unbelief, prejudice, and jealousy beat about Him, and if His humanity had not been united with divinity, He would have failed and become discouraged. At times His divinity flashed through humanity, and He stood forth as the Son of God, His veil of flesh too transparent to hide His majesty. But the men who claimed to be the expositors of the prophecies refused to believe that He was the Christ. Satan had control of their minds, and they utterly refused to acknowledge the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth." (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald 26th March 1901. 'Lessons from the Christ-life'*)

One final thought from the pen of Ellen White

In an article published in the *Review and Herald* called *Man's Failure to Comprehend Divinity in Humanity*, Ellen White penned these words

"When Christ was upon earth, it was difficult for those with whom he daily associated to realize that he was divine. It was difficult for the members of his own family to comprehend the fact that he was the Son of God. It seemed hard for them to realize that divinity wore the garb of humanity. Again and again he was obliged to declare his position as the Son of God. They were so dull of perception that they could not distinguish the divine from the human. Although they believed that his works were of a miraculous character, they could not fully understand their nature, and he had to state his authority and his position." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 11th June 1889, 'Man's Failure to Comprehend Divinity in Humanity'*)

It would seem that within Seventh-day Adventism today, it is still difficult for

many to realise that Christ, in His pre-existence, really was the Son of God. In contrast, the once proud king of Babylon did recognise Christ. As Ellen White explained to the youth of her day

“The Hebrew captives had told Nebuchadnezzar of Christ, the Redeemer that was to come, and from the description thus given, the king recognized the form of the fourth in the fiery furnace as the Son of God.” (*Ellen G. White, Youth’s Instructor, 26th April 1904, ‘Lessons From the Life of Daniel The Fiery Furnace’*)

There are those who will say that as long as we present Christ as being divine it does not matter whether we teach that Christ really is the Son of God. The important thing they say is that we do not split the church on this matter. This though is a wrong attitude. For the sake of peace we must not compromise the truth of what God has revealed through the Scriptures. Ellen White wrote of those who stifle their convictions. After quoting where Jesus said “He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me” she said of a person who would rather have peace than uphold the truth

“But in order to have the peace of Christ, it is necessary to place Christ and His service first. “Those who yield their convictions of truth to please father or mother, sister, or brother, husband or wife or children, prove themselves unworthy of Christ. They do not estimate his excellency. They view him not as the Son of God, whom the Father gave for the sins of the world, in order that they might not perish, but have everlasting life; and therefore they shun the cross. But there is a cross to be lifted by everyone who by faith accepts a crucified and risen Saviour.” (*Ellen G. White, Bible Echo, 19th March 1894, ‘Variance between believers and unbelievers’*)

Ellen White was primarily here referring to those who will not make a public confession of keeping the commandments of God and professing the divinity of Christ but the principle she is advocating comes across loud and clear. We must not sacrifice the truth for peace. This is whether it is in the home or in the church.

Summary

From the above, we have seen that even after the publication of *Desire of Ages*, Ellen White continually presented the idea that the wisdom of Proverbs chapter eight was the Son of God. We have also seen that she said that in His pre-existence He is truly begotten of the Father therefore is truly the Son of God.

In the next section (sixteen), we shall give consideration to Christ being the eternal presence. This is where we shall be looking at some *eternity* statements that Ellen White made with respect to Christ. As we shall see there, they were not always what they appeared to be. In other words, these statements need to be compared with all the other statements that she made about Christ. This is the only true and honest way to obtain a true picture of her overall beliefs.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section sixteen

The Son of God – the eternal presence

We have noted in the previous sections that throughout the time of Ellen White's ministry, the standard belief amongst Seventh-day Adventists was that Christ is begotten of God meaning that He truly is God's Son. We have also noted that the present-day denominational belief is that Christ is not begotten. This has been a dramatic change to the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. It is this change that the once editor of the Adventist Review, namely William Johnson, called a startling change. This is when he said

“Some Adventists today think, that our beliefs have remained unchanged over the years, or they seek to turn back the clock to some point when we had everything just right. But all attempts to recover such “historic Adventism” fail in view of the facts of our heritage. Adventists beliefs have changed over the years under the impact of present truth. Most startling is the teaching regarding Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord.” *(William Johnson, Adventist Review January 6th 1994 Article ‘Present Truth - Walking in God's Light’, 1994)*

He explained by saying

“Many of the pioneers, including James White, J. N. Andrews, Uriah Smith and J. H. Waggoner held to an Arian or semi-Arian view - that is, the Son at some point in time, before the creation of our world, was generated by the Father.” *(Ibid)*

This was the standard belief held during the time of Ellen White. William Johnson then said of this begotten belief

“Only gradually did this false doctrine give way to the Biblical truth, and largely under the impact of Ellen Whites writings in statements such as “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. (Desire of ages p 530)” *(Ibid)*

As we can see here, today our current theologians say that our pioneers were wrong in their theology of the God. This is why they say that as a denomination we now profess a belief in the trinity doctrine. They say it is to correct the errors of the pioneers.

As we have seen in the previous sections, Ellen White endorsed the begotten

view of Christ. She also said that He was the wisdom of Proverbs chapter 8 brought forth. We noted this particularly in the previous section. This did not stop the early Seventh-day Adventists believing that Christ was God but rather confirmed this belief.

Christ the express image of God – God essentially

The reason why the early Seventh-day Adventists believed that the Son of God is God essentially is because the Bible says so (see John 1:1, Hebrews 1:8, Philippians 2:5-8 etc). It really is as simple as that! They also reasoned it was because the Bible says that He is begotten of God, meaning brought forth (or caused to be) of God.

Whilst in one sense this begetting may appear to be the same as found in the original creeds that came out of the various church councils such as Nicaea and Constantinople etc (these are the creeds that say the Son is God from God, true God from true God), there is one very important difference between that particular belief and the one that was believed by the pioneers. It is this difference that makes one of these views decidedly non-trinitarian and the other decidedly trinitarian. Allow me to explain.

The orthodox trinity doctrine says that the Son is eternally (everlastingly) begotten of the Father, meaning that never was there a time or never will be a time when the Son is not being begotten. If correct, this would conclude that as a separate personality from the Father, Christ has never ceased to exist. This is the whole point of the creeds. For comments on the latter 4th century ecumenical councils see section four, section five and section six.

Throughout the ministry of Ellen White, the standard belief of Seventh-day Adventists was that Christ was begotten (not created) of God but this happening was said to be so far back in eternity that it was beyond the comprehension of the human mind to imagine. This reasoning concludes that as a separate personality from God, there was a time when the Son did not exist. In other words, there was a point in time when the Son, as a personality separate from the Father, was brought forth of the Father's own being (not created). This was seen as being in keeping with Ellen White when she wrote

*"The Son is all the fullness of the Godhead manifested. The Word of God declares Him to be "the express image of His person." "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Here is shown the personality of the Father." (Ellen G. White, *Special Testimonies Series B No.7, page 62 1906 'Come out and be Separate'*)*

In understanding the identity of Christ, this latter statement is very important. It is equivalent to where the Scriptures say of Jesus

"Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his [God's]

person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high: Hebrews 1:3

We shall now look at who Ellen White identified Christ to be. We shall then come back to the meaning of “the express image of his [God’s] person” as in the above verse of Scripture. We shall see that it is one and the same person but two separate personalities. This perhaps is the mystery of mysteries, meaning how Christ can be God manifest in the flesh but not God the Father. It means that Christ, the Son of God, is the eternal presence.

Christ - the eternal presence

In 1891, in an article called *The Comforter*, Ellen White quoted Jesus as saying

“I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you.” The divine Spirit that the world's Redeemer promised to send, is the presence and power of God. He will not leave his people in the world destitute of his grace, to be buffeted by the enemy of God, and harassed by the oppression of the world; but he will come to them. The world cannot see the truth; they know not the Father or the Son, but it is only because they do not desire to know God, they do not wish to look upon Jesus, to see his goodness, his love, his heavenly attractions. (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 23rd November 1891, 'The Comforter'*)

Notice that Ellen White said nothing about knowing the Holy Spirit – only knowing the Father and the Son - but she did add

“Jesus is inviting all men to accept him; and wherever the heart is open to receive him, he will come in, gladdening the soul with the light and joy of his presence.” (*Ibid*)

To have the Holy Spirit present is to have Jesus present. As she said in *Steps to Christ* (regarding the disciples meeting after the ascension)

“And Pentecost brought them the presence of the Comforter, of whom Christ had said, He “shall be in you.” And He had further said, “It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you. Henceforth through the Spirit, Christ was to abide continually in the hearts of His children. Their union with Him was closer than when He was personally with them.” Acts 4:13” John 14:17; 16:7.” (*Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, page 74, 'Growing up into Christ'*)

In her much-read book *Desire of Ages*, Ellen White clearly defined the identity of Jesus. With reference to Him saying, “Before Abraham was I am” (John 8:58) she said

“Silence fell upon the vast assembly. The name of God, given to Moses to express the idea of the eternal presence, had been claimed as His own by this Galilean Rabbi. He had announced Himself to be the self-existent One, He who had been promised to Israel, "whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity." Micah 5:2, margin. (*Ellen White, The Desire of Ages, page 469, 'The light of Life'*)

Note here that Ellen White says that the words “I am” as Jesus used them as quoted in John 8:58 express the idea of “the eternal presence”. This is very important for us to remember because as we have noted in previous sections, this tells us that she believed, just as the Bible says, that Jesus is God Himself manifest in the flesh (see John 1:1, 14, Hebrews 1:1-3, 1 Timothy 3:16 etc). Understandably, the trinitarians amongst us often use this quote to try to show that Ellen White was a trinitarian.

This statement in *Desire of Ages* was drawn from thoughts she first penned in a manuscript that the Ellen White Estate confirms was written on February 18th and February 19th, 1895, at Granville, New South Wales. This was during the time that Ellen White was residing in Australia (1891- 1900). This is when she said

“I AM means an eternal presence; the past, present, and future are alike to God. He sees the most remote events of past history and the far distant future with as clear a vision as we do those things that are transpiring daily.” (*Ellen G. White, Manuscript No. 1084, February 18, 19th, 1895, page 21*)

Two paragraphs later she added

“Then said the Jews unto Him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast Thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I AM. Then took they up stones to cast at Him” because of that saying [verses 57-59]. Christ was using the great name of God that was given to Moses to express the idea of the eternal presence.” (*Ibid*)

This is very interesting, also extremely important. This is because it means that this statement regarding Christ as being “the eternal presence” (the ‘I AM’), was written by Ellen White **3 months before** she wrote the article in the *Signs of the Times* (30th May 1895) saying that Christ is “a Son **begotten** in the express image of the Father's person”. She then wrote

“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.” (*Ellen G.*

White, Signs of the Times, 30th May 1895, 'Christ our complete salvation'

It is even more interesting that the above “eternal presence” statement was also written almost **5 months before** the article was written in which she referred to Christ as being “Him **who was made** in the express image of his person” (9th July 1895) This is when she said

“The Eternal Father, the unchangeable one, gave his only begotten Son, tore from his bosom Him who was made in the express image of his person, and sent him down to earth to reveal how greatly he loved mankind.” (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald 9th July 1895 'The Duty of the Minister and the People'*)

The fact that Ellen White described Christ as the “eternal presence” (Feb 1895) did not stop her saying 3 months later that He is “begotten in the express image of the Father's person” (May 1895) or 4 months later that He was “made in the express image of His [the eternal Father's] person” (July 1895), in fact when reasoned through, it made it imperative.

What I mean is that if Christ is begotten **of** God then He must be the “eternal presence”. This is only reasonable exegesis. As we shall see in this section, this is exactly the same as where she said of the Son “Here is shown the personality of the Father” (see above). Later when we discuss the Holy Spirit we shall see that this is both the Father and the Son omnipresent, again making Christ the eternal presence.

In her understanding of “begotten” and “made”, Ellen White made no profession of knowing **how** this happening was accomplished. This remains therefore, just like Waggoner admitted in his book *Christ and His Righteousness*, a process unknown to man.

“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; but we know that He was the Divine Word, not simply before He came to this earth to die, but even before the world was created. We know that Christ “proceeded forth and come 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” (*E. J. Waggoner, 'Christ and His Righteousness', page 9, 1890*)

The Son of God – God essentially but a separate personality from God

In 1906, which was 8 years after the initial publication of *Desire of Ages* (this was whilst the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still decidedly non-trinitarian), Ellen White wrote an article called *The Word made flesh*. The entire article can be found here

[http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Articles\(EGW\)/TheWord-1906.htm](http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Articles(EGW)/TheWord-1906.htm)

After saying that Christ had truly taken humanity into Himself she wrote

“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, the one in whom all nations of the earth, both Jews and Gentiles, if they accepted him, were to be blessed. "The Word was with God, and the Word was God." Before men or angels were created, the Word was with God, and was God.” (Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, 5th April 1906, ‘*The Word made flesh*)

There are those who have taught (and still teach) that the Word of John 1:1 did not exist as a divine being but here Ellen White refutes this belief. She very clearly says that the Word did exist as “the eternal Son of God”. Note she speaks of the “oneness” that the Son, in His pre-existence, had with “His Father”. She also emphasises that the Son was with God and was God (as John 1:1). Notice in this oneness there is no mention of the Holy Spirit. Ellen White then wrote with regards to the Son

“The world was made by him, "and without him was not anything made that was made." If Christ made all things, he existed before all things.” (*Ibid*)

This is a very clear statement with reference to John 1:3. Ellen White then added in confirmation of that which she had just said

“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.” (*Ibid*)

Again it must be asked, how much clearer can it be said that the Son of God is God essentially?

Note two sets of wording here. The first is “the eternal Son of God”. The second is the Son having been “with God from all eternity”. On the face of it, it must be admitted that these two phrases do appear to show that Ellen White was saying that the Son, as a separate personality from God, did have an eternal existence but as we have seen in the previous section, Ellen White did say that the Son’s divine life could not be “reckoned by human computation”. There is an implication in this latter statement that it could be measured by a means known to divinity.

When later we compare such words as “all eternity” with other of Ellen White’s statements, it will be seen that she did not mean forever or everlasting. We shall return our thoughts to this later. It is crucial to our studies.

It is only by checking out **everything** that Ellen White said on the various aspects of this subject that we can determine what she really did believe. This is the only fair and honest way to treat her writings. Note in this latter statement, as

does the Scriptures, Ellen White differentiates between Christ and God. She says “He was with God”. She then wrote in this same article

“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.” (*Ibid*)

Ellen White again makes it appear that as a personal being separate from God the Father, the Son has always existed. Note the reference again to the Son being “one with the Father”, also that He was a “distinct person” from the Father. She was meaning to make this very clear. Note too how she uses the words “God” and “Father” synonymously (see above). Again it is understandable that the trinitarians use this verse to support their theories.

During the Godhead crisis of the early 1900's, Ellen White repeatedly stressed that Christ was a separate personality from God. Remember here that in the thinking of Seventh-day Adventists in 1906, God was a personal being, just as His Son was a personal being. They were Father and Son - two separate and distinct personages.

As has been said, in their attempts to show that Ellen White was a trinitarian, the pro-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists understandably quote the previous statements but they do not appear to very often use what she says next. This is when she wrote concerning the Son of God being God essentially, also one with His Father

“This was no robbery of God.” The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way," he declares, "before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth; while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth." (*Ibid*)

This is a very interesting statement, especially as it follows on from what appears to be statements saying that the divine Son of God, as a separate personality from the Father, has never had a beginning.

As we noted in the previous section, Ellen White is saying here that the wisdom of Proverbs chapter eight (Proverbs 8:24-25) refers to the person of “the Son of God”. Note that this was now **8 years after** the publication of *Desire of Ages*. It was also amidst the Godhead crisis of the early 1900's. The latter is really very important to remember because Ellen White was attempting to stabilize this critical situation. She was not trying to inflame it.

Notice as these Scripture say that prior to anything being created, Christ was “brought forth” (note the text says this twice). Many Seventh-day Adventist non-trinitarians believe that this is with reference to Christ being begotten of the Father (see previous section). Many trinitarians also believe that the wisdom of Proverbs 8 is Christ. This has been a long held belief in Christianity. History attests that it was held by many of the early church fathers. Note also the reference to Christ being “set up from everlasting”. This is considered by many to be with reference to the Son being established as mediator of the covenant.

Following this, Ellen White commented on the oneness that she had previously referred to that the Son had with God before the foundation of the world (see above). She wrote

“There are light and glory in the truth that Christ was one with the Father before the foundation of the world was laid. This is the light shining in a dark place, making it resplendent with divine, original glory. This truth, infinitely mysterious in itself, explains other mysterious and otherwise unexplainable truths, while it is enshrined in light, unapproachable and incomprehensible.”
(*Ibid*)

It is only reasonable to believe that Ellen White had in mind here the trinity doctrine. This is because at the time she wrote this article, it was only a few years since the leading physician within Seventh-day Adventism, namely John Harvey Kellogg, had confessed to the idea of God being a trinity. We shall cover this from section twenty-four through to twenty-nine. Suffice to say for now though that Kellogg came to this belief (that God was a trinity) to justify what he had written in his book *The Living Temple* - the which Ellen White condemned because she said that it was making God a nothingness.

Whilst Ellen White was alive, the Seventh-day Adventist Church made no confession of God being a trinity therefore with regards to this issue Kellogg was at variance with the teachings of the church. He was also at variance with the writings of Ellen White although in support of (in an attempt to justify) his beliefs he did quote some of the things she said regarding God. Ellen White maintained that Kellogg was misusing her writings.

Kellogg is the very first Seventh-day Adventist that I can find who professed a belief in the trinity doctrine. This is why it is integral to this study. It is also reasonable to believe that this is why at that time (the early 1900's), many Godhead statements came from the pen of Ellen White, meaning that it was to refute what Kellogg was teaching.

Ellen White was not ignorant concerning what is taught by the trinity doctrine. She was well aware of it. In fact in section twenty-seven we shall see that she condemned all three-in-one illustrations used to promote God as a trinity. We shall also see that she took a trinitarian statement of God made by a Presbyterian minister named Boardman and changed it - still using mainly his

words - to one that is acceptable to non-trinitarians. As we shall see, regarding the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, this became the most comprehensive statement that was ever made by her. This shows us how Ellen White regarded the trinity doctrine. It also shows us that she was not ignorant of its precepts.

The trinity teaching is based entirely upon the premise that all three personalities of the Godhead (of divinity) are of the one and the same substance (see section six). If this same substance reasoning is lacking, there is no trinity doctrine. This is the oneness of the trinity doctrine. This is why I said that when Ellen White made the above statement regarding Christ's pre-existent oneness with the Father that she had in mind the trinity doctrine (trinity oneness).

Note here that whatever it was that constituted this pre-existent oneness, Ellen White did say that in itself it was both "infinitely mysterious" and "incomprehensible". This is about as far as Ellen White went with this line of reasoning. Never did she involve herself in metaphysics (what God may or may not be). Certainly also she never went as far as saying - as does the trinity doctrine - that the three personalities are of the one and the same substance.

Notice also that she did say that this truth, meaning whatever constituted this oneness, "explains other mysterious and otherwise unexplainable truths". These "unexplainable truths" were regarding how Christ could be with God and yet be God Himself. It was also to do with the relationship between the three personalities of the Godhead.

As we have noted in previous sections, particularly section thirteen, we have seen that whatever it was that constituted this oneness, Ellen White did say that if the Son had sinned, which was a possibility, He would have gone out of existence. This is definitely a non-trinitarian oneness because in trinitarian oneness this is an impossible conclusion.

Addressing the issues

During the early 1900's there was a Godhead crisis within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This was when their long held beliefs concerning God and Christ were being challenged.

On many of an occasion Ellen White specifically addressed the issues concerned. In particular she spoke of God and Christ being two separate personalities. Perhaps this tells us a great deal about the issues themselves. In 1907, under the heading of *Sabbath Sermon*, Ellen White wrote

"On Sabbath, April 27, many of our brethren and sisters from neighboring churches gathered in the parlors with the sanitarium family, and I spoke to them there. I read the first chapter of Hebrews as the basis of my discourse. This chapter clearly indicates the individual personalities of the Father and the Son. Speaking of the Son, the apostle says, "God . . . hath appointed [him] heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the

brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald. 1st August 1907, 'Notes of Travel, No.2'*)

Note that Ellen White here quoted from the opening verses of the book of Hebrews. She continued

"If men and women could be once inspired by a view of the great and grand work that has been accomplished through God's gift of his Son, their days would no longer be given up to pleasure-seeking and frivolity. Our ears would no longer be pained by the drunkard's song and the story of crime and wickedness. Men would endeavor to place themselves where they could realize the meaning of the great salvation offered through Jesus Christ. It means life, eternal life to the receiver." (*Ibid*)

Just two weeks later she wrote again of a sermon she had preached, this time at San Diego. This had been preached on May 4th, just one week after the previous one. Under the heading "Sabbath Sermon at San Diego" she said

"On Sabbath, May 4, the Lord gave me a message to our brethren and sisters in San Diego. I based my remarks on the first chapter of Hebrews:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Here the position of Jesus Christ in reference to his Father is brought to view. While they are one in purpose, and one in mind, yet in personality they are two." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald 15th August 1907, 'Notes of Travel, No. 4 'Labors in San Diego'*)

This was the message of God to the believers in San Diego. It is also a message to us today. God and Christ are two separate personalities. Let us not become confused regarding this issue.

The express image of the Father's person (the person of God)

We now need to return our thoughts to Hebrews 1:3 which concerning Christ says

"Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his [God's] person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high:"
Hebrews 1:3

Our study will now concentrate on how the Son can be said to be God yet a separate personality from God the Father. This will entail a study of what the writer of Hebrews was saying here concerning Him being “the express image” of His Father’s person.

In Hebrews 1:3, the Greek word that is translated here person is the Greek word hupostasis. This is completely different than the Greek word prosopon that Paul could have used which means the countenance or appearance (i.e. that which is visibly seen, the visage). As a matter of interest, this latter word prosopon is often translated in the KJV as face, faces, or countenance etc., thus depicting outward appearance.

If Paul had wanted to say here that Christ was the image of God (as he did in Colossians 1:15), He could also have used the word ‘eikon’ which is always translated in the KJV as ‘image’. It is where we obtain our English word ‘icon’. We can see therefore that in His opening remarks to the Hebrew Christians, the writer avoided using either ‘prosopon’ or ‘eikon’, which are often used with reference to outward appearance.

Paul had good reason for using the word hupostasis. He did it not to express the idea that the Son was the same as the Father outwardly but that He was one and the same inwardly meaning the very same in His person (inner person or inner being). In what I believe was her most comprehensive statement on the Godhead (this was when there was a crisis within Seventh-day Adventism regarding Godhead theology), Ellen White wrote

“The Son is all the fullness of the Godhead manifested. The Word of God declares Him to be “the express image of His person.” “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Here is shown the personality of the Father.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B No. 7, page 62 1906 ‘Come out and be Separate’*)

In other words, the Son is the very person (inner person or inner being) of God shown. As a matter of passing interest here, Ellen White does say that the Father and Son are not identical. At the time she was preparing *Desire of Ages*, she said to the Seventh-day Adventist youth of her day

“As the disciples comprehended it, as their perception took hold of God's divine compassion, they realized that there is a sense in which the sufferings of the Son were the sufferings of the Father. From eternity there was a complete unity between the Father and the Son. They were two, yet little short of being identical; two in individuality, yet one in spirit, and heart, and character.” (*Ellen G. White, Youth’s Instructor 16th December 1897 ‘The New Commandment part 1’*)

We can see again from this that Ellen White clearly says that the Father and Son

are **two separate individuals**. She also says that they are “little short of being identical”. In other words, the Father and Son are almost the same but not quite. As she said in the *Signs of the Times* in 1903

“If it were not for the light that is given us from above, we could not follow step by step in the footprints of Jesus. Christ came to this world in order that we might have this light. He is “the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” He, the Majesty of heaven, the Son of the living God, the One equal with the Father, came to our world to stand by the side of fallen beings, through His sacrifice giving value to humanity.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the times 3rd June 1903, ‘Walk in the light’*)

Notice that in the sense of personality, Christ is spoken of as the Son of God, not the “living God”. He is the Son of the Father, “the Son of the living God”.

Understanding hupostasis

Returning our thoughts to the book of Hebrews, three times the writer uses the word hupostasis. First in 1:3 where it is translated *person*, secondly in 3:14 where it is translated *confidence* and thirdly in 11:3 where it is translated *substance*. All three instances are as in the KJV. The same writer also used it in 2 Corinthians 9:4 and 2 Corinthians 11:17. This is where it is translated as *confident* and *confidence* (KJV).

The word hupostasis is a compound of two other Greek words. These words are *hupo* meaning literally *under* (for its usage see such as Matthew 5:15, Luke 13:34, Acts 2:5 and Romans 16:20 etc) and *histemi* (a primary verb) meaning to be stood (stand or standing) or be established (for its usage see Matthew 2:9 [stood], 6:5 [standing], 18:16 [established], Mark 9:36 [set], John 1:26 [standeth] and Acts 24:21 [standing] etc).

We can see therefore that the word ‘hupostasis’ means that which is the ‘foundation’ or ‘under-girding’ (sub-structure or substance) of cause of being. It also means the *essential structure* of what something is (what makes something what it is). We can see this more clearly as we study how the author of Hebrews used this same word in Hebrews 3:14. This is where he says

“For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence [Gr. Hupostasis] stedfast unto the end” Hebrews 3:14

This “confidence” is the substance of our hope (it is that of which our hope is made, the foundation or under-girding). As Paul explains as he uses this Greek word for the third time

“Now faith is the substance [Gr. Hupostasis] of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Hebrews 11:1

The substance/confidence (Gr. hupostasis) is the ‘stuff’ of which are hopes are

made. It is our faith, the foundation or under-girding of our hopes. Paul uses this very same Greek word when he said that the Son is the “**express image** (Gr. **charakter**) **of His** (God’s) **person** (hupostasis - substance)” (see Hebrews 1:3).

This ‘stuff’ (substance/foundation/under-girding) therefore of which Paul says that Christ consists, is God’s person. It is the very essence of God (who and what God is). It is very interesting to note that William Tyndale translated Hebrews 1:3 as saying (as did Miles Coverdale when he produced his translation of the complete Bible after Tyndale was martyred for his faith)

“Which sonne beyng the brightnes of his glory and very ymage of his substance bearyng vp all thinges with the worde of his power hath in his awne person purged oure synnes and is sitten on the right honde of the maiestie an hye” Hebrews 1:3 Tyndale’s translation

This would say to us today in modern English

“Which son being the brightness of his glory and very image of his [God’s] substance bearing up all things with the word of his power hath in his own person purged our sins and is sitting on the right hand of the majesty on high”

Notice here that Tyndale says that the Son is the “**very image of his** [God’s] “**substance**” whereas the KJV says, “**express image of his** [God’s] **person**”. Notice also that Tyndale emphasises that the Son purged our sins in “**his own person**” (Gr. ‘heautou’ meaning himself) thus ensuring that the Son is seen as a separate person from the Father meaning the one who did the purging in Himself.

Tyndale’s translation is much better than the KJV. It shows exactly what Paul meant by his use of hupostasis. Seeing that the translators of the KJV relied heavily on Tyndale’s version, one is left to wonder why they did not use his translation here. They confused the issue whilst Tyndale made it very clear. Tyndale is saying that what God is so is the Son.

For further discussion on hupostasis see section five, section six and section seven of *The Begotten Series*.

Substance and person

By using the words substance and person, Tyndale was attempting to show (and I believe succeeded) that the Greek conveys that the Son, as a separate personality from God, was a manifestation of the very being (substance/person) of God (who and what God is). The translators of the KJV did not accomplish this very well when they translated it as saying of the Son

“Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by

himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high:"
Hebrews 1:3.

The expression here used ("express image of His person") could quite easily be taken to mean an exact copy of God in every aspect.

By his use of Greek words, the author of Hebrews did not mean to convey that latter thought. To put it another way again, the understanding of this verse, as it is written in the KJV, would totally depend on the reader's conception of the word person although the KJV rendering would be more than acceptable to trinitarians. This is because it does tie in quite well with their trinity formula. It is quite possible therefore that the KJV translators translated this verse with a trinitarian bias. In other words by saying "very image of his [God's] substance", Tyndale successfully captured the original thought of the writer whilst the translators of the KJV confused (clouded) the issue.

In Hebrews 1:3, Paul was setting out to convey, as we would say today and as was said by Ellen White, that the Son is the very "personality (substance) of God made manifest" (see above). It is very interesting to note that in his 18th century translation of the New Testament translated directly from the Greek, the Presbyterian minister Daniel Mace says of the Son in Hebrews 1:3

"Who being the radiation of his glory, and the imprest image of his [God's] substance, and governing all things by his powerful command, after having himself made expiation for our sins, sat down on the right hand of the divine majesty in the highest heavens." Hebrews 1:3 Mace translation (1729)

Note like Tyndale he says "substance" and not "person" as does the KJV. Note too he translates this verse as saying that the Son is the "imprest image" of that substance.

Interesting also is the way that this is explained in *The Abingdon Bible Commentary* of 1929. Some 66 professors of biblical exegesis, biblical languages, theology, Christian doctrine and church history etc compiled this commentary. With reference to the words *express image* (KJV) it says

"The word translated 'very image' means, literally, the stamp cut by a die, and so the impress made upon a seal; thus the phrase signifies that the essence of the divine nature was stamped on the Person of Christ. He was the impress of God's essence" (*Professor H. T. Andrews, D.D., 'The Abingdon Bible Commentary', 1929*)

Note the words "the essence of the divine nature was stamped on the Person of Christ". This "nature" is with reference to the inner person (substance) of God.

In a letter addressed to the Bishop of Constantinople, Alexander the Bishop of Alexandria said with reference to the words of Jesus "I and my Father are one"

(this is from the same letter in which we noted in section eight that Alexander said that those who believe the Son to be unbegotten have their intellects blinded)

“In these words [I and my Father are one] the Lord does not proclaim Himself to be the Father, neither does He represent two natures as one; but that the essence of the Son of the Father preserves accurately the likeness of the Father, His nature taking off the impress of likeness to Him in all things, being the exact image of the Father and the express stamp of the prototype.” (*Letter, Alexander of Alexandria to Alexander of Constantinople, Theodoret’s history, Book 1 chapter 3*)

This is much the same as was said by Daniel Mace in his translation of the Scriptures. Note the wording “impress of likeness” to God’s nature. Alexander said that the “essence of the Son” “preserves accurately the likeness of the Father”. Note too he says that the Son is “the express stamp of the prototype”, meaning an exact replica of the original. In other words, as we have already seen that Ellen White says

“The Son is all the fullness of the Godhead manifested. The Word of God declares Him to be “the express image of His person.”Here is shown the personality of the Father.” (*see above*)

More could be said here of this verse in Hebrews but enough has been said to show that the Son is God essentially (everything that God is) yet is a separate personality from the Father. As the New English Bible translates John 1:1

“When all things began, the word already was. The word dwelt with God and what God was, the word was.” John 1:1 New English Bible

From everlasting (from the days of eternity)

I did say previously that we would return our thoughts to the various statements made by Ellen White where she gave the impression that she was saying that Christ, as a separate personality from the infinite God, has never had a beginning. We shall take a look at these now.

Some of these statements and phrases were such as (as drawn from her writings above),

- “the eternal Son of God” (*Review and Herald, 5th April 1906, The Word made flesh*)
- “from everlasting” (*Ibid*)
- “He was with God from all eternity” (*Ibid*)
- “existed from eternity” (*Ibid*)
- “from the days of eternity” (*The Desire of Ages, page 44, ‘Unto you a Saviour’, 1898*)

I would be the first to admit that at first glance, these statements do strongly suggest that Ellen White was saying that Christ, as a separate personality from God (not to identity of being), was never begotten but again I ask, in the light of other statements she made, was this really what she was saying? This is the question that we shall now seek to answer. As we have noted so many times before, Ellen White said that Christ, as a personality, is “the Son of the infinite God” and that “He is the only begotten Son of the living God”. Never did she say that as a personality He was the infinite or living God (the Father) although she does maintain, as do the Scriptures, that He is God essentially.

In the extract above from *Desire of Ages*, Ellen White said that Christ had identified Himself as being “the self-existent One” and that His “goings forth” (meaning His pre-existent activities) had been “from the days of eternity” (see Micah 5:2). This is when she said

“Silence fell upon the vast assembly. The name of God, given to Moses to express the idea of the eternal presence, had been claimed as His own by this Galilean Rabbi. He had announced Himself to be the self-existent One, He who had been promised to Israel, “whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity.” Micah 5:2, margin. (*Ellen White, The Desire of Ages, page 469, ‘The light of Life’*)

Note something very important. Whilst Ellen White quotes here from the King James Version of the Bible, she does not use all of the words as in the KJV text but instead uses the margin notes. This is something that she also did very near the beginning of the book. This is when she said of Mary the mother of Jesus

“She is of the lineage of David, and the Son of David must be born in David's city. Out of Bethlehem, said the prophet, “shall He come forth . . . that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity.” Micah 5:2, margin.” (*Ellen G. White, ‘The Desire of Ages, page 44, ‘Unto you a Saviour’, 1898*)

Twice in *Desire of Ages* when quoting Micah 5:2, also in *Prophets and Kings* page 697, Ellen White quoted from the King James Version of the Bible but instead of using the words “from everlasting” (as used in the KJV text) she used the margin notes “from the days of eternity”. For doing this she had a very good reason. I say this because if she wanted to depict Christ as never having a beginning as in the trinity doctrine, then what better choice of words could be used from the English language than “from everlasting”?

In other words, what choice of wording other than “from everlasting” could better describe someone as never having a beginning? None I would think, yet twice in *Desire of Ages*, also once in *Prophets and Kings*, Ellen White refused to use them with respect to Christ's pre-existence. Instead she gave preference to the margin notes (“from the days of eternity”). This was even in *Desire of Ages*. Now why did she do this? Why substitute words that unmistakably convey the

meaning of never having a beginning with words that speak of an indefinite period of existence?

We can reason from this that she did so because she knew that the words “[from the days of eternity](#)”, rather than did the words “[from everlasting](#)”, depicted more accurately what God had revealed to her about the personage of the Son. It is also interesting to note that the Hebrew word ‘owlam’, translated in Micah 5:2 as “[from everlasting](#)” (KJV), does not mean forever.

This particular Hebrew word has the meaning of time out of mind – meaning ‘a time that is not revealed’ or ‘a time currently hidden’. This stems from its root meaning (Heb. alam) of ‘hidden or veiled from sight’ etc. It also gives the idea (as some translations of the Bible has it) of ‘an indefinite or indeterminable period of time’. Someone has also explained it as like standing on seashore and looking at the horizon knowing that there is something beyond but you cannot yet see it. In other words, ‘owlam’ is an unknown length or unknown period of time (a timeless age). As Fernando Canale admits in the official Seventh-day Adventist declaration of their doctrine of God

“When the idea of eternity is searched in the Biblical record, however, the first facet that comes into view is that the words usually translated “eternity” have a clear, temporal meaning.” (*Fernando Canale, Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia, Volume 12, Handbook of Seventh-day Theology page 109, ‘The doctrine of God’*)

Canale admits here that in the Bible, the concept of eternity is not forever. He then adds

“In the OT ‘*olam* and in the NT *aión* basically mean “a long time or duration” referring to a limited or unlimited period of time.” (*Ibid*)

In harmony with this thought (as we can see above), the words of Ellen White “[from the days of eternity](#)” were not intended by her to mean what many Seventh-day Adventist trinitarians believe she meant by them. Clearly in harmony with Scripture she used them to denote ***an indeterminable or unrevealed period of existence***, or maybe even as Canale says, “... [a long time or duration](#)”. In other words, referring back to what we noted earlier in this section, there was no difference between the views of Ellet Waggoner and those of Ellen White.

Compare their two statements again. Waggoner said

“The Word was “in the beginning”. The mind of man cannot grasp the ages that are spanned in this phrase.” (*E. J. Waggoner, ‘Christ and His Righteousness’ 1890 page 9*)

Ellen White said in the article called *The Word made flesh*

“Here Christ shows them that, altho they might reckon His life to be less than fifty years, yet His divine life could not be reckoned by human computation. The existence of Christ before His incarnation is not measured by figures.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times. 3rd May 1899 ‘The Word made flesh’*)

Note again very importantly that this latter statement from the *Signs of the Times* (May 3rd 1899) was written **after** the publication of *Desire of Ages*. This must mean that even after the publication of this book, Ellen White still believed that way back in eternity, too far back for the human mind to comprehend it, the Son was begotten (brought forth) of the Father. This clearly reveals that her latter named book is not trinitarian. All of this knowledge helps us to understand more clearly the meaning of Ellen White’s words in the opening paragraph of *Desire of Ages*. This is when she wrote

“From the days of eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father:” (*Ellen White, The Desire of Ages, Page 19, ‘God with us’*)

By the words “days of eternity”, Ellen White was not saying that the Son, as a separate personality from God, had been with God from forever (“from everlasting”) but that His divine life could not be reckoned by human reasoning (human computation).

A dire warning

The once Seventh-day understanding that Christ is God essentially yet not God the Father (at least not in personality) was summed up magnificently by Uriah Smith. This is when in his book *Looking Unto Jesus* (1898) he said of the Seventh-day Adventist begotten concept of the Son

“With the Son, the evolution of deity, as deity, ceased. All else, of things animate or inanimate, has come in by creation of the Father and the Son — the Father the antecedent cause, the Son the acting agent through whom all has been wrought. No ranks of intelligences, it matters not how high, above or below; no orders of cherubim or seraphim; no radiant thrones or extensive dominions, principalities, or powers, but were created by our Lord Jesus Christ.” (*Uriah Smith, Looking unto Jesus, page 13, chapter 2, ‘Christ as Creator’ 1898*)

Uriah Smith believed that Christ was God, also that He was God begotten. This begotten Son faith was the faith from which Ellen White said that there would be a very serious departing. This was when she said in 1904

“Be not deceived; many will depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. We have now before us the alpha of this danger. The omega will be of a most startling nature.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B, No. 2 page 16, ‘A Letter to Leading Physicians’, July 24th 1904, ‘Teach the Word’*)

It is only when we understand that Christ is truly the Son of God that we can understand and appreciate the true gospel. The fact that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has rejected the belief that Christ is a begotten Son (a real Son) shows how far they have actually strayed from the original message of the pioneers.

As we have seen previously, the trinity theology now held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church does destroy the belief that as a Son, Christ could have lost His eternal existence. It also says that He cannot die. This inevitably obscures the love that both God and Christ have for fallen humanity. This is because it obscures the risk taken by these two divine beings in securing mankind's salvation. This current trinity theology is certainly a departing from the 1904 faith of Seventh-day Adventists.

In conclusion

In conclusion of both this and the previous section, we can see that during the early 1900's and in harmony with Seventh-day Adventists as a whole, Ellen White repeatedly said that as regards to personalities, the infinite God and Christ were two separate, distinct personages but with regards to identity of person she said that Christ was God essentially (the "I AM"). This is because it was believed that He was the only begotten of God therefore He was truly the one and only (unique) true Son of God. This means that Christ was and still is the eternal presence.

This then was the faith from which Ellen White said that there would be a very serious departing and from what we have seen in the previous section, this was well underway just a few years after she died. This is why in those years prior to her death (the early 1900's), Ellen White was stressing the old time religion (faith) of Seventh-day Adventists, saying that it should never be changed or discarded. We shall see this very clearly in later sections.

We can also see that when Ellen White used the word eternal it was not necessarily meant by her to mean forever or everlasting but an indeterminable length of existence.

We now need to move on from taking a look at the theology of the Son in His pre-existence to how it was with Him in the incarnation. We shall do this in the next section (seventeen). This is where we shall see that in partaking of human nature, He placed Himself in exactly the same position as you and I. This involves something called kenosis. We shall see that there are various understandings of it.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section seventeen

Kenosis

As were some of the previous sections, this one is quite lengthy but the author believes that in understanding the present trinity debate within Seventh-day Adventism, it is imperative. He also hopes its readers will find it interesting, enlightening and helpful. No doubt there will be those who term themselves trinitarian that will disagree with the conclusions that are drawn herein so in section nineteen we shall be taking a look at their viewpoint.

In previous sections we have taken note that in the main, the trinity objections made by the Seventh-day Adventist non-trinitarians concern the very gospel of Jesus Christ. This is why it is imperative that these objections are not ignored but duly noted and addressed. Certainly they do not simply concern the deity of Christ and the personhood of the Holy Spirit. As we noted in section two, that reasoning is just a red herring.

In this and the next section, just as we did in the previous two sections, we shall continue to see how the trinity doctrine impacts what Seventh-day Adventists used to teach with respect to what was achieved by Christ in becoming human. In brief, we shall continue to see how the trinity doctrine impacts the incarnation. As we have already noted, this concerns not only what He accomplished at the cross as our atonement but also what He risked in becoming human. In the next section we shall see how it concerns what He needed to do to become our example.

In trinitarian theology, the humanity of Christ often takes a back seat (this was the original problem at the Council of Nicaea) but it should be regarded as of paramount importance. The reason for this is because when it is understood that Christ in becoming incarnate could have sinned and could have gone out of existence, this has a direct bearing on how we understand His ontological relationship with His Father. In other words, when we fully realise what Christ did by becoming incarnate, this will affect our understanding of the Godhead. In contrast to this, if we do not understand what He did in becoming incarnate, this will cause our concept of the Godhead to be distorted.

In summary, all that I am saying is that as we noted in section four and elsewhere, the trinity doctrine is said by the trinitarians to be built upon everything that the Scriptures say about the three personalities of the Godhead

but it must be reasoned that if the consequences of the incarnation are excluded, then the conclusions will be faulty.

In this section we shall be considering not only **what** Christ achieved by becoming human but also **the way** (the method) that He did it. Please note this very well. It is extremely important.

To understand **the method** that Christ did use in achieving salvation for mankind does demand a study of what He relinquished (gave up) in becoming human. This is because without this giving up, our salvation could not have been achieved. This involves a topic that is theologically known as kenosis. Whilst this study is not intended solely as a theological treatise, we need to understand what is meant by this term. This is because we need to understand the Seventh-day Adventist non-trinitarian point of view - also their objections to the trinity doctrine.

Kenosis

When Christians speak of the divine Son of God becoming flesh they all too often only think in terms of Him possessing a human body (flesh, blood and bones etc) but this reasoning does not go far enough. We need to think of Him fully functioning as a human being, meaning the way that He lived. Very often the latter is forgotten. This involves kenosis, meaning a certain emptying or giving up of divine functions. If the latter was not done then Christ could not be said to have been truly human. To put this in another way again, if Christ lived on earth by independently using His powers of deity, then He did not function as you and I have to function as normal human beings. This would invalidate Him as being our Saviour because He would not have taken our place.

In the *Review and Herald* of December 23rd 1971, Don Neufeld asked two very important questions. He asked what is kenosis and what did it have to do with Christmas, meaning of course, what has it to do with the incarnation. As we shall see, the answer should be that it has everything to do with it. Neufeld then said

“Kenosis is a word that was popular with certain theologians in the middle-nineteenth century who were emphasizing the magnitude of Christ's self-denial and self-sacrifice when He assumed human nature.” (*D. F. Neufeld, Review and Herald, December 23rd 1971, 'Christmas and kenosis'*)

It is very true indeed that in the mid-1800's, also in the early 1900's, there was an emphasis by some on kenosis. Whilst I have not read the following publications, I have been informed that this was brought to the fore by such as H. Crosby (*The True Humanity of Christ* 1880), C. Gore (*The Incarnation* 1891), A. M. Fairbairn (*The Place of Christ in Modern Thought* 1893), W. N. Clarke (*An Outline of Christian Theology* 1898) and H. Van Dyke (*The Gospel for an Age of Doubt: The Human Life of God* 1897). Needless to say, not all agreed as regards what constituted this emptying. Neufeld then said this concerning kenosis

“The word is derived from Philippians 2:7, which reads: "But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." The word translated "made ... of no reputation" is the Greek *kenoo*, from which is derived the noun *kenosis*, which is transliterated into the English as *kenosis*. *Kenoo* means literally "to empty." Precisely in what way Christ emptied Himself when He became man, theologians have argued over for centuries.” (*Ibid*)

This is also very true indeed. It is the problem regarding the *kenosis* debate. It is all to do with what it was - when becoming human - that the pre-existent Christ emptied Himself. Very true also is that today’s theologians are still debating it. Neufeld then said

“There are mysteries involved in the Incarnation that finite minds cannot fathom. At the same time, inspiration has shed much light on *kenosis* that it is our privilege to contemplate.” (*Ibid*)

Again I agree with Neufeld and so would Ellen White. In 1904 she said

“The incarnation of Christ is the mystery of all mysteries.” (Letter 276, 1904)” (*Ellen G. White, as quoted in the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia Volume 6, page 1082*),

Just 6 years earlier regarding the incarnation she had also said to the Seventh-day Adventist youth

“When we approach this subject, we would do well to heed the words spoken by Christ to Moses at the burning bush, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." We should come to this study with the humility of a learner, with a contrite heart. And the study of the incarnation of Christ is a fruitful field, which will repay the searcher who digs deep for hidden truth.” (*Ellen G. White, Youth’s Instructor 13th October 1898, ‘Search the Scriptures, No. 1*)

Bearing this in mind we shall continue our study of *kenosis*.

A non-Seventh-day Adventist perspective

In his book *Christian foundations*, Maldwyn Hughes says of the doctrine of *kenosis*

“There are frequent references to this idea in the writings of the Fathers, but the chief developments of the theory are modern. It has been developed as the result of the desire to state the doctrine of the two natures in such a way as to guard the reality of the human nature without denying the reality of the divine nature in Jesus Christ. The records make it clear that in some respects our Lord shared our human limitations, Modern conceptions of personality make it difficult for us to accept the view of a double

consciousness in Him, whereby He knew some things as God, but was ignorant of them as man. It is therefore held that the eternal Son on His incarnation voluntarily underwent a process of Kenosis, or depotentialization, or self-emptying.” (*Maldwyn Hughes, Christian Foundations, page 43, ‘Jesus Christ’*)

As we shall see later, this “double consciousness” view, meaning one person with both a finite and an infinite consciousness, is today being promoted amongst Seventh-day Adventists - even in our own publications. This is the end result of our trinity theology. After saying that the teaching of kenosis has taken many forms (which is very true), Hughes then made this comment

“It is obvious that incarnation, to be real, must involve a measure of self-emptying. As Bishop Gore has said, ‘The Son of God, without ceasing to be God, the Son of the Father, and without ceasing to be conscious of His divine relation as Son to the Father, yet in assuming human nature, so truly entered into it, as really to grow and live as Son of Man under properly human conditions, i.e. under properly human limitations.’” (*Ibid*)

In 1891, Bishop Gore had been chosen to deliver the *Bampton Lectures* at Oxford University. He caused quite a stir because upon explaining the incarnation, He said that it was possible for Christ to err. He drew this conclusion because he believed that throughout His sojourn on earth, Christ lived on the level of humanity. Hughes added that Bishop Gore had said of Christ

“By the voluntary action of His own self-limiting and self-restraining love, He did cease from the exercise of those divine functions and powers, including the divine omniscience, which would have been incompatible with a truly human experience.” (*Ibid*)

It is very true to say that if Christ had walked this earth exercising divine prerogatives not available to fallen humanity (like you and me), then He did not walk this earth as a true human being, which would of course have invalidated the claim that He was the last Adam (see 1 Corinthians 15:45). This was even though He had a body of flesh, bones and blood etc. This is why it was said above that to only say that Christ had a human body is not to go far enough with our reasoning that Christ was truly human. We need to emphasise that He **truly functioned** as a human being. Maldwyn Hughes himself concluded

“But to attempt to advance beyond a general statement of this kind is perilous. It is to describe events and processes in the eternal life of God of which we have no knowledge, but for which we draw on our imagination.” (*Ibid*)

Ellen White and the incarnation of Christ

To fallen humanity, the incarnation must remain the mystery of mysteries. We can only stand in awe of what God in the person of His own Son did at

Bethlehem. In 1895 Ellen White wrote with regards to the incarnation

“Christ came to our world, sent of God to take human nature upon him. The mysterious union was to be formed between human nature and the divine nature. Christ was to become a man, in order that he might unfold to men as fully as possible the mysteries of the science of redemption.” (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald, 22nd October 1895, ‘Satan’s malignity against Christ and His people’*)

Note the restriction on fallen humanity fully understanding the incarnation. She then said in confirmation

“But the scheme of redemption far exceeds the comprehension of the human mind. The great condescension on the part of God is a mystery that is beyond our fathoming. The greatness of the plan cannot be fully comprehended, nor could infinite Wisdom devise a plan that would surpass it. It could be successful only by the clothing of divinity with humanity, by Christ becoming man, and suffering the wrath which sin has made because of the transgression of God's law. Through this plan the great, the dreadful God can be just, and yet be the justifier of all who believe in Jesus, and who receive him as their personal Saviour. This is the heavenly science of redemption, of saving men from eternal ruin, and can be carried out through the incarnation of the Son of God, through his triumph over sin and death. In seeking to fathom this plan, all finite intelligences are baffled.” (*Ibid*)

The next year she wrote

“In contemplating the incarnation of Christ in humanity, we stand baffled before an unfathomable mystery, that the human mind cannot comprehend. The more we reflect upon it, the more amazing does it appear. How wide is the contrast between the divinity of Christ and the helpless infant in Bethlehem's manger! How can we span the distance between the mighty God and a helpless child? And yet the Creator of worlds, he in whom was the fulness of the Godhead bodily, was manifest in the helpless babe in the manger.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times July 30, 1896, ‘Child life of Jesus’*)

Remember this point very well. Note too that like the Scriptures, Ellen White says that even in this “helpless child” was manifested the Creator of our world, the one in whom dwelt the “the fulness of the Godhead bodily”. In continuing

“Far higher than any of the angels, equal with the Father in dignity and glory, and yet wearing the garb of humanity! Divinity and humanity were mysteriously combined, and man and God became one. It is in this union that we find the hope of our fallen race. Looking upon Christ in humanity, we look upon God, and see in him the brightness of his glory, the express image of his person.” (*Ibid*)

In 1903 the same author penned these words

“There is no one who can explain the mystery of the incarnation of Christ. Yet we know that He came to this earth and lived as a man among men. The man Christ Jesus was not the Lord God Almighty, yet Christ and the Father are one. The Deity did not sink under the agonizing torture of Calvary, yet it is nonetheless true that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (*Ellen G. White, letter 32, 1899, Manuscript 140, 1903, as quoted in the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary page 1129*)

On the same theme she concluded

“We cannot explain the great mystery of the plan of redemption. Jesus took upon himself humanity, that he might reach humanity; but we cannot explain how divinity was clothed with humanity. An angel would not have known how to sympathize with fallen man, but Christ came to the world and suffered all our temptations, and carried all our griefs. Are you not glad that he was tempted in all points like as we are, and yet without sin? Our hearts should be filled with gratitude to him. We should be able to present to God a continual thank-offering for his wonderful love. Jesus can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. When we are in sorrow and trouble and temptation, we need not think nobody knows, nobody can understand. O, no; Jesus has passed over every step of the ground before you, and he knows all about it.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, October 1st 1889, 'Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith'*)

In 1906, Ellen White wrote in an article called *The Word made flesh*

“The doctrine of the incarnation of Christ in human flesh is a mystery, "even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations." It is the great and profound mystery of godliness. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." Christ took upon himself human nature, a nature inferior to his heavenly nature. Nothing so shows the wonderful condescension of God as this. He "so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." John presents this wonderful subject with such simplicity that all may grasp the ideas set forth, and be enlightened.” (*Ellen White, Review and Herald, 5th April 1906, 'The Word made flesh'*)

A huge amount more could be quoted here from Ellen White concerning the mystery of the incarnation yet there is one thing she said that encapsulates everything she wrote. This was when she penned the following for the Seventh-day Adventist youth of her day

“Our sufficiency is found only in the incarnation and death of the Son of God. He could suffer, because sustained by divinity. He could endure, because he was without one taint of disloyalty or sin. Christ triumphed in

man's behalf in thus bearing the justice of punishment. He secured eternal life to men, while he exalted the law, and made it honorable." (*Ellen White, Youths Instructor, 4th August 1898, 'The risen Saviour'*)

Just a few months later with respect to how Seventh-day Adventists regarded the humanity of Christ she also said to the youth

"The humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. It is the golden chain that binds our souls to Christ, and through Christ to God. This is to be our study. Christ was a real man; he gave proof of his humility in becoming a man. Yet he was God in the flesh." (*Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor 13th October 1898, 'Search the Scriptures, No. 1'*)

This is when she said (as we noted above)

"When we approach this subject, we would do well to heed the words spoken by Christ to Moses at the burning bush, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." We should come to this study with the humility of a learner, with a contrite heart. And the study of the incarnation of Christ is a fruitful field, which will repay the searcher who digs deep for hidden truth." (*Ibid*)

It is with the realisation that our finite minds cannot fully understand the incarnation; also that it is as Ellen White says here "a fruitful field" for those who earnestly study this subject, that we approach this study of kenosis.

The meaning of kenosis

The word kenosis has a basic meaning of to purge or to empty. It also has as its root the Greek kenos meaning empty. As the Wikipedia Encyclopaedia says

"Kenosis is a Greek word for emptiness which is used as a theological term." (*Wikipedia Encyclopaedia, 'Kenosis'*)

It also said under the sub-heading of *Kenosis in Christology*

"In Christian theology, *Kenosis* is the concept of the 'self-emptying' of one's own will and becoming entirely receptive to God and his perfect will. It is used both as an explanation of the incarnation, and an indication of the nature of God's activity and condescension" (*Ibid*)

To this I would agree but I would be very careful not to give support to the idea that the incarnate Christ did not have a free will of His own. In other words, not only was Christ able to make choices for Himself but throughout His life on earth was continually doing so.

When on earth, Christ was not inseparably bound to the choices of His Father (God). Just like the rest of humanity He was a free moral agent who was placed

on probation for His continuing existence as the Son of God. As we have been told through the spirit of prophecy

“For a period of time Christ was on probation. He took humanity on Himself, to stand the test and trial which the first Adam failed to endure. Had He failed in His test and trial, He would have been disobedient to the voice of God, and the world would have been lost.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times 10th May 1899, ‘Christ glorified’*)

Note that this was written one year after the publication of *Desire of Ages*. This is the book that the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church say led our denomination to accept the trinity doctrine.

Whilst on earth, Christ could follow the will of God - or He could have been disobedient. The choice was His. As it was He chose to be obedient. In the face of adversity and temptation, this is how He maintained His pre-incarnate state of sinlessness. Orthodox trinitarians would disagree with this reasoning. They would say that He was literally **unable** to sin. In other words according to orthodox trinitarians, Christ had **no choice but not to sin** (see section thirteen for a more detailed discussion on peccability and impeccability).

So when He became human, of what was it that Christ emptied Himself? This is the much-debated point. It is the kenosis issue.

The kenosis issue

The kenosis issue is centred in the words of Paul to the Philippians. This is when he wrote

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”
Philippians 2:5-8 KJV

It is the words “of no reputation” that is the kenotic issue. Note how the New American Standard Bible puts these verses. It says

“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Philippians 2:5-8 NAS

Notice here instead of saying “of no reputation” as does the KJV, the NAS says “emptied Himself”. Note too how instead of “thought it not robbery to be equal

with God” (as the KJV) it says that Christ “did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped”. This too is an important part of the understanding of kenosis.

Paul stated clearly that Christ, in His pre-existence, was “equal with God”. This is part of the continuing evidence that the Scriptures repeatedly speak of God as one personal being and Christ as another personal being. Nowhere does the inspired word speak of God as three-in-one as in the trinity concept (see section four). Note also there are two aspects of Christ that are brought to view here. One is His pre-incarnate state whilst the other is His incarnate state. First we shall deal with His pre-incarnate state.

Equal with God

Regarding the words “thought it not robbery to be equal with God” (see Philippians 2:5-8) there is much theological debate.

Some will say that Paul’s words simply reflect the idea that Christ did not believe that it was robbing God of anything (taking away or plundering from God) in thinking of Himself as being “equal with God”. This would mean that Christ did not think that He was claiming for Himself something that did not rightfully belong to Him. In addition, others say that it means that as long as this world was lost in sin, Christ did not regard His equality with God as something to be held on to, meaning to be seized or grasped. In other words, Christ thought that the saving of this world was more to be desired than His standing (equality) with God. We shall now look at both of these aspects of interpretation.

The Greek word (harpagmos) that is translated here “robbery” is only used this once in the entire Scriptures although it does stem from ‘harpazo’ (meaning to seize). This is used a number of times. This latter word is said by Strong’s Concordance to be a derivative of ‘haireomai’ meaning to take for oneself.

The use of ‘harpazo’ with regard to the idea of grasping, especially in a forceful and a powerful manner, is seen a number of times in Scriptures. This is in such as Matthew 11:12, 13:19, John 6:15, 10:12, Acts 8:39 and Acts 23:10. It can also be seen in 2 Corinthians 12:2, 12:4, 1 Thessalonians 4:17, Jude 1:23 and Revelation 12:5. This gives us a reasonably good idea of the meaning of this word.

Ellen White used this phrase (thought it not robbery to be equal with God) in a number of senses. Note the following. In Volume 2 of the Spirit of Prophecy she wrote

“The Son was the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person. He possessed divine excellence and greatness. He was equal with God. It pleased the Father that in him all fullness should dwell. He “thought it not robbery to be equal with God.”” (*Ellen G. White, Spirit of Prophecy Volume 2, ‘The life of Christ’, 1877*)

Notice here that Christ is said to have “all fullness” dwelling in Him by the pleasure of the Father. We are talking here in terms of Christ’s pre-existence and not His incarnation (note the context). This is with reference to the fullness of the Godhead as spoken of in Colossians 1:19, 2:9 and is the reason why He is “equal with God”. In addition, the Seventh-day Adventist non-trinitarians say that this is with reference to the original begetting of the Son. In 1912 in the Columbia Union Visitor, Ellen White wrote (after quoting Philippians 2:5-7)

"Notwithstanding all that was His by right Christ yielded it all up, that He might give you life, and teach you how to live for Him." (*Ellen G. White, Columbia Union Visitor, 2nd October 1912, 'From Strength to strength'*)

Notice that Ellen White does not say that Christ gave up some of the things that were rightfully His. She says that He “yielded” up “all” that was His by right. This is with respect to His divine prerogatives as the Son of God.

In this quote, note very importantly the last words of Ellen White. She says that in giving up “all” (whatever constitutes that “all”), Christ taught us how to “live for Him”. This means that this passage of Scripture is with regards to Him being our example. This is why Paul said “let this mind be in you as in Christ Jesus”. It is also why we need to get it right concerning what Christ did relinquish in becoming human. If we get it wrong, Christ will cease to be our perfect example. We shall see more of this as we continue in this study.

With regards to Christ thinking equality with God was not a thing to be grasped, Ellen White wrote

"Who, being in the form of God, counted it not a thing to be grasped to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross." Philippians 2:6-8, R. V., margin." (*Ellen G. White, 8th Volume Testimonies, page 287, 'The essential knowledge', 1904*)

This is very much the same as the previous thought. Note Ellen White’s use of the margin notes of the Revised Version of the Scriptures. She was favouring this here in preference to the KJV rendering. This was in 1904 in the midst of the Godhead crisis. In similar fashion she said to the Seventh-day Adventist youth in 1897

"Jesus Christ "counted it not a thing to be grasped to be equal with God. Because divinity alone could be efficacious in the restoration of man from the poisonous bruise of the serpent, God himself, in his only begotten Son, assumed human nature, and in the weakness of human nature sustained the character of God, vindicated his holy law in every particular, and accepted the sentence of wrath and death for the sons of men." (*Ellen G. White, Youth’s Instructor, 11th February 1897, 'The mind of Christ'*)

What a marvellous description of what God, through His Son, has accomplished for humanity. Notice here the reference to God being “in his only begotten Son”. This is very important. Phrasing this a little bit differently in 1914 she said of Christ

“He possessed divine excellency and greatness. It pleased the Father that in Him all fulness should dwell. And Christ “thought it not robbery to be equal with God.” Yet Jesus exchanged a throne of light and glory which He had with His Father, counting it not a thing to be desired to be equal with God while man was lost in sin and misery.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 22nd December 1914, ‘Inexpressible joy’, see also Bible Echo, 15th March 1893, ‘The Way to Christ’, also Bible Echo 15th July 1893, ‘The plan of salvation the same in all ages’, also Signs of the Times, 20th February 1893, ‘The plan of salvation’*)

Again there is reference here to the fullness of divinity in Christ being the pleasure of the Father (see Colossians 1:19 and 2:9) but Ellen White adds this time that whilst the world was in a lost condition, Christ regarded His equality with God not a thing to be grasped (to be held on to).

In 1893 Ellen White wrote with respect to Christ clothing His divinity with humanity

“The Redeemer of the world clothed his divinity with humanity, that he might reach humanity; for, in order to bring to the world salvation, it was necessary that humanity and divinity should be united. Divinity needed humanity, that humanity might afford a channel of communication between God and man, and humanity needed divinity, that a power from above might restore man to the likeness of God. Christ was God, but he did not appear as God. He veiled the tokens of divinity, which had commanded the homage of angels and called forth the adoration of the universe of God. He made himself of no reputation, took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of sinful flesh. For our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich.” (*Ellen White, Signs of the Times, 20th February 1893, ‘The plan of Salvation’, see also Signs of the Times, 5th January 1915, ‘The mighty and inspiring conflict’*)

This statement is very important. It tells us everything in summary regarding kenosis. It says that although Christ was God, when He walked this earth He did not walk it as God. She also refers to what He gave up by reason of the incarnation as Him veiling His “tokens of divinity”. This was not the hiding of His character but the hiding of His attributes (powers) of divinity.

A. T. Jones added an interesting thought to the meaning of Philippians 2:5-8 (the emptying of Christ). He said in 1895 at a General Conference Session

“Now there is something else in that that comes right along with the

thought. He was in the form of God, - he left that, he emptied himself; and the French version is translated: "He annihilated himself," and it is none too strong; for as to the form which he bore, he annihilated himself, and in that form he will never again appear." (A. T. Jones, *General Conference Bulletin, March 4th 1895, 'The Third Angels' Message – No. 23*)

Again this is a revelation of God's character. We shall now compare this with the mind of Satan.

The mind of Satan

The mind of Satan is exactly opposite to the mind of the divine Son of God. We know this because whereas Christ was willing to forgo His standing with God to secure salvation for mankind, the word of God says of the arch-deceiver

"How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High." Isaiah 14:12-14

Spoken of here is the aspiration of Satan to be something that he never was and never could be. He aspired to the position of God. This was exactly opposite to the mind of Christ. Our Saviour knew that He Himself was equal with God but whilst this world was lost in sin, He did not think it something to be preferably desired. These are two opposites of thinking. One is humility whilst the other is self-exaltation. I will leave you to determine which thinking belongs to whom. I am sure it will not take a lot of working out. In *Desire of Ages* Ellen White wrote

"Lucifer had said, "I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; . . . I will be like the Most High." Isa. 14:13, 14. But Christ, "being in the form of God, counted it not a thing to be grasped to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men." Phil. 2:6, 7, R. V., margin." (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages, page 22, 'God with us'*)

Along the same lines she later said in the same book

"While Lucifer counted it a thing to be grasped to be equal with God, Christ, the Exalted One, "made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Phil. 2:7, 8." (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages, page 436, 'Who is the greatest'*)

What a contrast of minds and personalities between Christ and Satan. No wonder Ellen White says that the great controversy is between Christ and Satan.

As Ellen White quite rightly pointed out, Satan did not really want to be like God. She had said on the previous page

“Had Lucifer really desired to be like the Most High, he would never have deserted his appointed place in heaven; for the spirit of the Most High is manifested in unselfish ministry. Lucifer desired God's power, but not His character. He sought for himself the highest place, and every being who is actuated by his spirit will do the same.” (*Ibid page 435*)

Humility is the hallmark of God. It is also the hallmark of every single person who is truly a follower of Christ. Humility is also the essence of kenosis. It is having the mind of Christ.

That latter statement by Ellen White is one that the author of these notes believes is the key to understanding what Christ gave up in becoming human. He believes that Christ gave up His right to the independent use of the powers of divinity but gave up nothing of His character. It was Christ's character that revealed both His and His Father's humility. Satan wanted the power of God but not His character. Christ's thoughts were exactly the opposite. For the sake of mankind, He was willing to give up the power of deity but He shunned the giving up of the character of deity.

Of no reputation

Whilst there is continuing conjecture as to what Paul meant by the words “*thought it not robbery*” (see Philippians 2:6), there appears to be even more conjecture as to what he meant when he said of the Son that in becoming incarnate He had “*made himself of no reputation*” (verse 7).

This is where we encounter the kenotic problem because the word translated “*reputation*” (KJV), having its root in kenos, means to make empty (also see above). This conjecture concerns itself of ***what*** it was that Christ emptied Himself. Some say He rid Himself of His attributes of deity. These would have been such as omniscience (all knowing), omnipresence (everywhere present) and also omnipotence (all powerful). This would be like saying that He gave up His divinity, which is something we know that He did not do. As Ellen White said with reference to Christ and His temptation in the wilderness

“Christ had not exchanged his divinity for humanity; but he had clothed his divinity in humanity, and he gave Satan the evidence for which he had asked, -- showed him that he was the Son of God. Divinity flashed through humanity, and the evil one could not resist the authority of the divine voice, as Jesus said, “Get thee behind me, Satan; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 29th October 1895, ‘Satan’s malignity against Christ and His people’*)

Again after saying that in the incarnation that Christ had clothed His divinity

with humanity, Ellen White said in 1905 (again this was in the midst of the Godhead crisis)

“He veiled his divinity with the garb of humanity, but he did not part with his divinity. A divine-human Saviour, he came to stand at the head of the fallen race, to share in their experience from childhood to manhood. That human beings might be partakers of the divine nature, he came to this earth, and lived a life of perfect obedience.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 15th June 1905, ‘Lessons from the second chapter of Philippians’*)

Some who say that in becoming incarnate Christ still possessed all of His attributes of deity say that He only partly gave up His independent right to the use of them, meaning that in His own right He used them on certain (special) occasions. Again though, even if He had only exercised this prerogative once, this would have meant that He did not walk this earth like fallen humanity. This only once would have invalidated Him being the Saviour of this world.

The author of these notes believes that none of the above concepts of Kenosis is correct. His belief is that in agreeing to become flesh, the Son of God voluntarily agreed to relinquish **all of His rights** to the exercising of His own independent will and instead placed His life in the hands of His Father. This of course would include the giving up of the independent exercising of the powers of divinity that in His pre-existence He had so freely used in His own right. It would also include Him refraining from using for Himself, when on earth, the power given to Him by His Father. This would place Him in exactly the same position as fallen humanity, meaning that in His sojourn on earth He needed to completely rely in faith upon God His Father.

This does not mean that it was impossible for Christ to have independently used these powers of divinity. This is because even though becoming flesh, He still remained fully divine. For this reason He still retained His full divinity, therefore He retained all of His divine powers. All that He gave up was His independent use of them. He could also have used His allotted power to work a miracle on His own behalf but as we shall see more clearly in the next section, this is something that He chose never to do.

In contract with God and in order to become man’s atoning sacrifice for sin, the Son of God **voluntarily surrendered His independent right** to use the powers of deity, thus He exposed Himself to the possibility of sinning and losing His eternal existence. This is where trinitarians differ in their reasoning. They say that it would have been impossible for the divine Son of God to be lost (see section thirteen).

As we shall see in the next section, it was said by Ellen White that this surrendering was an agreement (a contract) that the Son entered into with God His Father, which, if at any time He so desired, He could have chosen not to honour. In other words, at His own discretion, He could have opted out of this

agreement although it must be said that if He had done this, then the consequences would have been fatal.

This is the author's understanding of kenosis. It is the belief that in agreement with God to secure salvation for mankind, Christ voluntarily gave up His divine prerogative (a right that He naturally had as the Son of God) to the independent exercise of the powers of deity. Thus it was that the Son became like one of us in all things (see Hebrews 2:14, 4:14-16, John 5:19, 5:30).

Ellen White caught the design of this beautifully. She said when writing from Australia to her niece

"The Son of God lived a perfect life of obedience in this world. We need always to keep in view the truthfulness of the humanity of Christ Jesus. When Christ became our substitute and surety, it was as a human being. He came as a man, and rendered the obedience of human nature to the only true God. He came not to show us what God could do, but what God did do, and what man, a partaker of the divine nature, can do." (*Ellen G. White, Letter to Mary Watson, July 9, 1896, from "Sunnyside," Cooranbong, N.S.W, Manuscript Volume 14, MR No. 1130*)

Now note the following

"It was the human nature of Christ that endured the temptations in the wilderness, not His divine nature. In His human nature He endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself. He lived a perfect human life. Jesus is everything to us, and He says to us, "Without Me ye can do nothing." (*Ibid*)

Understanding the claims

Before we move on, we need to completely understand what it is that is being claimed here in this section.

The author of these notes believes that the (powers of) divinity that Christ accessed when on earth was exactly the same (powers of) divinity that He still possessed when becoming human. This was exactly the same (powers of) divinity that He had in His pre-existence. The difference was though, when He walked this earth, is the way (the method) that He accessed these powers.

In His pre-existence, Christ had exercised these powers in His own right as the Son of God but in His incarnate state, He exercised them as His Father willed. In other words, when on earth, Christ accessed the powers of divinity in exactly the same way as fallen human beings are required to access them, meaning through the Holy Spirit

Past thoughts regarding kenosis

In 1880 and after quoting from Philippians 2:8 (the kenotic verse), S. N. Haskell wrote of Christ

“He was the Creator, and possessed all power in Heaven and in earth; but in his humiliation he became subject to the frailties of human nature.” (S. N. Haskell, *Review and Herald*, June 17th 1880, ‘Responsibility of Christ’s ministers’)

In the *Review and Herald* in 1894 when Uriah Smith was its editor, it said concerning Philippians 2:5-8

“The word which is rendered here "made himself of no reputation," is "kenosis." He "emptied" himself; that is the word; and here is the picture: The Lord Jesus was in heaven, he was in the beginning with God, and there was a conference in the ineffable Trinity, one saying to another, "What shall we do? Look at these people perishing down in that sin-stricken world! What shall we do? Whom shall we send? Who will go for us?" And he said, " Here am I; send me." (*Review and Herald*, September 25th 1894, ‘Christ died for us’)

Note the reference to the trinity. This was in 1894. The article continued

“He [the Lord Jesus] put upon his head the helmet of salvation, and put upon his loins the girdle of his omnipotence, and came forth to the deliverance of our ruined race; and to that end he emptied himself. He thought it no robbery to be equal with God; but in order that he might deliver you and me, he put aside his kingly robes, he laid aside the diadem of the kingdom of glory, and game down, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross, and put all his divine rights beneath his feet, that he might fulfill the glorious privilege of doing what was never done in heaven or earth before.” (*Ibid*)

The author concludes

“He gave himself, all his rights, and all his prerogatives; he emptied himself for us.” (*Ibid*)

Notice particularly here that it says that in becoming incarnate, Christ gave up “all his rights” and “all his prerogatives”, not just some of them.

In the *Review and Herald* in 1965, under the sub-heading of "Made Himself of No Reputation", L. H. Hartin wrote

“The expression "emptied himself" has been called the "kenotic problem," from the Greek kenno, meaning "to empty." This is nearer the Greek, and in every way more satisfactory than "made himself of no reputation." The

question among commentators has ever been about the meaning of "emptied himself." Many and various interpretations have been offered. The one point on which most seem to agree is that the author is here thinking about the incarnation of Jesus and the condescension of a member of the Godhead to become a member of the human family." (L. H. Hartin, *Review and Herald*, March 18th 1965, 'The self-emptied one')

Hartin also said in answer to the question "Of what did Christ empty himself"

"If "emptying himself" is involved in the price paid for our redemption, we might ask, Of what did He empty Himself? Lightfoot says, "He divested himself, not of his divine nature, for this was impossible, but of the glories, the prerogatives of Deity." (*Ibid*)

The conclusion was

"While in Jesus dwelt "the whole fulness of deity bodily" (Col. 2:9, R.S.V.), yet "he voluntarily surrendered the independent exercise of his divine prerogatives" (Strong's Systematic Theology)." (*Ibid*)

The latter I believe is an excellent way of stating what Christ gave up in becoming incarnate.

Ellen White summarised kenosis beautifully. She says on page 259 of Volume 3 of the Spirit of Prophecy

"Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." The Saviour came into the world, outwardly the son of David, not manifesting the full significance of his character. His spirit was subject to that discipline and experience through which humanity must in some measure pass. His divinity was veiled beneath humanity. He hid within himself those all-powerful attributes which belonged to him as one equal with God. At times his divine character flashed forth with such wonderful power that all who were capable of discerning spiritual things pronounced him the Son of God." (*Ellen G. White, Spirit of Prophecy Volume 3 page 259, 'Ascension of Christ' 1878*)

These "all-powerful attributes" that Christ "hid within himself" would have been omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence. These are virtues that belong only to the divine (to God). In 1887, the year prior to the famous Minneapolis Conference, she said

"The apostle would call our attention from ourselves to the Author of our salvation. He presents before us his two natures, divine and human. Here is the description of the divine: "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God." He was "the brightness of his glory, and the

express image of his person.

Now, of the human: "He was made in the likeness of man: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death." He voluntarily assumed human nature. It was his own act, and by his own consent. He clothed his divinity with humanity. He was all the while as God, but he did not appear as God. He veiled the demonstrations of Deity which had commanded the homage, and called forth the admiration, of the universe of God. He was God while upon earth, but he divested himself of the form of God, and in its stead took the form and fashion of a man. He walked the earth as a man. For our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich. He laid aside his glory and his majesty. He was God, but the glories of the form of God he for a while relinquished." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 5th July 1887, 'Christ man's example'*)

The next year she wrote (this was shortly following the Minneapolis Conference

"We do not half appreciate the grandeur of the plan of salvation. He who was one with the Father stepped down from the glorious throne in heaven, laid aside his royal robe and crown, and clothed his divinity with humanity, thus bringing himself to the level of man's feeble faculties." (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald. 11th December 1888*)

This latter summation of kenosis is the view of the author of these notes. We shall now go to section eighteen. This is where we shall see the application of kenosis. We will also see that because of the method employed by Jesus in walking this earth, He is our perfect example in overcoming sin.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section eighteen

Truly human - truly our example (A study of the spirit of prophecy regarding the incarnate Christ)

In the previous section we encountered and explained kenosis. This concerned what the Son of God gave up (emptied Himself of) in becoming incarnate (Philippians 2:5-11). In this section we shall consider the consequences and challenges that became His lot because of this giving up.

So what was it exactly that Christ relinquished in becoming flesh?

Whilst in theological circles this has often been a hotly debated topic (a real hot potato), the author of these notes believes that to become the Saviour of this world, also to become our example in overcoming sin, the Son of God needed to empty Himself of self. This necessitated not only giving up of His glory in the courts of Heaven but also the giving up of His divine prerogative of the independent use (independent exercising) of divine power. This would have included surrendering to His humanity the essential qualities of deity (meaning that which made Him God). These qualities are such as omniscience (all knowing), omnipotence (all powerful) and omnipresence (everywhere present). In other words to become our Saviour, Christ needed to surrender these attributes of deity to His humanity.

If Jesus had walked this earth as God, meaning not surrendering His qualities of deity to His humanity, then whatever He would have achieved would have been meaningless. Certainly He would not have been our example. This is because we would not have been able to emulate Him (meaning of ourselves we cannot exercise these divine qualities). As it was, Christ did lay aside these divine prerogatives. This means that He overcame as we need to overcome; therefore He not only became our Saviour but also our example.

As we noted in the previous section, it is important to remember that in becoming human, Christ did not give up His divinity. This means that when He walked this earth in human flesh He was still as much God as He was in His pre-existence. He also brought with Him His divine powers meaning that in the incarnation He did not give them up. This sometimes made His life on earth very difficult. We shall take note of this later in this section.

If it is said that Christ did possess these attributes of deity but that it was not possible for Him to independently exercise them, or if it is said that He did not possess these powers (meaning He did not bring them over into the incarnation), then this takes away from Him what He fully achieved in His humanity. In other words, if we say such things, we make what He achieved on earth look easier than it was in reality. This is something else that we shall consider later.

In this section we shall also see that it was the Father, through the Holy Spirit, that gave Christ His divine power although as our Saviour He was never to use this power for His own benefit.

As we proceed through this study, please bear in mind that not only is it important to understand just **what** it was that Christ achieved by becoming human **but the way** that He achieved it. This really is very important.

Important to remember also is that there is only one divine nature. This means that when Jesus accessed divine power on earth, it was from the same divinity as He shared with His Father. The difference was that when He was here on earth, instead of using this power in His own right as the Son of God (as He would have done in His pre-existence) He did so through the Holy Spirit. This is why Jesus said that it was His Father in Him that was doing the works and not Himself (see John 5:17-19, 5:30, 8:28 and 14:10).

The fullness of the Spirit

As a divine person, Christ did not need the outpouring of the Holy Spirit but to be like one of us (fully human), also to fulfil the task for which He came to earth, it was a necessity. As John the Baptist said of the incarnate Christ

“For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.” John 3:34

Commenting this Ellen White said

“It was not a make-believe humanity that Christ took upon Himself. He took human nature and lived human nature. Christ worked no miracles in His own behalf. He was compassed with infirmities, but His divine nature knew what was in man. He needed not that any should testify to Him of this. The Spirit was given Him without measure; for His mission on earth demanded this.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 106, 1896 Seventh-day Adventist Bible commentary Vol. 5 page 1124*)

She also said in 1887

“Christ, the sinless One, upon whom the Holy Spirit was bestowed without measure, constantly acknowledged his dependence upon God, and sought fresh supplies from the Source of strength and wisdom. How much more should finite, erring man feel his need of help from God every hour and

every moment.” (Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, 8th November 1887, ‘Humility before honor’)

In the *Desire of Ages* we find these words

"The prince of this world cometh," said Jesus, "and hath nothing in Me." John 14:30. There was in Him nothing that responded to Satan's sophistry. He did not consent to sin. Not even by a thought did He yield to temptation. So it may be with us. Christ's humanity was united with divinity; He was fitted for the conflict by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.” (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 123, ‘The Temptation’)

One of us (in His human nature)

We noted this next statement of Ellen White in the previous section but it is imperative that we note it again here. This is because it helps us to appreciate the importance that Seventh-day Adventists once placed on an understanding of what it was that the divine Son of God achieved in His human nature.

In 1898 (this was the year *Desire of Ages* was published), Ellen White penned these words

“The humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. It is the golden chain that binds our souls to Christ, and through Christ to God. This is to be our study. Christ was a real man; he gave proof of his humility in becoming a man. Yet he was God in the flesh. When we approach this subject, we would do well to heed the words spoken by Christ to Moses at the burning bush, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." We should come to this study with the humility of a learner, with a contrite heart. And the study of the incarnation of Christ is a fruitful field, which will repay the searcher who digs deep for hidden truth” (Ellen G. White, *Youth's Instructor* 13th October 1898, ‘Search the Scriptures, No. 1)

As we did with the study of kenosis, we need to realise here that because of our limited comprehension, we cannot fully understand how divinity and humanity were together combined in the one man Jesus, yet as Ellen White says, it will be “a fruitful field” for those who take the time to study this mystery. In this section we shall concentrate on **how** it was Jesus resisted sin and **how** this makes Him our example in accomplishing the same. We shall also see **how** this enabled Him to take our place (be our substitute) and become our Saviour. Needless to say, the purpose of this section is to show **how** Christ overcame.

In 1889 Ellen White wrote of the mystery of the incarnation

“We cannot explain the great mystery of the plan of redemption. Jesus took upon himself humanity, that he might reach humanity; but we cannot explain how divinity was clothed with humanity. An angel would not have

known how to sympathize with fallen man, but Christ came to the world and suffered all our temptations, and carried all our griefs. Are you not glad that he was tempted in all points like as we are, and yet without sin?" (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald, 1st October 1889, 'Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith'*)

In answer to her own question she wrote

"Our hearts should be filled with gratitude to him. We should be able to present to God a continual thank-offering for his wonderful love. Jesus can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." (*Ibid*)

She also said in 1900

"Christ's humanity made him very tender toward humanity." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 2nd October 1900 'Lessons from the Christ-life'*)

In 1895 she wrote with respect to the incarnation

"The union of the divine with the human is one of the most mysterious, as well as the most precious, truths of the plan of redemption. It is of this that Paul speaks when he says, "Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh. While it is impossible for finite minds fully to grasp this great truth, or to fathom its significance, we may learn from it lessons of vital importance to us in our struggles against temptation. Christ came to the world to bring divine power to humanity, to make man a partaker of the divine nature." 1 Tim. 3:16." (*Ellen G. White, General Conference Bulletin, 25th February 1895, 'Extracts from 'Life of Christ'*)

We can see from this that there are, regarding the incarnation, mysteries that we cannot fully understand (we noted this in the previous section). Ellen White says though that in its study there are "lessons of vital importance" that help us to overcome sin (our sanctification), the latter of which is a major part of the objective of the plan of salvation. It is important therefore that by the grace of God and as far as possible, we understand what Christ achieved in becoming human and **how** He did it, hence the importance of this section. Six years later in 1901 Ellen White wrote

"When Christ bowed his head and died, he bore the pillars of Satan's kingdom with him to the earth. He vanquished Satan in the same nature over which in Eden Satan obtained the victory. he enemy was overcome by Christ in his human nature. The power of the Saviour's Godhead was hidden. He overcame in human nature, relying upon God for power. This is the privilege of all. In proportion to our faith will be our victory." (*Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor, 25th April 1901, 'After the crucifixion'*)

By becoming incarnate, whatever we consider it was that the Son of God emptied Himself, it placed Him in exactly the same position as fallen humanity, meaning “relying upon God for power”. This is how Jesus became our Saviour and our example. ***It was not relying upon self.***

There are many things that regarding the incarnation will remain a mystery, perhaps even for eternity. For now we can only study to acquire the knowledge of what our God has so graciously revealed. This will benefit us in our own salvation.

Not as God

It is because we know that Christ in His pre-existence was God that regarding **how** He walked this earth we can make very serious mistakes. This is because it is possible to present him as accomplishing this as God and not as a human. If this is done then as much as if we had said that He did not have a real human body, we destroy His humanity. Note various comments

“When Christ became our substitute and surety, it was as a human being. He came as a man, and rendered the obedience of human nature to the only true God. He came not to show us what God could do, but what God did do, and what man, a partaker of the divine nature, can do. It was the human nature of Christ that endured the temptations in the wilderness, not His divine nature. In His human nature He endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself. He lived a perfect human life. Jesus is everything to us, and He says to us, “Without Me ye can do nothing.” (Ellen G. White, *Letter 128, 1896, Manuscript releases Volume 14, MR No. 1130*)

“We need not place the obedience of Christ by itself as something for which he was particularly adapted, because of his divine nature; for he stood before God as man's representative, and was tempted as man's substitute and surety. If Christ had a special power which it is not the privilege of a man to have, Satan would have made capital of this matter. But the work of Christ was to take from Satan his control of man, and he could do this only in a straightforward way. He came as a man, to be tempted as a man, rendering the obedience of a man. Christ rendered obedience to God, and overcame as humanity overcome.” (Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times, 10th April 1893, ‘Overcome as Christ overcame’*)

There is something that we need to realise here that is really very important. This is that it is possible to stress that Jesus did become human (become flesh) and yet at the same time, as Ellen White puts it here, “to destroy the completeness of his humanity” (note the emphasis). This we can do by saying that in His own right as the Son of God, Christ exercised the various attributes (qualities/powers) of deity. This would mean that He would not have been truly human even though He had a real human body. This is because humanity cannot independently exercise divine power. Jesus did not accomplish all that He did by relying upon Himself but by relying upon His Father through His humanity. This is how He

overcame. It is exactly the same as we need to overcome.

Ellen White's son understood this perfectly. He said in his book *Past, Present, and Future*

“Christ did not come to earth in His own divine strength. He left this when He came as a babe in the manger. But, guarded and guided by power from on high, as every human being can be guarded and guided, He lived a life of simple purity such as no other being has lived upon earth, and thus became our perfect example.” (*James Edson White, Past, Present, and Future, page 32, chapter, 'The Plan of Redemption', 1914 edition*)

Jesus never claimed to be doing His works by Himself. He said

“Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.” John 14:10 (see also John 5:17-19, 5:30, 8:28)

In conclusion Ellen White wrote (following on from the above quote)

“The Lord Jesus came to our world, not to reveal what God in his own divine person could do, but what he could do through humanity.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 10th April 1893, 'Overcome as Christ overcame'*)

As was said above, this is really important to realise. Three years previous to this she had written

“The Son of God was assaulted at every step by the powers of darkness. After his baptism he was driven of the Spirit into the wilderness, and suffered temptation for forty days. Letters have been coming in to me, affirming that Christ could not have had the same nature as man, for if he had, he would have fallen under similar temptations. If he did not have man's nature, he could not be our example. If he was not a partaker of our nature, he could not have been tempted as man has been. If it were not possible for him to yield to temptation, he could not be our helper. It was a solemn reality that Christ came to fight the battles as man, in man's behalf.” (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald 18th February 1890, 'How to meet a controverted point of doctrine'*)

This latter sentence is really important. Please read it again. It is telling us that Christ came to battle with sin as we have to battle with it. He did it as a man and not as God. She concluded the paragraph by saying

“He withstood the temptation, through the power that man may command. He laid hold on the throne of God, and there is not a man or woman who may not have access to the same help through faith in God. Man may become a partaker of the divine nature; not a soul lives who may not

summon the aid of Heaven in temptation and trial. Christ came to reveal the Source of his power, that man might never rely on his unaided human capabilities.” (*Ibid*)

Two years later we find this in the Bible Echo

“Those who claim that it was not possible for Christ to sin, cannot believe that He took upon Him human nature. Christ was actually tempted, not only in the wilderness, but all through his life. In all points He was tempted as we are, and because He successfully resisted temptation in every form, He gave us a perfect example.” (*Ellen G. White, Bible Echo, 1st November 1892, ‘Tempted in all points like as we are’, see also Signs of the Times, 10th October 1892, ‘Draw from the source of strength’*)

Whether Christ could have sinned is something that is hotly disputed within Christianity. Generally speaking, trinitarians will say that this is impossible because it would have invalidated God’s eternal purposes in Christ but nevertheless, to the incarnate Christ, this possibility was a reality. He was placed in exactly the same position as humanity, meaning at the risk of failure and eternal loss. When He was on earth, just like every other human being, Christ was on probation. As we have been told through the spirit of prophecy (note this was the year after *Desire of Ages* was published)

“For a period of time Christ was on probation. He took humanity on Himself, to stand the test and trial which the first Adam failed to endure. Had He failed in His test and trial, He would have been disobedient to the voice of God, and the world would have been lost.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times 10th May 1899, ‘Christ glorified’*)

Christ our example

There are many today who would point to the sinless life of Jesus and say that because of its perfection it should be our example. Again this is only a half-truth. Whilst it is true that in itself the life of Christ is our example, the example also lies in **the method** He used to achieve this perfection not just because it was perfect. Regarding Christ as our example Ellen White wrote

“As one of us He was to give an example of obedience. For this He took upon Himself our nature, and passed through our experiences. "In all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren." Heb. 2:17. If we had to bear anything which Jesus did not endure, then upon this point Satan would represent the power of God as insufficient for us. Therefore Jesus was "in all points tempted like as we are." Heb. 4:15.” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 24, ‘God with us’*)

Note the emphasis of Hebrews 4:15. Christ was not only tempted in all points but very importantly, “like as we are”. We know therefore that Christ does not only sympathise with us but also is our example and our helper (see Hebrews

4:16). Ellen White then added regarding Christ

“He endured every trial to which we are subject. And He exercised in His own behalf no power that is not freely offered to us. As man, He met temptation, and overcame in the strength given Him from God.” (*Ibid*)

Here we can see that as far as the use of divine power was concerned, the lot of the incarnate Christ was the common lot of fallen humanity. He overcame not in His own strength (as the divine Son of God) but in the strength of His Father. This is what God desires of every human being. He does not expect us to do it alone. That would be an impossible task.

Very often, because He was both the divine Son of God (God essentially) and also our Creator, it is thought that it was first nature for Jesus to perform miracles, meaning it was easy for Him to do them. Whilst in one respect this reasoning is correct, if it is left without explanation it will again lead to misunderstandings. This is because it does not take into consideration that in becoming incarnate, the divine Son of God laid aside His prerogative to use His divine powers. This is as Ellen White pointed out with regards to the storm on the Sea of Galilee (see Matthew 8:23-27, Mark 4:37-41 and Luke 8:22-25). She said

“When Jesus was awakened to meet the storm, He was in perfect peace. There was no trace of fear in word or look, for no fear was in His heart.” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages*, page 336, ‘Peace, be still’)

Some may say here that Jesus was at peace because He was omnipotent, meaning He knew that as the Creator of this world He possessed the power to control the storm, also perhaps that because He was omniscient, He knew He would control it. This is totally wrong reasoning. Whilst as Creator He could have easily calmed the storm, note very carefully the next words of Ellen White. She wrote

“But He rested not in the possession of almighty power. It was not as the “Master of earth and sea and sky” that He reposed in quiet. That power He had laid down, and He says, “I can of Mine own self do nothing.” John 5:30.” (*Ibid*)

Here again we encounter kenosis, meaning realising what Christ gave up to become the Saviour of humanity. To secure our salvation, Christ surrendered His prerogatives, as the Son of God, of the independent use of the powers of divinity. In other words, Christ did not calm the storm as the Son of God (or as God or as our Creator) but as a human being would calm it who was being used by God. Note very importantly that Ellen White did not say that Christ did not possess “almighty power”. She said that he “rested not” in the possession of it, meaning that **He did possess it** but did not rely upon or put His trust in this possession. As she further explained

“He trusted in the Father's might. It was in faith -- faith in God's love and care -- that Jesus rested, and the power of that word which stilled the storm was the power of God.” (*Ibid*)

In order to still the storm Jesus did not rest in His own abilities as the Son of God but in faith in His Father. Having faith in our Father is also what we are called to do. Jesus was here setting us an example to follow. In the same book Ellen White wrote

"The Saviour was deeply anxious for His disciples to understand for what purpose His divinity was united to humanity. He came to the world to display the glory of God, that man might be uplifted by its restoring power. God was manifested in Him that He might be manifested in them. Jesus revealed no qualities, and exercised no powers, that men may not have through faith in Him. His perfect humanity is that which all His followers may possess, if they will be in subjection to God as He was" (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages*, page 664, 'Let not your heart be troubled')

This statement is really very important. It is all embracing. It tells that Christ had no advantage over us. It also tells us that our lot was His lot. She also said in 1874

“The Saviour of the world became sin for the race. In becoming man's substitute, Christ did not manifest his power as the Son of God.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald 18th August 1874. 'The temptation of Christ'*)

Again this is very important to realise. It places Christ as one of us. She then added concerning Christ

“He ranked himself among the sons of men. He was to bear the trial of temptation as a man, in man's behalf, under the most trying circumstances, and leave an example of faith and perfect trust in his Heavenly Father. Christ knew that his Father would supply him food when it would gratify him to do so. He would not in this severe ordeal, when hunger pressed him beyond measure, prematurely diminish one particle of the trial allotted to him by exercising his divine power.” (*Ibid*)

From beginning to end, Ellen White did not change her belief that in becoming incarnate Christ had set aside His prerogative to independently use His powers of deity. Perhaps we could even say that Christ considered the power of His divine nature dead like we are to consider our fallen human nature dead (even though it is not dead). This means that He walked this earth as you and I are called to walk it – by faith in God our Father.

This next statement from the pen of Ellen White perhaps says it all. This was written in Volume 3 of the Spirit of Prophecy (1878). It is these volumes that contain much of the materials for what we now know as *Desire of Ages, Christ's*

Object Lessons and Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing. She says on page 259

"Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." The Saviour came into the world, outwardly the son of David, not manifesting the full significance of his character. His spirit was subject to that discipline and experience through which humanity must in some measure pass. His divinity was veiled beneath humanity. He hid within himself those all-powerful attributes which belonged to him as one equal with God. At times his divine character flashed forth with such wonderful power that all who were capable of discerning spiritual things pronounced him the Son of God." (*Ellen G. White, Spirit of Prophecy Volume 3 page 259, 'Ascension of Christ' 1878*)

With great simplicity, precision and brevity, Ellen White summed up the greatest mystery (and miracle) of all time – Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh.

Here Ellen White is referring to those attributes that belong to God alone. These are omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence. These are natural with God. They are unnatural with created beings – fallen or unfallen. To truly become like one of us, meaning to function as each one of us functions, she says that, "He hid within himself those all-powerful attributes". Miracles of miracles! Wonder of wonders! Who can understand how it was done let alone explain it? We can only stand in wonder and say that God has done it through His only begotten Son.

It is to this humiliation of God that each one of us owes our redemption and our eternal salvation. If it were not what God has done through His Son in becoming human we would still be lost - doomed for eternity. Throughout eternity this will be our song and science. It is today our privilege to search the Scriptures so that we better understand and appreciate these things, also that we may share with others what God has shared with us.

In an address at the Armadale Camp Meeting in November 1895, Ellen White said concerning the pre-existent Christ

"He came as a helpless babe, bearing the humanity we bear. As the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same." He could not come in the form of an angel; for unless He met man as man, and testified by His connection with God that divine power was not given to Him in a different way to what it will be given to us, He could not be a perfect example for us." (*Ellen G. White, Address Given at the Armadale Camp Meeting November 1895, Manuscript 21, 1895, see also Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary Vol. 7 page 925, 1966 edition*)

This is very clear. Divine power, as Jesus used it, was given to Him in the very

same way as we receive it - through the Holy Spirit.

Christ's example

In the 4th Volume of the Testimonies Ellen White wrote

“Christ's example is before us. He overcame Satan, showing us how we may also overcome. Christ resisted Satan with scripture. He might have had recourse to His own divine power, and used His own words; but He said: "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." To the second temptation He said: "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." (*Ellen G. White, 4th Volume Testimonies, page 45, 'Choosing earthly treasure'*)

This teaching was still the same in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1921. In our Sabbath school lesson studies for the 2nd quarter of that year it said

“In realizing His aim to do the will of God, Christ did not depend upon any power inherent in Him as the Son of God, but as an example to us, He trusted in another (Heb. 2: 13, first clause), and through His union with the Father, the works were wrought in Him by the indwelling Father (John 14: 10). 'He thus left us an example (1 Peter 2: 21), teaching us how we ought to walk (1 John 2:6).” (*SS Lesson Quarterly, 2nd Quarter 1921, 'The Work of Christ', page 34, lesson 12 for June 18th 1921, 'Doing the Will of God'*)

Ellen White also made the following remarks

“The glory of Christ is His character, and His character is an expression of the law of God. He fulfilled the law in its every specification, and gave to the world in His life a perfect pattern of what it is possible for humanity to attain unto by cooperation with divinity. In His humanity Christ was dependent upon the Father, even as humanity is now dependent upon God for divine power in attaining unto perfection of character.” (*Ellen White, Signs of the Times, 3rd July 1907, 'The Law Revealed in Christ'*)

“As Christ was dependent upon his Father, so man is dependent upon Christ. "I can of mine own self do nothing," he declared. The work which I do is all of my Father. The necessity is anticipated by him to whom I have access at all times. Had there been one deviation from the divine mind in the work of Christ, the plan of redemption would have proved a failure.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 15th February 1898, 'The Danger of Rejecting Life'*)

“The only-begotten Son of God came to our world as a man, to reveal to the world the fact that men through divine power could keep the law of God. Satan, the fallen angel, had declared that no man could keep God's law, and he pointed to the disobedience of Adam as proving the declaration true. But the Son of God placed himself in man's stead, and passed over the

ground where Adam fell, and endured temptation stronger than ever was or ever will be brought to bear upon the human race.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 10th April 1893, ‘Overcome as Christ overcame’*)

“Jesus resisted the temptations of Satan in the same manner in which every tempted soul may resist the evil one. He referred the tempter to the inspired record and said, "It is written." Christ overcame the temptations as a man, by relying solely upon the word of God; and every man may overcome as Christ overcame.” (*Ibid*)

“Jesus, the world's Redeemer, as our example, could only keep the commandments of God in the same way that humanity can keep them. "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 17th April 1893, ‘Overcome as Christ overcame’*)

“We must practice the example of Christ, bearing in mind His Sonship and His humanity. It was not God that was tempted in the wilderness, nor a god that was to endure the contradiction of sinners against himself. It was the Majesty of heaven who became a man -- humbled Himself to our human nature.” (*Ellen G. White, November 15th 1892, Manuscript Releases Volume 6 No. 402*)

“In Christ dwelt the fullness of the God-head bodily. This is why, although tempted in all points like as we are, he stood before the world untainted by corruption, though surrounded by it. Are we not also to become partakers of that fullness? and is it not thus, and thus only, that we can overcome as Christ overcame? (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 10th October 1892, ‘Draw from the source of Strength’*)

A most profound illustration

We have just seen that in walking this earth to become our Saviour, Jesus rested in faith in the power of His Father (see above re the storm on the Sea of Galilee). As Jesus Himself said

“Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake.” John 14:10-11

What we shall see now is a most profound illustration regarding the dependence of Jesus on the divine power of His Father. Ellen White explains with respect to Jesus saying that He was “the true vine” (John 15:1)

"Instead of choosing the graceful palm, the lofty cedar, or the strong oak, Jesus takes the vine with its clinging tendrils to represent Himself. The palm

tree, the cedar, and the oak stand alone. They require no support. But the vine entwines about the trellis, and thus climbs heavenward. So Christ in His humanity *was dependent upon divine power*. "I can of *Mine own self do nothing*," He declared. John 5:30" (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 674, 'Let not your heart be troubled'*)

We can see from the above that for what He achieved when on earth, Jesus depended on "divine power". This was as His Father gave it to Him. Certainly He did not depend on the independent use of this power as the pre-existent divine Son of God. Ellen White also wrote in *Desire of Ages*

"So utterly was Christ emptied of self that He made no plans for Himself. He accepted God's plans for Him, and day by day the Father unfolded His plans. So should we depend upon God, that our lives may be the simple outworking of His will." (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages page 208, 'Bethesda and the Sanhedrin'*)

The incarnate Christ was not omniscient. He lived day by day as His Father unfolded His plans for Him. As was said by Ellen White here, should it be any different with us? As we must do so did Christ. In *Desire of Ages* Ellen White wrote

"The angels of God are ever passing from earth to heaven, and from heaven to earth. The miracles of Christ for the afflicted and suffering were wrought by the power of God through the ministration of the angels. And it is through Christ, by the ministration of His heavenly messengers, that every blessing comes from God to us." (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 143, 'We have found the Messiah', see also Ellen White, Review and Herald, 21st January 1873, 'Life and mission of John', see also Spirit of Prophecy, Volume 2, 'The mission of Christ', 1877)*

Earlier in *Desire of Ages*, this time in the chapter *The Temptation*, Ellen White wrote about the time when Christ and Satan first met in conflict in Heaven. After this she wrote of when they first met on earth.

"Now their condition is apparently reversed, and Satan makes the most of his supposed advantage. One of the most powerful of the angels, he says, has been banished from heaven. The appearance of Jesus indicates that He is that fallen angel, forsaken by God, and deserted by man. A divine being would be able to sustain his claim by working a miracle; "if Thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread." Such an act of creative power, urges the tempter, would be conclusive evidence of divinity. It would bring the controversy to an end.

Not without a struggle could Jesus listen in silence to the arch-deceiver. But the Son of God was not to prove His divinity to Satan, or to explain the reason of His humiliation. By conceding to the demands of the rebel,

nothing for the good of man or the glory of God would be gained. Had Christ complied with the suggestion of the enemy, Satan would still have said, Show me a sign that I may believe you to be the Son of God. Evidence would have been worthless to break the power of rebellion in his heart. And Christ was not to exercise divine power for His own benefit. He had come to bear trial as we must do, leaving us an example of faith and submission.” (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 119, ‘*The temptation*’)

Why did Jesus struggle? He struggled because to use His divine powers to prove His divinity was a temptation to Him. In other words, as the Son of God, He could have used them. Concerning the temptation of Christ, Ellen White wrote in *Spiritual Gifts*

“The circumstances and surroundings of Christ were such as to make temptation upon this point peculiarly aggravating. The long fast had physically debilitated him, the pangs of hunger consumed his vitals, his fainting system clamored for food. He could have wrought a miracle in his own behalf, and satisfied his gnawing hunger; but this would not have been in accordance with the divine plan. It was no part of his mission to exercise divine power for his own benefit; this he never did in his earthly life; his miracles were all for the good of others” (Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, Volume 2, ‘*Temptation of Christ*, page 92)

Two paragraphs later

“In becoming man's substitute, and conquering where man had been vanquished, Christ was not to manifest his divine power to relieve his own suffering, for fallen man could work no miracles in order to save himself from pain, and Christ, as his representative, was to bear his trials as a man, leaving an example of perfect faith and trust in his Heavenly Father.” (*Ibid*)

In 1894 Ellen White addressed the Seventh-day Adventist young people by writing

“Let children bear in mind that the child Jesus had taken upon himself human nature, and was in the likeness of sinful flesh, and was tempted of Satan as all children are tempted. He was able to resist the temptations of Satan through his dependence upon the divine power of his heavenly Father, as he was subject to his will, and obedient to all his commands.” (Ellen G. White, *Youth's Instructor* August 23, 1894, ‘*Privileges of Childhood*’)

Notice from where the divine power was coming to enable Jesus to resist sin. It was not coming from Himself but from His Father. Here we can see again that Christ did not resist sin by His own power but by relying upon His heavenly Father. This is exactly the same way as we need to do it. This is why it can be

said that Jesus is our example. This example is not just that He did not sin but ***the way that He did it.***

Two years previously, this time in the *Bible Echo*, Ellen White again spoke of the temptation of Christ. After saying that Satan had said to Jesus that the Father was “satisfied with his willingness to endure the trial” also that He was “satisfied with Christ's willingness to set his feet in the bloodstained path”, she said that Satan told Jesus that the Father had sent an angel to tell Him the fast was over. She then wrote

“This specious reasoning was a temptation to Christ. His humanity made it a temptation to Him, and it was only by trusting his Father's word that He could resist the power of the enemy. He walked by faith, as we must walk by faith, and turned from the artful deceiver, who feigned to doubt his divinity. Satan declared that a powerful angel of heaven had been banished to the earth, and that Christ's appearance indicated that instead of being the King of heaven, He was this fallen angel, forsaken of God and deserted by man.” (*Ellen G. White, The Bible Echo, 15th November 1892, ‘Tempted in All Points Like as Were Are’*)

She then said that in tempting Jesus, Satan reasoned with Him that

“If He were the Son of God, He was equal with God, and could make this evident by working a miracle. He said, "If Thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread." He promised that if Jesus would do this, he would acknowledge his supremacy and no longer contest his claims. The archdeceiver hoped that under the force of despondency and extreme hunger, Christ would lose faith in his Father, work a miracle in his own behalf, and take Himself out of his Father's hands. Had He done this, the plan of salvation would have been broken; for it was contrary to its terms that Christ should work a miracle in his own behalf. Throughout his life on earth, his power must be exercised for the good of suffering humanity alone. As man's representative, He was to bear the trials of man, leaving a perfect example of submission and trust in God.” (*Ibid*)

Seven years later she said to the Seventh-day Adventist youth

“When we are tempted to question whether Christ resisted temptation as a man, we must search the Scriptures for the truth. As the substitute and surety of the human race, Christ was placed in the same position toward the Father as is the sinner. Christ had the privilege of depending on the Father for strength, and so have we. Because he laid hold of the hand of infinite power, and held it fast, he overcame; and we are taught to do the same.” (*Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor 28th December 1899, ‘Tempted in all points like as we are, part II*)

Again Ellen White points out Christ's dependence on His Father. She added

“The language of Christ on many occasions shows that he was placed in the same position that we are. He had to walk by faith, as we walk by faith; and when temptations came to him with overwhelming power, he used the language that every child of earth must use. "The Son can do nothing of himself," Christ declared, "but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise." "I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me." "When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things."
(Ibid)

Under contract to God

With reference to the sin of presumption, Ellen White wrote in 1877

“There are many who fail to distinguish between the rashness of presumption and the intelligent confidence of faith. Satan thought that by his temptations he could delude the world's Redeemer, to make one bold move in manifesting his divine power, to create a sensation, and to surprise all by the wonderful display of the power of his Father in preserving him from injury. He suggested that Christ should appear in his real character, and by this masterpiece of power, establish his right to the confidence and faith of the people, that he was indeed the Saviour of the world. If Christ had been deceived by Satan's temptations, and had exercised his miraculous power to relieve himself from difficulty, he would have broken the contract made with his Father, to be a probationer in behalf of the race.”
(Ellen G. White, Review & Herald. 1st April 1875, 'The temptation of Christ')

Here we come to the crux of the matter. Christ was under contract to God. To save fallen humanity He had accepted the limitations and liabilities of fallen humanity. As our beloved Saviour, this was His lot. Now note very importantly the next words of Ellen White. She said

“It was a difficult task for the Prince of Life to carry out the plan which he had undertaken for the salvation of man, in clothing his divinity with humanity.” *(Ibid)*

So why was it so difficult? She explains

“He had received honor in the heavenly courts, and was familiar with absolute power. It was as difficult for him to keep the level of humanity as it is for men to rise above the low level of their depraved natures, and be partakers of the divine nature.” *(Ibid)*

Here we can see the struggle that was Christ's. In one sense it was exactly the opposite of ours and in another sense exactly the same. What I mean by this is that you and I struggle to suppress our fallen human nature. Christ's struggle

was different inasmuch as His problem was to keep His divine nature subject to His human nature, meaning keeping His divine nature suppressed (below the level of His humanity) and depend on the power of God (His Father). Through His human nature, Christ's divine nature was urging itself to come to the surface and Christ was doing battle with it.

What we are dealing with here is nature of character. In other words, it was in Christ's nature to absolutely command. As the pre-existent Son of God it was His common lot to have absolute power. This character (nature) He had not left behind in Heaven. He came as He was, meaning He came as God essentially. Now though, in keeping with what we have seen said by the apostle Paul (Philippians 2:5-8), to become like one of us He had humbled Himself to the depths of fallen humanity. It was because He was still God that familiarity with divine (absolute) power was still inherent in Him. In the incarnation, He had not surrendered the nature of His character. Notice too how Ellen White began that paragraph. She had said

“There are many who fail to distinguish between the rashness of presumption and the intelligent confidence of faith.” (*Ibid*)

The latter is how Christ walked this earth, meaning how He accomplished all that He did on earth and how He overcame sin. It was all done through the “intelligent confidence of faith”.

In an article called *Bible Study*, Ellen White wrote in 1881 (this was the year that her husband died)

“Christ taking upon himself humanity, and preserving the level of man for thirty years, and then making his soul an offering for sin, that man might not be left to perish, is a subject for the deepest thought and the most concentrated study.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 11th January 1881, 'Bible Study'*)

Again she wrote in the 3rd Volume of the Spirit of Prophecy

“The Jews were continually seeking for and expecting a Divinity among them that would be revealed in outward show, and by one flash of overmastering will would change the current of all minds, force from them an acknowledgment of his superiority, elevate himself, and gratify the ambition of his people. This being the case, when Christ was treated with contempt, there was a powerful temptation before him to reveal his heavenly character, and to compel his persecutors to admit that he was Lord above kings and potentates, priests and temple. But it was his difficult task to maintain the level of humanity.” (*Ellen G. White, Spirit of Prophecy Volume 3, page 269, 'Ascension of Christ', 1878*)

In *Desire of Ages* we find this gem of revelation

“To be surrounded by human beings under the control of Satan was revolting to Him. And He knew that in a moment, by the flashing forth of His divine power, He could lay His cruel tormentors in the dust. This made the trial the harder to bear.” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, Page 700, ‘Before Annas and the court of Caiaphas’*)

It was His ability to exercise divine power at will that was a temptation to Christ. This is what “made the trial the harder to bear”.

In the *Signs of the Times* in 1890, Ellen White wrote of the temptation of Christ in the wilderness. She explained how in the third of the three temptations, Satan took Jesus into an exceeding high mountain and that after showing Him all the kingdoms of the world, promised that if He (Jesus) would worship him (Satan), he would give them all to Him. She followed this by saying

“Christ had heard Satan's taunting words of scorn regarding His claim to be the Son of God: "Thou the Son of God -- born in a stable, hurried off to Egypt for fear of being destroyed by Herod, working as a carpenter in an obscure town of Galilee! If at Thy baptism a voice from heaven said, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,' why art Thou now helpless and starving in this wilderness? Why is the illustrious Son of God wandering, unhonored and unattended, among the wild beasts? Where is Thy retinue of angels? Where are Thy glory and honor?" (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 11th April 1900, ‘Victory over Temptation’ part 2*)

She explains three paragraphs later (after saying that Satan had withdrawn defeated)

“Christ had gained the victory. Passing over the ground where Adam stumbled and fell, He had not yielded in a single point. The conflict was ended, and He was a conqueror. But the strain had been great, and He lay as one dying. "And, behold, angels came and ministered unto Him." Not only was food supplied to Him; supernatural restoration came. God sent His approval and commendation to revive His Son.” (*Ibid*)

Some might say here that Jesus having these angels to help Him gave Him an advantage over us but notice how this is explained

“How much the Saviour enjoyed the comfort brought to Him! His time of victory had come. He could accept the companionship and service of the angels, since they came unbidden by Himself, sent direct from the Father, whom He had honored by enduring the test under circumstances such as no human being will ever pass through. He had been given opportunity to take sides with the apostate foe of God, but He repulsed every temptation with the words, "It is written." Well might a voice from heaven declare, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”” (*Ibid*)

This is a very important statement. If Jesus Himself had called for the angels (which He could have done as the divine Son of God – Him being the Commander of the Heavenly angels) He would have broken the contract that He had made with His Father. As it was, it was the Father who had given these angels their commission and not the Son of God. As Ellen White said, Jesus “could accept the companionship and service of the angels, since they came unbidden by Himself, sent direct from the Father”. This is only the same, when He sees fit to do so, as God will do for any of His people (fallen humanity). It gave Jesus no advantage over us. The Father’s act for Christ was only the same as He does for all who at times need the special support of angels.

All by faith

Some present the idea that when Christ was in the cradle, He possessed a perfect knowledge of His pre-existence but this could not be so. As the Scriptures say of the child Jesus

“And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.” Luke 2:40

After telling of the experience of Jesus to His first visit to Jerusalem at 12 years of age the Scriptures also say

“And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.” Luke 2:42

Here we can see, as is experienced by every human, the growing up (maturing) process. In commenting on this experience Ellen White wrote

“The child Jesus did not receive instruction in the synagogue schools. His mother was His first human teacher. From her lips and from the scrolls of the prophets, He learned of heavenly things. The very words which He Himself had spoken to Moses for Israel He was now taught at His mother's knee. As He advanced from childhood to youth, He did not seek the schools of the rabbis. He needed not the education to be obtained from such sources; for God was His instructor.” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 70, ‘As a child’*)

In the next paragraph we find these words

“Since He gained knowledge as we may do, His intimate acquaintance with the Scriptures shows how diligently His early years were given to the study of God's word. And spread out before Him was the great library of God's created works. He who had made all things studied the lessons which His own hand had written in earth and sea and sky. ... From the first dawning of intelligence He was constantly growing in spiritual grace and knowledge of truth.” (*Ibid*)

The child Christ had no conscious knowledge of His pre-existence. He was learning as He grew (matured). As He grew He became more and more aware of His divine nature, His pre-existence and His mission. Ellen White also said of Jesus

“Every child may gain knowledge as Jesus did.” (*Ibid*)

So how did Jesus come to realise that He was the Messiah, the long awaited Saviour of the world? We have been told through the spirit of prophecy

“At the age of twelve, Jesus accompanied Joseph and Mary to Jerusalem to attend the Passover. Here, for the first time during His child-life, He looked upon the temple. He saw the white-robed priests performing their solemn ministry, and witnessed the impressive rites of the paschal service. Day by day He saw their meaning more clearly. Every act seemed to be bound up with His own life. New impulses were awakening within Him. Silent and absorbed, He seemed to be studying out a great problem. The mystery of His mission was opening to the Saviour. The work that He was to accomplish for the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the appointed heirs of the promises of the covenant, began to dawn upon His mind.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies, series B No. 9 page 10, ‘Perfect through sufferings’*)

Jesus only had one mind. There is no evidence that it was split into two with one half knowing everything (being omniscient) and the other half having a limited knowledge. We shall return to this thought in the next section.

The man Jesus Christ did not know everything. He did not even know that He was the pre-existent divine Son of God except that He believed it in faith as the Father revealed it to Him. This is only the same as we know we are the Sons of God. It is through faith in the Word of God. This is one of the reasons why He struggled in the temptation. If by His divine power He had turned the stones to bread, which is something that He had no command from His Father to do, this would have proved to Himself that He was the pre-existent Son of God. As it was, He needed to believe (know) this by faith and not by sight.

The Scriptures say that when Jesus was talking of the time of His return to earth He said

“But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.” Mark 13:32

The gospel writer Mark put the words of Jesus this way

“But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.” Matthew 24:36

Very interestingly, Ellen White wrote of this situation

“But the day and the hour of His coming Christ has not revealed. He stated plainly to His disciples that He Himself could not make known the day or the hour of His second appearing. Had He been at liberty to reveal this, why need He have exhorted them to maintain an attitude of constant expectancy?” (*Ellen G. White ‘The Desire of Ages page 632, chapter ‘On the Mount of Olives’*)

Note well Ellen White’s words. She said that Christ was not “at liberty to reveal” the date of His return. This must mean that Christ was either under obligation not to access this information from divinity or release it, unless given permission by His Father. This is a permission that He had not received therefore He chose not to do it.

Very interesting is that in 1857 in an article called *Signs of the Times*, James White wrote with reference to these words of Jesus

“An old English version of the passage reads, "But that day and hour no man maketh known, neither the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." This is the correct reading according to several of the ablest critics of the age. The word know, is used in the same sense here that it is by Paul in 1 Cor. ii, 2. " For I determined not to know [make known] anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified." Men "will not make known the day and hour, angels will not make it known, neither will the Son; but the Father will make it known.” (*James White, Review and Herald, October 29th 1857, ‘Signs of the Times’*)

In 1908 in the Australian *Signs of the Times*, T. H. Craddock wrote (very similarly to James White)

“An old English version of Matt. 24 : 36 reads as follows : "But of that day and hour no man maketh known, neither the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." This, undoubtedly, gives the correct rendering. That God, the Ancient of days, knows, the Bible clearly points out; that Jesus, the Son, knows, there can be no doubt; but none, neither the Son nor the angels, have been authorised to make that definitely appointed time known.” (*T. H. Craddock, Australian Signs of the Times, July 6th 1908, ‘The Time of Christ's Coming, Is It Known?’*)

This would be in keeping with what was said by Ellen White (see above) that Christ was not at liberty to make the date of His return known.

In speaking of the experience of the 12 year old Jesus when talking to the teachers of the law in the temple at Jerusalem Ellen White wrote

“His knowledge of sacred science was a surprise to these learned men; for He had never been instructed in the schools of the rabbis. They wondered

where He had gained His knowledge. They did not comprehend that He had access to a knowledge that they knew not of." (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times. 7th June 1905, 'A teacher sent from God'*)

Note that Ellen White did not say here that the child Jesus had knowledge but that He "had access to a knowledge" of which the rabbis did not know. This knowledge was contained in His divinity but Christ limited Himself to what His Father chose to reveal to Him through the Holy Spirit. In other words, the knowledge of the time of His return to earth was in His divine nature but He had chosen not to access it therefore He was not conscious of it.

This verse of Scripture has long been a bone of contention with Bible commentators. They have reasoned that if Jesus was divine then how could He have not known something? The above explanation is the only way that I can reason this one. It is the only one that seems to fit in with Scripture and what we have been told through the spirit of prophecy. Others will have different ideas.

Tempted to doubt

From the time of that experience in Jerusalem until the time of His baptism at the age of 30, there is nothing revealed in the scriptures concerning the life of Jesus. What we do have though, as His ministry began, is the encounter that our Saviour had with Satan.

As we have already dealt with this above, we shall not do so again here, suffice to say that in his temptations, Satan was appealing to Christ's divine nature (character) to exercise the authority that was built into it as the Son of God. This Christ did not do. He was not to exercise this authority independently but wait upon His Father for deliverance. So too must we do. Christ is our example in all things. We must not struggle ourselves out of God's hands. As Ellen White said

"The archdeceiver hoped that under the force of despondency and extreme hunger, Christ would lose faith in his Father, work a miracle in his own behalf, and take Himself out of his Father's hands. Had He done this, the plan of salvation would have been broken; for it was contrary to its terms that Christ should work a miracle in his own behalf." (*Ellen G. White, Bible Echo, 15th November 1892, 'Tempted in all points like as we are'*)

This was also the attitude of Christ as He went to the cross. With Him it was not a case of let my will be done (as the Son of God) but rather let the Father's will be done (see Luke 22:40-42). This too should be our attitude.

Notice this quote from Ellen White. She said with reference to Christ on the cross

"Even doubts assailed the dying Son of God. He could not see through the portals of the tomb. Bright hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the tomb a conqueror and His Father's acceptance of His sacrifice." (*Ellen G. White, 2nd Vol. Testimonies page 209, 'The sufferings of Christ'*)

Here we see the truly human Jesus. Here He was completing the contract that He had made with His Father. Even at death's door He chose to keep His divinity subject to His humanity. He could have looked at the future but He did not. For our sakes He maintained the status quo. Ellen White continued by saying

“The sin of the world, with all its terribleness, was felt to the utmost by the Son of God. The displeasure of the Father for sin, and its penalty, which is death, were all that He could realize through this amazing darkness. He was tempted to fear that sin was so offensive in the sight of His Father that He could not be reconciled to His Son. The fierce temptation that His own Father had forever left Him caused that piercing cry from the cross: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (*Ibid*)

This was not simply the human part of Christ that was having this experience. It was the pre-existent divine Son of God experiencing it in His humanity. In *Desire of Ages* Ellen White wrote

“Satan with his fierce temptations wrung the heart of Jesus. The Saviour could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father's acceptance of the sacrifice. He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal. Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race. It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father's wrath upon Him as man's substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God.” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 753, 'Calvary'*)

In the Bible Echo in 1887, Ellen White penned very similar words but with more detail. She wrote

“In order to fully realize the value of redemption, it is necessary to understand what it cost. In consequence of limited views of the sufferings of Christ, many place a low estimate on the great work of atonement. They think that Christ suffered only a small portion of the penalty of the law of God. They know that the wrath of God was felt by his dear Son; but they suppose that through all his painful sufferings he had the evidence of his Father's love and acceptance, and that the portals of the tomb before him were illuminated with bright hope

There are many whose hearts are no more deeply stirred by the humiliation and death of Christ than by the death of the martyrs of Jesus. Many have suffered death by slow tortures, and some by crucifixion. In what does the death of God's dear Son differ from these? It is true that he died upon the cross a most cruel death; yet others for his sake have suffered equally, so far as bodily torture is concerned. Why, then, was the suffering of Christ more dreadful than that of other persons who have yielded their lives for his

sake?

Had his suffering consisted in bodily pain alone, then his death was no more painful than that of some of the martyrs; but bodily pain was only a small part of the agony of the beloved Son of God as he hung upon the cross. The sins of the world were upon him, and also the sense of his Father's wrath against the sinner, as he suffered the penalty of the law. It was these that crushed his divine soul. It was the hiding of his Father's face, a feeling that his own dear Father had forsaken him as he drank the cup which the sinner so richly merited, that brought despair to his soul. The separation that sin makes between God and man was fully realized and keenly felt by the innocent, suffering Man of Calvary. He was oppressed by the powers of darkness, and had not one ray of light to brighten the future. His mental agony on this account was so great that man can have but a faint conception of it." (*Ellen G. White, Bible Echo, 1st January 1887, 'The Love of God'*)

Ellen White later said

"It was in this terrible hour of darkness, the face of his Father hidden, legions of evil angels enshrouding him, the sins of the world upon him, that from his pale lips were wrenched the words, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (*Ibid*)

In an appeal she said

"When the atonement is viewed correctly, when we realize the great price that has been paid to rescue sinful man from eternal death, the salvation of souls will be felt to be of infinite value. In comparison with the worth of everlasting life, everything else sinks into insignificance." (*Ibid*)

In 1887, the year before the famous Minneapolis Conference, Ellen White expressed these thoughts

"Wondrous combination of man and God! He might have helped his human nature to withstand the inroads of disease by pouring from his divine nature vitality and undecaying vigour to the human. But he humbled himself to man's nature. He did this that the Scripture might be fulfilled; and the plan was entered into by the Son of God, knowing all the steps in his humiliation, that he must descend to make an expiation for the sins of a condemned, groaning world. What humility was this! It amazed angels. The tongue can never describe it; the imagination cannot take it in. The eternal Word consented to be made flesh! God became man! It was a wonderful humility! (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald 5th July 1887 'Christ man's example'*)

Much more could be said here regarding Ellen White's remarks on the incarnation and Christ's humiliation, but space does not permit. Jesus though, as

the title of this section says, really was “*Truly human - truly our example*”.

I believe that one person who summed this up perfectly is James Fowler. In an article he has on the web called *Christmas, Its History and Meaning* he says

“The divine Son did not divest Himself of His Being as God in any way, but did defer the independent exercise of His divine function in order to function dependently and derivatively as a man. His divine prerogative of direct and independent enactment of divine function was suspended in order to voluntarily subordinate Himself in human contingency and receptivity.”
(James A. Fowler, page 45. ‘*Christmas, Its History and Meaning, ‘The self-emptying of the Son)*

This says absolutely everything.

In conclusion

We can see from all of this that we need to be very careful indeed as to how we present the incarnate Christ. None of us have all the answers but what we can be sure of is that if we present Jesus as someone who had exercised prerogatives (rights) above and beyond the ones that we possess as human beings, not only will we take away from Him what He achieved in becoming human but we will also negate His life as our example of ***how*** to live the Christian life. We will also, as was said by Ellen White, “***destroy the completeness of His humanity***” (see above - *Signs of the Times*, 10th April 1893, ‘*Overcome as Christ overcame*’)

In section nineteen we shall see how current Seventh-day Adventism differs somewhat from what has been concluded here. After this we shall be in a position to take a look at more of the history of the trinity doctrine within Seventh-day Adventism. By this I mean we shall be able to reason why they rejected it. Certainly it was not because of what it says about Christ being divine. The latter is something that had been believed by Seventh-day Adventists from the very beginning.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section nineteen

Current theology – objections to kenosis

We have seen in the previous section that in becoming incarnate, Christ relinquished His right, as the Son of God, to the independent use of the powers of deity. These powers were such as immortality, omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence etc. These are the attributes that belong to God alone.

All of this giving up comes under the heading of kenosis but as we have previously noted, there are different ideas as to what Christ, in becoming human, actually relinquished. We shall now look at certain trinitarian Christology that does not involve kenosis. This is orthodox trinitarianism.

Orthodox trinitarianism

Within orthodox trinity Christology, the uniting of the two natures of Christ is called the hypostatic union. Generally speaking, trinitarians correctly say that there is only one person in Christ. This means that both the human nature and the divine nature belong to the one and the same person. These two natures have individual properties of their own, meaning properties that are peculiar to each nature. In the incarnate Christ, these natures were not mixed together to form a third nature. Each retained its own particular properties. This means that the **one person** of Christ possessed the entirety of the properties of both natures. In other words, each nature remained as it was originally.

This is where the problems arise.

According to trinitarian theology, this hypostatic union allowed the one person of Christ, on His divine side, to exercise all the attributes of deity (meaning His powers of immortality, omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence etc) whilst at the same time on His human side He experienced the things of humanity. The latter was such as a limited knowledge, loneliness, hunger, thirst, tiredness, temptation and death etc. These were the things that He could not experience when only having a divine nature (meaning in His pre-existence).

This reasoning makes a dichotomy of Christ. It is the same as saying He had two centres of consciousness. Certainly it is not as we have been told through the spirit of prophecy that the pre-existent Christ surrendered Himself to His human nature, therefore surrendering His right, as the Son of God, to the independent use of the powers of deity. These are two opposing theologies. I say this

because in the trinitarian theology, the mediatory intercession of the Holy Spirit appears to be totally absent.

The trinity incarnate Christ

One Seventh-day Adventist trinitarian who appears to reject the kenosis theory (at least the one to which I subscribe) is Max Hatton. He is a retired Seventh-day Adventist minister.

After reading his book *Understanding the Trinity*, also upon reading his website article *Ellen G. White and the Trinity*, I came to the conclusion that he presents the idea of a Christ who at the same time as He was limited by His human nature was also omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent in His divine nature. What I mean by this is that Hatton says that at times, Christ independently exercised His divine attributes whilst at other times He refrained from doing so. This to me is again making a dichotomy of Christ for how can one individual person experience at the same time being both finite and infinite. This is like one individual having two separate personalities. How can this be?

Take for example omniscience (being all knowing). How could the person of Christ be at times all knowing whilst at another time possess a limited knowledge? That is not a reasonable assumption to make because it would necessitate a person having a **dual consciousness**.

On page 69 of his book, Max Hatton clearly says that whilst Christ was on earth, He was omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. This is only the same as he says in his website article, which reflects the same theology as his book. When thinking about it, why should the two differ?

In both his book and his website article, Hatton maintains that not only did Christ retain all of His attributes of deity when becoming incarnate (which I agree) but also that He used them in His own right as God (with this I do not agree). As we noted in the previous section, if Jesus had used His divine attributes in His own right as the Son of God, He would have not walked this earth as you and I need to walk it. Certainly by doing this He could not have been my substitute or my Saviour. Neither would He have been my example in overcoming sin.

In his website article (this is under the sub-heading of *Kenotic theory*), Hatton says

“I have detected the prevalence of a certain Kenotic theory in the writing of some in our Church. And I think I can say that a form of it is fairly commonly held by some Church members. What is maintained by those adhering to this theory is that when Jesus became a man He emptied Himself of the attributes of God. But I ask, “Can God cease to be God?” The attributes of God such as omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, are what make Him what He is.” (*Max Hatton article ‘Ellen G. White and the Trinity’*)

Amongst the non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists, there are a number of differing kenotic theories. It cannot be said therefore that all the non-trinitarians say that the divine Son of God “emptied Himself of the attributes of God”. For instance, as we have noted in previous sections, it is my belief that when on earth that Christ **retained** all of His divine attributes, although He never, as the Son of God, used them in His own right. Hatton continues

“There is no doubt that the Glory of God was veiled when the Word became the God-man. It is acceptable to say that He surrendered the independent exercise of His divine attributes, as far as His humanity was concerned, but this is far different from saying that He surrendered them altogether while a man.” (*Ibid*)

Notice that Hatton says, “... as far His humanity is concerned”. Again this is making a dichotomy of Christ. It is like saying He was doing one thing in His humanity and another in His divinity. As we shall see later, Hatton presents a Christ with a dual consciousness, one finite and one infinite. It must be remembered here that nature is not equivalent to personality. These are two different things. Christ was one personality but He had two different natures. He did not have within Him two different personalities. As a personality, meaning as the divine Son of God, He needed to keep His divinity below the threshold of His humanity. As we have seen in the previous section, Ellen White did say that at times this was a very difficult task for Him to accomplish. This was when she wrote

“It was a difficult task for the Prince of Life to carry out the plan which he had undertaken for the salvation of man, in clothing his divinity with humanity. He had received honor in the heavenly courts, and was familiar with absolute power. It was as difficult for him to keep the level of humanity as it is for men to rise above the low level of their depraved natures, and be partakers of the divine nature.” (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald. 1st April 1875, ‘The temptation of Christ’*)

Perhaps this is something that we do not take into consideration very often. This is that to function within the confines of His human nature, Christ found it a difficult thing to do.

Two opposing theologies

Hatton says in his article (following on from his previous statement above)

“Malachi 3:6 asserts that God is immutable, so Jesus, being God, could never cease to be God or cast off His attributes.” (*Max Hatton article ‘Ellen G. White and the Trinity’*)

A close look at Malachi 3: 6 does not say that God is immutable meaning as Hatton says that Christ can “never cease to be God or cast off His attributes”. This text of Scripture actually says

“For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.” Malachi 3:6

It is reasonable to conclude that Malachi was talking here in terms of the **character** and the **purposes** of God. This is what is unchangeable. This is also why God says that the “sons of Jacob are not consumed”. It is nothing to do with ontology (how God exists).

Notice that Hatton says that “Jesus, being God, could never cease to be God or cast off His attributes”.

This tells us that Hatton believes that Christ could never cease to be or lose His divine attributes. Now take note of the following statements that have come to us through the spirit of prophecy. As will be seen, they differ from Max Hatton’s reasoning. The first one says

“There is no one who can explain the mystery of the incarnation of Christ. Yet we know that He came to this earth and lived as a man among men. The man Christ Jesus was not the Lord God Almighty, yet Christ and the Father are one. The Deity did not sink under the agonizing torture of Calvary, yet it is nonetheless true that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (*Ellen G. White, letter 32, 1899, Manuscript 140, 1903, as quoted in the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary page 1129*)

The second quote is found in a letter written **two years after** *Desire of Ages* had been published. Ellen White wrote of Christ

“He became subject to temptation, endangering as it were, His divine attributes. Satan sought, by the constant and curious devices of his cunning, to make Christ yield to temptation.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 5, 1900, as quoted in the Seventh-day Adventists Bible Commentary Volume 7 page 926*)

The year following the publication of *Desire of Ages* Ellen White wrote in the *Signs of the Times*

“But although Christ's divine glory was for a time veiled and eclipsed by His assuming humanity, yet He did not cease to be God when He became man. The human did not take the place of the divine, nor the divine of the human. This is the mystery of godliness. The two expressions human and divine were, in Christ, closely and inseparably one, and yet they had a distinct individuality. Though Christ humbled Himself to become man, the Godhead was still His own. His Deity could not be lost while He stood faithful and true to His loyalty. Surrounded with sorrow, suffering, and moral pollution, despised and rejected by the people to whom had been intrusted the

oracles of heaven, Jesus could yet speak of Himself as the Son of man in heaven. He was ready to take once more His divine glory when His work on earth was done.” (Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, 10th May 1899, ‘Christ glorified’)

Here we can see two different theologies. Max Hatton is saying that “Jesus, being God, could never cease to be God or cast off His attributes” whilst we have been told through Ellen White that the man Jesus was not the God almighty, also that through disobedience He could have lost His attributes of deity. These are contrasting statements. The very same year that *Desire of Ages* was published Ellen White wrote

“Could Satan in the least particular have tempted Christ to sin, he would have bruised the Saviour's head. As it was, he could only touch His heel. Had the head of Christ been touched, the hope of the human race would have perished. Divine wrath would have come upon Christ as it came upon Adam. Christ and the church would have been without hope” (Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, June 9th 1898, see also *Selected Messages Book 1* page 256)

Again this is totally opposite to Max Hatton’s reasoning. Hatton continued in his article

“The most convincing way to demonstrate that Jesus maintained His Divine Attributes must surely be to show that He used them on some special occasions. Please enjoy with me the following thrilling encounters Jesus had resulting from the use of His *Divine Attributes*.” (Max Hatton article ‘Ellen G. White and the Trinity’)

Here Max Hatton is stressing that Christ not only retained His powers of divinity but also used them in His own right. This he does to attempt to prove Christ’s divinity. As we have seen in the previous section, this is a mistake. To say that Christ independently used the powers of divinity would disqualify Him being our Saviour.

The question here is not whether Christ possessed divine powers or whether He used them (this is not denied) but rather ***how He accessed them***. In other words, did He use them in His own right as the Son of God (as Max Hatton says here) or did He access them in faith in His Father through the Holy Spirit? These again are two entirely different theologies. One is trinitarian. The other is not. As we noted in the previous section, Ellen White answered this question by saying of Christ

“He had infinite power only because He was perfectly obedient to His Father's will.” (Ellen G. White, *Manuscript 99*, 1903, pp. 3, 4. “*Christian Education in Our Schools*”, September 1, 1903, see also *Selected Messages book 3*, page 141, chapter 19, ‘The incarnation’)

This is entirely different to what Hatton says. He puts across the idea (in attempting to prove Christ's divinity) that Christ possessed and used these powers because He was God. Ellen White says that He had those powers "only because He was perfectly obedient to His Father's will". Again there is a world of difference between these two theologies. One is kenotic whilst the other is not.

Omniscience or revelation from God through the Holy Spirit?

In his book *Understanding the Trinity* (see page 69), Hatton says that under inspiration, Peter acknowledged that Jesus was omniscient (all knowing). This is when John records

"He [Jesus] saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep." John 21:17

There appears to be a misunderstanding here on Hatton's part. There is nothing in this text, or in its context, to say that Peter was under inspiration when he made this statement. All that we know is that John the gospel writer was inspired when he recorded that Peter had said it (see 2 Timothy 3:16). This is saying two entirely different things.

As proof of Christ's omniscience (also on page 69), Hatton cites the experience of Nathaniel when Christ told him that He had seen him under the fig tree. He also cites the experience of Jesus with the woman at the well when telling her all the things she had done (John 4:1-29). Another instance he cites is when Christ told the centurion that his son would live (Matthew 8:5-13). As evidence of Christ's omniscience, Hatton also cites our Saviour's knowledge of Lazarus dying (John 11:1-44).

Needless to say, all of this was Jesus having knowledge of things that human ability alone would prohibit Him from possessing. Of this there is no argument. In other words, in all these experiences of Jesus, there was a supernatural working but was it as Max Hatton suggests that Jesus knew these things because He was omniscient? The answer is - not necessarily!

If Ellen White's and my own reasoning is correct, Jesus did not know these things because of the exercise of omniscience, at least not on His own part. Jesus had accessed this information from His divinity via the Holy Spirit (see previous section). This is no different than was done by the prophets of old. They had also seen the past, present and future events alike, not because they were omniscient but because God had revealed it to them through His Holy Spirit. This is exactly the same as it was with Ellen White.

As God's chosen vessel for the reception of the spirit of prophecy, she also saw things that were past, present and future. On a number of occasions she said that she saw events, places, people and situations without being there to see

them for herself. She was not omniscient, neither was she omnipresent. It was simply that God, through His Holy Spirit, had shown her these things. There is no reason to believe that this was not exactly the same with Christ. It was not that in His own power as the Son of God that He knew these things but that God had revealed them to Him through the Holy Spirit.

Omnipotent or dependence upon God? – two different theologies

Hatton also says on page 69 of his *Understanding the Trinity* that because Christ is our Creator, He was omnipotent but this is totally discounting the incarnation. As we have seen in previous sections, in becoming incarnate, Christ contracted with His Father not to exercise in His own right the powers of deity.

Hatton also says that Jesus demonstrated this omnipotence (being all powerful) by walking on water (see Matthew 14:22-27 and Mark 6:47-50), also when calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee (Mark 4:36-41) but as we noted in the previous section, Ellen White said that He did not do the latter in His own right as the Son of God. In her supposedly trinitarian *Desire of Ages* she said

“When Jesus was awakened to meet the storm, He was in perfect peace. There was no trace of fear in word or look, for no fear was in His heart. But He rested not in the possession of almighty power. It was not as the "Master of earth and sea and sky" that He reposed in quiet. That power He had laid down, and He says, "I can of Mine own self do nothing." John 5:30. He trusted in the Father's might. It was in faith--faith in God's love and care--that Jesus rested, and the power of that word which stilled the storm was the power of God” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages*, page 336, ‘Peace, be still’)

Unlike Max Hatton, Ellen White said that Christ did not calm this storm because He was omnipotent but did so by faith in His Father’s watch care and power. Again there is a world of difference between these two theologies. Again one is kenotic and the other is not.

According to what we have been told through the spirit of prophecy, the whole point of the Son of God becoming human was *not to show* what God could do as God but what God could do *through humanity*. To achieve this, the Son of God had to walk this earth as a human being and not as God. As Ellen White said

“When Christ became our substitute and surety, it was as a human being. He came as a man, and rendered the obedience of human nature to the only true God. He came not to show us what God could do, but what God did do, and what man, a partaker of the divine nature, can do.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 128, 1896, Manuscript releases Volume 14, MR No. 1130*)

What Jesus did on earth He did as a man would need to do it. He did not do it as God. If He had done it as God there would have been no point in Him coming to earth. In itself, miracle working is not proof of divinity. If it were then some of the

prophets and disciples would be regarded as divine, which they were not. Like Jesus they would have done all of their miracles through the power of the Holy Spirit and through angels. Certainly they did not do these things by their own power. It is just the same with having knowledge of things that is not possible for mere mortals to possess. This does not prove a person to be either omniscient or omnipresent. It could be that God has revealed these things through the Holy Spirit.

Two modes of consciousness?

Hatton does not totally discount the humanity of Christ but he does say on page 84 of his *Understanding the Trinity* that when Christ was on earth **He had two modes of consciousness**. He says that this was **one consciousness as a human being** and **one consciousness as God**. This means that at the same time that this one person of Christ had a finite knowledge (as a human) he also had an infinite knowledge (as God). In consequence of this, Hatton says that there were times when Jesus possessed great knowledge not available to men and other times when He was ignorant of things known only to God (see page 84).

This to me sounds very confusing because how can one person (one individual) have two modes of consciousness (two modes of realisation)? To do this He would need to be like two separate personalities in one body. If this were so then this so-called one person of Jesus would not be like any other human. It would also mean that He did not walk this earth like every other human has had to walk it. If this were true, it would invalidate His claim to be the Saviour of the world. This is inasmuch as He would not have truly taken our place.

This would also mean that Christ would not be our example. I say this because you and I cannot switch at will between two different modes of consciousness, one finite and one infinite. In other words, if Christ could have done the latter, then He could not have been considered to be truly human (more like super-human) therefore He could not be our substitute or our Saviour.

If Christ had switched between these two different modes of consciousness, we would be left wondering if when we read in the Scriptures of Christ exercising divine power, was He accomplishing this by faith in His Father (as our example) or did He exercise it in His own right as the divine Son of God? This really would be very confusing.

Take for example when Christ stilled the storm on the lake of Galilee (as we noted above). If we believe He had two modes of existence (one of humanity and one of divinity) then when we look at this story (Matthew 8:23-27, Mark 4:36-41 and Luke 8:22-25) what are we to conclude? Are we to conclude that He did this miracle in His own divine right as the Son of God or did He do it as a human being? As has been said previously, there is a world of difference between these two views. One is kenotic and one is not. Allow me to explain what I mean.

As God or as man?

Quite recently I heard a Seventh-day Adventist preacher comment on this very same miracle (the storm on the Sea of Galilee). He said that because Christ was the creator, this miracle was easy for him to accomplish. It was also said that because He could control the weather this proved that He was our Creator.

The preacher probably thought he was exalting Christ but in reality he was robbing our Saviour of what He achieved *in His humanity*. In other words the way that this preacher explained this miracle, it was totally discounting the humanity of Christ. I would also say that because of the preacher's reasoning, the whole point of the Son of God becoming incarnate was completely lost. You would need to read section seventeen and section eighteen to fully appreciate what is being said here.

If we conclude that Christ did this miracle in His own right as the Son of God (meaning as our creator) this is no comfort to us at all. This is because we do not inherently possess this power. If we say that He did this as a human being (as says Ellen White above) then Christ is our example of faith. On the other hand, if we do not know which way that He did it (because of His switching between two modes of consciousness) then all that we have is total confusion and suspicion.

Hatton says of Christ's experience on the Sea of Galilee that it was proof of His omnipotence. Ellen White said that Christ did not accomplish this miracle as the Son of God but as a human being. Again these are entirely different viewpoints. One is kenotic whilst the other is not.

The way that I see it is that in Hatton's view, the incarnate Christ lived a double life meaning having two modes of consciousness (one human and one divine). If this was the case then the Son of God did not truly become human. To become truly human He had to become in all things like you and me, which the Scriptures say did truly happen (see Hebrews 2:17). As we noted previously, Maldwyn Hughes says of the doctrine of kenosis

“It has been developed as the result of the desire to state the doctrine of the two natures in such a way as to guard the reality of the human nature without denying the reality of the divine nature in Jesus Christ. The records make it clear that in some respects our Lord shared our human limitations, Modern conceptions of personality make it difficult for us to accept the view of a double consciousness in Him, whereby He knew some things as God, but was ignorant of them as man. It is therefore held that the eternal Son on His incarnation voluntarily underwent a process of Kenosis, or depotentiation, or self-emptying.” (Maldwyn Hughes, *Christian Foundations*, page 43, 'Jesus Christ')

It should go without saying that those who reason as does Max Hatton, meaning the trinitarians, would disagree with this conclusion.

Trinity reasoning versus the spirit of prophecy

We noted in previous sections that the basic trinity belief is that because Christ always has his existence in the one and the same substance as the Father, He never leaves His Father's side. This would mean that even in the incarnation, Christ was with His Father on high. This is why the trinitarian St. Germanus said in his hymn (Christmas carol) *The great and mighty wonder*

“The Word becomes incarnate and yet remains on high,
And cherubim sing anthems to shepherds from the sky.
Repeat the hymn again: “To God on high be glory
And peace on earth to men!””
(*St. Germanus, ‘A great and mighty wonder’*)

In his website article *Ellen G. White and the Trinity*, Hatton agreed with this reasoning. He even quotes St Germanus as we have seen here. It was also as my internet orthodox priest friend said to me

“We [orthodox trinitarians] maintain rather the invariability of the Godhead (its simplicity and unity) in the sense that no action can lead to ontological change; namely in this case that the Word, one ousia with the Father and the Spirit, never leaves the Father's side even when He joins with our human nature in the Incarnation.” (*Email, Father Gregory Hallam, Orthodox Priest, to Terry Hill, 16th May 2007*)

In the same website article, Hatton also reiterated what he had said in his book *Understanding the Trinity*. This was that whilst on earth, Jesus was not only omniscient and omnipotent but also omnipresent. He even said in this article of Jesus being omnipresent

“It hardly seems necessary to assert that Jesus was not present in the sickroom of Lazarus in the form of a man, He was there as the Omnipresent God.” (*Max Hatton, Website article, Ellen G. White and the trinity*)

Whichever way that you look at it, this is saying that Jesus was in the same room as Lazarus when the latter died although Hatton does say that He was not there in human form.

Hatton's statement appears to be in disagreement with Ellen White. This is where she said in *Desire of Ages*

“Cumbered with humanity, Christ could not be in every place personally. Therefore it was for their interest that He should go to the Father, and send the Spirit to be His successor on earth. No one could then have any advantage because of his location or his personal contact with Christ. By the Spirit the Saviour would be accessible to all. In this sense He would be nearer to them than if He had not ascended on high.” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages page 669*)

Ellen White is referring here to Jesus as only being **one person** who only has **one mode** of being, meaning that of a human being. This is kenotic reasoning.

The Bible is also very clear that when Lazarus died Jesus was not at Bethany. When the sisters of Lazarus sent to Jesus telling Him that their brother was dead the Scriptures say

“When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.” John 11:4

Jesus Himself said that the death of Lazarus was for the glorification of the Son. Note this well. We shall come back to this point later. It is very important. The Scriptures continue

“Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was. Then after that saith he to his disciples, Let us go into Judaea again.” John 11:5-7

The Scriptures are clear that Jesus was in Bethany when Lazarus died. They also tell us that Jesus said to His disciples

“And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him.” John 11:15

Jesus was not telling lies. He was not at Bethany when Lazarus died. He even told His disciples He was glad that He was not there. This is more than likely because if He had been there then He would have been expected to heal Lazarus from his sickness. If that had happened then Jesus would not have been glorified through the raising of him to life.

When Jesus and His disciples arrived at Bethany, Lazarus had already been dead for four days. He had been placed in a sealed tomb. After saying that Jesus had promised His followers that they would see the glory of God the gospel writer John explains

“Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.” John 41-44

According to what Jesus said, the raising of Lazarus was to His glorification. To what glorification was Jesus referring? Now note these words from Ellen White

with respect to the same miracle. This is very important. It explains everything. She said

“In all that He did, Christ was co-operating with His Father. Ever He had been careful to make it evident that He did not work independently; it was by faith and prayer that He wrought His miracles.” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 536, ‘Lazarus come forth’*)

Note these last words very well. We are told that it was by “faith and prayer” that Jesus wrought His miracles. This is why He said to His Father “I thank thee that thou hast heard me”. Jesus was not working these miracles independent of the Father, Note Ellen White’s words. She said that Christ had ever been careful to make it clear that “He did not work independently”. This is why He said that it was the Father in Him that was doing the works (see John 14:10). Jesus made this very plain yet some still insist that the miracles of Christ, in themselves, are proof of Christ’s deity.

We need now to look at the reason why Jesus did these miracles. This is particularly in respect to the raising of Lazarus. Ellen White said next

“Christ desired all to know His relationship with His Father.” (*Ibid*)

She then repeated the words of Jesus

"Father," He said, "I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me. And I knew that Thou hearest Me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, *that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me.*" (*Ibid*)

Now note very importantly her very next words. She wrote

“Here the disciples and the people were to be given the most convincing evidence in regard to the relationship existing between Christ and God. They were to be shown that Christ's claim was not a deception.” (*Ibid*)

All of these miracles were not to show how powerful Jesus was and that because of this He must have been divine but was to show “the relationship” that Christ had with God. It was this relationship that was the proof of His divinity, not the miracle working power itself. As Ellen White said in *Desire of Ages*

“The flashing forth of His divinity in the cleansing of the temple, His miracles of healing, and the lessons of divine truth that fell from His lips, all proclaimed that which after the healing at Bethesda He had declared before the Sanhedrin, -- His Sonship to the Eternal.” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 231, ‘The kingdom of God is at hand’*)

She also said in the same book

“The angels of God are ever passing from earth to heaven, and from heaven to earth. The miracles of Christ for the afflicted and suffering were wrought by the power of God through the ministration of the angels. And it is through Christ, by the ministration of His heavenly messengers, that every blessing comes from God to us.” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 143, ‘We have found the Messiah’*)

In the official Handbook of Theology of Seventh-day Adventists there is a very small section on kenosis called Kenoticism. It said in totality (this after making reference to Albrecht Ritschi’s understanding of Christology)

“In contrast, Gottfried Thomasius (1802-1875) and other Kenoticists held that at the time of His incarnation the divine Logos laid aside His divine attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence.” (*Raoul Dederen, Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology, Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia, Volume 12, page 194, ‘Christ: his person and work’*)

It also said

“On the basis of Philippians 2:7, they thought to maintain the reality and integrity of Christ’s dual nature and to underline the magnitude of His humiliation by becoming human.” (*Ibid*)

On this very important topic of kenosis, nothing more was said in the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*. The Christology article did say that Jesus was our example but I could not find anywhere where it said **how** He achieved what He did, which as we have seen from above, is the most important part (see previous section). To just say that Jesus did overcome sin is not enough to be our example. For Christ’s life to be our example we need to understand **how** He did it. This article made no effort to explain what Christ gave up in the incarnation. Obviously it was not thought of as being important.

Communication of properties

In trinity reasoning, there is such a thing as *Communication of properties* (Communicatio Idiomatum). The Wikipedia encyclopaedia describes this teaching as being

“A doctrine that is related to the Hypostatic Union is the communicatio idiomatum (Latin for "communication of properties"). It is the teaching that the attributes of both the divine and human natures are ascribed to the one person of Jesus. This means that the man Jesus could lay claim to the glory He had with the Father before the world was made (John 17:5), claim that He descended from heaven, John 3:13), and also claim omnipresence, (Matt 28:20). All of these are divine qualities that are laid claim to by Jesus; therefore, the attributes of the divine properties were claimed by the person of Jesus.” (*Wikipedia online Encyclopaedia, ‘Communicatio idiomatum’*)

In Himself, Jesus never claimed to be omniscient. He never claimed either to be omnipresent or omnipotent. In fact in *Desire of Ages* Ellen White wrote

"Christ's humanity was united with divinity; He was fitted for the conflict by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit." (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages page 123*)

If we present a Christ that walked this earth independently using His powers of deity, what we will do is to destroy His image as our example. We shall also make null and void all that He achieved in becoming human.

Objections by the trinitarians to kenosis

Amongst the objections made by trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists to the kenotic view of Christ are two statements made by Ellen White. These are said to show that Christ, in His own right, was omniscient (all knowing) and omnipotent (all powerful). The first of these two statements is as follows (this is with reference to Judas the night he betrayed Jesus)

"By reading the secret purpose of the traitor's heart, Christ gave to Judas the final, convincing evidence of His divinity. This was to the false disciple the last call to repentance." (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 655, 'In remembrance of me'*)

The non-kenotic view says that this is proof that in his own right, Jesus was using His omniscience. This though is not what Ellen White is saying. She said that as a person it was "convincing evidence of His divinity". She does not say that He was using this power independently of His Father. As we know ourselves, Ellen White was given insight into the lives and thoughts of many Seventh-day Adventists. This we know because of the hundreds of testimonies that Ellen White sent to them. This insight into these people's lives did not mean that she was omniscient or divine. It was just that God had shown her these things. In the next paragraph she wrote

"In pronouncing the woe upon Judas, Christ also had a purpose of mercy toward His disciples. He thus gave them the crowning evidence of His Messiahship. "I tell you before it come," He said, "that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I AM." Had Jesus remained silent, in apparent ignorance of what was to come upon Him, the disciples might have thought that their Master had not divine foresight, and had been surprised and betrayed into the hands of the murderous mob." (*Ibid*)

The Son of God did have foresight, but it was a foresight (divine power) that He had because He was obedient to God. It was not because He used His inbuilt abilities and attributes. As we noted Ellen White as saying

"He [Christ] had infinite power only because He was perfectly obedient to His Father's will." (*Ellen G. White, Manuscript 99, 1903, pp. 3, 4. "Christian*

Education in Our Schools", September 1, 1903, see also Selected Messages book 3, page 141, chapter 19, 'The incarnation')

The second statement is regards to the raising of Lazarus. This is when Jesus cried with a loud voice "Lazarus, come forth". Ellen White wrote in *Desire of Ages*

"His voice, clear and penetrating, pierces the ear of the dead. As He speaks, divinity flashes through humanity. In His face, which is lighted up by the glory of God, the people see the assurance of His power. Every eye is fastened on the entrance to the cave. Every ear is bent to catch the slightest sound. With intense and painful interest all wait for the test of Christ's divinity, the evidence that is to substantiate His claim to be the Son of God, or to extinguish the hope forever." (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages', Page 536 'Lazarus, come forth')*

Again the anti-kenotic arguments are reasonably obvious but as we noted above, Ellen White said that this miracle was to prove Christ's relationship with the Father not to show that He was omnipotent and that in His own right He was performing miracles. Ellen White also said in the *Home Missionary* in 1897

"The wonderful works which Christ had done, which were so full of convincing power, ought to have removed prejudice, unbelief, and malice from the hearts of the Jews. Christ had given a convincing proof of his divinity in raising Lazarus from the dead. Through Christ the Father had been revealed to believers and unbelievers. If the disciples believed this vital connection between the Father and the Son, their faith would not forsake them when they beheld Christ's suffering and death to save a perishing world. He desired them to see that their faith must lead up to God, and be anchored there." (*Ellen G. White, Home Missionary, 1st July 1897, 'Words of comfort')*

Again we see Ellen White say that the raising of Lazarus was to show the relationship of the Son to the Father, or as Ellen White put it here, to show the "vital connection between the Father and the Son". Out of interest, note here like she does so many times, she only mentions the Father and the Son but makes no mention of the Holy Spirit.

The revelation of the Father in the Son – the proof of Christ's divinity

In the *Review and Herald* of October 19th 1897, Ellen White wrote with respect to Jesus saying "Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake." She then said of those who heard these words

"Their faith might safely rest on the evidence given in Christ's works, -- works that no man ever had done or could do. These wonderful works, so full of convincing power, ought to have removed all prejudice and unbelief

from the hearts of the Jews. By raising Lazarus from the dead, Christ had given a proof of his divinity. Through him the Father had been revealed to believers and unbelievers.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 19th October 1897, 'Words of comfort'*)

Notice what is said to have been proved here, that is that in the Son, “the Father had been revealed”. Note also that this was to “believers and unbelievers”. With respect to the words of Jesus to Thomas found in John 14:6 Ellen White wrote

“Jesus would have him [Thomas] understand that the Father had been revealed in the Son – in his teachings that reflected the wisdom of Heaven, and in his works that showed the power of Omnipotence.

Philip perceiving but dimly the meaning of his Lord said to him, "Lord, show us the Father and it sufficeth us." Philip, and also the other disciples were filled with apprehension and doubt, and they desired that Jesus should give them a last convincing proof of his divinity by showing them the Father. Christ appeared in the disguise of humanity as a servant. But those who were partakers of his divine nature had eyes to perceive his divinity, the glory of which had upon special occasions, flashed through his human disguise, revealing indeed the Father” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 17th January 1878, 'Christ's promise to his disciples'*)

The divinity of Christ was the divinity of the Father. It was this **relationship** that proved the divinity of Christ not that He was omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent.

Summary

In a summary of this and the previous two sections, we have seen that according to what we have been told through the spirit of prophecy, the divine Son of God, in the incarnation, laid aside His divine prerogatives to the independent use of the powers of deity. We have seen very clearly that although in His divinity He did possess these powers, also that He did exercise them, this was done by Him **accessing them through the Holy Spirit**, through faith in His Father.

This is historic Seventh-day Adventism. It was what the Seventh-day Adventist Church believed whilst Ellen White was alive. When it became trinitarian, the concept of **how** Christ achieved salvation for mankind became changed. We can see therefore that the trinity doctrine is not simply about whether Christ is divine or not, neither is it just over the personhood of the Holy Spirit but is all to do with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We need therefore to get it right concerning what we believe happened at the incarnation else we shall not only have a distorted view of the Godhead but also of salvation.

To the author of these notes it seems that within Seventh-day Adventism today, the object of the exercise is to prove both the divinity of Christ and the personhood of the Holy Spirit. Gone it seems is any emphasis on what Christ

achieved by becoming human, meaning that it was ***in His human nature*** that He accomplished salvation. Gone it seems also is the risk that He took in becoming human. Gone also is the love that God showed toward humanity in taking that risk. This is well and truly eclipsed by trinitarian theology.

We shall now move on to section 20. This is where we shall take a look at the non-trinitarianism and the anti-trinitarianism within Seventh-day Adventism.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section twenty

Non-trinitarianism and anti-trinitarianism within Seventh-day Adventism

At this juncture it would seem appropriate to take a look at some of the anti-trinitarian and non-trinitarian remarks made by the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism. This will help to substantiate the claims that are made in this study that during the time of Ellen White's ministry, Seventh-day Adventists were strictly non-trinitarian. Before we do this it is important to keep in mind that within this study, the terms anti-trinitarian and non-trinitarian are used in two different ways although they are both tantamount to being opposed to the trinity doctrine.

The terminology non-trinitarian (or non-trinitarianism) is used to denote any belief that is not in accordance with the prime thrust of the trinity doctrine, which is that there are three coeternal personalities all subsisting in the one indivisible substance (the one being) of God. The latter is trinity essentialness. The term anti-trinitarian (or anti-trinitarianism) is used to denote the actual speaking out against this teaching.

Very interesting is a letter concerning the trinity doctrine that was received from a reader of the *Review and Herald* as early as 1856. An extract was published saying

"BRO. DANIEL BAKER writes from Tioga Co., Pa.: "After contending against the Trinitarian doctrine and all sectarian disciplines for about sixteen years, and against the doctrine of the soul's immortality eight years, and for the seventh-day Sabbath three years, it is truly refreshing to find in your paper the same views proved by Scripture. (Review and Herald, March 13th 1856, Extracts from letters)"

This reveals that from its very beginnings, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was a decidedly non-trinitarian denomination. It shows also that we were a people who were not afraid to speak out against the trinity doctrine. By the other denominations - which in the main were trinitarian - these objections were nothing less than an anathema. This is one of the reasons why we were termed a cult.

In a term paper he produced in 1969 regarding the rejection and acceptance of the trinity doctrine within Seventh-day Adventism, Russell Holt wrote concerning

the time period of the early pioneers (this was up to 1881, the year of the death of James White)

“A survey of other Adventist writers during these years reveals, that to a man, they rejected the trinity, yet, with equal unanimity they upheld the divinity of Christ.” (*Russell Holt, “The doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination: Its rejection and acceptance”, A term paper for Dr. Mervyn Maxwell, 1969*)

Holt then wrote of the pioneers’ beliefs

“To reject the trinity is not necessarily to strip the Saviour of His divinity. Indeed, certain Adventist writers felt that it was the trinitarians who filled the role of degrading Christ’s divine nature.” (*Ibid*)

Holt’s conclusions we have noted previously. This is that Seventh-day Adventists have always believed in the divinity of Christ, even though they were not trinitarians.

From the beginning

We shall now take a look at some of the anti-trinitarian statements made by our pioneers. This will be done without additional comment.

This following list must not be considered exhaustive but rather samples from certain of our pioneers who **spoke out against** the trinity doctrine. Certainly they were not as Froom purported in his *Movement of Destiny* just the minority personal views of the few. We shall be taking a close look at this latter named book in section fifty-two. These are some of the anti-trinitarian statements made in our publications

J. N. Andrews

“The doctrine of the Trinity which was established in the church by the council of Nice A. D. 325.

This doctrine destroys the personality of God and his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. The infamous, measures by which it was forced upon the church which appear upon the pages of ecclesiastical history might well cause every believer in that doctrine to blush.” (*J. N. Andrews, Review and Herald, March 6th 1855, ‘The Fall of Babylon’*)

Uriah Smith

“The doctrine called the trinity claiming that God is without form or parts; that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, the three are one person, is another [false doctrine].” (*Uriah Smith, Review and Herald, July 10th 1856, ‘Communications’*)

M. E. Cornell

“Protestants and Catholics are so nearly united in sentiment, that it is not difficult to conceive how Protestants may make an image to the Beast. The mass of Protestants believe with Catholics in the Trinity, immortality of the soul, consciousness of the dead, rewards and punishments at death, the endless torture of the wicked, inheritance of the saints beyond the skies, sprinkling for baptism and the PAGAN SUNDAY for the Sabbath; all of which is contrary to the spirit and letter of the new testament. Surely there is between the mother and daughters, a striking family resemblance.” (*M. E. Cornell 'Facts for the Times' page 76 1858*)

D. W. Hull

“The inconsistent positions held by many in regard to the Trinity, as it is termed, has, no doubt, been the prime cause of many other errors.” (*D. W. Hull, Review and Herald, November 10th 1859, 'Bible doctrine of the divinity of Christ'*)

J. N. Loughborough

“Question 1. “What serious objection is there to the doctrine of the trinity?”

Answer. “There are many objections which we might urge, but on account of our limited space we shall reduce them to the three following: 1. It is contrary to common sense. 2. It is contrary to scripture. 3. Its origin is Pagan and fabulous.” (*Review and Herald, November 5th 1861 'Questions for Brother Loughborough'*)

W. C. Gage

“Having noticed some of the evil effects of the doctrine of immortal soulism, and the errors growing out of it, we propose to refer briefly to another erroneous belief, equally popular and quite as unscriptural, if not fully as mischievous in its tendency, namely Trinitarianism.” (*W. C. Gage, Review and Herald, August 29th 1865, 'Popular errors and their fruits No.5'*)

H. C. Blanchard

“We are well aware that there has been much disputation on the subject of the sonship of Christ in the religious world, some claiming that he is nothing but a man as to origin, being only about eighteen hundred years old; others that he is the very and eternal God, the second person in the trinity. This last view is by far the most widely entertained among religious denominations. We are disposed to think that the truth lies between these views.” (*H. C. Blanchard, Review and Herald, September 10th 1867, 'The Son'*)

Joseph Bates

“My parents were members of long standing in the Congregational church, with all of their converted children thus far, and anxiously hoped that we would also unite with them. But they embraced some points in their faith that I could not understand. I will name two only: their mode of baptism, and doctrine of the trinity.” (*Joseph Bates ‘The Autobiography of Joseph Bates’ page 204, chapter 17, 1868*)

R. F. Cottrell

“This has been a popular doctrine and regarded as orthodox ever since the bishop of Rome was elevated to the popedom on the strength of it. It is accounted dangerous heresy to reject it; but each person is permitted to explain the doctrine in his own way. All seem to think they must hold it, but each has perfect liberty to take his own way to reconcile its contradictory propositions; and hence a multitude of views are held concerning it by its friends, all of them orthodox, I suppose, as long as they nominally assent to the doctrine.

For myself, I have never felt called upon to explain it, nor to adopt and defend it, neither have I ever preached against it. But I probably put as high an estimation on the Lord Jesus Christ as those who call themselves Trinitarians. This is the first time I have ever taken the pen to say anything concerning this doctrine.” (*R. F. Cottrell, Review and Herald 1st June 1869 ‘The Doctrine of the Trinity’*)

James White

“The inexplicable Trinity that makes the Godhead three in one and one in three, is bad enough; but that ultra Unitarianism that makes Christ inferior to the Father is worse. Did God say to an inferior, “Let us make man in our image?” (*James White, Review and Herald November 29th article ‘Christ Equal with God’ 1877*)

D. M. Canright

“And then the Bible never uses the phrases, "trinity," "triune God," "three in one," " the holy three," "God the Holy Ghost," etc. But it does emphatically say there is only one God, the Father. And every argument of the Trinitarian to prove three Gods in one person, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, all of them of one substance, and every way equal to each other, and all three forming but one, contradicts itself, contradicts reason, and contradicts the Bible.” (*D. M. Canright, Review and Herald, August 29th 1878, ‘The personality of God’*)

A. J. Dennis

“What a contradiction of terms is found in the language of a trinitarian creed: “In unity of this Godhead are three persons, of one substance,

power, and eternity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.” There are many things that are mysterious, written in the word of God, but we may safely presume the Lord never calls upon us to believe impossibilities. But creeds often do.” (A. J. Dennis, *‘Signs of the Times’* May 22nd 1879, page 162 article *‘One God’*)

J. H. Kellogg

“Our reviewer seems to be somewhat displeased at our reference to the doctrine of the trinity, a doctrine which is confessedly in the highest degree unphilosophical, unreasonable, and unreconcilable with common sense, which leads us to conclude that we were not incorrect in supposing him to be a believer in the doctrine. Our only reason for mentioning the doctrine of the trinity was to remind our reviewer that so long as he held a view so utterly at variance with logical reasoning, he ought to have at least a small amount of liberality for other views in which there may at first seem to exist slight difficulties.” (J. H. Kellogg, *Review and Herald*, August 19th 1880, *‘The soul - no 2. Reply to Dr. Kellogg’s rejoinder’*)

J. H. Waggoner

“Many theologians really think that the Atonement, in respect to its dignity and efficacy, rests upon the doctrine of a trinity. But we fail to see any connection between the two. To the contrary, the advocates of that doctrine really fall into the difficulty which they seem anxious to avoid. Their difficulty consists in this: They take the denial of a trinity to be equivalent to a denial of the divinity of Christ. Were that the case, we should cling to the doctrine of a trinity as tenaciously as any can; but it is not the case. They who have read our remarks on the death of the Son of God know that we firmly believe in the divinity of Christ; but we cannot accept the idea of a trinity, as it is held by Trinitarians, without giving up our claim on the dignity of the sacrifice made for our redemption.” (J. H. Waggoner, *‘The Atonement in Light of Nature and Revelation’*, 1884 Edition, chapter *‘Doctrine of a Trinity Subversive of the Atonement’*)

Loyd Caldwell

“But since in Roman Catholic theology, Christ is at once God and Holy Spirit, the three being absolutely one and the same (and yet three!), are there not as many of the Trinity as of Christ? (Pardon, kind reader, the seeming irreverence of these questions, but Rome forces these doctrines to the front, and teaches them to children and adults alike. Let those answer who are responsible for such monstrous, senseless, and utterly impossible doctrines)” (Loyd Caldwell, *Review and Herald*, December 11th 1888, *‘Man’s perversions of God’s memorials’*)

Judson Washburn

“The doctrine of the Trinity is a cruel heathen monstrosity, removing Jesus

from his true position of Divine Savior and Mediator.” (*Judson Washburn, letter to General Conference 1939*)

These statements are just some of the many anti-trinitarian comments that were made by some of our pioneers. Needless to say, during their time, which was the time of Ellen White’s ministry, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was a decidedly non-trinitarian denomination.

Note in passing that the final quotation was taken from a letter written to the General Conference in 1939 by a man who although retired at that time, had been a very well known Seventh-day Adventist minister and evangelist. He had been baptised by James White and knew Ellen White personally. He kept her informed of how the work was progressing wherever it took him. If anyone knew what was taught by Seventh-day Adventists it was Judson Washburn. He knew our message from beginning to end.

Washburn complained bitterly that the trinity doctrine was then “seeking” to find its way into Seventh-day Adventism. This shows very clearly that by 1939, trinitarianism was far from being established within Seventh-day Adventism. This conclusion is also in keeping with Merlin D. Burt’s analysis of the demise of non-trinitarianism in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In the preface to his paper he wrote

“One of the remarkable aspects of the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the development of its position of the trinity and the deity of Christ. These doctrines did not become normative in the church until the middle of the twentieth century”. (*Merlin D. Burt, 1996, Preface to ‘Demise of Semi-Arianism and anti-trinitarianism in Adventist theology, 1888-1957’*)

We shall remind ourselves of these and other similar statements as we progress through this study. They are very clearly relevant to our understanding of this trinity debate.

Non-trinitarianism (or semi-Arianism)

During the time of our pioneers, also within our own publications, there are countless numbers of statements that are tantamount to being non-trinitarian. These beliefs today are commonly said to be semi-Arian. This is the belief that sometime in eternity past, so far back that it is beyond the comprehension of the human mind, the Son was begotten of (meaning came out of or was brought forth of the Father’s own substance. This differs from the original and orthodox trinity doctrine. This is inasmuch as in the latter, the Son of God is said to be **eternally** begotten of the Father and is of (belonging to) the same substance as the Father (the one being of God).

This orthodox trinity belief - because it says that the Son is eternally begotten of the Father - maintains that there never was a time when the Son was not begotten. This means that there never will be a time when He is not begotten.

This is the same as saying that there never has been a time when the Son has not had an existence, also that there never will be a time when He will not have an existence. In other words, in the latter theology, the Son has never ceased to have been or will ever cease to be.

This same belief also emphasises that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit all belong to one indivisible substance of God - the latter of which is often referred to as the one being of God. This describes the original and orthodox trinity doctrine but it must be noted that this is not the same as the trinity doctrine as is believed and taught today within Seventh-day Adventism. This is because their rendition of it says that all three personalities are all unbegotten, meaning that none are sourced of the others. Nevertheless, Seventh-day Adventists still say, as do orthodoxy, that all three personalities make up the one indivisible being of God. This is what makes their teaching truly trinitarian. If it did not say this then it would not be trinitarian.

As far as the non-trinitarian remarks within early Seventh-day Adventism are concerned, a vast amount could be quoted, suffice to say for now, as an example of them all, we shall quote those made by Ellet Waggoner. This is as they are written in his book *Christ and His Righteousness*.

As most Seventh-day Adventists will realise, Waggoner was the main proponent of the righteousness by faith message at the famous 1888 Minneapolis Conference. His latter named book is said to depict that message. This publication came off our press in 1890 and was circulated amongst our people. This reveals what was then the accepted and united faith of Seventh-day Adventists.

Ellen White was present at the Minneapolis General Conference. This means that she knew exactly what Waggoner had preached. This is the message she said that at that time (1888), God had sent to His people.

A few extracts from Waggoner's book should be sufficient to show exactly what it was that in the 1890's constituted the non-trinitarian faith that throughout the time of the ministry of Ellen White was the standard and accepted faith of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. These extracts, when compared with the beliefs of the trinitarianism that Seventh-day Adventists hold today, together constitute the startling change that concerning Christ, William Johnsson says has taken place regarding our denominational beliefs (see section ten). In his book *Christ and His Righteousness*, Waggoner made such statements as

“The Word was “in the beginning”. The mind of man cannot grasp the ages that are spanned in this phrase.” (*E. J. Waggoner, 'Christ and His Righteousness', page 9, 1890*)

He then said with respect to **how** the Son of God was begotten

“It is not given to men to know when or how the Son was begotten; but we know that He was the Divine Word, not simply before He came to this earth to die, but even before the world was created.....We know that Christ “proceeded forth and come 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.” (*Ibid*)

Here Waggoner denies the trinity doctrine - no matter what version it may be. That is because all versions say that the three personalities are coeval meaning of the same age (co-eternal). If any belief does not say this it would not be a trinity doctrine (see section six). On pages 21- 22 Waggoner confirms

“There was a time when Christ proceeded forth and came from God, from the bosom of the Father (John 8:42 and 1:18) but that time was so far back in the days of eternity that to finite comprehension it is practically without beginning. But the point is that Christ is a begotten Son and not a created subject.” (*Ibid pages 21-22*)

With regards to the identity of the Son of God, Waggoner wrote

“This name [God] was not given to Christ in consequence of some great achievement but it is His by right of inheritance Speaking of the power and greatness of Christ, the writer to the Hebrews says that He is made so much better than the angels, because “He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.” Heb. 1:4. A son always rightfully takes the name of the father; and Christ, as “the only begotten Son of God,” has rightfully the same name. A son, also, is, to a greater or less degree, a reproduction of the father; he has to some extent the features and personal characteristics of his father; not perfectly, because there is no perfect reproduction among mankind. But there is no imperfection in God, or in any of His works, and so Christ is the “express image” of the Father’s person. Heb. 1:3. As the Son of the self - existent God, He has by nature all the attributes of Deity.” (*Ibid*)

Reiterating the point that Christ is a begotten Son and not created Waggoner said

“But the point is that Christ is a begotten Son and not a created subject. He has by inheritance a more excellent name than the angels. He is “a Son over His own house.” Heb. 1:4; 3:6. And since He is the only-begotten Son of God, He is of the very substance and nature of God, and possesses by birth all the attributes of God; for the Father was pleased that His Son should be the express image of His person, the brightness of His glory, and filled with all the fullness of the Godhead. So He has “life in Himself;” He possesses immortality in His own right, and can confer immortality on others. Life inheres in Him, so that it cannot be taken from Him; but, having voluntarily laid it down, He can take it again.” (*Ibid page 22*)

Waggoner considered Christ to be no one less than Jehovah. At that time, this was the Seventh-day Adventist denominational faith. They believed that Christ was God but they did not explain it in terms of trinitarianism. He said

“Christ “is in the bosom of the Father;” being by nature the very substance of God and having life in Himself, He is properly called Jehovah, the self existing one and is thus styled in Jer. 23:56, where it is said that the righteous Branch, who shall execute judgment and justice in the earth, shall be known by the name of Jehovah-tsidekenu--THE LORD, OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.” (*Ibid page 23-24*)

Waggoner made sure that there was not seen in his message a confusion of personalities. He said

“A word of caution may be necessary here. Let no one imagine that we would exalt Christ at the expense of the Father or would ignore the Father. That cannot be, for their interests are one. We honor the Father in honoring the Son. We are mindful of Paul's words, that "to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him" (1 Cor. 8:6); just as we have already quoted, that it was by Him that God made the worlds. (*Ibid page 19*)

He then added with respect to God the Father being the source of all things including the Son

“All things proceed ultimately from God, the Father; even Christ Himself proceeded and came forth from the Father, but it has pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell, and that He should be the direct, immediate Agent in every act of creation. Our object in this investigation is to set forth Christ's rightful position of equality with the Father, in order that His power to redeem may be the better appreciated.” (*Ibid*)

As did Ellen White and the other pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism, Waggoner maintained that Christ was equal with God. They did not depict Him as a lesser being or a lesser god than God the Father. This is very important for us to realise. This is because the trinitarians will say to the contrary, meaning that they will attempt to depict the non-trinitarians as teaching that Christ is some sort of demigod (part or half god). As a matter of passing interest here, note the remarks that Waggoner made concerning the Holy Spirit. He said

“Finally, we know the Divine unity of the Father and the Son from the fact that both have the same Spirit. Paul, after saying that they that are in the flesh cannot please God, continues: “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” Rom. 8:9. Here we find that the Holy Spirit is both the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ.” (*Ibid page 23*)

Waggoner's theology at Minneapolis was decidedly non-trinitarian. It was also the preponderant view of our church at large. This was not only up to 1890's but also during the **entire time** of Ellen White's ministry. It was also the same during the decades following her death, hence Judson Washburn's objections to the General Conference regarding the trinity doctrine in 1939 (see above). We shall see more of this as we go through this section.

Waggoner's message fully supported by Ellen White

During the three years following the 1888 Minneapolis Conference, Ellen White, along with Waggoner and Jones (another of the main preachers at the conference), extensively toured America. This was prior to the church splitting them up by sending Ellen White to Australia and Waggoner to England. As well as attending local churches together, they also attended camp meetings, weeks of prayer meetings and revivals etc. As Woodrow Whidden in his Ministry article *Salvation pilgrimage* put it

“Though no action was taken at Minneapolis, the opposition to Waggoner and Jones was so severe that Ellen White teamed up with Jones and Waggoner, mounting an intense campaign of revivals across North America. During the next three years they toured widely, emphasizing the primacy of justification by faith alone as the bedrock of any vibrant Christian experience.” (*Woodrow Whidden, 'Salvation Pilgrimage, The Adventist journey into justification by faith and trinitarianism'*)

Very interesting is that nowhere concerning Waggoner's views regarding the relationship of God and His Son, or his views on the Holy Spirit, is there any record of the Seventh-day Adventist Church ever objecting to his teachings. Even more interestingly, neither can be found any objections made by Ellen White. All that can be found are objections as to how Waggoner regarded the law (particularly in Galatians 3:24) in comparison to how a person is saved (justification by faith). Needless to say, these objections did not come from Ellen White but from some of the other delegates.

Having said that, as we have seen in section thirteen, Waggoner and Ellen White did not see eye-to-eye regarding the incarnation. We saw that Waggoner believed that Christ could not sin (impossible to sin) whilst Ellen White said that He could have sinned.

Ellen White maintained though that via these two young men (Waggoner and Jones), **God Himself had sent a message to the Seventh-day Adventist Church**. When Ellen White said this she had been called of God to the prophetic office **for over 50 years**. The approval was printed in pamphlet form in a special testimony to the Battle Creek Church and included in Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers (see page 91). This was in 1895. Here is what she said

“The Lord in his great mercy sent a most precious message to his people through Elders Waggoner and Jones. This message was to bring more

prominently before the world the uplifted Saviour, the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. It presented justification through faith in the Surety; it invited the people to receive the righteousness of Christ, which is made manifest in obedience to all the commandments of God. Many had lost sight of Jesus. They needed to have their eyes directed to his divine person, his merits, and his changeless love for the human family. All power is given into his hands, that he may dispense rich gifts unto men, imparting the priceless gift of his own righteousness to the helpless human agent.” (Ellen G. White, *Testimony to Battle Creek 1st May 1895 written from Hobart, Tasmania, Australia to O. A. Olsen, MR 1100 Vol. 14, also Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers page 91*)

First of all note the date of this communication. It was 1st May 1895. This was just previous to her making her ‘begotten’ and ‘made’ statements concerning Christ (30th May and July 8th 1895). We shall look at these again in this section. She concluded

“This is the message that God commanded to be given to the world. It is the third angel's message, which is to be proclaimed with a loud voice, and attended with the outpouring of his Spirit in a large measure.” (*Ibid*)

Ellen White endorsed Waggoner’s Minneapolis message. She even said that it was “the message that God commanded to be given to the world”. She also said that it was the “third angel’s message” that would be attended with the “outpouring” of God’s Holy Spirit “in a large measure”. Note too that she said that many needed their attention to be drawn to Christ’s “divine person”. If Ellen White had any problem with Ellet Waggoner’s views, particularly concerning Christ, here was the place to say it but she did not. She praised his message.

At the time of the Minneapolis Conference (1888), Waggoner’s remarks concerning the relationship that existed between God, His Son and the Holy Spirit was the denominational faith of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This view was strictly non-trinitarian. We shall see a denominational confession of this belief later in this section. First though we shall see that Waggoner’s Godhead beliefs were in complete harmony with the spirit of prophecy.

Waggoner in step with the spirit of prophecy

Many have said that as the 1890’s drew on, Ellen White’s beliefs became out of step with the theology of the other pioneers but this is a seriously mistaken conclusion. This is especially as far as the begotten Son concept is concerned. In his book *Christ and His Righteousness*, Ellet Waggoner had written

“It is true that there are many sons of God, but Christ is the “only begotten Son of God,” and therefore the Son of God in a sense in which no other being ever was or ever can be. The angels are sons of God, as was Adam (Job 38:7; Luke 3:38), by creation; Christians are the sons of God by adoption (Rom. 8:14, 15), but Christ is the Son of God by birth. The writer to

the Hebrews further shows that the position of the Son of God is not one to which Christ has been elevated but that it is one which He has by right" (*E. J. Waggoner, 'Christ and His Righteousness', page 12, 1890*)

Here is Waggoner's reasoning of Christ as the begotten Son of God. Notice his words very carefully. He said that the angels were sons of God "by creation", Christians were sons of God "by adoption" but "Christ is the Son of God by birth". This was his 1888 message.

Now notice what Ellen White said 7 years later. This is when she was in Australia. It is almost identical to what was said by Waggoner. During the summer of 1895 (this was also the very same month that she wrote the above letter from Australia endorsing Waggoner's message at Minneapolis), Ellen White wrote in the *Signs of the Times*

"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." (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 30th May 1895, 'Christ our complete salvation'*)

Ellen White is expressing here the very same thought as did Waggoner at Minneapolis. Of that there is no doubt. As many people know, Ellen White had very little formal education. She even said herself that she had difficulty expressing in writing what God had shown her. This is why at times she used the words of other authors. Why I say this is because when comparing Ellen White's statement with the one Waggoner quoted in his book *Christ and His Righteousness*, it is very difficult not to spot the very close similarities. The only real difference was that Ellen White refrained from using the word *birth*. She simply said begotten. As we also noted in the previous section, Ellen White also wrote just 6 weeks later

"The Eternal Father, the unchangeable one, gave his only begotten Son, tore from his bosom Him who was made in the express image of his person, and sent him down to earth to reveal how greatly he loved mankind." (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald 9th July 1895 'The Duty of the Minister and the People'*)

Here, instead of using the word begotten, Ellen White uses the word "made". This was not meant by her to mean created. We know this because it would have gone against the many other statements she made that said that the Son was God essentially although she repeatedly made it very clear that as a personality He was not the infinite God (God the Father).

At the time (1895), this view as expressed through the spirit of prophecy. was

the accepted view within Seventh-day Adventism. Certainly it was the same as said by Waggoner at Minneapolis. If Ellen White or Waggoner had said any different, it would have been going against what Seventh-day Adventists then believed. It was even the same up to and after the death of Ellen White (1915).

Dudley Canright – Christ the divine Son of God

Much could be said concerning Dudley Marvin Canright (1840-1919) but space here is limited. He appears to have been quite an unstable person. He was ordained to the Seventh-day Adventist ministry in 1865 but became discouraged and left a number of times only to return later. In February 1887 he finally left the church to become a Baptist minister.

All the time that he was a Seventh-day Adventist, he was very much against the trinity doctrine but on becoming a member of the Baptist Church (1887) he professed to believe it. It appears that he spent the remainder of his life writing against the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He wrote a very popular book called *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced*. It had at least 14 separate printings. Dudley Canright is said to have been a very powerful preacher. He was also an accomplished writer. He wrote much in the *Review and Herald*. In 1878, in an article called *The Personality of God*, Canright wrote

“The Bible says nothing about the trinity. God never mentions it, Jesus never named it, the apostles never did. "Now men dare to call God, Trinity, Triune, etc.” (*D. M. Canright, Review and Herald, August 29th 1878, 'The Personality of God'*)

Canright of course is correct. No one will dispute this fact. Nowhere in the Scriptures or in the writings of Ellen White is God spoken of as in the trinity doctrine. This is why this teaching must always remain an assumed doctrine. See section four for details. After saying that God is the source of all life and immortality, he also says

“Even Jesus Christ, the Son of God, derives his existence and his life from the Father, for so he himself says, "As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me." John 6:57. "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself." John 5:26. This statement is unequivocal. The Father has life in himself, and in his great love for his Son he bestows the same gift upon him; but it will be noticed that the Father is the one from whom the gift came.

In harmony with this, the apostle says, "But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are are [sic] all things, and we by him." 1 Cor. 8:6. How carefully Paul distinguishes between the Father and the Son. He says, "The Father, of whom are all things," and "Jesus Christ, by whom are all things." The Father is the source of everything. Jesus is the one through whom all things

are done. All the authority, the glory, and the power of Christ he received from his Father. It was given to him, he had it not in himself.” (*Ibid*)

Canright concluded (this was with respect to Jesus saying "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou has sent.")

“We must know the Father as the only true God. Then there is no true God besides the Father. But we must also know his Son Jesus Christ, whom he has sent. How simple and plain is this doctrine, and how abundantly sustained by the Holy Bible.” (*Ibid*)

This is the faith that was once held by Seventh-day Adventists. It was the preponderant denominational faith.

A preponderant belief

At the time of the 1888 Minneapolis Conference, also for decades beyond, it cannot be denied that the preponderant belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church was that the Father was **unbegotten**, the Son was **begotten** and that the Holy Spirit **proceeded**. To this there were no objections from anyone, not even from Ellen White. In principle, meaning as far as they go here, these concepts are in accordance with the creeds that came out of the ecumenical councils of Nicaea (AD 325) and Constantinople (AD 381).

In contrast to the beliefs of early Seventh-day Adventism, these creeds maintain that the Son is **eternally** begotten of the Father and is **belonging** to the one substance (the one being) of God. The latter was not believed then by the non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists. This is no more than it is believe by them today. This is what makes them non-trinitarian. They realise that the Bible does not reveal as such.

Neither was there any objection the following year (1889) to Waggoner’s theology of the Godhead. This was when on behalf of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and published in the *Signs of the Times* there was a series of articles written by him defending the divinity of Christ. We shall look at these in the next section. In like fashion there were no objections the following year (1890). This was when his Minneapolis message was published in book form (*Christ and His Righteousness*). This is the book from which we have just quoted. We can see from this that Waggoner’s concept of the Godhead was the common belief within Seventh-day Adventism.

Going back five years **prior** to the Minneapolis Conference, we can see from our publications that this begotten concept of Christ was then our denominational faith. Under the heading “**Christ not a created being**”, a reader asked a question. That question was

“Will you please favor me with those scriptures which plainly say that Christ

is a created being? (*Question No. 96, Review and Herald, April 17th 1883, The commentary, Scripture questions, 'Answers by W. H. Littlejohn'*)

The person who asked the question was only identified by the initials J. C. so we do not know who he was but what we can say is that it is more than likely that he (or she) was not a Seventh-day Adventist. I say this because it was commonly taught within Seventh-day Adventism that Christ was equal with God (begotten of Him) not that He was a created being. W. H. Littlejohn who answered this question said

“You are mistaken in supposing that S. D. Adventists teach that Christ was ever created. They believe, on the contrary, that he was "begotten" of the Father, and that he can properly be called God and worshiped as such.” (*Ibid*)

This indeed in 1883 was the preponderant belief of Seventh-day Adventists. This was 5 years prior to the Minneapolis Conference. We can see why Waggoner's reasoning at the conference went without objection from anyone, including Ellen White. Littlejohn continued

“They [Seventh-day Adventists] believe, also, that the worlds, and everything which is, was created by Christ in conjunction with the Father. They believe, however, that somewhere in the eternal ages of the past there was a point at which Christ came into existence. They think that it is necessary that God should have antedated Christ in his being, in order that Christ could have been begotten of him, and sustain to him the relation of son.” (*Ibid*)

Again this was bottom-line Seventh-day Adventism, not only in 1883 but also all during the time of Ellen White's ministry. Littlejohn continued

“They hold to the distinct personality of the Father and Son, rejecting as absurd that feature of Trinitarianism which insists that God, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit are three persons, and yet but one person.” (*Ibid*)

Some trinitarians will say that this is not what they really believe but if this is said then it is also being said that their trinity God is not a person. Littlejohn then said in confirmation of what was believed by Seventh-day Adventists as far as the oneness between God and Christ is concerned

“S. D - Adventists hold that God and Christ are one in the sense that Christ prayed that his disciples might be one; i. e., one in spirit, purpose, and labor.” (*Ibid*)

We shall see in a later section that this was much the same as was said by Ellen White but to quote her here would make this section too lengthy. Very interestingly, Littlejohn ended his answer by saying

“See "Fundamental Principles of S. D. Adventists," published at this Office. Price, 4 cts.” (*Ibid*)

At that time there appears to have been a tract for sale detailing the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. This detailed their beliefs concerning Christ. As yet I have not managed to locate it so it cannot be quoted from here.

The Captain of our Salvation

In 1886, Uriah Smith, as editor of the *Review and Herald*, published a book called *The Captain of our Salvation*. This book was written by Charles Wesley Stone, secretary to the General Conference for a year, also a teacher and editor. Ordained in 1879, Stone wrote his book in 1883. This was whilst teaching in public school at Battle Creek. He also taught business and singing at Battle Creek College. Unfortunately, the year he wrote his book, he died tragically in a railroad accident but Smith regarded it as worthy of publication so 3 years later he published it. At the 1883 Vermont annual conference session it was stated in the minutes

“Whereas, By the mysterious Providence of God in that dreadful calamity, - the accident on the Borne, Watertown, and Ogdensburg R. B. at Carlyon, N. Y., on the evening of July 27, 1883, - our hearts are sorely stricken with sorrow by the sudden death of our beloved brother, Eld. C. W. Stone;

Resolved, That this Conference has sustained a great loss; and that we tender to the family and friends our heartfelt sympathy in this their great bereavement.” (*Review and Herald, September 25th 1883 'Vermont Conference'*)

As of yet I have not been able to locate Stone's book to read it for myself but I have found a quote from it that I will now share with you. On page 17 he wrote

“The Word then is Christ. The text speaks of His origin. He is the only begotten of the Father. Just how he came into existence the Bible does not inform us any more definitely; but by this expression and several of a similar kind in the Scriptures we may believe that Christ came into existence in a manner different from that in which other beings first appeared; That He sprang from the Father's being in a way not necessary for us to understand.” (*C. W. Stone, The Captain of our Salvation, page 17, 1886*)

From mentions Charles Stone in his *Movement of Destiny*. Under the heading: *Stone - Christ Came Into "Existence" From Nonexistence* he says

“In an otherwise helpful printed discourse, Captain of Our Salvation, in chapter II ("Who Is Christ?") Stone takes us back to "the distant past" (p. 12), to "a period of time before creation" (p. 15) - to "that time when no being existed beside himself ["the Son of the living God"] and God the Father" (p. 15). He then declares, "Christ existed before any other being

save God the Father" (ibid.). Rightly denying that Christ was Himself a "created being" (p. 16), Stone refers to Christ as the "efficient cause" of the creation of all things." (*LeRoy Froom, Movement of Destiny, chapter ten, 'Amplified "Atonement" Volume Hastens Confrontation', page 179, 1971*)

What we see here once again is the begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventists. It is that Christ came forth of the bosom of God therefore not only is He the Son of God but also God Himself. Note Froom says that Stone, on page 16 of his book, "Rightly" denies that Christ is a "created being", also that all things were created by Him. Everything that Stone said here was exactly the same as was to be said two years later at Minneapolis by Ellet Waggoner (see above). Froom then adds

"Stone then turns to Christ's "origin" (p. 17), and says, "Just how he came into existence, the Bible does not inform us" (ibid.). The conclusion seems inescapable that, according to Stone, since Christ had an "origin," or beginning, and at some point came into "existence," there must inevitably have been a time previously when He was not in personal existence. That, of course, is simply a form of the Arian position that Smith at that time likewise held." (*Ibid*)

We know that this was more than the personal views of Charles Stone and Uriah Smith. It was then the preponderant faith of Seventh-day Adventists. It was this faith that two years later (1888) Ellet Waggoner preached at Minneapolis (see above). This was the message that by saying it was from God that Ellen White endorsed. Then, after quoting from the above passage (page 17) from Stone's book, Froom wrote

"Stone again refers back to the time, "before creation" (p. 17), when "there are two beings, the Father and the Son, both of whom are called God" (p. 19; also p. 40—"only two beings in the universe"). He then rightly shows that Christ was the "Creator" (p. 20), Lawgiver (p. 39), Mediator (ch.III), Redeemer and Leader, and Inspirer of the prophets (p. 72). This latter part was all true and well stated." (*Ibid*)

Here again, very well stated, is the one-time begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This was as it was throughout the time of Ellen White's ministry.

In an article written concerning the death of Charles Stone, George Butler, who was then the General Conference President said concerning the previous days funeral service

"We should judge that twenty- five hundred people were present, showing the regard of the citizens of this place for him. He had been in and out among them as a teacher and as a minister. ... We have known Brother Stone for some ten or twelve years past. His ability was first class in many directions. His musical talent was perhaps superior to that of any one in our ranks" (*George Butler, Review and Herald, August 7th 1883, 'A mysterious*

providence')

Butler later said of Stone

“He had a great love for the truth, and was a firm believer in every part of it. He was a man of moral courage to express his convictions, whether others favored his views or not.” (*Ibid*)

This reveals that in his beliefs, Stone was not out of harmony with the rest of Seventh-day Adventism but totally in agreement with them. The publishing of this book shows that what was said in it was acceptable to Seventh-day Adventists. To read the entirety of Butler’s write up concerning Charles Stone, go to the following link (page 504)

<http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Periodicals/RH/RH18830807-V60-32.pdf>

A beginning of days

Within pre-trinity Seventh-day Adventism, it was the preponderant belief that the Son of God, as a personality, had a beginning of days. This can be seen in such statements as the following. James White said (this was the very year that he died)

“In his exaltation, before he humbled himself to the work of redeeming lost sinners, Christ thought it not robbery to be equal with God, because, in the work of creation and the institution of law to govern created intelligences, he was equal with the Father. The Father was greater than the Son in that he was first. The Son was equal with the Father in that he had received all things from the Father.” (*James White, Review and Herald, 4th January 1881, ‘The Mind of Christ’*)

J. N. Andrews, also an anti-trinitarian said of those not having beginning of days

“Even the angels of God have all had beginning of days, so that they would be as much excluded by this language as the members of the human family. And as to the Son of God, he would be excluded also, for he had God for his Father, and did, at some point in the eternity of the past, have beginning of days. So that if we use Paul’s language in an absolute sense, it would be impossible to find but one being in the universe, and that is God the Father, who is without father, or mother, or descent, or beginning of days, or end of life.” (*J. N. Andrews, Review and Herald, 7th September 1869, ‘Melchisedec’*)

Uriah Smith also held exactly the same view. In his *Daniel and the Revelation* he wrote

‘The Scriptures nowhere speak of Christ as a created being, but on the contrary plainly state that he was begotten of the Father. (See remarks of

Rev. 3:14, where it is shown that Christ is not a created being. But while as the Son he does not possess a coeternity of past existence with the Father, the beginning of his existence, as the begotten of the Father, antedates the entire work of creation, in relation to which he stands as joint creator with God. John 1:3; Heb 1:2.” (U. Smith, *Thoughts on the Book of Daniel and the Revelation*, p. 430. 1882)

He then said of John 5:26, Philippians 2:9 and Hebrews 1:8

“These testimonies show that Christ is now an object of worship equally with the Father; but they do not prove that with him he holds an eternity of past existence.’ (Ibid)

Looking unto Jesus

Concerning Christ, there was one book that encapsulated everything that during the early 1900’s was believed by Seventh-day Adventists. This book was called *Looking Unto Jesus* and was authored by Uriah Smith. This was the same person who had written the classic *Daniel and the Revelation*. The latter is a book that when our denomination introduced trinitarianism into its beliefs, it underwent a violent editing. This was so that all the non-trinitarianism could be removed from its pages. This happened in the 1940’s when trinitarianism was making its way into Seventh-day Adventism. We shall see how this was done in later sections.

It would be too much to tell here of how highly *Looking Unto Jesus* was rated by both Seventh-day Adventists and non-Seventh-day Adventists alike but just like his *Daniel and the Revelation*, it certainly received the highest of acclaim. In section thirty-nine we shall see how much approval it received. This is where we take note of the comments that were made concerning it, also the advertising that was done to encourage Seventh-day Adventists to purchase a copy. In a stark revelation of its non-trinitarianism, the second chapter began

“God alone is without beginning.” (Uriah Smith, *Looking unto Jesus*, page 10, chapter 2, ‘Christ as Creator’ 1898)

Here in a few simple words is the belief that the Only Being who does not have a beginning is God (the Father). This was the same as was said by other of our pioneers like James White, J. N. Andrews and E. J. Waggoner (see above). Smith then said of the Son of God

“At the earliest epoch when a beginning could be, — a period so remote that to finite minds it is essentially eternity, — appeared the Word.” (Ibid)

This is exactly the same as was said by E. J. Waggoner (see above). If you remember too, even Ellen White said that Christ’s divine life “could not be reckoned by human computation”, also that it could not be “measured by figures”. See section fifteen and section sixteen, also *Signs of the Times*. 3rd May

1899 *The Word made flesh*. To read the latter article go here

<http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/SB-EGWarticles.htm>

After quoting John 1:1, Uriah Smith then said of Christ

“This uncreated Word was the Being, who, in the fulness of time, was made flesh, and dwelt among us. His beginning was not like that of any other being in the universe. It is set forth in the mysterious expressions, “his [God’s] only begotten Son” (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9), “the only begotten of the Father” (John 1:14), and, “I proceeded forth and came from God.” John 8:42. Thus it appears that by some divine impulse or process, not creation, known only to Omniscience, and possible only to Omnipotence, the Son of God appeared.” (*Ibid*)

Note the stress that Smith makes on saying that Christ is ***not a created being***. Note also that like Waggoner he says that the process of Christ’s begetting, as well as when, are “known only to Omniscience”. Smith then said with regards to the Holy Spirit

“And then the Holy Spirit (by an infirmity of translation called “the Holy Ghost”), the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, the divine afflatus and medium of their power, representative of them both (Ps. 139:7), was in existence also.” (*Ibid*)

Here again we see just what it was that in the early 1900’s that Seventh-day Adventists believed concerning the Holy Spirit. Smith said that it was the “**Spirit of Christ**” as well as the “**Spirit of God**” and that He (the Holy Spirit) was “**representative of them both**”. This is exactly the same as is believed by many of today’s Seventh-day Adventist non-trinitarians.

After a length explanation about Christ creating all things but making absolutely sure again that his readers did not conclude that Christ Himself was a created being, Uriah Smith said

“With the Son, the evolution of deity, as deity, ceased. All else, of things animate or inanimate, has come in by creation of the Father and the Son — the Father the antecedent cause, the Son the acting agent through whom all has been wrought. No ranks of intelligences, it matters not how high, above or below; no orders of cherubim or seraphim; no radiant thrones or extensive dominions, principalities, or powers, but were created by our Lord Jesus Christ.” (*Ibid page 13*)

Regarding the pre-existent Son of God, this statement concisely summarizes everything we need to know about the early 1900’s faith of Seventh-day Adventists. As was said by Smith, “**With the Son, the evolution of deity, as deity, ceased**”. This is with reference to the begetting of the Son, as a separate

personality from God, in eternity.

Note though the emphasis on “as deity”. Here Smith is delineating clearly between the evolution of deity and Christ becoming incarnate.

A hymn with a doctrinal problem

Some may feel that this is not very important but there must be seen in it a certain significance.

In our hymn book there is a song called *Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty*. This is a very popular hymn but prior to our latest hymnal (1985), it was not as it is usually written. As most denominations sing it, at least the trinitarian denominations, the first and last stanza of that hymn end with the words “God in three persons, Blessed Trinity” but this was not in keeping with what was once our non-trinitarian theology. So it was that in *Christ in Song*, also in ‘The Advent Hymnal Revised (1928), also in *The New Advent Hymnal (1941)* this was changed. In the first verse these words were substituted with “God overall who rules eternity” whilst the last verse (verse 4) was totally omitted. This modified version of this hymn was in keeping with the non-trinitarianism of Seventh-day Adventism.

What is very interesting is that when our church hymnal was revised in 1985 (our current one), the hymn was included but with its original wording. It now includes the words “God in three persons, Blessed Trinity”. The last verse with the same wording is also included. So it is that this hymn now reflects the current trinitarianism of Seventh-day Adventism. This new (current) hymn book was published shortly after the trinity doctrine was first voted in at the 1980 General Conference Session at Dallas Texas.

External evidence

As external evidence as to what was believed in the early 1900’s by Seventh-day Adventists, which is one of the main objectives of this study, we quote the experience of Dudley Canright. He was mentioned previously in this article.

Canright was once a very highly valued Seventh-day Adventist minister although he was at times unstable. He was also, whilst a member of our denomination, an outright anti-trinitarian. In fact through our publications he did give vent to his beliefs. Eventually, when he apostatised from the Seventh-day Adventist Church and became a minister of the Baptist Church, he then adopted the trinity teaching. This should tell us quite a lot because what Canright did was to leave God’s remnant church and join the ministry of Babylon (the confusion of voices in the popular churches).

Canright wrote a book called *Seventh-day Adventism, Renounced*. This is one of those books where the title does aptly portray what is between its covers. I say this because in his book, Canright denied that many of the teachings of Seventh-

day Adventism were biblical, particularly those considered distinctive.

In the earlier editions of this book (there were at least 14 of them) he said that one of the beliefs as held by the evangelicals that the Seventh-day Adventist Church rejected was the doctrine of the trinity. Interestingly, when in the early 1900's Seventh-day Adventists professed that the Holy Spirit is a personality, he dropped that remark from future editions but he still wrote in the 1914 edition (this was when speaking of the doctrines of Seventh-day Adventists)

“In doctrine they [Seventh-day Adventists] differ radically from evangelical churches. The main points are these as taught in all their books: They hold to the materiality of all things; believe in the sonship of Christ... “

This is additional proof that in 1914, the Seventh-day Adventist Church still believed that Christ was literally the pre-existent begotten Son of the infinite God. Canright is saying here that we still believed in this “sonship”.

We shall return later to Canright's views. This was when he was a Seventh-day Adventist minister. We shall see that he did not believe that the Holy Spirit was a person, also that he gave some very good reasons for believing as such.

Conflicting perspectives

As we have so clearly seen, all through the time period of Ellen White's ministry, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was strictly a non-trinitarian denomination although in their theology they never denigrated the personage of Christ. This was even though they regarded Him as a begotten Son. In fact this very reasoning upheld their belief that the Son was God essentially. As can also be seen, some of our earlier pioneers were quite vocal in speaking out against the trinity doctrine. All were non-trinitarian. Not everyone has this perspective of Seventh-day Adventist history. In his *Movement of Destiny*, LeRoy Froom wrote

“We have seen that at first, in our early decades, the divergencies over the intrinsic nature of Christ and the Godhead, and the Holy Spirit, were regarded as optional. In such a light they at first presented no particular problem.” (*LeRoy Froom, Movement of Destiny, page 411, chapter 25, 1931 Opens New Epoch of Unity and Advance—No. 1*)

As we have seen from the above and previous sections, there was not, in the early decades of Seventh-day Adventism, any serious conflict of views regarding the nature of Christ. Only unity existed. Froom then added

“But especially by the mid-1860's and 1870's individuals began to project into print their personal anti-Trinitarian views — denying the eternal pre-existence and complete Deity of Christ, the Second Person of the Eternal Godhead — maintaining instead that He was actually a derived Being. And consistently therewith, that the Holy Spirit was merely an impersonal power or influence. Hence, no Trinity.” (*Ibid*)

Seventh-day Adventists, with their begotten faith, never denied the divinity of Christ. He was regarded as no one less than God. This is the testimony of history. By using the word “individuals”, Froom makes it appear that anti-trinitarianism and non-trinitarianism was just the views of the few. This is the picture that he projects throughout *Movement of Destiny*. We shall see more of this in section fifty-two.

Froom’s remarks about Christ being a “derived Being” is with reference to the begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventists but as we have previously seen, this teaching makes Christ God Himself in the person of His Son. It is certainly not a denigrating of Him.

Another person who appears to have underestimated the one-time non-trinitarian faith of Seventh-day Adventists is R. L. Staples. He wrote in the *Ministry* magazine of September 1993

“In the early days of Adventism, several of its leaders, who formerly had been Christianites, held mildly anti-trinitarian and semi-Arian views, which derived from an earlier Socinian influence. Apart from these early deviant views, Adventists have held orthodox views regarding the Godhead and what are generally considered to be the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith.” (*Russell L. Staples, Ministry, September 1993, ‘Understanding Adventism’*)

I would say that “mildly anti-trinitarian and semi-Arian views” really is something of an understatement. I would also say that prior to our acceptance of the trinity doctrine that our beliefs concerning the Godhead were far from being “orthodox”. Again we have seen this in previous sections. In the next month’s issue of *Ministry*, George Knight put a different slant on things. He said

“Most of the founders of Seventh-day Adventism would not be able to join the church today if they had to subscribe to the denomination's Fundamental Beliefs.” (*George Knight, ‘Ministry’ magazine, October 1993 page 10, ‘Adventists and Change’*)

This is nearer to the mark of truthfulness rather than the statements by Froom and Staples. I have not found any of our original pioneers who would have believed our current published denominational beliefs. He then added

“More specifically, most would not be able to agree to belief Number 2, which deals with the doctrine of the Trinity.” (*Ibid*)

This really is the truth of the matter. None of our pioneers were trinitarian. They all rejected the trinity doctrine. Speaking of the time period of 1888-1892, Woodrow Whidden said

“Prior to this time, Arianism had been quite pervasive in the writings of early

Seventh-day Adventism.” (Woodrow Whidden, *Ministry*, April 1998, ‘*Salvation Pilgrimage, The Adventist journey into justification by faith and trinitarianism*’)

As we have noted previously, this kind of statement can be very misleading. It seems that anything that does not fit into a trinitarian concept of God is termed Arian. Unfortunately, this makes it look as though our pioneers believe that Christ was a created being (a creature) which they did not. They believed that He was begotten of the Father which is saying something entirely different. This is the same as saying that He is God. For a more in depth understanding of the begotten concept see the *Begotten Series*. Whidden then said

“Interestingly, Arianism (which owes its origin to Arius [d. 336], who denied the divinity of Christ and held that Christ was a created being), has had a natural attraction for religious movements that concentrate on personal obedience while neglecting the importance of justification by faith in the Christian salvation experience.” (*Ibid*)

As can be seen from section eight, it must never be reasoned that Arius believed that Christ was a created being. He believed that Christ was God Himself but he did not arrive at this conclusion from a trinitarian standpoint. Arius believed that Christ was fully divine.

As we have also seen, Ellen White cannot be termed trinitarian but certainly she did not neglect the importance of justification by faith although she did emphasis personal obedience. Whidden continued

“By the time of the Minneapolis revivals, Jones was forthrightly Trinitarian, emphasizing the full deity of Christ. However, E. J. Waggoner, like many Adventists of his day, had moved from a predominant Arianism to a semi-Arian position.” (*Ibid*)

I cannot find anywhere in our publications where Ellet Waggoner says that he believed that Christ was a created being (if that is what is meant by “**predominant Arianism**”), although it must be said that Whidden probably had access to writings of Waggoner that I have never seen.

If Waggoner did at anytime believe that Christ was a created being I shall be very much surprised. I say this because all the other Seventh-day Adventist pioneers, including his father Joseph Waggoner, believed that Christ was God essentially. Ellet Waggoner (1855-1916) was only in his early 30’s when he preached at Minneapolis (1888).

As far as Jones at Minneapolis being “**forthrightly Trinitarian**” is concerned, this is a total misunderstanding of his faith. We know this because seven years **after** the Minneapolis Conference, in a sermon preached at the 1895 General Conference he said

"He [Christ] who was born in the form of God took the form of man." In the flesh he was all the while as God, but he did not appear as God." "He divested himself of the form of God, and in its stead took the form and fashion of man" "The glories of the form of God, he for awhile relinquished." (A. T. Jones, *General Conference Bulletin*, March 4th 1895, 'The Third Angel's Message – No. 23')

This is outright non-trinitarianism. Jones speaks of Christ as being "born in the form of God". Remember this was 7 years **following** Minneapolis. The latter part of this statement ("The glories of the form of God, he for awhile relinquished") we spoke of in section seventeen and section eighteen. This is when we noted that in the foregoing of His rights as God, the Son of God walked this earth as a fully functioning human being, even putting at risk His own attributes of deity and His eternal existence (see also section thirteen).

Four years later (1899), again at a General Conference session, Jones preached the same non-trinitarian faith of Seventh-day Adventism. If Jones had preached trinitarianism at Minneapolis (1888) 11 years earlier he would have been completely out of harmony with his church. As it was, in preaching non-trinitarianism, he was in agreement with its theology. At the 1899 General Conference Jones said of Christ

"He was born of the Holy Ghost. In other words, Jesus Christ was born again." (A. T. Jones, *Sermon preached on March 6th 1899 at the General Conference Session in South Lancaster, Massachusetts*, see *Review and Herald*, August 1st 1899, 'Christian perfection')

Again this shows that Jones believed that in eternity, Christ was "born" of the Father. This we know because he said that [at Bethlehem] "Jesus Christ was born again". Again it can only be said that this was once the begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventists. Note this was in 1899, the year following the publication of the supposedly trinitarian *Desire of Ages*. Jones then added concerning Christ

"He came from heaven, God's first-born, to the earth, and was 'born again'. But all in Christ's work goes by opposites for us: he, the sinless one, was made to be sin, in order that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. He, the living one, the prince and author of life, died that we might live. He whose goings forth have been from the days of eternity, the first-born of God, was born again, in order that we might be born again." (*Ibid*)

Jones could not have said it any clearer. At Bethlehem, "God's first-born" (in eternity) was "born again" (on earth). This is about as non-trinitarian as it gets. This "first-born" is with reference to our Saviour being begotten of God (God begotten) in eternity. At this time (1899), this was still the predominant faith of Seventh-day Adventism. Jones also said

“He [Christ] was born again, and was made partaker of the human nature, that we might be born again, and so made partakers of the divine nature. He was born again, unto earth, unto sin, and unto man, that we might be born again unto heaven, unto righteousness, and unto God.” (*Ibid*)

Whidden continued in his *Salvation Pilgrimage* article

“By the late 1880s Ellen White was unequivocally Trinitarian in the expression of her convictions regarding the full deity of Christ. This is truly remarkable, given the strongly Arian and semi-Arian views that were so dominant in the Adventism of that time, and given the fact that even her strong-minded, forthright husband, James White, held such views until relatively late in his life.” (*Woodrow Whidden, Ministry, April 1998, ‘Salvation Pilgrimage, The Adventist journey into justification by faith and trinitarianism’*)

As we have seen so clearly, Ellen White was not a trinitarian, at least not in the accepted sense of the term. Certainly she would have completely rejected today what the Seventh-day Adventist Church is teaching. Never did she speak of God the Father or Christ or the Holy Spirit in such terms as are currently being used by trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists. Never did she profess such a belief as the three divine personalities existing in the one God – which is the trinity doctrine.

As we have also seen, in the mid-1890’s she was advocating along with the rest of the pioneers, that Christ was begotten of God. She even said then that He was made in the express image of God’s person (see above). We have also seen that she said that Christ’s pre-existent life is beyond human computation, meaning that His existence can be computed by some means known only to God (see above). How is it possible therefore to conclude that, “By the late 1880’s Ellen White was unequivocally Trinitarian”?

Whilst Ellen White was alive, this begotten faith was the preponderant faith within Seventh-day Adventism. On this matter she was in harmony with the pioneers, not against them. Notice Whidden’s remarks concerning James White (that he held Arian or semi-Arian views “until relatively late in life”). This is implying that late in his life, James White changed his views regarding Christ but there is no evidence of this from our history. As we have seen from the above, he was a non-trinitarian until he died.

In the book *The Trinity*, published to so say help Seventh-day Adventists understand the trinity debate, there is an introduction to the book. There are also endnotes to that introduction. Who wrote these it does not say but they are very misleading. Take note of what was said regarding James White. It says

“James White ultimately confessed the full deity and eternity of Christ, and Uriah Smith evolved from an Arian to a semi-Arian position. E. J Waggoner, a semi-Arian, came very close to confessing the full deity of Christ.” (*The*

Trinity' by Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon and John Reeve, Introduction Endnotes, page 14)

It is obvious from these remarks that whoever wrote them believed that semi-Arianism did not depict the full deity of Christ yet it says that “ultimately”, James White “confessed the full deity and eternity of Christ”. It can only be concluded therefore that it is being said here that eventually (as above implied by Whidden), James White became a trinitarian (so say confessing this full deity). Yet what we know from what we have seen above is that James White remained an anti-trinitarian. This statement in the endnotes therefore is leading people to misunderstand the views of James White although as we have seen very clearly from the above, he always believed in the full deity of Christ although this was always from a non-trinitarian perspective.

In a book published in 1914, Ellen White's son, James Edson White wrote

“From a reading of John 1:1-3, 10, it will be seen that the world, with all it contains, was created by Christ (the Word), for "all things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made." The angels, therefore, being created, are necessarily lower than Christ, their Creator. Christ is the only being begotten of the Father.” (*James Edson White, Past, Present, and Future, page 52, chapter, 'Angels - their nature', 1914 edition*)

Edson White was expressing exactly the same faith as his mother.

As regards to James White (the husband of Ellen White), he was an anti-trinitarian until the day he died, although like his wife and the other pioneers he did believe that Christ was equal to God (see above). Such is the differing perspectives of our denominational history. Never did our denomination reject the divinity of Christ. During Ellen White's time, they just spoke of it in terms that were non-trinitarian. This was their begotten faith.

A summary conclusion

In our studies, all of the above realisations should be of the highest significance. It shows that all throughout the time of Ellen White's ministry, this begotten faith was the faith across the board in Seventh-day Adventism.

Something else that I find very significant is that the pro-trinitarians in our church today quote massively of certain trinitarian looking statements from the writings of Ellen White. This is to so say prove that she was a trinitarian. It also to so say prove that she was in harmony with the current theology of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (their rendition of the trinity doctrine which says that all three personalities are unbegotten). Never though, by these trinitarians, have I seen highlighted as being the truth, her begotten and made statements that we have just read above. It must be asked therefore, is this a fair and honest way to treat the writings of the spirit of prophecy?

I must also say here that in respect to the many statements we have seen made by Ellen White with regards to the Son, if He had sinned, going out of existence, I have not seen any of these used by the pro-trinitarians. Again we must ask, is this a fair and honest way to treat her writings?

We shall now move on to section 21. This is where we shall see that in 1899 (this was the year following the Minneapolis General Conference session) the Seventh-day Adventist Church was challenged regarding what they believed concerning the divinity of Christ. As we shall see, Ellen White defended the views of our pioneers.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section twenty-one

Seventh-day Adventists challenged regarding the divinity of Christ

During the time period of Ellen White's ministry, our non-trinitarianism led to Christians of other denominations completely misunderstanding what Seventh-day Adventists really did believe about Christ. This was particularly so regarding His divinity. In brief, because we were non-trinitarian, it was believed that we denied His Godhead. This was because by many, just as it still is today, trinitarianism was the only accepted way to correctly express this divinity. Seeing that for centuries this has been traditionally taught by trinitarians, this is understandable.

Generally speaking, this is the ongoing problem with trinitarians. They regard anything outside of trinitarianism as denying the true divinity of Jesus but as we have noted previously (see section four), the trinity doctrine (formula) cannot be found in Scripture therefore there must be a non-trinitarian way (a Scripture only way) that correctly and adequately expresses it.

The challenge

In 1889, the year after Ellet Waggoner had delivered his message of righteousness by faith at the famous Minneapolis General Conference session, it came to the notice of our denomination that the Methodist Church had produced a book, not surprisingly, in which it was said that Seventh-day Adventists were teaching error. This error, said the author of this book, was particularly with regards to the Sabbath, which of course, according to Methodist discipline is Sunday.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church promised to review this book for its author, a minister by the name of Rev. Dr. M. C. Briggs, the results of which Waggoner detailed in the *Signs of the Times*. Before beginning to defend the seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday) though, Waggoner chose instead to defend the views of Seventh-day Adventists regarding the divinity of Christ. This is because in the preface to this book, the Rev. Briggs had said that along with our other wrong teachings, we, as Seventh-day Adventists, denied Christ's divinity (more than likely because we were not trinitarian).

At that time (1889), both Ellet Waggoner and Alonzo Jones (the other main preacher at the Minneapolis General Conference Session) were co-editors of the

Signs of the Times but it was Waggoner that in the publication of March 25th 1889 began addressing himself to the question of Christ's divinity.

Whilst it is not possible to quote everything here that was written in these articles, suffice to say for now that Waggoner made it abundantly clear that Seventh-day Adventists believed that Christ was God Himself manifest in flesh and that in His pre-existence, He was truly the begotten Son of God. This was not from a trinitarian point of view but from one that was non-trinitarian. Thus it was that Waggoner made it clear that Seventh-day Adventists believed that God and Christ were separate personalities, although clearly stating as well that Christ was God essentially.

In his book, the Rev. Briggs had also said that certain Adventists were denying that human beings had a soul (spirit) but Waggoner denied this allegation. After making a repudiation of that claim, Waggoner then said with respect to the assertion that Seventh-day Adventists did not believe in the divinity of Christ

“But when the doctor [Briggs] states that Seventh-day Adventists deny the divinity of Christ, we know that he writes recklessly.” (E. J. Waggoner. Signs of the Times, March 25th 1889, article ‘The Divinity of Christ’)

This, as Seventh-day Adventists regarded it, was Waggoner's opening defence of the divinity of Christ. He said that the Rev. Briggs had written “recklessly”. Waggoner also made it clear that he realised Briggs knew differently than what was being alleged. He said

“We are fully persuaded in our own mind that he [Briggs] knows better; but be that as it may, the statement has been made so often by men who professed to know whereof they were speaking, that many have come to believe it; and for their sakes, as well as for the benefit of those who may not have given the subject any thought, we purpose to set forth the truth.” (Ibid)

Waggoner is saying here that unfortunately, because certain people had been listening to those who appeared to know of that which they were speaking, many had come to regard Seventh-day Adventists as not believing in the divinity of Christ. For the benefit therefore of those who had been led to believe that this was true, as well as for those who “may not have given the subject any thought”, Waggoner said that he was now going “to set forth the truth”. He was saying that certain people knew that Seventh-day Adventists did not deny Christ's divinity but were putting around this belief anyway with perhaps to the view of making it look bad for Seventh-day Adventists. More than likely this was because we were not trinitarians and often we had spoken out against this teaching.

Notice particularly that Waggoner said of this allegation that it “has been made so often” that people believed it to be true. This shows us that this was an ongoing problem within Seventh-day Adventism but Ellen White maintained, as

we shall see in later sections, that in spite of all this we should not change our faith. Notice now that before beginning to explain why Seventh-day Adventists believed in the divinity of Christ, Waggoner said

“We have no theory to bolster up, and so, instead of stating prepositions, we shall simply quote the word of God, and accept what it says.” (*Ibid*)

It should go without saying that those who were saying that Seventh-day Adventists were denying the divinity of Christ were the trinitarians. These are the ones who need to go outside of Scripture to prove their suppositions and who therefore usually offer very lengthy explanations that are only tantamount to theory (speculation/philosophy). This is more than likely why Waggoner said that “instead of stating prepositions”, which by trinitarians are usually in the form of propositions, expositions, discourses and illustrations explaining their three persons in one indivisible substance theory of God, he said “we shall simply quote the word of God, and accept what it says”. This was the scripture only non-trinitarian way to depict the divinity of Christ.

In his articles from that point onward (these were spread over six issues of the *Signs of the Times* from March 25th – May 6th 1889), even though the Methodist book in question mainly concerned the Seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday), Waggoner expounded the Scriptures concerning the Seventh-day Adventist view on the divinity of Christ, which of course was a strictly non-trinitarian view. This shows how important this subject was, in 1889, to Seventh-day Adventists.

Interesting to note is that in the November of this same year (1889), there was included in the *New York Independent* an article that was written by Samuel Spear, a non-Seventh-day Adventist. Three years later (1892), this same article was included as No. 90 in the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Students Library, a series of tracks explaining what we believed as a denomination and why we believed it. It carried the title of *The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity* but when it was published in the *New York Independent* it was called *The Subordination of Christ*.

This article by Spear was decidedly non-trinitarian (even anti-trinitarian). This is why at that time (1892) it was so well accepted by Seventh-day Adventists. If you wish to read this article you can do so here

[http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Articles\(others\)/Speararticle.pdf](http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Articles(others)/Speararticle.pdf)

We spoke of this in previous sections. We shall also speak of it again in later sections. This is where we shall see that attempts have been made to show that there was trinitarianism within early Seventh-day Adventism but the proof that is offered is not really proof at all. In fact when correctly considered, this so called evidence proves that it was non-trinitarianism and not trinitarianism that was the preponderant belief of early Seventh-day Adventism.

Christ fully God

Throughout his series of articles in the *Signs of the Times*, Waggoner asserts on behalf of the Seventh-day Adventist Church that the pre-existent Christ is fully God. In his very first article, and perhaps in overall summary of them in their entirety, Waggoner made the all-embracing statement

“We believe in the divinity of Christ, because the Bible says that Christ is God” (*Ibid*)

Could this have been put more plainly or clearly? Note Waggoner’s use of “We”, Prior to making this statement, Waggoner had quoted John 1:1. This is the verse of Scripture that says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”. Waggoner then quoted verse 14 (which says “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” etc) and makes the comment

“Indeed, we have never heard of anyone who doubted that the evangelist has reference to Christ in this passage. From it we learn that Christ is God” (*Ibid*)

In 1889, this was the preponderant belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It was the claim that Christ is God Himself, manifest in the flesh. Seventh-day Adventists did not deny the divinity of Christ. This is even though they maintained that He is begotten of God and were non-trinitarian.

In a term paper that he produced in 1969 on the rejection and acceptance of the trinity doctrine in Seventh-day Adventism, Russell Holt had it correct concerning our pioneers and their understanding of the divinity of Christ. He wrote concerning the time period of the early pioneers (this was up to 1881, the year of the death of James White)

“A survey of other Adventist writers during these years reveals, that to a man, they rejected the trinity, yet, with equal unanimity they upheld the divinity of Christ.” (*Russell Holt, “The doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination: Its rejection and acceptance”, A term paper for Dr. Mervyn Maxwell, 1969*)

Holt then wrote of the pioneers’ beliefs

“To reject the trinity is not necessarily to strip the Saviour of His divinity. Indeed, certain Adventist writers felt that it was the trinitarians who filled the role of degrading Christ’s divine nature.” (*Ibid*)

To many trinitarians, this conclusion would be anathema because they say that the only way to correctly depict the divinity of Christ is as it expressed in the trinity doctrine. As can be seen though, Russell Holt said that the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism rejected this reasoning. As I am sure you will agree, his latter remark is one that is extremely interesting and merits investigation.

Returning our thoughts to Waggoner and his defence of the divinity of Christ as expressed by Seventh-day Adventists, he said in the following week's article that whilst on earth, Christ actually claimed to be God. After making a comparison of Scriptures that he believed supported this view he penned in summary

"From these texts we have proof not only that the inspired writers call Jesus the divine Son of God, but that Jesus himself claimed to be God." (Ellet J. Waggoner, Signs of the Times article 'The Divinity of Christ (continued)', April 1st 1889)

Speaking personally I have not found anywhere in the Scriptures where the man Jesus claimed to be God but Waggoner's point is readily seen. Christ was manifesting God in the flesh. Again it must be asked though, as far as Ellet Waggoner's remarks are concerned, how much clearer could it be that the pioneers did not deny the divinity of Christ? Regarding the man Jesus Christ, Ellen White wrote in 1899

"There is no one who can explain the mystery of the incarnation of Christ. Yet we know that He came to this earth and lived as a man among men. The man Christ Jesus was not the Lord God Almighty, yet Christ and the Father are one. The Deity did not sink under the agonizing torture of Calvary, yet it is nonetheless true that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (Ellen G. White, letter 32, 1899, Manuscript 140, 1903, as quoted in the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary page 1129)

To continue with Waggoner's defence of the Seventh-day understanding of Christ's divinity, in the following weeks article (April 8th 1889), he makes the point that because Christ is God, He received worship from his followers. He says in one place

"That Christ is divine is shown by the fact that he receives worship." (Ellet J. Waggoner, Signs of the Times' article 'The Divinity of Christ (continued)', April 8th 1889)

A little further along in the article and with reference to the worship that in His pre-existence Christ had once received from the angels in Heaven, as well as with respect to the worship that He would receive in the future by the redeemed, Waggoner also said

"If Christ were not God, then this [worship] would be idolatry" (Ibid)

In this article and with great clarity, Waggoner reveals what was then the non-trinitarian faith of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This is when he says

"In arguing the perfect equality of the Father and the Son, and the fact that

Christ is in very nature God, we do not design to be understood as teaching that the Father was not before the Son.” (*Ibid*)

This indeed is non-trinitarianism; in fact the trinitarian would say that it was anti-trinitarianism.

Whilst maintaining that the Father and Son were perfectly equal, Waggoner here is denying the doctrine of the trinity. This is inasmuch as the doctrine says (at least the one that I refer to as orthodox) that the Son is **eternally** begotten of the Father meaning that the Father and Son are coeval (of the same age). In one respect, this is the same as the trinity version held today by Seventh-day Adventists. They say that Christ was never begotten but say like orthodoxy that He has always existed therefore He is coeval with the Father.

As Waggoner said, although Seventh-day Adventists say that the Father and Son are equal, they were not to be taken as saying “that the Father was not before the Son”. To put this another way and avoiding the use of double negatives, Waggoner explains that Seventh-day Adventists believed that the Son, as a separate personality from God, came forth of the Father in eternity therefore the Father was before (prior to) the Son. This is totally opposed to the reasoning of orthodox trinitarians. This is because they say that the Son is eternally begotten of the Father, or as Seventh-day Adventists today say, never begotten. With respect to Christ as a personality never having a beginning, these two beliefs are synonymous.

Waggoner realised that by saying that the Son came forth of the Father at some point in the eternity, would, according to trinitarians, derogate (diminish) the divinity of Christ. This is probably why he continued his article by saying

“It should not be necessary to guard this point, lest some should think that the Son existed as soon as the Father; yet some go to the extreme, which adds nothing to the dignity of Christ, but rather detracts from the honour due to him, since many throw the whole thing away rather than accept a theory so obviously out of harmony with the language of Scripture, that Jesus is the only-begotten Son of God.” (*Ibid*)

Waggoner then says of the Son of God

“He was begotten not created. He is of the substance of the Father, so that in his very nature he is God; and since this is so “it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell.” Col. 1:19.” (*Ibid*)

Saying that Christ is begotten is not the same as saying that He is created. Whilst space is limited here for a detailed explanation, it should be noted that the difference is crucial. This is seen in the way that the very early Christian fathers (who were mainly Greek speaking) explained the existence and personality of Christ. They understood the Bible writer’s use of the Greek language as meaning

that the Son existed by a process of generation unknown to humanity but was definitely not an act of creation. This is dealt with extensively in *The Begotten Series* (see especially section two and section three).

In summary of this non-trinitarian view of God and Christ, Waggoner stated with reference to Jesus saying that His Father was greater than He (John 14:28)

“While both are of the same nature, the Father is first in the point of time. He (the Father) is also greater in that he had no beginning, while Christ’s personality had a beginning” (*Ibid*)

Here is one of the main differences between the trinitarian view of God (at least the original/orthodox view) and non-trinitarianism (the Son begotten). The trinitarian view says that the Son is eternally begotten of the Father (no beginning or ending to being begotten) whilst the non-trinitarian view says that the Son, **as a separate personality from God** and having come forth of the Father, was begotten at a point in eternity.

Note very importantly that Waggoner said that the difference between the Father and the Son is that “Christ’s personality” had a beginning. This really is very important. He was not referring to identity of person (God) but to His personality.

Perhaps in summary we can let Waggoner speak for himself. This is when at the very beginning of that particular week’s article he said

“The fact that Jesus is spoken of as the only begotten Son of God should be sufficient to establish a belief in his divinity. As the Son of God, he must partake of the nature of God.” (*Ibid*)

Here is the conclusion to believing that the Son is literally begotten of God. It means that He is God Himself begotten therefore He is and must be God essentially. Note Waggoner’s emphasis on the Son partaking of “the nature of God”. This is the same as said in the trinity creeds, God from God, true God from true God.

After quoting the words of Jesus as found in John 5:26 which says “For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself”, Waggoner then comments

“Life and immortality are imparted to the faithful followers of God, but Christ alone shares with the Father the power to impart life. He has “life in himself,” that is, he is able to perpetuate his own existence.” (*Ibid*)

This sharing of life we will come back to later when we see what Ellen White had to say with respect to John 5:26 (as did Waggoner here). Waggoner concludes

“This is shown by his own words when, showing the voluntary nature of the

sacrifice for man, he said "I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." John 10:17, 18." (*Ibid*)

In his series of articles, Waggoner said so much more in his defence of Seventh-day Adventists believing in the full and complete divinity of Christ that it is far too much to quote here. Suffice to say that in defence of the Seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday), which primarily was what the Rev. Briggs in his book was disputing, Waggoner went on to say, during the following weeks, that Christ was not only the law-giver at Sinai but He was in fact the Creator of this world.

From what we have noted above and in the previous section, how much more clearly could it be seen that the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism believed in the complete and full divinity of the Son of God? This was even though it was from the standpoint of non-trinitarianism.

Sharing the divine life

In the light of what we have read above, I would like to share with you something now that Ellen White said in the *Home Missionary* in 1897. This was whilst she was still in Australia. She said

"God has sent his Son to communicate his own life to humanity. Christ declares, "I live by the Father," my life and his being one." (*Ellen G. White, Home Missionary, 1st June 1897, 'A call to the work'*)

Here Ellen White stresses two very important things. One is that God sent His Son to communicate (impart) His (God's) "own life" to us whilst the second is that she said that Christ declared (by saying that He lived by the Father) that His life and the life of the Father (God) was one. Note her words well. She said that by saying that He lived by the Father, Christ was also saying "my life and his [God's] being one". In other words, God and His Son share the one and the same divine life. She then said

"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him," "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of Man." The head of every man is Christ, as the head of Christ is God. "And ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." (*Ibid*)

Remember here that Ellen White did clearly say that the Son, as a separate personality from God was begotten (made) in the express image of his Father's person (see previous section).

As we have seen above, this was no different in principle than was said by Ellet Waggoner. In respect of Christ being a begotten Son, both Ellen White and Ellet Waggoner agreed. This was the faith (beliefs) of Seventh-day Adventists at the

end of the 19th Century. With the turn of the 20th century though, things were going to change. This was when this same faith was going to be challenged from within and not as we have seen here from outside. We shall see this later.

Christ is fully divine says old time Seventh-day Adventists

That Seventh-day Adventists have always believed Christ to be fully divine is not in doubt but needless to say, all of the early pioneers rejected the doctrine of the trinity. We shall see the evidence of this now. As early as 1859 in the *Review and Herald*, D. W. Hull wrote

“The inconsistent positions held by many in regard to the Trinity, as it is termed, has, no doubt, been the prime cause of many other errors. Erroneous views of the divinity of Christ are apt to lead us into error in regard to the nature of the atonement” (*D. W. Hull, Review and Herald, November 10th 1859, ‘Bible doctrine of the divinity of Christ’*)

Hull regarded the trinity doctrine as very misleading. Note now what he regarded as the problem area. Here we can see it clearly said that the way that the trinity doctrine depicts the divinity of Christ impacts the atonement. This is something that we have noted previously (see section twelve). Hull said a few paragraphs later

“Just here I will meet a question which is very frequently asked, namely, Do you believe in the divinity of Christ? (*Ibid*)

By the “you”, Hull meant that this was being asked of Seventh-day Adventists. He promptly answered his own question by saying (now note the “we”)

“Most unquestionably we do; but we don't believe, as the M. E. church Discipline teaches, that Christ is the very and eternal God; and, at the same time, very man; that the human part was the Son, and the divine part was the Father.” (*Ibid*)

This conclusion that Christ is not the “very and eternal God” (the Father) is no different than that which was said by Ellen White. Note too the remarks about the human and the divine parts of Christ. There was no dichotomy in Christ. In other words, the divine part was not one person and the human part another person. The ONE person of Christ was of two natures. This is the mystery of the incarnation. Jesus was still the ONE person of the divine Son of God. As Ellen White said in 1897

“The One appointed in the counsels of heaven came to the earth as an instructor. He was no less a being than the Creator of the world, the Son of the Infinite God.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies on Education page 173 1897*)

This was the same view as the vast majority of Seventh-day Adventists believed

concerning the relationship between God and Christ. They all maintained that as to identity of person, Christ was God essentially but in personality He was not said to be the infinite God. To the pioneer Seventh-day Adventists therefore, this “eternal God” (the “infinite God”) is the Father whilst Christ is the Son, thus making the “infinite God” the Father, and Christ the Son, two separate personages. As we shall see in later sections when we look at the Godhead (trinity) crisis that erupted in the early 1900’s, this is something that Ellen White stressed over and over again.

In 1863, the year that the Seventh-day Adventist Church initially became an organized church, J. H. Waggoner (E. J. Waggoner’s father) published an article called *The Atonement*. In this article, which was decidedly anti-trinitarian, he wrote

“The divinity and pre-existence of our Saviour are most clearly proved by those scriptures which refer to him as “the Word.” "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made." Jno. i, 1-3. This expresses plainly a pre-existent divinity.” (*J. H. Waggoner, Review and Herald, October 27th 1863 ‘The atonement’*)

J. H. Waggoner believed in the divinity of Christ (His full deity). This was because the Scriptures say that He is God and not because of any trinity formula.

Four years later, whilst still a Seventh-day Adventist minister, Dudley Canright wrote an article called *The Son of God*. In this article he passionately upheld the non-trinitarian theology of his denomination (we spoke of Canright’s apostasy in the previous section). After quoting John 1:1, John 1:18 and John 3:16 he wrote

“According to this, Jesus Christ is begotten of God in a sense that no other being is; else he could not be his only begotten Son. Angels are called sons of God, and so are righteous men; but Christ is his Son in a higher sense, in a closer relation, than either of these. God made men and angels out of materials already created. He is the author of their existence, their Creator, hence their Father. But Jesus Christ was begotten of the Father's own substance. He was not created out of material as the angels and other creatures were. He is truly and emphatically the "Son of God," the same as I am the son of my father.” (*D. M. Canright, Review and Herald, June 18th 1867, ‘The Son of God’*)

There is no mistaking Canright’s theology. He said later

“No created being can ever be worthy of worship, however high he may be, neither would it be right nor just for God to bid one order of his creatures to worship another. Divinity alone is worthy of worship, and to worship

anything else would be idolatry. Hence Paul places Christ far above the angels, and makes a striking contrast between them. He asks, "For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?" The implied answer is, that he has "made so much better than the angels." He says that the angels are simply ministering spirits, but to Christ, God has said, "Thy throne, O God is for ever and ever." (*Ibid*)

Along with the rest of Seventh-day Adventism, Canright regarded the Son of God as totally divine. He also said in his article

"But while the Son is so plainly placed far above all created beings, he is at the same time just as plainly stated to be distinct and separate from the Father." (*Ibid*)

In a nutshell, this was the begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventists. It was that Christ is full divine, that He is the literal Son of God; also that He is a separate and distinct person from the Father. Throughout the time of Ellen White's ministry, this was the faith held by Seventh-day Adventists. Note that Canright's article was published as early as 1867.

Earlier that same year, a Seventh-day Adventist by the name of Johnston, along with a sister in the church, was on his way home by train from a conference (this was told in a letter from Johnston to Uriah Smith who was editor of the *Review and Herald*). They were also joined in their carriage by two Congregational preachers who it appears had been attending one of their own denominational conferences. On overhearing the lady relating that she was a seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday) keeper, and also in an effort to persuade her that Sunday was the correct day of rest, the oldest of the Congregationalists engaged in conversation with her. In the ensuing discussions, this Congregationalist was totally silenced by her arguments. Upon realising the situation, the younger Congregationalist asked the lady if she believed in the divinity of Christ. This was possibly asked to show that Christ, by being divine and by His resurrection from the grave on a Sunday, had changed the day of rest to Sunday. At this point, Johnston decided to join in the conversation. He explains

"I now thought it was my turn to join in; so I replied, Why, yes sir. We believe that Christ is all divine; that in him dwelt "the fullness of the God-head bodily;" that he is "the brightness of the Father's glory, the express image of his person, up holding all things by the word of his power," &c., &c." (*Review and Herald, June 25th 1867 Bro. Johnston, letter to Uriah Smith,*)

Note again that this was in 1867. There is no doubting that Seventh-day Adventists then believed in the full and complete divinity of Christ.

The next year, in July 1868, there was an answer given to someone referred to just as "A. S." His letter was not published but it does appear that he had said

that Seventh-day Adventists believed in the divinity of Christ. The reply to him said

“To A. S. You are correct in saying we do not deny the divinity of Christ. If those who assert such a thing are acquainted with our faith they know better; if they do not know they are guilty of speaking evil of the things they know not.

Our views are examined at some length, and contrasted with those of our opponents, in the recently published tract on the Atonement, to which we refer you.” (*Review and Herald, July 14th 1868*)

Three years later in 1871 James White wrote of a conversation he had on a train with a Christian missionary. This missionary had spent almost twenty-four years in China. James White reported

“This missionary seemed very liberal in his feelings toward all Christians. But after catechizing us upon the trinity, and finding that we were not sound upon the subject of his triune God, he became earnest in denouncing unitarianism, which takes from Christ his divinity, and leaves him but a man. Here, as far as our views were concerned, he was combating a man of straw. We do not deny the divinity of Christ. We delight in giving full credit to all those strong expressions of Scripture which exalt the Son of God. We believe him to be the divine person addressed by Jehovah in the words, " Let us make man." (*Ibid*)

In the next paragraph he explained

“The simple language of the Scriptures represent the Father and Son as two distinct persons. With this view of the subject there are meaning and force to language which speaks of the Father and the Son. But to say that Jesus Christ "is the very and eternal God," makes him his own son, and his own father, and that he came from himself, and went to himself. And when the Father sends Jesus Christ, whom the Heavens must receive till the times of restitution, it will simply be Jesus Christ, or the eternal Father sending himself.

We have not as much sympathy with Unitarians that deny the divinity of Christ, as with Trinitarians who hold that the Son is the eternal Father, and talk so mistily about the three-one God. Give the Master all that divinity with which the Holy Scriptures clothe him.” (*Ibid*)

By the latter sentence, it is being said that we should speak of the divinity of Christ as expressed in the Scriptures – no more or any less. James White concluded

“Our adorable Redeemer thought it not robbery to be equal with God, and

let all the people say, Amen! Thank Heaven! Here we may sing, Worthy, worthy, is the Lamb; and on the other shore, by the grace of God, we will join all the redeemed in the highest ascriptions of praise for their salvation to both Him that sitteth upon the throne, and the Lamb, forever and ever.”
(*Ibid*)

The same author also wrote six years later in 1877

“Paul affirms of the Son of God that he was in the form of God, and that he was equal with God. “Who being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God.” Phil. 2:6. The reason why it is not robbery for the Son to be equal with the Father is the fact that he is equal. If the Son is not equal with the Father, then it is robbery for him to rank himself with the Father.” (*James White, Review and Herald 29th November 1877, ‘Christ Equal with God’*)

He then says though with respect to the trinity doctrine

“The inexplicable Trinity that makes the Godhead three in one and one in three, is bad enough; but that ultra Unitarianism that makes Christ inferior to the Father is worse. Did God say to an inferior, “Let us make man in our image?” (*Ibid*)

From the beginning to the end of his associations with the remnant people of God, meaning from 1844 until his death in 1881, James White was a devout non-trinitarian but there can be no mistaking that he believed in the full and complete divinity of Christ. Notice too that just like his wife Ellen he uses the terms ‘God’ and ‘Father’ synonymously. The year previous (1876) when commenting on the difference in beliefs between Seventh-day Adventists and Seventh-day Baptists, this same man said

“The principal difference between the two bodies is the immortality question. The S.D. Adventists hold the divinity of Christ so nearly with the trinitarians that we apprehend no trial here.” (*James White, Review and Herald, Oct 12th 1876, ‘The two bodies - The Relation Which the S.D. Baptists and S.D. Adventists Sustain to Each Other’*)

James White knew how the Seventh-day Baptists regarded Christ. It was in keeping with the trinity doctrine but here he was saying that because the views of the Seventh-day Adventist Church regarding Christ’s divinity was almost the same as the trinitarians, he did not see this as being anything of a problem between the two denominations. This, as I am sure you will agree, is both a very interesting and a very enlightening statement. Seventh-day Adventists certainly did not regard themselves as having a lesser view of the deity of Christ than the trinitarians

In 1878, a reader of the *Review and Herald* asked if Seventh-day Adventists

were Unitarians or trinitarians. The answer was given

“Neither. We do not believe in the three-one God of the Trinitarians nor in the low views of Jesus Christ held by unitarians. We believe that Christ was a divine being, not merely in his mission, but in his person also; that his sufferings were penal and his death vicarious.” (*Review and Herald, June 27th 1878 ‘To correspondents’*)

Five years later in 1893, M. E. Kellogg wrote with regards to Isaiah 25:9

“Two ideas are especially prominent in this text. They had waited for the Lord; they had believed He was coming, and thus expecting his return, they had made a preparation to such an extent that they were ready to receive Him. There was no surprise and no fear. They exclaim, "This is our God!" A very close and intimate relation is signified by these words.” (*M. E. Kellogg, Bible Echo, October 15th 1893, ‘How will Christ be received?’*)

That Christ is God has always been the preponderant belief of Seventh-day Adventists. That much we know for sure.

The early 1900's

In 1910, a renowned Seventh-day Adventist minister by the name of O. A. Johnson (1851-1923) wrote a Bible textbook called *Bible Doctrines* for his students. In 1911 a second issue was printed whilst in 1917 a fourth edition came off the presses of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (I have not yet discovered the date that the third edition was printed). It should go without saying that it was a popular book. This was not the first study book he had compiled. There was an earlier one called *Bible Text-book*, published in 1900. We shall quote from that one later. He wrote this when he was Instructor in Bible and History at Union College.

That Johnson was a well-known minister can be seen by his obituary. Published in the *Review and Herald* of March 22nd 1923 it said

“He raised up his first church in the year 1874. He was ordained to the ministry in the year 1876. and shortly after this raised up a church at Debello, Wis.” (*Obituaries, Review and Herald, March 22nd 1923, Elder O. A. Johnson*)

After referring to a number of other churches Johnson set up it says

“In 1890 he was called to the presidency of the South Dakota Conference. The following year Union College opened a Scandinavian department, and Elder Johnson was called to take charge. In 1894 he was elected to the presidency of the Wisconsin Conference, serving in that capacity two years. From 1896-97 he labored extensively in the general camp-meetings held in the Central and Northern Union Conferences. He was again called to the

Scandinavian department of Union College, where he remained for three years. In 1900 he accepted a call to the presidency of the conference in Norway, where he remained for seven years. During the years 1904 and 1905 he conducted a mission school in Christiania, Norway. A little later the three conferences of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark united in opening a training school in Nyhyttan, Sweden, and Elder Johnson was placed in charge. In 1908 he responded to a call to the Bible department of Walla Walla College, where he remained until 1922.” (*Ibid*)

We can see from all of this that Johnson was well respected minister of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In 1908 he was called to head the Bible Department at Wall Walla College. In the first few years, as seen above, he compiled a Bible text book called *Bible Doctrines*. The one that we shall be looking at here was the fourth edition and contained 150 lessons. It appears to have covered the entire spectrum of our denominational beliefs. Each set of statements and Bible texts was followed by a set of questions. In a section called *The Godhead*, under a sub-section called *God the Father*, Johnson says

“1. There are three persons in the Godhead; viz., the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Rom. 1:20; Matt: 28:19.

2. God the Father is the first person of the Godhead, and, as such, he is the greatest. Matt. 28:19; John 14:28; 1 Cor. 15:27, 28.” (*O, A. Johnson, Bible Doctrines, page 34, Lesson IX, ‘God the Father’*)

Whilst “three persons” is mentioned, there is no mention of a trinity. Only the word Godhead is used. In the next study, which is called simply *Divinity of Christ*, Johnson says

“1. Christ is the only begotten Son of the Father. John 1:14; 3:16, 18

“2. Since Christ is begotten of the Father, he must therefore be of the same substance as the Father; hence he must have the same divine attributes that God has, and therefore he is God.” (*Ibid*)

3. The Father calls his Son “God,” and therefore he must be God. Heb. 1:8-10.” (*Ibid page 36*)

Here again we see the begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventism. It is that Christ is God. He also says later

“Although Christ is the Son of God, yet he says his Father is greater than himself.” John 14:28.” (*Ibid*)

This shows us that in 1917, even in their College text books, Seventh-day

Adventists were still teaching that Christ is the begotten Son of God therefore He is God Himself. This was now 2 years after the death of Ellen White. In the 1900 *Bible Text-Book* mentioned previously, Johnson had said concerning Christ

“That which proves Christ to be God is the fact that he is the Son of God, and that he created all things by the word of his power” (*O. A. Johnson, Bible Text-Book, page 41, chapter 12, ‘Christ and antichrist’*)

Again this shows the faith of Seventh-day Adventists in the early 1900’s.

In summary

We can see from the above that the preponderant faith in Seventh-day Adventism has never been that Christ is a created being. It has always been that He is fully divine. It was just that instead of depicting it as in the trinity doctrine, it was viewed strictly from a scriptural point of view. As we have noted previously, the trinity doctrine is only an assumed doctrine (see section four)

Jerry Moon, as co-author of the recent Seventh-day Adventist publication *The Trinity*, encapsulates in just one single paragraph the entire problem regarding the difference between what the pioneers once taught and what is being taught by Seventh-day Adventists today. He says on page 190 of this book

“That most of the leading SDA pioneers were non-Trinitarian in their theology has become accepted Adventist history, surprising as it sounded to most Adventists 40 years ago when Erwin R. Gane wrote an M. A. thesis on the topic. More recently, a further question has arisen with increasing urgency: was the pioneers’ belief about the Godhead right or wrong? As one line of reasoning goes, either the pioneers were wrong and the present church is right, or the pioneers were right and the present Seventh-day Adventist Church has apostatized from biblical truth.” (*Jerry Moon, ‘The Trinity’, chapter, ‘Trinity and anti-trinitarianism in Seventh-day Adventist history, page 190’*)

This appraisal of this situation regarding the problem of the difference between the beliefs of the pioneers and the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists today could not have been summarized more clearly. It says that either the pioneers had it right (and from what we have read here we must include Ellen White in this statement) and our present church “has apostatized from biblical truth” or the Seventh-day Adventist Church today is correct and the pioneers were wrong in what they believed. Which one it is though you will need to decide for yourself because quite obviously, both cannot be correct.

We shall now go to section twenty-two. This is where we shall see that Ellen White experienced the misunderstanding of others towards what Seventh-day Adventists were teaching about Christ. As we shall see, she upheld the beliefs of the pioneers, albeit it was a non-trinitarian faith.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section twenty-two

Misunderstandings regarding Seventh-day Adventists and the divinity of Christ

It is an undeniable fact of life that some non-trinitarians are grossly misunderstood. Certainly this was true of the vast majority of past non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists. It is no different today. The trinitarians still say that the non-trinitarians deny the divinity of Christ, or as they like to put it, Christ's full and complete divinity. Admittedly, some non-trinitarians such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Christadelphians do deny that Christ is divine but the Seventh-day Adventist non-trinitarian pioneers did not. That much we know for sure.

Generally speaking, trinitarians regard all non-trinitarians as denying the full and complete divinity of Christ (as the trinitarians put it). This is because trinitarians regard their own extreme speculative view as being the only valid means of correctly defining His relationship with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. As we have noted a number of times before though, the Scriptures are totally silent to God being a trinity so there must be a non-trinitarian way, meaning a Scripture only way, of correctly expressing these relationships.

Ellen White experienced the misunderstandings of others to the non-trinitarian faith of Seventh-day Adventists. In 1893 when residing in Australia, she spoke of the misrepresentations, in that country and in New Zealand, concerning the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. This she said was particularly so with regards to the divinity of Christ. She wrote

*"In this country, the denominational ministers tell the most unblushing falsehoods to their congregations in reference to our work and our people."
(Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 5th December 1893, 'An appeal for the Australasian field')*

She followed this by saying

*"Whatever false report has been started, is circulated by those who oppose the truth, and is repeated from church to church and from community to community. The circulators of these falsehoods take no pains to find out whether or not they are true, for many of those who repeat the reports, though not the framers of them, still love the false reports, and take delight in giving them a wide circulation."
(Ibid)*

This is very often the scenario today. She then added

“They do not, like honest, just men, come to those who are accused, and seek to find out what is the truth concerning what they have heard in regard to their faith; but without inquiry they spread false statements in order to prejudice the people against those who hold the truth.” (*Ibid*)

Again how true this is today. Some people would rather believe gossip than ask the ones who are being gossiped about what they actually do believe.

People who do this type of thing said Ellen White, are not acting like honest men but in order to cause prejudice, spread false statements about those of whom they are gossiping. Note here that Ellen White said that this was to prejudice people’s minds “against those who hold the truth”. She was referring primarily of course to that which was held and being taught as truth by Seventh-day Adventists.

Please note well the date. The year was 1893. This was whilst we were still very much a non-trinitarian denomination. I also ask you to note the date because 2 years later in 1895, Ellen White made the statement that in His pre-existence Christ was truly “begotten” in the “express image of His Father’s person whilst 6 weeks later she said that He was “made” in the express image of His Father’s person. This shows us that she was completely in harmony with the pioneers. We shall note these statements again in this section.

As we noted in section twenty, Ellen White’s begotten statement is thought for thought in keeping with Waggoner’s views that he had presented at the famous 1888 Minneapolis Conference. These were the views that were later collated and produced in his book *Christ and His Righteousness*. That Ellen White copied his wording from this book (although not word for word) is beyond question. See section twenty for the comparison. This in itself reveals that Ellen White was in harmony with the then begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventists. On the evidence available, this cannot be disputed.

As an example of what she had claimed, Ellen White then recounted an incident when attempts were made to hire a hall for evangelistic purposes (she had said previously that they could not use tents in many places as they had done in America because the wind would strip them to ribbons). She said

“For instance, an effort was made to obtain the use of the hall at a village four miles from Hastings, where some of our workers proposed to present the gospel to the people; but they did not succeed in obtaining the hall, because a schoolteacher there opposed the truth, and declared to the people that Seventh-day Adventists did not believe in the divinity of Christ.” (*Ibid*)

Here then is the reason why Seventh-day Adventists (in this instance) were not

allowed to hire the hall. It was said that they “did not believe in the divinity of Christ”. Note very importantly that the schoolteacher mentioned was said by Ellen White to have “opposed the truth”. She then went on to say

“This man may not have known what our faith is on this point, but he was not left in ignorance. He was informed that there is not a people on earth who hold more firmly to the truth of Christ's pre-existence than do Seventh-day Adventists. But the answer was given that they did not want that the doctrines of Seventh-day Adventists should be promulgated in that community. So the door was closed.” (*Ibid*)

At one time, I had wondered why Christians of other denominations had come to this conclusion spoken of here. I thought to myself, “How could anyone believe this, seeing that we were trinitarians”, which remember, I had once erroneously believed (see section ten)?

When I realised that from our beginnings (and until many years after the death of Ellen White) we had been a non-trinitarian denomination, the truth suddenly struck home to me. People thought as I once did that a denial of the trinity was equivalent to a denial of Christ's divinity, which of course, as I realise now, is far from being the truth.

Whilst Ellen White said that the man who had refused them the hire of the hall may not have known what Seventh-day Adventist really believed about Christ, she also said that he was told “that there is not a people on earth who hold more firmly to the truth of Christ's pre-existence than do Seventh-day Adventists”. She also said that when people were spreading false rumours about these non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists, they only did this “in order to prejudice the people against those who hold the truth”. This “truth” of course included what they (meaning the pioneers and Ellen White) then believed and taught about the divinity of Christ, which was of course a non-trinitarian belief. Here she says that what Seventh-day Adventists were then teaching was “the truth”.

This “truth” that Ellen White spoke of here included a non-trinitarian belief in the divinity of Christ. It was this that she and the other pioneers were teaching. This realisation is a serious indictment against those today like William Johnsson (ex editor of the Review) who say

“Many of the pioneers, including James White, J. N. Andrews, Uriah Smith and J. H. Waggoner held to an Arian or semi-Arian view - that is, the Son at some point in time, before the creation of our world, was generated by the Father. Only gradually did this false doctrine give way to the Biblical truth, and largely under the impact of Ellen Whites writings in statements such as “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. (Desire of ages p 530)” (*William Johnsson Adventist, Review January 6th 1994 ‘Present Truth - Walking in God's Light’, 1994*)

Ellen White did not think the same way as William Johnson. This much is only too apparent. She said that what the pioneers were teaching about Christ, albeit it was in a non-trinitarian framework, was the truth. In 1890, she expressed the faith of Seventh-day Adventists perfectly. In an article called *God made manifest in Christ* she wrote

“Christ came to represent the Father. We behold in him the image of the invisible God. He clothed his divinity with humanity, and came to the world that the erroneous ideas Satan had been the means of creating in the minds of men, in regard to the character of God, might be removed. We could not behold the glory of God unveiled in Christ and live; but as he came in the garb of humanity, we may draw nigh to our Redeemer.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 20th January 1890, ‘God made manifest in Christ’*)

Note here she is saying that Christ is not “the invisible God” but the “image” of Him. She followed this by saying (very interestingly)

“We are called upon to behold the Lord our Father in the person of his Son. Christ came in the robe of the flesh, with his glory subdued in humanity, that lost man might communicate with him and live. Through Christ we may comprehend something of him who is glorious in holiness. Jesus is the mystic ladder by which we may mount to behold the glory of the infinite God. By faith we behold Christ standing between humanity and divinity, connecting God and man, and earth and heaven.” (*Ibid*)

This was the faith of Seventh-day Adventists in 1890. It was as Ellen White so eloquently put it, that Christ was “the Lord our Father in the person of his Son”. This was the begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventists.

We have noted in previous sections that in 1895 (this was 2 years following the above quoted experience in Australia) Ellen White did say very clearly that Christ was a begotten Son. This was when she said

“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.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 30th May 1895, ‘Christ our complete salvation’*)

It was this begotten faith that had allowed her to say 5 years previously that Christ was “the Lord our Father in the person of his Son”. She confirmed and clarified this 6 weeks later by saying (this was in the *Review and Herald*)

“The Eternal Father, the unchangeable one, gave his only begotten Son,

tore from his bosom Him who was made in the express image of his person, and sent him down to earth to reveal how greatly he loved mankind." (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald 9th July 1895 'The Duty of the Minister and the People'*)

She also said 4 years later (this is when with reference to Jesus saying, "Before Abraham was I AM" John 8:58)

"Here Christ shows them that, altho they might reckon His life to be less than fifty years, yet His divine life could not be reckoned by human computation. The existence of Christ before His incarnation is not measured by figures." (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times. 3^d May 1899 'The Word made flesh'*)

This leads us to conclude that Ellen White believed that Christ's divine life, as a separate personality from the Father, is measurable but only by means know to divinity. We will be coming back to this begotten quote later.

In 1894, the year following the above experience in Australia (this was whilst she was still in Australia completing the manuscripts for *Desire of Ages*), Ellen White asked the youth of her day

"Who is Christ? -- He is the only begotten Son of the living God. He is to the Father as a word that expresses the thought, -- as a thought made audible. Christ is the word of God. Christ said to Philip, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father." His words were the echo of God's words. Christ was the likeness of God, the brightness of his glory, the express image of his person." (*Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor, 28th June 1894, 'Grow in grace'*)

Here we can see Ellen White echoing the Scriptures by saying that Christ is the "express image" of God's person (Hebrews 1:3) also that He is the "word of God" (John 1:1), God's "thought made audible". Note she differentiates as usual between the One she refers to as "the living God" and His "only begotten Son". Her remarks concerning the Son of God being like an expression of thought (a word) is also very interesting. As we have seen, Ellen White did maintain, as well as repeatedly make clear, that the eternal (infinite) God and Christ as personalities were separate individual beings. She also maintained that in His pre-existence, Christ was "begotten in the express image of *the Father's person*" (see above). This she interpreted to mean that Christ (the Son of God) was God essentially.

An interesting observation is one made by Gilbert Valentine. He said regarding the work in Australia during the time period we have spoken of above (mid 1890's)

"Church workers were astonished at the interest, particularly in the light of

the widespread prejudice against Adventists in the community. Uriah Smith's Thoughts on Daniel and Revelation had been widely distributed by colporteurs, and its semi-Arian teaching on the pre-existence of Christ had caused many to view Adventists as a heretical, sub-Christian sect that denied the divinity of Christ." (*Gilbert Valentine, Ministry, May 2005, 'A slice of history: How clearer views of Jesus developed in the Adventist Church'*)

As we can see, the so-called semi-Arianism of Seventh-day Adventism was a continuing source of problems for Seventh-day Adventism but as was said by Ellen White, it was the truth that God had given to our pioneers. This is why she upheld it.

A double birth

One person who expressed the Seventh-day Adventist belief at that time concerning Christ was a leading administrator by the name of W. W. Prescott. He said in 1896

"Jesus Christ was God in heaven, and he came to this world, and was born of the flesh, and thus he who had been born of the Spirit was afterward born of the flesh, and by this double birth this family was established, --the divine human family of which he is the head, - in order that we who have already been born of the flesh, may by his grace and the power of the same Spirit, be born of the Spirit, -- that is, every member of this divine-human family is twice born." (*W. W. Prescott, Review and Herald March 17th 1896, 'The Christ of Judea'*)

Note primarily the reference to Christ's "double birth". What we see here is the double birth of all who become Christians. Just 4 weeks later Prescott said in the same continuing series of articles

"As Christ was twice born, -- once in eternity, the only begotten of the Father, and again here in the flesh, thus uniting the divine with the human in that second birth,-- so we who have been born once already in the flesh, are to have the second birth, being born again of the Spirit, in order that our experience may be the same, -- the human and the divine being joined in a life union" (*W. W. Prescott, Review and Herald, April 14th 1896, 'The Christ for to-day'*)

Prescott is here speaking of the begetting of Christ in eternity also His birth in the incarnation, thus he says that Christ was "twice born". This, all during the time of Ellen White's ministry as well as beyond, was the preponderant belief in Seventh-day Adventism.

The year previous, A. T. Jones, in a sermon he preached at the 1895 General Conference Session, said

"He who was born in the form of God took the form of man." In the flesh he

was all the while as God, but he did not appear as God." "He divested himself of the form of God, and in its stead took the form and fashion of man" "The glories of the form of God, he for awhile relinquished." (A. T. Jones, *General Conference Bulletin, March 4th 1895, 'The Third Angel's Message – No. 23'*)

Four years later, again at a General Conference Session, Alonzo Jones who along with E. J. Waggoner was the main preacher at the famous 1888 Minneapolis General Conference wrote with respect to Christ being twice born

"He was born of the Holy Ghost. In other words, Jesus Christ was born again. He came from heaven, God's first-born, to the earth, and was 'born again'. But all in Christ's work goes by opposites for us: he, the sinless one, was made to be sin, in order that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. He, the living one, the prince and author of life, died that we might live. He whose goings forth have been from the days of eternity, the first-born of God, was born again, in order that we might be born again." (A. T. Jones, *Sermon preached on March 6th 1899 at the General Conference Session in South Lancaster, Massachusetts, see Review and Herald, August 1st 1899, 'Christian perfection'*)

Notice here that Jones refers to Christ as "God's first-born". This is with reference to our Saviour being begotten of God (God begotten) in eternity. Jones also said of Christ

"He was born again, and was made partaker of the human nature, that we might be born again, and so made partakers of the divine nature. He was born again, unto earth, unto sin, and unto man, that we might be born again unto heaven, unto righteousness, and unto God." (*Ibid*)

In 1899, this was the preponderant belief within Seventh-day Adventism. It was that Christ was begotten of God in eternity and born again here on earth at the incarnation. Notice that this was said one year after the publication of *Desire of Ages*. This is the book that the Seventh-day Adventist Church says today led our denomination to become trinitarian. By 1899, it did not have that effect and this was shown at a General Conference session.

A denial of the trinity not a denial of Christ's divinity

As has been said before, J. H. Waggoner (the father of E. J. Waggoner) was one of the most outspoken anti-trinitarians of Seventh-day Adventism. He was also a prolific writer. His article mentioned earlier called *The Atonement* was well accepted by Seventh-day Adventists. In one form or another it had five different printings spread over 21 years (the later publications were longer and more detailed). This shows us the popularity and demand for what this man had written.

In principle, these same articles were also produced in a book called *The*

Atonement in the Light of Nature and Revelation. In it Waggoner said with reference to trinitarians

“They take the denial of a trinity to be equivalent to a denial of the divinity of Christ. Were that the case, we should cling to the doctrine of a trinity as tenaciously as any can; but it is not the case.” (*J. H. Waggoner, ‘The Atonement in Light of Nature and Revelation’, 1884 Edition, chapter ‘Doctrine of a Trinity Subversive of the Atonement’*)

Waggoner was refuting the idea, stressed by the trinitarians, that to deny the trinity was the same as denying the divinity of Christ. He added

“They who have read our remarks on the death of the Son of God know that we firmly believe in the divinity of Christ; but we cannot accept the idea of a trinity, as it is held by Trinitarians, without giving up our claim on the dignity of the sacrifice made for our redemption.” (*Ibid*)

Although a devout anti-trinitarian, J. H. Waggoner believed in the divinity of Christ. From this we can also see that this divinity was everything to Seventh-day Adventists.

What some will claim though is because Waggoner did not explain it in the trinitarian sense, then he was not depicting the full and complete divinity of Christ but that is a matter of interpretation. J. H. Waggoner never denied the divinity of Christ, no more than did his son E. J. Waggoner at the Minneapolis General Conference session.

There is something important to consider here. How is it possible for a divine person to be partially divine? This would be impossible. If someone was only part divine then what would the rest of him be?

Christ, in His pre-existence, was either fully divine or He was not divine at all. There is no in between. This is why, even though they expressed it from a purely non-trinitarian standpoint, our pioneers believed in Christ’s full and complete pre-existent divinity. We shall be taking a look again at J. H. Waggoner’s book in later sections. This is when we shall be giving consideration also to other major non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventist publications.

Note Waggoner’s thoughts regarding the atonement (the death of Christ as our sacrifice). He said that to believe in the trinity would be the same as denying the “dignity” of what Seventh-day Adventists believed concerning the atonement. This he said because Seventh-day Adventists did believe then that the pre-existent divine Son of God really did die, not as it seems that they say today that only His human nature died (see section twelve)

James White, the husband of Ellen White, did not believe that Christ was a lesser being than the Father. We know this because in 1877 he said

“The inexplicable Trinity that makes the Godhead three in one and one in three, is bad enough; but that ultra Unitarianism that makes Christ inferior to the Father is worse. Did God say to an inferior, “Let us make man in our image?” (*James White, Review and Herald November 29th article ‘Christ Equal with God’ 1877*)

Three years later he wrote a number of small articles in the *Review and Herald* regarding Christ. In the first he said

“The person that appeared in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush is called "the Angel of the Lord," 'the Lord," and "God." He declares, "I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. These terms can all be applied to Christ without doing violence to the simple language of Scripture, or the truth of God. He who appeared in the burning bush had seen the oppression of his people and had come to their deliverance. Paul speaks of this deliverer under a figure of "that spiritual Rock that went with them, and that Rock was Christ. 1 Cor. 10 : 4." (*James White, Review and Herald, July 29th 1880, ‘Christ in the burning bush’*)

In the second article he wrote

“It has been shown that He who went with the Hebrews to deliver them from the house of bondage was Christ. He, then, is the angel whom the Father sent before the Hebrews. The Father put his name in the Son, who represents the mind and will of God in that wonderful deliverance.” (*James White, Review and Herald, July 29th 1880, ‘My name is in Him’*)

In the third article he penned these words

“And if God did not communicate directly with Adam, Noah, and Abraham, for the reason that he could not speak to sinful men and maintain the dignity of his throne, he did not speak with Moses and the hosts of Israel when assembled at the base of Sinai to hear the ten precepts of the moral code. The Son, burdened with the word of the Father, descends upon Sinai wrapt in fire and flame, and speaks the ten commandments in the audience of the people.

That Christ was with Moses in the Mount Sinai, is evident from the address of Stephen, who bears this important testimony: "This [Moses] is he that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel [Christ] which spake to him [Moses] in the Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, who received the lively oracles to give unto us." Acts 7:38. The conclusion seems irresistible that the Son of God spoke the ten commandments from Sinai.” (*James White, Review and Herald, July 29th 1880, ‘Christ speaks from Sinai’*)

All of these statements show that James White believed that Christ was no

less a person than God, albeit it was God in the person of His Son. This was the begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventists.

E. J. Waggoner (J. H. Waggoner's son), in his book that is said to depict his message at the famous Minneapolis Conference of 1888, wrote

“Christ “is in the bosom of the Father;” being by nature the very substance of God and having life in Himself, He is properly called Jehovah, the self existing one and is thus styled in Jer. 23:56, where it is said that the righteous Branch, who shall execute judgment and justice in the earth, shall be known by the name of Jehovah-tsidekenu--THE LORD, OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.” (E. J. Waggoner, ‘Christ and His Righteousness’ 1890 page 23)

Here again the full and complete divinity was expressed but as we have seen in section twenty, Ellet Waggoner believed that Christ was brought forth from God at a given point in eternity. He said also that this point was so remote (so far back in eternity) that it is incomprehensible to the human mind (almost forever).

Six years after the Minneapolis Conference and four years after the publication of Waggoner's book, there were notes printed in the *Review and Herald* concerning the then current Sabbath School lesson study. In these notes it said

“Therefore the life of God is the law of the universe. But Christ is God. In him is life, even the life of God” (*Review and Herald*, May 15th 1894, Notes on Sabbath School Lessons for May 26th 1894, ‘Lessons from the book of Luke’)

On this subject of Christ's divinity, there had been no change in the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists, not even from the very beginning.

As has been said before, there are masses of quotation that could be cited here that would show that Seventh-day Adventists, even prior to the changeover in beliefs to trinitarianism, have always believed in the full and complete divinity of Christ but they would all be from a non-trinitarian (Scripture only) point of view. Trinitarians say though that Scripture only, without the speculations of the trinity doctrine, cannot depict His divinity correctly. This remains a matter of divided opinion.

Misconceptions

In my 7 years of studies regarding the current trinity debate within our denomination, I have drawn the conclusion that there are many misconceptions and red herrings being circulated amongst us. None are so great though as the one that says that in our early days, the general belief was that Christ was a created being. Alden Thompson wrote in the *Review and Herald* in 1982

“Many of the early Adventists believed that Christ was a created being.”

(Alden Thompson, Review and Herald, July 1st 1982, 'The prodigal son revisited')

This is a total misconception, but it is one that is often said of non-trinitarians by the trinitarians. Just as the trinitarians say that Arius taught that Christ was a created being, so they say the same of any who do not depict the deity of Christ as expressed by the trinity doctrine. This though is an unfair and unreasonable conclusion. As we have seen, all of our pioneers said that Christ was God and not a created being. Even Ellen White said that Christ is a begotten Son.

Thompson then details the names of some of these “Adventists” who believed that Christ was a created being. He said

“The list includes such notables as James White, Joseph Bates, Uriah Smith, J. H. Waggoner, E. J. Waggoner, and W. W. Prescott (ibid., pp. 286,287).” (Ibid)

All of these Seventh-day Adventists believed that Christ was God but not as depicted in the trinity doctrine. They believed that He was the begotten Son of God therefore He was God essentially. This is where we get the misconception that because Christ’s divinity is not expressed in trinitarian terms then it is not expressed correctly. This, as we have seen, was not the view of Ellen White. She said clearly that in their beliefs, the pioneers had expressed this divinity correctly. She also said that those who were misrepresenting the pioneers were those who opposed the truth (see above). Alden Thompson does not see it that way. He continued by saying

“I am convinced that Ellen White's ministry was the key factor in leading the Adventist community to the acceptance of the eternal divinity of Christ. Without prophetic authority it might never have happened.” (Ibid)

Thompson makes it look as though Ellen White was at variance with what our pioneers believed concerning the divinity of Christ but as we have seen, she was in complete harmony with them. Christ’s divinity was eternal but this was not the same with respect to Him as a separate personality from God. Ellen White said clearly that Christ was begotten of God.

In his paper called, *The doctrine of the Trinity among Adventists*, Gerhard Pfandl of the Adventist Biblical Institute wrote

“As we shall see below, during the 1890s several statements came from the pen of Ellen White which clearly support the Trinitarian concept of God.” (Gerhard Pfandl, Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Institute, 'The doctrine of the trinity among Adventists, 1999)

This “several statements” comment gives the idea that prior to 1890 there was virtually no statements from the pen of Ellen White that would have supported

the trinity doctrine. This gives the impression, because of what Pfandl says next, that before this time (1890), Ellen White did not speak of Christ as depicting the full and complete deity of Christ. This is because Pfandl then said

“There were also changes in the understanding of the Godhead in the writings of other Adventist authors as the nineteenth century progressed.”
(Ibid)

The implication here of course is that along with other Seventh-day Adventist authors, particularly during the 1890's, Ellen White changed her views regarding the Godhead. Pfandl continued

“By about 1880 the idea of Christ as a created being faded away and the concept of Christ as the “begotten” Son of God, became the standard.”
(Ibid)

As we have clearly seen from the previous sections, the preponderant belief of Seventh-day Adventists was never that Christ was a created being. He was always regarded as fully divine. Admittedly some of the language that was used, especially if taken out of its context, may have appeared to make it look as though it was being said that Christ was a created being but this was definitely not the overall intent. Christ has always been regarded by Seventh-day Adventists, regardless of the terminology sometimes used, as being fully divine. Maybe also there was the odd person that believed as such (Christ a created being) but what denomination does not have its few dissenters from the main body of believers? Certainly a literally created Christ was never the preponderant belief of Seventh-day Adventists. This statement therefore I find is extremely misleading.

In a special edition of the Review in 1975, D. F. Neufeld wrote on the differing views of our pioneers as they came from the various denominations around 1844. He said

“For example, one of the views on which they differed was that concerning the Trinity.” *(D. F. Neufeld, Review, November 13th 1975, ‘125 years of advancing light’)*

In my studies, I have not found this to have ever been a major difference of opinion amongst our pioneers. They all rejected the idea of the trinity doctrine. In other words, there was not disunity amongst them on this subject only unity. Neufeld continued

“Some of the leaders had been members of the Christian Connection, a church that at that time held a form of the Arian belief concerning the nature of Christ. Arguing from the terms Father and Son, this church, while it did not deny that Christ was divine, the Creator of heaven and earth, Son of God, Lord, and Saviour, held that Christ had a beginning, even though in

the inconceivably remote past. When these leaders formed a new group they brought this belief with them, and for some 50 years and more there were those in the Seventh-day Adventist Church who held the Christian Connection view or some modification of it.” *(Ibid)*

As is said here by Neufeld, the preponderant belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church has always been that Christ is fully divine but it was not expressed as in the trinity doctrine. What was believed is generally known as semi-Arianism. This is the belief that at some time in the remote past, the Son, as a separate personality from God, came out of (was brought forth of) God. Thus the Son, as a separate personality from God, although having a beginning, was God essentially (fully divine). Neufeld continued

“But during all these years, when Ellen White expressed herself on the nature of Christ she never endorsed the anti-Trinitarian view, but emphasized Christ's eternity and His equality with His Father.” *(Ibid)*

This I would say was a completely misleading statement. First of all we know that Ellen White was in harmony with the pioneers regarding the deity of Christ. We shall see this in more detail later. We shall see also that she told the pioneers that they should never give up their beliefs regarding God and Christ, which was of course, a non-trinitarian view. In fact she did say in 1905 (this was when our church was still a non-trinitarian denomination) that wrong views regarding these two divine personalities were on their way into Seventh-day Adventism. We shall see this later.

As we have also seen in past sections, Ellen White held views that no trinitarian would believe so she could not have been a trinitarian. Neufeld concluded concerning Ellen White

“Her position has been the church's position now for years.” *(Ibid)*

This again is a very misleading statement. Ellen White's view was that Christ is a begotten Son (a true son) and that His divine life could not be measured by figures (see above). Neufeld continued by saying

“The fact that the church held to no creed but the Bible enabled it to make a transition to Trinitarianism without serious controversy. If the church had adopted a creed, and an anti-Trinitarian position had been written into the creed, it is doubtful that the change could have been effected easily.” *(Ibid)*

There is a lot of truth in this statement. Our changeover to trinitarianism was so slow (so very gradual) that it was almost imperceptible; nevertheless, the change was made. It was not made though without controversy. As we have seen and will continue to see, there were objections, some of them very serious. In this changeover to trinitarianism from non-trinitarianism, the fact that we did not have a creed did help a great deal.

Strange to relate though, after quoting Ellen White where she told of how she would be taken off in vision to be given explanation of difficult passages of Scriptures that the pioneers had been studying and that her own mind was locked to the meaning of the Scriptures until all the principle points of our faith had been established, Neufeld had previously said

“Reflecting on these early experiences, Ellen White also said, “Very well do we know how every point of truth was established, and the seal set upon it by the Holy Spirit of God.”—Selected Messages, book 2, p. 104.

The proclamation of the first, second, and third angels' messages has been located by the Word of Inspiration. Not a peg or a pin is to be removed.”—*Ibid.*” (*Ibid*)

What is also interesting is that Neufeld quotes Ellen White’s commendation of Ellet Waggoner’s and Alonzo Jones’ message at Minneapolis. This he did by quoting her as saying

“The Lord in His great mercy sent a most precious message to His people through Elders Waggoner and Jones. This message was to bring more prominently before the world the uplifted Saviour, the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. It presented justification through faith in the Surety; it invited the people to receive the righteousness of Christ, which is made manifest in obedience to all the commandments of God. Many had lost sight of Jesus. They needed to have their eyes directed to His divine person, His merits, and His changeless love for the human family.”—Testimonies to Ministers, pp.91, 92.” (*Ibid*)

Why I say this is interesting is because Waggoner’s message at Minneapolis was decidedly non-trinitarian. In other words, a trinitarian would have rejected out of hand this message at Minneapolis. Neufeld concluded

“Again because the church had adopted no creed but the Bible, so long as the new emphasis could be shown to be Bible supported, it stood a chance of being accepted, and by many was accepted.” (*Ibid*)

In reality, there was no new emphasis or new message at Minneapolis. It was the same one that had been there from the beginning. It was just that by 1888, because of the over emphasis of keeping God’s law at the expense of stressing His grace, this righteousness by faith message had become very obscured. Call it a renewed emphasis if you like but not a new one.

Certainly there was no division in the church regarding what Waggoner had said concerning the divinity of Christ. This in 1888 was the preponderant faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This is why there was no objection to it. This view that there was division between the old time pioneers on the subject of Christ’s divinity was also projected in a week of prayer reading in 1982. This is when it

was said

“So among our founding fathers were different concepts concerning subjects such as the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the personality of the Holy Ghost, and the atonement on the cross. Patiently, for more than half a century, Ellen White guided the church to a better Biblical understanding of the eternal salvation verities.” (*V. Norskov Olsen, Review and Herald, October 14th 1982, Week of prayer readings, ‘Ellen White: Defense against error and apostasy’*)

Again this statement is very misleading. As did Neufeld’s, it makes it look as though regarding the Godhead there was only disunity amongst early Seventh-day Adventists when in fact there was only harmony. This “better Biblical understanding” is supposedly the trinity doctrine but as we shall see later, there was no division at all on these things whilst Ellen White was alive, that is of course until in the early 1900’s when John Harvey Kellogg began to promote his trinitarian ideas of God. We shall see this later. Even then, through Ellen White, these teachings were substantially allayed but this was not to continue.

When Ellen White died, things began to develop quickly. No longer was there a voice to say that these trinity understandings of God were wrong. What did remain though was what she had written regarding this topic but would Seventh-day Adventists take note and heed it?

A correct perspective

Perhaps it is Russell Holt who best sums up the old time religion of Seventh-day Adventists regarding the Godhead. Remarking on the beliefs of early Seventh-day Adventists he wrote

“A survey of other Adventist writers during these years reveals, that to a man, they rejected the trinity, yet, with equal unanimity they upheld the divinity of Christ. To reject the trinity is not necessarily to strip the Saviour of His divinity. Indeed, certain Adventist writers felt that it was the trinitarians who filled the role of degrading Christ’s divine nature.” (*Russell Holt, “The doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination: Its rejection and acceptance”, A term paper for Dr. Mervyn Maxwell, 1969*)

This conclusion, referring to the time period up to the time of the death of James White (1881), appears to be at odds with what Alden Thompson, Pfandl and Neufeld say above.

Allegations

As we have seen in previous sections, because our pioneers were not trinitarian, it is alleged that they did not believe in the full divinity of Christ. This was levelled at them not only by those who were not of our denomination but is also the view of the present leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, meaning of

course the trinitarians. This we saw when we noted William Johnsson as saying in the *Review and Herald* of January 6th 1994

“Many of the pioneers, including James White, J. N. Andrews, Uriah Smith and J. H. Waggoner held to an Arian or semi-Arian view - that is, the Son at some point in time, before the creation of our world, was generated by the Father. Only gradually did this false doctrine give way to the Biblical truth, and largely under the impact of Ellen Whites writings in statements such as “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. (Desire of ages p 530)” (*William Johnsson Adventist, Review January 6th 1994 ‘Present Truth - Walking in God’s Light’, 1994*)

So let’s ask the question. Did the pioneers, by their alleged “false doctrine” of Christ actually deny His complete and full divinity? As we have seen above, not according to Ellen White. She said that our pioneers depicted the divinity of Christ correctly - so who is it that we are going to believe?

We shall now go to section twenty-three. This is where we shall see that as it was in early Christianity, non-trinitarianism was the standard belief in early Seventh-day Adventism.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section twenty-three

Non-trinitarianism – a landmark belief of both early Christianity and early Seventh-day Adventism

We noted in section seven and section eight how, during the 4th century, trinitarianism became established within the Christian Church. This tells us most definitely that the trinity doctrine was not a landmark belief of early Christianity. This is exactly how it was within Seventh-day Adventism. In fact it was not until after the death of Ellen White (1915) that there were even attempts to introduce this teaching into our fundamental beliefs although it does appear that some were harbouring the thought of God being a trinity (as depicted in the trinity doctrine). We shall cover this in later sections. In other words, just like early Christianity, a landmark belief of Seventh-day Adventism was non-trinitarianism and not trinitarianism. This again is history repeating itself.

As we progress through this section, we shall again discover our past non-trinitarianism. We shall also see that Ellen White said that these beliefs should never be changed. As a denomination, we have ignored this counsel.

We also noted in section nine that as Christianity continued in its development of apostasy, trinitarianism was an integral part of it. This eventually resulted in the formation of the Roman Catholic Church. It must be asked here whether within Seventh-day Adventism, is this a repeating of history? In other words, just as it was within early Christianity, could trinitarianism be part and parcel of the development of an apostasy from the truth within Seventh-day Adventism? It certainly seems that way!

Trinity essentialness

As you read through this section, please keep in mind trinitarian essentialness. These are the principles that are necessary to make any Godhead formula truly trinitarian. The two basic essential factors are threeness and indivisible oneness. Without either of these two essentials there is no trinity doctrine. Whilst the threeness is reasonably obvious (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), it is the indivisible oneness that is often misunderstood. This is the one indivisible being of God (the one God) theory. We must also remember here that in trinity theology and whichever version is spoken of, because the three personalities constitute the one God, neither of the three existed before the other two. This is the conclusion of believing in this type of oneness. This is the trinity three-in-one God doctrine. It is also the belief that none of the three, because they make up the one being

of God, can ever go out of existence. As we noted in section thirteen, this was not the belief of Ellen White. She firmly believed that if Christ had sinned He would have lost his eternal existence.

Misunderstandings concerning the history of Seventh-day Adventism

Until fairly recent times, many Seventh-day Adventists, including myself, have been under the impression that their denomination had always been trinitarian. We shall see instead that throughout the entire time of the ministry of Ellen White, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was strictly a non-trinitarian denomination. The reason as to why this false impression has existed we shall consider later.

This non-trinitarianism was duly recognized by the denominations that constitute what is generally termed mainstream or orthodox Christianity. These are the same denominations that in the main are trinitarian and which historically the Seventh-day Adventist Church have always regarded as fulfilling the role of the Babylon of Bible prophecy (see Revelation 14:8 and 18:1-4 etc). Note here the reasoning of Ellen White. After saying that the Roman Catholic Church was the “woman” (Babylon) of Revelation 17, she wrote in *The Great Controversy*

“Babylon is said to be “the mother of harlots.” By her daughters must be symbolized churches that cling to her doctrines and traditions, and follow her example of sacrificing the truth and the approval of God, in order to form an unlawful alliance with the world. The message of Revelation 14, announcing the fall of Babylon must apply to religious bodies that were once pure and have become corrupt. Since this message follows the warning of the judgment, it must be given in the last days; therefore it cannot refer to the Roman Church alone, for that church has been in a fallen condition for many centuries. Furthermore, in the eighteenth chapter of the Revelation the people of God are called upon to come out of Babylon. According to this scripture, many of God's people must still be in Babylon. And in what religious bodies are the greater part of the followers of Christ now to be found? Without doubt, in the various churches professing the Protestant faith” (*Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, page 382, ‘A warning rejected’ 1911 edition*)

Note well the final sentence. Ellen White is saying that the part of “Babylon” in which the “greater part” of God’s people can be found is undoubtedly those who profess the “Protestant faith”. After saying that these protestant churches had once taken a stand for the truth but turned from it by desiring to imitate “the practices and courting the friendship of the ungodly”, she also said in the next paragraph

“Many of the Protestant churches are following Rome's example of iniquitous connection with “the kings of the earth” -- the state churches, by their relation to secular governments; and other denominations, by seeking the favor of the world. And the term “Babylon” -- confusion -- may be

appropriately applied to these bodies, all professing to derive their doctrines from the Bible, yet divided into almost innumerable sects, with widely conflicting creeds and theories.” (*Ibid*)

From my studies, I would say that it was definitely our non-trinitarianism that was one of the main barriers separating us from these other protestant denominations. Certainly it was not just our beliefs regarding the seventh day Sabbath, the state of the dead and the sanctuary etc. I say this for two simple reasons.

The first reason is that any denomination that fails to espouse the trinity doctrine is never regarded as being Christian, at least not by the trinitarians. This is because by the latter, the trinity doctrine is not only deemed to be the central belief of Christianity but also the only way to correctly express the full deity of Christ. The non-trinitarians of course would disagree with this reasoning. The second reason is that during the 1950's, the evangelical wing of Christianity, through certain of their leadership, announced to the Christian world that the Seventh-day Adventist Church should be regarded as a Christian denomination and that its adherents, meaning Seventh-day Adventists, could safely be recognised as Christian. This was after decades of being regarded by the evangelicals as a cult. We shall be taking a look at this 1950 situation in later sections.

We shall see also that whilst these evangelicals accepted Seventh-day Adventists as fellow Christians, they still did not accept our distinctive beliefs. These beliefs were such as the Sabbath, the state of the dead, the investigative judgment and the writings of Ellen White etc. These beliefs the evangelicals regarded as both heterodox (unorthodox/heretical) and divisive. This undoubtedly reveals that it was not these distinctive doctrines that in the past were prohibiting the evangelicals from believing us to be Christian but rather something else.

In his book *Movement of Destiny*, LeRoy Froom delineated this 'something else'. With respect to the trinitarian denominations regarding us as being a non-Christian denomination (a cult), he penned these words

“It was this unhappy situation that gave rise to the widespread misconception, bandied about in the theological circles of the religious world, that we were actually an “anti-Christian cult” – for a cult, according to the definition of many Evangelicals, is a religious body that denies (1) the eternal pre-existence and complete Deity of Christ, and (2) that His Act of Atonement was completed on the cross.” (*Leroy Froom, 'Movement of destiny', Chapter one 'Pushing Back Our Horizons' pages 35-36*)

Throughout *Movement of Destiny*, Froom maintains that the reason why these other denominations regarded us as being non-trinitarian was not because we were non-trinitarian but simply because a few strong minded pioneers managed

to get their own personal non-trinitarian views into print and make it look that way. This is what Froom refers to in the above quote as the “unhappy situation”. Throughout his book, Froom maintains that during the time of the pioneers, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was predominantly a trinitarian denomination. As we know today, this is far from being a correct representation of our history.

As a matter of passing interest here, *Movement of Destiny* was one of the first books that I read when becoming a Seventh-day Adventist. This is why from my very early Christian days until I came to realise differently, I erroneously believed that our church had always been a trinitarian denomination (see section ten). In later sections we shall be looking at some of the statements in Froom’s book that led me to draw this conclusion.

By the phrase “eternal pre-existence and complete Deity of Christ”, Froom is making reference to Christ, as He is portrayed in the teachings of the doctrine of the trinity. As we have already noted, trinitarians do not regard non-trinitarians as professing the full deity of Christ. This is regardless of how the non-trinitarians may explain their belief. Note here that Froom says that it was because of this that the other denominations regarded us as being an “anti-Christian cult”. This was an ongoing problem within early Seventh-day Adventism.

Note Froom’s reference to the atonement. This confusion came about because of our teaching that in the investigative judgement, Christ is today making atonement. Unfortunately, because an explanation of the latter is outside the scope of this study, we will say no more here except to say that I have found that what we teach today with respect to this belief is often something of what many would term a watered down version of how we used to present it. This is what this same many see as another knock on affect of accepting the trinity doctrine, also our present affiliation (fellowship/relationship) with the other trinitarian denominations.

Undoubtedly, the vast majority of denominations, whether Catholic or Protestant, regard the trinity doctrine as the central teaching of their faith whilst our pioneers, because they regarded it as being unscriptural, firmly rejected it. They regarded it as a leftover from the reformation, a long-held tradition that many of the reformers had failed to denounce.

The trinity doctrine – not one of the landmarks of Seventh-day Adventism

It may surprise many Seventh-day Adventists but it was not until 1931, 16 years after the death of Ellen White that the word trinity was first included in any of our published beliefs. Even then it was without depicting what I term trinity essentialness (three co-eternal personalities in the one indivisible being of God).

In a later section, where we shall discover how our declared published fundamental beliefs have changed over the years, we shall see that its usage then would have only been regarded by many as an alternative word for the term Godhead.

These two words (trinity and Godhead) are not synonymous. There is no possibility of rendering any of the Greek words translated Godhead in the KJV (Acts 17:9, Romans 1:20, Colossians 2:9) as meaning a unity of beings as in the trinity doctrine. These Greek words simply mean pertaining to or of divinity. This means that in this 1931 statement of beliefs, our first use of the term trinity was rather ambiguous, meaning that it was open to interpretation. To put it another way again, the statement itself was just as acceptable to the non-trinitarians, which it certainly appears the majority of Seventh-day Adventists would still have been at that time (1931), as it would have been to the trinitarians. To put it succinctly, this statement would have encompassed the beliefs of both the non-trinitarians and trinitarians. It was because of this that it would have not been the cause of too much dispute.

By 1931, it can be safely said that the majority of Seventh-day Adventists would still have been non-trinitarian. This means that this statement of faith needed to be phrased as it was to avoid causing a massive split within our ranks. Certainly it was totally devoid of any trinity essentialness. However, it must be said that this first inclusion of the word trinity into our fundamental beliefs, albeit it was one that was very subtle, was a very big step in inculcating the trinity doctrine itself into Seventh-day Adventism.

As a brief overview of these historical facts, note very importantly that the very first time that the word trinity was included in any of our published fundamental beliefs was 87 years after our movement began (using 1844 as a starting point) and 16 years after the death of Ellen White. Throughout our studies, these two realisations should always be regarded as being highly significant. Certainly they should always be borne in mind.

We shall also repeatedly note that this was 33 years after the publication of Ellen White's *Desire of Ages*. This must also be regarded as being highly significant. I say this because throughout this study, it will be seen that our church claims today that it was what this lady wrote in *Desire of Ages* that is the reason for our denomination becoming trinitarian. This Ellen White claim is something that is ongoing within our denomination. As Andrew Bates observed in the *Ministry* magazine of June 2002

“Church publications are now saying more clearly that only with the publication of *The Desire of Ages* (1898) did a full trinitarian theology burst upon the Adventist scene.” (Andrew Bates, *Ministry*, June 2002, ‘*The use and abuse of authority*’)

This indeed is the ongoing reason, given by our leadership, for the adoption of trinitarianism within Seventh-day Adventism but as we have seen already and will see again in later sections, this reasoning is not valid. I say this because even many years after she had written this book, Ellen White clearly and repeatedly said that Seventh-day Adventists should never give up what they had believed about Christ since their beginnings, which was of course a non-

trinitarian faith. This will be expressly seen in a later section that deals with her appeals at the 1905 General Conference session. This was when attempts were being made, albeit in a rather subtle way, to introduce trinitarianism into Seventh-day Adventism.

We shall also see later that even though in 1931 the word trinity was first included in our fundamental beliefs, the trinity doctrine itself, as our denomination teaches it today, was far from being realised. In fact it was not until the early 1950's that this teaching could be said, within our denomination, to have become anywhere near fully established. This does not mean however that in the mid 1950's every Seventh-day Adventist believed and accepted this teaching. This is because we know for a fact that even then there were still those who held on to the old theology (what was believed and taught by our pioneers), therefore not approving of the trinity doctrine being expressed as part of our fundamental beliefs. This is something else we shall see more clearly in a later section.

The exact number of these trinity dissenters is not only unknown but also indeterminable although what we can be sure of is that there were not very many. Most just accepted the word trinity to explain God even though they may have not had any real theological understanding of what was actually meant by this term. In fact as I have said previously, if my reasoning in section four is correct, then most would not have been trinitarian at all. This is because many would have held beliefs that no trinitarian would accept.

The 1936 Sabbath School Lesson Studies

A good guide to what Seventh-day Adventists in general believed in 1936 regarding God, Christ and the Holy Spirit is the Sabbath School Lesson studies for the 4th quarter of that year.

As this is covered in detail in section forty-two we will not elaborate too much here, suffice to say that this set of studies (the 4th quarter of 1936) was one of 7 consecutive quarters that outlined the entire spectrum of beliefs held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. A dedicated article on this subject can also be read here

<http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/godhead/1936sabbathschoolstudies.pdf>

As will also be seen in section forty-two, these studies were not only endorsed by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists but the manuscripts for the studies, before they were published in the form of the Sabbath School study, was vetted by a select number of high ranking officials. These same officials were voted in as part of the team (the Sabbath School committee) that initially produced the studies. We can see therefore that in one sense these studies presented what Seventh-day Adventists then officially believed. In other words, these Sabbath School studies promoted their denominational faith. The entire set (7 quarters) were called "Bible Doctrines".

After the studies were published, the General Conference gave them high acclaim. They were said to be “the truth” that Seventh-day Adventists should share with their neighbours. Through our publications, great emphasis was placed on this action being carried out. Our church even had special binders made to contain the studies.

Why I have said all of this is that in the first set of these studies (the 4th quarter of 1936), the belief that was emphasised was that Christ was truly begotten in eternity of the Father (literally came out of the Father). This was the very same faith that had been held by Seventh-day Adventists all throughout the time of Ellen White’s ministry. Even 21 years after her death, in these lesson studies, these very same beliefs were still being promoted, complete with the endorsement of the General Conference. This should tell us all that we want to know concerning the faith of Seventh-day Adventists regarding Christ in the late 1930’s.

Just one snippet from these studies reveals their content. This was when the question was asked, “What testimony concerning His deity did Christ Himself give”, also citing John 16:27, John 16:28 and 8:58 as containing the answer. The study note said

“The direct statement of Jesus, “I came forth from the Father,” reads literally, “I came out of the Father.” Putting with this, His testimony in John 10:38, “The Father is in Me, and I in Him,” we have His personal witness that He truly was “begotten of the Father,” as John says in 1:14.” (*Sabbath School Lesson Study, 4th quarter 1936, Lesson 3, October 17th 1936, page 12. ‘The Godhead’*)

Concerning Christ, this was the 1936 denominational faith of Seventh-day Adventists. It was the same begotten faith as held by Seventh-day Adventists during the ministry of Ellen White.

1940’s objections

In later sections it will be seen that in the mid 1940’s when certain of our classic literature was edited to suit our new found faith of trinitarianism (our new theology), our church was divided on this matter. Some even said that in doing this editing, our church, via a few, was making a pronouncement on doctrine. For this reason they were very much against it being carried out. In contrast of course, there were those in favour of it.

In the main, this editing was done to Uriah Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation*, a book that was very highly regarded by Ellen White. Another book, *Bible Readings for the Home Circle* also underwent revision. In the latter, the actual amount that was changed was very slight in comparison to the changes made in Smith’s book but the content of what was actually edited out was not considered by many to be slight. This was where it said that in the incarnation, Christ took upon Himself sinful flesh, the flesh that many believed to be exactly the same

flesh as possessed by His mother Mary. Many have seen the editing out of this remark as Seventh-day Adventists creating their own version of the Roman Catholic teaching of the Immaculate Conception. Others explain it as a correct understanding of the type of flesh that Christ took upon Himself at the incarnation.

Throughout this study, we will be discussing the editing of Smith's book more fully. This is because the author of these notes regards it as being highly significant to an overall understanding of our changeover to trinitarianism.

One person who objected to the trinity doctrine becoming a part of the teachings of Seventh-day Adventism was Judson Washburn. He was then a retired minister, a very well known evangelist. Washburn knew very well the original message of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In fact he had kept Ellen White informed of the progress of our work wherever he had held his evangelistic campaigns. This Seventh-day Adventist minister had nothing good to say about the trinity doctrine. In fact in 1939, he wrote a letter to the General Conference objecting to this teaching making its way into Seventh-day Adventism. In it he said such things as

“This monstrous doctrine transplanted from heathenism into the Roman Papal Church is seeking to intrude its evil presence into the teachings of the Third Angel's Message.” (*Judson Washburn, 'The Trinity', letter to the Seventh-day Adventists General Conference, 1939*)

From these remarks, we can see why it was previously said that it was not until the middle of the decade following the writing of this letter, meaning the 1950's, that the trinity doctrine could be said to be the preponderant belief of Seventh-day Adventism. Even in the 1940's it was not fully accepted, even by those of the ministry. How many of the ministry thought this way is unknown. Some have tried to say that Washburn was only objecting to the Roman Catholic version of the trinity doctrine but this is certainly not true. He was against the very principles of this teaching, meaning the essentials of trinitarianism (three separate coeval personalities in the one indivisible being of God).

Into the 1950's

Merlin D. Burt, in the preface of a paper that he wrote concerning the demise of non-trinitarianism in the Seventh-day Adventist Church stated

“One of the remarkable aspects of the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the development of its position of the trinity and the deity of Christ. These doctrines did not become normative in the church until the middle of the twentieth century”. (*Merlin D. Burt, 1996, Preface to 'Demise of Semi-Arianism and anti-trinitarianism in Adventist theology, 1888-1957*)

This realisation regarding our developing trinity theology may be one of the “remarkable aspects” of our history but it is very true although concerning Burt's

conclusion of the establishing of the trinity doctrine within Seventh-day Adventism I can only partly agree.

I say this because by the mid 1950's, even though most Seventh-day Adventists would have probably called themselves trinitarian, the doctrine itself was certainly not then as pointedly stated as it is today therefore it would have been open to far more elasticity of interpretation. The fact that it was not detailed precisely made the use the word trinity more easily acceptable. I would have thought that if Seventh-day Adventists had realised the implications of it (as we have seen in previous sections) the majority would not have confessed it.

I would also be very careful as regards to Burt's comment on the deity of Christ.

As we shall continually observe as we progress through this paper, Seventh-day Adventists have always taught the complete deity of Christ, at least how it is revealed throughout both the Scriptures and the spirit of prophecy, although admittedly this is not as depicted in the trinity doctrine. We shall see more of this in the following sections. This is when we shall be taking a look at our early 1900's history. This will help us to understand what constituted the faith from which Ellen White warned that there would be a departing. As we noted in section one, she did say in 1904 (please note these dates very well because they are extremely important)

“Be not deceived; many will depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. We have now before us the alpha of this danger. The omega will be of a most startling nature.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B, No. 2 page 16, 'A Letter to Leading Physicians', July 24th 1904, 'Teach the Word'*)

If we can establish just what it was that constituted the 1904 Seventh-day Adventist faith, we shall be able to understand the warning itself. Without this knowledge we shall not be able to make any sense of it at all.

Unreasonable conclusions

As we noted above, trinitarians do not regard non-trinitarians as believing in the full deity of Christ. This is regardless of how the non-trinitarian belief is expressed. In other words, according to those who profess a true trinitarianism, unless a person expresses the deity of Christ as expressed in the trinity doctrine, then the full deity of Christ is not professed.

This though would not be a reasonable conclusion to draw, I say this because nowhere in the Scriptures is the trinity doctrine expressed. This means of course, if trinity reasoning is correct, then those who depict the deity of Christ only as it is expressed in Scripture are not professing His full deity. This of course would be an absurd conclusion to draw. We can see therefore that there must be a form of non-trinitarianism, a Bible only way, which correctly professes the deity of Christ.

As we noted in section four, one person who declared Christ's deity by using Scripture alone was Samuel Spear. He was a non-Seventh-day Adventist who wrote an article called *The Subordination of Christ* that was published in the New York Independent on the 14th November 1889. This was reprinted by the Pacific Press in 1892 and included in the Bible Students Library (sets of tracts depicting the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists). This shows that what he wrote in his article was what Seventh-day Adventists believed then, in the early 1890's, concerning the three personalities of the Godhead. When it was reprinted by our denomination in 1892, the title was changed to *The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity*. It appears that this title was given to it to express that it stood in opposition to the unbiblical extreme speculations of the trinity doctrine. This same article was also reprinted in the *Signs of the Times*, spread over two weeks, in the December of 1891 (7th and 14th). It was then published under its original title, *The Subordination of Christ*.

Spear's article was decidedly non-trinitarian. In it he spoke out against the extreme speculations of the trinitarians. As we also noted in section four, the trinity doctrine is only an assumed doctrine, based solely on speculation (things that God has not revealed in the Scriptures). If you would like to read Spear's article please go here.

[http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Articles\(others\)/Speararticle.pdf](http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Articles(others)/Speararticle.pdf)

Throughout the lifetime of Ellen White and even for decades after her death (1915), the trinitarians believed that Seventh-day Adventists did not profess the fullness of Christ's deity. As we have seen in previous sections, this was an ongoing problem within Seventh-day Adventism. We have also seen that Ellen White upheld the pioneers in their beliefs, saying that they were correctly professing the deity of Christ.

Remember here that the trinity doctrine could not have said to become established within Seventh-day Adventism until at least the mid 1950's. This means that it was by a very slow process that the Seventh-day Adventist Church eventually became to be regarded as both trinitarian and orthodox Christian.

God and Christ - a pillar of faith

Within our denominational history, there is no record of trinitarianism (three co-eternal divine personalities in one indivisible substance) being taught whilst Ellen White was alive (she died in 1915). Certainly there is no record of Ellen White herself ever professing this teaching.

Whilst she did profess a belief in the three personalities of the Godhead (the latter being a biblical word meaning pertaining to or of divinity), never once did she say that each have their subsistence in the one and the same indivisible substance of God, or, as it is said by the trinitarians, the *one being* of God. This though, meaning the three-in-one substance (one being) theory, is that which makes this teaching truly trinitarian (trinity essentialness). Just by saying that

there are three personalities of the Godhead, as did Ellen White, is certainly not making a profession of the trinity doctrine.

One thing that Ellen White did say (and this was in the early 1900's), was that what was then believed by Seventh-day Adventists concerning God and Christ was one of the landmark beliefs of Seventh-day Adventism. This is when she said to some of the delegates at the 1905 General Conference held at Takoma Park (please note very importantly that this was 7 years following the publication of *Desire of Ages*)

“Let not any man enter upon the work of tearing down the foundations of the truth that have made us what we are. God has led His people forward step by step though there were pitfalls of error on every side. Under the wonderful guidance of a plain, "Thus saith the Lord," a truth has been established that has stood the test of trial. When men arise and attempt to draw away disciples after them, meet them with the truths that have been tried as by fire.” (*Ellen G. White to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Takoma Park, Washington D. C., May 24th 1905, "A Warning against False Theories," MR 760*)

After appropriately quoting Revelation 3:1-3 which was God's message to Sardis telling them to hold fast to their beliefs she said

“Those who seek to remove the old landmarks are not holding fast; they are not remembering how they have received and heard. Those who try to bring in theories that would remove the pillars of our faith concerning the sanctuary or concerning the personality of God or of Christ, are working as blind men. They are seeking to bring in uncertainties and to set the people of God adrift without an anchor.” (*Ibid*)

The time context of these remarks is very important indeed. In fact it is crucial to understanding why she made them.

Ellen White made these remarks when the Godhead crisis was at its height within Seventh-day Adventism. This was during the early 1900's when the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventist concerning God and Christ were under attack from Satan. Ellen White told the 1905 conference delegates to hold fast to the beliefs that they then held.

Needless to say, these beliefs were non-trinitarian, not trinitarian. We can see therefore that Ellen White said that these non-trinitarian beliefs were a part of the landmarks of Seventh-day Adventism. She referred to them as being “foundations of the truth that have made us what we are”, meaning an integral part of the truth that had “stood the test of trial” and truth that had been “tried as by fire”.

Ellen White had no problem with the non-trinitarianism of Seventh-day

Adventism and this was now 7 years after she had written *Desire of Ages*. We shall speak more of this in section twenty-nine where we shall be taking a closer look at the early 1900's appeals of Ellen White for Seventh-day Adventists to keep the faith. This was at the 1905 General Conference session.

This keeping of the early 1900's faith was something that Seventh-day Adventists have failed to do. They have completely changed it. In his paper mentioned previously, Burt concludes with regards to our changeover to trinitarianism

“For the doctrines of the trinity and eternal deity of Christ, the change took over fifty years to become normative” (*Merlin D. Burt, 1996, Preface to 'Demise of Semi-Arianism and anti-trinitarianism in Adventist theology, 1888-1957, page 59, 'Chapter 7, 'Summary and conclusion'*)

This is in harmony with when he stated (see above) that the trinity doctrine “did not become normative in the church until the middle of the twentieth century”, meaning the 1950's. As also Woodrow Whidden put it in an article called *The Trinity* in the *Ministry* magazine of February 2003

“By the middle of the twentieth century, Seventh-day Adventists had reached the same consensus on these issues as had the church of the fourth century: that there is "one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," who have manifested themselves as a "unity of three co-eternal Persons.” (*Woodrow Whidden, Ministry, February 2003, 'The Trinity'*)

As we shall see in section twenty-four onward, it was beginning with Kellogg that attempts were made to introduce trinitarian beliefs into the Seventh-day Adventist Church, albeit it was done then in a very subtle way. This happened in 1903, the year before Ellen White said that the alpha of heresies was already confronting Seventh-day Adventists. If we add 50 years to this date, we then come to the year 1953, which, as we have just noted, is when the trinity doctrine is said by Merlin Burt to have become “normative” within Seventh-day Adventism. This confirms that it was in the early 1900's that the push began that eventually brought trinitarianism into our ranks.

Arriving at adulthood

In the *Ministry* magazine of June 1991 George Knight said

“By 1900 Adventism's lifestyle and doctrinal position were well established, and the church supported a rapidly expanding system of missions, conferences, schools, hospitals, and publishing houses around the world. Beyond that, leadership was becoming progressively more formal and "administrative," as opposed to being informal and charismatic.” (*George Knight, Ministry, June 1991, 'Adventism, institutionalism, and the challenge of secularization'*)

This statement of George Knight's is very true indeed. This is inasmuch as by the 1900's the lifestyle and the doctrines of Seventh-day Adventism had become "well established". It must be remembered here though that all the time that Ellen White was alive (the time period to which George Knight is referring) this denomination was strictly non-trinitarian. It was not until after she died (1915) that attempts were first officially and openly made to introduce trinitarian concepts (essential trinitarianism) into this denomination's beliefs.

In later sections when we look at the events of the 1919 Bible Conference, which was 4 years after the death of Ellen White, we shall see this far more clearly. This was when there was a very big push to bring in trinitarian concepts of Christ. These were concepts that up to that time were not generally taught within Seventh-day Adventism. This is why at this conference that there was a dispute over them.

In other words, there was no such official or open attempt to bring the trinity doctrine into our fundamental beliefs whilst Ellen White was alive. All during her time, these beliefs were strictly non-trinitarian. This is how it was when George Knight says, "By 1900 Adventism's lifestyle and doctrinal position were well established". Yes, agreed, by 1900's the Seventh-day Adventist doctrinal position was "well established", in fact it was very well established but what was established was not trinitarianism but non-trinitarianism. George Knight then says

"If a specific date can be given for Adventism's arrival at "adulthood," it may best be seen as 1956, when the denomination had the "right hand of fellowship" extended to it by Donald Grey Barnhouse, editor of Eternity and a highly influential fundamentalist leader." (*Ibid*)

Notice that we have come back again to the 1950's. This really is very important. Please bear it in mind. What though about this "adulthood" and "right hand of fellowship"? What is this all about?

Into fellowship with the evangelicals

In the mid 1950's (note the date very well because it is the very same time that the trinity doctrine was said to be established within Seventh-day Adventism) and for the very first time in our history, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was recognised by mainstream Christianity as being Christian. This though was not until our leadership assured them that as a denomination, we agreed with them on what they, the evangelicals, regarded as the basic fundamentals of the Christian faith. This did include of course, amongst other teachings, the doctrine of the trinity.

This all came about when Walter Martin, an evangelical leader renowned for his exposure of cults and after having dialogue with certain of our leadership concerning our fundamental beliefs, expressed to the Christian world that we should be termed Christian.

So it was that in the middle of the 1950's, the evangelicals held out to us what George Knight refers to as the "right hand of fellowship" (see above). In other words, in the 1950's and for the very first time in our history, the evangelicals regarded us as belonging to mainstream Christianity, therefore part of them. Unfortunately (and this really is a very big unfortunately), this mainstream Christianity is what was once believed and vigorously taught by Seventh-day Adventists as being the Babylon of Bible prophecy (see above).

It should be needless to say that without the profession of the trinity doctrine, there would have been no such fellowship offered to Seventh-day Adventists. Certainly the evangelicals would not have termed us as being Christian. This is because then, as it is now, the trinity doctrine was regarded as the central belief of the vast majority of Christian denominations.

It was not until the 1950's, by which time the trinity doctrine had become established within Seventh-day Adventism, that we received this gift of fellowship. If the trinity doctrine had not been established by then, it would not have transpired. That much really is an absolute certainty.

The one thing that is needful to note here is that the thermometer or gauge of the establishing of trinitarianism within Seventh-day Adventism is that which our church leadership claimed our beliefs to be. It was not necessarily the belief of every Seventh-day Adventist throughout the world although it must be said that by the 1950's, most would probably have termed themselves as being trinitarian. At least this would have been in the nominal sense of the word.

This, if my reasoning is correct in section five and things were much the same then as they are today, which is more than likely that they were, many of these Seventh-day Adventist trinitarians would not have actually been trinitarian at all. What exactly in percentage terms in the 1950's was the actual consensus of beliefs in the field is not only unknown but also indeterminable, although by that time the term trinity was certainly more favourably used than it had been in previous decades.

In later sections we shall see that the only thing that Walter Martin wanted to know was what our church leadership said that Seventh-day Adventists believed. Certainly he was not interested in what the laity or even the ministry in general said was believed. As we shall also see, not all agreed with what our leadership told Walter Martin. This included those amongst our ministry. This led to more division in our church and even more controversy.

As we noted above, George Knight said that by the year 1900, our "doctrinal position" was "well established" but history attests that this fellowship with the other denominations did not then exist. This is because we were still non-trinitarian and they, the mainstream trinitarian denominations, still regarded us as a cult. This is why it was not until the mid 1950s, after the trinity doctrine had become established within Seventh-day Adventism, that our relationship with

them became changed.

Important to remember here is that the trinity doctrine itself did not come into Seventh-day Adventism overnight. It was a long struggle for it to actually become established. This is why Judson Washburn said in 1939 that it was still only then “seeking to intrude” its evil presence into the teachings of the Third Angel’s Message” (see above).

The trinity doctrine – a pillar of Babylon

As we have seen above, Ellen White clearly said that the belief of Seventh-day Adventists concerning God and Christ in 1905 was one of the “landmarks” and “pillars” of their faith. This faith though was non-trinitarian therefore our “landmarks” and “pillars” of our God given faith was non-trinitarian. In contrast to this, in his book *The Pillars*, Morris Venden emphasised his belief that the trinity doctrine is one of the pillars of Christianity. He said

“There are certain monumental pillars, great truths of the Bible, that the Evangelicals have held. There are landmarks of the fundamentally orthodox, Bible-believing Christians that they have fought for, lived for, and died for. They are the essence of the Christian faith. And they are beliefs that we as Seventh-day Adventists share.” (Morris Venden, *The Pillars*, pages 9-10, *The pillars of the faith*)

Morris Venden makes reference here to the “evangelicals” and the faith (beliefs) that we as Seventh-day Adventists share with them. Remember that these are amongst the denominations that Seventh-day Adventists once taught were the Babylon of Bible prophecy. After listing the inspiration of the Scriptures as being the first of these beliefs, Morris Venden then writes of the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists

“Second, they believe in the Trinity. They accept the Three Persons of the Godhead as being all-knowing, all-powerful, and everywhere present - God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.” (*Ibid* page 10)

Note here the trinitarian language, meaning the reference to “God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit”. This is not Biblical language; neither can these terminologies be found in the spirit of prophecy. This is religious language that in support of their trinity belief has been introduced by the trinitarians. As we have pointed out already, just a belief in the three personalities of the Godhead, however they are regarded, does not constitute a trinity doctrine. There needs to be the inclusion that they all have their subsistence in the one indivisible substance (one being) of God. This is part and parcel of essential trinitarianism (see section six).

Venden is saying here that amongst other teachings, the trinity doctrine is the “essence of the Christian faith”. He also says that it is one of the “landmarks” of “fundamentally orthodox, Bible-believing Christians”. This implies, because none

of our pioneers were trinitarian (some even positively anti-trinitarian), that they were not, according to this analysis, “[fundamentally orthodox, Bible-believing Christians](#)”. This is quite an allegation.

As we know, the trinity doctrine was definitely not a landmark or pillar belief of the pioneers. Under the auspices of Ellen White (God’s messenger to the remnant), they totally rejected it. According to her it was what they taught about God and Christ that constituted a landmark and pillar of Seventh-day Adventism.

Adulthood or adultery?

Note that George Knight says that when from the evangelicals we received this “right hand of fellowship”, we had reached as he put it, “[adulthood](#)” (see above quote from the *Ministry* magazine). It must be recognised here that these evangelicals (these other denominations that constitute mainstream Christianity and who had accepted us in the 1950’s as fully Christian) are what was once regarded in Seventh-day Adventism as being part of the Babylon of Bible prophecy.

Allow me to put this in another way.

In the 1950’s, because Seventh-day Adventists had been found to meet a certain standard of requirements (a certain criterion), we were accepted, by the falling protestant churches of Bible prophecy (Babylon), as being a part of them. This is the reason why they gave to us the “[right hand of fellowship](#)”. This must be regarded as a startling realisation, especially as George Knight recognises this as Seventh-day Adventism reaching its “[adulthood](#)” (our coming of age). This is where Seventh-day Adventism had arrived at, by the 1950’s. George Knight also noted in his article

“The acceptance of that fellowship unfortunately (but predictably) split the Adventist ranks between those who viewed it as a step forward and those who saw it as a “sell-out” to the enemy.” (*George Knight, Ministry, June 1991, ‘Adventism, institutionalism, and the challenge of secularization’*)

This is referring to the mid 1950’s therefore not all Seventh-day Adventists then, according to George Knight, regarded this “[fellowship](#)” with the evangelicals as being God ordained. Take note also that this same author said that this whole affair (some regard this is an appropriate word to use for this getting together with the evangelicals) “[split the Adventist ranks](#)”. Some regarded it as George Knight had said as a “[step forward](#)” whilst others regarded it as “[a sell-out to the enemy](#)”.

In the *Ministry* magazine in an article called *Adventists and ecumenical conversation*, Angel Manuel Rodriguez who is director of the Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Research Institute wrote

“The Adventist involvement in interfaith conversations has never had the

purpose of seeking unity with other ecclesiastical bodies. We have used such conversations as a means of sharing our true identity and mission with others, and as a way of eliminating misunderstanding and prejudices against us.” (*Angel Manuel Rodriguez, Ministry, December 2003, ‘Adventists and ecumenical conversation’*)

As Rodriguez noted though

“There is always the risk of misrepresenting differences in order to make them more palatable to the partner in conversation.” (*Ibid*)

The same author warned

“Coming too close to other religious communities could hamper our mission to them. It is tempting to conclude that since believers in those communities are good Christians, we have little or nothing to offer to them.” (*Ibid*)

According to many Seventh-day Adventists, this is exactly what has happened. They say that this dialoguing with other denominations has caused a de-emphasising of some of what was always considered to be the distinctive aspects of our message and mission.

This division in views has still not changed today. Some regard us in the 1950’s as having reached “**adulthood**” whilst some regard us as having an adulterous affair with Babylon. Whichever it is, each individual needs to decide for his or her self on the weight of evidence that they find. This is one of the main reasons for the publication of these studies. It is to help others, particularly Seventh-day Adventists, to make better-informed decisions. As George Knight concluded however regarding the 1950’s

“Like it or not, the denomination did reach its adulthood.” (*Ibid*)

As can be seen, this church historian places a lot of importance on us reaching “**adulthood**” also in receiving the “**right hand of fellowship**” from the evangelicals – whether we “**like it or not**”. In section twenty-four we shall see the beginnings of the early 1900’s crisis within Seventh-day Adventism. Amongst other things, this concerned the personalities of the Godhead.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section twenty-four

The early 1900's Controversy concerning God and Christ

In previous sections we have taken particular note that whilst Ellen White was alive, the belief of Seventh-day Adventists was that Christ is the begotten Son of God. This was even something that she said herself. This though did not prohibit them from believing in His full and complete divinity. Rather it endorsed it. They maintained that this was in harmony with where the Bible says that Christ is God, such as John 1:1 etc.

Although they believed that the Son was God essentially, Seventh-day Adventists did not believe that He was coeval (of the same age) as the Father. This is because they believed that as a separate personality from God (the Father) He had come into existence at a point in eternity. This was said to be so far back in eternity that it was impossible for the human mind to comprehend it.

We have also noted that in this respect, there was harmony amongst Seventh-day Adventists. This was even following the publication of Ellen White's *Desire of Ages* (1898), the book that our leadership is saying today led our denomination to become trinitarian. Keep this uppermost in your mind because it really is extremely important.

As we shall see now, Ellen White said that what Seventh-day Adventists were teaching in the early 1900's regarding Christ was the truth that God had given to them. This, as far as the Son being begotten is concerned, is why she upheld their beliefs. This harmony though was not to continue. Discord was about to break out amongst God's remnant people. As W. A. Spicer put it when referring to the problems caused by the publication of John Harvey Kellogg's book *The Living Temple*

“At the turn of this twentieth century the Advent movement was passing into some years of special difficulty. It seemed as though error, in the most unexpected way, was threatening to come in like a flood. Just there we saw the Spirit of prophecy working, instant on the right hand and on the left, with special power to meet special needs.” (*W. A. Spicer, How the Spirit of Prophecy Met a Crisis: Memories and Notes of the "Living Temple" Controversy', 1938*)

We shall take note of this now.

Foundation truths – the landmarks and pillars of our faith

At the 1905 General Conference session (as this is very important to our studies we shall look at this in far more detail in section twenty-nine), Ellen White told the delegates that Satan was making a two-pronged attack on the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. This is when she said

“Let not any man enter upon the work of tearing down the foundations of the truth that have made us what we are. God has led His people forward step by step though there were pitfalls of error on every side. Under the wonderful guidance of a plain, "Thus saith the Lord," a truth has been established that has stood the test of trial. When men arise and attempt to draw away disciples after them, meet them with the truths that have been tried as by fire.” (*Ellen G. White to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Takoma Park, Washington D. C., May 24th 1905, "A Warning against False Theories," MR 760*)

Seventh-day Adventists were being told at this conference that the “foundations of the truth that have made us what we are” was the truth that had “stood the test of trial”. This is why Ellen White said that when those would bring in wrong teachings that would lead our people astray, they could be confronted with it. She referred to this as “truths that have been tried as by fire”. Note again that this was in 1905. Then, after quoting Revelation 3:1-3 (which was God’s message to Sardis telling them to hold fast to their beliefs) she said

“Those who seek to remove the old landmarks are not holding fast; they are not remembering how they have received and heard. Those who try to bring in theories that would remove the pillars of our faith concerning the sanctuary or concerning the personality of God or of Christ, are working as blind men. They are seeking to bring in uncertainties and to set the people of God adrift without an anchor.” (*Ibid*)

Here it can be clearly seen that in 1905, Ellen White included in our foundational truths the beliefs we then held regarding God and Christ. Notice there was no mention of the personality of the Holy Spirit. Note again the differentiating between God and Christ as two separate beings. This was something that over and over again Ellen White would do during the early 1900’s.

Here we have the two beliefs that were under attack from Satan. One belief concerned the sanctuary whilst the other concerned the Godhead. As most Seventh-day Adventists would agree, these are the two main beliefs that have been tampered with since Ellen White has died.

Two years earlier in 1903, Ellen White had written to the teachers at the Emmanuel Missionary College saying that perilous times were ahead for Seventh-day Adventists. This was the year that Kellogg published his book *The Living Temple*. She wrote

“Perilous times are before us. Every one who has a knowledge of the truth should awake, and place himself, body, soul, and spirit, under the discipline of God. Wake up, brethren, wake up. The enemy is on our track. We must be wide awake, on our guard against him. We must put on the whole armor of God. We must follow the directions given in the spirit of prophecy. We must love and obey the truth for this time. This will save us from accepting strong delusions. God has spoken to us through his Word. He has spoken to us through the Testimonies to the church, and through the books that have helped to make plain our present duty and the position that we should now occupy. The warnings that have been given, line upon line, precept upon precept, should be heeded.” (*Ellen G. White ‘A Warning of Danger’. St. Helena, Cal., Sept. 23, 1903. To the Teachers in Emmanuel Missionary College, Spalding and Magan’s Unpublished Manuscript Testimonies of Ellen G. White, page 324, 1903*)

Here we are told that for our own sakes (to save us accepting “strong delusions”) we must heed both the Scriptures and the spirit of prophecy (God’s testimonies to the church). Notice as well that Ellen White said that God has also spoken to His people through certain of our books although she does not actually name any of them here. She concluded about these God-given warnings

“If we disregard them, what excuse shall we offer?” (*Ibid*)

What excuse indeed but before they can be heeded we must first discover what constitutes them.

New theories concerning God and Christ (but not regarding the Holy Spirit)

Note very importantly the next words of Ellen White. I say very importantly because as we have previously noted, she did say in 1905 that along with our sanctuary teaching, the main area that Satan was attacking was what Seventh-day Adventists believed concerning God and Christ. With respect to what Kellogg had written in his book she said

“The new theories in regard to God and Christ, as brought out in “The Living Temple”, are not in harmony with the teaching of Christ.” (*Ibid*)

Nothing is said here concerning new beliefs regarding the Holy Spirit. Ellen White then added

“The Lord Jesus came to this world to represent the Father. He did not represent God as an essence pervading nature, but as a personal being. Christians should bear in mind that God has a personality as verily as has Christ.” (*Ibid*)

This is also one gigantic and decisive statement from the spirit of prophecy that makes it abundantly clear that both God and Christ are each, in their own right, separate personalities. Ellen White also said, “God has a personality as verily as

has Christ". How much clearer could this be stated? This must never be forgotten or else we really shall be led down some very strange paths. In 1903, there were moves afoot to make God something other than a personal being (trying to make Him into a nonentity or nothingness). This testimony was written the month before Kellogg said that he had come to believe in the trinity doctrine. We shall see this in the next section. Notice here that Ellen White refers to God as "the Father".

Ellen White also says here that the "new theories" via Kellogg that were making inroads into Seventh-day Adventism were "in regard to God [the Father] and Christ". She also said that these views were failing to depict God [the Father] as "a personal being". This is the thrust of what she is saying was wrong with Kellogg's book. It was de-personalising God.

As we shall see in the following sections, Ellen White said that attempts were being made to make both God and Christ nonentities (meaning nothingness). Note that in the above statement, Ellen White said nothing about these new views making the Holy Spirit something other than a personal being. This is again very interesting and probably because He was not generally regarded as such by Seventh-day Adventists although He was recognised as a separate personality from God and Christ. We shall speak more of this in later sections.

Note very importantly too that Ellen White said that these beliefs about God and Christ, referring to what Kellogg was teaching, were "new theories", meaning that they did not conform to what Seventh-day Adventists were teaching then in 1903 which was of course non-trinitarianism. This is also something that should be very significant. Never did Ellen White say that what Seventh-day Adventists believed in this respect was error. She only endorsed their beliefs. This was even many years following the publication of *Desire of Ages*, the book that the pro-trinitarians say led Seventh-day Adventists to become trinitarian. This should be a very significant realisation.

In 1906, Ellen White wrote a letter addressed to "my ministering brethren in Australia". In it she warned that our youth were "not to venture to Battle Creek" to train as medical missionaries or teachers of the gospel. This she said is because at Battle Creek they were ignoring the warnings that God had sent and were "no longer safe teachers". She followed this by saying

"The history of the first great rebellion has been frequently presented to me in figures. The same spirit that brought about the great deception in heaven, is at work in our world today. Our watchmen must be wide awake to give the trumpet a certain sound." (*Ellen G. White, Letter 256, 1st August 1906*)

She then said, very interestingly

"Study carefully the first chapter in *Patriarchs and Prophets*. From this chapter I quote:- " (*Ibid*)

In 1906, as a defence against the prevailing false doctrines concerning Christ that were then being taught at Battle Creek (and anywhere else), Ellen White appealed to a book she had published 16 years earlier in 1890. Whilst we cannot quote all she said here, suffice to say it was in keeping with the then non-trinitarianism of Seventh-day Adventism. She began by saying

“The Sovereign of the universe was not alone in His work of beneficence. He had an associate -- a co-worker who could appreciate His purposes, and could share His joy in giving happiness to created beings. ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.’ Christ, the Word, the only begotten of God, was one with the eternal Father -- one in nature, in character, in purpose -- the only being that could enter into all the counsels and purposes of God. ‘His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.’ His “goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”” (Ibid)

Notice first of all that the “Sovereign of the Universe” and Christ (the “associate” or “co-worker” as Ellen White calls Him) are two separate Beings. Notice too she said that Christ “the only begotten of God” was the “only being that could enter into all the counsels and purposes of God”. She then went on to say

“And the Son of God declares concerning Himself: “The Lord possessed Me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting. When He appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him: and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him.” (Ibid)

Ellen White is saying here that the Wisdom of Proverbs chapter 8 is none other than Christ Himself. This is the begotten concept of Christ. He was as one who was “brought up with” the “Sovereign of the universe”. As Ellen White so often said during the Kellogg crisis, God (the “Sovereign of the universe”) and Christ (an “associate” and “co-worker”) are two separate personages. As this opening chapter is read, the one thing that becomes significant is that there is no mention of the Holy Spirit. This is more significant when it is realized that later in the chapter Ellen White wrote

“Sin originated with him who, next to Christ, had been most honored of God and was highest in power and glory among the inhabitants of heaven. Lucifer, “son of the morning,” was first of the covering cherubs, holy and undefiled.” (Ibid)

Again there is no mention of the Holy Spirit. She said that Lucifer was the one “next to Christ” who was the “most honored of God” in Heaven. She also said in that chapter in *Patriarchs and Prophets*

“The King of the universe summoned the heavenly hosts before Him, that in

their presence He might set forth the true position of His Son and show the relation He sustained to all created beings. The Son of God shared the Father's throne, and the glory of the eternal, self-existent One encircled both." (*Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, page 36, 'Why was sin permitted'*)

Again there is no mention of the Holy Spirit. Note she says "encircled both". She does not mention a third divine being. Again the Son of God is differentiated from "the self-existent one". She also said

"Before the assembled inhabitants of heaven the King declared that none but Christ, the Only Begotten of God, could fully enter into His purposes, and to Him it was committed to execute the mighty counsels of His will." (*Ibid*)

The presence and personality of God

When for the very first time that Ellen White read *The Living Temple* (her son had persuaded her to read some of it with him), she made this observation

"As we read, I recognised the very sentiments against which I had been bidden to speak in warning during the early days of my public labors. When I first left the State of Maine, it was to go through Vermont and Massachusetts, to bear a testimony against these sentiments. "Living Temple" contains the alpha of these theories. I knew that the omega would follow in a little while; and I trembled for our people" (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B, No. 2 'The Foundation of our Faith' Page 53 1904*)

Here again our thoughts are returned to the "alpha of deadly heresies" and the "omega" (see section one). Take particular note that Ellen White said here that the sentiments she had encountered in her "early days" were the same as the false theories that in her time was already within Seventh-day Adventism (Kellogg's beliefs). In other words, these false sentiments that she had spoken about in her "early days" were seeking to take the place of what Seventh-day Adventists believed then in the early 1900's.

So what was Ellen White referring to here? What were these false sentiments? We know what they were because of her next words. She said

"I knew that I must warn our brethren and sisters not to enter into controversy over the presence and personality of God. The statements made in "Living Temple" in regard to this point are incorrect. The Scripture used to substantiate the doctrine there set forth, is Scripture misapplied." (*Ibid*)

Now we know what these false sentiments were all about. They were primarily concerned with (as Ellen White put it), "the presence and personality of God".

Here then, in this early 1900's crisis, was the problem area.

As we shall see later, it was all to do with the Holy Spirit who then, in the early 1900's, was believed by Seventh-day Adventists to be God and Christ omnipresent (God's presence and personality). As we shall see in detail later, Kellogg came to believe differently. Obviously too, because of this, it was all to do with the Godhead (or as some say the trinity). Under the subtitle of "A False and a True Knowledge of God Speculative Theories" Ellen White wrote

"Those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever;" but "the secret things belong unto the Lord our God." Deuteronomy 29:29. The revelation of Himself that God has given in His word is for our study. This we may seek to understand. But beyond this we are not to penetrate. The highest intellect may tax itself until it is wearied out in conjectures regarding the nature of God; but the effort will be fruitless. This problem has not been given us to solve. No human mind can comprehend God. Let not finite man attempt to interpret Him. Let none indulge in speculation regarding His nature. Here silence is eloquence. The Omniscient One is above discussion.

Even the angels were not permitted to share the counsels between the Father and the Son when the plan of salvation was laid. Those human beings who seek to intrude into the secrets of the Most High show their ignorance of spiritual and eternal things. Far better might they, while mercy's voice is still heard, humble themselves in the dust and plead with God to teach them His ways." (*Ellen G. White, 8th Volume Testimonies, page 279, 'The essential knowledge' 1904*)

Notice here that again Ellen White does not include the Holy Spirit. She simply says "Father and the Son". This, as we shall see as we progress through these studies, was something that was done by her very often. There is a reason for it. Note that this was in 1904.

Unfortunately, the fact that the Bible is totally silent on how God eternally exists (either as the Father, the Son or even the Holy Spirit) has not deterred the Christian church from using the term trinity as a way to describe His being (how God exists). Nevertheless, their ongoing insistence that this teaching is an unfathomable mystery that cannot be fully understood, particularly by the layperson, has ultimately led to a decided lack of study of what this doctrine actually does teach.

We can conclude therefore that with respect to the very being of God, meaning how God exists, many Christians today freely use the term the trinity, even regarding this concept as being sacrosanct, yet they often do so without understanding what is really entailed. This is how it was with me before I began these studies (see section ten). In this very same book of Special Testimonies, Ellen White wrote in defence of the pioneers' non-trinitarian faith of her time

“We are God's commandment-keeping people. For the past fifty years every phase of heresy has been brought to bear upon us, to becloud our minds regarding the teaching of the word,--especially concerning the ministration of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, and the message of heaven for these last days, as given by the angels of the fourteenth chapter of Revelation. Messages of every order and kind have been urged upon Seventh-day Adventists, to take the place of the truth which, point by point, has been sought out by prayerful study, and testified to by the miracle-working power of the Lord.” (*Ellen White, Letter 95, 1905, To Dr. and Mrs. Daniel Kress, March 14, 1905, see also Special Testimonies Series B. No. 2 page 59 ‘The Foundation of Our Faith’*)

Again Ellen White refers to the “past fifty years” (this would be approximately 1855-1905). She says that during this time, attempts had been made to inculcate into the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventism all kinds of wrong beliefs. These she said were meant to take the place of the “truth” that they were then teaching. Remember in section twenty-two we noted that when in Australia in the mid 1890's (this was when *The Desire of Ages* was being prepared), Ellen White said that what the pioneers were teaching concerning Christ was “the truth”. This was when our beliefs were still non-trinitarian. Note she says above that it was by prayerful study of God's word that was the way that the pioneers formulated their beliefs. Here she was emphasising how this truth was established.

She also says that what they believed was the “truth” and that it had been attested to by “the miracle-working power of the Lord”. She had in mind here the many evidences of God's working that she and the other pioneers had experienced during those fifty years. It was also God's own personal endorsement that what Seventh-day Adventists had been teaching (and still were teaching) was the truth that God had given to them. She then added

“But the way-marks which have made us what we are, are to be preserved, and they will be preserved, as God has signified through His word and the testimony of His Spirit. He calls upon us to hold firmly, with the grip of faith, to the fundamental principles that are based upon unquestionable authority.” (*Ibid*)

Again there is an appeal to both the Scriptures and the spirit of prophecy (the testimony of God's Spirit). Note Ellen White makes it clear that what she then regarded as the “fundamental principles” of Seventh-day Adventism, which would have included what we then believed concerning God, Christ and the sanctuary were based upon “unquestionable authority”, also that these were “way-marks” that were to be preserved. This was in 1905, shortly after returning from Australia. Ellen White had also written the previous year (1904)

“Let none seek to tear away the foundations of our faith -- the foundations that were laid at the beginning of our work by prayerful study of the word and by revelation. Upon these foundations we have been building for the

last fifty years.” (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church Volume 8 ‘The Essential knowledge’ 1904, see also Review and Herald 3rd March 1904*)

Again there is reference here to how it was in the beginning when the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were formed. Ellen White said that it was “by prayerful study of the word and by revelation”. Note again the “fifty years”. Ellen White is pleading with Seventh-day Adventists not to give up what she believes was their God-given faith. She then added

“Men may suppose that they have found a new way and that they can lay a stronger foundation than that which has been laid. But this is a great deception. Other foundation can no man lay than that which has been laid.” (Ibid)

In the next paragraph, she wrote

“In the past many have undertaken the building of a new faith, the establishment of new principles. But how long did their building stand? It soon fell, for it was not founded upon the Rock.” (Ibid)

Notice in particular that Ellen White said that in the past, meaning during the previous fifty years to 1904 (1854-1904), many had attempted to build what she terms a “new faith” established on “new principles”. This was “new” to how it was then in 1904, which was non-trinitarian. In other words to Seventh-day Adventists, trinitarianism would have been a “new faith” established on “new principles”. This was no different than what she had said in 1901 which was that

“No line of truth that has made the Seventh-Day Adventist people what they are, is to be weakened. We have the old land-marks of truth, experience, and duty, and we are to stand firmly in defence of our principles in full view of the world.” (Ellen G. White, *Australian Union Conference Record 7th January 1901 ‘The Work for this time’*)

How much more plainly could this have been said?

All of the above was either spoken or written by Ellen White whilst we were still a non-trinitarian denomination, also after the publication of *Desire of Ages*. Remember, this is the book that is said to have led our denomination to accept trinitarianism.

So how could this be? How could the book *The Desire of Ages* have led our denomination to conclude that our pioneers had been teaching error if after it had been published, Ellen White was telling Seventh-day Adventists not to change the beliefs about God and Christ that they had held for the previous fifty years? This really does take some thinking about!

More early 1900's warnings of apostasy

Concerning the crisis of the early 1900's Ellen White wrote

"Few can see the meaning of the present apostasy. But the Lord has lifted the curtain, and has shown me its meaning, and the result that it will have if allowed to continue. (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B, No. 7 page 37 'Councils in Battle Creek' June 15th 1904 'Decided action to be taken now'*)

Note first of all that Ellen White refers to the beginning of the drifting away from the early teachings of Seventh-day Adventism (this included the alpha of heresies as in Kellogg's teachings) as "the present apostasy". She then added

"We must now lift our voices in warning. Will our people acknowledge God as the supreme Ruler, or will they choose the misleading arguments and views that, when fully developed, make Him, in the minds of those who accept them, as nothingness?" (*Ibid*)

Here we can see a very serious warning for Seventh-day Adventists. Note particularly that Ellen White was warning that in the minds of those who accept what she calls "misleading arguments", God would become "nothingness". This is much the same as we read above where Ellen White said concerning the books that our ministers, editors and teachers were reading, "... Satan is working to make a nonentity of God and of Christ (see above). This is one of the main things that she had against Kellogg's teachings. It was de-personalising God. In 1905 Ellen White again warned Seventh-day Adventists

"One thing it is certain is soon to be realized, -- the great apostasy, which is developing and increasing and waxing stronger, and will continue to do so until the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout. We are to hold fast the first principles of our denominated faith, and go forward from strength to increased faith." (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B, No. 7 page 57 Sanitarium, Cal., Dec. 4, 1905, 'Standing in the way of God's Messages'*)

This really is a fearsome but enlightening statement. She then said with reference to Seventh-day Adventists. Once again we see Ellen White defending the 1905 non-trinitarian faith of Seventh-day Adventists but now she is making reference to "a great apostasy". She also said that even though this apostasy would continue until Jesus returns, Seventh-day Adventists were to "hold fast" to (not let go of) the "first principles" of their "denominated faith". This is the faith that we have previously seen her describe as the "landmarks" and "pillars" of Seventh-day Adventism. We can also see here a similar message to the one that we noted in section one where she said in 1904 that many would depart from the faith of Seventh-day Adventists. In endorsement of what she had just said she added

“Ever we are to keep the faith that has been substantiated by the Holy Spirit of God from the earlier events of our experience until the present time.”
(*Ibid*)

As can be seen, Ellen White saw no problem with the 1905 faith of Seventh-day Adventists, even though it was non-trinitarian. In fact she was saying that it was the truth that God had given to the pioneers therefore it should never be changed.

As well as with respect to the sanctuary, this was particularly so with regards to our beliefs about the individual personalities of God and Christ. This really is very important for us to remember. So too is the fact that this was 7 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*. This is the book that our leaders claim today led us to become trinitarian. In 1905, Ellen White did not envisage this book, even after she was dead, as changing the faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This was no more than it had changed this faith whilst she was alive. Two years later she wrote in a letter to Battle Creek

“I thank the Lord that there are many who can discern now, if not before, the spirit that has taken possession of those who resist the warnings of the Spirit of God. I am bidden to say to the believers in Battle Creek, Press together. Let no words be spoken to irritate or provoke. Stand firmly in the faith in which God has led us for the last fifty years.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter to Battle Creek, April 19th 1907*)

So what was it that by the early 1900's that Seventh-day Adventists believed concerning God and Christ? We shall take a look at this now. Certainly it was not trinitarianism.

Christ is God essentially

In her book *Desire of Ages* (1898), Ellen White clearly defined the identity of Jesus. With reference to Him saying, “Before Abraham was I am” (John 8:58) she said

“Silence fell upon the vast assembly. The name of God, given to Moses to express the idea of the eternal presence, had been claimed as His own by this Galilean Rabbi. He had announced Himself to be the self-existent One, He who had been promised to Israel, “whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity.” Micah 5:2, margin. (*Ellen White, The Desire of Ages, page 469, ‘The light of Life’*)

Ellen White did certainly believe that Christ was “the eternal presence” (the “I AM”). We noted this in section sixteen. As we proceed through this and the next section, that Ellen White said this is very important for us to remember because it does tell us that this same author believed, just as the Bible says, that Christ is God Himself manifest in the flesh (see John 1:1, Hebrews 1:1-3, 1 Timothy 3:16 etc). This was not in a trinitarian sense but one that was non-trinitarian. As she

also said in 1905

“Christ was God manifest in the flesh; in him dwelt "all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." All this glory he longed to pour upon the world, but men refused to receive it. They were given evidence upon evidence; but they bound themselves up in their stubborn unbelief and prejudice. Therefore they were without excuse.” (*Ellen G. White, Youth’s Instructor, 21st March 1901, Show us a sign from heaven*)

This was no different than she had always believed. In a letter written to M. J. Church in 1890 she had written

“Christ did not seek to be thought great, and yet He was the Majesty of heaven, equal in dignity and glory with the infinite God. He was God manifested in the flesh.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 8a, July 7th 1890, To M. J. Church, Manuscript Release Volume 20, MR1444*)

Note here that Ellen White refers to Christ as “the Majesty of heaven but also says that He was “*with* the infinite God”. She does not say that He is the Infinite God, at least not in personality. She also said in the same letter concerning Christ

“He was not the Father but in Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and yet He calls to a suffering world, "Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (*Ibid*)

To Seventh-day Adventists and Ellen White in 1890, the Father is the infinite God whilst Christ is the Son of the infinite God. In 1906 concerning Christ Ellen White penned these words

“The world was made by him, "and without him was not anything made that was made." 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.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 5th April 1906, ‘The Word made flesh*)

It is very difficult to misunderstand what Ellen White is saying here. It is in keeping with John 1:1 etc. You can read the entire article here

<http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/SB-EGWarticles.htm>

After saying to the youth in 1900 that Christ was not compelled to undertake the role of the saviour of mankind but that it was on His part a voluntary decision she said

“He might have continued to abide in the heavenly courts, clothed in garments of purest white, sitting as a prince of God's right hand. Voluntarily he offered himself, a willing sacrifice.

Not one of the angels could have become surety for the human race: their life is God's; they could not surrender it. The angels all wear the yoke of obedience. They are the appointed messengers of Him who is the commander of all heaven. But Christ is equal with God, infinite and omnipotent. He could pay the ransom for man's freedom.” (*Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor, 21st June 1900, 'The price of our redemption part IV*)

Here again she contrasted Christ with God, two separate divine personalities. She says, “Christ is equal with God”. In other words, God is one personal divine being whilst the Son is another. They are two separate divine personalities, two separate personages. From the very beginning, this had always been the belief of Seventh-day Adventists. She then added regarding the pre-existent Christ

“He is the eternal, self-existing Son, on whom no yoke had come; and when God asked, "Whom shall I send?" he could reply, "Here am I; send me." He could pledge himself to become man's surety; for he could say that which the highest angel could not say,--I have power over my own life, "power to lay it down, and . . . power to take it again." (*Ibid*)

Although an “eternal, self-existing Son” and although God essentially (equal with God), we noted in section thirteen that we have been told through the spirit of prophecy that if Christ had sinned, He would have not only have lost His attributes of deity but also His eternal existence.

True identity or blasphemy?

That Ellen White did say that Christ is “God essentially”, also that He is as the “eternal presence” (the ‘I AM’) must lead us to conclude that she also believed that as regards to identity of person He was no less than God Himself manifest in the flesh. In *Desire of Ages* (following on from the previous quote above where she says that Jesus claimed the name of ‘I AM’) Ellen White wrote

“Again the priests and rabbis cried out against Jesus as a blasphemer. His claim to be one with God had before stirred them to take His life, and a few months later they plainly declared, "For a good work we stone Thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that Thou, being a man, makest Thyself God." John 10:33.” (*Ellen White, The Desire of Ages, page 470, 'The light of Life'*)

Note Ellen White said that Jesus claimed, “to be one with God”. She does not say that He claimed to be God. Quite rightly though, she quoted the Scripture where it says that later, the Jews believed that Jesus was claiming to be God Himself. This was their realisation, not the claim of Jesus. With regards to personalities, Jesus was not claiming to be the infinite God but in Himself was manifesting God in a unique way that only the Son could accomplish. With

reference to this accusation of the Jews towards Jesus, Ellen White explained to the youth of her time

“The strong denunciation of the Pharisees against Jesus was, "Thou, being a man, makest thyself God;" and for this reason they sought to stone him. Christ did not apologize for this supposed assumption on his part. He did not say to his accusers, "You misunderstand me; I am not God." He was manifesting God in humanity.” (*Ellen G. White, Youth’s Instructor, 16th September 1897, ‘What think ye of Christ’*)

In that penultimate statement from *The Desire of Ages*, Ellen White added in conclusion

“The Light was shining in darkness; but "the darkness apprehended it not." John 1:5, R. V.” (*Ellen White, The Desire of Ages, page 470, ‘The light of Life’*)

That “light” was the presence of Jehovah. In other words, Jesus was, and still is, no one less than “God manifest in the flesh”, the “I AM”. The Jews, reading much more into this “I AM” statement than just a claim to pre-existence, realised that Jesus was identifying Himself with the “I AM” of Exodus 3:14-15. This was the one whom they regarded as Yahweh (commonly Jehovah), the one true God. This is why they said that He was a “blasphemer”.

This “I AM” statement which is referred to here (Exodus chapter 3) is the time when God spoke to Moses saying that he (Moses) was to deliver the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt. Moses then asked God what name he should give when asked who had sent him. The reply of God to Moses is in Exodus 3:14-15 where it says

“And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, the LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.” Exodus 3:14-15

From what we have read so far in this and previous sections, it is very clear that regarding the identity of Christ (who He is), Seventh-day Adventists believed, whilst Ellen White was alive, that He is no less than Jehovah Himself (the I AM), yet they still regarded Him, as a personal being, as the begotten Son, meaning God begotten (see John 1:18) and a separate person from God. In other words, theirs was a non-trinitarian faith.

This though is not the belief held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church today because unlike the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism, they now say that Christ, in His pre-existence is not begotten therefore they say He is not truly the

Son of God. We can see therefore that in this regard, Seventh-day Adventists no longer teach as they did during the time of Ellen White that in His pre-existence, Christ really was the Son of God.

Interesting to note here is that some translations have as an alternate reading to "I AM THAT I AM" the words, "I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE". This is in keeping with the begotten Son concept. As Uriah Smith wrote in his *Looking Unto Jesus* (this was an expression of the Seventh-day Adventist faith at that time)

"With the Son, the evolution of deity, as deity, ceased. All else, of things animate or inanimate, has come in by creation of the Father and the Son — the Father the antecedent cause, the Son the acting agent through whom all has been wrought. No ranks of intelligences, it matters not how high, above or below; no orders of cherubim or seraphim; no radiant thrones or extensive dominions, principalities, or powers, but were created by our Lord Jesus Christ." (*Uriah Smith, Looking unto Jesus, page 13, chapter 2, 'Christ as Creator' 1898*)

A testimony worth noting and remembering

In 1903 at the beginning of the so-called pantheism crisis, Ellen White wrote of the dangers of speculating about things that God had not revealed concerning Himself.

"God's Word and His works contain the knowledge of Himself that He has seen fit to reveal to us. We may understand the revelation that He has thus given of Himself. But it is with fear and trembling and with a sense of our own sinfulness that we are to take up this study, not with a desire to try to explain God, but with a desire to gain that knowledge which will enable us to serve Him more acceptably." (*Ellen G. White, Manuscript 132, Nov. 8, 1903, "God's Chosen People"*)

Then came a stern warning

"Let no one venture to explain God. Human beings cannot explain themselves, and how, then, dare they venture to explain the Omniscient One? Satan stands ready to give such ones false conceptions of God."

To the curious I bear the message that God has instructed me not to frame answers to the questions of those who enquire in regard to the things that have not been revealed. The things that are revealed belong unto us and to our children. Beyond this, human beings are not to attempt to go. We are not to attempt to explain that which God has not revealed. We are to study the revelation that Christ, the Great Teacher, has given of the character of God, that in spirit and word and act we may represent Him to those who know Him not." (*Ibid*)

Here Ellen White is saying that she has been told not to put together words to

attempt to explain what God has chosen to be silent upon. She then said concerning the very being of God Himself

“In regard to the personality and prerogatives of God, where He is and what He is, this is a subject which we are not to dare to touch. On this theme silence is eloquence. It is those who have no experimental knowledge of God who venture to speculate in regard to Him. Did they know more of Him, they would have less to say about what He is. The one who in the daily life holds closest communion with God, and who has the deepest knowledge of Him, realizes most keenly the utter inability of human beings to explain the Creator.

Let men beware how they seek to look into the mysteries of the most high.”
(*Ibid*)

She then related how the “men of Bethshemesh” had looked into the ark where the commandments of God were kept and that God had smitten fifty thousand and seventy with “great slaughter”. She also related how God had smitten Uzzah for touching the ark and how Moses was told to stay away when he wanted to see why the bush was burning but not consumed. She also told how Joshua at Jericho (this was when he asked the man he saw “with his sword drawn” whether he was with or against God’s people) was told to take off his shoes because he was standing on Holy ground. All of these instances were where people (God’s people) were enquiring of things that were not for them to know (curiosity). Then, after quoting a number of Scriptures that speak of God’s unchanging attributes she said

“God always has been. He is the great I AM.” (*Ibid*)

She said later

“The Bible teaching of God is the only teaching that it is safe for human beings to follow. We are to regulate our faith by a plain “Thus saith the Lord.” The knowledge of Himself that God desires us to gain from His Word, will, if brought into the daily life, make men and women strong to resist evil, and fit them to represent Him.

We need to study the simplicity of Christ's teachings. He urges the need of prayer and humility. These are our safeguards against the erroneous reasoning by which Satan seeks to lead us to turn aside to other gods, and to accept misleading theories, clothed by him in garments of light.

A man who is spiritually blind is easily led by those who improve every favorable opportunity to advance theories and conjectures regarding God. The one deceived by Satan imparts to a fellow being the new light that he supposes he has received, as Eve placed the forbidden fruit in the hand of Adam. Unenlightened heathen are in no worse condition spiritually than is

the man who has known the truth but has accepted error.” (*Ibid*)

As we have noted in section four, the trinity doctrine is only an assumed doctrine. Nowhere in Scripture is it explicitly stated. This is why those who teach this doctrine are going beyond the sacred page, meaning going beyond what God has revealed. This has always been the problem with the trinity doctrine. It cannot be proven from Scripture. It is only a matter of human speculation.

Final years

During the final years of her ministry, Ellen White repeatedly said that it had been God who had given the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventists their beliefs. To her dying day, this is why she maintained that these same beliefs, albeit they were non-trinitarian, should never be changed. So the question that it behoves every Seventh-day Adventist to ask today is: if Ellen White did not authorise a change in the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists then who did? I say this because as we have seen, since her death they certainly have changed?

One more quote from Ellen White should suffice to show us how she regarded the truth that God had given to the pioneers. She said

"We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and his teaching in our past history. We are now a strong people, if we will put our trust in the Lord; for we are handling the mighty truths of the word of God. We have everything to be thankful for. If we walk in the light as it shines upon us from the living oracles of God, we shall have large responsibilities, corresponding to the great light given us of God. We have many duties to perform, because we have been made the depositaries of sacred truth to be given to the world in all its beauty and glory. We are debtors to God to use every advantage he has entrusted to us to beautify the truth of holiness of character, and to send the message of warning and of comfort, of hope and of love, to those who are in the darkness of error and sin." (*Ellen G. White, General Conference Daily Bulletin, 20th February 1899*)

Ellen White here described the faith of the Seventh-day Adventist Church of her time as “sacred truth”. She said God had made them “depositaries” of it. Note again that this was after *Desire of Ages* had been published. This was still then a non-trinitarian faith.

We shall now go to section twenty-five. This is where we shall see where trinitarianism began to raise its head within Seventh-day Adventism and a crisis began.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section twenty-five

John Harvey Kellogg and the trinity doctrine

We have seen in previous sections that regardless of the allegations that say to the contrary, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, throughout the entire time of Ellen White's ministry (1844-1915), had always upheld the full divinity of Jesus Christ, albeit this was from a non-trinitarian point of view. We have also noted that because it is necessary to go outside of the Scriptures to formulate a trinity doctrine (see section four), non-trinitarianism must be the end result of using Scripture only to describe Christ. To put this in another way, to form a trinity doctrine of any type, there must be included in it a certain amount of speculation. This speculation of course, because of its very nature, may or may not be true.

From harmony to disharmony

Up to the beginning of the 1900's regarding the Godhead, there was no division amongst Seventh-day Adventists although it must be reasoned that as in any denomination there must have been those who believed differently than the main body of its members. These would have wished that others would believe the same as did they but this was not brought to the fore. In other words, those who believed differently than the main body of believers regarding the Godhead did not make it an issue. Within Seventh-day Adventism up to the early 1900's, all was harmony with respect to the Godhead beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists.

It was then that this situation began to change. This was when different beliefs did come to the fore and it did bring about a veritable crisis within Seventh-day Adventism. This was when there came from Ellen White a steady stream of statements stressing that the faith of Seventh-day Adventists (this was the same faith that they had held from their beginnings) should be upheld.

In other words, because in the early 1900's there were those who were attempting to promulgate views regarding God and Christ that were out of harmony with the main body of the church, Ellen White, by defending what had been the faith of Seventh-day Adventists for the previous 50 years, met the challenge head on.

So what exactly happened for this messenger of the Lord to resort to doing such a thing? Certainly it was not something that she had previously deemed necessary to do.

In this section, we shall be seeking to unfold this mystery.

The date of this crisis is extremely important to note. It was the early 1900's, meaning that it was following the publication of the book *Desire of Ages*. This is the book that many of the pro-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists say led our denomination to becoming trinitarian. If this is true, if in this book Ellen White did promote God as being a trinity, then why, many years after it was published did she appeal to Seventh-day Adventists to hold on to their faith of the previous 50 years which as we have noted was a non-trinitarian view of God? This really is something of a mystery.

Kellogg's speculative views concerning God

On various occasions and by a number of different people, the world-renowned physician John Harvey Kellogg (1852-1943), the leading physician in Seventh-day Adventism, had been cautioned about promoting his speculative ideas concerning God. Even before he made them public (this was in his book *The Living Temple*) there were those who knew that his new theories were far from being in harmony with the beliefs then held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In spite of this, Kellogg still retained his position as leading physician.

So how did Kellogg come to write such a book? W. A. Spicer who in 1903 became secretary of the General Conference wrote

“Immediately following the loss of the sanitarium, in early 1902, counsels were held between the board of that institution and the available members of the General Conference Committee looking toward plans for rebuilding. To help in rebuilding, it was agreed that a medical book should be written, on popular lines to be sold by our people for the benefit of sanitarium work, as Mrs. White's book, "Christ's Object Lessons," had been sold for the benefit of our schools.” (W. A. Spicer, *How the Spirit of Prophecy Met a Crisis: Memories and Notes of the "Living Temple" Controversy*, 1938)

That book was Kellogg's *The Living Temple*. Spicer continued

“It was agreed that the leader of the medical forces should write the health book.” (*Ibid*)

This man was John Harvey Kellogg. Spicer then added

“It was out of the teaching of this book that a crisis developed that touched many phases of the work, raising issues not only about teaching, but about church organization and unity of the advent movement, and the integrity of the Spirit of Prophecy which had been a counselor in the movement and a guide since the days of 1844.” (*Ibid*)

Arthur L. White, Ellen White's grandson, relates that when it was first suggested that Kellogg should write a book in order to help secure funds for the re-building

of the Battle Creek Sanitarium (this was after it had been devastated by fire), A. G. Daniells, then the General Conference President, counselled Kellogg not to include in it any of his beliefs that were not in harmony with Seventh-day Adventism. The higher ups therefore knew of Kellogg's views. Arthur White records that Daniells said to Kellogg

“Now look here, Doctor, that book must not contain a single argument of this new theory you are teaching, because there are a lot of people all over the States who do not accept it. I know from what they say, and if it has any of what they consider pantheism they will never touch it.” (*Arthur L. White 'The Early Elmshaven Years' Vol. 5 chapter 21 page 288*)

Notice here that Daniells did not say that Kellogg was a pantheist or that his views were those of a pantheist but that people may believe his views to be what they “consider pantheism” to be. It is quite possible that Daniells was saying this because during the 19th and 20th centuries, just as there is today, wrong views were in circulation as to what constituted pantheism. Some thought it to be that God is in everything. This is an incorrect view of pantheism. It is only a popular (traditional) view of it. Pantheism is actually the belief that all (pan) is God (theism). In other words, in pantheism there is no personal God or a personal saviour. Kellogg professed to believe in both (a personal God and a personal saviour). Kellogg knew exactly what pantheism was all about and he said that he did not believe it. At least this was his claim in 1907. This was the year his membership was removed from the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Arthur White continues by revealing Kellogg's response to this warning. He wrote

“And the doctor replied, "Oh yes, oh yes, I understand that." And Daniells reiterated the point: “You must leave all that out.” (*Ibid*)

Arthur White then says that

“Dr. Kellogg fully agreed.” (*Ibid*)

This was not the first time that Kellogg had been counselled concerning his views of God. We know this because at the 1905 General Conference Session, Ellen White said concerning what Kellogg was teaching (this is where Ellen White over and over again stressed the long-held belief that God and Christ were two separate personages, also that Seventh-day Adventists should hold on to their non-trinitarian faith)

“This subject has been kept before me for the past twenty years, yea, for more than twenty years. Before my husband's death, Dr. Kellogg came to my room to tell me that he had great light. He sat down and told me what it was. It was similar to some of the views that he has presented in Living Temple. I said, "Those theories are wrong. I have met them before. I had to meet them when I first began to travel." (*Ellen G. White to the delegates at*

the 1905 General Conference, Ms 70, 1905, pp. 3, 4. "A Message of Warning,")

We can see here that Kellogg's ideas and teachings in *The Living Temple* were no surprise to Ellen White. She knew of them only too well, even knowing of them before her husband's death (James White had died 24 years previously in 1881). She also remarked that she had encountered these theories from her first travels as God's messenger to the remnant. She also went on to say

"Ministers and people were deceived by these sophistries. They lead to making God a nonentity and Christ a nonentity. We are to rebuke these theories in the name of the Lord." (Ibid)

Note here as she often did, that Ellen White was differentiating between God and Christ. She regarded them as two separate personal beings, two separate personages. Take particular note that again she says nothing at all about the Holy Spirit. If Ellen White had believed, as some people purport she believed, that the Holy Spirit is a person like God and Christ, then why did she not include Him here in this statement? In other words, why did she not say that Kellogg was making the Holy Spirit a non-entity? This should be very significant because as we shall see in the next section, Kellogg's entire problem was with respect to the Holy Spirit, not with God and Christ as such. Note that this was in 1905, seven years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*.

In 1905, Ellen White did regard the Holy Spirit as a personality but she also regarded Him as the omnipresence of both God and Christ when these two latter divine beings were not personally (bodily) present. We shall see this in section thirty three and section thirty-four. Her statement therefore, because of her silence regarding the Holy Spirit, is a very strong indication that she did not understand the Holy Spirit to be a person like she regarded God and Christ to be persons. When we realise that Kellogg came to believe that the Holy Spirit is a person like God and Christ, which at that time was not believed by Seventh-day Adventists, this becomes even more evident. We shall return our thoughts to this in the next section. Ellen White concluded

"As I talked about these things, laying the whole matter before Dr. Kellogg, and showing him what the outcome of receiving these theories would be, he seemed to be dazed. I said, "Never teach such theories in our institutions; do not present them to the people". (Ibid)

It appears here that after Ellen White had shown Kellogg what the end result would be of accepting his speculative theories, it left him rather shocked and bewildered but he still ignored the advice that he had been given. This we know because in his book *The Living Temple*, he did publish his speculative theories concerning God and it did bring about a very serious crisis for Seventh-day Adventists.

Notice now about light that Ellen White said had come from God to Kellogg. She wrote with regards to repeated warnings that had been persistently ignored

“This course can not long be passed over in silence; for I have been instructed by the Lord that the people have a right to know and understand that for the past twenty years God in His mercy has been giving to our physician-in-chief light that has never been given to the churches. This light has shone upon our brother's pathway, in order that he might be prevented from pursuing a course that God could not approve and bless.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies to the Church, Series B No 7 page 55 ‘The result of failure to heed God’s warnings’*)

Here we are told that God, in His mercy, just like He had done so in the beginning with Lucifer, had been very patient with Kellogg. Note also that Ellen White said that she had been “instructed by the Lord” that Seventh-day Adventists had a right to be aware of this knowledge. We are told also that God had sent to Kellogg message after message that was “light that has never been given to the churches”. Kellogg therefore was not innocently ignorant of what he was doing but had consciously and deliberately ignored the warnings.

It was this constant ignoring of God’s testimonies that had brought about the crisis regarding the presence and personality of God. This is why Seventh-day Adventists today should take note. I say this because Ellen White called Kellogg’s wrong views the alpha of heresies whilst she said that the omega, whatever it would be, would follow in a little while (see section one). Could the ignoring of God’s testimonies be one of the problem areas in the omega? This is an absolute certainty.

Where is God’s presence?

In *The Living Temple*, Kellogg had taken the view that the presence of God was actually in everything. This was the problem. In an attempt to prove his point, Kellogg wrote as an illustration (this is probably the most often quoted part of his book)

“Suppose now we have a boot before us -- not an ordinary boot, but a living boot, and as we look at it, we see little boots crowding out at the seams, pushing out at the toes, dropping off at the heels, and leaping out at the top -- scores, hundreds, thousands of boots, a swarm of boots continually issuing from our living boot -- would we not be compelled to say, "There is a shoemaker in the boot"? So there is present in the tree a power which creates and maintains it, a tree-maker in the tree.” (*John Harvey Kellogg, ‘The Living Temple’, page 29*)

Strange as it may seem to us, Kellogg was making it look as though God’s actual presence was within the boot or within the tree. This was why the Seventh-day Adventist Church did not sanction his book. It was on theological grounds that they made their objections, meaning of course that Kellogg’s beliefs were not in

keeping with what was then believed by Seventh-day Adventists.

Remember here, as we have noted in previous sections, Seventh-day Adventists believed that the Holy Spirit was the personal presence of both God and Christ when the latter two divine beings were not bodily present. In other words, the Holy Spirit was considered to be, by Seventh-day Adventists, God and Christ omnipresent. As we read through this section concerning Kellogg, this is very important for us to remember because as we noted above, Ellen White did say that by his views he was making both God and Christ non-entities but she did not say that he was doing the same to the Holy Spirit. Remember too that we noted in section sixteen that Ellen White said that Christ was the eternal presence.

As we shall see later, Kellogg said that he thought he had removed from his book everything that could be considered of a theological nature but certain Seventh-day Adventist brethren did not see it this way, particularly Ellen White.

When referring to the 1903 General Conference Committee meeting where two testimonies from Ellen White exposed the errors in Kellogg's book, Arthur White (Ellen White's grandson) said

“When the messages were read at the Council in Washington, Dr. Kellogg responded favorably, saying that he accepted the testimony and that he would modify the wording in the *Living Temple* dealing with theological matters. But his statements were rather erratic and changeable. His attitude alternated, and it finally turned out that the doctor never really changed.” (A. L. White, *The Early Elmshaven Years* chapter 22, page 302 'Meet it')

At the time of this council (October 1903), Kellogg knew that in his book he had included a certain theology concerning the personalities of the Godhead. He knew also that to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, this theology was not acceptable. This was the very same theology that Ellen White said concerned *the* presence and personality of God (the Holy Spirit then to Seventh-day Adventists) and the very same theology of which the trinity doctrine concerns.

Kellogg converts to trinitarianism

It was during 1903 and by private means that John Harvey Kellogg published his book *The Living Temple*. The Seventh-day Adventist Church, because its leadership rejected what it was teaching, never sanctioned this printing.

Later that same year (1903) at the October council of the General Conference Committee, Kellogg's book was discussed, the outcome of which was decided when two testimonies, both condemning what this book was teaching, were received from Ellen White. In consequence, Kellogg said that he would not only withdraw his book from the open market but also that he would revise it. This was in particular regard to its theological content.

The day following this council, Kellogg discussed his book with A. G. Daniells,

then the General Conference president. In this conversation and in an attempt to justify what he had written in it, Kellogg said that because he had recently come to believe in the doctrine of the trinity, he could now explain his theories much better. We are aware of this conversation today because A. G. Daniells wrote to W. C. White (Ellen White's son) telling him about it. Daniells wrote

“He [Kellogg] then stated that his former views regarding the trinity had stood in his way of making a clear and absolutely correct statement but that within a short time he had come to believe in the trinity and could now see pretty clearly where all the difficulty was and believed that he could clear up the matter satisfactorily.” (*Letter, A. G. Daniells to W. C. White Oct 29th 1903*)

Here we can see that like the vast majority of all other Seventh-day Adventists, Kellogg had once been a non-trinitarian. Now though, in 1903, he was making confession to Daniells that “within a short time he had come to believe in the trinity”. This was something that he, along with Seventh-day Adventists in general, had not done previous to this time. Daniells continued

“He (Kellogg) told me that he now believed in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost and his view was that it was God the Holy Ghost and not God the Father that filled all space and every living thing.” (*Ibid*)

This must have been a dramatic switch in beliefs for Kellogg. I say this because prior to accepting this trinity belief, it is more than likely that he believed, as did then the vast majority of Seventh-day Adventists, that the Holy Spirit was the personal presence of both God the Father and the Son (God and Christ omnipresent), not another personal being like them.

Now though, in 1903, Kellogg was managing to separate the Holy Spirit from these two divine personalities, thus making the Holy Spirit an individual being like God and Christ. We can see all this because Daniells told W. C. White that Kellogg had said that it was this third being, “God the Holy Ghost”, that “filled all space and every living thing” and “not God the Father”.

Whether these were *exactly* the words that Kellogg had used we do not know but Daniells said that this is what Kellogg had told him. The main point is that Kellogg had said that he had come to believe in the trinity, meaning that he now believed that the Holy Spirit was a personal being like the Father and Son (God and Christ).

In section forty-four, we shall see that W. C. White (to whom Daniells had written concerning Kellogg) wrote in 1935 that because some of our ministers were then attempting to make the Holy Spirit to be an individual person like God and Christ, that he (W. C. White) was saddened. This, as you must surely agree, is a very interesting observation. Note the year well. It was 1935.

This realisation is very relevant to our studies because it tells us that even in 1935 it appears that the preponderant belief in Seventh-day Adventism was that the Holy Spirit was not an individual person (being) like God and Christ. This is very important because it also tells us that by 1935, the trinity doctrine would not have considered to be the preponderant belief of Seventh-day Adventists. I say this because without regarding the Holy Spirit to be an individual being like God the Father and Christ, it is impossible to have a trinity doctrine.

We can see that it was Kellogg's problem of trying to say that God's presence was actually everywhere and in everything that had led him to his trinity belief. This, through his book, is what he was attempting to have people believe. It was also these theories that brought about the early 1900's crisis within Seventh-day Adventism. Where God's presence is was the all-important question? Kellogg's answer, according to Seventh-day Adventist theology, destroyed the gospel. He did though, in an attempt to resolve the problem, say that he had come to believe in the trinity.

We know that Kellogg was once in harmony with Seventh-day Adventism on the deity of Christ, also that he once rejected the trinity doctrine because of his own personal testimony in a series of discourses that he had in 1880 with a Seventh-day Baptist. These were recorded in the *Review and Herald*.

Kellogg's anti-trinitarianism

In the *Review and Herald* of December 4th 1879 there was an article dealing with the differences between Seventh-day Adventists and Seventh-day Baptists, the latter of whom were trinitarians (generally speaking there was a certain cordiality between these two denominations, both recognizing that they had a work to do for God, although there was at times confrontation). In this article there was a reminder that during 1871 there had been a camp meeting that had been attended by approx 400 Seventh-day Adventists, also the same number of Seventh-day Baptists. It was also noted that a delegate from the Seventh-day Adventist Church had attended a Baptist General Conference in September 1876. There was also the reminder that the month following the conference, again in the *Review and Herald*, James White had said

“The principal difference between the two bodies is the immortality question. The S. D. Adventists hold the divinity of Christ so nearly with the trinitarian, that we apprehend no trial here.” (*James White, Review and Herald, Oct 12th 1876, 'The two bodies - The Relation Which the S.D. Baptists and S.D. Adventists Sustain to Each Other'*)

Following the 1879 article, there was detailed the continuing dialogue between the Rev. N. Wardner of the Seventh-day Baptists and John Harvey Kellogg on behalf of Seventh-day Baptists. In one reply to the Baptists, Kellogg said (this was in response to a misunderstanding of Wardner's)

“The only grounds upon which our reviewer could be justified in making

such a statement would be the supposition on his part that we believe in the doctrine of the trinity; but he very well knows, from positions taken and arguments used in previous articles, that we do not agree with him on this subject any better than on that of the nature of the soul. We believe in but one Deity, God, who is a unity, not a compound being. We think the Bible as well as common sense sustains this view.” (J. H. Kellogg, *Review and Herald*, November 25th 1880, ‘Reply to Eld. Wardner’s rejoinder’)

Kellogg later said

“We repel the charge of "trinitarianism" without the slightest hesitation. We do not believe in a triune God, as before remarked. And we will not, as did our reviewer in a former article, leave the reader in doubt as to our position on this point. We are utterly at a loss to comprehend how our reviewer could have blundered so strangely as to suppose us to share in so gross an error as we believe the orthodox doctrine of the trinity to be.” (*Ibid*)

Note that this was 8 years prior to the famous 1888 Minneapolis General Conference.

Throughout the 1890’s that followed, also the early 1900’s, this non-trinitarian faith still remained the preponderant faith of Seventh-day Adventists. Kellogg is the first Seventh-day Adventist that I can find who openly professed a belief in the trinity doctrine. This was in the early 1900’s.

Kellogg’s teachings invalidate the gospel

The entire problem with Kellogg’s newly acquired trinity beliefs was that according to Seventh-day Adventist theology, it was antagonistic to the gospel. This is inasmuch that if (as was being said by Kellogg) the Holy Spirit was in everything, which in consequence meant that He was within everyone, then there was no need of conversion. This was the unacceptable part of his theology. In a talk where she made reference to Kellogg’s *Living Temple*, also relating how she had to meet similar sentiments during her younger years, Ellen White spoke of the danger in believing that the Holy Spirit dwelt within everyone. She said

“Thus I worked and suffered in my girlhood. And all through my life I have had the same errors to meet, though not always in the same form. In *Living Temple* the assertion is made that God is in the flower, in the leaf, in the sinner. But God does not live in the sinner. The Word declares that He abides only in the hearts of those who love Him and do righteousness. God does not abide in the heart of the sinner; it is the enemy who abides there.” (Ellen G. White, *Ms. 46*, 1904, May 18th 1904, ‘*The foundation of our faith*’)

Notice first of all that although Kellogg had said (after he had published the book) that he believed that it was not God the Father that was in everything but the Holy Spirit, Ellen White interpreted him as saying that God was in everything,

including “in the sinner”. Thus it was that in the thinking of Ellen White, wherever the Holy Spirit is present, God Himself (the Father) is present. This was the early 1900’s theology of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In Ellen White’s notebook leaflets were found these words

“Let not the theory be presented that God would dwell in the soul-temple of a wicked man. No greater falsehood could be presented.” (*Ellen G. White, Notebook Leaflets from the Elmshaven Library, ‘Be Earnest and Steadfast’*)

With reference to Kellogg’s beliefs and the gospel, Ellen White made it very clear that

“If God is an essence pervading all nature, then He dwells in all men; and in order to attain holiness, man has only to develop the power that is within him. These theories, followed to their logical conclusion, sweep away the whole Christian economy.”. (*Ellen G. White 8th Volume Testimonies, ‘The essential Knowledge’ page 291 1904*)

She also wrote in 1905

“There has been growing up a spirit of criticism, and a lack of faith in the gospel ministry, and this has continued until the present time. Now the publication of "Living Temple" has brought about a crisis. If the ideas presented in this book were received, they would lead to the uprooting of the whole construction of the faith that makes Seventh-day Adventists a chosen, denominated people.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies, Series B, No. 7, page 48, 1906, written November 18th 1905, ‘A Great opportunity slighted’*)

As we shall see in later sections, Seventh-day Adventists believed that the Holy Spirit was the personal presence (not bodily presence) of both God the Father and of Christ but not a separate being like them. It was for this reason why Kellogg could not use this particular belief to say that it was the Holy Spirit that was in every living thing. This is because in the thinking of Seventh-day Adventists, it was just like saying that both the Father and Son (God and Christ) were in everything. Somehow therefore, to justify what he had written in his book, Kellogg had to come up with an alternative theology, meaning that he had to separate the Holy Spirit from the Father and from Christ. This is why he ended up with believing in three separate divine beings.

Kellogg therefore maintained that he had come to accept the trinity belief of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit (making the Holy Spirit a personal being like the Father and Son), therefore according to this reasoning he was now able to achieve his objective. Kellogg’s theology though, if left on its own, appears to fall short of trinity essentialness. This is because although Kellogg said that he had come to believe that the Holy Spirit was a person like God and Christ, I cannot find in his theology any mention of trinity oneness. If it

was not there, then his views were more tritheistic (three gods) than trinitarian. If in any belief the Holy Spirit can be separated from the other two personalities of the Godhead, then it is definitely tritheistic. In other words, if it can be said that the Holy Spirit is somewhere where God the Father is not, then this is a problem.

W. W. Prescott realised the problem. In the periodical *Lest we Forget* it said that

“In January, 1902 the Sanitarium in Battle Creek had burned down. The GC Committee approved using the sale of Dr. Kellogg’s upcoming book for fund-raising to replace the San. This book, *The Living Temple*, was planned from a collection of health studies commissioned for a church-wide health emphasis. However, Prescott detected pantheism in the manuscript. In the December 2, 1902 issue of the *Review*, he began to address the Kellogg danger of “substituting a human conception of the presence of God for the reality of his presence in Christ through the Holy Spirit.” Over the next five years more than 100 of his editorials dealt with Kellogg’s concepts.” (*Lest we Forget, Adventist Pioneer Library, Second quarter 2000, Volume 10, No. 2, ‘W. W. Prescott Part 2, 1901-1944’*)

In the early 1900’s, Seventh-day Adventists did believe that the Holy Spirit was the personal presence of the Father and the Son whilst bodily they were in the sanctuary in Heaven (see section thirty-one and section thirty-two for the pioneers’ beliefs of the Holy Spirit, also section thirty-three and section thirty-four for Ellen White’s beliefs). The article then reveals that

“Prescott wrote to Dr. Kellogg on 10/28/03, specifying the errors he detected.”

The article then list these errors by saying

“He [Prescott] stated the doctor’s teaching:

1. gave “a wrong view of God and his dwelling place”
2. “set aside any need of atonement and the work of Christ as our High Priest in the Sanctuary above”
3. led to “a breaking down of the distinction between the sinner and the Christian by teaching that every man is a temple of God regardless of his faith in Christ” (*Ibid*)

As we can see, there were very serious theological problems with Kellogg’s book. It was not just a simple case of God in nature but something much more sinister. It was all to do with a wrong picture of God, the atonement, the sanctuary and the sinner’s need for a saviour. Kellogg’s theories therefore struck right at the heart of the gospel, particularly as it was taught within Seventh-day Adventism. It was casting the truth to the ground, as Seventh-day Adventists

understood it.

No theological change

At the time of this controversy (the early 1900's), the theology of Seventh-day Adventists regarding the Holy Spirit (meaning the Father and Son omnipresent) was still the same as it always had been. This was even when they had come to accept, because of light given through the spirit of prophecy, that the Holy Spirit is a personality. This is because they still believed, just as Ellen White had been stressing all through this time of this Godhead crisis, that just like Christ is a personal being in His own right, so too God is a personal being in His own right, therefore God and Christ are two separate personal beings.

In other words as far as personalities were concerned, God and Christ were not the one being. This is why in the sense of personalities, Seventh-day Adventists clearly differentiated between the infinite God (the Father) and His Son (Christ) although the latter they definitely believed to be God essentially (for how Seventh-day Adventists were misunderstood concerning their beliefs about Christ's divinity see section twenty-one and section twenty-two).

This new light therefore (that the Holy Spirit is a personality) did not in one iota change the theology of Seventh-day Adventists. They still regarded Him, although believing Him to be a personality, as the personal presence of both the Father and the Son (God and Christ) but not another personal being like them.

The alpha of deadly heresies (new theories concerning God and Christ)

Referring back to the letter that Daniells sent to Willie White, Daniells explained that regarding Kellogg's newly found theology

“He [Kellogg] said that if he had believed this before writing the book, he could have expressed his views without giving the wrong impression the book now gives” (*Letter, A. G. Daniells to W. C. White Oct 29th 1903*)

Here we can see it said that prior to writing *Living Temple*, Kellogg had not believed in the trinity doctrine. This “wrong impression” that Kellogg said he had made was the impression that he was saying that God the Father (the infinite God to Seventh-day Adventists) was in “every living thing” but now he (Kellogg) had come to believe in the trinity he could see instead that it was the Holy Spirit that was in everything.

We can see therefore that Kellogg's conversion to what some term 'trinitarianism' (which was more like tritheism) was after he had published his book (1903) and was used by him as an attempt to justify what he had written in it. This was a conversion that necessitated him changing his views regarding the Holy Spirit. In other words, by saying that the Holy Spirit was a person like God and Christ, Kellogg was introducing heresy into the 1904 faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This is why when Ellen White warned about wrong beliefs that were

coming into the Seventh-day Adventist Church she said

“In the book "Living Temple" there is presented the alpha of deadly heresies. The omega will follow, and will be received by those who are not willing to heed the warning God has given.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B No. 2, page 50, letter, August 7th 1904 'Beware'*)

This is also why she said in 1903 to the teachers in Emmanuel Missionary College

“The new theories in regard to God and Christ, as brought out in "The Living Temple", are not in harmony with the teaching of Christ. The Lord Jesus came to this world to represent the Father. He did not represent God as an essence pervading nature, but as a personal being. Christians should bear in mind that God has a personality as verily as has Christ.” (*Ellen G. White, September 23 1903, To the teachers in Emmanuel Missionary College, 'A Warning of Danger'*)

Ellen White was saying here that Kellogg's views were making God look like an “essence pervading nature” and not as Jesus came to present Him as “a personal being”. This then was the problem area.

Kellogg had said that by coming to believe in the trinity that he had solved the problem of what he had written in his book but it is obvious that Ellen White did not see it this way. Note according to her that Kellogg's views were making God look as though He was not a personal being but never did she say that he was doing this with respect to the Holy Spirit. This was even though Kellogg said it was the Holy Spirit that was in everything. It is only reasonable to believe therefore that if Ellen White had believed that the Holy Spirit was a personal being like God and Christ then she would have said that He (the Holy Spirit) was being made to look a non-entity. As it was, she only said that Kellogg was making God and Christ look that way. This is very significant.

Not clear on the personality of God

Whilst Kellogg did confess to have come to believe in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit (the trinity confession), Ellen White consistently repudiated his understanding of the Godhead. Even before he openly made this trinity confession she had said to him

“You are not definitely clear on the personality of God, which is everything to us as a people. You have virtually destroyed the Lord God Himself.” (*Ellen G. White to John Harvey Kellogg, Letter 300, March 16th 1903*)”

This statement was a part of a letter that just previous to the 1903 General Conference session Ellen White had sent to Kellogg but during the conference itself, she did send him at least two others, both of which condemned *The Living Temple*. Ellen White could not have told Kellogg more clearly that by his

teachings he was virtually destroying God as a personal being.

Note very importantly that there is no record of Ellen White either commending or directly condemning Kellogg for coming to believe in the trinity doctrine although as we shall see in section twenty-seven (this was in denouncing what Kellogg had written in his book) she did condemn all illustrations that depicted God as three-in-one. Obvious to relate, she did this for a very good reason. She also said in a number of different testimonies that in all of this, Kellogg was being led astray by the devil himself and satanic influences.

Kellogg had said that he had come to believe in the trinity, meaning God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit (see above Daniells to W. C. White letter dated October 29th 1903). Four years later his name was removed from the membership roll of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This was not only because of doctrine but also of other circumstances that is outside of the scope of this study to detail.

The presence and personality of God

No one will deny that the trinity doctrine concerns the presence and personality of God but I wonder how many Seventh-day Adventists realise that this is exactly what Ellen White said that the alpha heresy in Kellogg's *Living Temple* was all about? Remember too that she constantly linked this heresy found in Kellogg's book with the omega she warned was coming into Seventh-day Adventism.

When Ellen White first received a copy of *The Living Temple*, she placed it in her library. There it remained unread until her son persuaded her to read a portion of it. So it was that together they read the very first chapter and certain other paragraphs. She said of what Kellogg had written

“As we read, I recognized the very sentiments against which I had been bidden to speak in warning during the early days of my public labors. When I first left the State of Maine, it was to go through Vermont and Massachusetts, to bear a testimony against these sentiments. "Living Temple" contains the alpha of these theories. I knew that the omega would follow in a little while; and I trembled for our people. I knew that I must warn our brethren and sisters not to enter into controversy over the presence and personality of God. The statements made in "Living Temple" in regard to this point are incorrect. The scripture used to substantiate the doctrine there set forth, is scripture misapplied.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies, series B No. 2 Page 53, 'The Foundation of our Faith 1904*)

Here we can see that Ellen White was giving a warning to Seventh-day Adventists that they should not enter into controversy over “**the presence and personality of God**”. This is what she regarded Kellogg was doing. It concerned her immensely. Note she said that the Scriptures Kellogg was using to prove his point were “**scripture misapplied**”. In other words to prove his point, Kellogg had used the Scriptures but Ellen White said that he had misapplied them. Kellogg

could have said therefore that his beliefs were based on Sola Scriptura but as we have seen said by Ellen White, this did not make them correct.

She also said that these sentiments in Kellogg's book were the same as those she had encountered and had spoken out against in the early days of her "public labours". Now though, in 1904, she was linking these same sentiments with the coming omega that she said Seventh-day Adventists would very soon encounter. It was this realisation she said that had caused her to tremble! She also wrote in this same testimony

"I have been instructed by the heavenly messenger that some of the reasoning in the book, "Living Temple," is unsound and that this reasoning would lead astray the minds of those who are not thoroughly established on the foundation principles of present truth. It introduces that which is naught but speculation in regard to the personality of God and where His presence is. No one on this earth has a right to speculate on this question. The more fanciful theories are discussed, the less men will know of God and of the truth that sanctifies the soul." (*Ibid page 51*)

As we noted in previous sections, Ellen White definitely included in the "foundation principles of present truth" what Seventh-day Adventists had always believed about God and Christ (Father and Son). This belief was that they were two separate personalities (two separate personal beings). She said that this belief (using her words) was amongst the landmarks and the pillars of the faith of Seventh-day Adventism. We shall note in later sections that repeatedly she said that the Holy Spirit is both God and Christ omnipresent.

In the statement above, Ellen White is referring to the 1904 `faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This is the faith that she said should never be changed.

In her latter statement, note first of all that she said that Kellogg's teachings with regards to God and His presence was "naught but speculation", meaning of course, something about which God had not revealed. This is very important for us to realise because as we noted in section four, the trinity doctrine is based totally on speculation. Ellen White also said that if heeded, Kellogg's "speculation" (see above) would lead many away from what she regarded as being the "present truth" as held in 1904 by Seventh-day Adventists. This is also very important for us to remember! This is because the Seventh-day Adventist faith was then non-trinitarian.

Kellogg certainly realised that his book did contain trinitarian theology. This we know because when certain Seventh-day Adventist brethren visited him prior to his membership being withdrawn from the Seventh-day Adventist Church (this was in 1907) he said

"Now, I thought I had cut out entirely the theological side of questions of the trinity and all that sort of things. I didn't mean to put it in at all, and I took

pains to state in the preface that I did not. I never dreamed of such a thing as any theological question being brought into it. I only wanted to show that the heart does not beat of its own motion but that it is the power of God that keeps it going" (*Interview, J. H. Kellogg, G. W. Amadon and A. C. Bourdeau October 7th 1907 held at Kellogg's residence*)

Regardless of what Kellogg said, he had been shown that in his book he did include trinitarian theology. He knew also that it was a theology to which Seventh-day Adventists objected.

God without form

In 1903, the year Kellogg's *The Living Temple* was published, W. A. Spicer became the General Conference secretary. In 1922 he followed on from A. G. Daniells as General Conference President. This was until 1930.

In 1938, he wrote of his recollections of the Kellogg pantheism controversy and how through the spirit of prophecy God guided the church. Throughout his manuscript, Spicer wrote of how Kellogg's reasoning was destroying the reality of things such as Heaven, the sanctuary, the throne of God and even God Himself. This was as reasoned by Prescott (see above). In one place he quoted from Ellen White's *Early Writings*

"I saw a throne, and on it sat the Father and the Son. I gazed on Jesus' countenance and admired His lovely person. The Father's person I could not behold, for a cloud of glorious light covered Him. I asked Jesus if His Father had a form like Himself. He said he had, but I could not behold it, for, said He, if you should once behold the glory of His person, you would cease to exist."—*Early Writings* p. 45.

This view is in harmony with Bible descriptions. Strike this view from us, and substitute the idea the all-pervasive personality called God by the pantheistic philosophy and we are at once involved in the mazes of the spiritualistic deception. Then Heaven and the throne are wherever God is, and He is everywhere, in tree and plant and creature.

In the first interview I had with the author over the book prepared for us he illustrated his idea that it was idolatry to conceive of God as having form. He [Kellogg] gleefully told of pressing one of our ministers into a description of the Father's person. Naming different portions of the human anatomy, he got the unsuspecting minister to say "Yes" as to likeness of man's bodily members, until the picture was crude and irreverent. The reverent view leaves it just where the view given by the Spirit of prophecy left it. The form was there on the throne, as real as the form of Jesus on the throne beside the Father. But a cloud of glory veiled the Father's person. The reverent mind does not seek to penetrate that veil between." (*W. A. Spicer, How the Spirit of Prophecy Met a Crisis: Memories and Notes of the "Living Temple" Controversy', 1938*)

Spicer also gave this warning

“Strike out this view of Bible truth and substitute for it the pantheistic conception that makes of Deity a personality present everywhere the same as He is anywhere, and there is no place in the universe for the sinner to come before God. This hopeless Hindu conception is easily recognized in its own heathen surroundings. But clothe it in the language of Christian thought, and in third angel's message phraseology, and it may readily deceive the very elect if they are off guard.

In the very first writings of the Spirit of prophecy — in 1844 and 1845 — descriptions of heaven and of the throne, and of the Father and Son were given to lift up a standard against the religio-scientific philosophy of God and nature that was to come in like a flood.” (*Ibid*)

Notice something very important here. Just like Ellen White, Spicer mentions the separate forms of the Father and the Son but does not mention the Holy Spirit. Once again this is indicative of pre-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventist thinking. They did not regard the Holy Spirit as a person like God and Christ were persons but rather that He was the personal presence of them both whilst they were in the sanctuary in Heaven. In the next chapter Spicer said

“The redeemed, in the flesh, immortal, will "see God." They can approach a Father upon His throne in the heavenly temple. "They shall see His face." And by the Father's side we shall see "the man Christ Jesus" - "this same Jesus" that the disciples saw - in form like unto the Father.” (*Ibid*)

Spicer says that the redeemed will “see God” and see “the man Christ Jesus” but says nothing about seeing the Holy Spirit.

The trail of the serpent

Concerning Kellogg's apostasy, which as we have seen certainly involved trinitarian theology, Ellen White said in 1906 (this was the year previous to Kellogg's name being removed from the membership roll)

“This large work and its sure results are plainly presented to me. I am so sorry that sensible men do not discern the trail of the serpent. I call it thus; for thus the Lord pronounces it. Wherein are those who are designated as departing from the faith and giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, departing from the faith which they have held sacred for the past fifty years? I leave that for the ones to answer who sustain those who develop such acuteness in their plans for spoiling and hindering the work of God.” (*Special Testimonies Series B No 7, page 61 'Come out and be Separate 1906*)

Here Ellen White is saying that as usual she could see the bigger picture. In other words her eyes were open as to what was going on. This was written in

1906 when Seventh-day Adventists were still strictly adhering to a non-trinitarian faith. It was also eight years after the professedly trinitarian *Desire of Ages*. Ellen White was again warning not to depart from this non-trinitarian faith. She even said that this was the faith that for the “past fifty years” had been “held sacred” by Seventh-day Adventists. This is a categorical statement. Can it be misinterpreted or misunderstood?

Worth remembering again here is that Ellen White said it was the Seventh-day Adventists beliefs about the separate personalities of God and Christ (as well as the sanctuary teaching) that were under attack from Satan (see section twenty-three). Her latter quoted statement is no different to what she said the same year which was

“Ever we are to keep the faith that has been substantiated by the Holy Spirit of God from the earlier events of our experience until the present time.”
(*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B No. 7 page 57 Sanitarium, Cal., Dec. 4, 1905, ‘Standing in the way of God’s Messages’, see also the New York Independent, 27th February 1906*)

This “present time” that Ellen White spoke of here was 1905/6, meaning that it was the early 1900’s faith of Seventh-day Adventists of which she said “Ever are we to keep”. Notice she also said that this was “the faith” that had been “substantiated by the Holy Spirit of God”. Again and again Ellen White endorses that it was God Himself that gave the pioneers their faith (beliefs).

Two years later in 1908 as Ellen White’s ministry to Seventh-day Adventists was in its latter years (she died in 1915), she wrote in one testimony under the sub-heading of “Dangers of speculative study”

“There is danger that the false sentiments expressed in the books that they have been reading will sometimes be interwoven by our ministers, teachers, and editors with their arguments, discourses, and publications, under the belief that they are the same in principle as the teachings of the Spirit of truth.” (*Ellen G. White, 9th Volume Testimonies, page 68 1909, ‘Literature in service’, see also Review and Herald 6th August 1908 ‘Circulate the publications No. 1*)

By the term “the Spirit of truth”, Ellen White is referring to the Holy Spirit. Particularly she must have had in mind the truth that God had substantiated through the spirit of prophecy. We can see this because she then added

“The book *Living Temple* is an illustration of this work, the writer of which declared in its support that its teachings were the same as those found in the writings of Mrs. White. Again and again we shall be called to meet the influence of men who are studying sciences of satanic origin, through which Satan is working to make a nonentity of God and of Christ.” (*Ibid*)

Notice very importantly here that Ellen White said that these “false sentiments” found in the books that those of our leadership were reading did concern both “God” and “Christ” (note the differentiating again). These were books to do with the Godhead. Note too that she said that there was a danger of these very same sentiments being interwoven in what was then being taught in Seventh-day Adventist discourses and publications. These were books that were not in support of what Seventh-day Adventists then believed but our leaders were reading them anyway. This said Ellen White was the danger. She also said that through these same “false sentiments”, Satan was seeking to make “a nonentity of God and of Christ” meaning making both of them something but certainly not personal beings.

Notice here also that Ellen White did not say that there were those who were trying to make the Holy Spirit a non-entity. She only said this with reference to God and Christ. In other words she did not say that Satan was trying to make God, Christ and the Holy Spirit a non-entity – only God and Christ. This is another very important realisation.

Notice also that Ellen White said that the writer of *The Living Temple* (Kellogg) was claiming that what he had written in his book was only the same as in her writings. This was also with reference to the “wrong sentiments” that she said would attempt to be passed off “as the teachings of the Spirit of truth”. In other words, attempts were being made then to pass off these wrong teachings as though they were supported by the writings of the spirit of prophecy (Ellen White’s writings). This is how it was in the alpha of heresies. Could it be the same with the omega? This again is an absolute certainty.

Non-trinitarianism

Ellen White’s consistent view that God is a personal being and Christ is another personal being separate from Him does completely invalidate the idea of God being a trinity. To put it another way, true trinitarians would never confess such a belief. This is because they regard God as a trinity (tri-unity) of persons with all three personalities subsisting in the one indivisible substance (the one being) of God. This is something that was never professed by Ellen White. Today though, the Seventh-day Adventist Church confesses such a belief. In the second of its fundamental beliefs it says

“There is one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons.” (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe ... A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines page 16*)”

Here in brief is the Seventh-day Adventist confession of their belief in the trinity. It says simply that God is a “unity of three co-eternal persons”. This is in stark contrast to that which Seventh-day Adventists believed during the time of Ellen White, which was (as Ellen White put it to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference Session)

“Christ is one with the Father, but Christ and God are two distinct personages. Read the prayer of Christ in the seventeenth chapter of John, and you will find this point clearly brought out.” (*Ellen G. White to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Takoma Park Washington D. C., May 19th 1905, Review and Herald, June 1st 1905, ‘The Work in Washington’*)

Ellen White concluded about this long held belief

“Wrong sentiments regarding this are coming in, and we shall all have to meet them.” (*Ibid*)

Here is the ultimate warning, given through the spirit of prophecy, which says that wrong sentiments regarding God and Christ were on their way into Seventh-day Adventism. These would be sentiments that would conflict with what was then, in 1905, their non-trinitarian faith.

We shall now go to section twenty-six. This is where we shall be taking a look in more detail at this early 1900’s Godhead crisis within Seventh-day Adventism. We shall see that it concerned Kellogg’s views regarding the Holy Spirit. In the section following that one we shall see how Ellen White, when speaking out against Kellogg’s teachings, condemned all three-in-one illustrations of God.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section twenty-six

The early 1900's crisis - Kellogg and the Holy Spirit

We noted in the previous section that in 1903, the leading physician in Seventh-day Adventism, namely John Harvey Kellogg, said that he had come to believe in the trinity doctrine, meaning that he had come to believe in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. He also said that because of his conversion, he could now explain more easily how God was in everything. This was the teaching that he expressed in his book *The Living Temple*, a publication that Ellen White condemned as containing wrong ideas concerning God and Christ. Our church refused to publish this book.

To say the very least, Kellogg's profession was startling to Seventh-day Adventists. This was because at that time (1903), just like they always had been since their beginnings, they were still a non-trinitarian denomination. As we shall see now, the main problem as far as Kellogg was concerned was their denominational teaching regarding the Holy Spirit. He came to believe, unlike Seventh-day Adventists then, that the Holy Spirit was a person like God and Christ. In contrast to this, Seventh-day Adventists believed that the Holy Spirit was the presence (omnipresence) of both God and Christ when these two divine personalities were not physically present. This was a major difference between Seventh-day Adventist theology and Kellogg's so-called trinity beliefs. We noted in the previous section they were more tritheistic than anything else.

We shall now look at certain observations that Kellogg made concerning the Holy Spirit, also the response to them by the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In later sections we shall take a detailed look at what the pioneers, including Ellen White, had to say about the Holy Spirit. This will be in sections thirty-one through to thirty-four.

The Holy Spirit - a person and yet not a person

In a letter to G. I. Butler who was then the Southern Union Conference president, also a member of the General Conference Committee, Kellogg challenged the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists concerning the Holy Spirit. This he did after our church had refused to publish his book *The Living Temple*. Kellogg wrote

“As far as I can fathom, the difficulty which is found in the *Living Temple*, the whole thing may be simmered down to this question: is the Holy Ghost

a person? You say no.” (Letter, Kellogg to G. I Butler, October 28th 1903)

This indeed was the main difference between Kellogg’s beliefs and those of Seventh-day Adventists. Whilst the belief of the latter was that the Holy Spirit was a personality, they certainly did not regard Him as a person like God and Christ. Kellogg reasoned differently. He continued

“I had supposed the Bible said this [the Holy Spirit a person] for the reason that the personal pronoun he is used in speaking of the Holy Ghost. Sister White uses the pronoun he and has said in as many words that the Holy Ghost is the third person of the Godhead.” (Ibid)

This is very interesting because by then (1903), Ellen White had referred to the Holy Spirit as a person or personality a number of times. She had even said in *Desire of Ages*

“The Spirit was to be given as a regenerating agent, and without this the sacrifice of Christ would have been of no avail. The power of evil had been strengthening for centuries, and the submission of men to this satanic captivity was amazing. Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power.” (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 671, ‘Let not your heart be troubled’)

By 1903, five years after *Desire of Ages* was published, Kellogg must have known about this statement. He also probably knew about some of the other statements that she made concerning the Holy Spirit being a personality.

Why then, it must be asked, did he not specifically say that Ellen White had written in this book that the Holy Spirit was a person? Why did he say that she had said “in as many words that the Holy Ghost is the third person of the Godhead”, making it look as though she had not specifically said it? Some may say that this is a mystery because the above statement from *Desire of Ages* is one of Ellen White’s statements that the pro-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists thrive upon today to show that the Holy Spirit is a person like the Father and the Son. Why therefore did not Kellogg use it as such?

Note first of all how this third person statement is currently quoted in *Desire of Ages* and then compare it with how Kellogg used it. The one in *Desire of Ages* is capitalised (“Third Person”) whilst Kellogg’s use of it is not capitalised. In Kellogg’s letter and how they were in the older editions of the *Desire of Ages* was “third person”.

In later re-prints of Ellen White’s book, capital letters are used. The more recent printings say “the Third Person of the Godhead” not as was said originally “the third person of the Godhead”. In other words, Ellen White’s writings have been modified (changed) to bring them more in line with present trinity thinking. Such

has been one of the results of our transition from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism.

In a paper published on the White estate website, there is an article written by Tim Poirier called “Ellen White’s trinitarian statements: What did she actually write?” Note those latter words very well (“What did she actually write”). Tim Poirier says

“In *The Desire of Ages* she writes that “sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy but in the fulness of divine power” (p. 671)”. (*Tim Poirier, Ellen White’s trinitarian statements: What did she actually write’, Ellen White and current issues symposium 2006*)

Note here the capitalisation of the words “Third Person”. Poirier then says

“This is how the text has read since its first publication in 1898.” (*Ibid*)

This is an incorrect statement. These words were not actually as Ellen White wrote them. She wrote them without capital letters.

Apart from where it is written in *Desire of Ages*, Ellen White made this same statement (“third person of the Godhead”) a number of times but never have I found the words “third person” to be capitalised. Whilst some may say that this does not make any difference to the statement, it does prove that to make her writings sound more trinitarian they have been changed. Those responsible for this alteration must have reasoned it justifiable to do so.

Before we move away from this *Desire of Ages* statement, notice her words that followed. She said

“It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world's Redeemer. It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure. Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress His own character upon His church.” (*Ibid*)

Ellen White referred to the Holy Spirit as Christ’s Spirit (“His Spirit”) meaning belonging to Christ, not a separate divine being like Him. This is exactly what Seventh-day Adventists believed in the early 1900’s. We shall come back to this thought when taking a look in detail at Ellen White’s views on the Holy Spirit.

Ellen White’s secretaries, just as they did with other publications, helped her to put together *Desire of Ages*. This they did by extracting portions of her past writings and collating them into the various chapters in the book’s pre-publication manuscripts, all being done of course under her supervision.

Interesting to note is that the latter statement from *Desire of Ages* regarding the Holy Spirit was originally written in a letter sent to the brethren in America when Ellen White was residing in Australia. She said

“Evil had been accumulating for centuries, and could only be restrained and resisted by the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fulness of divine power. Another spirit must be met; for the essence of evil was working in all ways, and the submission of man to this satanic captivity was amazing.” (*Ellen G. White, letter dated February 6th 1896 from ‘Sunnyside’ Cooranbong, Australia, ‘To my brethren in America’*)

In this letter Kellogg himself is mentioned, therefore it is quite possible that he either knew of it or had read it and is one of the reasons (apart from it being in *Desire of Ages*) why he wrote “third person” as she did here and not “Third Person”. Kellogg certainly disputed with the way that Seventh-day Adventists regarded the Holy Spirit. We know this because he said in his letter to Butler

“How the Holy Ghost can be the third person and not be a person at all is difficult for me to see” (*Letter, Kellogg to G. I Butler, October 28th 1903*)

John Harvey Kellogg had been raised a Seventh-day Adventist. His Father (John Preston Kellogg) had accepted this faith the very year that his son had been born. From a young lad, John Harvey Kellogg had been well acquainted with James and Ellen White. They had even helped him financially with his medical studies. Regarding the Holy Spirit therefore, Kellogg knew exactly what Seventh-day Adventists believed. He was now 61 years of age. Notice very importantly that this dispute took place in 1903, 5 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*. By then, this book had not led Seventh-day Adventist to believe that the Holy Spirit was a person like God and Christ. This is even though it had said that the Holy Spirit was the “third person of the Godhead”. Obviously too, by this time, this book had not led Seventh-day Adventists to think of God as being a trinity (three-in-one). This is because without a third person like the Father and the Son, a trinity doctrine is not possible.

Regarding the Holy Spirit, the early 1900’s belief of Seventh-day Adventists can be seen very clearly in a letter the following year Butler wrote to Kellogg. When attempting to convince this physician of his errors Butler wrote

“God dwells in us by His Holy Spirit, as a Comforter, as a Reprover, especially the former. When we come to Him, we partake of Him in that sense, because the Spirit comes forth from him; it comes forth from the Father and the Son” (*G. I Butler, letter to J. H. Kellogg April 5th 1904*)

As expressed by the one who was then president of the Southern Union Conference, here we can see the 1904 faith of Seventh-day Adventists. It was that the Holy Spirit comes forth from both “the Father and the Son” (God and

Christ) therefore concluding that the Holy Spirit is the personal presence of them both. This was the view of the majority of the pioneers. Note that this was now 6 months after Kellogg had written to Butler concerning the Holy Spirit and Butler was still trying to convince Kellogg that he was wrong. It was also 6 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*.

As we can also see, Seventh-day Adventists believed in 1904 that the Holy Spirit was the Father and Son (God and Christ) omnipresent but certainly it was not believed that He was a person like God and Christ. To the pioneers, this latter belief would not have made sense. We can see this because Butler also said to Kellogg concerning the Holy Spirit

“It is not a person walking around on foot, or flying, as a literal being, in any such sense as Christ and the Father are – at least, if it is, it is utterly beyond my comprehension or the meaning of language or words.” (*G. I Butler, letter to J. H. Kellogg April 5th 1904*)

In 1904, Butler’s statement appears to be the preponderant belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In other words, the Holy Spirit was not regarded by Seventh-day Adventists to be another personal being like God and Christ, even though Ellen White had said that He was a personality.

In Seventh-day Adventist theology, the Holy Spirit was both God and Christ omnipresent whilst neither was bodily present. This was the 1904 faith of Seventh-day Adventists, the faith that Ellen White said, because God had given it to them, should never be changed or discarded. It was also the faith from which she clearly warned that there would be a departing. We shall see this more clearly in section twenty-eight when we consider the omega.

Contrary to the faith

In a brief summation of what was fast becoming a crisis, we have a General Conference president, namely A. G. Daniells, telling another General Conference Committee member, namely W. C. White (Ellen White’s son), that one of the most prominent and prodigious members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, namely John Harvey Kellogg, had come to believe in the doctrine of the trinity. This meant of course, as Daniells said to Ellen White’s son, that Kellogg had come to believe in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, thus believing the Holy Spirit to be a divine person like the Father and Son.

This type of confession today (2008) would not be considered earth-shattering news but in 1903 it was considered heretical for a Seventh-day Adventist to confess it. This was because at that time, just as it had been from its very beginnings, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was strictly a non-trinitarian denomination.

Interestingly, this was all the time that it was under the auspices of God’s

messenger to the remnant, namely Ellen White who even more interestingly never once objected to these non-trinitarian beliefs. Instead, as we have seen and will continue to see, she decidedly upheld and promoted the faith (beliefs) of the pioneers, saying that it had been God Himself that had given it to them. This means therefore that the 1904 faith that Ellen White said that the omega would lead Seventh-day Adventists away from was a God-given non-trinitarian faith. If you remember in section one, we quoted God's servant when she said in 1904

"Be not deceived; many will depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. We have now before us the alpha of this danger. The omega will be of a most startling nature." (Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B, No. 2 page 16, 'To Leading Physicians', 'Teach the Word' Nashville, Tennessee, July 24th 1904)

To some Seventh-day Adventists today, especially those of our ministry, the fact that Ellen White was warning Seventh-day Adventists not to depart from their non-trinitarian faith will probably be a most startling realisation, yet nevertheless it is perfectly true!

A heretical confession

By making confession of the trinity doctrine, John Harvey Kellogg was admitting to believing something that up to that time (1903) no other pioneer of Seventh-day Adventism had ever publicly confessed. It was therefore a heretical confession. Even up to the present time of my studies (2008), I have never found any other Seventh-day Adventist who has ever professed this publicly, at least not during the time of Ellen White's ministry. If any reader knows of another person who whilst Ellen White was alive openly made this type of confession then perhaps they can send me the details.

Kellogg, this brilliantly talented doctor who held such sway over many of his fellow physicians, had now in 1903 confessed to believe in this teaching. This to Seventh-day Adventists really was earth-shattering news! It also heralded a denominational crisis. Thus it was that from this time onwards, Ellen White stressed that God and Christ were two separate personal beings. This it appears was done in an effort to allay and counteract any trinitarian ideas that were then being circulated amongst Seventh-day Adventists. It is most likely that what Kellogg had said to Daniells that he in turn had told W. C. White, the latter passed it on to his mother (Ellen White).

Now we can see just why it was that during the early 1900's, Ellen White chose to repeatedly emphasise a belief that had been held by Seventh-day Adventists since their beginnings. This belief of course was that God was a personal being in His own right and that Christ was another personal being in His own right meaning that they were two separate personal beings. This she said was one of the landmarks and pillars of their faith (see section twenty-four). She also said that it was the truth that Seventh-day Adventists had received from God and therefore should never be surrendered.

In passing, please note again that Kellogg's heretical confession was 5 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*. This again is really very interesting because as we have already noted in previous sections (see section ten particularly), the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church today is saying that it was the writings of Ellen White, especially what she had written in *Desire of Ages*, that has led our denomination to change from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism. One is left to wonder of course, if this is true, then why did she stress over and over again, after Kellogg had said in 1903 that he had come to believe in the trinity, that Seventh-day Adventists should retain their non-trinitarian faith. Are we to believe that by this time (in the early 1900's through to her death), that not even Ellen White had realised that she had been speaking of God as a trinity? Are we to say also that Kellogg was correct in his theology?

From what we have read above, it does appear that neither A. G. Daniells (then General Conference president) nor G. I Butler (then the Southern Union Conference president) believed in the trinity doctrine. If they did, then why was it that they were both concerned that Kellogg had come to believe in this teaching and why Butler's remarks about the Holy Spirit not being a person like God and Christ? Note that these dialogues between Kellogg, Daniells and Butler took place during 1903 and 1904, 5 or 6 years after *Desire of Ages* (1898) was published.

Another question that must be asked here is this; if in *Desire of Ages* and other places Ellen White did speak of God as being a trinity (three-in-one), then why didn't anyone realise this until many years after her death? In other words, why didn't anyone realise this whilst she was alive? Are we to believe that for 17 years (1898 -1915) that God hid this so-called truth from every Seventh-day Adventist, including Ellen White and then revealed it after she was dead? This really does take a tremendous amount of believing!

We need also to note here that although *Desire of Ages* was published in 1898 and that Ellen White died 17 years later in 1915, there was no sign during this time (1898-1915) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church adopting the doctrine of the trinity. Certainly Ellen White said nothing in this direction. She only said that Seventh-day Adventists should never change their beliefs concerning God and Christ, which as we know were non-trinitarian.

A forbidden subject

In a talk given at the Lake Union Conference on May 18th 1904, Ellen White spoke of her feelings concerning Kellogg's *Living Temple*. She said how sorry she was about the way it had been published. She actually said

"I am so sorry that *Living Temple* came out as it did, and was circulated, and the worst of it -- that which struck right to my heart -- was the assertion made regarding the book: "It contains the very sentiments that Sister White has been teaching." When I heard this, I felt so heartbroken that it seemed as if I could not say anything. Had I said anything, I would have been

obliged to speak the truth as it was.” (Ellen G. White, *Talk given on May 18th 1904, Sermons and talks, Volume one, page 341, Manuscript 46, 1904, ‘The Foundation of our Faith’*)

This was one of the problems in the alpha. Kellogg was saying that what he had written in his *Living Temple* was only the same as Ellen White said in her writings. Ellen White refuted this claim. After saying that the sentiments found in Kellogg’s book were those that she was bidden to speak out in warning against at the beginning of her public work she said

“Living Temple contains the Alpha of these theories. The Omega would follow in a little while. I tremble for our people. These beautiful representations are similar to the temptation that the enemy brought to Adam and Eve in Eden.” (*Ibid*)

Kellogg’s problem was that he was trying to define where God’s presence resides. It was all to do with the Holy Spirit. With regards to this Ellen White said

“There are some things upon which we must reason, and there are other things that we must not discuss. In regard to God -- what He is and where He is -- silence is eloquence. When you are tempted to speak of what God is, keep silence, because as surely as you begin to speak of this, you will disparage Him.

Our ministers must be very careful not to enter into controversy in regard to the personality of God. This is a subject that they are not to touch. It is a mystery, and the enemy will surely lead astray those who enter into it. We know that Christ came in person to reveal God to the world. God is a person and Christ is a person. Christ is spoken of in the Word as "the brightness of His Father's glory, and the express image of His person." (*Ibid*)

She then said concerning Kellogg

“I was forbidden to talk with Dr. Kellogg on this subject, because it is not a subject to be talked about. And I was instructed that certain sentiments in *Living Temple* were the Alpha of a long list of deceptive theories.” (*Ibid*)

As most would realise, the trinity doctrine is tied up in God’s presence and personality. This is why the trinity is integral to the alpha. In order to justify his beliefs, Kellogg said that he had come to believe in the trinity.

This early 1900’s crisis was that John Harvey Kellogg, one of the most influential people in Seventh-day Adventism, would be teaching his trinity beliefs to all who came under his influence. As we know today, he did have those who followed him but this is another story. If he had come to believe in the trinity doctrine, then he would certainly have been teaching others the same. This was the crisis!

Many considered him a leading light in Seventh-day Adventism. Certainly he was popular within and without the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

We shall now go to section twenty-seven. This is where we shall see that in condemning Kellogg's beliefs, Ellen White condemned all three-in-one illustrations of God. We shall then take a closer look at the alpha of heresies and omega warnings.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section twenty-seven

The early 1900's crisis - Ellen White condemns trinity three-in-one illustrations of God

As we noted in the two previous sections, John Harvey Kellogg, one of the most famous names in Seventh-day Adventism, said in 1903 that he had come to believe in the trinity doctrine. This means that he had come to believe in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit (the trinity confession). Ellen White consistently repudiated Kellogg's understanding of the Godhead. Even before he openly made this trinity confession she said to him

*"You are not definitely clear on the personality of God, which is everything to us as a people. You have virtually destroyed the Lord God Himself."
(Ellen G. White to John Harvey Kellogg, Letter 300, March 16th 1903)"*

This statement was a part of a letter that just previous to the 1903 General Conference session Ellen White had sent to Kellogg but during the conference itself, she did send him at least two others, both of which condemned *The Living Temple*. Ellen White could not have told Kellogg more clearly that by his teachings he was virtually destroying God as a personal being.

Note very importantly here that there is no record of Ellen White either commending or directly condemning Kellogg for coming to believe in the trinity doctrine although as we shall see now she did, when reproving what he had written in his book, condemn all illustrations that depicted God as three-in-one. She must have done this for a very good reason. She also said in a number of different testimonies that in all of this, Kellogg was being led astray by the devil. This should be telling us something very important.

Three-in-one illustrations of God condemned

Needless to say, Kellogg's thinking was not, in 1903, in harmony with the Seventh-day Adventist faith. This was because it now involved a certain theology of which our denomination did not approve. It was also a theology that Ellen White herself condemned, even naming it the alpha of heresies and saying that by it Kellogg had *"virtually destroyed the Lord God Himself"*.

From a personal perspective, I would say that it is evident that Ellen White did know of Kellogg's trinitarian theology. I say this because it is only reasonable to believe that apart from any other way she may have come to this knowledge, her

Son, W. C. White, must have told her. This was after Daniells had written to him saying that Kellogg had told him that he (Kellogg) had now come to believe in the trinity and that this explained what he had written in his *Living Temple* (see previous section)

Kellogg's defection from the faith was not a small thing within Seventh-day Adventism. It was a massive issue. He was our chief physician and a leading light. This is why Ellen White wrote so many testimonies concerning this crisis. In one such testimony she wrote (this was with respect to Kellogg's book *The Living Temple*).

"I am instructed to say, The sentiments of those who are searching for advanced scientific ideas are not to be trusted. Such representations as the following are made: "The Father is as the light invisible; the Son is as the light embodied; the Spirit is the light shed abroad." The Father is like the dew, invisible vapor; the Son is like the dew gathered in beautiful form; the Spirit is like the dew fallen to the seat of life." Another representation: "The Father is like the invisible vapor; the Son is like the leaden cloud; the Spirit is rain fallen and working in refreshing power." (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies, Series B, No. 7, page 62 'Come out and be separate'*)

As the vast majority of Christians will undoubtedly realize, all the illustrations listed here, along with other illustrations that are very similar in nature, are those that trinitarians use in an attempt to describe God as being three-in-one, meaning their trinity or triune concept of God. This undoubtedly shows us that Ellen White was making reference here to the doctrine of the trinity.

Ellen White was not the author of these illustrations. We know this because as they are written here, they can also be found in a book written in 1858 by a pastor and teacher named the Rev. William Boardman. The book was titled *The Higher Christian Life* and was a worldwide success. In fact the 1870's *Higher Life* movement in England that promoted holy Christian living actually took its name from this book. This shows us the popularity of this publication. Boardman, along with Dwight L. Moody and Ira Sankey, held evangelistic campaigns promoting Christian holiness.

Boardman used these three-in-one illustrations to help explain the relationship between the three personalities of the Godhead, particularly how the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in each of them. These were the personalities that he said (using his words) comprised "the living" and "triune God" (see below), meaning the trinity God. He actually wrote concerning the three-in-one illustrations (in his book these were all in upper case)

"The Father is as the light invisible. The Son is as the light embodied. The Spirit is as the light shed down." (*W. Boardman, The Higher Christian life, part 2, chapter 1, page 101, 'For me: what then must I do?'*)

On the next page he wrote

“The Father is like the dew in invisible vapor. The Son is like the dew gathered in beautiful form. The Spirit is like the dew fallen to the seat of life.” (*Ibid page 102*)

He continued on the following page

“The Father is like to the invisible vapor. The Son is as the laden cloud and falling rain. The Spirit is the rain — fallen and working in refreshing power.” (*Ibid page 103*)

As can be seen, there is very little difference in the way that Ellen White wrote these illustrations (see above). With reference to these illustrations Boardman said

“These likenings are all imperfect. They rather hide than illustrate the tri-personality of the one God, for they are not persons but things, poor and earthly at best, to represent the living personalities of the living God.” (*Ibid*)

To a degree, as we shall soon see, Ellen White would have agreed with this statement (at least where Boardman says that these illustrations are imperfect). Boardman then wrote

“So much they [the illustrations] may do, however, as to illustrate the official relations of each to the others and of each and all to us. And more. They may also illustrate the truth that all the fulness of Him who filleth all in all, dwells in each person of the Triune God.” (*Ibid*)

As can be seen, these illustrations were originally penned by Boardman to help explain the three-in-one (trinity or triune) concept of God. Whilst admitting that they were “imperfect” he did say that they do “illustrate the truth” that “all the fulness” of the Godhead dwells in each of the divine personalities. Note that according to Boardman this “living God” was the “triune God”, meaning a composite entity. Note too he says that these illustrations do “illustrate the official relations of each to the others”. Ellen White did not see it the same way, far from it in fact. She said (note the very first words of this paragraph)

“I am instructed to say,” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies, Series B, No. 7, page 62 ‘Come out and be separate’*)

This was not her own opinion she was voicing. She had been instructed by God to say it. This is when she wrote (as we noted above)

“The sentiments of those who are searching for advanced scientific ideas are not to be trusted. Such representations as the following are made: “The Father is as the light invisible; the Son is as the light embodied; the Spirit is

the light shed abroad." "The Father is like the dew, invisible vapor; the Son is like the dew gathered in beauteous form; the Spirit is like the dew fallen to the seat of life." Another representation: "The Father is like the invisible vapor; the Son is like the leaden cloud; the Spirit is rain fallen and working in refreshing power."

These three-in-one illustrations are the same as what Boardman had written in his book. Note that Ellen White said that these types of ideas "are not to be trusted". She then condemned them by saying

"All these spiritualistic representations are simply nothingness. They are imperfect, untrue. They weaken and diminish the Majesty which no earthly likeness can be compared to. God can not be compared with the things His hands have made. These are mere earthly things, suffering under the curse of God because of the sins of man. "The Father can not be described by the things of earth." (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies, Series B, No. 7, page 62 'Come out and be separate'*)

Notice first of all what Ellen White called these three-in-one illustrations (or "representations"). She called them "spiritualistic representations". We shall come back to this point later.

By quoting more or less the exact words of the illustrations from Boardman's book, we can see clearly here that Ellen White, as was Boardman, was making reference to the trinity doctrine (the "triune God" as Boardman called Him). We can see therefore that in 1905, Seventh-day Adventists were being told that all illustrations that attempt to make God's being as three-in-one are wrong. In fact Ellen White says that they are all "imperfect" and "untrue". How much more of a plain testimony could Seventh-day Adventists receive about not depicting God as being three-in-one (a trinity)?

In this Kellogg crisis therefore, as seen in this testimony concerning the alpha of heresies, it was the doctrine of the trinity that was in question. Of this there is no doubt. Notice whom it was that Ellen White said could not be described by using the things of this earth. She said it was "the Father" (the infinite God as she so often called Him). He is the one who was believed by Seventh-day Adventists (prior to their conversion to trinitarianism) to be the source of everything in the universe. This included the Son who was believed to have been begotten or brought forth of Him (not created by Him).

By his three-in-one illustrations, Boardman was saying, as in trinity orthodoxy, that the source of the Son was the Father. On the face of it therefore, according to Seventh-day Adventist reasoning, these illustrations did appear to depict this part of their denominational belief. So what was the problem? Why did Ellen White condemn his illustrations?

It could be reasoned that the problem was either to do with the three-in-one

illustration itself (its indivisible oneness) or the depiction in it of the Holy Spirit being the same as God the Father and the Son (making its threeness), which as we have noted before is essential trinitarianism.

From my own personal studies I would say that it was both. I say this because at that time, Seventh-day Adventists did not believe that the Holy Spirit was a person like the Father and Son but was rather the personal presence of them both when they were not bodily present. There is also the reason that Ellen White always spoke of God as a personal being and not a composite entity as does the trinity doctrine. Whatever the truth of the matter, Ellen White condemned all these types of three-in-one illustrations.

The danger of false sentiments

As we noted above, Boardman's writings (particularly his book 'The Higher Christian Life) helped to establish the Keswick Conventions that began in the early 1870's in England and are still going strong today (2008). One source says that when the book was published (1858), it sold 100,000 copies. It was as popular in America as it was in England. For this reason it is quite possible that many Seventh-day Adventists would have read it, meaning that they would have seen these three-in-one illustrations for themselves. Certainly it was a well-advertised and very well read book.

It is more than likely that this was one of the books to which Ellen White was referring when she said in the early 1900's (this was under the sub-heading of "Dangers of speculative study")

"There is danger that the false sentiments expressed in the books that they have been reading will sometimes be interwoven by our ministers, teachers, and editors with their arguments, discourses, and publications, under the belief that they are the same in principle as the teachings of the Spirit of truth. The book Living Temple is an illustration of this work, the writer of which declared in its support that its teachings were the same as those found in the writings of Mrs. White. Again and again we shall be called to meet the influence of men who are studying sciences of satanic origin, through which Satan is working to make a nonentity of God and of Christ." (Ellen G. White, 9th Volume Testimonies, page 68 1909, 'Literature in service', see also Review and Herald 6th August 1908 'Circulate the publications No. 1)

As we noted in the previous section, Kellogg did say that he had thought he had avoided in his book anything that could be considered trinitarian theology but Ellen White did not see it this way. We can also see here that in condemning Kellogg's reasoning, she condemned all three-in-one illustrations of the trinity. We shall return our thoughts to this in a later section.

A most comprehensive statement

In his book *The Higher Christian Life* and following on from his three-in-one illustrations of God, Boardman made this statement (note the capitalised words are as they are in Boardman's book)

“The Father is all the fulness of the Godhead INVISIBLE.
The Son is all the fulness of the Godhead MANIFESTED.
The Spirit is all the fulness of the Godhead MAKING MANIFEST.”
(*William Boardman, The Higher Christian Life, part ii 'How attained, chapter 1, page 105 'For me: then what must I do?'*)

Ellen White in similar fashion said (this was following on from her condemnation of Boardman's three-in-one illustrations)

“The Father is all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and is invisible to mortal sight.

The Son is all the fullness of the Godhead manifested. The Word of God declares Him to be “the express image of His person.” “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Here is shown the personality of the Father.

The Comforter that Christ promised to send after He ascended to heaven, is the Spirit in all the fullness of the Godhead, making manifest the power of divine grace to all who receive and believe in Christ as a personal Saviour.”
(*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B No.7, page 62 1906 'Come out and be Separate'*)

Here we can see that Ellen White used Boardman's statements as a basis for what she herself wrote. In doing she expanded, modified and elaborated on them. Boardman concluded in his book

“The persons are not mere offices, or modes of revelation, but living persons of the living God.” (*William Boardman, the Higher Christian Life, part II 'How Attained, chapter I, 'For me: then what must I do?'*)

This has now become a trinitarian statement. To the three “living persons” has now been added the oneness of “the living God”. Ellen White concluded in similar fashion (but note the very important modification to Boardman's words)

“There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers-the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit-those who receive Christ by living faith are baptised, and these powers will co-operate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B No.7, page 62 1906 'Come out and be Separate'*)

The way that Ellen White modified Boardman's statement is extremely important for us to note. It is also highly significant in the present trinity debate within Seventh-day Adventism.

Boardman had said that the three personalities were "living persons of the living God" whilst Ellen White said that they were "living persons of the heavenly trio". What is the difference? The difference is that Boardman's is a trinitarian statement whilst Ellen White's statement is non-trinitarian. Boardman spoke of God as being three-in-one whilst Ellen White did not. She just said that the three were of the Godhead not that they made up God as was said by Boardman. This really is very, very important.

Here then, from the pen of Ellen White, which Seventh-day Adventists believe was motivated by the leading of God's Spirit, was an all-encompassing and very important statement regarding the Godhead. It also depicted what Seventh-day Adventists then believed. This was in 1906. It was still non-trinitarianism.

Some have used this statement to try and prove that Ellen White was a trinitarian but this cannot be done. This is because she does not say that all three personalities are all united into one indivisible God (essential trinitarianism) as Boardman was saying but is a trio of divine personalities. In fact as we have seen in this testimony, she condemned the three-in-one illustrations that made Him look triune. If you wish to read the entire testimony you will find it here

<http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/SB-EGWarticles.htm>

It must be recognised here that Ellen White took what many would say was a genuine (authentic) trinitarian statement and turned it into one that was non-trinitarian. Here therefore is a question.

If Ellen White was a trinitarian (remember this testimony was initially written in 1905 and reproduced in the testimonies in 1906 which was 8 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*), then why did she do it. In other words, if she was a trinitarian, then why, when using Boardman's statement, did she remove the trinitarianism from it and make it non-trinitarian? She must have had a very good reason for doing so or she would have used it as it was written by Boardman. This is only reasonable to believe.

The reason why Ellen White removed the trinitarianism because it was not in keeping with what God had shown her. This was in keeping with her condemnation of the three-in-one illustrations used by Boardman. In other words, Ellen White removed the trinitarian oneness.

Essential yet incomprehensible oneness

In 1906, in the midst of the Godhead crisis within Seventh-day Adventism (this is with reference to the alpha of heresies as we noted in the preface to this study), Ellen White wrote (note this was the same year as the special testimony we have

just spoken of above was published)

“There are light and glory in the truth that Christ was one with the Father before the foundation of the world was laid. This is the light shining in a dark place, making it resplendent with divine, original glory.” (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald 5th April 1906 ‘The Word made Flesh’*)

Here we are told that prior to the creation of our world there was a certain oneness between the Father and Christ. Here therefore Ellen White is addressing trinity issues. Notice very importantly that she does not include the Holy Spirit in this oneness. This is more than likely because during the time of her ministry, Seventh-day Adventists did not regard the Holy Spirit as a personal being like they regarded God and Christ as personal beings. We shall see more of this as we go along. Note too that Ellen White did not say that Kellogg was making the Holy Spirit a non-entity, only that he was doing this to God and Christ. Ellen White then adds (and this really is very important so please note it well)

“This truth [the pre-existent oneness that Christ had with God His Father], infinitely mysterious in itself, explains other mysterious and otherwise unexplainable truths, while it is enshrined in light, unapproachable and incomprehensible.” (*Ibid*)

Here we are told that whatever constituted this pre-existent oneness between the Father and the Son (and we must stress here that Ellen White did say it existed), it is something that is “enshrined in light, unapproachable and incomprehensible.”

This “incomprehensible” is with regards to the possibility of the human mind to understand it. This is where Seventh-day Adventists should leave it – as something not revealed and beyond our ability to understand. This is why the oneness as portrayed in the trinity doctrine is only an assumed oneness. Certainly it is not something that can be proven from Scripture. Neither, as we can see from this statement from Ellen White, has God revealed it through her.

It should also be obvious that Ellen White was not referring here to the oneness that God and Christ had with regards to their desire to save humanity, neither was it to do with their oneness in eternal purposes in the salvation of mankind. We can also say that this oneness was not with respect to the love that they both have for humanity or their oneness in personal characters. This is because none of these things would be “incomprehensible” to us but would easily be understood.

Certainly none of these things could be termed “unapproachable”. It must be accepted therefore that this oneness Ellen White speaks of here must be to do with the eternal ontological existence of Christ with the Father (their divine being or the way that they exist), something that is not spoken of in Scripture. This I

believe is only reasonable to conclude. As has been said, she was addressing trinity issues but she certainly was not promoting God as a trinity.

From my own personal studies, I have drawn the conclusion that Ellen White wrote this entire article with reference to the trinity doctrine. I say this because as we have already seen both in the previous section and here, this is what the concern was in the early 1900's crisis within Seventh-day Adventism.

Ignoring the testimonies

Strange as it may seem, by using very similar three-in-one illustrations that were so clearly condemned by Ellen White (see above), God is today being described in Seventh-day Adventists publications as a trinity. One such glaring example of this is in our recent Sabbath School lesson studies (the second quarter of 2006). In attempting to describe God as three-in-one, the lesson author asks Seventh-day Adventists throughout the world

“What analogies—such as a triangle or a three-pronged fork — can help someone understand the idea of how one God can be composed of three equal Persons?” (The Seventh-day Adventist Lesson quarterly, 2nd quarter 2006 Sunday March 26th page 7)

To describe God this way I believe is denigrating. Never should we describe His being as like “a three-pronged fork”. We have the testimony of the spirit of prophecy on this one. This is worse than the denigration (disparagement) of the three-in-one illustrations that was condemned (see above). If this was not enough the same author then asks

“What other examples might help us better understand this deep truth?” (Ibid)

Here we can see that in 2006 and throughout the world, Seventh-day Adventists were being asked to illustrate (to liken) God by the use of “a triangle” and a “three-pronged fork”. They are then asked, what “other examples” they can think of to show “this deep truth” that God is three-in-one. Needless to say, in their Sabbath School classes, it is more than likely that many came up with illustrations similar to the ones that Ellen White both mentioned and condemned (see above).

Unfortunately for Seventh-day Adventists, the Sabbath School lesson authors quoted from the testimony we have just read above but they did not quote where she condemned this type of three-in-one illustrations. In other words, the condemnation for these types of illustrations was deliberately omitted. All that they did was to partly quote Ellen White by saying

“The Father is all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and is invisible to mortal sight. The Son is all the fullness of the Godhead manifested. The Word of God declares Him to be ‘the express image of His person.’ . . . The

Comforter that Christ promised to send after He ascended to heaven, is the Spirit in all the fullness of the Godhead, making manifest the power of divine grace to all who receive and believe in Christ as a personal Saviour. There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will co-operate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, pp. 614, 615.” (*Ibid*)

This quote is not complete. Even though it may at first glance look as though that it has been taken from one paragraph it is in fact an extract from three separate paragraphs. It is these three paragraphs that we have noted above where Ellen White condemns three-in-one illustrations and gives what I have termed her most comprehensive statement regarding the Godhead. The first paragraph actually says (this was with reference to the three-in-one trinity illustrations in the previous paragraph)

“All these spiritualistic representations are simply nothingness. They are imperfect, untrue. They weaken and diminish the Majesty which no earthly likeness can be compared to. God can not be compared with the things His hands have made. These are mere earthly things, suffering under the curse of God because of the sins of man. The Father can not be described by the things of earth. The Father is all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and is invisible to mortal sight.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies, Series B, No. 7, page 62 ‘Come out and be separate’*)

In the Sabbath School lesson study, only the final sentence was quoted. The condemnation from Ellen White of three-in-one illustrations was omitted. If this had been included in the quote in the lesson, then the Sabbath School authors would certainly have found it difficult, impossible in fact, to quote their three-in-one illustrations (see above). It would also have been impossible for them to ask Seventh-day Adventists to dream up more of them (also see above). The second paragraph originally said

“The Son is all the fullness of the Godhead manifested. The Word of God declares Him to be “the express image of His person.” "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Here is shown the personality of the Father.” (*Ibid*)

In the quote in the Sabbath School lesson book, the last two sentences are omitted. These are the ones that reflect the Seventh-day Adventist pre-trinity belief that the Son of God is literally begotten of God (meaning brought forth of God) and is the personality of the Father shown. It is my belief that if these sentences had been quoted they would have led to enquiry as to what is meant by them. As it was they were simply omitted therefore they would not be queried. The third paragraph was quoted correctly. This one said

“The Comforter that Christ promised to send after He ascended to heaven, is the Spirit in all the fulness of the Godhead, making manifest the power of divine grace to all who receive and believe in Christ as a personal Saviour. There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers--the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit-- those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will co-operate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ.” (*Ibid*)

This depicting of God as three-in-one in our Sabbath School lessons is going totally contrary to the testimony from God that we have just read where Ellen White said that Seventh-day Adventists are not to use three-in-one illustrations to describe God. This therefore must be seen as open rebellion against the testimonies unless of course this testimony is unknown which cannot be said concerning those who authored the Sabbath School lesson. This is worsened by the fact that this testimony was only partly quoted. This was to deliberately omit the condemnation of these types of three-in-one illustrations.

Undoubtedly, Kellogg's views did concern the doctrine of the trinity else Ellen White would not have written what she did with respect of *The Living Temple* in this testimony. We shall return our thoughts to this testimony in later sections. This is where we shall discover what Ellen White really did believe concerning God and Christ.

In this testimony above, Ellen White did not just condemn three-in-one illustrations of God. She did in fact make what the author of these notes believes is her most comprehensive statement concerning the Godhead. As we have seen though, it did fall short of a trinity view although some do use this statement today to try to show that Ellen White did believe that God is a trinity (it was this part that was quoted in the Sabbath School lesson study).

This early 1900's crisis within Seventh-day Adventism therefore had everything to do with the doctrine of the trinity. Remember too that Kellogg's views were also that which Ellen White referred to as containing the alpha of heresies.

In the previous section, we noted that to arrive at his beliefs, Kellogg had to think differently about the Holy Spirit than did Seventh-day Adventists at that time (1903). So too, to arrive at the place where they could inculcate the trinity doctrine into their denomination, the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church had to somehow change the denominational view of the Holy Spirit. How this came about is detailed in section forty-four.

Before moving on to the next section I would ask you to note something very important. The above quotation is often misunderstood. People tend to think that Ellen White said that the Father is all the fullness of the Godhead, the Son is all the fullness of the Godhead and the Holy Spirit is all the fullness of the Godhead but this is not what she said – at least not concerning the Holy Spirit. Concerning

the latter she said, “The Comforter...is the Spirit IN all the fulness of the Godhead”. She did NOT say IS all the fullness of the Godhead. This is saying two entirely different things.

We shall now go to section twenty-eight. This is where we shall be asking if the trinity doctrine is the omega that Ellen White warned Seventh-day Adventists was on its way into Seventh-day Adventism. Following that we shall be taking a look at some of the things that Ellen White said to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference concerning the early 1900’s Godhead crisis within Seventh-day Adventism. This was the first General Conference following the publication of Kellogg’s *Living Temple*. It was also where Ellen White repeatedly stressed that God and Christ were two separate personal beings. Obviously she did this for a very good reason. In the author’s opinion it was to allay ideas of trinitarianism.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section twenty-eight

Warnings of apostasy – is the trinity doctrine the omega?

During the early 1900's there came from the pen of Ellen White a number of very serious warnings. These were saying that Seventh-day Adventists were in danger of apostatising from the faith (beliefs) that God had given to them. We shall now take a look at some of these warnings. For obvious reasons they should be considered as being very relevant to us today.

The alpha of heresies and the omega

Many Seventh-day Adventists realise that there are amongst us today in 2007, those who believe that the trinity doctrine is the omega of which in 1904 Ellen White had warned

“Be not deceived; many will depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. We have now before us the alpha of this danger. The omega will be of a most startling nature.” (Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B, No. 2 page 16, ‘A Letter to Leading Physicians’, July 24th 1904, ‘Teach the Word’)

Ellen White is warning here that sometime in the future, meaning sometime after 1904, many would depart from the “faith”. This was the faith (beliefs) that in 1904 was then held by Seventh-day Adventists.

In other words, the “faith” from which Ellen White warned that there would be a departing was the 1904 denominational faith of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I say this because it is only reasonable to conclude that whatever it was that constituted this faith, meaning what Ellen White and the other pioneers were teaching in 1904, they did believe it to be the truth that God had revealed to them. If this had not been the case, then it is very safe to assume that they would not have been teaching it.

We can also safely conclude that if Ellen White had not regarded this faith as being the truth, then she would not have warned Seventh-day Adventists about not departing from it. This also is only a reasonable conclusion to draw and one that some may say is only too apparent.

This does not mean that our pioneers concluded that there was no more truth to be had, or that what they then believed could not be expanded upon but they

certainly believed that what they were then teaching, in 1904, was the truth that God had given to them. As has been said, this is why they were teaching it. Notice too that Ellen White said in 1904 that the “[alpha](#)” of the danger of departing from the Seventh-day Adventist faith was already “[before us](#)”. This was in the form of what our chief physician John Harvey Kellogg was then encouraging Seventh-day Adventists to believe, also what Albion Fox Ballenger was perpetrating amongst our people regarding salvation and the sanctuary.

In the above testimony, Ellen White also gives the reason for this departing. She said it was because many (meaning Seventh-day Adventists) would give heed to “[seducing spirits and doctrines of devils](#)”. Note also she said that the “[omega](#)” (the end of this departing), would be “[of a most startling nature](#)”. Again Ellen White saw something coming upon Seventh-day Adventists that to her way of thinking was astonishing, especially as it was happening to those who claimed to be God’s remnant people.

These words of Ellen White cannot be read without the realisation of the seriousness of their import. This is why as Seventh-day Adventists today we must not ignore them. Could it be today that many Seventh-day Adventists have been deceived by Satan and in consequence now believe a lie? According to the words of Ellen White, this is very much a possibility. Notice too here that she said that these deceived people would depart from the faith. She did not say that they would depart from the church.

It should go without saying that if we can discover (or perhaps better said re-discover) just what it was that constituted the 1904 Seventh-day Adventist faith, then we can know for sure from what it was that Ellen White said that there would be a departing. This is something that in this study we are endeavouring to uncover. My prayer is that this is being successful.

It should not be necessary to say that to verify the validity of these beliefs, whatever we realise them to be, there will be a need to compare them and check them out with the Scriptures. This is something that you the reader will need to do for yourself. For my part I have dealt with this already (although I am open to changing or modifying my views if the evidence is sufficient enough to do so) and I have offered my conclusions by way of the theological studies that are on this website.

More warnings concerning the alpha and omega

From a very similar warning to the one we have just read above, it can be seen that the “[alpha](#)” that Ellen White said in 1904 was already “[before us](#)” was found in the teachings of that much-gifted and world-renowned physician John Harvey Kellogg. This was when Ellen White wrote

“[In the book "Living Temple" there is presented the alpha of deadly heresies. The omega will follow, and will be received by those who are not willing to heed the warning God has given.” \(Ellen G. White, Special](#)

Here we are told that it was Kellogg's book *The Living Temple* that contained the "the alpha of deadly heresies". This means therefore that regarding certain of Kellogg's teachings (not all of them), Ellen White saw them as being the very beginning of the teachings that constituted a departing from the 1904 faith of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (the alpha being the first letter of the Greek alphabet). Please note here that when Ellen White gave this warning it was 6 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages* (1898). This means that up to this time (1898) and for 6 years beyond (1904), Ellen White did not regard the message of the pioneers as having contained false teachings (heresies).

Strange to relate though, Seventh-day Adventists today are being led to believe, through their denominational publications, that the most important part of that message, meaning what the pioneers believed concerning the Godhead, was error and not biblical truth. We shall note this again in the next section. As can be seen, Ellen White said in the above testimonies exactly the opposite of what our leadership is saying today. This is because she said that up to this time (the early 1900's), the message of the Seventh-day Adventist Church did not contain heresy whilst our present leadership is saying today that it did.

Ellen White's reasoning is the very reason why many Seventh-day Adventists today are coming to the conclusion that what the pioneers had been teaching, in the early 1900's when Ellen White was alive, is the truth that God has revealed and is therefore not heresy. This is something that each of us needs to decide for ourselves.

Heresy

So what exactly is a heresy?

A dictionary definition of a heresy is that it is a personal belief or opinion held in opposition to the established doctrine (established faith) of any denomination, which, if accepted, will cause division. This was how Ellen White regarded some of Kellogg's teachings.

As a matter of passing interest here, the Greek word sometimes translated heresy or heresies (*hairesis*) means 'a choice' or 'the opinion chosen' (see Acts 24:14, 1 Corinthians 11:19, Galatians 5:20 and 2 Peter 2:1). It is also translated 'sect' meaning divisions or factions (see Acts 5:17, 15:5, 24:5, 28:22). The latter is with reference to bodies of people making their own choices.

From what we have read it can also be seen that Ellen White is saying that the "omega", meaning the end of the departing from the 1904 denominational faith of Seventh-day Adventists, would definitely come to pass. In other words, there was no maybe or might be about it. It would definitely happen.

According to Ellen White, this would come about through the acceptance of

beliefs (or heresies as Ellen White termed them) that would take the place of (meaning be a substitute for) the 1904 faith of Seventh-day Adventism. She also said that those who were “not willing to heed the warning God has given” would definitely be deceived by this “omega” and thereby be its recipients. For Seventh-day Adventists today (2008), this should constitute quite a startling realisation. Again I say that as God’s remnant people, we cannot afford to ignore these warnings.

Has the omega arrived or is it still to come?

With reference as to when this “omega” would arrive within their church, Seventh-day Adventists were clearly told (again this was written in 1904)

"Living Temple" contains the alpha of these theories. I knew that the omega would follow in a little while; and I trembled for our people." (Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies, Series B No. 2 Page 53, 'The Foundation of our Faith' 1904)

Note very importantly that since the time that this warning was given in 1904, over 100 years have come and gone. This is one of the reasons why today (2008), many Seventh-day Adventists are asking if this “omega” has already arrived within Seventh-day Adventism, albeit undetected by the many who have been deceived by it (obvious to relate, it would be undetected by them if they had been deceived by it), or is it still to come in the future? This must be considered to be an honest and valid question because when all is said and done, how long after 1904 is a “little while”?

With regards to this “omega”, it is not necessary to believe that Ellen White was making reference to any doctrine in particular although she may have had one in mind. She could have just been saying that it is the last of a series of heresies that would eventually make their way into Seventh-day Adventism, the omega being the final letter of the Greek alphabet. If we do go as far as stipulating that this “omega” is one specific doctrine, meaning that it is the absolutely final heresy to come into Seventh-day Adventism, this is also the same as saying that no other heresy would follow it. This could possibly blind our eyes to other deceptions. It is best therefore not to insist that one particular doctrine is the “omega”.

Look at this in another way.

Ellen White did not say that there were only two heresies that were going to come into our church (the alpha and omega) but she did say the “alpha of heresies” and “the omega”. From this we can readily see that this was the beginning and the end of the heresies that would find their way into Seventh-day Adventism. From this we can readily see that by the acceptance of one heresy after another, this would eventually result in “the omega”.

Worth noting again here is that we were told that this “omega” would definitely

happen (in other words there is no might be or maybe about it), therefore it has to come prior to the return of Jesus. This means that if we say Jesus is coming very soon then we must also say that the “**omega**”, however it is understood, must come sooner (or already has come). One interesting point to note here before we move on is that in 1890 Ellen White had warned

“The very last deception of Satan will be to make of none effect the testimony of the Spirit of God. "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18). Satan will work ingeniously, in different ways and through different agencies, to unsettle the confidence of God's remnant people in the true testimony.” (*Ellen G. White to Brother and Sister Garmire, letter 12, August 12th 1890*)

We must ask therefore, could this unsettling the faith of Gods people in the testimonies of God’s Spirit be involved with the omega? That I would say is a forgone conclusion. Note that we have been told that, “**Satan will work ingeniously**”. Does not that remark send shivers of fear down the spine? Let us not underestimate the ingenuity of our adversary. I say this because our eternal salvation is at stake. Can we afford not to be correct? Can we afford to be misled? If we are serious about our salvation then obviously not!

Understanding the omega

So how should Seventh-day Adventists today understand “**the omega**”?

The only answer that I can give is that those who take the time to study this problem will need to make up their own minds about it. This will be according to the weight of evidence that each person finds during his or her studies. Some may be saying here that I have sidestepped the question but the truth of the matter is that we each need to study for ourselves and then draw our own conclusions. If Ellen White had specified a certain doctrine as being “**the omega**” then this would be different but as it is she did not. Certainly she did say that this final departing (the omega) was making its way into Seventh-day Adventism. She also said that it would arrive in “**a little while**”. Remember though, this she said just over 100 years ago in 1904.

In this latter warning, whatever else may be gleaned from it, we again see Ellen White saying that Kellogg’s *Living Temple* contained the “**alpha**” (beginning) of these false theories. As we shall see later, Kellogg did attempt to explain the mysteries concerning the presence and the personality of God which, as most Christians will appreciate, is that which the trinity doctrine is all about. This is just one of the reasons why some have concluded that this is also what is concerned in the “**omega**”. As we noted in previous sections, the alpha had everything to do with the trinity doctrine.

We shall also take note that in the same booklet of testimonies where Ellen White warned of this alpha of heresies and the omega, she did make specific reference to the trinity doctrine. This was when she condemned all illustrations

from nature etc that depicted God as three-in-one (see previous section). This she did in speaking out against Kellogg's book *The Living Temple*.

Certainly the "alpha" (the Kellogg problem) did concern the trinity teaching. In fact in an effort to justify what he had written in his book, Kellogg did say that he had personally come to believe in this doctrine (see section twenty-five). This confession was not something that was generally professed by Seventh-day Adventists in 1903 when Kellogg made it. This is because at that time (1903), the Seventh-day Adventist Church was strictly a non-trinitarian denomination.

Whilst it is comparatively easy to prove that the "alpha" did involve the trinity doctrine, the one important question still remains. Is it also involved with the "omega"? This is something that only a study of the facts of history will reveal, hence one of the reasons for this study.

Notice that Ellen White did say concerning this "omega" that she "trembled" for future (meaning after 1904) Seventh-day Adventists. This reveals not only the magnitude of what she saw was coming within our church (God's remnant people) but also perhaps the sheer subtlety of it to deceive. For obvious reasons and for those Seventh-day Adventists who are living today in 2008, this too should be quite a realisation.

In conclusion, I would say that we have in these warnings from God the best possible incentive for these studies. It is the divine injunction to study and heed the warnings or else be deceived. So I ask you, what better incentive could we as God's remnant people have been given? I would suggest none because God has offered no alternatives. It is just as though God is saying to each and every one of us – "this is my only offer, take it or leave it".

A satanic reformation

In the very same booklet (Special Testimonies Series B, No's 2 and 7) that contained many of the testimonies that Ellen White wrote concerning the early 1900's crisis within Seventh-day Adventism (this is also where she had housed many of the testimonies concerning Kellogg's *The Living Temple* including the alpha and omega warnings), this messenger of the Lord wrote (notice the title of this testimony)

"The enemy of souls has sought to bring in the supposition that a great reformation was to take place among Seventh-day Adventists, and that this reformation would consist in giving up the doctrines which stand as the pillars of our faith, and engaging in a process of reorganisation." (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B No. 2 page 54 'The Foundation of Our Faith', 1904*)

Here we are told that Satan would suggest a reformation was necessary to the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. Remember, this was in 1904 when the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still non-trinitarian. This reformation would

result (said Ellen White) in “giving up the doctrines which stand as the pillars of our faith”. This means that to understand this warning we need to understand what Ellen White then believed constituted the “pillars of our faith”. Again we are talking in terms of reasonable conclusions. Ellen White then asks

“Were this reformation to take place, what would result? (*Ibid*)

Notice very carefully now what Ellen White said would happen if this so called reformation were to take place. She said

“The principles of truth that God in His wisdom has given to the remnant church, would be discarded. Our religion would be changed.”

Notice now this one gigantic statement. She said

“The fundamental principles that have sustained the work for the last fifty years would be accounted as error.” (*Ibid*)

Here Ellen White refers to what was once the “fundamental principles” of the Seventh-day Adventist faith. These would be the same as what she describes as the “pillars of our faith” (see above). This is a warning that Seventh-day Adventists should not have ignored, either in 1904 or now.

Ellen White warned that if this so called reformation did take place, then what was once believed and taught by Seventh-day Adventists “would be discarded” and “Our religion would be changed”. She also said that the “fundamental principles” (not all the beliefs) that Seventh-day Adventists had taught for the fifty years previous to 1904 “would be accounted as error”. This really is quite a warning because in those fundamental principles, Ellen White would have included what we then believed about God and Christ.

These landmark beliefs would be amongst the targets of this reformation that Satan would suggest was necessary to the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. Ellen White continued concerning the results of this reform. She said (remember this was in 1904)

“A new organization would be established. Books of a new order would be written. A system of intellectual philosophy would be introduced. The founders of this system would go into the cities and do a wonderful work. The Sabbath of course would be lightly regarded as also the God who created it. Nothing would be allowed to stand in the way of the new movement. The leaders would teach that virtue is better than vice, but God being removed, they would place their dependence on human power, which, without God, is worthless.” (*Ibid*)

She then concluded

“Their foundation would be built on the sand, and storm and tempest would sweep away the structure.” (*Ibid*)

Now we can see what would happen if this satanic reformation did take place within Seventh-day Adventism. Ellen White said that “Books of a new order would be written”, meaning books would be published that taught something different than what was taught in 1904 by her and the pioneers. She also said “A system of intellectual philosophy would be introduced”. This would take the place of the biblical truth that God had revealed to Seventh-day Adventists. The question now before us therefore is, has any of this happened?

As we shall see in later sections, the books and publications that came off the presses of our church whilst Ellen White was alive were non-trinitarian. Even her own books, those of the spirit of prophecy, are non-trinitarian. I say this because whilst they may contain statements that would fit well into a trinitarian theology, especially those found in *Desire of Ages*, they are, when taken overall, non-trinitarian. In other words, at the time of their publication, all of Ellen White’s books were in harmony with what was being taught within Seventh-day Adventism, which was non-trinitarianism. Ellen White’s books were never at odds with our fundamental beliefs; at least not until the trinity doctrine was accepted.

Apart from the spirit of prophecy books, the truth of the matter is that the publications that in the main depicted our 1904 non-trinitarian faith are not now in publication whilst one particular book, namely Uriah Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation*, because it was regarded as such a classic within Seventh-day Adventism that it could not be removed from circulation, was, in the 1940’s, completely rewritten (edited). This was to expunge from its pages all of its non-trinitarian theology. This is the extent to which the Seventh-day Adventist Church has gone in support of their now trinitarian theology.

As we shall also see in later sections, the editing of Smith’s book brought about adverse reactions amongst Seventh-day Adventists. Some even said that by doing it (by removing the non-trinitarianism etc from its pages), the few were making a pronouncement on doctrine on behalf of the many (the church). We shall see the latter in section forty-seven.

Notice that even in this satanic reformation, Ellen White said that “a wonderful work” would be done in the cities, meaning that evangelism would greatly prosper. This in turn would mean, as is happening today, that the Seventh-day Adventist membership would increase rapidly. Take a close look though at what Ellen White said would happen in this evangelism. She said the Sabbath would be “lightly regarded as also the God who created it”.

This does not mean that the seventh-day Sabbath would be totally discarded (Satan would probably never attempt this with Seventh-day Adventists because this would immediately expose him as the author of this reformation) but as Ellen

White said, God's day of rest would be "lightly regarded". This clearly means that its importance would not be stressed as much as was done by our pioneers.

This of course would have a decided knock on effect as far as our message to Christians of other denominations is concerned. This is inasmuch as our call to them to come out of their denominations, which historically Seventh-day Adventists have regarded as the falling Babylon of Bible prophecy (see Revelation 14:8 and 18:1-6) and often referred to as mainstream Christianity, would be substantially weakened. So it would be that a major part of our God given message would be weakened. Such though, it must be admitted, would be the ploy of Satan.

As we noted in section twenty-three and will see again in future sections, in the 1950's we did receive from the evangelicals the right hand of fellowship, meaning that they accepted us as belonging to them (Babylon). There is a link here between the lightly regarding of the Sabbath and our acceptance by these evangelicals as being part of them. We will also see that all of this had to do with our changeover to trinitarianism.

The reformed beliefs – heresies

It is only reasonable to conclude that the reformed beliefs in this so called reformation are only the same as the heresies that Ellen White said would find their way into the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is not reasonable to believe that they are two different things.

During my studies, I have found that the only beliefs that have been totally discarded over the years, as were once taught by our pioneers, are those that concern the three personalities of the Godhead. It must be said though that the teachings of the sanctuary, mainly concerning what Seventh-day Adventists term the investigative judgement, I have found to be much watered down although we still speak in terms of a pre-advent judgement.

It seems to me that what we once taught regarding a literal investigation of the lives of those who have professed to be God's people and that some names are being accepted whilst some are being rejected, is not now so prominently taught as it was at one time. As this is the subject of another study, this is the summary of these observations, suffice to say that what the pioneers once taught about God, Christ and the Holy Spirit has now been discarded and has been replaced by other teachings. This is a reformation of beliefs.

The early 1900's crisis within Seventh-day Adventism (not a local crisis)

The "alpha" and "omega" warnings were given at a time of very serious crisis for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This was in the early 1900's when the landmarks and the pillars of our faith (beliefs) were then being very seriously challenged.

As we have seen (see section twenty-four), Ellen White did warn that this attack was very much a two-pronged affair, meaning that there were two very important areas of beliefs that were then, in the early 1900's, under threat. One area concerned the sanctuary, which will be no surprise to the majority of informed Seventh-day Adventists whilst the other area (which may be a surprise) was concerning our beliefs about the separate personalities of God and Christ. We shall also see in the next section that amidst this crisis there were appeals from Ellen White for Seventh-day Adventists to hold on tight to what was then their denominational faith (beliefs). We shall also take special note, very importantly, that this was whilst these beliefs were still non-trinitarian. This was not just an obscure one off warning but was one that was often repeated by her.

The above warnings concerning the “alpha” and “omega” were included in a series called *Special Testimonies Series B No. 2 and No. 7*. The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia says with reference to this entire series

“Another series comprising 19 numbers in 21 pamphlets of varying size and in various editions with pagination not uniform, comprising in all more than 750 pages, issued between 1903 and 1913 to meet special situations of a local or temporary character.” (*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia, Volume 10, page 1417, 1966 edition*)

By saying that these testimonies are of a “local or temporary character”, this statement makes it appear that they do not have application to us today but as we have seen, this is far from being the truth. From what we have read already, these testimonies are of vital interest to us today (2008). Certainly they give us an invaluable insight into what was happening in the early 1900's within our church and as we shall soon see, they are applicable to our present situation that we find ourselves in as a denomination.

These *Special Testimonies* include many of the testimonies that Ellen White wrote concerning the teachings of John Harvey Kellogg, the leading physician in Seventh-day Adventism. This was as these teaching were found in his book *The Living Temple*. These testimonies were also with regard to the influence that his ideas were then having, in the early 1900's, amongst Seventh-day Adventists. These are also the testimonies that contained the warnings about the alpha of heresies and the omega. There were also, as we have seen, condemnation for all illustrations that depict God as three-in-one.

In these same testimonies, Ellen White warned of the attempts of Satan to overthrow the beliefs of the church. These were those that she said had been established by prayerful study of the Scriptures and had been miraculously confirmed by God. It should be no surprise therefore to realise that Satan was attacking these beliefs with all the subtlety and ingenuity that he could muster. How can it be said then, as it does in the Seventh-day Adventist encyclopaedia, that these *Special Testimonies*, “issued between 1903 and 1913”, were only to meet special situations of a “local or temporary character”? There must be

something very misleading about this reasoning.

In this study we have already seen (see section ten) that the Seventh-day Adventist Church today freely admits that the teachings of the pioneers regarding the Godhead, as held by them during the ministry of Ellen White, have now been discarded as error and has been replaced by the very doctrine that in principle the pioneers rejected (remember essential trinitarianism). We must ask here therefore, is this “the omega” or is it perhaps part of the in-between heresies that would lead up to the eventual final departing from the 1904 faith of Seventh-day Adventists?

Prophecy is conditional

I have heard it said by some that this satanic reformation spoken of by Ellen White (see above) might never come to pass. This they say is because prophecies of this nature are conditional. This of course is very true (see Jeremiah 18:5-10) but whether the prophecy is fulfilled or in the process of being fulfilled can only be determined by the evidences we see around us. In other words, as far as this satanic reformation is concerned (see above), we must ask ourselves, has what Ellen White said would transpire in this reformation actually come to pass or not? In other words:-

- Have we as God’s remnant people given up the doctrines that once stood as the pillars of our faith?
- Have the principles of truth that God gave to our church been discarded?
- Has our religion changed?
- Have the fundamental principles held between the 1850’s and early 1900’s been accounted as error?
- Have books of a new order been written?
- Has a system of intellectual philosophy been introduced into Seventh-day Adventism?
- Is the Sabbath lightly regarded now as far as our evangelism to other Christian denominations is concerned?

If we can answer yes to any given number of these questions, which I believe that we can do, then I believe that we have the right to at least suspect that Satan has corrupted certain of the doctrines of Seventh-day Adventism. On the other hand, some may say, the changes that have been made to our teachings regarding God, Christ and the Holy Spirit are scriptural therefore they need to be upheld.

The question still remains therefore, was it the non-trinitarian pioneers that were correct in what they believed or is it the present trinitarian beliefs of our church that are correct? This really is the question that we all need today to be asking. This is why we need to study the evidences of our history for ourselves and then make informed decisions based on the weight of the evidence we discover.

What we do know for sure is that the crisis brought about by the teachings of Seventh-day Adventism's foremost physician had everything to do with trinitarianism. Of that there is no doubt. This then was the alpha of heresies but is the trinity doctrine involved in the omega? From my own studies I would definitely say yes!

Some may say that what we believe now is a development of truth once held by the pioneers but this cannot be true. As we said in section one, if something was true yesterday then it must be true today, therefore it will always be true. If the pioneers were teaching the truth then we have discarded it. If we are teaching the truth today then the pioneers must have been in error regarding what they taught. This cannot be disputed.

The early 1900's were indeed a time of very serious crisis for Seventh-day Adventists. It behoves us therefore to study to find out exactly what was happening within our own denomination at that time. This is something that is not only our privilege to do but also our bounden duty, a duty that I would suggest we must never seek to avoid.

In the next section (twenty-nine), we shall be taking a look at some of the things that Ellen White said at the 1905 General Conference session. This was the first conference since the publication of Kellogg's book *The Living Temple*.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section twenty-nine

The 1905 General Conference

We have noted in previous sections that through the spirit of prophecy, Seventh-day Adventists were told in 1904 that the alpha of heresies was already within their denomination. They were also warned that the omega, meaning the finality of the falling away from the faith of Seventh-day Adventism, would follow “in a little while” (see *Special Testimonies, Series B No. 2 Page 53, The Foundation of our Faith 1904*). In addition they were told that Satan was attempting to suggest a reformation was needed to the faith (beliefs) of Seventh-day Adventists. These heresies would be the results of this reformation.

When Ellen White said that there would be a departing from the faith of Seventh-day Adventists (this was in 1904), she must have been referring to the 1904 denominational faith of Seventh-day Adventists, meaning what was believed and taught by Seventh-day Adventists at that time. As has been said before, if she did not mean this then the warning does not make sense.

In this section we shall see that in the early 1900's (this was when the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still a non-trinitarian denomination) Ellen White made it very clear that what Seventh-day Adventists were then teaching was the truth that God had given to them. This is the reason why she said that this faith should never be changed. It is also the reason why today we should spend time in revisiting our history and re-discovering this faith.

In the early 1900's, these alpha and omega testimonies (see previous section) were far from being the only warnings that Seventh-day Adventists had received from Ellen White. There were many others, most of which came when during the same time period (the early 1900's), attempts were made to bring into the teachings of Seventh-day Adventism views that were in opposition to two of their most basic fundamental beliefs. These were namely

- (a) The sanctuary
- (b) The separate personalities of God and Christ.

We shall now take a look at some of these other warnings, also the admonitions to keep the faith.

The 1905 General Conference

During the General Conference session held at Takoma Park in 1905 (this was the first General Conference following the publication of Kellogg's book *The Living Temple*), Ellen White tenaciously defended what was then the faith (beliefs) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Note that this was one year after the alpha and omega warnings about Seventh-day Adventists leaving the faith (see section one and previous section). It was also the year after Ellen White gave the warning regarding not using illustrations that depicted God as three-in-one (see section twenty-seven). This was also the first General Conference after Kellogg's profession of the trinity doctrine. All these things tie in together.

Another important thing to note is that this conference took place 7 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*. This is the book that the pro-trinitarians say led our denomination to become trinitarian. Note though at this conference that Ellen White was defending and upholding what was still their non-trinitarian faith (beliefs). We shall also see that she gave more warnings that wrong views concerning God and Christ were on their way into the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

At the 1905 conference session, Ellen White also explained to the delegates, many of whom would not have been at the very beginnings of Seventh-day Adventism, how it was during the early days when the pioneers came together in Bible study (this was when the faith of Seventh-day Adventists was in the process of being established).

Originally coming from different denominations, the pioneers held various different beliefs so the truth needed to be established.

A conference talk

During a talk in the afternoon of Tuesday May 16th, Ellen White said

“God has given me light regarding our periodicals. What is it? -- He has said that the dead are to speak. How? -- Their works shall follow them. We are to repeat the words of the pioneers in our work, who knew what it cost to search for the truth as for hidden treasure, and who labored to lay the foundation of our work. They moved forward step by step under the influence of the Spirit of God. One by one these pioneers are passing away. The word given me is, Let that which these men have written in the past be reproduced.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 25th May 1905, 'The work for this time', address at the 1905 General Conference, May 16th 1905*)

She said later

“Not long ago I took up a copy of the *Bible Echo*. As I looked it through, I saw an article by Elder Haskell and one by Elder Corliss. As I laid the paper down, I said, These articles must be reproduced. There is truth and power

in them. Men spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

Let the truths that are the foundation of our faith be kept before the people. Some will depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils.

They talk science, and the enemy comes in and gives them an abundance of science; but it is not the science of salvation. It is not the science of humility, of consecration, or of the sanctification of the Spirit. We are now to understand what the pillars of our faith are, -- the truths that have made us as a people what we are, leading us on step by step." (*Ibid*)

She then related the early experiences of Seventh-day Adventists. At times said Ellen White, when she and the other pioneers could not understand the passages of Scripture that they had been studying (this is an important part of the how our faith had been established and confirmed)

"I would be taken off in vision, and a clear explanation of the passages we had been studying would be given me, with instruction as to how we were to labor and teach effectively. Thus light was given that helped us to understand the scriptures in regard to Christ, his mission, and his priesthood. A line of truth extending from that time to the time when we shall enter the city of God, was made plain to me, and I gave to others the instruction that the Lord had given me." (*Ibid*)

Ellen White was stressing that it had been God Himself who had given the pioneers their faith (beliefs). As has been said already, important to realise here is that many in attendance at this conference would not have been at the very beginnings (1844) or even early decades of Seventh-day Adventism therefore some may not have even heard of these experiences. Now though they were being told of these things first hand so to speak. Ellen White was also making this plain because she knew that at that time (1905), attempts were being made from within to change this faith. She was therefore stressing to the delegates that it was God Himself who had given Seventh-day Adventists their beliefs. For that reason this was an appeal to Seventh-day Adventists to keep the faith that she said God had given to them in their early days.

So it was that Ellen White was explaining how the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church came to be established (formed or arrived at). This method she said was through prayer, joint Bible study and direct revelation from God. Note that at this conference Ellen White was now almost 78 years of age therefore by this time had been God's messenger to the remnant for 61 years (she had received her first vision from God in December 1844 when 17 years of age).

Ellen White was stressing to the delegates that their 1905 faith was one that had been God-given. Once again there is no mistaking here regarding what she is saying. She says emphatically that with regards to "Christ, his mission and His

priesthood”, it was God Himself that gave to her “light” that she in turn passed on “to others”. These “others” included the other pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism.

As we have already noted, (and we shall see again in following sections), this faith held by our pioneers in 1905 was still decidedly non-trinitarian. This is how it had been from the beginning. Note also that this “light” that Ellen White said she had been given would extend from the time that she had received it until “the time when we shall enter the city of God”. This light therefore was permanent light, not something that was temporary. She then added regarding the aforementioned experience

“During this whole time I could not understand the reasoning of the brethren. My mind was locked, as it were, and I could not comprehend the meaning of the scriptures we were studying. This was one of the greatest sorrows of my life. I was in this condition of mind until all the principal points of our faith were made clear to our minds, in harmony with the Word of God. The brethren knew that, when not in vision, I could not understand these matters, and they accepted, as light directly from heaven, the revelations given.” (*Ibid*)

Notice particularly here that Ellen White said that she was in this condition of mind of which she spoke until to the minds of the pioneers “all” not some of “the principal points of our faith were made clear”. Note too she said “our minds” and not just her mind. One would think that these “principle points” would be the “pillars” of Seventh-day Adventism that she said should never be changed. These were those that included what Seventh-day Adventists believed concerning God and Christ.

Regarding her visions, note she said that the pioneers accepted this as “light directly from heaven”. This is why it has been already said in this study that the pioneers believed that their faith (beliefs) was the faith that God Himself had given to them. This is the same faith that Ellen White said had been substantiated by the Holy Spirit of God therefore it never should be changed. It was also the faith from which Ellen White said that many Seventh-day Adventists would depart (see section one and previous section).

Strange as it may seem, our church leadership is saying today that the pioneers were wrong in what they were teaching about God and Christ (see section ten). This is why, so our church tells its members today, that after these pioneers had died, our fundamental beliefs needed to be changed. This was to accommodate the doctrine of the trinity, the truth concerning God (so they say) that the pioneers had rejected.

Understanding the old landmarks

In his biographical book called *Ellen G. White: The Elmshaven years*, A. L. White (Ellen White’s grandson) notes that during this conference

“On Wednesday, May 24, in a message titled "A Warning Against False Theories," Ellen White addressed herself to the subject in a document that most likely was read to a rather limited group. A copy was placed in Elder Ballenger's hands.” (A. L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Elmshaven years, Volume 5, 1900-1905*, chapter 31 page 410)

At this conference, Ellen White stressed that because of what she regarded as his false theories concerning the sanctuary, Albion Ballenger was leading God's people to deny what she claimed was the truth that God had revealed to His remnant people. In this address and after warning of Ballenger's teachings she said

“Let not any man enter upon the work of tearing down the foundations of the truth that have made us what we are. God has led His people forward step by step, though there are pitfalls of error on every side. Under the wonderful guidance of a plain "Thus saith the Lord," a truth has been established that has stood the test of trial. When men arise and attempt to draw away disciples after them, meet them with the truths that have been tried as by fire” (Ellen G. White to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Takoma Park, Washington D. C., May 24th 1905, "A Warning against False Theories," MR 760)

Here at the 1905 General Conference, whilst the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still a non-trinitarian denomination, Ellen White was telling Seventh-day Adventists that their faith (beliefs), as they held it then, was the truth that “step by step” God Himself had given to them. She also said that it had “stood the test of trial” and had “been tried as by fire”.

Many may try to say that Ellen White was only making reference here to what was believed by Seventh-day Adventists concerning the sanctuary but this is far from being the truth. We shall see this now.

A pillar belief – what Seventh-day Adventists believed about God and Christ

After appropriately quoting from God's message to the church at Sardis with respect to holding fast to the faith that they then had, Ellen White said

“Those who seek to remove the old landmarks are not holding fast; they are not remembering how they have received and heard.” (*Ibid*)

In principle, this is exactly what God said to the believers at Sardis (see Revelation 3:1-6). Just as they were told to hold on to their faith, so too were Seventh-day Adventists being told to hold on to what they then believed. Notice Ellen White said that those who were seeking to “remove the old landmarks” were not only “not holding fast” but also they were “not remembering how they have received and heard”. We shall consider this “how” later in this section. She then added

“Those who try to bring in theories that would remove the pillars of our faith concerning the sanctuary or concerning the personality of God or of Christ, are working as blind men. They are seeking to bring in uncertainties and to set the people of God adrift without an anchor.” (*Ibid*)

I know we have read this before but take particular note here again of what it was that in 1905 Ellen White included in “the old landmarks” and “the pillars” of Seventh-day Adventism. She said as well as what was believed about the sanctuary, these landmarks also included what was then believed about the separate personalities of God and Christ. This simply means that regarding what we believed in 1905 concerning both God and Christ, Ellen White did definitely include in the “foundations of the truth that have made us what we are” (the landmarks and pillars).

This is extremely important to remember. This is because there have been those who in attempting to justify our changeover to a trinitarian belief say that at no time was this actually said by Ellen White. As we can see, this latter claim is far from being correct. We must remember here that Ellen White was defending non-trinitarianism, not trinitarianism. This really is important to remember. She later said

“When men come in who would move one pin or pillar from the foundation which God has established by His Holy Spirit, let the aged men who were pioneers in our work speak plainly, and let those who are dead speak also, by the reprinting of their articles in our periodicals. Gather up the rays of divine light that God has given as He has led His people on step by step in the way of truth. This truth will stand the test of time and trial.” (*Ellen G. White to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Takoma Park, Washington D. C., May 24th 1905, Ms 62, 1905. "A Warning against False Theories," MR 760*)

Here at the General Conference session of 1905, Ellen White was not only defending the non-trinitarian beliefs of the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism but was also saying that what these “aged men” had written should be reprinted. She emphasised “let those who are dead speak also”.

This, as we have already seen in previous sections, is something far different than what the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church today are saying because they now regard our pioneers as having been teaching error concerning the Godhead and not Biblical truth. This they say is why after Ellen White had died it was necessary for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to adopt the doctrine of the trinity. This was done (again so they say), to correct the non-trinitarian views of the pioneers. We shall return our thoughts to these claims later in this section.

The message of Ellen White at this 1905 General Conference was no different than she had said a couple of months earlier. This was when again defending

what was then being taught by Seventh-day Adventists. This is when she said

“We are God's commandment-keeping people. For the past fifty years every phase of heresy has been brought to bear upon us, to becloud our minds regarding the teaching of the word,--especially concerning the ministration of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, and the message of heaven for these last days, as given by the angels of the fourteenth chapter of Revelation. Messages of every order and kind have been urged upon Seventh-day Adventists, to take the place of the truth which, point by point, has been sought out by prayerful study, and testified to by the miracle-working power of the Lord.” (*Ellen White, Letter 95, 1905, To Dr. and Mrs. Daniel Kress, March 14, 1905, see also Special Testimonies Series B. No. 2 page 59 'The Foundation of Our Faith'*)

Again Ellen White refers to the “past fifty years” (this would be approximately 1855-1905). She says that during this time period, attempts had been made to inculcate into the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventism all kinds of wrong beliefs. These she said were meant to take the place of the “truth” that they were then teaching. Remember in section twenty-two we noted that when in Australia, Ellen White said that what the pioneers were teaching concerning Christ was “the truth”.

Note also above she says that it was by prayerful study of God's word that the pioneers formulated their beliefs. Here she was emphasising how this truth was established.

She also says that what they believed was the “truth” and that it had been attested to by “the miracle-working power of the Lord”. In her mind, she must have had the many wonderful things that she and the other pioneers had experienced in those fifty years. It was also God's own personal endorsement that what Seventh-day Adventists had been teaching (and still were teaching) was the truth that He had given to them. Note again that this was when Seventh-day Adventists were still non-trinitarian. She then added

“But the way-marks which have made us what we are, are to be preserved, and they will be preserved, as God has signified through His word and the testimony of His Spirit. He calls upon us to hold firmly, with the grip of faith, to the fundamental principles that are based upon unquestionable authority.” (*Ibid*)

Again there is an appeal to both the Scriptures and the spirit of prophecy (the testimony of God's Spirit). Note Ellen White makes it clear that what she then regarded as the “fundamental principles” of Seventh-day Adventism, which would have included what we then believed concerning God, Christ and the sanctuary were based upon “unquestionable authority”, also that these were “way-marks” that were to be preserved. This was in 1905. It appears therefore, at this time, that Ellen White still believed it was God who had given the pioneers

their beliefs, especially those concerning God and Christ.

Not everyone has given this impression. In 2005 Gilbert Valentine wrote

“Many early Adventist pioneers such as James White, Joseph Bates, J. H. Waggoner, and R. E. Cottrell were, in fact, strongly anti-Trinitarian. They came from Disciples of Christ or similar church backgrounds and brought their strong anticreedal, anti-Trinitarian theology with them.” (*Gilbert Valentine, Ministry, May 2005, ‘A slice of history: How clearer views of Jesus developed in the Adventist Church’*)

He then said (and this is the misleading part)

“This was how it came to be that semi-Arian concepts of Christology were fairly deeply imbedded in early Adventist beliefs and literature.” (*Ibid*)

As we have seen above, this was not the same view as held by Ellen White. She said that it was God who had given the pioneers their beliefs. Never did she say that they believed these things because the pioneers brought them over from their former denominations. This would not make sense anyway. These statements from Ellen White saying that the pioneers were teaching the truth were made in 1905. This was over 60 years after our beginnings. It was also after 60 years of revelation from God through the spirit of prophecy. We were not teaching non-trinitarianism therefore just because a few of our early pioneers brought over these beliefs from former denominations. Common sense tells us this much. Valentine then asks

“When did the change to Trinitarianism occur? (*Ibid*)

He answers by saying with reference to the book *The Trinity* written by Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon and John Reeves

“As Jerry Moon points out, "an irreversible paradigm shift" occurred in the Adventist Church in the 1890s, spurred along by the church's publication of Ellen White's *The Desire of Ages* in 1898. This influential book on the life of Christ reflected Mrs. White's own developing understanding and called attention "to scriptures whose significance had been overlooked." Its publication contributed to a "complete reversal" of Adventist thinking on the Trinity, and it became a kind of "continental divide." (*Ibid*)

This I find is a very strange remark indeed. The supposedly trinitarian *Desire of Ages* was published in 1898 whilst as we have just seen from the above, which was 7 years later at the 1905 General Conference session, Ellen White was pleading with Seventh-day Adventists not to change from their faith concerning God and Christ that they had held for the previous 50 years. This faith of course was non-trinitarianism. Are we to reason therefore that in 1905 Ellen White did not realise that in *Desire of Ages* that she had spoken of God as a trinity?

Regarding this continuing, also oft-repeated *Desire of Ages* claim, we need to do some sanctified reasoning.

Seventh-day Adventist history can be searched high and low but nothing will be found to even suggest that when *Desire of Ages* was published it had any affect on the theology of Seventh-day Adventism. It was only after Ellen White had died when certain members sought to bring in trinitarian ideas of God that this idea was suggested. This “complete reversal” of thinking had not happened by 1905. At this General Conference session, Ellen White was telling Seventh-day Adventists to hold fast to the same beliefs about God and Christ that they had held for the previous 50 years (1855-1905).

We will also see later that this reversal of beliefs had not happened by 1936. This was when the General Conference declared our official beliefs. An account of this can also be found at the following link. It makes very interesting reading.

<http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/godhead/1936sabbathschoolstudies.pdf>

Interesting to note here is that in our yearbook for that year (1905), there was published a statement of fundamental beliefs. This was the first time this had been done since 1889. These began by saying

“Seventh-day Adventists have no creed but the Bible; but they hold to certain well-defined points of faith, for which they feel prepared to give a reason” to every man that asketh” them. The following propositions may be taken as a summary of the principal features of their religious faith, upon which there is, so far as is known, entire unanimity throughout the body.” (1905 *Seventh-day Adventist yearbook*, ‘*Fundamental Principles of Seventh-day Adventists*’, page 188)

Notice very importantly here the reference to “entire unanimity” amongst Seventh-day Adventists upon our fundamental beliefs. These were exactly the same words as was said 16 years earlier in the 1889 yearbook. This is when it said

“The following propositions may be taken as a summary of the principal features of their religious faith, upon which there is, so far as we know, entire unanimity throughout the body.” (*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook of Statistics for 1889*, page 147)

The beliefs concerning God and Christ were also exactly the same. It said

“That there is one God, a personal, spiritual being, the Creator of all things, omnipotent, omniscient, and eternal; infinite in wisdom, holiness, justice, goodness, truth, and mercy; unchangeable, and every where present by his representative, the Holy Spirit. Ps. 139: 7.” (1905 *Seventh-day Adventist yearbook*, ‘*Fundamental Principles of Seventh-day Adventists*’, page 188,

see also page 147 in the 1889 Yearbook)

This was followed by No. 2 that stated

“That there is one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Eternal Father, the one by whom he created all thing's, and by whom they do consist;” (*Ibid*)

These are the beliefs from which Ellen White pleaded with the 1905 General Conference delegates not to depart. This was the once non-trinitarian faith of Seventh-day Adventists. These beliefs were repeated in our yearbook from 1907 through to 1914, the year before the death of Ellen White. They were not published again in our yearbook until 1931. This was when for the very first time in our history, the word trinity was used in these published beliefs.

False sentiments, speculations and uncertainties

As can be seen from the above, Ellen White said that these same “landmarks” and “pillars” (what we once believed about God, Christ and the sanctuary) should never be discarded, not even changed. This she said was because it was the truth that God had given to us and has “made us what we are”. This again was reminiscent (indicative or suggestive) of God’s message to the church at Sardis. Note as she usually did, especially during the early 1900’s crisis, Ellen White was making a specific distinction between God and Christ. This is also very important to keep in mind.

She also said that by bringing in “uncertainties” (things that may or may not be true) about God, Christ and the sanctuary, those people that were doing it were setting God’s people “adrift without an anchor”. This is very significant because as we duly noted in section four, the trinity doctrine is based on nothing more than mere speculation. This is inasmuch as trinitarians believe that the three personalities in the Godhead all have their existence in the one and the same indivisible substance (the one being) of God, which, as has been said already, is a belief that cannot be substantiated, either from Scripture or from the writings of Ellen White. It is very possible that Ellen White had in mind here trinity speculation. This is because as we have seen in previous sections, the early 1900’s crisis within Seventh-day Adventism did centre on this teaching.

In defence of Seventh-day Adventism

At this 1905 General Conference session, we find Ellen White defending the early 1900’s faith (beliefs) of Seventh-day Adventists. At first, she was not sure whether to attend but she did say that God led her to be there. Of both her experience and her purposes to attend this gathering she wrote (remember she was almost 78 years of age)

“I can but feel that the Lord is in my coming to Washington at this time. I have a message to bear. God helping me, I will stand firm for the right, presenting truth unmixed with the falsities that have been stealthily creeping

in. Those who are on the Lord's side will refuse to be drawn astray by false science, which makes a jingle of the true word of prophecy. May the Lord give me much of His grace, that in every work and act I may reveal the light of truth." (*Ellen G. White, Letter 135, 1905*)

By 1905, according to Ellen White, false teachings had been "stealthily creeping in" to Seventh-day Adventism. As we noted above, she had pointed out to the delegates that these "falsities" were not only concerning the sanctuary but also with regard to what was then believed by Seventh-day Adventists regarding the personalities of God and Christ.

In May 1905, Ellen White wrote about what God had revealed to her during a night season (this was the time of the General Conference session). She wrote

"The Lord would have us at this time bring in the testimony written by those who are now dead, to speak in behalf of heavenly things. The Holy Spirit has given instruction for us in these last days. We are to repeat the testimonies that God has given His people, the testimonies that present clear conceptions of the truths of the sanctuary and that show the relation of Christ to the truths of the sanctuary so clearly brought to view." (*Ellen G. White, May 1905, Manuscript release No. 760*)

Note the reference to the writings of the pioneers regarding their beliefs about the sanctuary and what they believed was the relation of Christ to it. Notice particularly that again she said that God had given these beliefs to "His people" (the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism). She then said

"If we are the Lord's appointed messengers, we shall not spring up with new ideas and theories to contradict the message that God has given through His servants since 1844." (*Ibid*)

This is something to think about seeing that our denomination is saying today that our pioneers had it all wrong about God and Christ. She continued

"At that time many sought the Lord with heart and soul and voice. The men whom God raised up were diligent searchers of the Scriptures." (*Ibid*)

Ellen White had a high regard for our pioneers as Bible students. She then said

"And those who today claim to have light, and who contradict the teaching of God's ordained messengers who were working under the Holy Spirit's guidance, those who get up new theories which remove the pillars of our faith, are not doing the will of God, but are bringing in fallacies of their own invention, which, if received, will cut the church away from the anchorage of truth and set them drifting, drifting, to where they will receive any sophistries that may arise." (*Ibid*)

Again we see Ellen White supporting the faith of the pioneers. It was also a very strong warning not to come up with “new theories” that would contradict what she termed “the pillars” of the Seventh-day Adventist faith, which as we have seen she included what was then believed about God and Christ.

Notice here also that Ellen White said that those who “contradict the teaching of God's ordained messengers” are “not doing the will of God”. This cannot be read without remembering that William Johnsson said that our pioneers were teaching “false doctrine” and not “biblical truth” about Christ (see below). Johnsson also said that it was to rectify these false teachings that Seventh-day Adventists had adopted the trinity doctrine. See also George Knight’s comments in section ten.

This really is something to think about! Ellen White had no problem with what her fellow pioneers were teaching. She made it clear that they had been “working under the Holy Spirit's guidance”. Regarding these “sophistries” or “new theories” she then said

“These will be similar to that which Dr. J. H. Kellogg, under Satan's special guidance, has been working for years.” (*Ibid*)

This was in 1905 when Seventh-day Adventists were still strongly advocating and teaching a non-trinitarian faith. It was also 7 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*. Should this be telling us something today?

As we have already seen, Kellogg’s false views did have everything to do with the presence and the personality of God, which as we know is what the trinity doctrine concerns. Kellogg also said in an attempt to justify what he had written in *The Living Temple* that he had come to believe in the trinity doctrine (see section twenty-five), which then, in 1903 when he professed it, was something that was not confessed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Note here that Ellen White said that Kellogg had been “under Satan's special guidance”. What does this say about his claim to coming to believe in the trinity doctrine because this is where his wrong beliefs had led him? She then said again with reference to future “fallacies”

“Our work is to bring forth the strong reasons of our faith, our past and present position, because there are men who, never established in the truth, will bring in fallacies which would tear away the anchorage of our faith. Even presidents of conferences will fear to move, as some have done, dictating and commanding and forbidding. They drive the sheep away into forbidden paths.” (*Ibid*)

This “past and present position” would have included what we then believed concerning God, Christ and the Holy Spirit. She then said in conclusion

“God sends no man with a message that leads souls to depart from the faith that has been our stronghold for so many years. We are to substantiate this

faith rather than tear down the foundation upon which it rests.” (*Ibid*)

Again we need to think about the claims of our church leadership today that our pioneers were teaching error (false doctrine) because here Ellen White is saying that any man that does this is not sent of God. Note she also says that Seventh-day Adventists were to “substantiate” the foundation of the pioneers’ faith, not to tear it down. She was again referring here to the pillars of Seventh-day Adventism, meaning including that which Seventh-day Adventists then believed, in the early 1900’s, concerning God, Christ, the Holy Spirit and the sanctuary.

A contrast of perspectives

There is quite a contrast in perspectives between the thinking of the current leadership of Seventh-day Adventism and Ellen White. We know this because in 1995 William Johnsson wrote in the Advent Review

“Many of the pioneers, including James White, J. N. Andrews, Uriah Smith and J. H. Waggoner held to an Arian or semi-Arian view - that is, the Son at some point in time, before the creation of our world, was generated by the Father.” (*Ibid*)

If it is going to carry any title, semi-Arianism does probably best describe the preponderant faith of Seventh-day Adventists whilst Ellen White was alive. This is the belief that way back in eternity, too far back for the human mind to comprehend it, the Son was brought forth of the Father’s substance. This is the begotten concept, meaning God from God, true God from true God, not that Christ was a created being. William Johnsson then said

“Only gradually did this false doctrine give way to the Biblical truth, and largely under the impact of Ellen Whites writings in statements such as “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. (Desire of ages p 530)” (*Ibid*)

For one of the leaders of Seventh-day Adventism to make it, this is quite an allegation but this is what Seventh-day Adventists today are being led to believe.

Ellen White’s views though, especially those concerning God and Christ, were the very same as those then held, in the early 1900’s, by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. These were views that by then had not changed in one iota. In fact even through to the year of her death (1915), neither Ellen White nor the Seventh-day Adventist Church had ever changed their beliefs about God or Christ. These were the very same beliefs that Ellen White considered to be amongst the “old landmarks” and “pillars” of the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. These were also the beliefs she had said the Holy Spirit had substantiated as being the truth.

As we have seen above, Ellen white in 1905, 7 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*, was telling Seventh-day Adventists not to change their beliefs. This was when they were still non-trinitarian.

God and Christ – two separate personages

At the 1905 General Conference session, just as she had been doing since the early 1900's crisis had begun, it cannot help but be noticed that Ellen White repeatedly stressed what was then the faith of Seventh-day Adventists regarding God and Christ. This was the very same faith that had been held by this denomination since its beginnings (1844). It was in fact a non-trinitarian faith, a faith that depicted God as one personal being and Christ as another personal being, two separate, distinct personalities.

We must ask though, why was this being done by Ellen White? Remember here that this was when the Kellogg crisis was at its height and he had said that he had come to believe in the trinity (see section twenty-five). If we bear this in mind it will provide us with the context of many of the early 1900's statements of Ellen White regarding God and Christ.

That God and Christ are separate beings was of the utmost importance to the early 1900's faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This can be very clearly seen when Ellen White said to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference

“Christ is one with the Father, but Christ and God are two distinct personages. Read the prayer of Christ in the seventeenth chapter of John, and you will find this point clearly brought out.” (Ellen G. White to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Takoma Park Washington D. C., May 19th 1905, Review and Herald, June 1st 1905, ‘The Work in Washington’)

Ellen White stressed the belief that God, in His own right, is an individual person. This is just as the Son, in His own right, is also an individual person. Admittedly she did say that these two divine personalities are “one” but emphasised here that they were “two distinct personages”. It will be seen that Ellen White keeps returning to this thought therefore she must have had a good reason for doing so.

In saying that God and Christ were “two distinct personages”, Ellen White directed the minds of the delegates to the words of Jesus found in the seventeenth chapter of John's gospel. This is when Jesus said to His Father in prayer

“And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” John 17:3

Note whom Jesus was saying was “the only true God”. It was His Father. Notice too that He said nothing about knowing the Holy Spirit. Ellen White then said to the delegates

“How earnestly the Saviour prayed that his disciples might be one with him as he is one with the Father. But the unity that is to exist between Christ

and his followers does not destroy the personality of either. They are to be one with him as he is one with the Father. By this unity they are to make it plain to the world that God sent his Son to save sinners.” (*Ellen G. White to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Takoma Park Washington D. C., May 19th 1905, Review and Herald, June 1st 1905, ‘The Work in Washington’*)

Again Ellen White returns the thoughts of the delegates to the oneness that exists between God and Christ but she emphasised that it did not negate them being two separate personages. This is no more she says than the unity between the followers of Christ destroys their individual personalities. As has been said before, she must have been stressing this for a reason.

Note too the emphasis on God actually sending “His Son”. Concerning this same prayer of Jesus for oneness in the disciples (John 17:21) James White quipped

“When it can be proved that the object of the prayer of the Son of God was, that the disciples might be one body with twelve heads, then it can be shown that we have a Deity which has one body and three heads.” (*James White, Review and Herald, March 11th 1880, ‘God is love’*)

Then, after quoting 1 Timothy 3:16 he wrote

“And we have never been able to see how the inexplicable doctrine of the trinity relieved that which Paul declares to be a mystery. Those who had been with Christ, heard his words of wisdom, and had witnessed his miracles, had not seen the invisible Father who had sent his Son, the very being to whom the Son prayed; but in Christ they had seen the mind, will, and love of the Father, which Christ had come to exhibit among the children of men.” (*Ibid*)

To those who do not understand what the trinity doctrine really teaches, these following remarks may seem rather strange but true trinitarians do not believe that Christ actually vacated the glories of Heaven and came to earth or that He actually left the presence of His Father. This is because (so the trinitarians say) the Son is always part of the one and the same indivisible substance as the Father (the one being of God) so He and His Father are never actually separated. In other words, even when Christ was here on earth (according to trinitarian theology), He was also, at the same time, “on high” with His Father (see section six).

James White had not changed his views since the beginning. In defence of the divinity of Christ he said in 1871 (this was after saying that as Seventh-day Adventists we did not believe in the trinity doctrine)

“We do not deny the divinity of Christ. We delight in giving full credit to all those strong expressions of Scripture which exalt the Son of God. We

believe him to be the divine person addressed by Jehovah in the words, "Let us make man." He was with the Father before the world was. He came from God, and he says, "I go to him that sent me." (James White, *Review and Herald*, June 6th 1871, 'Western Tour')

He later said

"The simple language of the Scriptures represent the Father and Son as two distinct persons." (*Ibid*)

This was exactly the same as was said 34 years later by his wife Ellen White (see above). This was 24 years after his death. He then explained

"With this view of the subject there are meaning and force to language which speaks of the Father and the Son. But to say that Jesus Christ "is the very and eternal God," makes him his own son, and his own father, and that he came from himself, and went to himself. And when the Father sends Jesus Christ, whom the Heavens must receive till the times of restitution, it will simply be Jesus Christ, or the eternal Father sending himself." (*Ibid*)

This "eternal God" is the "eternal Father".

A very interesting observation

Very interesting to note is that not long after the close of the 1905 conference, an announcement was made in the *Review and Herald* concerning a new book that was shortly to be published. This publication, detailing and explaining the Book of Revelation, was Stephen Haskell's *The Story of the Seer of Patmos*.

Stephen N. Haskell was a well known and a very well respected Seventh-day Adventist minister. Whilst his biography would be far too much to detail here, suffice to say that he had joined the Seventh-day Adventists as early as 1853. This was 9 years after the great disappointment of October 22nd 1844. There was not very much that Haskell did not know regarding Seventh-day Adventism. We shall detail some of his history later.

George Butler, one time General Conference President, wrote the introduction to Haskell's book. He said of Haskell (this was written on April 24th 1905)

"This volume, "The Story of the Seer of Patmos," is a companion volume to "The Story of Daniel the Prophet," by the same author. We doubt not that this volume will equal or exceed the former in popularity." (*G. I. Butler, The Story of the Seer of Patmos, 'Introduction', 1905*)

Here is shown how popular this book was expected to be. Butler added

"The author is a devoted minister of the gospel of long experience; a deep and most earnest student of the holy Scriptures, and especially conversant

with the subject of prophecy. He has given many years of careful study to the subjects contained in this volume. It is written for all classes of readers. The most intelligent professional man can find herein blessed food for thought, and precious instruction in the Bible truths for this remarkable age.”
(*Ibid*)

In the *Story of the Advent Message* it said of Haskell

“It was about 1853 when he became a Seventh-day Adventist and soon he began to bear burdens in the cause he came to love so dearly. He helped to lay the foundation of our work in America; and is very appropriately known as the "father of the tract and missionary society," for it was largely through his special efforts that this phase of our denominational work was developed.” (*Matilda Erickson Andross, Story of the Advent Message, page 86, Chapter VIII 'The lengthening honor roll'*)

Andross then added

“Elder Haskell also labored extensively in other fields; in fact, he was the first representative of our church to travel around the world to study the great missionary problem that lay before Seventh-day Adventist believers. Elder Haskell, however, was a writer as well as a preacher, and his books, "The Story of Daniel the Prophet," "The Story of the Seer of Patmos," and "The Cross and Its Shadow," are well known.” (*Ibid*)

Ellen White also had an extremely high regard for Haskell. She wrote of him as teaching Bible at Avondale

“His experience and knowledge of the truth, commencing in so early a stage of our history as Seventh-day Adventists, was needed in this country [Australia]. From his youth upward, he has been a self-denying, self-sacrificing man. And now his age and gray hairs give him the respect of all who know him.” (*E. G. White, Letter 126 1897, as quoted in Vol. 4 of The Australian Years 1891-1900 by Arthur L. White, page 4, Chapter 25, 'Avondale – A new start in Christian Education'*)

At this time, Haskell would have been around 64 years of age. Ellen White also said of Haskell

“Brother Haskell is the Lord's servant, a man of opportunity. We appreciate his experience, his judgment, his thoughtful care and caution. He is indeed a mighty man in the Scriptures. He opens the Word of God in such a simple manner, making every subject reveal its true importance.” (*E. G. White, June 6th 1897, as quoted in Ellen G. White Vol. 4 The Australian Years 1891-1900, By Arthur L. White, 1983 p. 307*)

Ellen White had a great deal of respect for Haskell, especially as a Bible student.

She also had a great deal of respect for him as a Christian gentleman. When he and his second wife left Australia for America in 1899, she said that she would miss them both immensely. Haskell and his wife had a close relationship with Ellen White. This can be seen in the letters that she wrote to them. In one such letter she wrote

"I rejoiced that I had the help of Brother and Sister Haskell. These God appointed to be my companions in establishing the school in this place." (*Ellen G. White, Letter 77, 1897, as quoted in Ellen G. White Vol. 4 The Australian Years 1891-1900, By Arthur L. White, chapter 24, page 294*)

She also wrote the same year

"He [Haskell] presents truth in a clear, earnest manner that carries its own evidence with it to the hearts of those that hear it. As matron and teacher, Sister Haskell could not be excelled. She is firm as a rock to principle, and she has no special favorites. She loves all, and helps all." (*Ellen G. White, Letter 99, August 19th 1897 to Elder and Mrs. Olsen, Manuscript Release Volume 3, MR No. 194*)

In the May of 1897, Ellen White wrote to her son Edson and his wife saying (Ellen White was still in Australia)

"Elder Haskell conducts the Bible study, and he makes everything so plain and simple that every mind can take it in. How many times I have wished that you were here to listen to the precious words from the lips of the servant of God. All who listen to his presentation of the Word, as he places before their minds the truth in its simplicity, are conscious that they are favored. They are learning the "It is written," and how to use the Word of God." (*Ellen G. White, letter No. 149 to Edson and Emma White, 30th May 1897*)

Ellen White later wrote

"I am more pleased than I can tell you with the help we have in Elder Haskell as a worker in the school. His wife also gives Bible lessons. Brother Haskell has been opening the Scriptures upon the Sanctuary subject, and he makes the matter stand out clear and forcible. Sister Haskell gives lessons in Revelation, and makes this subject very plain. All are pleased. It is so nice to have workers who have had an experimental knowledge of the Word of God." (*Ibid*)

It also said in the Bible Echo that same year (Avondale School had been operating then for 2 months)

"Pastor S. N. Haskell is the principal instructor in Bible study; and Mrs. Hettie Hurd Haskell, his wife, has charge of one Bible class, and acts as the

matron of the school.” (*Bible Echo*, June 21st 1897, ‘Avondale school notes’)

Haskell’s work took him not only to Australia but also to New Zealand, England, Japan, Southern Africa, India and China. According to the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia, it was his preaching that led to the first Seventh-day Adventist group being formed in New Zealand. In 1887 he worked in England and began a church there.

In his early ministry he was twice president of the New England Conference (1870-1876, 1877-1887), three times president of the California Conference (1879-1887, 1891-1894, 1908-1911), also president of the Maine Conference (1884-1886). In 1870 he organized the first conference tract and missionary society. Much more could be said of Haskell, especially regarding his preaching and writing skills, also other offices he took, as well as his various other achievements but space does not permit. Needless to say, he was a brilliant Bible student. Regarding this we have the testimony of Ellen White.

Why I say this is because like all the other literature that by that time (1905) had come off the presses of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, his book *The Story of the Seer of Patmos* was decidedly non-trinitarian. In keeping with what was then the predominant faith of the Seventh-day Adventist Church he penned these words

“Back in the ages, which finite mind cannot fathom, the Father and Son were alone in the universe.” (*S. N. Haskell, The Story of the Seer of Patmos, pages 93-94, chapter V ‘A glimpse of Heaven’ 1905*)

Note there is no mention here of the Holy Spirit. This is because although regarded as a personality, the Holy Spirit was not thought of as a person like both God and Christ were persons. He then added

“Christ was the first begotten of the Father, and to Him Jehovah made known the divine plan of Creation. The plan of the creation of worlds was unfolded, together with the order of beings which should people them.” (*Ibid*)

Again this is rank non-trinitarianism. In the same chapter Haskell wrote

“Christ was the firstborn in heaven; He was likewise the firstborn of God upon earth, and heir to the Father’s throne. Christ, the firstborn, though the Son of God, was clothed in humanity, and was made perfect through suffering. He took the form of man, and through eternity, He will remain a man.” (*Ibid, pages 98-99*)

In 1905, what Haskell wrote here was the continuing faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This was the very same faith from which Ellen White had warned the delegates at the 1905 General Conference that they should not depart (see

above). It was also the same faith that she said that they had held for 50 years and should not in any way be changed. In a later chapter called *The Great Controversy*, Haskell said

“Before the creation of our world, “there was war in heaven.” Christ and the Father covenanted together; and Lucifer, the covering cherub, grew jealous because he was not admitted into the eternal councils of the Two who sat upon the throne.” (*Ibid*, page 217,)

Here again we return to the thought of God and His Son being two separate and distinct personalities but once again no mention of the Holy Spirit. This was the early 1900’s faith of Seventh-day Adventists but Ellen White warned it was under attack from Satan.

Here is the point I am trying to make concerning Haskell’s book.

It was published in 1905, the same year that Ellen White addressed the delegates at a General Conference saying that their faith they had held for the past 50 years should not be changed. This would have been non-trinitarianism yet 7 years previous she had published her *Desire of Ages*. Surely if she believed that God was a trinity and had written as such in that latter book, then she would not have told them to hold on to their non-trinitarianism. This would not make sense. In fact in 1906, the year after the publication of Haskell’s *The Story of the Seer of Patmos*, Ellen White wrote

“Because of the importance of this work, I have urged that Elder Haskell and his wife, as ministers of God, shall give Bible instruction to those who will offer themselves for service.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, November 29th 1906, ‘The Work in Oakland and San Francisco—No. 1’*)

What did Ellen White believe that Haskell would teach in his Bible instruction? It would be exactly what he had always believed and taught, also that which he had written in his newly published book, also what Seventh-day Adventists believed then. What else could he teach?

Remember, this was 8 years after the publication of Ellen White’s supposedly trinitarian *Desire of Ages*. By that time it had no effect whatsoever on what Haskell believed concerning Christ (at least not in changing from his non-trinitarian thinking) – and it must be said here that there was probably not one person on earth who had more confidence in Ellen White as a messenger of God than did Haskell. This was shown in the dispute that took place with other ministers over the daily of Daniel chapter 8 which is far too much to detail here. There is also something else.

As we shall see in section thirty-nine, in our periodicals *The Story of the Seer of Patmos* was highly acclaimed and highly promoted. I can even find it advertised for sale as the 1930’s approached. Now what is that telling us today? In the

companion book *The Story of the Prophet Daniel* published 4 years previously, we can catch a glimpse of Haskell's views regarding the Holy Spirit. Interesting is that in one place he says

“Gabriel was only an angel, upheld by the same Power that sustained John, and he would not for one moment allow John to be deceived by thinking he was a part of the great Trinity of heaven, and worthy of the worship of mankind.” (S. N. Haskell, *The Story of the Prophet Daniel*, page 132, Chapter 9, ‘The eighth chapter of Daniel’ 1908)

Had Haskell come to believe that the Holy Spirit was a person like God and Christ? I would not think so. Look at what he said earlier. In dealing with Daniel Chapter 7 he had said

“At the age of eighty-five, after sixty-seven years of court life, with all its allurements, and the natural tendency of human nature to sink to a purely physical existence, his [Daniel's] eye of faith was so undimmed that at the bidding of Michael, Gabriel could carry Daniel into heaven itself, there to behold the Father and the Son in the final work of the sanctuary above.” (Ibid, page 109, Chapter 7, ‘The Seventh Chapter of Daniel’)

Haskell says nothing concerning seeing the Holy Spirit. He also says regarding the totality of the redeemed in Heaven around the throne of God

“The number which would have peopled the earth had no sin ever entered, is gathered about the Father and the Son.” (S. N. Haskell, *The Story of the Prophet Daniel*, page 309, Chapter 18, ‘The Closing scene’ 1908)

Again no mention is made of the Holy Spirit. It is more than interesting that Ellen White condemned what John Harvey Kellogg believed but she never condemned any of our non-trinitarian literature. Never either did she condemn any of Haskell's books. All that she said of him was that he was a brilliant Bible student. Is that telling us something today? It can also be found in many places that as Haskell did here, she refers to the Father and the Son but does not mention the Holy Spirit. At a later date these statements will be added to this website.

From the above, we can see that Ellen White did not expect her book *Desire of Ages* to change the faith of Seventh-day Adventists but she did warn of wrong views that were coming into Seventh-day Adventism. We shall see this now.

Wrong sentiments making their way into Seventh-day Adventism

One week after (this was on Thursday May 25th) emphasising to the delegates at the 1905 Conference that “Christ and God are two distinct personages” (see above), Ellen White again stressed to them this same belief. This time she warned that wrong sentiments regarding this were making their way into Seventh-day Adventism. This is when she addressed the delegates on lessons from the First Epistle of John. Note that this was also the day before she warned

them about the two-pronged attack that was then being made on the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. This is the attack that we noted was not only the sanctuary doctrine but also on the separate personalities of God and Christ (see above). In addressing the delegates, Ellen White began by quoting 1 John 1:1-3 of which verse 3 says

“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” 1 John 1:3

Note John’s emphasis to two separate personalities.

Interesting to note also here is that in this “fellowship” (1 John 1:3) John does not include the Holy Spirit. This was even though he wrote this letter over 60 years after the Pentecostal outpouring in AD 31. Note also that Paul, in the introduction of each of his epistles, only extends the grace from the Father and Son. Never does he include the Holy Spirit (see Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:3, 2 Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:3, Ephesians 1:2, Philippians 1:2, Colossians 1:2, 1 Thessalonians, 1:1, 2 Thessalonians 1:2, 1 Timothy 1:2, 2 Timothy 1: 2, Titus 1:4 and Philemon 1:3). The apostle must have had very good reason for excluding the Holy Spirit. We must also remember that he wrote under the direct inspiration of God through the Holy Spirit. We must also remind ourselves that in His prayer to His Father (John 17:3), neither did Jesus say anything about knowing the Holy Spirit.

As we shall clearly see in later sections, the early 1900’s belief of Seventh-day Adventists was that whilst the Holy Spirit was considered to be a personality, He was not considered to be a person in the very same sense as was the Father and the Son. We shall see instead that He was regarded as the presence of both the Father and Son (the Father and Son omnipresent) when they were not bodily present therefore it was believed that when He (the Holy Spirit) was present it was just as though Father and Son (God and Christ) were present. In her address to the delegates on John’s epistles Ellen White said

“There are those who are always seeking for something new. If they understood aright, they would realize that the newness that they need is that which comes from a daily growth in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Let us keep firm and unshaken our faith in the message that God has given us for these last days.” (*Ellen G. White to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Takoma Park Washington D. C., May 25th 1905 Review and Herald 13th July 1905, ‘Lessons from the first Epistle of John’*)

This is another appeal from Ellen White to keep the faith that she maintained God Himself had given to Seventh-day Adventists. Very importantly, please compare the first and last sentences in this statement. This was a repeated plea from Ellen White.

This “something new” was “new” in contrast to the faith (beliefs) that was then held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which, as all would agree, was a non-trinitarian faith. Remember here that our church leadership today freely admits that since the death of Ellen White, these non-trinitarian beliefs have been discarded and have been replaced by beliefs that are trinitarian (see above). Ellen White however did clearly say to the delegates that Seventh-day Adventists were to keep “firm and unshaken” in the message that God had given to them, which in 1905 they were then teaching.

Following this appeal, and after saying that the world was fast becoming like as it was in the days of Noah, she then said to the delegates (this is the point to where her remarks were leading)

"And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. All through the Scriptures, the Father and the Son are spoken of as two distinct personages. You will hear men endeavoring to make the Son of God a nonentity. He and the Father are one, but they are two personages."
(Ibid)

Here we can see again the purpose and the thrust of Ellen White saying that Seventh-day Adventists should “keep firm and unshaken our faith in the message that God has given us for these last days”. This she said to strengthen their long held non-trinitarian faith that God and Christ were two separate personages.

Here we can also see the particular problem area to which Ellen White is addressing her remarks. It was all to do with the problem of new beliefs (new faith) that would make God and Christ something different than how she describes them here (two separate personages). Notice she did say that the Father and Son (God and Christ) “are one, but they are two personages”. The problem was also to do with this oneness. Notice once again that there is no mention of the Holy Spirit. In other words, she did not say that people were trying to make the Holy Spirit a non-entity; only that this was being done to God and Christ. Now note her next words very carefully. She said to the delegates

“Wrong sentiments regarding this are coming in, and we shall all have to meet them.” *(Ibid)*

From my studies, I have drawn the conclusion that Ellen White was here warning about the philosophical (speculative) oneness views of the trinity doctrine. These are the views that make God to be a three-in-one entity or as some say, a three-in-one non-entity. As we progress with these studies, the reasons for these conclusions will become more and more evident. I say this because when Ellen White spoke these words (1905), the denominational faith of Seventh-day Adventists was still non-trinitarian. In other words, their faith was non-trinitarian when *Desire of Ages* was published (1898) and it was still non-trinitarian 7 years later in 1905. This was when Ellen White warned the delegates at that

conference session that wrong views about God and Christ, particularly other than being two separate personages, were making their way into Seventh-day Adventism. Has this happened?

Max Hatton is a retired Seventh-day Adventist minister living in Australia. He is a devout trinitarian. In fact he wrote a highly publicised book that was published by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This book, often quoted from by our leadership in support of the trinity doctrine, is called *Understanding the Trinity*. On his website, Max Hatton has an article called *Ellen G. White and the Trinity Doctrine*. Whilst it would be too much to comment on all of it here, he does draw the attention of his readers to where Ellen White wrote in *Early Writings*

“I saw a throne, and on it sat the Father and the Son. I gazed on Jesus’ countenance and admired His lovely person. The Father’s person I could not behold, for a cloud of glorious light covered Him. I asked Jesus if His Father had a form like Himself. He said He had, but I could not behold it, for said He, “If you should once behold the glory of His person, you would cease to exist.” (*Ellen G. White, Early Writings, page 54*)

Commenting on this, Hatton has written in his current website article

“The fact that Mrs White says she saw in vision that Jesus and the Father are quite separate individuals does not fit with the Trinitarian concept found in Scripture.” (*Max Hatton, Website article, Ellen G. White and the Trinity Doctrine*)

If you remember, Ellen White did say to those in attendance at the 1905 General Conference session

“He [the Son] and the Father are one, but they are two personages. Wrong sentiments regarding this are coming in, and we shall all have to meet them.” (*Op. cit*)

She was correct. These “Wrong sentiments” are taught today within Seventh-day Adventism. They are taught by the trinitarians amongst us.

We shall now move on to section thirty. This is where again we shall see that Ellen White kept emphasising, in the early 1900’s, that God and Christ were two separate personalities, also that this had always been the faith of Seventh-day Adventists.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section thirty

Historic Seventh-day Adventism – God and Christ two separate personalities

We noted in section ten that it is now an accepted fact of history that since the death of Ellen White (1915), the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church have undergone such a dramatic change that it would today prevent its pioneers from becoming members of the very church they once pioneered into being. This must be regarded as a most startling realisation. This is particularly as we have noted in previous sections (see section twenty-eight and section twenty-nine in particular) that Ellen White said it was God Himself that had given these pioneers their beliefs. As we also noted, this situation has only arisen because of the acceptance of the very teaching that our pioneers once rejected. That teaching is the doctrine of the trinity.

This changeover to trinitarianism did not materialise overnight, neither did it happen because of Bible conferences in which this matter was openly discussed and later decided upon by a vote at a General Conference session. This change only happened because of the gradual acceptance, over the years, of trinitarian concepts. As we hold it today, the very first time that the trinity doctrine was officially voted in at a General Conference session was at Dallas Texas in 1980.

We have noted throughout the previous sections that 76 years earlier in 1904, Ellen White warned Seventh-day Adventists that many would depart from the faith (this was when their faith was still non-trinitarian). We also noted in the previous section that at the 1905 General Conference regarding their beliefs concerning God and Christ, Ellen White made appeals for Seventh-day Adventists to keep the faith that they had always had from the beginning.

It is only reasonable to believe that by this time (1905), Kellogg's trinity views were being permeated amongst Seventh-day Adventists. This would not just have been that in the person of the Holy Spirit God was in everything but also Kellogg's justification for believing it. This justification, as we noted in section twenty-five, was his newly found faith of the trinity doctrine.

So here we can see again the purpose and the thrust of Ellen White saying that Seventh-day Adventists should remain unshaken in the faith that God has given to them. She would have said this to strengthen their non-trinitarian faith.

If you remember, she said to the delegates concerning their long held belief that God and Christ were two separate personalities

“There are those who are always seeking for something new. If they understood aright, they would realize that the newness that they need is that which comes from a daily growth in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Let us keep firm and unshaken our faith in the message that God has given us for these last days.” *(Ellen G. White to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Takoma Park Washington D. C., May 25th 1905 Review and Herald 13th July 1905, ‘Lessons from the first Epistle of John’)*

Notice how Ellen White not only identifies with Seventh-day Adventists but also with their beliefs (note the use of “us” and “our”). She was supporting their beliefs – not criticising them. Note too she refers to “the message that God has given us”. As is said here by Ellen White, our end time message is not the invention of Seventh-day Adventists. It is God-given. She also said in the next paragraph (this was after saying that the world was fast becoming as it was in the time of Noah)

"And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." All through the Scriptures, the Father and the Son are spoken of as two distinct personages. You will hear men endeavoring to make the Son of God a nonentity. He and the Father are one, but they are two personages." *(Ibid)*

She then gave Seventh-day Adventists a very strong warning. It also has a very strong application to our present trinity debate.

“Wrong sentiments regarding this are coming in, and we shall all have to meet them.” *(Ibid)*

Here, at this General Conference session of 1905 (this was when the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still a decidedly non-trinitarian denomination) was the ultimate warning that has come through the spirit of prophecy to Seventh-day Adventists. Ellen White warned that in respect to the two separate personages of the Father and Son (God and Christ), “wrong sentiments” were on their way into Seventh-day Adventism. Note too she said that we would “all have to meet them”. This she said in 1905, 7 years after *Desire of Ages* had been published.

Remember too that it was at the same conference session (1905) that Ellen White warned about those who were coming in who were trying to tear down the foundation of Seventh-day Adventism. This is when she called the foundational beliefs of our denomination the truth that had “stood the test of trial” and that “step-by-step” God had given it to them (see previous section).

We will now see that the belief that God and Christ are two separate individual

personalities has always been the faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This was a major part of the non-trinitarianism of Seventh-day Adventism.

Early history

Prior to the changeover to trinitarianism, the belief that God was one personal being and that His Son was another personal being had always been the standard faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This can be seen when John Loughborough (the last of the original pioneers to die) was asked what serious objections that we, as a denomination, had to the trinity doctrine. He replied saying

“There are many objections which we might urge, but on account of our limited space we shall reduce them to the three following: 1. It is contrary to common sense. 2. It is contrary to scripture. 3., Its origin is Pagan and fabulous, These positions we will remark upon.” (*John Loughborough, Review and Herald, November 5th 1861, ‘Questions for John Loughborough’*)

In his explanation he wrote

“It is not very consonant with common sense to talk of three being one, and one being three. Or as some express it, calling God "the Triune God," or "the three-one-God". If Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are each God, it would be three Gods; for three times one is not one, but three. There is a sense in which they are one, but not one person, as claimed by Trinitarians.” (*Ibid*)

Trinitarians would deny that they believe the “one person” part of Loughborough’s statement but this is the same as saying that their trinity God is not a person. Notice very importantly that Loughborough did say that there was a oneness between the three personalities of the Godhead but not as in the trinity doctrine. This is the same as we have been told through the spirit of prophecy. In 1906 Ellen White wrote (this was in the midst of the Godhead crisis)

“There are light and glory in the truth that Christ was one with the Father before the foundation of the world was laid. This is the light shining in a dark place, making it resplendent with divine, original glory. This truth, infinitely mysterious in itself, explains other mysterious and otherwise unexplainable truths, while it is enshrined in light, unapproachable and incomprehensible.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 5th April 1906, ‘The Word made flesh’*)

We have commented on this statement in previous sections (see section sixteen and section twenty-seven) so we will not do so too much here, suffice to say that it is reasonable to believe that as did John Loughborough, Ellen White had in mind trinity oneness (meaning that they objected to it). Notice primarily she said that whatever it was that constituted this oneness between God and Christ, it is incomprehensible to the human mind. This is where trinitarians make their big mistake. They endeavour to explain this oneness, meaning that they go beyond

what God has revealed. Note that Ellen White did not deny the oneness, saying only that it was not understandable to humanity. This is the key to understanding the Godhead controversy.

Returning our thoughts to John Loughborough and his reasons for denying the trinity doctrine, he is obviously denying trinity oneness. He also said of the trinity doctrine itself

“It is contrary to Scripture. Almost any portion of the New Testament we may open which has occasion to speak of the Father and Son, represents them as two distinct persons. The seventeenth chapter of John is alone sufficient to refute the doctrine of the Trinity. Over forty times in that one chapter Christ speaks of his Father as a person distinct from himself.” (*John Loughborough, Review and Herald, November 5th 1861, ‘Questions for Bro. Loughborough’*)

This is very plain speaking. It is also exactly the same sentiment that 44 years later Ellen White would repeat to the delegates of the 1905 General Conference (see previous section) and may I say for much the same reason. We can see therefore that in this respect between 1861 and 1905, nothing had changed in the thinking of Seventh-day Adventists. Still speaking of why we, as a denomination, rejected the trinity doctrine, John Loughborough continued with reference to Christ

“His Father was in heaven and he upon earth. The Father had sent him. Given to him those that believed. He was then to go to the Father. And in this very testimony he shows us in what consists the oneness of the Father and Son. It is the same as the oneness of the members of Christ's church.” (*Ibid*)

Notice first of all John Loughborough's remarks about oneness. He said that it was the same as was between “the members of Christ's church”. Ellen White had said very similar at the 1905 General Conference. This was when she said to the delegates

“How earnestly the Saviour prayed that his disciples might be one with him as he is one with the Father. But the unity that is to exist between Christ and his followers does not destroy the personality of either. They are to be one with him as he is one with the Father. By this unity they are to make it plain to the world that God sent his Son to save sinners.” (*Ellen G. White to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Takoma Park Washington D. C., May 19th 1905, Review and Herald, June 1st 1905, ‘The Work in Washington’*)

In principle, the two statements of John Loughborough and Ellen White are exactly the same. Notice too, very importantly, John Loughborough's remarks about the Father being in one place (in Heaven) whilst the Son was in another

place (here on earth). He had said

“His Father was in heaven and he upon earth” (see above)

This is an outright denial of the trinity doctrine. In fact what Loughborough was doing was denying the oneness of the trinity doctrine. This appears to be the entire purpose of his remarks.

Regarding the one substance of God (see section six), Loughborough must have known exactly what was taught by reason of the trinity doctrine. He knew that it said that when Christ was on earth He was still with His Father on high (see section twelve, especially the remarks concerning St. Germanus and trinity theology in song etc). Loughborough also emphasised that the “Father had sent” Christ and that Christ was to “go to the Father”, thus denoting that Christ had actually vacated Heaven and had returned when His work was finished. This is something that the trinity doctrine does not teach. From John Loughborough’s remarks, we can very clearly see that he refuted the idea that there was any trinity (philosophical) oneness between God and Christ. So too Ellen White rejected it.

Another person who in our early history wrote an article regarding the trinity doctrine was J. F. Cottrell. In one article denying the trinity doctrine he said

“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.” (*R. F. Cottrell Review and Herald 1st June 1869 ‘The Doctrine of the Trinity’*)

This is much the same as was said by John Loughborough eight years previous (see above).

Cottrell affirms that Christ, in His pre-existence, was a Son. This is not in keeping with the current Seventh-day Adventism idea of God being a trinity because they now say that Christ, in His pre-existence, is not a Son. This shows us how much, since the time of our pioneers, that the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists have changed. Cottrell also said

“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. He asked his Father that his disciples might be one. His language is, “that they may be

one, even as we are one." (*Ibid*)

Like as most do who are against the trinity doctrine, Cottrell is denying trinity oneness. There can be no doubt he understood what the trinity doctrine teaches (see section six). Note his emphasis in saying that the Father and the Son (God and Christ to Seventh-day Adventists then in 1869) were "two beings". Concerning the trinity doctrine, Cottrell had previously said

"For myself, I have never felt called upon to explain it, nor to adopt and defend it, neither have I ever preached against it. But I probably put as high an estimation on the Lord Jesus Christ as those who call themselves Trinitarians." (*Ibid*)

This was said in 1869. I have found no reason to believe that this did not reflect the then generally held belief of Seventh-day Adventists. Note here that Cottrell plainly states that "He [Jesus Christ] was God" (see above), also that "the Father and the Son [God and Christ] are two beings". Cottrell must have believed therefore that there was a sense that Christ was God and yet in another sense was a separate personality from God. This is just as the Scriptures say (see John 1:1).

Cottrell knew what trinitarians believed but he did not regard them as placing a higher "estimation" on Christ than was done by him. Again in principle, these words of Cottrell are no different than Ellen White spoke to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference session (see previous section) or what John Loughborough had said regarding this oneness between God and Christ (see above).

Throughout the latter conference, Ellen White had refuted any belief that depicted God and Christ as being one in any way that would unsettle the belief that they were separate, individual personalities. More than likely, as did the other pioneers, she did have in mind the oneness that we find taught in the trinity doctrine. This is the oneness that says the Father, Son and Holy Spirit each have their subsistence in the one indivisible substance (the one being) of God therefore none of them can be separated or go out of existence (see section six, section twelve and section thirteen).

The latter was not something that was believed by Ellen White or the Seventh-day Adventist Church at large. They believed that Christ could be separated from God meaning that if when on earth He had sinned, which was something that they did believe was possible, they believed He would have lost His eternal existence (see section thirteen).

Just 5 weeks later in continuing his thoughts regarding the trinity, Cottrell again reiterated his belief that God and Christ were two separate divine beings. After saying that he had never believed the trinity doctrine or ever professed to believe it he said (we noted this in section nine when we spoke of the establishing of

trinitarianism within Christianity))

“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 the 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.” (*R. F. Cottrell, Review and Herald, July 6th 1869, ‘The Trinity’*)

He concluded his article

“Let us believe all he has revealed, and add nothing to it.” (*Ibid*)

Another person who was a devout anti-trinitarian was James White, the husband of Ellen White. He said regarding the trinity doctrine (note his speaking out against trinity oneness)

“Jesus prayed that his disciples might be one as he was one with his Father. This prayer did not contemplate one disciple with twelve heads, but twelve disciples, made one in object and effort in the cause of their master. Neither are the Father and the Son parts of the “three-one God”.” (*James White, ‘Life Incidents’ page 343 Chapter ‘The Law and the Gospel’ 1868*)

These words of James White were no different in principle than almost 40 years later that his wife Ellen had spoken to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference session (see above). He then said concerning the Father and the Son (God and Christ)

“They are two distinct beings, yet one in the design and accomplishment of redemption.” (*Ibid*)

We can see here that James White does not value very much the three in one teaching of the trinity. Like his wife Ellen he repeatedly emphasises that both God and His Son are separate persons who have personalities of their own. These were the same as both Cottrell’s and Loughborough’s sentiments.

Nine years later in the *Review and Herald* of November 29th 1877, James White wrote an article in which he compared the beliefs of Unitarians and Trinitarians. In this article he said (note the title of it)

“Paul affirms of the Son of God that he was in the form of God, and that he was equal with God. “Who being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God.” Phil. 2:6. The reason why it is not robbery for the Son

to be equal with the Father is the fact that he is equal. If the Son is not equal with the Father, then it is robbery for him to rank himself with the Father.” (*James White, Review and Herald November 29th article ‘Christ Equal with God’ 1877*)

This was in 1877. As can be seen, James White had no problem with Christ being in the form of God and equal with Him. In 1877 therefore, especially in the light of what we read in previous sections, this was then the faith of Seventh-day Adventists. It was that Christ was equal with God. James White did say though

“The inexplicable Trinity that makes the Godhead three in one and one in three, is bad enough; but that ultra Unitarianism that makes Christ inferior to the Father is worse. Did God say to an inferior, “Let us make man in our image?” (*Ibid*)

Regarding James White’s beliefs concerning the deity of the Son, there is no need to say any more. Certainly he did not regard the trinity doctrine as necessary to explain it. Like Ellen White he regarded the Son as God essentially; also that God and Christ were two separate divine beings. Note again that this was in 1877. This was 11 years previous to the 1888 Minneapolis Conference.

There are those today who would like us to believe that our very early pioneers (such as James White, John Loughborough and R. F. Cottrell etc) because they rejected the trinity doctrine did not believe in the full and complete deity of Christ but as we have seen here, this is a total misconception.

Father and Son – chief designer and master builder

On January 20th 1891 there was published in the *Review and Herald* an article called *Christian Fellowship*. It was based on John’s first epistle and was written by H. J. Farman. It highlighted what was then the faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This was particularly with regards to the Father and the Son. Note that this was now three years after the famous Minneapolis General Conference. Farman wrote

“ONE object in the writing of this epistle [1 John] was evidently to set forth the fellowship existing between the Father, the Son, and the children of God. To do this, the apostle presents the Son of God as the "Word of life," which Word they (the disciples) had seen, heard, and handled with their own hands (1 John 1:1), and were, therefore, reliable witnesses of him. This Word of life they declare to be "that eternal life" which was with the Father in the beginning. John 1:1-3.” (*H. J. Farman, Review and Herald, 20th January 1891, ‘Christian Fellowship’*)

Notice first of all that in this “*Christian Fellowship*”, Farman did not include the Holy Spirit. This is because throughout the time of Ellen White’s ministry, even though she did say that the Holy Spirit was a personality, Seventh-day Adventists (generally speaking) did not regard him as an individual being like the

Father and the Son. Farman's remarks therefore were in complete harmony with what was then the preponderant faith of Seventh-day Adventists. Farman then went on to say

"Christ co-existed with the Father. Micah says of him, that he existed from the days of eternity. Micah 5:2 (margin). The "Spirit of Prophecy" says "that he was with the Father before the angels were created" (vol. 1, chap. 1, T 1); and John says he was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Rev. 13: 8." (*Ibid*)

Take note that as did Ellen White and E. J. Waggoner (see section seven of the *Begotten Series*, also section fifteen, section sixteen, section twenty and section twenty-four of this series), Farman here quotes Micah 5:2 from the KJV but does not use the words "from everlasting" as in the KJV. Instead he uses the margin notes ("from the days of eternity"). This again, at that time (1891), was in keeping with what was generally believed by Seventh-day Adventists. This belief was that at some point in eternity, Christ came forth (was begotten) of the Father. Notice also that by quoting Ellen White where she says that Christ was "with the Father before the angels were created", there is a strong implication here of the very same begotten reasoning. Farman continues

"Fellowship," says Webster, means to be a partner, or an associate; to be associated with, or to be in partnership with. This was the relation that existed between the Father and the Son from the foundation of the world, from the days of old. They were associated together, even before the angels were made" (*Ibid*)

Notice again there is no mention of the Holy Spirit. Farman adds

"The Father bestowed upon the Son the power and honor of a creator, and made him the active agent in the creation of the worlds. Heb. 1:2; Col. 1:15-17; John 1: 10. The most intimate relationship that could exist between a father and a son, existed between them. They consulted together with reference to the creation of man. God said, "Let us make man in our image." Gen. 1: 26. To whom did God speak? — To his Son, — "Let us make man." The entire record shows this fact. Verses 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24. God spoke, and the Son performed the work. Compare Heb. 11: 3 with Heb. 1 : 2, substituting "command" in the place of "word" in chap. 11: 3." (*Ibid*)

This again was in keeping with what was then the faith of Seventh-day Adventists. Notice that Farman did not say that the Father spoke to the Holy Spirit. As Ellen White wrote in *Volume 1 of the Spirit of Prophecy* (this is the following paragraph from where Farman previously quoted Ellen White as being "with the Father before the angels were created")

"The great Creator assembled the heavenly host, that he might in the

presence of all the angels confer special honor upon his Son. The Son was seated on the throne with the Father, and the heavenly throng of holy angels was gathered around them. The Father then made known that it was ordained by himself that Christ, his Son, should be equal with himself; so that wherever was the presence of his Son, it was as his own presence. The word of the Son was to be obeyed as readily as the word of the Father. His Son he had invested with authority to command the heavenly host. Especially was his Son to work in union with himself in the anticipated creation of the earth and every living thing that should exist upon the earth. His Son would carry out his will and his purposes, but would do nothing of himself alone. The Father's will would be fulfilled in him." (*Ellen G. White, Spirit of Prophecy Volume 1 page 17, 'The Fall of Satan'*)

Notice the order here between the Father and the Son. The Father was conferring "special honour upon his Son". It was the Father who "ordained" that "Christ, his Son, should be equal with himself". It was also the Father who had "invested" His Son "with authority to command the heavenly host". This was the order of rank. The Son had come forth (been begotten) of the Father. It was not the other way around. Once again there is no mention of the Holy Spirit. After explaining that Satan became jealous of Christ, Ellen White continued

"Christ had been taken into the special counsel of God in regard to his plans, while Satan was unacquainted with them. He did not understand, neither was he permitted to know, the purposes of God. But Christ was acknowledged sovereign of Heaven, his power and authority to be the same as that of God himself." (*Ibid*)

There is a distinction of persons here between "Christ" and "God Himself". The former is not the latter and the latter is not the former. They are two separate and distinct personalities. Referring to the fall of Satan and the efforts of the unfallen angels to reconcile him with God, Ellen White wrote

"Angels that were loyal and true sought to reconcile this first great rebel to the will of his Creator. They justified the act of God in conferring honor upon Jesus Christ, and with forcible reasons sought to convince Satan that no less honor was his now than before the Father had proclaimed the honor which he had conferred upon his Son. They clearly set forth that Jesus was the Son of God, existing with him before the angels were created; and that he had ever stood at the right hand of God, and his mild, loving authority had not heretofore been questioned; and that he had given no commands but what it was joy for the heavenly host to execute. They had urged that Christ's receiving special honor from the Father, in the presence of the angels, did not detract from the honor that he had heretofore received." (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 9th January 1879, 'The Great Controversy: The Fall of Satan: The Creation'*)

Returning our thoughts to Farman's article, he made it absolutely clear that the

Father and the Son were two separate personalities. He said

“Macknight so translates it, and the Emphatic Diaglott gives the same thought. Thus the worlds were framed by the command of God. This accords with the other scriptures making the Father the great architect, the chief designer, and the Son the master-builder. What fellowship, what mutual companionship, existed between them! Yea, they consulted together with reference to the redemption of man. Eph. 1:3-5, 9-11. Says Zechariah, “The counsel of peace shall be between them both.” Zech. 6:13.” (*H. J. Farman, Review and Herald, 20th January 1891, ‘Christian Fellowship*)

Again this was in keeping with what we have been told through the spirit of prophecy. In 1904, Ellen White wrote with respect to the prayer of Jesus as found in John 17:20-23. This is when He said

“Neither pray I for these [disciples] alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.” John 17:20-23

In this prayer of Jesus, the oneness that He had with His Father is very prominent. In commenting on these verses Ellen White wrote

“Wonderful statement! The unity that exists between Christ and His disciples does not destroy the personality of either. They are one in purpose, in mind, in character, but not in person. It is thus that God and Christ are one.

The relation between the Father and the Son, and the personality of both, are made plain in this scripture also:

"Thus speaketh Jehovah of hosts, saying,
Behold, the man whose name is the Branch:
And He shall grow up out of His place;
And He shall build the temple of Jehovah; . . .
And He shall bear the glory,
And shall sit and rule upon His throne;
And He shall be a priest upon His throne;
And the counsel of peace shall be between Them both." (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies Volume 8, page 269, ‘The Essential Knowledge’, 1904*)

Ellen White wrote this testimony in 1904. This was when the Godhead crisis was very much to the fore.

Early realisations

During the early 1900's, even through to the time period leading up to her death, Ellen White repeatedly testified (and stressed) that God and Christ, each in their own right, were separate personalities. As we noted in previous sections, there was a very definite reason for her stressing it. This was when, in the form of Kellogg's beliefs, trinitarianism was rearing its head within Seventh-day Adventism. This early 1900's two separate personality faith was no different than how she had always spoken of God and Christ (Father and Son). In *Early Writings* she had written

"I saw a throne, and on it sat the Father and the Son. I gazed on Jesus' countenance and admired His lovely person. The Father's person I could not behold, for a cloud of glorious light covered Him. I asked Jesus if His Father had a form like Himself. He said He had, but I could not behold it, for said He, "If you should once behold the glory of His person, you would cease to exist." (*Ellen G. White, 'Early Writings', page 54, 1882*)

Here we can see Ellen White saying that both the Father and Son (God and Christ) have "a form" of their own. Notice again that she does not mention the Holy Spirit. Later in the same book, continuing her thoughts regarding God and His Son as being two separate persons, she wrote

"I have often seen the lovely Jesus, that He is a person. I asked Him if His Father was a person and had a form like Himself. Said Jesus, "I am in the express image of My Father's person." (*Ibid page 77*)

Here we have the added emphasis that the Son is the "express image" of Gods (His Father's) person. Note again that Ellen White did not see the Holy Spirit sitting on the throne with the Father and the Son. The Scriptures never depicted this view. Neither did Ellen White. She then added concerning what she called the spiritual view (remember in section twenty-seven she referred to all three-in-one illustrations of God as being "spiritualistic representations")

"I have often seen that the spiritual view took away all the glory of heaven, and that in many minds the throne of David and the lovely person of Jesus have been burned up in the fire of Spiritualism. I have seen that some who have been deceived and led into this error will be brought out into the light of truth, but it will be almost impossible for them to get entirely rid of the deceptive power of Spiritualism. Such should make thorough work in confessing their errors and leaving them forever." (*Ibid*)

This "spiritualism" that Ellen White spoke of here (which she also referred to as the "spiritual view") was not spiritualism as in necromancy, meaning speaking to the dead, but what we might term fanciful spiritual views (perhaps better said philosophical or speculative views). Note that she said that in this spiritual view, the reality of the person Jesus as well as the reality of the "throne of David" was destroyed ("burned up in the fire of Spiritualism"). It is more than likely that here

she would have been referring to the speculative (philosophical) views of such as the doctrine of the trinity. This is because in the trinity doctrine, the three personalities are of one indivisible substance (one being) of God therefore they cannot be separated from one another. This would indeed bring to nought the Biblical teaching that eventually, when the earth was made new, that Christ would sit upon His own throne, meaning “the throne of David” (see Luke 1:32 and 1 Corinthians 15:23-28).

Note that Ellen White says that those who are led into this error (the spiritual view) will find it “almost impossible” to entirely rid themselves of this “deceptive power”. This is how it is with those who believe that God is three-in-one. Regardless of what is said by anyone, including Ellen White, many trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists will always struggle to let go of their belief. It is just like an enchantment.

James White, the husband of Ellen White called the trinitarians spiritualizers. This is why it is reasonable to believe that Ellen White used it in the very same way. He said in 1846

“The way spiritualizers this way have disposed of or denied the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ is first using the old unscriptural trinitarian creed, viz, that Jesus Christ is the eternal God, though they have not one passage to support it, while we have plain scripture testimony in abundance that He is the Son of the eternal God.” (*James White, letter, The Day-Star January 24th 1846*)

Note what James White is saying. He said that it was the trinitarians who “disposed of or denied the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ”. This is quite a realisation. He was the husband of the messenger of God for 35 years. Can you imagine how many conversations that they had together concerning the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and the trinity doctrine? Never though did he change his mind concerning his above beliefs concerning God and Christ. Note that he said this in 1846, the year that he and Ellen married whilst she made a similar statement in 1882 (see above). He also said in 1855

“Here we might mention the Trinity, which does away the personality of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ, and of sprinkling or pouring instead of being " buried with Christ in baptism," "planted in the likeness of his death:" but we pass from these fables to notice one that is held sacred by nearly all professed Christians, both Catholic and Protestant.” (*James White, Review and Herald, December 11th 1855, 'Preach the Word'*)

Fourteen years later, in the *Review and Herald* of June 8th 1869, A. C. Bourdeau wrote with respect to the concepts of the trinity doctrine. In speaking of the instructions that along with others he had received at a French Baptist Educational Institute in Canada he wrote

“1. That God is an infinite and eternal Spirit, with out person, body, shape, or parts; is everywhere and nowhere present; or, is everywhere as a Spirit, and nowhere as a tangible being. I ask, Is not this making God almost a mere nothing?

“2. That Jesus Christ is God himself; the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are one identical being; hence in describing one, we describe the other. Certainly this is doing no better by the Son than by the Father.” (A. C. Bourdeau, *Review and Herald*, June 8th 1869, ‘*The Hope that is in you*’)

He concluded

“Is this not spiritualizing away God, Christ, angels, saints, and Heaven? burning them down to nothing, as it were, by the fire of Spritualism [sic]? Yet this constitutes the Christian's hope as taught by popular orthodoxy. Heaven save us, and open our eyes, that we may see the truth.” (*Ibid*)

Separate personalities in eternity

According to what we have been told through the spirit of prophecy, God and Christ have always been separate personalities. This is even though there was, as Ellen White said, a oneness between them that is incomprehensible to the human mind. Obviously this oneness did not prohibit God and His Son being two separate personalities, neither, if He had sinned, would it have prevented the Son of God Christ from going out of existence. This then could definitely not have been a trinitarian oneness because it is impossible for this to happen in that theology.

Even in the very first chapter of *Desire of Ages*, the book that many pro-trinitarians say led Seventh-day Adventists to become trinitarian, Ellen White wrote

“From the beginning, God and Christ knew of the apostasy of Satan, and of the fall of man through the deceptive power of the apostate. God did not ordain that sin should exist, but He foresaw its existence, and made provision to meet the terrible emergency. So great was His love for the world, that He covenanted to give His only-begotten Son, "that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16” (*Ellen G. White, ‘The Desire of Ages’ page 22, ‘God with us’*)

Here, in *The Desire of Ages*, we again see Ellen White differentiating between God and Christ as two personal beings. This is the book that many pro-trinitarians say led the Seventh-day Adventist Church to become trinitarian. Again Ellen White speaks of God and Christ (God the Father and His Son) as two separate distinct beings (two separate individuals). She also says here that from the very beginning, both God and Christ knew of the apostasy of Satan. Note as she usually does that Ellen White makes reference to Christ as being God’s “only begotten Son”. This is very important. I say this because it is the

belief of many today, including this author, that if Christ is not begotten of the Father then He cannot be rightly termed God (for Ellen White's remarks concerning Christ being begotten and therefore a true Son see section fifteen).

Admittedly, Ellen White did speak of God as a spirit but she always maintained that He was still an individual personal being. Never did she speak of Him as a composite entity as does the trinity doctrine. As she said in one such statement

"God is a spirit; yet He is a personal being, for man was made in His image. (Ellen White, 'Education', 1903, chapter 'Science and the Bible' page 131, see also Ministry of Healing pages 418, 1905 and 8th Volume of the Testimonies page 265 'The Essential Knowledge' 1904)

This "image" was not just in character. It was also in outward appearance. As we have been told through the spirit of prophecy

"Man was to bear God's image, both in outward resemblance and in character. Christ alone is "the express image" (Hebrews 1:3) of the Father; but man was formed in the likeness of God." (Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, page 45, 'The Creation')

In outward appearance, according to Ellen White, a human being looks very similar to God (or vice versa), thus we get the idea that God has bodily form (shape) similar to humans. The Son though, is the only one who is the "express image" of God, meaning, as most theologians will agree, that He is the only one who is the exact representation of God. This means that the Son is unique.

Returning our thoughts to the previous quote from *Ministry of Healing* and the 8th *Volume of the Testimonies*, the same author wrote

"As a personal being, God has revealed Himself in His Son. Jesus, the outshining of the Father's glory, "and the express image of His person" (Hebrews 1:3), was on earth found in fashion as a man." (Ellen White, 'Education', 1903, chapter 'Science and the Bible' page 131, see also Ministry of Healing pages 418, 1905 and 8th Volume of the Testimonies page 265 'The Essential Knowledge' 1904)

Once again we see Ellen White stressing that God is a "personal being" (an individual person). She was also confirming here the early 1900's faith of Seventh-day Adventists.

She also says, as does the Scriptures, that the Son of God is the "express image" of His Father's "person". If we are to understand anything at all about this trinity issue then this expression must be clearly understood. In other words, the phrase "express image of His person" is absolutely crucial to our studies. We noted the meaning of this word in section sixteen.

Fourteen years earlier in 1890, Ellen White made a very clear statement as to regards the identity of Christ. In the *Signs of the Times* she wrote

“Christ came to represent the Father. We behold in him the image of the invisible God.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 20th January 1890, ‘God made manifest in Christ’*)

She later said of Jesus

“We are called upon to behold the Lord our Father in the person of his Son.” (*Ibid*)

This was the begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventists. It was that Christ was no less a person than God the “Father in the person of his Son”. We have also been told, through the spirit of prophecy, something that in our studies we should consider to be extremely important. This is that since the first sin, God has not spoken directly to humanity but has always communicated with us through His Son, denoting once again that God is an individual personal being. This is when Ellen White wrote in *Patriarchs and Prophets*

“Since the sin of our first parents there has been no direct communication between God and man.” (*Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, page 366, ‘The Law and the Covenants’ 1890*)

This shows us very clearly that Ellen White spoke of God as a personal being. It also shows us that she believed that from the beginning, Christ has been a separate person from God. Note now that like she often does, Ellen White uses the term “God” synonymously with the term “the Father”. This is when she added

“The Father has given the world into the hands of Christ, that through His mediatorial work He may redeem man and vindicate the authority and holiness of the law of God. All the communion between heaven and the fallen race has been through Christ.” (*Ibid*)

Note specifically that we are told here that since the fall there has been “no direct communication between God and man” but that all communication with “the fallen race has been through Christ”. Ellen White regarded God as a personal being separate from Christ. This is in the sense of personality but not to identity of person. For a discussion on the understanding of the word person with regards to God and Christ, see section sixteen.

As can be seen in these two statements, Ellen White regarded the Father as God Himself. In other words, to Ellen White, as well as to all of the other pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism, God, as a personal being, is the Father. As we progress through these studies, we shall discover this over and over again (see 1 Corinthians 8:6, 1 Corinthians 15:24 and 2 Corinthians 1:2-3, 2 Corinthians 11:31 etc). In the very same paragraph, after saying that it was the

Son who had revealed Himself to such patriarchs as Noah, Isaac and Moses, Ellen White wrote

“These holy men of old held communion with the Saviour who was to come to our world in human flesh; and some of them talked with Christ and heavenly angels face to face.” (*Ibid*)

In the context of how Ellen White speaks here of God and Christ, she is not saying that these patriarchs spoke directly with God but rather that they spoke with Christ. By 1901, 3 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages* Ellen White wrote

“Adam and Eve were given a probation in which to return to their allegiance; and in this plan of benevolence all their posterity were embraced.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times. 29th May 1901*)

Now note very carefully her next words. She said

“After the fall, Christ became Adam's instructor. He acted in God's stead toward humanity, saving the race from immediate death. He took upon Him the work of mediator between God and man. In the fulness of time He was to be revealed in human form. He was to take His position at the head of humanity by taking the nature but not the sinfulness of man. In heaven was heard the voice, "The Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord." (*Ibid*)

In the above statements, we can readily see that Ellen White believed that there is a sense in which Christ is not God, at least not the infinite God. This is in the sense of personalities (personal beings). To put it another way, in the sense of personal beings (personalities), Ellen White always spoke of God and Christ as being separate individuals but as to identity of person she always spoke of Christ as being God. This is the begotten concept. As she said when preparing *Desire of Ages* for publication

“The One appointed in the counsels of heaven came to the earth as an instructor. He was no less a being than the Creator of the world, the Son of the Infinite God.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies on Education page 173 1897*)

Here we can see Ellen White clearly differentiating between the one she terms “the infinite God” and “the Son of the infinite God”. From what we have read, this “infinite God” is the Father. This is in agreement with 1 Corinthians 8:6 where it says

“But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.”
1 Corinthians 8:6

Many trinitarians will say that within the trinity, the Father and Son are exactly the same (no difference between them) but this is not confirmed through the spirit of prophecy. We know this because Ellen White wrote

“As the disciples comprehended it, as their perception took hold of God's divine compassion, they realized that there is a sense in which the sufferings of the Son were the sufferings of the Father. From eternity there was a complete unity between the Father and the Son. They were two, yet little short of being identical; two in individuality, yet one in spirit, and heart, and character.” (*Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor 16th December 1897 'The New Commandment part 1'*)

Here again we can see the emphasis that “the Father and the Son” (God and Christ) whilst they are in “complete unity” are “two in individuality”. She also added though that they are “little short of being identical”. It is just as though Ellen White is saying that they are almost identical but not quite. She also said in a letter dated July 7th 1890

“The divine nature in the person of Christ was not transformed in human nature and the human nature of the Son of man was not changed into the divine nature, but they were mysteriously blended in the Saviour of men. He was not the Father but in Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and yet He calls to a suffering world, "Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (*Ellen G. White, Manuscript release Volume 6 MR. No. 356, Letter 8a, 1890, pp. 2, 3. to M. J. Church, July 7, 1890*)

Note here that Ellen White says that Christ is “not the Father”. To Ellen White and the other pioneers, God was the Father. This was only the same as saying that the Son is not the infinite God, at least not in personality. This “two distinct personages” belief can again be seen in these words that Ellen White penned in 1898. This is when she wrote

“The Father and the Son rested after Their work of Creation.” (*Ellen G. White, Ms 25, 1898, pp. 3, 4. 'The Man of Sorrows'*)

No mention is made here of the Holy Spirit. After quoting from Genesis 2:1-3 she then wrote

“The death of Christ was designed to be at the very time in which it took place. It was in God's plan that the work which Christ had engaged to do should be completed on a Friday, and that on the Sabbath He should rest in the tomb, even as the Father and Son had rested after completing Their creative work.” (*Ibid*)

Again there is no mention made here of the Holy Spirit, only “the Father and Son”. Again in 1906 she wrote

“He who denies the personality of God and of his Son Jesus Christ, is denying God and Christ. "If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father." If you continue to believe and obey the truths you first embraced regarding the personality of the Father and the Son, you will be joined together with him in love. There will be seen that union for which Christ prayed just before his trial and crucifixion.” (*Ellen White, Review and Herald, 8th March 1906, 'A God of Knowledge, by Whom Actions Are Weighed'*)

Repeatedly throughout her writings, Ellen White made this kind of statement (referencing to God and Christ but not to the Holy Spirit).

An invested Son

Ellen White’s reasoning that God and Christ (Father and Son) are two separate personalities is no different than that which she wrote in Volume 1 of the Spirit of Prophecy. This is when she said

“The great Creator assembled the heavenly host, that he might in the presence of all the angels confer special honor upon his Son. The Son was seated on the throne with the Father, and the heavenly throng of holy angels was gathered around them. The Father then made known that it was ordained by himself that Christ, his Son, should be equal with himself; so that wherever was the presence of his Son, it was as his own presence.” (*Ellen G. White, Spirit of Prophecy, Volume 1, page 17, 'The fall of Satan'*)

As can be seen, the Son being present is not the Father being present. This is why Ellen White said “wherever was the presence of his Son, it was as his (God the Father’s) own presence”. This is clearly non-trinitarianism.

We can also see here that God Himself (the Father) had conferred this “special honour” upon His Son. This He confirmed by telling the angels that He Himself (God) had ordained that His Son “should be equal with Himself (God)”. Clearly here we can see two separate personalities, meaning God (who is the Father – the infinite God) and His Son (Christ). Note that Ellen White said that Christ had received this honour because God the Father ordained that it should be so. This was in the Son’s pre-existence, prior to Him coming to earth. We can also see here that the angels needed this to be told to them.

Interesting to note here is that neither in the Scriptures nor in the writings of Ellen White is the Holy Spirit ever depicted as sitting upon a throne with the Father and the Son. The enquiring mind will ask why. This is why we shall be dealing with this more fully later when we take a look at the pioneers’ beliefs regarding the Holy Spirit. This we shall do in the next four sections. Ellen White then went on to say

“The word of the Son was to be obeyed as readily as the word of the Father. His Son he had invested with authority to command the heavenly

host. Especially was his Son to work in union with himself in the anticipated creation of the earth and every living thing that should exist upon the earth. His Son would carry out his will and his purposes, but would do nothing of himself alone. The Father's will would be fulfilled in him." (*Ibid*)

Note the emphasis that the Father had "invested" the Son with authority to command the host of heaven and work with God in the future creation of this world. This is definitely non-trinitarian language. These very same thoughts were transposed into Ellen White's *Patriarchs and Prophets*. This is when she said

"The King of the universe summoned the heavenly hosts before Him, that in their presence He might set forth the true position of His Son and show the relation He sustained to all created beings. The Son of God shared the Father's throne, and the glory of the eternal, self-existent One encircled both." (*Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets page 36, 'Why was sin permitted?'*)

God called the inhabitants together to "set forth" the true position of His Son to all created beings. Notice the sharing of the throne of the Father and Son but again no mention of the Holy Spirit. After saying that this throne was surrounded by myriads of angels she then said

"Before the assembled inhabitants of heaven the King declared that none but Christ, the Only Begotten of God, could fully enter into His purposes, and to Him it was committed to execute the mighty counsels of His will." (*Ibid*)

Here we are told that Christ is the only being that could enter into the purposes of the King of the universe (the infinite God). Notice she referred to Him as being "the Only Begotten of God". She then added

"The Son of God had wrought the Father's will in the creation of all the hosts of heaven; and to Him, as well as to God, their homage and allegiance were due. Christ was still to exercise divine power, in the creation of the earth and its inhabitants. But in all this He would not seek power or exaltation for Himself contrary to God's plan, but would exalt the Father's glory and execute His purposes of beneficence and love." (*Ibid*)

Here once again we see Ellen White not only differentiating between God and Christ as two separate personalities but also again using the term 'God' synonymously with 'the Father'. To Ellen White, God is the Father whilst Christ is the Son. Note that this event took place prior to the creation of our world, also that no Holy Spirit is seen or mentioned.

Some have tried to say that after she said this (*Patriarchs and Prophets* was published in 1890) that Ellen White moved on in her theology but note what she said here in 1903 in a letter to her two sons (this was 5 years after *Desire of*

Ages was published)

“Many will depart from the faith and give heed to seducing spirits. Patriarchs and Prophets and Great Controversy are books that are especially adapted to those who have newly come to the faith, that they may be established in the truth. The dangers are pointed out that should be avoided by the churches. Those who become thoroughly acquainted with the lessons in these books will see the dangers before them and will be able to discern the plain, straight path marked out for them. They will be kept from strange paths. They will make straight paths for their feet, lest the lame be turned out of the way.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter written from St. Helena, California to Edson White and W. C. White, 27th September 1903, manuscript releases Volume 21 No. 1594, see also ‘Evangelism’ chapter 10 page 366*)

Ellen White is pointing out here that the book we have just quoted from (*Patriarchs and Prophets*) where she makes reference to God investing His Son with authority, is “especially adapted” to newcomers to the faith. This she said was so that they may become “established in the truth”. She also said that by reading such books, these newcomers would be “kept from strange paths”. This was in 1903, 5 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*. It should go without saying therefore that what she wrote in this decidedly non-trinitarian *Patriarchs and Prophets* was no different in theology than she wrote in her supposedly trinitarian *Desire of Ages*. She then went on to say

“In *Desire of Ages*, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, *The Great Controversy*, and in *Daniel and the Revelation*, there is precious instruction. These books must be regarded as of special importance, and every effort should be made to get them before the people.” (*Ibid*)

It is quite apparent that Ellen White did not regard anything she said in *Patriarchs and Prophets* (1890), which is decidedly non-trinitarian, as being in conflict with her supposedly *Desire of Ages* (1898). Note here too the reference to Uriah Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation*. This was another totally non-trinitarian publication. This is why, when our denomination began to take on board trinitarianism, this book, so that all the non-trinitarian theology could be removed from its pages underwent a massive editing. We shall take note of this and its results in section forty-four and section forty-five. We shall also see in section forty-three that one Seventh-day Adventist evangelist, because he was not aware that Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation* was non-trinitarian, had a very embarrassing experience with it, at least this was his personal testimony.

The above quotes from Ellen White show very clearly that she had no problems with the non-trinitarianism of Seventh-day Adventism. It was this she said was the faith that God had given to our people and from which we should never depart.

Later realisations

Very interesting is an article published in the *Review and Herald* in 1915, the year that Ellen White died. It was written by one of its then associate editors, Charles Snow. The article is called *Misrepresenting Our Father*. It was a rebuttal against a statement made by the editor of the 'Western Watchman (Catholic)'. Snow quotes this editor as saying

"God is the most selfish being that the mind of man can contemplate, and he is selfish because he has nobody to share with; he is alone. And he would not be God if he was not absolutely selfish. He has nobody to share anything with, he has not a partner in any sense; he is alone, and he is everything. Therefore, I everything comes from him and everything must return to him. So the highest attribute of God is his absolute selfishness. . . . There is only one God; everything comes from that one God, and everything revolves around that one center of the one God. Talk about divine selfishness; it means simply truth. — Western Watchman (Catholic), May 13," (As quoted by C. M. Snow, *Review and Herald*, May 27th 1915, 'Misrepresenting Our Father')

I may be wrong here (I do not have access to the paper in question) but it is quite possible that the author of this article in the *Western Watchman (Catholic)* was thinking of "God" in terms of being a trinity (the "one God"). This though is not what I wish to draw to your attention. I would like us to note how Snow refutes the reasoning of this author. This is the important part. After saying such things as God is love and that He has never changed, also that He gave His Son to die in our stead etc, Snow wrote

"The editor of the Western Watchman bases his astonishing charges against our loving Father in heaven upon another unwarranted assertion: "He has nobody to share with; he is alone. . . . He has not a partner in any sense." It is true there can be but one God the Father; but he is not alone; and he does have a partner." (*Ibid*)

Notice that Snow recognises "God" (as used by the editor of the Watchman) as being "the Father". In other words Snow recognises the "one God" as the Father and says that He is "not alone" but has "a partner". This "partner" is he Son of God. This was a rebuttal against the editor of the *Watchman* who said that "he [the one God] has not a partner in any sense; he is alone". After quoting Hebrews 1:1-3 Snow then says

"It is impossible from such scriptures as this to draw the conclusion that God sits in austere and lonely isolation upon the throne of the universe, demanding love, but manifesting only selfishness. One sits beside him whom he took into his counsel before the world was made. God said to his Son at that time, "Let us make man in our image." They were then in the same image; and this agrees with the words just quoted from Hebrews: "Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his

person," etc." (*Ibid*)

Notice that Snow does not say that the Son had been from forever (coeternal with the Father) but refers to Him as being there "before the world was made". He continued

"The apostle John, writing with the pen of inspiration concerning this same Son and companion of the Most High, says:—

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. . . . He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not." John 1:1-11" (*Ibid*)

Snow refers to the Father as "the Most High" and to the Son as His "companion". He is saying therefore that John is saying that "the Word" is the Son of God and the God whom the Word (the Son of God) was with is "the Most High". In other words, Snow is maintaining the separateness, also the individuality of these two divine personages. He does not combine them together as one divine being. Snow concludes

"That is Jesus Christ, our Saviour, one who "was in the beginning with God," who was the active agent of God the Father in the creation of the worlds. The declaration that God is companionless is thus just as untrue as the charge that he is the embodiment of selfishness." (*Ibid*)

A non- trinitarian faith

From the above and from previous sections, we can see that the early 1900's denominational faith of Seventh-day Adventists was strictly and decidedly a non-trinitarian faith. It was also the faith from which Ellen White said that there would be a very serious departing. We must ask ourselves today therefore, has this actually happened? Have "many" Seventh-day Adventists departed from this early 1900's faith (beliefs) of Seventh-day Adventism (the beliefs of our pioneers)? The obvious answer to this particular question is yes, many have departed from it but as we come to the close of this section we must always remember as God said to Elijah

"Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him." 1 Kings 19:18

We shall now proceed to section thirty-one. This is the first of four sections in which we shall be taking a look at what our pioneers, including Ellen White, believed concerning the Holy Spirit. These are very important sections.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section thirty-one

The pioneers and the Holy Spirit (Part 1 of 2)

One reason for the length of this study (it is divided into two parts) is because in the author's opinion, the beliefs of the pioneers concerning the Holy Spirit have been so unfairly represented that they need here to be extensively detailed. Admittedly, this particular part of their faith was somewhat more complex than was their belief about God and Christ but as we shall see in later sections, these views, in the early 1900's, were in complete harmony with the beliefs of Ellen White.

I would remind you here of one the objectives of our studies. It is to re-discover the early 1900's faith of Seventh-day Adventists. As we have noted before in section one and in other places, this is the faith from which Ellen White did say that there would be a very serious departing,

The old (non-trinitarian) view of Seventh-day Adventists regarding the Holy Spirit

At the close of Ellen White's ministry (1915), it was the generally held belief of Seventh-day Adventists that whilst the Holy Spirit was a personality, He was not a person in exactly the same sense as God and Christ are persons (individual personal beings). As will be seen in this and the following sections, it is what constitutes a person that always was, and still is today, the problem area in this trinity dispute. To our pioneers, the Holy Spirit was both the Father and Son omnipresent but certainly not another separate divine being like them.

Consider Christ for a moment. Who is He?

According to the early 1900's faith of Seventh-day Adventists, He was none other than God himself and yet with regards to personality (not to identity of person) He was the Son of God. It is this unexplainable and incomprehensible oneness that is the real mystery concerning the Godhead. As Ellen White said in 1906 (we have noted this on a number of occasions in previous sections but it is well worth noting again)

“There are light and glory in the truth that Christ was one with the Father before the foundation of the world was laid. This is the light shining in a dark place, making it resplendent with divine, original glory. This truth, infinitely

mysterious in itself, explains other mysterious and otherwise unexplainable truths, while it is enshrined in light, unapproachable and incomprehensible.”
(*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald 5th April 1906 ‘The Word made Flesh’*)

Here we can see that this oneness between God and Christ is something that is both “mysterious in itself” and “incomprehensible” (to the human mind). As has been said before, this is where as Seventh-day Adventists we should have left it but by means of the trinity doctrine, we have attempted to explain it.

The belief that Christ is God essentially has always been the faith of Seventh-day Adventists (we duly noted this in previous sections). This was even though they did not accept the extreme view as portrayed in the doctrine of the trinity. This latter view is the one that in trinity orthodoxy says that Christ is eternally begotten of the Father (not just begotten) and belonging to the same indivisible substance (the one being) of God whilst the current Seventh-day Adventist view says that Christ is unbegotten (see section six for what is considered trinity orthodoxy).

Both of these trinity views say that there never was a time when as a separate personality from God (the Father) that the Son did not exist. This is the crucial difference between the beliefs of the past non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists and the beliefs of those who are truly trinitarian (believe that God is three-in-one). It must be said though that these non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists did believe that Christ is begotten of God. This is one of the main reasons why they believed that He was God because being begotten of God would mean that He is God from God, true God from true God (God begotten).

During the ministry of Ellen White, this begotten belief about Christ was the accepted (standard) view of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It was also their preponderant faith that the Holy Spirit was the presence of both the Father and the Son (God and Christ) when the latter two divine personalities were not bodily present (meaning whilst the Father and Son were in Heaven). In other words, it was believed by the non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists that the Holy Spirit was both God and Christ (Father and Son), omnipresent.

It was also believed by Seventh-day Adventists that within the plan of redemption, the Holy Spirit had a two-fold ministry. They believed that initially He was to convince men and women of sin, thus having the sinner feel their need for a Saviour, whilst secondly He was to literally dwell within a converted person to produce from within the characters of both God and Christ. To put this as a mathematical equation, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit was equivalent to (equal to) having both God and Christ within. This was deemed to be, by the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism, the one and the same thing.

This belief is based on the concept that every human spirit is who and what a person is. In other words, my spirit is who and what I am whilst your spirit is who and what you are. Each of these individual spirits is unique to every individual

person. None is exactly the same as another.

Unlike our spirits that cannot function without a body (this is why in death, the totality of a person, including the spirit, ceases to experience life), God's Spirit can function independently. This is why God is said to be omnipresent, meaning that when He is here with me, He is also, at the very same time, some place else in this world with you. We shall see in section thirty-three and section thirty-four that this view regarding the Holy Spirit, as well as the aforementioned view of the spirit of man, was in fact the belief of Ellen White. Certainly (in the author's opinion) it is the teaching of the Holy Scriptures.

This belief concerning the Holy Spirit was crucial to the early Seventh-day Adventists understanding of the gospel. Any other belief, such as the trinitarian concept of the Holy Spirit, would have completely destroyed it.

Whilst this is not the place to go into the detail of this as a theology, if we are to understand the early 1900's faith of Seventh-day Adventists, which is one of the main objectives of this study, this knowledge is essential.

In all fairness to the early pioneers

In all fairness to the early pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism, even though at first they did not recognise the Holy Spirit as a personality, never because of their beliefs did they denigrate Him. In fact as we shall see later, these same pioneers regarded the Holy Spirit, as well as His work, as being totally indispensable to the plan of salvation.

We need to appreciate though that just like human words and reasoning today have the habit of limiting us in our explanation of deity, so too our pioneers were subject to the same limitations. In other words, just like us, the pioneers were the finite trying to explain the infinite. For this reason therefore, as we see how they grappled with this mystery of the Holy Spirit, I do believe that with regards to both their selection and their usage of words, we need to be very generous with our judgment. I also believe that we need to appreciate the reasoning of these pioneers and not just seek to belittle it. In other words, we need to give the views of the pioneers the consideration and respect that it deserves because after all, this is what Ellen White did and she was God's messenger to the remnant. If she did it so must we.

At the close of this study (meaning after reading both this and the next section), we shall see that the majority agreement of the pioneers was that the Holy Spirit was not a person in the sense that we normally consider a person to be therefore it was also concluded that He was not a person as are both God and Christ (God the Father and the Son of God). Seventh-day Adventists generally held this belief well into the decades beyond the death of Ellen White. This changed view of the Holy Spirit, to bring it into line with trinitarianism, did not happen overnight but was done very gradually over a long period of time.

It must be said here that these past non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists believed that as well as being in accordance with all that the Scriptures reveal about the Holy Spirit, they were also in harmony with all that God had revealed through Ellen White. Whilst their reasoning concerning the Holy Spirit may seem very strange to many of today's trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists, we shall see that in reality, it was both reasonable and logical. I believe also that as we study this reasoning, we shall see that to draw the conclusion that the Holy Spirit is a person just like God and Christ, is in fact unreasonable.

Early views

In 1875, the father of E. J. Waggoner of Minneapolis (1888) fame, namely J. H. Waggoner, wrote an article called *The Spirit of God; Its Offices and Manifestations* (note the 'it' reference to the Holy Spirit). In this article he said

"There is one question which has been much controverted in the theological world upon which we have never presumed to enter. It is that of the personality of the Spirit of God." (*Joseph H. Waggoner, Review and Herald, September 23rd 1875, 'The Spirit Of God; Its Offices And Manifestations'*)

This was in 1875. Here we can see that quite early in our history (31 years after 1844), we did not consider it a necessity to enter into too definite ideas concerning the Holy Spirit. This shows that in these early years at least, we were decidedly non-trinitarian. I say this because if we had been trinitarian, then unmistakably we would have had very definite views about the Holy Spirit being a person. Without three persons there cannot be a trinity doctrine. Joseph Waggoner then says

"Prevailing ideas of person are very diverse, often crude, and the word is differently understood; so that unity of opinion on this point cannot be expected until all shall be able to define precisely what they mean by the word, or until all shall agree upon one particular sense in which the word shall be used. But as this agreement does not exist, it seems that a discussion of the subject cannot be profitable, especially as it is not a question of direct revelation." (*Ibid*)

According to Waggoner, the problem of the Holy Spirit was with the word person. He is saying that because there is no precise agreement on what is actually meant by this word, discussion on this subject is not profitable. He also maintains that "it is not a question of direct revelation", meaning, one would assume, that the Bible did not specifically state it. Waggoner then said

"We have a right to be positive in our faith and our statements only when the words of Scripture are so direct as to bring the subject within the range of positive proof.

We are not only willing but anxious to leave it just where the word of God leaves it. From it we learn that the Spirit of God is that awful and mysterious

power which proceeds from the throne of the universe, and which is the efficient actor in the work of creation and of redemption.” (*Ibid*)

From the above, we can see that Waggoner was saying that it was the term person that was really in question. He also says that it is best to only describe the Holy Spirit as is described within the Bible and go no further. In itself, this is a very fair comment to make.

Another renowned pioneer, namely Dudley Canright, all the time he was a Seventh-day Adventist, quite vocally opposed the trinity doctrine. It must be said though that after he had apostatised from the Seventh-day Adventist faith and became a Baptist minister, he did embrace this very doctrine that he once so passionately rejected.

When he was a Seventh-day Adventist minister, Canright wrote an article called *The Holy Spirit*. This was published in the *Signs of the Times* in 1878, 3 years after Waggoner’s article above. In this article Canright wrote

“All trinitarian creeds make the Holy Ghost a person, equal in substance, power and eternity, and glory with the Father and the Son. Thus they claim three persons in the trinity, each one equal with both the others. If this be so, then the Holy Spirit is just as truly an individual, intelligent person as is the Father or the Son. But this we cannot believe. The Holy Spirit is not a person.

In all our prayers we naturally conceive of God as a person, and of the Son as a person; but who ever conceived of the Holy Spirit as a person, standing there beside the Father and equal to Him? Such a conception never enters one’s mind.” (*D. M. Canright, Signs of the Times July 25th 1878, article ‘The Holy Spirit’*)

Here we can see Canright completely repudiating the doctrine of the trinity. He is objecting to the reasoning that the Holy Spirit is a person like the Father and Son are persons. As I have previously said with regards to the pioneers’ endeavours to give an explanation of the Holy Spirit, we need to be generous in both our thoughts and with our judgment. We shall see that the problem area was always the definition of the word person.

Notice that Canright makes reference to “God as a person” and “the Son as a person”, two individual personal beings. All the time that Ellen White was alive, this was the non-trinitarian faith of Seventh-day Adventists. Note Canright also says that the thought of the Holy Spirit as standing next to God as a person, “never enters one’s mind”.

It should be noted here that never once did Ellen White say that she saw the Holy Spirit, neither did she say (as far as I know) that she actually saw the Father but what we do know is that she said that Jesus told her that He (the

Father) did have a form like Himself (see previous section). This is an interesting thought because when referring to Satan's apostasy, Ellen White repeatedly said that this fallen angel (Lucifer) was next to Christ in being honoured in Heaven and that Christ was next to God. It must be asked therefore, if the Holy Spirit is a person like God and Christ, then where was He?

Realising that many Christians (trinitarians mostly) believed the Holy Spirit to be a person like God and Christ, Canright asked

"If you say that it [the Holy Spirit] does [stand beside the Father], we ask of what form is the Holy Ghost? Is it like the Father and Son in the form of a man? (*Ibid*)

This is a reasonable question to ask. We can also see here that it was generally accepted by Seventh-day Adventists that we were originally made (created) in the outward image (outward resemblance) of both the Father and Son (see Genesis 1:26). This is as we noted that Ellen White believed (see previous section). Later in his article Canright says

"Many times it is explicitly declared that both the Father and Son have a throne, Rev 3:21. "But the throne of God and the lamb shall be in it." Rev. 22:3. But where is the throne of the Holy Spirit? Who ever heard of that? How astonishing, if the Holy Spirit is the same as the Father and Son, and is one of the trinity, equal with them in power, substance and glory! How is it we ask, that it has no throne while the others have? (*Ibid*)

Canright is here applying common sense and logic. If the Holy Spirit is a person like God and Christ are persons then where is His throne? This, it must be admitted, is a reasonable question to ask. Canright also went on to reason

"Another important fact is that while very much is said about the great love that exists between the Father and Son, how tenderly the Father loves the Son, and how devotedly the Son loves the Father, yet not one word is said about the Father's (sic) loving the Holy Ghost." (*Ibid*)

Canright's reasoning cannot be faulted. He also rightly observes

"Nor that the Son loves the Holy Ghost nor that the Holy Ghost loves the Father and Son. No such thought is ever expressed. How shall we account for this fact if the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are three persons alike and equal? How astonishing we say that much is said about the mutual love between the Father and Son, and yet not one word is said about a similar love between the Holy Ghost and the other two persons! Why is he left out in this manner? The truth is evident. The Holy Spirit is not a person, not an individual, *but is an influence or power proceeding from the Godhead*" (*ibid*)

I am sure that when thinking it through, most would appreciate Canright's

reasoning. He reasons that if the Holy Spirit is an individual like God and Christ then why are the Scriptures silent on the love of them (God and Christ) for Him (the Holy Spirit) and of course, vice versa. Canright objected to the idea of three persons all being the same and equal. Thus it was that in the process he felt compelled to conclude that the Holy Spirit is an influence or power “[proceeding from the Godhead](#)” (note he does not say from God or Christ singly).

Whilst we can see that Canright takes the view that the Holy Spirit is not a person, we need to remember here that what he was actually trying to say was that this mysterious Divine Being was not a person like the Father and Son (God and Christ) are persons. As he said “[The Holy Spirit is not a person, not an individual](#)”.

It goes without saying that Canright could not accept, like he regarded both the Father and Son, that the Holy Spirit was a physical being. In other words, the problem again goes back to what is meant by the concept of person. Canright is basing his conclusions on the reasoning that the Holy Spirit is either a person or He is not a person, meaning possibly that he (Canright) could not see any alternatives. Remember, this was 1878, many years before Ellen White stressed the view that the Holy Spirit was a personality.

In trying to express his particular view, Canright feels driven to say (obviously too in support of his anti-trinitarian reasoning) that the Holy Spirit is not a person, thus He finds himself restricted by human words and expressions. In conclusion of his argument he says

“[Further more, it is never said that the Holy Spirit loves man; yet it is frequently declared how greatly both the Father and Son do love man. But no such thing is ever said of the Holy Ghost. How shall we account for this?](#)” (*Ibid*)

Again this is reasonable thinking. It is also a good question that trinitarians should ask of their theology. How do we account for the fact that nowhere in the Scriptures does it say that the Holy Spirit loves man? There must be an answer to this question. After all, as Canright says, they (the Scriptures) do tell us that both the Father and Son love us. Canright then states

“[Then, almost every illustration that is given of the Holy Spirit is inconsistent with the idea of being a person.](#)” (*Ibid*)

It must be admitted that the reasoning of Canright is logical and totally based on Scripture. I say this because the way that the Scriptures illustrate the Holy Spirit, it is nothing like we think of a person in the normal sense (usual concept) of the word.

Canright then goes on to say that the Holy Spirit is ‘poured out, ‘shed abroad’ and ‘drank’ etc. He also says that people are ‘baptised’ with the Holy Spirit. This

he concludes is inconsistent with the way of which a person is normally spoken. Thus he concludes

“All these illustrations plainly show that the Spirit of God is not an individual.” (*Ibid*)

Now we can see the full import of Canright’s reasoning, meaning that we can see that he does not believe the Holy Spirit to be an individual (such as are both the Father and Son). He is saying that in this sense, the Holy Spirit is different. He reasons that if the Holy Spirit is ‘poured out’ and ‘drank’ etc, then He cannot be a person like God and Christ.

As I have said before, I believe that we need here to be generous with our thoughts about what Canright and the other pioneers were saying. All of the pioneers, especially those in the very early days of Seventh-day Adventism, found it extremely difficult to conclude (for very good reasons) that the Holy Spirit was a person exactly like the Father and Son. From my studies, I can only conclude that even Ellen White agreed that this was so. She even warned Seventh-day Adventists (and this was in the early 1900’s) not to attempt to explain or define the nature of the Holy Spirit. This was because (as she said), it is a mystery that God has chosen not to reveal. We shall see this in section thirty-three.

Our pioneers regarded the Holy Spirit as both the Father and the Son omnipresent. This does not necessarily deny that the Holy Spirit is a personality but it does conclude that He is not a person exactly like the Father and Son. We shall see this as we progress through these studies.

Further reasoning of Canright

Two weeks later, Canright concluded his article in the *Signs of the Times* on the Holy Spirit. This he did by appealing to the Greek language. He says at the very beginning of this conclusion

“Another fact which has a strong bearing on this question is that the word spirit, Greek *pneuma*, is always neuter, that is neither masculine or feminine. All the pronouns referring to the Holy Ghost are neuter, except when the Holy Ghost is personified, as the comforter, Greek, *Parakletos*, John 14:16. 26. Here of course it would have to be masculine. If the Holy Spirit is a person, the pronouns referring to it should be in the masculine, which they never are.” (*D. M. Canright, Signs of the Times, August 8th 1878, ‘The Holy Spirit’*)

Canright’s reasoning is that because the Greek word (*pneuma*) translated ‘Spirit’ is neuter (having no gender), then the pronouns ‘he’ or a ‘she’ cannot have application to it. He also explains that it is only when by the use of the Greek word *Parakletos* (which is masculine) that the Spirit “is personified” as the comforter and specific gender is applied. Note he says that, “it would have to be

masculine". In other words (Canright is saying), the reasoning behind why the Bible translators refer to the Comforter as a 'He' is that they are required to do so to be grammatically correct. Canright then asks

"It is said that Christ, was anointed with the Holy Ghost. Acts 10:38. Was one person of the trinity anointed with another person of the trinity? How could you anoint one person with another? But we can readily conceive how God could put his Spirit, and power, upon Jesus." (*Ibid*)

From a common sense standpoint, who would attempt to argue with Canright's reasoning?

As far as not being reasonable to conclude that the Scriptures reveal the Holy Spirit to be a person like God and Christ, Canright said much more but it is far too much to detail here. We can well sense though Canright's reasoning.

Later quotes from the pioneers concerning the Holy Spirit

Regarding the Holy Spirit, we shall now look at some more quotes of the pioneers. We shall also see why to describe Him they were all struggling with human words, also that very often these words were spoken in repudiation of the trinity doctrine (three individual persons in one indivisible substance or one being of God). As editor of the *Review and Herald*, Uriah Smith answered questions sent in by its readers. One such question was

"J. W. W. asks: 'Are we to understand that the Holy Ghost is a person, the same as the Father and the Son? Some claim that it is, others that it is not.'" (*Review and Herald, Oct. 28th, 1890, 'The Question Chair*)

Who these "Some" and "others" are (whether it be Seventh-day Adventists or otherwise) is not stated but it is more than likely that the questioner himself was a Seventh-day Adventist. Note the reference to "it".

Note very importantly that it was not being asked if the Holy Spirit is a person but is the Holy Spirit a person "the same as the Father and the Son?" This question implies that the reader believed that the Father and Son (God and Christ) were two separate individual persons who both had forms of their own. As we noted in the previous section, whilst Ellen White was alive, this was the consistent faith of Seventh-day Adventists. Uriah Smith answered

"The terms 'Holy Ghost,' are a harsh and repulsive translation. It should be 'Holy Spirit' (hagion pneuma) in every instance. This Spirit is the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of Christ; the Spirit being the same whether it is spoken of as pertaining to God or Christ." (*Ibid*)

Notice here, as did Ellen White, that Uriah Smith differentiates between God and Christ. We shall also see below that again like Ellen White, Smith uses these two terms synonymously with Father and Son.

Note particularly Smith's reasoning regarding the Holy Spirit. He is saying that when the Holy Spirit is referred to it is the same as saying the Spirit of God or the Spirit of Christ. Smith then says (as we have seen that Canright reasoned)

“But respecting this Spirit, the Bible uses expressions which cannot be harmonized with the idea that it is a person like the Father and the Son. Rather it is shown to be a divine influence from them both, the medium which represents their presence and by which they have knowledge and power through all the universe, when not personally present.” (*Ibid*)

Note Smith's words that the Holy Spirit could not be “a person like the Father and the Son”. This was the very same as Canright's reasoning. He too could not see any alternatives. In other words, Smith reasoned that either the Holy Spirit was an individual like God and Christ or He was not. In Smith's thinking there was no middle road. Notice again, agreeing with Canright's reasoning, Smith's latter statement about the Spirit being both God and Christ's presence when they (God and Christ) are “not personally present”. Smith then adds

“Christ is a person, now officiating as priest in the sanctuary in heaven; and yet he says that wherever two or three are gathered in his name, he is there in the midst. Mt. 18:20. How? Not personally, but by his Spirit.” (*Ibid*)

Smith says that Christ does not fulfil His promise to be with His disciples by being “personally” present, but by being with them “by his Spirit”. He then says (again as did Canright)

“In one of Christ's discourses (John, chapters 14,15, and 16) this Spirit is personified as 'the Comforter,' and as such has the personal and relative pronouns, 'he,' 'him,' and 'whom,' applied to it. But usually it is spoken of in a way to show that it cannot be a person, like the Father and the Son. For instance, it is often said to be 'poured out' and 'shed abroad.' But we never read about God or Christ being poured out or shed abroad.” (*Ibid*)

In answering this reader's question, Uriah Smith stresses that the Holy Spirit is not a person like the Father and Son, which is what the questioner asked.

A changing Holy Spirit

M. C. Wilcox (1853-1935) held the position of Editor in Chief of the *Signs of the Times* for 22 years (1891-1913).

Ordained in 1880, four years later he became the first editor of the *Present Truth* (published in Grimsby in England). This was after serving one year as assistant to Uriah Smith who was then the editor of the *Review and Herald*. Three years later he returned to America and became assistant editor of the *Signs of the Times*. After this, as we have noted above, he was Editor in Chief for twenty-two years. From 1913 to 1933, with the exception of one year when he left to act as Dean of Theology at the College of Medical Evangelists, he was the editor of the

Pacific Press. We can see therefore that this man Wilcox was very well respected and spent almost all of his time as a Seventh-day Adventist in holding either assistant or Editor in Chief offices. We can see therefore that he knew exactly what was believed and taught by Seventh-day Adventists, even into the 1930's (note he died in 1935).

As the 19th century was drawing to a close, Wilcox (as editor) wrote an article in the *Signs of the Times* called *The Spirit of Life*. After saying in the article that God is the source of all life, he asks

“But God is a person; how can His life be everywhere present?” (M. C. Wilcox, *Signs of the Times*, June 2nd, 1898, ‘*The Spirit of Life*’)

Again we see a pioneer saying that God is a person in His own right. He then answers his own question by saying

“God is everywhere present by His Spirit” (*Ibid*)

He also adds

“The presence of God is therefore His Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit is therefore the life of God.” (*Ibid*)

Wilcox is saying here that God is a person yet is everywhere present by His Holy Spirit. Note he says that the Holy Spirit is “the life of God.” This is very important. We shall see in section thirty-three and section thirty-four that this was also the view of Ellen White.

During his time as editor of the *Signs of the Times*, Wilcox compiled a book that was a collection of questions that had appeared previously in the *Signs of the Times*. Quite appropriately, this publication was called *Questions and Answers* and had, as far as my studies have led me to believe, four different publications. The first two were in 1911 and 1919 whilst the third was the year of his death. The fourth was in 1938, 3 years after he had died. It is in the latter that we see a changed Holy Spirit.

In the 1911 edition of this book (this was whilst both Wilcox and Ellen White were still alive, also whilst the faith of Seventh-day Adventists was still decidedly non-trinitarian), the question was posed in this book

“What is the difference between the Holy Spirit and the ministering spirits (angels), or are they the same?” (M. C. Wilcox, *Questions And Answers*, Pacific Press, 1911 p.181)

Wilcox answers

“The Holy Spirit is the mighty energy of the Godhead, the life and power of

God flowing out from Him to all parts of the universe, and thus making a living connection between His throne and all creation.” (*Ibid*)

Again we see the Holy Spirit described as the “life” of God. Note that this was in the 1911 edition of this book. Wilcox then says

“As is expressed by another: 'The Holy Spirit is the breath of spiritual life in the soul. The impartation of the Spirit is the impartation of the life of Christ.' It thus makes Christ everywhere present.” (*Ibid*)

Wilcox does not say so but he was actually quoting here from *Desire of Ages*. We shall look at this again in section thirty-four when we look at what Ellen White said about the Holy Spirit. Note for now though that the Holy Spirit is once again referred to as ‘life’, in particular “the breath of spiritual life in the soul” and “the life of Christ”.

Wilcox then uses the telephone as an illustration of his belief. He says

“To use a crude illustration, just as a telephone carries the voice of a man, and so makes that voice present miles away, so the Holy Spirit carries with it all the potency in Christ making Him everywhere present with all His power, and revealing Him to those in harmony with His law. Thus the Spirit is personified in Christ and God, but never revealed as a separate person” (*Ibid*)

This, is as we noted above, was the office work of the Holy Spirit. This was in 1911, 13 years after *Desire of Ages* was published. Wilcox adds in this same 1911 edition

“Never are we told to pray to the Spirit; but to God for the Spirit. Never do we find in the Scriptures prayers to the Spirit, but for the Spirit.” (*Ibid*)

Here again (like Canright) we see someone following the logic of the Scriptures. Wilcox also added

“The Spirit is the creative power of God by which angels and all other creatures came into existence. God fills them with His Spirit, His life, and makes them ministers of His life and power to others, especially to His people”. (*Ibid*)

Wilcox here describes the Holy Spirit as the “life” of God whilst we saw above that he says it is also the “life of Christ”. This he says was also the “life” that originally filled all of God’s created beings. This reminds us of where Ellen White said

“In the creation of man was manifest the agency of a personal God. When God had made man in His image, the human form was perfect in all its

arrangements, but it was without life. Then a personal, self-existing God breathed into that form the breath of life, and man became a living, breathing, intelligent being. All parts of the human organism were put in action. The heart, the arteries, the veins, the tongue, the hands, the feet, the senses, the perceptions of the mind--all began their work, and all were placed under law. Man became a living soul. Through Jesus Christ a personal God created man and endowed him with intelligence and power.”
(Ellen G. White, 8th Volume testimonies page 264, ‘The essential knowledge’ 1904)

In both the 1919 and 1938 edition of the book *Questions and Answers*, the question is asked

“Some say the Holy Spirit is a person; others say He is a personality; and others, a power only. Till how long should this be a matter of discussion?”
(Questions And Answers Volume 11, 1919, page 36, 1938 editions, page 33)

In answer to this question Wilcox said

“The personality of the Holy Spirit will probably be a matter of discussion always.” *(Ibid)*

As we can see for ourselves today, the prediction of Wilcox was correct. It is still a debate concerning person and personality etc. He then says

“Sometimes the Spirit is mentioned as being 'poured out,' as in Acts 2. All through the Scriptures, the Spirit is represented as being the operating power of God” *(Ibid)*

He later says

“The reason why the Scriptures speak of the Holy Spirit as a person, it seems to us, is that it brings to us, and to every soul that believes, the personal presence of our Lord Jesus Christ”. *(Ibid, also see 1919 edition page 37, 1938 edition page 34)*

Note the words “it seems to us”. This was the view of Seventh-day Adventists. It is that the Holy Spirit is the “personal presence” of Christ.

Immediately following, Wilcox quotes from John chapter 14. This is where Jesus said that with the coming of the Comforter, He Himself (Jesus) would come to the disciples (John 14:18). Wilcox also quotes verse 23 of the same chapter where Jesus said that by the means of the comforter, the Father would also come and dwell within the believer (John 14:23). Wilcox then says

“But both the Father and the Son come by the Holy Spirit” *(Ibid)*

Making reference to John 16:7 where Jesus again talks of the coming of the Comforter Wilcox observes

“His <Jesus> disciples could not realize the presence of the Spirit of God as long as Christ was with them personally. In that sense, He could be with those only who were in His immediate presence. But when He went away, and the Spirit came, it could make Christ present with every one, wherever that one was – with Paul in Athens, Peter in Jerusalem, Matthew in India, John in Patmos.” (*Questions And Answers Volume 11, 1919, page 38, 1938 editions, page 35*)

Wilcox is expressing the view that although Jesus was not physically present, He would be present by the means of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit then, to the believer, is the personal presence of Christ.

Now we come to something that is really very interesting. It is a changing Holy Spirit. In the 1919 edition (from which we have just been quoting), Wilcox says in the next paragraph

“Wherever God's children are, there is the Spirit - not an individual person, as we look upon persons, but having the power to make present the Father and the Son.” (*Ibid*)

As we noted above, this statement was in keeping with what can be termed historic Seventh-day Adventism. This is when the Holy Spirit was not regarded to be an individual person such as are God and Christ but the personal presence of them both when the latter two divine beings were not physically present. Whilst Ellen White was alive, this was the preponderant faith of Seventh-day Adventists therefore it was the early 1900's faith of Seventh-day Adventism.

Very importantly, now note just what it says in the 1938 edition of this book. This was after both Wilcox and Ellen White had died, also when trinitarian concepts were being introduced to Seventh-day Adventists. This latter sentence now simply says

“Wherever God's children are, there is the Spirit.” (*Ibid 1938 edition page 35*)

The latter part of this sentence, as it appeared in the 1919 edition saying that the Holy Spirit is “not an individual person, as we look upon persons” (see above), was, in the 1938 edition, completely expunged, thus removing its non-trinitarian emphasis.

There was almost 20 years between these two editions (1919 and 1938). This period was the early part of the transition time from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism. This was the time period when by urging upon them a trinitarian view of the Holy Spirit and Christ rather than the non-trinitarian view as held by

all of our pioneers, our church leadership began to change the thinking of Seventh-day Adventists. As we shall see in section forty-four, this change of the Holy Spirit was one of the major difficulties to be surmounted in changing our faith to one that was trinitarian but it was, if this change was to take place, an absolute necessity.

More pioneer quotes and views on the Holy Spirit whilst Ellen White was alive

One person who actually spoke of the Holy Spirit as a person was Sarepta Myrenda Henry who, during her time as a Seventh-day Adventist, wrote many articles for the *Review and Herald*. She also wrote a book called *The Abiding Spirit*. Here is a quote from that book. She says in answer to the question as to whether the Holy Spirit is a person or just the power through which God works

"The pronouns used in connection with the Spirit must lead us to conclude that he is a person, - the personality of God which is the source of all power and life." (Sarepta Henry, *The Abiding Spirit*, 1899 page?).

Notice here that although Sarepta Henry says of the Holy Spirit that "he is a person", she also says that He is "the personality of God". Throughout the early part of that year, this same book was advertised in the *Review and Herald*. Such things were said about it as

"It is a small book, and is so full of good things that many will read it through at one reading. There are doubtless many things in regard to the Holy Spirit and its mission that this book can teach you." (*Review and Herald*, March 7th 1899, *Please bear in mind*)

Notice here that regarding the Holy Spirit it was said "its mission". This was in 1899.

Another person who spoke of the Holy Spirit as a personality was George Cidus Tenney (1847-1921). He was a long time serving member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church who, as co-editor of the *Review and Herald*, was asked a number of questions concerning the Holy Spirit. This was in the section "To Correspondents". Here is the question

"Please explain 1 John 5 8. (1) Is the word "spirit" synonymous with Holy Ghost of verse 7? (2) What is the Holy Ghost? How do we receive it, through God, or through angels? (3) Is the Comforter of John 16: 7, 8 the Holy Ghost? If so, how can it be alluded to as " him" and " he "? C. W. W." (*Review and Herald*, 9th June 1896, *To Correspondents*)

George Tenney answered with these statements (I have listed them separately for ease of reading)

(1) We might dispose of the first question by saying that the last portion of

verse seven and the first portion of verse eight is an interpolation, and has no place in the sacred Scriptures. It is not in the Revised Version, and it is well understood by Biblical scholars that those words were inserted by some one who desired to render more prominent an erroneous idea of the dogma of the Trinity.. The text should read like this, " For there are three that bear record, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one."

From the fact that " spirit " is not capitalized in the eighth verse, we would-infer that the interpolator did not have reference to the Holy Ghost in the contrast which he was drawing between the heavenly witnesses and the earthly witnesses.

(2) We cannot tell. We cannot describe the Holy Spirit. From the figures which are brought out in Revelation, Ezekiel, and other Scriptures, and from the language which is used in reference to the Holy Spirit, we are led to believe he is something more than an emanation from the mind of God. He is spoken of as a personality, and treated as such. He is included in the apostolic benedictions, and is spoken of by our Lord as acting in an independent and personal capacity, as teacher, guide, and comforter. He is an object of veneration, and is a heavenly intelligence, everywhere present, and always present. But as limited beings, we cannot understand the problems which the contemplation of the Deity presents to our minds.

(3) Undoubtedly the Comforter is the Holy Ghost. It is so declared in John 11: 26: " But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name." He does not come to us through the agency of angels; he is sent direct from the Father by the Son. And for reasons noted above, he is spoken of with the personal pronoun as an intelligent, independent existence. G. C. T.

Here we can see that whilst Tenney says that the Holy Spirit is spoken of as both a "personality" and "an object of veneration", he also says that the Holy Spirit cannot be defined. Notice though that he says that the Holy Spirit is a "heavenly intelligence, everywhere present and always present" also that He "is spoken of by our Lord as being in an independent and personal capacity". This was in 1896 but as we shall see in section thirty-three and section thirty-four, this was much the same conclusion in later years as was said by Ellen White. This was when she said that the nature of the Holy Spirit is beyond the comprehension of the human mind.

In one sense therefore, to say that the Holy Spirit is a person like God and Christ (as in the trinity view) is to say that we have resolved this divine mystery. It is also like saying that we have resolved it without the help of God because as we know, God has never revealed the nature of the Holy Spirit.

We can also see from this that whilst there was a decided emphasis by Tenney

to make the Holy Spirit a personality, there was also a strong reluctance, on his part, to say that He is a person exactly like the Father and Son. Tenney simply says that the Holy Spirit is indescribable, meaning that His very nature is totally beyond human words.

S. N. Haskell said much the same. As editor of the *Review and Herald*, and after saying that God's Spirit (the Holy Spirit) is a "full representation of himself", he wrote in 1899

"To reason out what God's Spirit is, is the same as reasoning out what God is, or the same as reasoning out what Christ is in his divinity. The fact may be grasped, but the explanation can not be given. It is a great mystery; and a mystery is that which can not be comprehended." (S. N. Haskell, *Review and Herald*, November 28th 1899, 'The Holy Spirit')

This was exactly the same reasoning as Ellen White. She too said that the nature of the Holy Spirit is a mystery. We shall see this later in the sections devoted to her views regarding this mystery.

It can be seen from all of these statements that even well into the 1900's, although the Holy Spirit was regarded as a personality, He was still not regarded as a person exactly like the Father and Son. The summary view of the pioneers was that the personality of the Holy Spirit was still surrounded with mystery but that He (the Holy Spirit) definitely belonged to both the Father and Son therefore he could not be separated from them as did Kellogg in his reasoning. We noted the latter in section twenty-six.

In section 32 we shall see more of the pioneers' beliefs regarding the Holy Spirit. This is where we shall see that just as was believed by Ellen White, the pioneers also believed that this divine personality is not only the life of God and Christ but also both of them omnipresent.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section thirty-two

The pioneers and the Holy Spirit (Part 2 of 2)

We shall now continue with our study regarding our pioneers' beliefs concerning the Holy Spirit.

As has been said in part one (the previous section), this study has been carried out to alleviate the many misunderstandings that are currently in vogue concerning the pioneers' beliefs concerning the Holy Spirit. We shall now emphasise, even though it was briefly touched upon in the previous section, just how the pioneers regarded this divine personality in relation to God and Christ.

The Holy Spirit – the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ

In a sermon at the 1891 General Conference session, Uriah Smith said

“The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God; it is also the Spirit of Christ. It is that divine, mysterious emanation through which they carry forward their great and infinite work. It is called the Eternal Spirit; it is a spirit that is omniscient [sic] and omnipresent; it is the spirit that moved, or brooded, upon the face of the waters in the early days when chaos reigned, and out of chaos was brought the beauty and the glory of this world.” (*Uriah Smith, Sermon delivered Sabbath March 14th 1891, General Conference Bulletin March 18th 1891, 'The Spirit of Prophecy and our relationship to It'*)

This was the view that appears was generally held by the late 19th century Seventh-day Adventists. It was even one that existed throughout the early 1900's. Note too that Smith says that this Spirit is omniscient meaning all knowing. This really is very important because it tells us that as editor of the *Review and Herald*, he did not believe that this was just the power of God. Note that like Ellen White, he too differentiates between God and Christ (refer to section thirty). Smith then says of the Holy Spirit

“It is the agency through which life is imparted; it is the medium through which all God's blessings and graces come to his people. It is the Comforter; it is the Spirit of Truth; it is the Spirit of Hope; it is the Spirit of Glory; it is the vital connection between us and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; for the apostle tells us that if we "have not the Spirit of Christ," we are "none of his." It is a spirit which is tender; which can be insulted, can be

grieved, can be quenched.” (*Ibid*)

Uriah Smith regarded the Holy Spirit as being absolutely everything as far as the gospel and a person’s salvation is concerned. This is why he called the Spirit “the vital connection”. Nothing more in that respect really needs to be said here. Note that this was in 1891.

Smith recognised that the Holy Spirit was not just the power of God. This can be seen in his answer to the question “Through what divine agency is the love of God imparted to us?” This is when he said (again differentiating between God and Christ)

“God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the sinner himself, are all concerned in the work of conversion; and when a person is converted, his heart is filled with love, -- love to God and love to his fellow-men. God is love, and Christ is love, and they have promised to take up their abode with the believer; and when they are dwelling in the heart, they of course bring perfect love with them.” (*Uriah Smith, Review and Herald, November 19th 1895 ‘In the question chair’*)

Smith believed there was something more to the Holy Spirit than just the power of God. A power certainly cannot be “concerned”. Note too that he lists all three personalities (four if you count the sinner) as though he was listing individual persons. He then said

Ask yourself a question here. Why did Smith not say that the Holy Spirit is love? The answer of course is: Just like the other pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism, he did not regard the Holy Spirit as an individual person like God and Christ but he did regard Him as the presence of them both. He also said

“We can hardly separate these agencies in the work. For instance, Christ created the worlds; but God created them through Christ. The Holy Spirit is the representative of God and Christ sent forth into all the earth. Rev. 5:5. The Holy Spirit works; but it is God and Christ working through it.” (*Ibid*)

Again we see Smith saying that the Holy Spirit is something other than just the power of God but refers to Him again as it. This was generally the view of the pioneers.

As a matter of passing interest here, a brief study of the spirit of prophecy writings shows that on many of an occasion, even Ellen White referred to the Holy Spirit as it. You will find a list of these here

http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/holyspirit/EGW_HolySpirit_it.pdf

As we have seen in the previous section, this is grammatically correct as far as the Greek is concerned (spirit = Greek pneuma).

The belief that the Holy Spirit was the Spirit of both God and Christ was the long held belief of Seventh-day Adventists, albeit it is a non-trinitarian concept. In 1883, after explaining the various operations of the Holy Spirit (too many to list here hence the ellipsis), J. M. Hopkins wrote

“ ... it is that one selfsame Holy Spirit of God, emanating from the presence of the Father and the Son.” (*J. M. Hopkins, Review and Herald, July 3rd 1883, ‘Grieve not the Spirit’*)

This is the very same belief that is expressed in Ellet Waggoner’s book *Christ and His Righteousness*. This is the publication (1890) that is said to depict his message at the Minneapolis Conference (1888). Waggoner wrote

“Finally, we know the Divine unity of the Father and the Son from the fact that both have the same Spirit. Paul, after saying that they that are in the flesh cannot please God, continues: “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” Rom. 8:9. Here we find that the Holy Spirit is both the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ.” (*E. J. Waggoner, Christ and His Righteousness, page 23, 1890*)

In 1898, M. C. Wilcox, then editor of the *Signs of the Times*, agreed with the above conclusions by saying

“For the Spirit of truth, the Comforter, The Holy Ghost brings with it to every soul and in every soul the presence of God the father, and Jesus Christ our Lord.” (*M. C. Wilcox, Signs of the Times, September 29th 1898 ‘The Spirit and Body of Christ’*)

This encapsulates what Seventh-day Adventists once believed concerning the Holy Spirit. Wilcox says that the Holy Spirit brings with it (or as we would say today, “with Him”), the presence of both God and Christ. Here we can see exactly what Seventh-day Adventists believed about the Holy Spirit. This belief was that it was not the Father and Son each physically present but it was the “presence” of them both. He explains this by saying

“The Spirit is a comforter in that it brings to every child of God the presence of Father and Son, bringing them as near to living faith as tho [sic] they were bodily present.” (*Ibid*)

Wilcox later said

“The Spirit testifies of Jesus. It dwelt in Him while He was here on earth. It enabled Him to do all He did do in mighty miracles and triumphant victories; and it is therefore also the Spirit of Christ. It witnesses of Christ; it is a manifestation of Christ to the believer.” (*Ibid*)

In 1898, M. C. Wilcox also wrote of the Holy Spirit

“It is in the Father, it is in Christ; it is in every member of the church of Christ” (*M. C. Wilcox, Signs of the Times, December 22nd 1898, ‘The Divine Unity’*)

Note again the use of the word ‘it’ with reference to the Holy Spirit but even more importantly note that Wilcox says that this it is in both God the Father and Christ as well as in every Christian. He does not say that the Holy Spirit is a separate person from God and Christ or like them.

In the *Review and Herald* in 1900, Tenney, like the other pioneers, speaks of the Holy Spirit as belonging to both the Father and the Son. He says

“To receive the message of the Spirit is to receive the message of the Father and the Son.” (*G. C. Tenney Review and Herald April 3rd 1900 ‘Blended Personalities’*)

He later says of the Holy Spirit

“He does not manifest himself as apart from the Father and the Son; but as *one* with and sent by the Father and Son.” (*Ibid*)

Once again we see that the Holy Spirit is not spoken of as an individual separate (apart) from the Father and the Son but belonging to them both yet at the same time He is spoken of as a personality. Note Tenney’s use of the pronouns “He” and “Himself”. Tenney says again of the Holy Spirit

“He would make us know his personality but ever in living connection with Christ. He abides in our hearts down here, while Christ Jesus is our advocate with the Father above: but he abides in us as Christ, making the very life that speaks and works in Christ to also speak and work in us. “Christ in you.

Let us not grow bold over the Spirit alone: but remember that he is ever with the Father and Son, and that whatever he speaks to us he speaks as from them: for it is written, “Whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak.” (*Ibid*)

Again we see the belief that whilst Christ is with His Father in Heaven, He is, by the Spirit, within every believer here on earth. Note the use again of “He” and “Himself”. Notice very importantly Tenney says “He [the Holy Spirit] would make us know his personality” but adds “ever in living connection with Christ”. Tenney then says

Note the use of “he” again. Tenney later says

“To know him is to know the Father and the Son, and these can not be truly known and really honored until we receive and know the Spirit: for no man can call Jesus Lord except by the Holy Spirit” (*Ibid*)

We can see from what Tenney says here that the Holy Spirit is always with the Father and the Son and that to know Him is “to know the Father and the Son”. Note again the use of personal pronouns (He and Him)

From the above, we can see clearly that according to the beliefs of the pioneers, the Holy Spirit is as the personal presence of both God the Father and Christ.

As the presence of both God and Christ

In a discourse at a General Conference Session in 1893, A. T. Jones asked the delegates if it was possible that he could have the mind of Christ without having the rest of Him. He answers this question himself by saying

“No, I cannot. Therefore as I cannot have the mind of Christ without the rest of him, it follows that I must have the personal presence of Christ.” (*A. T. Jones, General Conference Bulletin, February 13th, 14th, 1893, ‘The third angels message – No. 11*)

Jones then asks

“What is it that brings to you and me the personal presence of Jesus Christ? (*Ibid*)

He again answers his own question by saying that it is

“The Spirit of God. Turn to two texts, one in John and one in Ephesians, and I think that will be all we will have time to read tonight. John 14:18, “I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you”. He does not leave us comfortless, that is without a comforter. So He says I will come to you: but when he comes to us thus, we are not without a comforter. Then he does come to us by the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost.” (*Ibid*)

Jones is here referring to the promise of Jesus found in John 14:18 (see also verse 23 where Jesus says that with the coming of the Comforter, both the Father and the Son dwell within the believer). He then talks of the promise of Christ dwelling in the heart of believers and says

“We receive the promise of the Spirit through faith but what brings it? The Spirit of God; and when we have that, Christ dwells in the heart. Then it is the Holy Spirit that brings the personal presence of Jesus Christ; and in bringing his personal presence to us, he brings Himself.” (*Ibid*)

Again we see the belief that the coming of the Comforter brings the “personal presence” of Christ to each believer. Notice especially the final stanza. Jones is

saying that the Holy Spirit is Christ Himself. We shall see in section thirty-three that this was also what we have been told through Ellen White.

Just a few weeks later in a series of talks on the Holy Spirit, W. W. Prescott says the very same thing. He says of the power of the Holy Spirit

“The power is in Christ, not in us, and the having the power is the personal presence of Christ in us; and that does not necessarily mean in the sense of a thrill of power in us all the time but it means an abiding faith that Christ is in us.” (*W. W. Prescott, General Conference bulletin March 2nd 1893 ‘The promise of the Holy Spirit – No. 9)*

The next day he says

“The Spirit is to glorify Christ. That is, he is to reveal Christ to us and in us. He is to bring to us the presence of Christ and what he really is; to enlighten our minds as to the true character of Christ, and then to reveal that character in us. That will glorify Christ. That will interpret Christ to the world.” (*W. W. Prescott, General Conference Bulletin, 3rd March 1893, ‘The promise of the Holy Spirit No. 10’)*

Two years later (1895), A. T. Jones also said at a General Conference Session

“That which brings to us the mind of Jesus Christ is the Holy Ghost. Indeed, the Spirit of God brings Jesus Christ himself to us. By the Holy Ghost the real presence of Christ is with us and dwells in us. Can he bring Christ to us without bringing the mind of Christ to us? — Assuredly not.” (*A. T. Jones, General Conference Bulletin February 25th 1895, ‘Third angel’s message No. 13)*

Jones also said two months later

“Christ taught that his presence should go with his people still. “I am with you always even until the end of the world.” This is by the Holy Ghost; and by faith the Holy Ghost is received.” (*A. T. Jones GC Bulletin April 1895, ‘Third angels message – No. 26’)*

John Loughborough (1832-1924) was just about the longest serving pioneer of Seventh-day Adventism (73 years). He was also the last of the pioneers to die.

In 1898 and after quoting Ps. 139:7-10 (this is where the psalmist says that wherever he goes, God’s Spirit – God’s presence – is there) he said

“We learn from this language that when we speak of the Spirit of God we are really speaking of his presence and power.” (*J. N. Loughborough, Review and Herald, September 20th 1898, ‘The Spirit of God’)*

It also said in the *Review and Herald* of September 23rd 1902 concerning Jesus (these studies were comments on the Sabbath School lesson)

“The promise of his continued presence with his disciples in his representative, the Holy Spirit, was the greatest promise which Jesus could make to his disciples just before the time when he was to take his bodily presence from them. "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." Jesus was' about to give himself as the living sacrifice for a fallen world, and "through this sacrifice the mighty influence of the Holy Spirit was given to the world." (*Review and Herald 23rd Sept 1902 'Studies in the Gospel Message)*

Note that the Holy Spirit was said to be the “continued presence” of Christ when the latter’s “bodily presence” had been removed. It then added

“Thus the living presence of the Father and the Son would be found in and among the people of God.” (*Ibid*)

Here we can see expressed, in 1902 regarding the Holy Spirit, the faith of Seventh-day Adventists. He is said to be “the living presence” of both “the Father and the Son”. This is the faith from which Ellen White said that there would be a departing (see section one). In the Australian *Signs of the Times* in 1925, R. A. Salton said

“THE outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost brought to the disciples of Jesus the certain, inward knowledge of the reality of the indwelling Christ; for, looking forward to that day, the Lord said: "At that day ye shall know that I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you." John 14:20.

What closer relationship between Father, Son, and the believer could there be than this? And all this could be realised only by the coming of the Comforter, whom He had promised: "And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth." John 14: 16, 17. Jesus further said: "If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and we [Father and Son] will come unto him, and make our abode with him." John 14: 23.

Just think of it a moment: Father and Son making their abode in the hearts of the believers. What wonderful condescension on their part, what great love that causes the God of heaven to dwell in sinful flesh! And on the other hand, what a wonderful privilege is the believer's! The whole power of the Trinity is at his command, into whose name he is baptised. Herein lies the hope of glory— "Christ in you." Col. 1: 27. “(R. A. Salton, *The Australasian*

Signs of the Times, February 23rd 1925, 'The greatest experience in life')

Notice here that with regards to this close relationship, Salton does not include the Holy Spirit. He depicts the indwelling Holy Spirit as being the cause of this relationship. Salton concluded

“The presence of the indwelling Christ in the soul of the believer in Jesus is the only passport to heaven. Could any human being desire any greater blessing or higher attainment, or deeper knowledge, than this—the presence within of the risen Christ, "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"? Col. 2: 3.” (*Ibid*)

By 1925, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit was still regarded as the indwelling of both God and Christ.

The importance of the Holy Spirit

From what we have seen, it should go without saying that the pioneers regarded the Holy Spirit and His work as being of the highest importance. They believed that everything about the gospel concerned Him. As far back as 1862 and regarding the belief of some that there was no Spirit, a man by the name of Goodrich wrote

“This error strikes at the very root of the matter, and with one fell stroke it crushes down everything before it, leaving man utterly destitute of all goodness. I do not contend against forms, neither do I deny the worth of doctrine; yet I do say that when we take out the Spirit of God from the religion of the Bible, the rest that remains is not worth speaking about.

How my heart has been pained within me at hearing men (teachers, even) who profess to be looking for Christ, and expecting to be changed when he comes, preach a gospel virtually leaving out the Spirit of God and its office work upon the hearts of men. The tendency and result of such teaching is utter darkness and death.” (*E. Goodrich, Review and Herald, January 28th 1862, 'No Spirit'*)

He concluded his article

“The plan of redemption in all its specifications and workings is divine, and the Spirit of the living God, the Holy Ghost, is the living and acting agent by which men are prepared to enjoy the glories of that God and the immortal age revealed in the Scriptures.” (*Ibid*)

Even though he may not have defined the Holy Spirit as a personality, Goodrich is saying that this divine agency is a “living agent”. D. Hildreth (again in 1862) wrote in the *Review and Herald*

“The Lord even helps us to supplicate a throne of grace. What more can we

ask? Paul speaks of this in Rom. viii, 26, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought ; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us;" that is, the Spirit prays through us. This reflects upon the benevolence: love, and condescension of God in the highest degree. What more can be done than has been done for us." (*D. Hildreth, Review and Herald, April 1st 1862, 'A comforting promise'*)

In 1883, in an article called *Grieve not the Spirit* (already quoted from above), J. M. Hopkins wrote

"Seeing these things are so, how we should welcome that holy messenger to our hearts, and yet how careful we should be lest we grieve or offend him, and he leave us forever! (*J. M. Hopkins, Review and Herald, July 3^d 1883, 'Grieve not the Spirit'*)

Note that Hopkins refers to the Holy Spirit as 'him' as well as "that Holy messenger". This was in 1883. Later in the same article he wrote

"The hasty, unkind word, the little overreachings in business transactions, the exaggerations in conversation, the frettings in the home circle, the little omissions of duty, the sinful gratification of appetite, the little bickerings among brethren, idleness, neglect of daily reading the Scriptures, and of secret prayer,--all these "grieve the Holy Spirit of God," and hinder the sealing work." (*Ibid*)

This was typical of just what it was that the pioneers believed and taught about the Holy Spirit. Rather than accenting on what He was, they emphasised the importance of the work He does within our hearts. It was this that they regarded as being of the main importance. Certainly the Old Testament believers never regarded God's Spirit (the Holy Spirit) as a personality. That much we know for sure.

In 1883 again, E. Swift wrote an article listing a number of the operations through which the individual is benefited of the Holy Spirit. As can be seen, each one he lists is prefixed by the pronoun He. These are such as (note this was in 1883)

"He convinces us of our sinfulness ...", He is the author of the new birth, the wicket gate through which we must pass as we enter the narrow gate that leads to the celestial city ..." as well as "He is our comforter." (*J. E. Swift, Review and Herald, July 3^d 1883, 'Our Companion'*)

Swift later appeals

"Dear brethren, if we would all comply with this requirement, and "be filled with the Spirit," in a short time God's jewels would all be found, and we be gathered home. Notice, the Spirit is not an occasional visitor, -- one who comes and goes, -- but if we will let him, he will according to the promise

(John 14:16), abide with us forever.” *(Ibid)*

Again we see Swift using the pronoun He when he speaks of the Holy Spirit. This was in 1883. Nine years previous to this in the same publication J. Clarke said

“Christianity, without the Spirit of God, is an empty, dry theory, and the mind, which is taken up with knowledge without the good influence of God's Spirit is like an observatory without a telescope, or a lantern without oil.

The Spirit of God is a reality. It is as really a living reality as God himself, and is the great moving agent of God in the establishment and continuation of Christianity in the world.” *(J. Clarke, Review and Herald, March 10th 1874, 'Be filled with the Spirit')*

Note Clarke's words carefully. He says that the Holy Spirit is as much “a living reality as God himself”. This was in 1874. He concludes

“The absence of the Spirit has caused all our present indifference; and its presence will cause all our hardness and indifference to melt away.” *(Ibid)*

What human words could convey more accurately the importance of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer? Note though that the Holy Spirit is referred to here as it.

Conclusion

From the above and part one (see previous section), we can clearly see that the early pioneers placed a supreme importance on both the Holy Spirit and His work. Never did they underestimate Him or undervalue the part that He plays in the plan of salvation. In this respect therefore, we should never attempt to denigrate these pioneers, even if some of them did not regard the Holy Spirit as a personality or as a person like God and Christ.

It must be said again though that even after Ellen White had said that the Holy Spirit was a personality, Seventh-day Adventists still did not regard Him as a person exactly like God and Christ. Many regard Him the same today.

So let's ask the question, were Ellen White's views of the Holy Spirit very much different from those of the pioneers? This we shall see in the next section (thirty-three).

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section thirty-three

Ellen White and the Holy Spirit (Part 1 of 2)

With regards to Ellen White's beliefs concerning the Holy Spirit, there are literally hundreds of quotations that came from her pen but because space here is very limited, we can only quote some of them. There will be enough though to give us a balanced view as to what she really did believe about this mysterious divine personality.

As we shall see as we go through this study, as far as Ellen White was concerned, the most important aspect of the Holy Spirit was that when He dwelt within a person, it was as the presence of our Lord within, thus it could be said that those who receive this presence (the Holy Spirit) were partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4).

The Holy Spirit – as the personal presence of Christ

In 1892, Ellen White penned these words

“The work of the holy Spirit is immeasurably great. It is from this source that power and efficiency come to the worker for God; and the holy Spirit is the comforter, as the personal presence of Christ to the soul. He who looks to Christ in simple, childlike faith, is made a partaker of the divine nature through the agency of the holy Spirit” (Ellen G. White, Review and Herald 29th November 1892, ‘The perils and privileges of the last days (concluded)’)

How much different was this than what the pioneers believed concerning the Holy Spirit (see section thirty-one and section thirty-two)? According to Ellen White, the presence of the Holy Spirit is *“as the personal presence of Christ to the soul”*. This was exactly the same as said by our pioneers. We are told here that when the Holy Spirit dwells within, we are then the partakers of the divine nature (see 2 Peter 1:4)

Over a decade later in 1903, Ellen White also said (this was after she emphasised that the Holy Spirit is a personality)

“Shall we not wrestle with God in prayer, asking for the Holy Spirit to come

into every heart? The presence of Christ, manifest among us, would cure the leprosy of unbelief that has made our service so weak and inefficient. We need the breath of the divine life breathed into us.” (*Ellen G. White, 8th Vol. Testimonies page 46 ‘Present opportunities’ 1904, see also Review and Herald 26th November 1903 ‘A view of the conflict)*

Note again we are told that this indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the very “presence of Christ”. Notice too that this is said to be “the breath of the divine life”. This is very important to us in both our theological and historical studies.

We also need to remember that Ellen White said this after saying that the Holy Spirit is a personality. She is therefore saying that as a personality, the Holy Spirit dwells within millions of different people at the same time (those who have experienced conversion). Does this depict the Holy Spirit as being a person just like God and Christ are persons? Notice here that the Father and Son do not dwell in Christians other than by reason of the indwelling Spirit. In other words, if the Holy Spirit does not dwell within, then the Father and Son do not dwell within. Ellen White also said in respect of the creation of Adam

“When God had made man in His image, the human form was perfect in all its arrangements, but it was without life. Then a personal, self-existing God breathed into that form the breath of life, and man became a living, breathing, intelligent being.”(*Ellen G. White, 8th Volume testimonies page 264, ‘The essential knowledge’, 1904)*

She also said three years later in 1908

“The religion of Christ means much more than the forgiveness of sin. It means taking away our sins, and filling the vacuum with the Holy Spirit. It means divine illumination, rejoicing in God. It means a heart emptied of self, and blessed with the abiding presence of Christ.” (*Ellen G. White, Bible Training School, 1st October 1908, ‘True Worship, see also Review and Herald 10th June 1902, ‘The promise of the Spirit and Review and Herald, 12th November 1914, Preparing for Christ’s return)*

Again we see Ellen White saying, as did the pioneers (see section thirty-one and section thirty-two) that the Holy Spirit is “the abiding presence of Christ”. Note this was now 1908, many years after she first said that the Holy Spirit is a personality. It was also 10 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*. This was no different than what she had always been saying. In 1894 she wrote regarding the parable of the labourers (Matthew 20:1-16) and the final judgment scene

“The righteous are represented as wondering what they have done for which they are to be so liberally rewarded. They had had the abiding presence of Christ in their hearts; they had been imbued with his Spirit, and without conscious effort on their part; they had been serving Christ in the person of his saints, and had thereby gained the sure reward.” (*Ellen G.*

White. Review and Herald, 3rd July 1894, 'Parable of the laborers)

Again we see Ellen White saying that the Holy Spirit is “the abiding presence of Christ”.

Here is a very interesting quote from Ellen White’s writings. It is an immense help in understanding how she regarded the Holy Spirit. This is with reference to the time when God raises the unrighteous to life after the thousand years in Heaven are ended (meaning after the millennium). She says

“The presence of Christ having been removed, Satan works wonders to support his claims.” (*Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, 1911 Edition page 663 'The Controversy ended'*)

Note here what is removed? It is the “presence of Christ”. This cannot mean the bodily presence of Christ because this would have been withdrawn from the earth at the ascension over 3000 years previously. It can only be concluded that this “presence” is the Holy Spirit. Allow me to explain.

This final and total withdrawal of Christ’s presence (the Holy Spirit) from this earth happens immediately prior to the return of Jesus. This is why at that time there will be a time of trouble like there never was before (see Daniel 12:1). In other words, there will be no Holy Spirit to hold in check the unrighteous. This is followed by the return of Jesus, also the taking of God’s people to heaven for a thousand years (see Revelation 20:1-6).

In the above quote therefore, Ellen White is saying that after the thousand years is finished (when the unsaved are raised to life) there is still no “presence of Christ” to hold them in check. This “presence of Christ” removed therefore, as in the Ellen White quote above, is the withdrawal of both the Holy Spirit and His controlling influence. To put this in another way, remove the Holy Spirit and you remove the presence of Christ. It is one and the same thing. The Holy Spirit is the “presence of Christ”.

This same “presence of Christ” (the Holy Spirit) is also that which gives God’s people their power. As Ellen White said in 1903

“God calls upon His people, many of whom are but half awake, to arouse, and engage in earnest labor, praying for strength for service. Workers are needed. Receive the Holy Spirit, and your efforts will be successful. Christ's presence is what gives power.” (*Ellen G. White, The Central Advance, February 25th 1903*)

Here Ellen White equates the presence of the Holy Spirit with the presence of Christ. She said this 5 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*. This was no different than what she had always believed. Take for example here remarks in an address delivered at the close of the Australian Bible School on December 13th

1892.

“The best recommendation you can carry with you of this school and its influence is a well-ordered life and a godly conversation. Wherever you may be, maintain the principles that you have been studying here. Wherever you go, carry on the good work of searching the Scriptures, and the Lord Jesus will always be at your right hand to help you. He is a merciful high priest pleading in your behalf. He will send his representative, the Holy Spirit; for He says, “I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you. By the Spirit the Father and the Son will come and make their abode with you.” By the Spirit the Father and the Son will come and make their abode with you.””
(*Ellen G. White, Bible Echo 15th January 1893, ‘The Source of our strength’*)

Ellen White is quoting here from John 14:18. Note whom Jesus said (and Ellen White is emphasising) would be coming as the comforter (the Holy Spirit). It was the “Lord Jesus” Himself. This is why she said “the Lord Jesus will always be at your right hand to help you”. The same author then concluded about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (this time with reference to John 14:23). We are also told here (just as the Bible says) that when the Holy Spirit dwells within it is the presence within of both “the Father and the Son” (see John 14:18, 23). This was not bodily because they are both still in the sanctuary in Heaven.

Very interesting is the way that she put it when she wrote to Uriah Smith (this was when he had need of counselling)

“The voice of God calls you as it did Elijah. Come out of the cave and stand with God and hear what He will say unto you. When you will come under the divine guidance, the Comforter will lead you into all truth. The office of the Holy Spirit is to take the things of Christ as they fall from His lips, and infuse them as living principles into the hearts opened to receive them. Then we will know both the Father and the Son.” (*Manuscript releases volume 14 No. 1106, Letter 40, To Uriah Smith, December 31st 1890, pp. 10-11. see also the Ellen G. White 1888 materials Chapter 102 To U. Smith*)

Notice here that Ellen White did not say to Uriah Smith that he would know the Holy Spirit but that he would know “both the Father and the Son”. This should tell us a great deal as to how Ellen White regarded the Holy Spirit. In *Desire of Ages* Ellen White wrote

“The Saviour has not promised His followers the luxuries of the world; their fare may be plain, and even scanty; their lot may be shut in by poverty; but His word is pledged that their need shall be supplied, and He has promised that which is far better than worldly good, -- the abiding comfort of His own presence.” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages’, page 367, ‘Give Ye Then to Eat’*)

The Holy Spirit – Christ omnipresent

In 1891, Ellen White wrote in a letter to a brother in Christ called Chapman

“It is not essential for you to know and be able to define just what the Holy Spirit is. Christ tells us that the Holy Spirit is the Comforter, and the Comforter is the Holy Ghost, “the Spirit of truth, which the Father shall send in My name.” (*Ellen G. White, letter to Brother Chapman June 11th 1891, Manuscript Release volume 14, No. 1107*)

Take careful note of her words. She said that it was not essential for us to define “just what” the Holy Spirit is. After quoting the words of Jesus when He spoke of the coming of the Comforter as found in John 14:16 and 17 she then said

"This refers to the omnipresence of the Spirit of Christ, called the Comforter. Again Jesus says, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth" [John 16:12, 13]." (*Ibid*)

Here Ellen White is referring to the Holy Spirit (“the Comforter”) as “the omnipresence of the Spirit of Christ”. If there are those who attempt to reason how this is at all possible, then they would do well to heed the words that Ellen White next wrote to Chapman. This is when she said to him

“There are many mysteries which I do not seek to understand or to explain; they are too high for me, and too high for you. On some of these points, silence is golden. Piety, devotion, sanctification of soul, body, and spirit--this is essential for us all. "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent" [John 17:3]”. (*Ibid*)

What is life eternal? Is it to know the Holy Spirit? Apparently not! As Ellen White quotes Jesus as saying, it is to know “the only true God, and Jesus Christ”. Jesus said absolutely nothing about knowing the Holy Spirit. Ellen White is saying here that even she did not understand how the comforter is Christ omnipresent. She said that these things were beyond the comprehension of both her and Chapman therefore on some of these points “silence is golden”.

As we shall see in section forty-four, Ellen White’s beliefs concerning the Holy Spirit were rather complex, not even being fully understood by her own son W. C. White and he probably understood her beliefs better than anyone else. Certainly her belief was not as easy as saying that the Holy Spirit was just another personal being like God and Christ.

These same sentiments that Ellen White expressed to Chapman were transposed into her book the *Acts of the Apostles* (1911). This is where it says

“It is not essential for us to be able to define just what the Holy Spirit is.

Christ tells us that the Spirit is the Comforter, "the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father." It is plainly declared regarding the Holy Spirit that, in His work of guiding men into all truth, "He shall not speak of Himself." John 15:26, 16:13, 52." (*Ellen G. White, 'Acts of the Apostles' pages 51-52, 1911*)

Note again she is still saying, even in 1911, that it is not essential for us to define "just what" the Holy Spirit is. This was now 13 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*.

Notice particularly that Ellen White quotes the Bible as saying that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father whilst the Son, as we have seen her say in section fifteen, is begotten of the Father. She also makes the point of quoting Scripture where it says that the Holy Spirit does not "speak of Himself". She then went on to say about the nature of the Holy Spirit

"The nature of the Holy Spirit is a mystery. Men cannot explain it, because the Lord has not revealed it to them. Men having fanciful views may bring together passages of Scripture and put a human construction on them, but the acceptance of these views will not strengthen the church. Regarding such mysteries, which are too deep for human understanding, silence is golden." (*Ibid*)

This was even though in *Desire of Ages* (published 13 years previously) she had written

"Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the third person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power." (*Ellen G. White, 'The Desire of Ages' page 671 chapter 'Let not your heart be troubled' 1898*)

Even though Ellen White said that the Holy Spirit is a "person", she says 13 years later that to us as human beings, His nature is a mystery. This is a rather obvious realisation, at least it does become so when it is realised that He dwells within perhaps millions of different people at the same time. Even before this in 1896, Ellen White had said much the same in a letter that she sent from Australia. This is when she said to the brethren in America

"Evil had been accumulating for centuries, and could only be restrained and resisted by the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fulness of divine power. Another spirit must be met; for the essence of evil was working in all ways, and the submission of man to this satanic captivity was amazing." (*Ellen White, letter to the brethren in America from "Sunnyside," Cooranbong, February 6th 1896. As quoted in Special Testimonies to Ministers and Workers, No.10, 1897, page 25 'Holy Spirit versus selfishness. The danger of rejecting Light'*)

Ellen White did make it clear though that

“The Bible shows us God in His high and holy place, not in a state of inactivity, not in silence and solitude, but surrounded by ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of holy beings, all waiting to do His will. Through these messengers He is in active communication with every part of His dominion. By His Spirit He is everywhere present. Through the agency of His Spirit and His angels He ministers to the children of men.” (*Ministry of Healing, page 417 ‘A true Knowledge of God’*)

Here we are told that God Himself, by His Spirit, is “everywhere present” yet at the very same time He is still in Heaven in “His High and Holy place”. This Spirit belongs to God and is Himself in a form that is totally beyond both our human (finite) comprehension. As Ellen White in *Desire of Ages* said concerning Jesus

“After His ascension He [Jesus] was to be absent in person; but through the Comforter He would still be with them, and they were not to spend their time in mourning. This was what Satan wanted. He desired them to give the world the impression that they had been deceived and disappointed; but by faith they were to look to the sanctuary above, where Jesus was ministering for them; they were to open their hearts to the Holy Spirit, His representative, and to rejoice in the light of His presence.” (*Ellen G. White, ‘The Desire of Ages’, page 277, ‘Levi – Matthew’*)

Again we see Ellen White saying that whilst Jesus was “absent in person” (whilst He was in the sanctuary in Heaven) He would “still be with them” here on earth. Now how can this be? Obviously it is only if the Holy Spirit, in one sense, is Christ. Notice that Ellen White said that the Holy Spirit was the “light of His [Christ’s] presence”. The Holy Spirit therefore is as the presence of Christ.

Amid the early 1900’s crisis regarding the Godhead (this is when John Harvey Kellogg in attempting to justify what he had written his book *The Living Temple* said that he had come to believe in the trinity), we were told this through the spirit of prophecy

“The Son is all the fulness of the Godhead manifested. The Word of God declares Him to be “the express image of His person.” “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Here is shown the personality of the Father.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B No. 7 page 63*)

Ellen White then added concerning the Holy Spirit

“The Comforter that Christ promised to send after He ascended to heaven, is the Spirit in all the fulness of the Godhead, making manifest the power of divine grace to all who receive and believe in Christ as a personal Saviour.” (*Ibid*)

She concluded

“There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers--the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit-- those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will co-operate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ. . . . (*Ibid*)

Understandably, the trinitarians amongst us use the above statement in support of their reasoning (that God is three-in-one) but as we have already noted in section twenty-seven, in this same testimony, Ellen White condemned all illustrations that depict God as being such. In fact she said that all these types of illustrations are untrue.

The Holy Spirit – Christ Himself

Now note something else that Ellen White said about the Holy Spirit. This is really important to our understanding of what she understood was the truth about Him.

As we have already noted in section sixteen and various other sections, Ellen White did say that Christ is the “[eternal presence](#)”. This is when she said after saying that ‘I AM’ means eternal presence

“Then said the Jews unto Him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast Thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I AM. Then took they up stones to cast at Him” because of that saying [verses 57-59]. Christ was using the great name of God that was given to Moses to express the idea of the eternal presence.” (*Ellen G. White, Manuscript No. 1084, February 18, 19th, 1895, page 21*)

As we reasoned this through considerably in section sixteen (see also section nine of the *Begotten Series*, we will not do so again here but I will point out that just two pages later we find these words

“Cumbered with humanity, Christ could not be in every place personally; therefore it was altogether for their advantage that He should leave them, go to His father, and send the Holy Spirit to be His successor on earth. The Holy Spirit is Himself divested of the personality of humanity and independent thereof. He would represent Himself as present in all places by His Holy Spirit, as the Omnipresent.” (*Ibid*)

Note the final remark of Ellen White. This is where she says that Christ is “[the Omnipresent](#)”. This can only be making reference to deity. We can also see here that she is making it very clear, just like she said in her letter to Chapman (see above) that the Holy Spirit is the “[omnipresence of the Spirit of Christ](#)”. Now note that she said that this divine personality (the Holy Spirit) was Christ Himself not “cumbered with” but “divested of the personality of humanity”. Cumbered means

troubled, restricted, hindered, or obstructed by etc., therefore Ellen White is saying that the Holy Spirit is the person of Christ unrestricted and unhindered etc by humanity.

When we remember that she also said that Christ was claiming to be “[the eternal presence](#)” (this is when Christ claimed the name ‘I AM’ John 8:58), it is hardly surprising that she said that the Holy Spirit is Christ Himself not hindered by humanity. Note too that she says that the Holy Spirit is “[independent](#)” of the humanity of Christ. This cannot mean that the Holy Spirit can do whatever He wishes but that he can operate outside (independently) of Christ’s humanity. This we can see because Ellen White also says

“The Holy Spirit is a free, working, independent agency. The God of heaven uses his Spirit as it pleases him, and human minds and human judgment and human methods can no more set boundaries to its working, or prescribe as to the channel through which it shall operate, than they can say to the wind, “I bid you to blow in a certain direction, and to conduct yourself in such and such a manner.” (Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*. 5th May 1896 ‘Operation of the Holy Spirit made manifest in the life’)

Here we can see clearly that by “[independent](#)”, Ellen White does not mean that the Holy Spirit Himself chooses what to do, but rather is used by God “[as it pleases him](#)”. This independency therefore is an independence from God the Father and Christ’s bodily presence. As she said, God “[uses](#)” his Spirit. Note that God here is spoken of as a personal being. The very same thoughts in the penultimate statement of Ellen White were also transposed into her book *Desire of Ages*.

“The Holy Spirit is Christ's representative, but divested of the personality of humanity, and independent thereof. Cumbered with humanity, Christ could not be in every place personally. Therefore it was for their interest that He should go to the Father, and send the Spirit to be His successor on earth. No one could then have any advantage because of his location or his personal contact with Christ. By the Spirit the Saviour would be accessible to all. In this sense He would be nearer to them than if He had not ascended on high.” (Ellen G. White, ‘*The Desire of Ages*’, page 669, ‘*Let not your heart be troubled*’)

Note well the final sentence. This was in 100% agreement with the other pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism (see section thirty-one and section thirty-two). By the indwelling Spirit said Ellen White, Christ would be nearer to His disciples than when He was on earth. Note she also says that in this way, no one would “[have any advantage because of his \(Christ’s\) location](#)”. She also said that by the Spirit “[the Saviour would be accessible to all](#)”. If Christ was nearer to them by the means of His Spirit then it must mean that the Holy Spirit is Christ Himself in another way other than in a bodily form (as are God the Father and Christ). In bodily form, neither Father nor Son could actually dwell within the believer but in

the form of the Holy Spirit (whose nature we cannot understand because it has not been revealed to us) they are both able to do so. Ellen White also said in 1909

“Those who believe the truth should remember that they are God's little children, that they are under His training. Let them be thankful to God for His manifold mercies and be kind to one another. They have one God and one Saviour; and one Spirit -- the Spirit of Christ -- is to bring unity into their ranks.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies, Series B No. 4 page 23, ‘The publishing work at College View’, see also testimonies Volume 9, page 189, ‘The spirit of unity’*)

Note whom or what Ellen White says is the “one Spirit”. She says it is “the Spirit of Christ”. In *The Great Controversy* Ellen White wrote

“When on His resurrection day these disciples met the Saviour, and their hearts burned within them as they listened to His words; when they looked upon the head and hands and feet that had been bruised for them; when, before His ascension, Jesus led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up His hands in blessing, bade them, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel," adding, "Lo, I am with you alway" (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:20); when on the Day of Pentecost the promised Comforter descended and the power from on high was given and the souls of the believers thrilled with the conscious presence of their ascended Lord -- then, even though, like His, their pathway led through sacrifice and martyrdom, would they have exchanged the ministry of the gospel of His grace, with the "crown of righteousness" to be received at His coming, for the glory of an earthly throne, which had been the hope of their earlier discipleship? “(*Ellen G. White, Great Controversy, page 350, ‘Light Through Darkness’*)

Notice whom it was that Ellen White said the believers recognized the Holy Spirit to be. It was “the conscious presence of their ascended Lord” – none other than Jesus Himself.

In 1897, Ellen White wrote a letter to a Mrs. Wessels. Her husband had turned away from God, which had placed a very large burden upon her. Ellen White wrote to her in encouragement

“Keep cheerful. Do not forget that you have a Comforter, the Holy Spirit, which Christ has appointed. You are never alone. If you will listen to the voice that now speaks to you, if you will respond without delay to the knocking at the door of your heart, "Come in, Lord Jesus, that I may sup with Thee, and Thee with me," the heavenly Guest will enter. When this element, which is all divine, abides with you, there is peace and rest. It is the kingdom of heaven come nigh unto you.” (*Ellen G. White to Mrs. Wessels, Letter 124, March 7th 1897*)

She also said later

"What saith our Saviour? "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." When trials overshadow the soul, remember the words of Christ, remember that He is as an unseen presence in the person of the Holy Spirit, and He will be the peace and comfort given you, manifesting to you that He is with you, the Sun of Righteousness, chasing away your darkness." (*Ibid*)

Notice very carefully Ellen White's words. She said that Christ is as an "unseen presence in the person of the Holy Spirit". She also added

"If a man love me," Christ said, "he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." Be of good cheer; light will come, and your soul will rejoice greatly in the Lord." (*Ibid*)

Here we can see that the Scriptures tell us that when the Holy Spirit dwells within, it is the same as having the Father and the Son dwelling within. We can see therefore that it would be impossible to have the indwelling of the Son (or the Father) without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In other words, it would be impossible for Christ or the Father to dwell within a person if the Holy Spirit was not within. He is both of them omnipresent.

In *Desire of Ages* Ellen White wrote (referring to after the resurrection)

"And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." The Holy Spirit was not yet fully manifested; for Christ had not yet been glorified. The more abundant impartation of the Spirit did not take place till after Christ's ascension. Not until this was received could the disciples fulfill the commission to preach the gospel to the world. But the Spirit was now given for a special purpose. Before the disciples could fulfill their official duties in connection with the church, Christ breathed His Spirit upon them. He was committing to them a most sacred trust, and He desired to impress them with the fact that without the Holy Spirit this work could not be accomplished." (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 805, 'Peace be unto you'*)

We can see very clearly here that the Holy Spirit is none other than the Spirit of Christ. It was this that the disciples received. In 1892, after saying that "The record declares, "He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.", Ellen White wrote

“Jesus is waiting to breathe upon all his disciples, and give them the inspiration of his sanctifying spirit, and transfuse the vital influence from himself to his people. He would have them understand that henceforth they cannot serve two masters. Their lives cannot be divided. Christ is to live in his human agents, and work through their faculties, and act through their capabilities. Their will must be submitted to his will, they must act with his spirit, that it may be no more they that live, but Christ that liveth in them. Jesus is seeking to impress upon them the thought that in giving his Holy Spirit he is giving to them the glory which the Father has given him, that he and his people may be one in God. Our way and will must be in submission to God's will, knowing that it is holy, just, and good.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 3rd October 1892, 'Faith brings Light'*)

The Father and the Son

In *Desire of Ages* Ellen White wrote

“The plan for our redemption was not an afterthought, a plan formulated after the fall of Adam. It was a revelation of "the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal." Rom. 16:25, R. V. It was an unfolding of the principles that from eternal ages have been the foundation of God's throne. From the beginning, God and Christ knew of the apostasy of Satan, and of the fall of man through the deceptive power of the apostate. God did not ordain that sin should exist, but He foresaw its existence, and made provision to meet the terrible emergency. So great was His love for the world, that He covenanted to give His only-begotten Son, "that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16.” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 22, Chapter 1, 'God with us'*)

Notice here there is no mention of the Holy Spirit. Later in the same book she wrote (this was when Jesus entered Heaven after the resurrection)

“There is the throne, and around it the rainbow of promise. There are cherubim and seraphim. The commanders of the angel hosts, the sons of God, the representatives of the unfallen worlds, are assembled. The heavenly council before which Lucifer had accused God and His Son, the representatives of those sinless realms over which Satan had thought to establish his dominion, -- all are there to welcome the Redeemer. They are eager to celebrate His triumph and to glorify their King.” (*Ibid page 834, Chap. 87 - "To My Father, and Your Father"*)

Again it must be asked, if Ellen White regarded the Holy Spirit as a individual being like God and Christ, why does she not say that Lucifer had accused Him (the Holy Spirit) as well as “God and His Son”. In continuing her remarks, Ellen White refers to the adoration that the angels and the unfallen beings of other worlds wanted to give to Christ. She said

“But He waves them back. Not yet; He cannot now receive the coronet of

glory and the royal robe. He enters into the presence of His Father. He points to His wounded head, the pierced side, the marred feet; He lifts His hands, bearing the print of nails. He points to the tokens of His triumph; He presents to God the wave sheaf, those raised with Him as representatives of that great multitude who shall come forth from the grave at His second coming. He approaches the Father, with whom there is joy over one sinner that repents; who rejoices over one with singing." (*Ibid*)

Again there is no mention of the Holy Spirit. Why not, if He is a person like God and Christ? She continues

"Before the foundations of the earth were laid the Father and the Son had united in a covenant to redeem man if he should be overcome by Satan. They had clasped Their hands in a solemn pledge that Christ should become the surety for the human race. This pledge Christ has fulfilled. When upon the cross He cried out, "It is finished," He addressed the Father. The compact had been fully carried out. Now He declares: Father, it is finished. I have done Thy will, O My God. I have completed the work of redemption. If Thy justice is satisfied, "I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am." John 19:30; 17:24." (*Ibid*)

In the very first chapter of *Steps to Christ* Ellen White wrote

"None but the Son of God could accomplish our redemption; for only He who was in the bosom of the Father could declare Him. Only He who knew the height and depth of the love of God could make it manifest. Nothing less than the infinite sacrifice made by Christ in behalf of fallen man could express the Father's love to lost humanity." (*Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, page 14, chapter one, 'God's Love for Man'*)

Again the Holy Spirit is conspicuous by His absence. We must ask a question, was not He, just like the Son, "in the bosom of the Father".

More 'the Father and the Son' quotes

The above "the Father and the Son" quotations that fail to mention the Holy Spirit are not the only ones of that nature. There are literally 100's of them. If you possess a CD of Ellen White's writings conduct a search for the phrase and you will see what I mean. If you do not possess this type of CD, go to the following link and search the writings of Ellen White online. Important to remember is that when searching for phrases, place them in quotation marks (i. e. "the Father and the Son").

<https://egwwritings.org/>

The following are a very small portion of these "the Father and the Son" statements. I will quote them here without comment except to say that they were all published after Ellen White said that the Holy Spirit was a person (or

personality). As you read through them, please ask yourself why she does not mention the Holy Spirit. There was obviously a reason for her not doing so.

In my search for these statements, I found that there was so many of them that it left me in quite a quandary as to which ones were the best to quote. Note the first ones are with reference to when, after the first resurrection, God's people enter the city of God.

- “When the wicked dead are raised from the grave, they come up with the tastes, habits, and characters that they formed in the time of probation. A sinner is not raised a saint, neither is a saint raised a sinner. The sinner could not be happy in the companionship of the saints in light, with Jesus, with the Lord of hosts; for on every side will be heard the song of praise and thanksgiving; and honor will be ascribed to the Father and the Son.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 24th October 1912, ‘The Measure of Light Given Measures Our Responsibilities’*)
- ““I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.” Revelation 21:22. The people of God are privileged to hold open communion with the Father and the Son.” (*Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, 1911 edition, ‘The Controversy Ended’*)
- “We are on trial now, but under every test let us make it manifest to all around us that we are on the Lord's side. I am so thankful that none need dishonor Christ! We may all win heaven; we may all be welcomed to the city of God by the Father and the Son; we may all wear the crown of immortality.” (*Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor, 21st November 1911, ‘Christ our Pattern’*)
- “In that day [Christ's Coronation Day] the redeemed will shine forth in the glory of the Father and the Son. The angels of heaven, touching their golden harps, will welcome the King and His trophies of victory -- those who have been washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. A song of triumph will peal forth, filling all heaven. Christ has conquered. He enters the heavenly courts accompanied by His redeemed ones -- the witnesses that His mission of suffering and sacrifice has not been in vain.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 21st November 1906, ‘The Results of Forgetting God’*)
- “As the voice was heard, a light darted from the cloud, and encircled Christ, as if the arms of Infinite Power were thrown about Him like a wall of fire. The people beheld this scene with terror and amazement. No one dared to speak. With silent lips and bated breath all stood with eyes fixed upon Jesus. The testimony of the Father having been given, the cloud lifted, and scattered in the heavens. For the time the visible communion between the Father and the Son was ended.” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 625, ‘In the Outer Court’*)
- “If the disciples believed this vital connection between the Father and the

Son, their faith would not forsake them when they saw Christ's suffering and death to save a perishing world." (*Ibid*, page 664, 'Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled')

- "In the beginning the Father and the Son had rested upon the Sabbath after Their work of creation." (*Ibid*, page 769, 'In Joseph's Tomb')
- "When in the fulness of time the Son of the infinite God came forth from the bosom of the Father to this world, He came in the garb of humanity, clothing His divinity with humanity. The Father and the Son in consultation decided that Christ must come to the world as a babe, and live the life that human beings must live from childhood to manhood, bearing the trials that they must bear, and at the same time living a sinless life, that men might see in Him an example of what they can become, and that He might know by experience how to help them in their struggles with sin." (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times*, 17th May 1905, 'A Teacher sent from God')
- "Even the angels were not permitted to share the counsels between the Father and the Son when the plan of salvation was laid. And human beings are not to intrude into the secrets of the Most High. We are as ignorant of God as little children; but, as little children, we may love and obey Him." (*Ellen G. White, Ministry of Healing*, page 429, 1905, 'Danger in Speculative Knowledge')
- "The most convincing argument we can give to the world of Christ's mission is to be found in perfect unity. Such oneness as exists between the Father and the Son is to be manifest among all who believe the truth." (*Ellen G. White, Bible Training School*, 1st February 1906, 'One, even as we are one')
- "Through the efficacy of the atonement made, man may return to his allegiance. Through accepting the righteousness of Christ, he may become loyal to the law of God, united to the Father and the Son." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald*, 3rd May 1906, 'The Great Controversy')
- "In the Bible every duty is made plain. Every lesson reveals to us the Father and the Son. The Word is able to make all wise unto salvation. In the Word the science of salvation is plainly revealed. Search the Scriptures; for they are the voice of God speaking to the soul." (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times*, 10th October 1906, 'Blessed are they that do')
- "Through the eternal ages the offensive character of sin will be seen in what it cost the Father and the Son, in the humiliation, suffering, and death of Christ. All the worlds will behold in Him a living testimony to the malignity of sin; for in His divine form He bears the marks of the curse. He is in the midst of the throne as a Lamb that has been slain." (*Ellen G. White, Bible Training School*, 1st December 1907, 'Wonderful Love')
- "The plan of redemption was arranged in the councils between the Father and

the Son.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 28th May 1908, ‘Cooperation’*)

- “The Father and the Son each have a personality. Christ declared, "I and my Father are one." Yet it was the Son of God who came to the world in human form. Laying aside his royal robe and kingly crown, he clothed his divinity with humanity, that humanity through his infinite sacrifice might become partakers of the divine nature, and escape the corruption that is in the world through lust.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 6th August 1908, ‘Circulate the Publications, No. 1’*)

- “The story of a crucified and risen Saviour is the great central theme of the Word of God. In the Psalms, in the prophecies, in the gospels, and in the epistles, God has by revelation made prominent the vital truths concerning the agreement between the Father and the Son in providing for the salvation of a lost race.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 24th September 1908, ‘Build on a sure Foundation’*)

- “The grace of Christ has made it possible that there be a close union between the receiver and the Giver. Those to whom God reveals by his Spirit the truths of his Word will be able to testify to an understanding of that mystery of godliness which from eternal ages has been hid in the Father and the Son.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 19th August 1909, ‘As ye have received so walk’*)

- “Writing to a helper in the gospel work, a woman of good repute and wide influence, he [John the gospel writer] said: "Many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed: for he that biddeth him Godspeed is partaker of his evil deeds.” (*Ellen G. White, Acts of the Apostles, 1911, page 554, ‘A faithful Witness’*)

- “It is perilous to neglect to render to God the full consecration of all our powers, for he has given them to man in trust. Will you not ask yourself, "How is it with my soul?" The great gift of salvation has been placed within our reach at an infinite cost to the Father and the Son.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 21st November 1912, ‘Peril of Neglecting Salvation’*)

- “He expired on the cross exclaiming, "It is finished," and that cry rang through every world, and through heaven itself. The great contest between Christ, the Prince of life, and Satan, the prince of darkness, was practically over, and Christ was conqueror. His death answered the question as to whether there was self-denial with the Father and the Son.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 5th January 1915, ‘The Mighty and the Inspiring Conflict’*)

- “By daily communion with God he [the minister who has made a full consecration] becomes mighty in a knowledge of the Scriptures. His fellowship is with the Father and the Son; and as he constantly obeys the divine will, he becomes daily better fitted to speak words that will guide wandering souls to the fold of Christ.” (*Ellen G. White, Gospel Workers, page 23, 1915, ‘Called with a Holy Calling’*)

The question must be asked again here. In all of the above quotations, why did not Ellen White write of the Holy Spirit as she did of the Father and the Son? Could it be that she wrote just as did the Bible writers, particularly as did the apostle Paul. As was Ellen White, the latter were inspired writers.

The Holy Spirit and the inspired writers of the Scriptures

In section twenty-nine we noted that in the introductions to all of his letters to the believers in the various churches, the apostle Paul only extends the grace from the Father and the Son. Never does he include the Holy Spirit. It behoves us to reason why not? Here is what he wrote in each of his epistles

“To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Romans 1:7

“Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both their's and our's: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Corinthians 1:2-3

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia: Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” 2 Corinthians 1:1-2

“Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;) And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia: Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ,” Galatians 1:1-3

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. “ Ephesians 1:1-2

“Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” Philippians 1:1-2

“To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace be

unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”
Colossians 1:1-2

“Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Thessalonians 1:1

“Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” 2 Thessalonians 1:1-2

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope; Unto Timothy, my own son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.” 1 Timothy 1:1-2

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus, To Timothy, my dearly beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.” 2 Timothy 1:1-2

“To Titus, mine own son after the common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour.” Titus 1:4

“Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer, And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house: Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Philemon 1:1-3

There must have been a very good reason for the exclusion of the Holy Spirit from these introductions. We must also remember that Paul wrote under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We must also remind ourselves of the prayer that Jesus offered up to His Father. In this prayer He said

“And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” John 17:3

If as some purport that the Holy Spirit is a person like the Father and the Son, then why did not Jesus mention that life eternal was getting to know Him as well? In other words, why again exclude the Holy Spirit? Did Jesus have a reason for doing so? He must have had a reason.

In what we call his first epistle, John the gospel writer penned these words

“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with

his Son Jesus Christ.” 1 John 1:3

Note first of all John’s emphasis to the two separate personalities of the Father and the Son. Note also that he does not mention the Holy Spirit. This surely must draw us to the conclusion that the Holy Spirit is not a person like the Father and the Son. What else can be concluded? In other words, if the Holy Spirit is a person like the Father and the Son then why leave Him out?

In closing this section, please note two final quotations from the spirit of prophecy. Do they give us a clue as to how Ellen White regarded the Holy Spirit? I believe they do. The first says

“The union between Christ and his people is to be living, true, and unending, resembling the union that exists between the Father and the Son. This union is the fruit of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.” (*Ellen G. White, General Conference Bulletin, 1st July 1900, ‘Unity among Believers’*)

Here we can see that the “indwelling of the Holy Spirit” is equivalent to the indwelling of the “the Father and the Son”. Note that Ellen White said that this Heavenly “union” was only between “the Father and the Son”. Again the Holy Spirit was excluded. This was only the same as what the other pioneers believed. This belief was that the Holy Spirit present is both the Father and Son personally present when the latter two are bodily and physically in Heaven. In other words, the Holy Spirit is God and Christ omnipresent.

The final quotation from the spirit of prophecy says

“As Saul yielded himself fully to the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, he saw the mistakes of his life and recognized the far-reaching claims of the law of God. He who had been a proud Pharisee, confident that he was justified by his good works, now bowed before God with the humility and simplicity of a little child, confessing his own unworthiness and pleading the merits of a crucified and risen Saviour.” (*Ellen G. White, Acts of the Apostles, page 119, 1911, ‘From persecutor to Disciple’*)

Ellen White then wrote

“Saul longed to come into full harmony and communion with the Father and the Son; and in the intensity of his desire for pardon and acceptance he offered up fervent supplications to the throne of grace.” (*Ibid*)

Here we see that this harmony for which the apostle Paul longed was not with the Holy Spirit but with “the Father and the Son”.

Many more quotations such as these can be found in the writings of Ellen White. This was even after she said that the Holy Spirit was a person (or personality). This must tell us something about how she regarded this very mysterious divine

personality. We can conclude that just like Jesus, also like the apostle Paul, Ellen White did not regard the Holy Spirit as a person like the Father and the Son.

The human spirit

A correct understanding of the human spirit would help us immensely in understanding how the Holy Spirit is the personal presence or (eternal presence) of both the Father and the Son.

The Scriptures say when referring to what happens when a person dies

“Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.” Ecclesiastes 12:7

When a person dies, the body itself returns to the dust from whence it originally came but the spirit of that person is returned to God. This spirit, because it does not have a human body through which it can function, is dormant (inactive or inanimate) and is therefore unconscious (sleeping). This means that in this condition (being without a body in which it can function), the spirit (or person) has nothing more to do with anything that happens on earth or in Heaven. This is of course until the resurrection. This is when the spirit of a person is again united with a human body and will be able to function as it did before the death of the original body.

God’s Spirit (the Holy Spirit) is not restricted by the lack of bodily form. This is why it can function apart from God Himself (the Father) and apart from the humanity of Jesus. We can conclude therefore that just as the human spirit is the life of a human person, so too the Holy Spirit is the life of Christ.

The next section (thirty-four) is part two of the study of Ellen White and the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit – a spiritual manifestation of Christ

As I am sure you will remember, Jesus, during His final discourse with His disciples, said to them

“If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.” John 14:5-21

Judas, not Iscariot, asked Jesus how He was going to manifest Himself to them (the disciples) but not to the world (see John 14:22). Jesus replied by saying

“...If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” John 14:23

The coming of the Comforter would be the presence of the Father and the Son – albeit physically and bodily they would both be in Heaven. When commenting upon this, Ellen White wrote

“That Christ should manifest Himself to them, and yet be invisible to the world, was a mystery to the disciples. They could not understand the words of Christ in their spiritual sense. They were thinking of the outward, visible manifestation. They could not take in the fact that they could have the presence of Christ with them, and yet He be unseen by the world. They did not understand the meaning of a spiritual manifestation.” (*Ellen G. White, Southern Watchman, 13th September 1898, 'Christ's representatives'*)

The coming of the Comforter therefore was a “spiritual manifestation” of Christ. This is in keeping with the words of Jesus when He said, “I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you” (John 14:18). It is also in keeping with His promise to His followers that “where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them”. (Matthew 18:20).

Here now, regarding this same topic, are a number of statements from the spirit of prophecy. I have highlighted the relevant words.

“The reason why the churches are weak and sickly and ready to die, is that the enemy has brought influences of a discouraging nature to bear upon trembling souls. He has sought to shut Jesus from their view as the Comforter, as one who reproves, who warns, who admonishes them, saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it."” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 26th August 1890, 'The righteousness of Christ'*)

“When God's people take the position that they are the temple of the Holy Ghost, Christ Himself abiding within, they will so clearly reveal Him in spirit, words, and actions, that there will be an unmistakable distinction between them and Satan's followers. (*Ellen G. White, MS. 100, 1902, Notebook Leaflets, page 79, 'The church school question'*)

“As by faith we look to Jesus, our faith pierces the shadow, and we adore God for His wondrous love in giving Jesus the Comforter.” (*Ellen G. White, MR Volume 19, No. 1405, 'Excerpts from diary July 6th – 31st, 1892'*)

“The Saviour is our comforter. This I have proved Him to be.” (*Ellen G. White, July 16th 1892, Manuscript Releases Volume Eight No. 548, 'How Ellen White Bore Suffering'*)

“The Lord is soon to come. We want that complete and perfect understanding which the Lord alone can give. It is not safe to catch the spirit from another. **We want the Holy Spirit, which is Jesus Christ.**” (Ellen G. White, Letter 66, 1894 to E. W. Prescott, April 10th 1894)

“**Christ is to be known by the blessed name of Comforter.** “The Comforter,” said Christ to His disciples, “which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name...” (Ellen G. White, Ms 7 1902, Typed January 28th 1902)

“I urge our people to cease their criticism and evil speaking, and go to God in earnest prayer, asking him to help them to help the erring. Let them link up with one another and with Christ. Let them study the seventeenth of John, and learn how to pray and how to live the prayer of Christ. **He is the Comforter. He will abide in their hearts, making their joy full.**” (Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 27th 1st 1903, ‘The meaning of God’s providences’)

“**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..... But no circumstances, no distance, can separate us from the heavenly Comforter. Wherever we are, wherever we may go, **he is always there, one given in Christ's place, to act in his stead.** He is always at our right hand, to speak soothing, gentle words; to support, sustain, uphold, and cheer. “(Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 26th October 1897, ‘Words of Comfort – No. 2)

“We turn from the picture of our shortcomings to behold the atonement made for us and we rejoice as we know that we may be clothed with Christ’s righteousness. In Him all fulness dwells. He has grace and pardon for every soul. As by faith we look to Jesus, our faith pierces the shadow, and we adore God for His wondrous love **<in giving us Jesus the Comforter.>**” (Ellen G. White, Ms 20 1892, July 26th 1892)

*The text between the symbols < > was added by Ellen White in her own handwriting to the typewritten text after it was copied by her secretaries.

“It is not essential for you to know and be able to define **just what the Holy Spirit is.** Christ tells us that the Holy Spirit is the Comforter, and the Comforter is the Holy Ghost, “the Spirit of truth, which the Father shall send in my name.” [John 14:26.] “I will pray the Father, and he shall send you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him; but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.” [John 14:16, 17.] **This refers to the omnipresence of the Spirit of Christ, called the Comforter.**”(Ellen G. White, letter 7 1891 to Brother Chapman June 11th 1891)

“In giving His commission to His followers, Christ did not tell them they would be left alone. **He assured them that He would be near them. He**

spoke of His omnipresence in a special way. Go to all nations, He said. Go, to the farthest portithon of the habitable globe, but know that My presence will be there....The assurance of His abiding presence was the richest legacy Christ could give His disciples ” (Ellen G. White, Ms 138 1897, December 2nd 1897, 'The Gospel')

Many more such statements can be found here

http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Godhead/EGW_HolySpirit.pdf

You will also find at the following link that Ellen White often referred to the Holy Spirit as it

http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/holyspirit/EGW_HolySpirit_it.pdf

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section thirty-four

Ellen White and the Holy Spirit (Part 2 of 2)

This is the continuation of the views of Ellen White regarding the Holy Spirit. Part one was the previous section

The Holy Spirit – the life and soul of Christ

As most Christians will agree, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is imperative to receiving eternal life. In *Desire of Ages* Ellen White wrote

“Christ became one flesh with us, in order that we might become one spirit with Him. It is by virtue of this union that we are to come forth from the grave, -- not merely as a manifestation of the power of Christ, but because, through faith, His life has become ours. Those who see Christ in His true character, and receive Him into the heart, have everlasting life.” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 388, ‘The crisis in Galilee’*)

Now notice her next words. She says

“It is through the Spirit that Christ dwells in us; and the Spirit of God, received into the heart by faith, is the beginning of the life eternal.” (*Ibid*)

Here we are told quite clearly that by the means of the Holy Spirit, Christ dwells within the believer. Note too we are told that this is the “Spirit of God”. This was exactly in keeping with the beliefs of the rest of the pioneers (see section thirty-one and section thirty-two). They also said that when the Spirit of God dwells within so too did the Father and the Son.

Six years after *Desire of Ages* was published, Ellen White wrote in the *Review and Herald*

“Christ declared that after his ascension, he would send to his church, as his crowning gift, the Comforter, who was to take his place. This Comforter is the Holy Spirit, -- the soul of his life, the efficacy of his church, the light and life of the world. With his Spirit Christ sends a reconciling influence and a power that takes away sin.” (*Ellen G. White Review & Herald. 19th May 1904 ‘The Promise of the Spirit’*)

Here we see Ellen White saying that the Holy Spirit (the comforter) is “the soul of his (Christ’s) life” as well as being “His (Christ’s) Spirit”. She also said (again in *Desire of Ages*)

“The Holy Spirit is the breath of spiritual life in the soul. The impartation of the Spirit is the impartation of the life of Christ. It imbues the receiver with the attributes of Christ. Only those who are thus taught of God, those who possess the inward working of the Spirit, and in whose life the Christ-life is manifested, are to stand as representative men, to minister in behalf of the church.” (*Ellen G. White, ‘The Desire of Ages’ page 805, ‘Peace be unto you’*)

Here in *Desire of Ages* is perhaps one of the most important statements that Ellen White ever made concerning the Holy Spirit. She says very clearly that it is “the life of Christ”. Note that she uses the word “it” with reference to this “life” and its impartation.

Through these statements, we can see that Ellen White believed that whilst the Holy Spirit is a personality, He is also the divine life (the soul) of Christ, not a third person like Him. This again was in keeping with what the other pioneers believed about this divine and mysterious personality although admittedly (and for very good reason) they did at first find great difficulty in regarding Him as a personality.

The Holy Spirit then, according to the spirit of prophecy, is “the life of Christ” within the believer. It is also the one and same Spirit who works within us to produce the character of Christ within revealed in the outward life. It is as Ellen White said “the Spirit of Christ” and the “Spirit of God”. As Ellen White also said in *Desire of Ages*

“The Holy Spirit comes to the soul as a Comforter. By the transforming agency of His grace, the image of God is reproduced in the disciple; he becomes a new creature. Love takes the place of hatred, and the heart receives the divine similitude. This is what it means to live “by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” This is eating the Bread that comes down from heaven.” (*Ellen G. White, ‘The Desire of Ages, page 391, ‘The crisis in Galilee’, 1898*)

This was only the same as she said six years earlier

“The office of the Holy Spirit is to control all our spiritual exercises. The Father has given his Son for us that through the Son the Holy Spirit might come to us, and lead us unto the Father.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times 3rd October 1892*)

Three years after the publication of *Desire of Ages* Ellen White wrote

“The influence of the Holy Spirit is the life of Christ in the soul. We do not now see Christ and speak to Him, but His Holy Spirit is just as near us in one place as another. It works in and through every one who receives Christ. Those who know the indwelling of the Spirit reveal the fruits of the Spirit,-"love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith." (Ellen G. White, *Bible Echo* 17th June 1901)

Note again that Ellen White says that the Holy Spirit is “the life of Christ in the soul”. Note here the use of the word “it” with regards to the Holy Spirit. This was in 1901, 3 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*.

The breath of God - as in creation

Until God breathed into Adam the breath of life, he was just a lifeless form of dust (we noted this in the previous section). As the Scriptures say

“And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” Genesis 2:7

When first created, man was a complete human being, meaning that he had both physical and spiritual life. When he sinned, all that he retained was his physical life. This is how it is with countless millions today. They are walking this earth with physical life but spiritually they are dead. It is not until the entrance of the Holy Spirit into the life that they become spiritually alive. As Ellen White once put it

“A revival and a reformation must take place, under the ministration of the Holy Spirit. Revival and reformation are two different things. Revival signifies a renewal of spiritual life, a quickening of the powers of mind and heart, a resurrection from spiritual death. (Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, 25th February 1902. ‘The need of a revival and a reformation’)

This same author said in 1897 (this was with reference to Satan’s temptation of Adam and Eve)

“He [Satan] tempted them [Adam and Eve] to sin, and they yielded, and became like himself, disloyal to God. But they repented of their sin, received Christ, and returned to their loyalty.” (Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, 14th September 1897)

Note here that we are told that when repentant, Adam and Eve “received Christ”. This reception of Christ was the same as what Ellen White had termed in the previous statement, the “renewal of spiritual life” and “resurrection from spiritual death”. So how did both Adam and Eve receive Christ? It was through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Remember here that just as we need to do today to experience conversion, both Adam and Eve needed this very same experience. It was the experience of the indwelling Christ (the indwelling of the Holy Spirit). In

1896 Ellen White wrote

“The Lord Jesus acts through the Holy Spirit; for it is his representative. Through it he infuses spiritual life into the soul, quickening its energies for good, cleansing from moral defilement, and giving it a fitness for his kingdom.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 25th August 1896, ‘Our battle with evil’, see also Review and Herald 10th February 1902*)

For Adam and Eve to receive Christ, the Holy Spirit must always have been the representative of Christ. Note here that Ellen White twice refers to the Holy Spirit as “it”. She also said 10 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages* (note her references to the Holy Spirit being the “breath of God”)

“There is a great work to do; and the Spirit of the living God must enter into the living messenger, that the truth may go with power. Without the Holy Spirit, without the breath of God, there is torpidity of conscience, loss of spiritual life. Unless there is genuine conversion of the soul to God; unless the vital breath of God quickens the soul to spiritual life; unless the professors of truth are actuated by heaven-born principles, they are not born of the incorruptible seed, which liveth and abideth forever.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 3rd December 1908, ‘The privileges and duties of the followers of Christ’*)

Twice in this one statement Ellen White refers to the Holy Spirit as “the breath of God”, in fact the second time she says “the vital breath of God”. This is not speaking of the Holy Spirit as a personal being like God and Christ but it is the same as “the Spirit of the living God” (see above). She also said about those who were alive but devoid of spiritual life (meaning physically alive but spiritually dead)

“The dead are often made to pass for the living; for those who are working out what they term salvation after their own ideas, have not God working in them to will and to do of his good pleasure” (*Ibid*)

As she also said in *Desire of Ages*

“Satan cannot hold the dead in his grasp when the Son of God bids them live. He cannot hold in spiritual death one soul who in faith receives Christ's word of power.” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 320, ‘The centurion’*)

She also said the year after *Desire of Ages* was published

“The Holy Spirit is the breath of life in the soul. The breathing of Christ upon his disciples was the breath of true spiritual life. The disciples were to interpret this as imbuing them with the attributes of their Saviour, that in purity, faith, and obedience, they might exalt the law, and make it

honorable. God's law is the expression of his character. By obedience to its requirements we meet God's standard of character. Thus the disciples were to witness for Christ." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald 13th June 1899, 'The remission of sins'*)

Here reference is made to John 20: 22. This is where it says that Jesus breathed on His disciples and said unto them "Receive ye the Holy Ghost". In other words, the disciples received a measure of the Holy Ghost (Holy Spirit) before Jesus returned to Heaven. Were they receiving from the mouth of Jesus an individual like God and Christ are individuals? I would think not. Note that Ellen White again refers to the Holy Spirit as "the breath of life". Notice she says that this was "the attributes of their Saviour" meaning the personality or character of Christ (who and what Christ is). She then said

"The impartation of the Spirit was the impartation of the very life of Christ, which was to qualify the disciples for their mission. Without this qualification their work could not be accomplished. Thus they were to fulfil the official duties connected with the church. But the Holy Spirit was not yet fully manifested, because Christ had not yet been glorified. The more abundant impartation of the Holy Spirit did not take place till after Christ's ascension." (*Ibid*)

Now we can see that the Holy Spirit (which Ellen White says is the breath of God) is also described as "the very life of Christ". Remember, this breathing of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples (John 20:22) was before the ascension of Jesus and before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 1:6-12 and Acts 2:1-21). Ellen White also wrote in 1908

"The Holy Spirit is the breath of spiritual life in the soul." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 19th November 1908*)

She then said (as she did in the previous 1899 quote)

"The impartation of the Spirit is the impartation of the life of Christ. It imbues the receiver with the attributes of Christ. Only those who are thus taught of God, those who possess the inward working of the Spirit, and in whose life the Christ-life is manifested, are to stand as representative men, to minister in behalf of the church." (*Ibid*)

The Holy Spirit - as much a person as God is a person

Note this next statement very carefully indeed. In attempting to show that Ellen White was a trinitarian, it is much used by trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists but it actually shows the opposite. She said to the students of Avondale in Australia (this was the year after the publication of her *Desire of Ages*)

"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." (*Ellen G. White, Ms 66, 1899, p. 4. Talk, April 15, 1899*).

As can be clearly seen here, Ellen White said that the Holy Spirit is a person but look to whom she compares Him. She says that He is "as much a person as God is a person". Here again, just as she always did, Ellen White did not speak of God as some sort of tri-unity (trine) entity but as a personal being. This is definitely not trinitarianism but non-trinitarianism. In a manuscript dated 1906, Ellen White also said,

"The Holy Spirit always leads to the written word. The Holy Spirit is a person; for He beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God." (*Ellen G. White, Ms 20, 1906 Manuscript releases Volume 20, No. 1437*)

In the next paragraph we find

"The Holy Spirit has a personality, else He could not bear witness to our spirits and with our spirits that we are the children of God. He must also be a divine person, else He could not search out the secrets which lie hidden in the mind of God. "For what man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of man, which is in him; even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." (*Ibid*)

This can be described as logical reasoning but let us not leave this statement with a one-sided idea. Here we are told that without having a personality, the Holy Spirit could not "witness to our spirits and with our spirits". We are also told that the Holy Spirit must be "a divine person". Quite naturally, the trinitarians will pounce on this text to so say prove their trinity reasoning.

Before we allow this text to have us jump to this conclusion, we need to ask a very important question. That question is, if because to witness to the human spirit that the Holy Spirit must be a person, then does not this mean that to receive that witness, our spirits (the human spirit) must also be a person? Again this is logical reasoning, but where does it lead us? It would lead us to believe that our spirits are another person separate from ourselves. This of course would be ridiculous reasoning. Most, if not all, would deny it. Why therefore do we conclude that the Holy Spirit is another person separate from, also the same as, the Father and the Son? If we do then our reasoning is not consistent. In this respect, what we apply to the Holy Spirit we must apply to the human spirit else our reasoning is not true.

Consider the following. In the previous section we noted that Ellen White did say concerning the Holy Spirit

"The Holy Spirit is a free, working, independent agency. The God of heaven

uses his Spirit as it pleases him, and human minds and human judgment and human methods can no more set boundaries to its working, or prescribe as to the channel through which it shall operate, than they can say to the wind, "I bid you to blow in a certain direction, and to conduct yourself in such and such a manner" (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 5th May 1896 'Operation of the Holy Spirit made manifest in the life'*)

If we put these and the previous statements side by side, we can see that whilst the Holy Spirit can be compared to our spirits, He differs from us in respect that He can operate independently from whom He belongs. This cannot be done by our spirits (the human spirit). Our spirits are confined to operating in and working through our physical bodies. In other words, when our physical body is dead, our spirits cannot operate. This is why they are returned to God (Ecclesiastes 12:7) until the resurrection when they will be given a body again to work (operate) through (we reasoned this through in the previous section).

Note that Ellen White says that God "uses his spirit as it please him". This shows us that she believed that the Holy Spirit did not please Himself what He did but was under the control of God. This shows us also that the Holy Spirit belongs to God, just as our spirits belong to us. Notice as quite often she did, she refers to the Holy Spirit as "it".

Regardless of how we reason these statements, we know for sure that Ellen White regarded the Holy Spirit as a personality. This is why these types of statements are used by Seventh-day Adventist trinitarians today in support of their belief in a triune God. This is only natural, also very understandable, but as we shall see now (also in section forty-four), it is a rather more complex issue than just saying that the Holy Spirit is a person like God and Christ.

Interesting observations

I would now like to draw your attention to some very interesting observations. The first is that from the very beginning to the end of her writings, Ellen White speaks of the apostasy of Satan. She repeats such statements as

"The Lord has shown me that Satan was once an honored angel in heaven, next to Jesus Christ." (*Ellen G. White, Spiritual Gifts, Volume 1, page 17, 1858 'The Fall of Satan'*)

"Satan was once an honored angel in heaven, next to Christ." (*Ellen G. White, Early Writings, 'Spiritual gifts' 1882*)

"Sin originated with him who, next to Christ, had been most honored of God and was highest in power and glory among the inhabitants of heaven." (*Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, page 35, 'Why was sin permitted'*)

"Before his fall, Satan was, next to Christ, the highest angel in heaven." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 14th January 1909, 'Called to glory and*

virtue')

“Satan is the leader of every species of rebellion to-day, as he was the originator of rebellion in the courts of heaven. Standing next to Christ in power and glory, yet he coveted the honor that belonged to the Son. He desired to be equal with God.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 4th February 1909, 'Lessons from the apostasy at Sinai, No. 1'*)

Much more could be found where Ellen White says exactly the same, which is that in the courts of Heaven before his apostasy, Satan was next in power and authority to Christ. Here now is the observation; “where is the Holy Spirit”? If the Holy Spirit is a person like God and Christ, shouldn't He have been seen as with them?

Here is another observation. Note these quotations from the spirit of prophecy

“After the earth was created, and the beasts upon it, the Father and Son carried out their purpose, which was designed before the fall of Satan, to make man in their own image. They had wrought together in the creation of the earth and every living thing upon it. And now God says to his Son, "Let us make man in our image." (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 9th January 1879, 'The great controversy: The fall of Satan; The creation', see also Spiritual gifts, Volume 3 'The creation. 1864'*)

If the Holy Spirit is a person like the Father and Son (God and Christ), why is He not mentioned here?

Ellen White also spoke of how anxiously the angels waited to see how Adam and Eve would respond to the temptation of Satan.

“How anxiously they waited to see if the holy pair would be deluded by the tempter, and yield to his arts. They asked themselves, Will the holy pair transfer their faith and love from the Father and Son to Satan?” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 12th May 1890, God's requirements in grace, the same as in paradise'*)

To the youth in 1898 Ellen White wrote

“He [Christ] was the embodiment of truth and holiness. He who had stood in the councils of God, who had dwelt in the innermost sanctuary of the Eternal, was speaking that whereof he knew. He was presenting truth of the highest order, revealing to men the mind of the Infinite. But the men who claimed to stand high in knowledge and spiritual understanding failed to comprehend his meaning; and that which had been evolved from eternity by the Father and Son, they in their ignorance stood as critics to condemn.” (*Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor, 22nd September 1898, 'That I should bear witness unto the truth'*)

Notice that she said that the Son had “stood in the councils of God” and had been in the sanctuary of “the Eternal”. Here we can see here differentiating again between the infinite God and His Son but again no Holy Spirit is mentioned. Two years later she said to the youth

“As the divine Sufferer hung upon the cross, angels gathered about him, and as they looked upon him, and heard his cry, they asked, with intense emotion, “Will not the Lord Jehovah save him? Will not that soul-piercing cry of God's only begotten Son prevail?” Then were the words spoken: “The Lord hath sworn, and he will not repent. Father and Son are pledged to fulfill the terms of the everlasting covenant. God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Christ was not alone in making his great sacrifice. It was the fulfilment of the covenant made between him and his Father before the foundation of the world was laid. With clasped hands they had entered into the solemn pledge that Christ would become the surety for the human race if they were overcome by Satan's sophistry.” (*Ellen G. White, Youth's instructor, 14th June 1900, 'The price of our redemption, part iii)*

No mention is made of the Holy Spirit making a sacrifice. In part four of this same article Ellen White wrote

“The darkness rolled away from the Saviour and from the cross. Christ bowed his head and died. The compact between Father and Son was fully consummated. Christ had fulfilled his pledge. In death he was more than conqueror. His right hand and his glorious, holy arm had gotten him the victory.” (*Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor, 21st June 1900, 'The price of our redemption, part IV)*

This was 2 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*. The Holy Spirit is not mentioned in this compact between the Father and the Son. In *Desire of Ages* Ellen White wrote of this compact

“Before the foundations of the earth were laid, the Father and the Son had united in a covenant to redeem man if he should be overcome by Satan. They had clasped Their hands in a solemn pledge that Christ should become the surety for the human race.” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 834, 'To my father, and your Father')*

Again no mention is made of the Holy Spirit.

In Volume One of the Spirit of Prophecy, Ellen White wrote of the praises sung by Adam and Eve with the angels. She wrote

“The angels united with Adam and Eve in holy strains of harmonious music;

and as their songs pealed forth from blissful Eden, Satan heard the sound of their strains of joyful adoration to the Father and Son.” (Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy, Volume 1, page 34, ‘The temptation and the fall’*)

Many more statement such as these could be found that only speak of the Father and Son but no Holy Spirit. Now note these that tell of the sacrifice made for our redemption. Ellen White said to the youth of her day

“We shall be judged according to the light we have had, according to the privileges we have been granted, according to the opportunity we have had to hear and understand the word of God. These privileges have been given us through an infinite cost to the Father and the Son.” (Ellen G. White, *Youth’s Instructor, 15th June 1893, ‘Words to the young’*)

She also said in 1912

“The great gift of salvation has been placed within our reach at an infinite cost to the Father and the Son. To neglect salvation is to neglect the knowledge of the Father, and of the Son, whom God hath sent in order that man might become a partaker of the divine nature, and thus, with Christ, an heir of all things.” (Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald, 21st November 1912, ‘Peril of neglecting salvation’*)

In the 1911 edition of the *Great Controversy* we find

“Before the universe has been clearly presented the great sacrifice made by the Father and the Son in man’s behalf.” (Ellen G. White, *Great Controversy’, page 671, ‘The controversy ended’ 1911*)

If the Holy Spirit is a person like God and Christ are persons, then why in these above quotations did Ellen White omit to mention Him? In other words, why did she say that the sacrifice made on our behalf has only been made by “the Father and the Son”? If the Holy Spirit is a person just like them, did He not also make a sacrifice? We must also ask that if Ellen White did believe that the Holy Spirit was a personal being like God and Christ, then why does she say that to neglect salvation is “to neglect the knowledge of the Father, and of the Son”? Why not say that it is to neglect the knowledge of the Holy Spirit as well?

The third observation has been already mentioned so we will only use one quotation of Ellen White here. This is when she said

“I saw a throne, and on it sat the Father and the Son. I gazed on Jesus’ countenance and admired His lovely person. The Father’s person I could not behold, for a cloud of glorious light covered Him. I asked Jesus if His Father had a form like Himself. He said He had, but I could not behold it, for said He, “If you should once behold the glory of His person, you would cease to exist.” (Ellen G. White, *Early Writings, page 54, ‘Experience and*

views' 1882)

Repeatedly Ellen White spoke of both the Father and the Son as sitting on a throne (just as do the Scriptures), but just as the Scriptures never speak of the Holy Spirit as sitting on a throne, neither did this messenger of the Lord. Have you ever wondered why Ellen White never asked Jesus if the Holy Spirit had a form?

Interesting also is that when speaking of the conversion of Saul (the apostle Paul) in her book *The Acts of the Apostles* she wrote (we noted this one in the previous section)

“As Saul yielded himself fully to the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, he saw the mistakes of his life and recognized the far-reaching claims of the law of God. He who had been a proud Pharisee, confident that he was justified by his good works, now bowed before God with the humility and simplicity of a little child, confessing his own unworthiness and pleading the merits of a crucified and risen Saviour. Saul longed to come into full harmony and communion with the Father and the Son; and in the intensity of his desire for pardon and acceptance he offered up fervent supplications to the throne of grace.” (*Ellen G. White, Acts of the Apostles, page 119, 'From persecutor to disciple'*)

Notice here that she says that it was the “Holy Spirit” that convicted Saul (Paul) but it was the “Father and the Son” with whom he longed to have communion. Is this interesting or not?

Concerning the Holy Spirit, here is the penultimate quotation from the pen of Ellen White. She said

“When the Holy Spirit is breathing upon the soul, the will and the powers of the man must respond to Its influence. Those who abide in Jesus will be happy, cheerful, and joyful in God. A subdued gentleness will mark the voice, reverence for spiritual and eternal things will be expressed in the actions, and music, joyful music, will echo from the lips; for it is wafted from the throne of God. This is the mystery of godliness, not easily explained, but nonetheless felt and enjoyed.” (*Ellen G. White, 4th Volume Testimonies, page 625, 'The Love of the World'*)

This just about sums up our understanding of the Holy Spirit. Ellen White says that it is something “not easily explained, but nonetheless felt and enjoyed”. Note here again she referred to the Holy Spirit as an it.

Is the Holy Spirit a personal being like the Father and the Son? From the testimony of the Holy Scriptures, also from what we have read that Ellen White said about Him, I would conclude definitely not, yet He is a divine personality, therefore it can be truthfully said that there are three personalities of the

Godhead, or as Ellen White put it

“There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers--the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit -- those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will co-operate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B No. 7 page 63*)

The next two sections

In attempting to keep things in a reasonable chronological order, we shall next take a look at the 1919 Bible Conference (two sections). It was at this conference that attempts were first made, at least attempts out in the open, to change the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists regarding Christ.

I say out in the open but this is not strictly true. This is because as we shall see in the first of these two sections, attendance at this conference was strictly limited to those who had been specifically invited. This invitation did not include the laity or ministry in general. Invitations were only sent to the top echelon of the leadership of Seventh-day Adventism.

As we have so clearly seen in previous sections, up to this time (1919) it was the preponderant belief of Seventh-day Adventists that Christ was truly the Son of God, meaning that He had been begotten of God the Father (brought forth not created) in eternity. This is one of the reasons why they were not trinitarians. To become trinitarian therefore, this begotten concept of Christ needed to be changed. This was attempted at this 1919 conference. The other reason for Seventh-day Adventists not being trinitarian was that they did not regard the Holy Spirit to be a person like God and Christ were persons, therefore to become trinitarian this belief also had to be changed.

In section forty-four we shall be taking a look at how the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists were changed regarding the Holy Spirit. This made way for the eventual adoption of the trinity doctrine, which, would have been impossible to do if the belief of the pioneers regarding Him had been maintained. In that section it will be seen that a man by the name of H. W. Carr sent Ellen White's son (W. C. White) a letter in which he requested details of Ellen White's beliefs concerning the Holy Spirit. You may be surprised at the reply he received. You can read the letters by going here

<http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/SB-Othersarticles.htm>

For now we will move on to section 35. This is where we shall see that in 1919, moves were made to introduce into Seventh-day Adventism, trinitarian concepts of Christ. This stood in direct contrast to what had historically been, and still was at that time (1919), the preponderant belief of Seventh-day Adventists.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section thirty-five

The 'secret' 1919 Bible conference (Part 1 of 2)

As has been seen in previous sections, the claim has been made that throughout the time of Ellen White's ministry - also for decades beyond - the Godhead beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists was strictly non-trinitarian. This claim will now be further substantiated. This will also help to reveal the early 1900's faith of Seventh-day Adventists, which, as we have said from the beginning, was one of the main objectives of these studies.

This we shall do by showing that very soon after Ellen White's death, attempts were openly made to bring about changes to what was then believed by Seventh-day Adventists. From what we shall see, this wanting to change was already an undercurrent within Seventh-day Adventism prior to her demise. These changes first concerned what we believed about Christ whilst following this, changes were introduced to what was generally believed concerning the Holy Spirit.

After being agitated amongst Seventh-day Adventists for decades, these new views eventually came to a complete fruition as our present trinity doctrine.

The previous sections have revealed that the long held belief of Seventh-day Adventists was that Christ, in His pre-existence, was begotten of God. This was said to be so far back in eternity that it is incomprehensible for the human mind to even imagine it. The consequence of this belief was that Christ is literally a son – meaning that He is literally the Son of God. This means that Seventh-day Adventists believed that the Son of God is God begotten therefore in every respect He is God essentially yet not the Father. We have also seen that because He was begotten of God, not only was He a separate person from God (the Father) but also that by becoming incarnate and living amongst us as a fully functioning human person, it was believed that it was possible for Him to have sinned thereby in consequence, if He had sinned, would have lost His eternal existence. In other words, in becoming incarnate there was a risk taken concerning the eternal existence of Christ.

The latter belief, because of the changeover to trinitarianism, is not something that can be believed today by Seventh-day Adventists – at least by those who are truly trinitarian. In other words, within our present trinity theology, it is

impossible to have the belief that the Son could have lost His eternal existence. This means that our change in beliefs has not only affected what was once believed concerning the relationship of the three personalities of the Godhead, but has also drastically affected what we once believed concerning the incarnation – meaning what was once believed by Seventh-day Adventists regarding the gospel - the latter being the love that God and Christ has for fallen humanity. For a more detailed discussion of this aspect of the changeover, see section twelve and section thirteen.

We shall now take a look at the first major attempt to change our once non-trinitarian beliefs. We shall see that it came through the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. These were attempts to change what was once believed about Christ. As this study is so lengthy, it is divided into two sections.

Before we begin though, we will make this one interesting observation.

Invite to an interdenominational conference

Very interesting is that two months prior to this 1919 Bible Conference, a representation from the Seventh-day Adventist Church attended another conference. This was an inter-denominational conference regarding the fundamental beliefs of Christianity. The following month this same conference was reported on in the *Review and Herald*. This was one month previous to our own Bible Conference. F. M. Wilcox wrote this report. He began by saying

“It was our privilege to attend, the latter part of last month, in Philadelphia, Pa., a conference of leading Christian workers, on Christian fundamentals. The conference was interdenominational. Delegates were registered from forty States of the United States, from Canada, British Columbia, Central America, China, Japan, India, and England.” (*F. M. Wilcox, Review and Herald, June 19th 1919, ‘A Conference on Christian Fundamentals’*)

In its official announcement, the conference said of its objectives

“The promoters of the conference are convinced that from this gathering there should go forth to Christians everywhere a ringing call to a united testimony unto the fundamentals of the Christian faith.... All over the world are groups of devout, faithful believers, still true and loyal to the whole Word of God. These at present are widely scattered and nominally separated. The supreme objective of this conference is to unite all such in a world-wide fellowship, to the end that we may all speak with one voice of unhesitating affirmation of the things which are verily believed among us.” (*ibid*)

This is ecumenicalism. Later in the report, under the heading of *A profession of Christian Faith*, Wilcox explained

“Near the close of the convention a statement of general doctrinal belief was prepared by a committee on resolutions, and enthusiastically adopted

by the three thousand men and women who filled the Academy of Music, where the convention was held. This pronouncement expresses for the most part the fundamentals of Christian belief upon which the great majority of evangelical Christians unite. The statement is as follows (*Ibid*)

Under the heading of “World Conference on Christian Fundamentals – 1919” also under the sub-heading “Doctrinal statement”, this interdenominational statement of beliefs was then listed. There were just 9 of them. The second listed said (the first was “We believe in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as verbally inspired of God etc.)

“We believe in one God, eternally existing in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” (*Ibid*)

This is undoubtedly the trinity doctrine. It is saying that the “one God” exists in three persons. This means that this “one God” is indivisible – therefore none of the three personalities of the Godhead can possibly lose their existence. Following this list of fundamentals Wilcox wrote

“To the general formal expression of this pronouncement, with the exception of the last article, we can give hearty assent. Seventh-day Adventists, of course, could not accept as Bible doctrine the statement regarding the conscious eternal punishment of the wicked. We believe in eternal punishment, but not in eternal punishing.” (*Ibid*)

Wilcox also added that Seventh-day Adventists could not agree to a pre-millennial reign of Christ. Following on from this, the article then published a list of fundamental beliefs held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church - the second of which said

“That the Trinity consists of the eternal Father, a personal, spiritual being, omnipotent, omniscient, infinite in power, wisdom, and love; the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the eternal Father, through whom all things were created and through whom the salvation of the redeemed hosts will be accomplished; the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, the one regenerating agency in the work of redemption. 1 John 5:7.” (*Ibid*)

This fell short of saying that the “one God” is a trinity – as it did in the fundamental beliefs voted at the conference (see above) but to many it would appear a trinity declaration. The word trinity is used here to denote a group of three.

Under the heading of *The Deity of Christ* it did say though

“That Jesus Christ possesses not only divine nature but deityship as well, being of the same nature and essence as the eternal Father.” (*Ibid*)

This is much the same as the Creed of Nicaea – that is without the embellishment of the creed that says the Son is not “subject to change or alteration” (for a discussion of the Council of Nicaea and the creed it produced please see section seven).

In itself, the above statement does not constitute a trinity doctrine – no more than it did at Nicaea – although what was said in the creed did later become the under-girding of the trinity doctrine.

F. M. Wilcox, as editor of the *Review and Herald*, was also one of the delegates at our own Bible Conference held some weeks later. It is with these thoughts in mind that we shall now proceed to have a look at the report of it.

The 1919 Bible conference

In the summer of 1919, which was just four years after the death of Ellen White, there was held at Takoma Park in Washington D.C. a Bible conference and a teachers meeting - the latter of which mainly concerned the writings of Ellen White. As this teachers meeting is outside the scope of this study, we shall not consider it here, nevertheless it is a very important part of our history. In some ways it is very relevant to our studies because how Ellen White’s writings are regarded is an integral part of them. For how the writer regards Ellen White and for how he believes her writings should be regarded in relation to the Scriptures please go here

<http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/SBEGW.htm>

As regards to the Bible conference itself, this could never be described as ordinary. This is because it was not open to everyone - not even to the vast majority of ministers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

This was a very exclusive meeting to which only those who had been specifically invited were allowed to attend. This is just one of the reasons why some have referred to this conference as being secret. As M. W. Campbell explains (this article was in the Review of January 28th 2010)

“Although the concept of Bible conferences was certainly not new to Adventism, this conference was different from previous meetings. It was the first time that such a highly educated group of educators, editors, administrators, and other thought leaders had gathered to discuss such a plethora of controversial topics. The planning committee had done this deliberately. The meetings were closed to anyone except those invited by the General Conference Executive Committee specifically so that they would feel free to express their viewpoint without fear of recrimination.”
(*Michael W. Campbell, Adventist Review, January 28th 2010, ‘Sifting Through the Past’*)

Why it was that amongst their other brethren in the church (ministers and lay

people) - also not behind closed doors that these leading Seventh-day Adventist could not “express their viewpoint without fear of recrimination” I have no idea but this is what is being said here.

Another reason for calling this conference secret was that when it drew to its close, the delegates decided that their discussions, faithfully recorded by stenographers, should not be made public, meaning that they were not revealed to Seventh-day Adventists – not even to the ministry in general. So it was that until Dr. Donald Yost discovered them in 1974, these records were confined to the dusty archives of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This was 55 years after the conference had taken place - by which time of course the trinity doctrine had become well and truly established within Seventh-day Adventism.

It would seem today that to an extent we are still keeping the details of this conference a secret. I say this because in this article by Campbell, no mention is made of a major debate at the conference - which concerned our denominational beliefs regarding Christ – yet what other belief could be so important.

We shall see later that each morning at the conference, W. W. Prescott, a leading administrator within Seventh-day Adventism, gave a presentation on *The Person of Christ* - which later in the day would be open for discussion amongst the delegates. We shall see also that there were very lively debates - particularly on the subject of Christ - with some saying that the view held as a denomination all through the time of Ellen White’s ministry was correct whilst some said that it was error. There was definitely a strong push by certain of our leadership to say that it was wrong.

Certainly the discussions were not as said by Campbell here which was

“Most of the differences among the participants of the conference revolved around issues in Adventist eschatology, issues such as the identity of the “king of the north” in Daniel and problematic dates in the sequence of prophetic chronology. Most Adventists today would quickly yawn and lose interest if they were somehow transported back in time to the 1919 Bible Conference. Yet the issues held a lot of significance to those present because they represented two different ways of interpreting inspired writings and thus concerned hermeneutics.” (*Ibid*)

If this were true I would say that this was a serious indictment concerning present-day Seventh-day Adventists. It is saying that Seventh-day Adventists today would be bored and not interested in these discussions. Hopefully this is not true. I for one would not have yawned or lost interest in what was being said at this conference.

The entire article by Campbell can be read here

<http://www.adventistreview.org/issue.php?issue=2010-1503&page=16>

As will be seen, in this article no mention is made of the discussions concerning Christ – or the trinitarian concepts of Christ that were attempted at this conference to be introduced into Seventh-day Adventist thinking and theology.

In this history paper that you are now reading, we shall only be making a very brief observation of the delegate's discussions. These are the observations that are applicable to this particular part of our study - the purpose of which is to help establish the claim that for many years following the death of Ellen White, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still a preponderantly non-trinitarian denomination (in other words, it is mainly an historical perspective). As was said before, it will also help to reveal the early 1900's beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists.

In 1919 there was a decided push to bring trinitarian concepts into Seventh-day Adventist theology whilst today exactly the opposite is happening. This means that the present objectors to the trinity doctrine are trying to urge their non-trinitarian concepts into present trinitarian Seventh-day Adventist theology. Such is the turn-about difference between the 1919 and the 2007 faith of Seventh-day Adventism.

The Bible Conference delegates

The delegates of the 1919 Bible conference were all very high-ranking officials. These were such as presidents, treasurers and field officers of the various conferences. It also included Bible and history teachers, presidents of colleges, as well as editors of our publishing houses, some of whom were members of the General Conference Committee. The chairman of this conference was A. G. Daniells who was then the General Conference President.

Taken overall, this really was an extremely influential group of delegates that - if they could be persuaded to take a certain course of action - were certainly in a position to persuade others to do the same. We can see therefore that assembled at this conference there was a group of delegates that could, if they so wished, have a very persuasive influence on the future (1919 onwards) thinking and theology of Seventh-day Adventists. This, as some must have seen it at that time, was the intention of the calling together of such a select and elite body of Seventh-day Adventists.

Bert Haloviak, the Assistant Director of the office of Archives and Statistics of the Seventh-day Adventist Church reported in 1979

“The General Conference Committee on April 5, 1918, adopted a resolution calling for a Bible and History Teachers' Council of six weeks' duration to begin July 1, 1918. Bible and history teachers from SDA colleges and junior colleges, leading editors and "such other leading men" as the GCC might designate, were invited to attend. A committee of seven selected some 40 delegates and assigned approximately 67 Bible and history topics to be considered.” (Bert Haloviak, A paper presented at the meeting of Seventh-

day Adventist Biblical Scholars in New York City November 14, 1979 'In the Shadow of the Daily', 'Background and Aftermath of the 1919 Bible and History teachers Conference')

Here it is said that a select group of people chose a select number of delegates. This is one of the reasons why this conference is said to have been secret. Haloviak explained though

“When the war situation caused cancellation of the proposed Conference, the General Conference Committee recommended one similar in scope to be held in 1919.” (*Ibid*)

Opening remarks

It was July 1st 1919 when the chairman A. G. Daniells opened the Bible conference. Much could be said here regarding his opening address but because space is limited we will confine our remarks to the things that were said that are relevant to our studies. Daniells opened his address by saying

“We have gathered for a Bible Conference to open the first day of July, and to continue until the 21st. This meeting was arranged by the General Conference Committee at its Spring Council. We had with us at that time several editors of our papers, and quite a number of the presidents of our Colleges. We had given this question a great deal of consideration. For some years there has been an earnest desire that we should have a special meeting for the study of various phases of our truth. When the question first arose, it was in the form of a proposal to meet and study some mooted questions, and for a long time that was the uppermost thought in the proposal. But there were difficulties in the way. One was the finding a time when those who ought to be at such a gathering could be present.” (*A. G. Daniells. Notes on the discussions of the 1919 Bible Conference and Teachers Meeting held at Takoma Park in Washington D.C. July 1st 1919, page 9*)

By “mooted questions” it appears that these were questions concerning which there was debate. Daniells then said

“Another, difficulty was the fear we had that in meeting to study controverted questions we might get into a controversy that would not be helpful to any of us nor to our people. And we hesitated.” (*Ibid*)

Daniells added

“As time passed and we gave the question more study, it shaped itself in our minds something like this, - that the great was not so much the study of questions concerning which there is a difference of view, or opinion, but the great need is a deeper and more cooperative study of the Word of God. And it kept on shaping that way until I think the dominant thought in the

Spring Council was that we should come together for a simple Bible Conference. That we would not spend our time magnifying differences and studying minor questions; but we would give first of all careful study to the majoy [sic] questions, the great essentials, the fundamentals, and that we would proceed along this line, and endeavor to bring forward light and truth as we can find it in the Word and in the history of the world that fulfills the prophetic part of the Word.” (*Ibid*, page 9-10)

This meeting therefore was not to settle minor differences but was to concentrate on the very basics (the major beliefs) of Seventh-day Adventists. Regarding those who would be chosen to attend this conference, Daniells went on to say

“I think I can state the action of the General Conference Committee with reference to the personnel of the Conference. It was to be the members of the General Conference Committee in America who could attend; the Bible and history teachers in our colleges, junior colleges, and seminaries; and a number of our leading editors in this country.” (*Ibid* page 10)

We can see here that those chosen were only the leading men of our denomination. No ‘ordinary minister’ was permitted to attend. Daniells continued

“We felt that a body of men of this experience, and carrying these responsibilities would exercise care and good judgment and would press together, and be careful of the reports they sent out, and would so deport themselves that unseemly discussion and differences would not come in, and that they would endeavor to make the Conference, through the blessing of God, a very great blessing to those of us who are here, and a real help to those who are not here in the days that will come.” (*Ibid*)

It would appear that Daniells is not expressing very much confidence in the ministry in general to do these things.

We shall see in the next section that it was decided by the delegates not to send out any report concerning the discussions at this conference. This was a deliberate action. They were kept secret – that is until they were found by Donald Yost in 1974. Daniells also explained

“Since the appointment a great many people have wanted to come to the Conference, and we have not been able to open the door. When people have approached me, I have said they would have to make application to the General Conference Committee, and some of them have done so. But we have not felt free to change our arrangements until we could get here in session. We have felt if there were persons here or elsewhere that we ought to invite, we could take the action here.” (*Ibid* page 10-11)

Daniells then said to the delegates

“Another thing is that a good many people feel very much afraid of what we are going to do. They wonder if we are going to fix up a creed for them to subscribe to. They are much disturbed about it.” *(Ibid page 11)*

Needless to say, this Bible conference was of a very high profile nature so it was not in this sense that it was secret. Daniells admitted though that with regards to its intended purposes, there were many who were “very much afraid”. Such was the depth of feelings of those who realised that this conference was due to take place. Daniells even admitted that some were afraid that the intention was “to fix up a creed for them to subscribe to”.

For many Seventh-day Adventists, this would have been a serious concern. This is because throughout Ellen White’s ministry, the belief of the leadership was that to fix up a creed would seriously hinder the work of the Holy Spirit in leading Seventh-day Adventists to a greater knowledge of the truth. To Seventh-day Adventists in 1919, the making of creeds was still very much a no-go area.

From the chairman’s opening remarks, we can see that “a good many people” did not like what was taking place. It is no wonder that so many wanted to be at the conference to see what was taking place – also to see what decisions would be made. Daniells continued

“The secrecy alarms them. We have never had anything like this before, and they are very fearful. Some almost felt we ought to abandon the plan, and stop because of this difficulty.” *(Ibid)*

We need to sense here the serious concern that many Seventh-day Adventists had that this conference should not even be taking place. The General Conference President even admitted that some were saying that because of the fears that people had about it that it should be abandoned. Note well his remarks concerning those who were “very fearful” and alarmed at the “secrecy” of it. Such was the worry that some had about the intentions of this conference. Certainly the General Conference President was correct in saying that Seventh-day Adventists had “never had anything like this before”. It does appear that those who knew of this conference were very much afraid of what was happening within Seventh-day Adventism.

Daniells then went on to explain how a few weeks previously, he had gone to Minneapolis to listen to a pastor of a First Baptist Church. This pastor’s name was Dr. Riley whom Daniells described “an active leader in a series of Bible Conferences being held on the second coming of Christ”. He then said of these meetings

“One of these was held in Philadelphia and some of our brethren attended. They are holding them in seventeen cities over the country.” *(Ibid)*

These were the interdenominational meetings that we referred to above. Daniells

then related the words of Riley. He explained that Riley had said

“There is no hope for the popular church today unless it comes back to the Word of God. He said the object of these Bible Conferences is to draw in men and emphasise the divine origin of the Book and the diety [sic] of the Son of God and to lead men away back to the original faith of Protestantism for salvation.” (*Ibid page 12*)

One is left to wonder what is meant to be “the original faith of Protestantism for salvation”. Very often this was meant that amongst other things, to be considered saved a person needed to believe in a certain set of teachings - which in the main had at its very centre the doctrine of the trinity. Note that the object of these conferences was to emphasise the “diety of the Son of God”. As we noted above, it was voted at the interdenominational conference that the second of the fundamental beliefs of Christianity was

“We believe in one God, eternally existing in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” (*F. M. Wilcox, Review and Herald, June 19th 1919, ‘A Conference on Christian Fundamentals’*)

We also noted that F. M. Wilcox reporting on this conference said of these voted fundamental beliefs

“To the general formal expression of this pronouncement, with the exception of the last article, we can give hearty assent. Seventh-day Adventists, of course, could not accept as Bible doctrine the statement regarding the conscious eternal punishment of the wicked.” (*Ibid*)

Wilcox did not say that Seventh-day Adventists would not agree with this trinity belief although at that time they were not a trinitarian denomination. Returning our thoughts to Daniells’ remarks concerning the words of Riley and the interdenominational conference he said

“It impressed me very much, and I felt that there was a place for the Seventh Day Adventists to hold a good, strong Bible Conference every year. I believe this ought to be the beginning of an annual Bible Conference for this people.” (*Ibid*)

Important observations

Please note that this 1919 Bible Conference took place

- (a) 4 years after the death of Ellen White (1915)
- (b) 21 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages* (1898)
- (c) 75 years after our beginnings (1844)

In this study, these three facts should be regarded as being highly significant. This is because our church leadership today claim that it is what Ellen White had

written, particularly in *Desire of Ages*, that led our denomination to become trinitarian. This cannot be true though because for the rest of her literary life after this book was published (which was 17 years), Ellen White insisted that what the pioneers had been teaching about God and Christ was the truth that God Himself had given to them. As we have seen in previous sections, she pleaded with them not to change their faith. This was in the early 1900's, years after the book *Desire of Ages* was published.

We have also noted that Ellen White made statements concerning Christ that no trinitarian would accept as being true. This is why we know that she was not a trinitarian.

We shall see in this section that by 1919, *Desire of Ages* had not by then had any affect whatsoever on the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. This was now 21 years after this book had been published. To put this another way again, 4 years after the death of Ellen White and 21 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still as non-trinitarian as it had been all throughout the time of Ellen White's ministry. Nothing in this respect had changed.

Prescott and his daily presentations on the person of Christ

During this Bible conference, W. W. Prescott (1855-1944), who as was said above was a leading administrator in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, gave a daily presentation on the person of Jesus. Later in the day, by the delegates, questions would be put to him and discussions would ensue.

Prescott's presentations caused a great deal of dispute amongst the delegates. This was even to the extent that at one point, because the discussions became so heated, he did not wish to continue with them. It is evident that there were some very strong feelings at this conference.

During his presentations, Prescott offered to the delegates a reasoning that was in harmony with concepts of the trinity doctrine. He also maintained that through our publications, our pioneers had been teaching error and not Biblical truth about Christ. These are the very same claims that our church leadership today is making (see section ten) but take particular note again that this was said after Ellen White had died and not before.

Interesting to note also is that throughout his life as a Seventh-day Adventist, Prescott had worked alongside these same pioneers whose beliefs he was now condemning and just like many of them had held positions of high authority. These were positions such as the presidencies of the Battle Creek School as well as the Union and Walla Walla Colleges. In one particular year, he was president of all three whilst at another time he was vice-president of the General Conference and editor of the *Review and Herald*.

Much could be said about Prescott and the work that he did within Seventh-day

Adventism but enough has been said already to show that throughout his lifetime he was well acquainted with the beliefs of the pioneers. It must also be said that when he and Daniells wanted to edit some of our books, Ellen White instructed both of them not to even touch them. She said in one such communication to Daniells who was then the General Conference President

“I have seen that Satan would have been greatly pleased to see Elders Prescott and Daniells undertake the work of a general overhauling of our books that have done a good work in the field for years. But neither of you is called of God to that work ... In some respects you and Brother Prescott have done a strange work.” (*Ellen G. White Letter 70, August 11th 1910, Manuscript Releases Volume 10 No. 842, ‘Councils concerning W. W. Prescott and A. G. Daniells’*)

She continued

“It is not for the best interests of either one of you that you be associated together so closely as heretofore ... If we should now sow broadcast seeds of doubt as to the correctness of our printed books and tracts, and encourage the thought that there must needs be a general revision of our published books, a work will have begun that the Lord has not appointed us to do.... If you and Brother Prescott were to sow broadcast seeds of uncertainty and distrust in the minds of others, God would call you to a stern account for this evil.” (*Ibid*)

Very interestingly she later recounted

“In the night season I have seen men looking over our printed books in search of something to criticize, and the adversary was standing by their side, making suggestions to their minds. The natural result of unwise criticism would be to bring infidelity into our ranks.” (*Ibid*)

Upon reading this council to Prescott and Daniells, one is left to wonder just what Ellen White would have said regarding the massive amount of editing that was done to Uriah Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation* which, as we shall see in section forty-five, was carried out to remove all of its non-trinitarianism that from the beginning had been in harmony with the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventism. This is how Uriah Smith’s classic work was brought into line with what was fast becoming the new theology of Seventh-day Adventism, namely trinitarianism. It was re-written.

July 2nd 1919 discussions on the person of Christ

To establish that it was said at the 1919 Bible Conference that our pioneers had been teaching error about Christ, it is necessary to look at some of the remarks that were made by the delegates. This is especially with regards to the remarks made by Prescott. To do this we shall look at some of the discussions of July 2nd - which was the second day of the conference.

The morning session consisted of Prescott's very first presentation on the person of Christ. This was followed by a presentation on Bible Prophecy. After an intermission, A. G. Daniells opened the afternoon session. He said

"The way is now open for any who wish to do so to ask Professor Prescott questions concerning the topic of the morning." (*A. G. Daniells. Notes on the discussions of the 1919 Bible Conference and Teachers Meeting held at Takoma Park, Washington D.C. July 2nd*)

The first to respond was W. E. Howell. He was the chairman of the committee that 23 years later in 1942 was appointed to rewrite Uriah Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation*. This was to expunge from its pages its non-trinitarianism (see section forty-three, section forty-five and section forty-six). Howell said in response to Elder Daniells invitation

"I would like to ask Professor Prescott if he is willing to enlarge just a little on the point of the "beginning" as he explained it this morning." (*W. E. Howell, ibid*)

Prescott replied to Warren Howell's question by saying

"Taking the first chapter of John, the third verse: At a certain point where finite beings begin time, it does not mean that that is where the word began. When the scriptures says, "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God," it does not mean that when you get back to that point that we denominate the beginning, then looking back into eternity, you can point to the time when the word was." (*Prescott, ibid*)

Here was the first attempt to change the begotten in eternity concept of Christ. This is the concept that had been held by Seventh-day Adventists all the time of Ellen White's ministry. Herbert Lacey replied

"Can we go one step further and say that the word was without beginning?" (*H. Lacey, ibid*)

Prescott responded

"I was going to raise the question. Are we agreed in such a general statement as this, that the Son of God is co-eternal with the Father? Is that the view that is taught in our schools?" (*Prescott, ibid*)

Instead of answering this, C. M. Sorenson replied

"It is taught in the Bible." (*C. M. Sorenson, ibid*)

This co-eternity of the personality of the Son with the Father was not the standard denominational belief. This latter belief was that Christ proceeded forth

and came out of the Father in the days of eternity. This did not make Christ any less than God, nor did it make Christ some sort of a demigod but was God Himself in the person of the Son. W. W. Prescott responded concerning this co-eternity

“Not to teach that is Arianism. Ought we continue to circulate in a standard book a statement that the Son is not co-eternal, that the Son is not co-eval or co-eternal with the Father? That makes him a finite being. Any being whose beginning we can fix is a finite being.” (*Prescott, ibid*)

This is only human logic. It is not a scriptural answer.

Here Prescott was refuting what Seventh-day Adventists had generally believed in the past concerning Christ. This was that at some point in eternity He was begotten (brought forth) of the Father. Prescott is saying though that if Christ's personality were to be regarded as having a beginning, this would be to make Him finite, meaning having a restricted existence (like a created being). Past Seventh-day Adventists would not have reasoned this to be true. They believed that the Son was begotten of God therefore He was God essentially, meaning that whilst in this state He could not go out of existence. In other words, whilst in the form of God, the Son was immortal. Prescott's reasoning therefore was straw man reasoning.

As we have seen in previous sections, our pioneers believed that the Son of God was God Himself manifest. There was never any question that they did not believe in His full and complete divinity - albeit their reasoning did not include the unwarranted and unnecessary speculations of the trinity doctrine. A person only has to look at some of the things that our non-trinitarian pioneers said about Christ (as we have done in previous sections) to know this to be true. What we see here then is Prescott setting up a straw man and then knocking it down. Certainly our pioneers never regarded the pre-existent Christ in any way as a finite being. This really is a misrepresentation of what they believed.

Note the remark concerning Arianism. Seeing that we considered the beliefs of Arius in previous sections we will not go into them again here suffice to say that this aged presbyter did believe that the Son, in His pre-incarnate state, was God and was immutable. Arius did say according to Theodoret's ecclesiastical history

“But we say and believe, and have taught, and do teach, that the Son is not unbegotten, nor in any way part of the unbegotten; and that He does not derive His subsistence from any matter; but that by His own will and counsel He has subsisted before time, and before ages, as perfect God, only begotten and unchangeable, and that before He was begotten, or created, or purposed, or established, He was not. For He was not unbegotten.” (*The ecclesiastical history of Theodoret, Book 1, Chapter 4, 'The letter of Arius to Eusebius, Bishop of Nicomedia'*)

This was also the faith of Seventh-day Adventists whilst Ellen White was alive. Prescott then continued his remarks by saying

“We have been circulating for 40 years a standard book which says that the Son is not co-eternal with the Father. That is teaching Arianism.” (*W. W. Prescott, Notes on the discussions of the 1919 Bible Conference and Teachers Meeting held at Takoma Park, Washington D.C. July 2nd*)

Again this is only human logic. It is not reasoning from the Scriptures.

The first part of Prescott’s statement is correct. Even up to that time (1919), it was still the general belief of Seventh-day Adventists that the Son was not coeternal with the Father (the infinite God as Ellen White referred to Him so many times). This was how it was all through the time of Ellen White’s ministry. As we have seen in previous sections, Ellen White endorsed this view.

It is the remark about Arianism that is extremely misleading. As has been said before (see section eight), Arianism is often a term applied to those who believe that Christ was a created being. Prescott made it sound as if this is what the Seventh-day Adventist Church had been teaching - which as we have seen in previous sections was definitely not the case.

That Christ is a created being has never been the denominational stand of the Seventh-day Adventist Church therefore if this is what Prescott was saying then all that he was doing again was setting up a straw man and then knocking it down (remember he had said that Seventh-day Adventists had not been teaching the co-eternity of the Son therefore this was making Him to be a finite being). If you remember also in previous sections we have taken particular note that Uriah Smith did say in his book *Looking Unto Jesus*

“With the Son, the evolution of deity, as deity, ceased. All else, of things animate or inanimate, has come in by creation of the Father and the Son — the Father the antecedent cause, the Son the acting agent through whom all has been wrought.” (*Uriah Smith, ‘Looking unto Jesus’, 1898, p.13*)

We can see here how Seventh-day Adventists regarded the Son. He was regarded as deity, not as Prescott had said “a finite being”.

Undoubtedly, this “standard book” that Prescott mentioned here was Uriah Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation*. This was the book that as we have noted was eventually rewritten to come into harmony with the new theology of trinitarianism. In his book, Uriah Smith presented what had always been the denominational stand of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This of course was non-trinitarianism. Prescott was sowing seeds here that later in the 1940’s would come to fruition. Prescott then asks

“Do we want to go on teaching that?” (*W. W. Prescott. Notes on the*

discussions of the 1919 Bible Conference and Teachers Meeting held at Takoma Park in Washington D.C. July 2nd)

Here we can see the frank admittance of Prescott that he for one did not wish to “go on” teaching that the Son was not co-eternal with the Father (begotten in eternity or Arianism as Prescott termed it) – even though this was then the standard denominational belief. We know this because Prescott said “Do we want to go on teaching that?”. This is a frank admittance of what was then, in 1919, the faith of Seventh-day Adventists. Prescott wanted to change it. This was 4 years after the death of Ellen White.

Note something very important here. In the *Review and Herald* of April 14th 1896 (this was when Ellen White was alive) Prescott had said

“As Christ was twice born, - once in eternity, the only begotten of the Father, and again here in the flesh, thus uniting the divine with the human in that second birth, - so we, who have been born once already in the flesh, are to have the second birth, being born again of the Spirit, in order that our experience may be the same, - the human and the divine being joined in a life union.” (*W. W. Prescott Review and Herald April 14th 1896*)

At this time (1896), what Prescott had said here was undoubtedly the denominational stand of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is obvious that 23 years later, by the time of the 1919 conference (4 years after Ellen White had died), he had changed his views. It was either that or he did not really believe what he had said in this 1896 statement but was saying it because it was the denominational faith. Certainly at this conference he was attempting to change the views of the delegates who believed what was still then the preponderant faith of Seventh-day Adventists (Christ a begotten Son). This is why there were objections to it.

In a complete turn-around from the profession of his former beliefs, Prescott was now saying (in harmony with the trinity doctrine) that the begotten Christ was co-eternal with the Father. G. B. Thompson then asked

“All things were created by him.” Do you understand that to mean more than this earth? (*G. B. Thompson, Notes on the discussions of the 1919 Bible Conference and Teachers Meeting held at Takoma Park in Washington D.C. July 2nd*)

Prescott replied

“Yes, whether they be thrones or principalities or powers or things visible or things invisible, all were created by him. That is, all existences of every kind depend upon His pre-existence and all present existences depend upon His present existence. Without Him there would be nothing in existence, and without Him that which is now in existence would fall out of existence.” (*W.*

W. Prescott Ibid)

Here we can see the problem area. Prescott is saying that not only does everything have its existence by reason of the Son's pre-existence but that it only continues to exist because of His existence. Here is confusion between the very source of beginnings (meaning the Father) and the Son.

God the Father created this world through the Son (Ephesians 3:9). The Son did not create it independently of the Father. The Father is the source of being of the Son. The source of the Son's power is the Father. As Ellen White once said

"Christ came to reveal the Source of his power, that man might never rely on his unaided human capabilities." (Ellen G. White, Review & Herald 18th February 1890)

There is also something else that is important to note concerning Prescott's remarks. That is that he says that if the Son did not exist today then nothing would exist.

We have said before that it had been the belief of Seventh-day Adventists that by becoming human, the Son could have sinned and would therefore, if this had happened, gone out of existence. This though does not mean that the world would have gone out of existence. This is because it would have been upheld by the power of the Father. Hence we can see in Prescott's reasoning the confusion between the Father and the Son. Prescott is almost making it appear that the Son, as a personality, is exactly the same as the Father. In 1894 Ellen White wrote (note the title of the article)

"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron." (Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 28th May 1894, 'Delusions of the last days')

This is the same warning that Ellen White made in the early 1900's in reference to the alpha of heresies and the omega. She continued

"Before the last developments of the work of apostasy there will be a confusion of faith. There will not be clear and definite ideas concerning the mystery of God. One truth after another will be corrupted. "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." (Ibid)

She went on to say that some will even deny the pre-existence of Christ but she did say in harmony with what was believed then by Seventh-day Adventists

“This is a total denial of Christ. He was the only-begotten Son of God, who was one with the Father from the beginning. By him the worlds were made.”
(*Ibid*)

Scriptural definitions versus non-scriptural definitions

During the ensuing discussions between Prescott and Bollman, the latter objected to Prescott’s use of the words co-eternal and coeval (of the same age). He said

“I would like to ask, Do you think it is necessary, or even helpful in the defining of Christian doctrine, to go outside of the New Testament for terms to use in the definition?” (*Bollman, Notes on the discussions of the 1919 Bible Conference and Teachers Meeting held at Takoma Park in Washington D.C. July 2nd*)

Prescott then replied by asking Bollman if he was asking whether dictionary terms should be accepted but Bollman said, no, this was not what he was asking. Prescott then asked Bollman to explain his question to which the latter (then associate editor of the magazine *Liberty*) said

“The scripture says Christ is the only begotten of the Father. Why should we go farther than that and say that He was co-eternal with the Father? And also say that to teach otherwise is Arianism?” (*Ibid*)

Bollman realised what Prescott was doing so he objected to Prescott’s use of non-biblical terminology. Bollman was not very pleased either concerning Prescott’s claim that the church had been teaching what he (Prescott) had labelled Arianism (the pre-existent Son a finite being). This is why he said to Prescott that it would be better to use only scriptural terms.

It is important to remember here that our church has always accepted the full and complete deity of Christ. This was never in question, even though Prescott’s remarks made it look as though this was the issue. The pioneers expressed this divinity though in non-trinitarian terms. Prescott was therefore again setting up straw men and then knocking them down. In an effort to justify the bringing in of the trinity doctrine, its present supporters use this self-same argument today.

The fact is that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has always upheld the full deity of Christ. This was something that on a number of occasions the delegates at the conference made clear to Prescott. This was particularly so when Prescott stressed that if Christ was not presented as being co-eternal with the Father then this would be to doubt His deity. There were strong objections to his reasoning. In other words, these objectors were upholding what was then the faith of Seventh-day Adventists.

In a defence and explanation of his argument, Prescott replied to Bollman by saying that although there were not in the Bible expressions such as co-eternal

etc, there were expressions (he believed) that were equivalent to it. Bollman asked for an explanation. Prescott replied

“I think the expression “I am” is the equivalent of eternity. I think these expressions, while they do not use the term co-eternal, are equivalent in their meaning. That brings up the whole question of the relation of the Son to the Father.” (*W. W. Prescott, ibid*)

Prescott

“There is a proper sense, as I view it, according to which the Son is subordinate to the Father, but that subordination is not in the question of attributes or of His existence. It is simply in the fact of the derived existence, as we read in John 5:26: “For as the Father hath life in himself, even so gave he to the Son also to have life in himself.” (*Ibid*)

Note Prescott’s remark to what he terms Christ’s “derived existence”. Here he is admitting, just as was taught in Seventh-day Adventism throughout the ministry of Ellen White, that the Son has His source in the Father. This is the begotten concept. This is very important. We shall come back to this thought again later. He continued

“Using terms as we use them, the Son is co-eternal with the Father. That does not prevent His being the only-begotten Son of God. We cannot go back into eternity and say where this eternity commenced, and where that eternity commenced. There is no contradiction to say that the Son is co-eternal with the Father, and yet the Son is the only-begotten of the Father.” (*Ibid*)

Prescott was still maintaining that Christ is a begotten Son even though he said that He is co-eternal with the Father. This of course is the language and concept that dealt with the personality of Christ at the original fourth century Council of Nicaea (AD 325). Here it was said that Christ was eternally or everlastingly begotten of the Father (see section seven, also the *Begotten Series*). This is much the same as what Prescott was saying.

These views of Prescott were different than what was then (1919) generally believed by Seventh-day Adventists. He was now saying (in effect) that Christ was eternally begotten of the Father (orthodox trinitarianism) and not begotten at a point in eternity (meaning that as a separate personality from God the Father there was a time when the Son was not). Prescott was finding it difficult to get away from the begotten belief that had been held by Seventh-day Adventists since their beginnings (also that he at one time had held). As we shall see later, he later denied his “derived existence” remarks (as above) but the stenographers had faithfully recorded what he had said.

All this shows that it is very difficult to change from one viewpoint to another –

especially where theology is concerned. It had been the historical belief in Seventh-day Adventism that at some point in eternity, too far back for the human mind to even imagine it, the Son came forth of (came out of) the Father. This meant that the Father was before the Son. Prescott was attempting to get away from this idea. He knew that Seventh-day Adventists were not denying the divinity of Christ but he did not care for the belief that as a separate personality from the Father, there was a time when the personality of the Son as a son, did not have an existence. This is why he was promoting the idea that the Son was coeternal with the Father.

Prescott's difficulty was how to do it. The Seventh-day Adventist faith was deeply seated in the belief that Christ really is the Son of God. In their thinking this was what made Him God Himself in the person of His Son. This means that the Son has His source in the Father. This is why His existence can be said to be "derived". Prescott was in difficulty because he was attempting to mingle the two thoughts, meaning Christ being truly the Son of God (begotten of God in eternity) and yet have a coeternity with the Father. This is why he said

"There is no contradiction to say that the Son is co-eternal with the Father, and yet the Son is the only-begotten of the Father" (see above)

If one person was finding this a difficult problem to get over, can you imagine what is needed to change the thinking of a denomination as a whole - especially a denomination that had been under the direct guidance of God's leading? This was in the form of His messenger to the remnant, meaning Ellen G. White. Never had she criticised the pioneers' begotten beliefs regarding Christ. She had only supported them in that belief. This was especially when defending them when they were criticized for holding it (see section fifteen and section twenty-two). In reply to Prescott's remarks, C. P. Bollman replied

"I think we should hold to the Bible definitions." (C. P. Bollman, *ibid*)

To this remark, Prescott responded by saying amazingly (as do the trinitarians) that it was better to stay with non-Scriptural language. He said

"We take the expression co-eternal, and that is better." (W. W. Prescott, *ibid*)

The identity of the "We" is left to the imagination. Prescott obviously knew. Certainly it was not then the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a whole.

Prescott's remarks are typically trinitarian. It was also the thinking of others at the conference. Even though this language is not scriptural, trinitarians say that this is the best way to describe the person of Christ.

Father and Son – metaphorical (allegorical) expressions

H. C. Lacey then came into the discussions. Whilst all that he said is too much to

quote here, his views can be summed up in the remarks that he made with reference to John 1:1-2. This is when he said

“If Jesus is divine, He must have that essential attribute, and so I have dared to say that Christ is absolutely co-eternal with the Father. You can not say that back in some point of duration the Son appeared, and prior to that He had not appeared.” (*H. C. Lacey, ibid*)

Lacey was now denying what the Seventh-day Adventist Church had been teaching since its beginnings. He also said

“I am just stating what I teach. I want to know whether this is so. That is what this council is for. I say that God was always in existence. Just as the light is always with the sun; the light comes from the sun, and so Jesus was always with God, always reigning with Him.” (*Lacey, Ibid*)

Again this is typical orthodox trinity reasoning (eternally begotten) but it is not the coeternal concept that was to be later held by Seventh-day Adventists (meaning the concept of Christ held by them now which is that like the Father He is not begotten).

Lacey then went to say that Christ, in His pre-existence, was not truly the Son of God but that the words ‘Son of God’ were just human words (figurative meanings) to show how much love there was between what he terms the first and second persons of the deity. He summed this up by saying

“To the first and only begotten Son was a specially tender feeling, and to indicate the wondrous love of the first person of the Deity to the second, this expression [the Son of God] is used. Never to indicate that the son came into existence after the Father.” (*Ibid*)

This is very much the reasoning of Seventh-day Adventist trinitarians today. They say that the Father and Son concept is not ontological but more so to do with the love shown between the two. Here we must ask a question though, if this reasoning is true, why do not the Scriptures use these terminologies with reference to the Father and the Holy Spirit regarding their love for each other - or the Son’s love to the Holy Spirit or vice versa etc? Why limit it only to the Father and the Son? Lacey also said

“I think we ought not to teach that there was a time when He produced another being who is called the son.” (*Ibid*)

Lacey was objecting to the faith that was held by Seventh-day Adventists all the time that Ellen White was alive. This faith was the producing (begetting) of a Son in eternity. This was still then, in 1919, the preponderant faith of Seventh-day Adventists but it was a changing faith. Some of these leaders wanted to make sure of that one. Lacey later added

“The son is called eternal with the Father, another person living with Him, a second intelligence in that Deity. The relationship between them is expressed by our human words father and son. The one was first in rank, the second, second, and the third, third.” (*Ibid*)

Thus it was that just four years after the death of Ellen White, both Prescott and Lacey were making the allegation that through our denominational publications, our pioneers had been teaching not Biblical truth but error. They also said that by it (this error), our pioneers were actually denying the divinity of the Son (this error being of course non-trinitarianism). This is untrue because as we have seen in previous sections, our pioneers, under the auspices of God’s messenger to the remnant namely Ellen White, taught that the Son was brought forth of the Father, therefore He was a true son and was God essentially.

This type of accusation against the pioneers was something that as the decades passed would continue to happen with more and more frequency. It was also done with more and more resolve.

Ellen White had said something entirely different. She said that what she and the other pioneers were teaching about God and Christ was the truth that God had revealed to them. She even called this truth sacred. If you wish to read how Ellen White regarded the Godhead beliefs of our pioneers then please read section fifteen and section twenty-one.

In section thirty-six we shall see how this debate continued. As can be seen already, it is much the same in principle as is taking place today between the opposing parties in Seventh-day Adventism. We shall also see in the next section how at the end of the conference, it was decided not to make known the discussions but to confine them instead to the archives.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section thirty-six

The 'secret' 1919 Bible conference (Part 2 of 2)

In part one of our studies of the discussions that took place at the 1919 Bible Conference, we noted that Prescott and others were urging that changes should be made to what had been believed concerning Jesus, by Seventh-day Adventists, all through the ministry of Ellen White. This belief was that at some point in eternity past, He was brought forth of the Father, meaning that He was begotten of God. This made Him literally the Son of God. This was non-trinitarianism.

We shall now see how the 1919 discussions continued.

July 6th discussions on the person of Christ

Sunday July 6th brought even more impassioned debate about Christ. Tension was mounting. Throughout his presentations, Prescott was still stressing that the Son was co-eternal with the Father. The afternoon session began with a vote to allow the speakers to develop the theme of the person of Christ prior to there being any more discussion.

These discussions concerned time and eternity. Christ was again presented as being co-eternal with the Father.

Herbert C. Lacey, the one time president of Newbold College (England) and who was then teacher of Bible and Biblical languages at the Washington Missionary College (later Columbia Union College – now Washington Adventist University), still insisted the same view as he did a few days previous. He said

“There never was a time when the Son was not. If the word Son puzzles us, let us remember that that is God’s own sacred word to present His love for that second person of the deity.” (H. C. Lacey. Notes on the discussions of the 1919 Bible Conference and Teachers Meeting held at Takoma Park in Washington D.C. July 6th)

We see here, as he did before, that Lacey is speaking of the Father and Son as not really being a father and son but that they were only role-playing. He was saying that the Word of God only calls Christ the Son to show the love that He

had for the “second person of the deity”.

This would be to make all references in the Scriptures of Christ being a son to be metaphorical. It would also make metaphorical the term father. As we have seen in previous sections, this was not what Seventh-day Adventists had been told through the spirit of prophecy. Ellen White had insisted on the literality of Christ being a pre-existent son (see particularly section fifteen). Lacey went on to say

“Jesus is the revelation. He is the Son of God, not meaning that He proceedeth forth and developed from him, nor is there another mother, -- I cannot help being precise, His existence spans eternity, and we cannot settle upon any point in eternity past when He began any more than we can settle upon any point in the future when He will not be.” (*Ibid*)

The latter part of this statement is true. It is also what Seventh-day Adventists once believed. This is that although the Son was begotten (sourced) of God, the precise time of this happening is unknown, at least to humanity. Seventh-day Adventists did once confess though, throughout the time of Ellen White’s ministry, that the Son did proceed forth from the Father (was sourced of the Father). This was also the belief of historic Christianity. In other words, prior to the unbegotten concept of Christ, it was always believed by Christians that Christ has His source in the Father.

The remark here concerning a mother is a mocking of the belief of a begotten Son therefore no further comment will be made. Lacey concluded

“When we raise the question of the origin of the Son, we say there is no origin to Him. He is the second person of the Godhead.” (*Ibid*)

Again we see Lacey denying what was once the faith of Seventh-day Adventists (the begotten faith). This brings to remembrance the words of Ellen White. This was when in 1904 she said

“Be not deceived; many will depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. We have now before us the alpha of this danger. The omega will be of a most startling nature.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B, No. 2 page 16, ‘A Letter to Leading Physicians’, July 24th 1904, ‘Teach the Word’*)

She also said the same year

"Living Temple" contains the alpha of these theories. I knew that the omega would follow in a little while; and I trembled for our people." (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies, Series B No. 2 Page 53, ‘The Foundation of our Faith’ 1904*)

Ellen White is here saying that what Kellogg had written in his book (about God)

was the first (the alpha) of heresies to come into Seventh-day Adventism. If she had believed that the Sonship of Christ belief, as taught by Seventh-day Adventists throughout her ministry, was error then she would not have described Kellogg's beliefs as such. This much really is evident. We need to remember that this was now 5 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*.

Lacey was advocating a very similar view to what Seventh-day Adventists believe today but it was certainly not in harmony with the original trinity doctrine that came out of the 4th century councils of Nicaea (AD 325) and Constantinople (AD 381). This is because the latter expressed the origins of the Son to be the Father. It was also not exactly in keeping with what Prescott had previously said about Christ being derived of the Father (see above). This was a difference that needed to be resolved but it does show the problem involved in changing over from one belief to another – in this case begotten to unbegotten.

No Sonship – no claims to deity

We shall now take note of the remarks of a minister by the name of Caviness. He had arrived late at the conference and had therefore missed some of the discussions. In reply to all these comments that he had heard concerning the co-eternity of Christ he said

“I missed a good deal of this discussion and I do not know whether the idea is that we are to accept the so-called Trinitarian doctrine or not”. (*L. Caviness, Notes on the discussions of the 1919 Bible Conference and Teachers Meeting held at Takoma Park in Washington D.C. July 6th*)

Even though Caviness “missed a good deal” of the discussions, he quickly concluded that attempts were being made to get the delegates to adopt certain concepts of the doctrine of the trinity.

Here we can see clearly then that at the time of this Bible conference (1919), our denomination was still a non-trinitarian denomination. This was even though there were now very strong suggestions of a change. Notice how Caviness referred to the trinity doctrine as being “the so-called Trinitarian doctrine”. It appears that he did not regard it with much respect.

Following this remark, Caviness proceeded to explain just why he thought that the trinity doctrine was unscriptural. As a defence of his beliefs he used the Gospel of John. This he maintained was written particularly to explain the deity and the humanity of Christ, a point on which he and I would thoroughly agree. He said

“Personally, I have not been able to accept the so called trinitarian doctrine, that is, as generally presented, that there are three persons in the Godhead, and that there were always three”. If that is the doctrine, I can not quite agree with it, because I was reading in the Bible yesterday, in the book of John, which is the book that reveals to us the deity of Christ and I

read as far as I could everything that Christ said concerning himself. Without contradicting what he said about himself, I cannot agree with the doctrine.” (*Ibid*)

Caviness uses the phrase “in the Godhead” but as we noted in section six, this could lead to believe that the word Godhead means the same as the word trinity when it does not. They are two entirely different words with two entirely different meanings. Never should they be confused. With reference to what he regarded as being the crux of the debate (and so do I as well as many others, both trinitarian and non-trinitarian) he then said

“As I understand it, his statement of the deity rests upon his Sonship, and I do not think there is any one thing through the book of John that is more constantly referred than the Sonship. I cannot believe that the two persons of the Godhead are equal, the Father and the Son, -- that one is the Father the other the Son and that they might be just as well the other way around.” (*Ibid*)

This though, in reality, is what the Seventh-day Adventist Church is saying today. They say that the persons of the Godhead are no different to each other and that in the plan of redemption they just took on different roles. In other words, according to this type of theology, it would have not been any different if the roles had been reversed. This is because current Seventh-day Adventism denies that the Son is begotten (sourced) of the Father.

Note very importantly the emphasis of Caviness. He said that the deity of Jesus rested on His “Sonship”. In other words (he is saying), if Christ is not really a Son then He is not divine (deity). This is the view of the non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists. It is also the view of orthodox trinitarians and the author of these notes. Caviness followed this by saying with reference to John 5:26

“There is another statement he (*Christ*) makes. He says that the Father who has life in himself, gave the Son to have life in himself. When that took place, I do not know, but I believe it took place somewhere away back in eternity.” (*Ibid*)

Caviness concluded

“I have to take Christ’s word for it, that at sometime that was true, that the Father had life in himself, and gave the Son to have life in himself.” (*Ibid*)

Caviness was repeating the stand taken by our pioneers. This was also the early 1900’s faith of Seventh-day Adventists. It was also the faith that Ellen White said should not be changed but warned that from it there would be a departing. The end of this departing she called the omega. We noted this in section one and in other places.

Caviness recognised that there was a push being made by some to accept the trinity doctrine, which, in itself, would have constituted a major change to the fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventism. He makes it very clear that he could not accept it. Notice here that Caviness says that he could not accept either that there are three persons of the Godhead who have always been there together (as the trinity doctrine purports) and also adds that he cannot accept that the two persons (Father and Son) are equal inasmuch as it did not make any difference which one took which role. His constant reference for his beliefs was what Jesus said about Himself.

After explaining that the scriptures say that the Father gave life to the Son, Leon Caviness then said

“There is also that other statement, that he had received glory from his Father. In praying he said it was his wish that the disciples might see the glory which he had with the Father, and which the Father had given him. It was not something he had all through eternity, but the Father had some time given to him the glory of God. He is divine, but he is the divine Son. I cannot explain further than that, but I cannot believe the so called Trinitarian doctrine of the three persons always existing.” (*Ibid*)

Caviness again emphasises the importance of Christ literally being “the divine Son”. To him, just like it is to the author of these notes, it is the all-important factor.

As a matter of interest here and before we jump to any conclusions about Caviness (1884-1955), we should note that just like the other delegates, he was no slouch when it came to understanding the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It cannot be said either that he was ignorant of the Scriptures, ignorant of the spirit of prophecy or ignorant of the doctrine of the trinity.

We know this because at the time of the conference, he was then the associate editor of the *Review and Herald*. Prior to this he had been a teacher of languages at Union College (1906-1913) and Professor of Greek at Washington Missionary Seminary (1913-1915). It is more than likely that he would also have known Ellen White personally although I have no documentation on that one. Interesting to note is that in 1913, Caviness went to Washington D.C. to work with W. W. Prescott on the *Protestant Magazine* and later became its assistant editor. We can see then that this man well understood the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He must also have had a prolific knowledge of the scriptures as well as of the writings of Ellen White.

After the 1919 conference, Caviness held the positions of departmental Secretary for the Latin Union (1920-1924), director of the *Seminaire Adventiste du Saleve* (1921-1922), Sabbath School and Educational Secretary of the European Division (1924-1928) and of the Southern European division (1928-1932). He then, from 1932 until he retired in 1952, became professor of Biblical

languages at Pacific Union College. This is quite a realisation seeing that he was, at the time of the 1919 Bible conference, a non-trinitarian.

In 1950, 5 years before he died, Caviness was still referring to Christ as the divine Son of God. He was also making reference to His Sonship. In an article where he refuted that Peter was the first pope (as claimed by Roman Catholics) he said

“Peter had acknowledged the deity of Christ, and it is upon that deity that the church is built. God had revealed to Peter the great truth of the divine Sonship of the Messiah.” (*L. L. Caviness, Review and Herald, August 10th 1950, ‘Is Peter the rock or a rock’*)

As he neared then end of the article he wrote

“We prefer to be members of a church built on the divine Son of God rather than on a man who denied his Saviour and to whom Christ said that when he was converted he should strengthen the brethren. (Luke 22:32.)” (*ibid*)

Proceedings temporarily halted

It was after the above remarks of Caviness concerning the trinity doctrine that the delegates of the 1919 Bible Conference became very uneasy. It even led to A. G. Daniells requesting the stenographers to cease from taking notes. It appears therefore that the remarks of Caviness struck home as to what many probably regarded as the prime intent of the conference, thus the fears that many had about it taking place were now becoming very real.

As there is no record as to what it was that Daniells actually said to the delegates, we can only conjecture, suffice to say that after he made his unrecorded comments, the proceedings did continue and the stenographers again began to take notes. The only thing that the stenographers did record regarding this incident was that

“Elder Daniells here made some suggestions as to the delegates not becoming uneasy because we are studying a subject that we cannot comprehend. He asked that these be not transcribed.” (*A. G. Daniells, ibid*)

One is left to wonder exactly what Daniells had said to the delegates but because the stenographers were not allowed to record his words, we shall never know. In other words, what the president said must be left to the imagination. Note that Daniells said that the delegates were studying a subject that cannot be comprehended. This is very interesting because whenever they are challenged, this is what trinitarians usually say regarding the trinity doctrine.

Strange really that it should be said of a man-made formula that it is impossible for anyone to understand it. One would have thought that the entire purpose of the formulation of this teaching was to clearly define the relationship between the

three divine personalities. Why invent a formula and then say that no one can understand it? This defies reasoning. It is not surprising therefore that one of our early pioneers said concerning the trinity doctrine

“All seem to think they must hold it, but each has perfect liberty to take his own way to reconcile its contradictory propositions; and hence a multitude of views are held concerning it by its friends, all of them orthodox, I suppose, as long as they nominally assent to the doctrine.” (*R. F. Cottrell Review and Herald 1st June 1869 ‘The Doctrine of the Trinity’*)

When the proceedings of the conference continued, Prescott addressed the delegates by making reference to Ellen White saying that that the Holy Spirit was the third person of the Godhead. He then said with regards to this suggestion

“I deal with it because it has brought great personal blessing to me, and has given me a view of the gospel that I never had before, and not because I am trying to establish a theory of Trinitarianism, Unitarianism or any other ism.” (*W. W. Prescott, Notes on the discussions of the 1919 Bible Conference and Teachers Meeting held at Takoma Park in Washington D.C.*)

Although Prescott denied attempting to establish a theory of trinitarianism (or any other ism), it is evident that certain of the delegates thought that this was his intention. Some probably came to the conclusion that this was the overall purpose of his presentations and perhaps even the overall purpose of the conference itself, hence the objections and resistance to that which he was attempting to have them accept.

Whilst the pioneers fully realized that Ellen White had said that the Holy Spirit was a personality (we have noted this in previous sections,), they did not believe that He was a person in exactly the same sense as they believed that God and Christ were persons but was the personal presence of them both.

The 1919 Bible Conference and Desire of Ages

We have seen that by 1919, trinitarianism was far from being accepted within Seventh-day Adventism. Prescott had even admitted that it was not his intentions to establish it but obviously, because of what he was saying in his presentations, certain of the delegates did not see it that way. This in itself should be the conclusive and overwhelming proof of our denominational 1919 non-trinitarian status.

In his research paper called “The Doctrine of the Trinity among Adventists”, Gerhard Pfandl the Associate Director of the Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Research Institute, makes reference to this conference.

With reference to Ellen White’s remarks in *Desire of Ages* concerning the deity of Christ (this was such as in Christ was “life, original, unborrowed, underived” etc)

he made this comment concerning the 1919 Bible Conference

“This discussion indicates that twenty years after Ellen White’s clear statement on the eternal divinity of Christ and his absolute equality with the Father, many in the church still held on to the idea that Christ, although divine, had a beginning.” (Gerhard Pfandl, research paper ‘The Doctrine of the Trinity among Adventists June 1999 page 5)

Here we can see it said, by a respected leader of Seventh-day Adventism, that even 20 years after *Desire of Ages* had been published, non-trinitarianism was still the denominational stance of Seventh-day Adventism. In other words, it was still believed by Seventh-day Adventists, 20 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*, that Christ had a beginning (was begotten or sourced of the Father). This was as a separate personality from God but not to identity of person.

One of the supposed “clear statement” of Ellen White’s on the eternity of Christ to which Pfandl makes reference is the one found in *Desire of Ages* that says “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived” (see page 530 of the *Desire of Ages*). Note then that twenty years after this book was published, this statement had still not changed the non-trinitarian thinking of Seventh-day Adventists. In other words, by 1919, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still as non-trinitarian as it had been all through the time of the ministry of Ellen White. This means that by 1919, *Desire of Ages* had not brought about any change in their beliefs.

In their begotten belief, the pioneers would have totally agreed with Ellen White’s statement. This is because they believed that the life (eternal life/divinity) in Christ was the divinity of the Father. They believed that in His pre-existence that He was totally divine.

This “beginning” that Gerhard Pfandl made reference to above was the belief that sometime in eternity, so far back that it was totally impossible for any human being to even contemplate it, the Son was begotten (brought forth) of the Father but as we have noted before, this does not mean that Seventh-day Adventists believed that Christ is a created or finite being. They believed that He was God Himself begotten. As Pfandl explains about the concept of begotten

“The word “begotten” was taken literally which meant that Christ at some point in eternity proceeded from the Father, and was therefore subordinate to Him.” (*Ibid page 4*).

As we have noted before, Ellen White made it very clear that she believed that the Son was begotten. If you wish to read about her beliefs then please go to section fifteen. With reference to this “beginning”, it is interesting to note that with respect of Jesus saying “before Abraham was I am” (see John 8:58), Ellen White said

“Here Christ shows them that, altho they might reckon His life to be less than fifty years, yet His divine life could not be reckoned by human computation. The existence of Christ before His incarnation is not measured by figures.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times. 3rd May 1899 ‘The Word made flesh’*)

Some may say that here is a very strong implication that Ellen White believed that Christ, as a separate personality from God the Father, had a beginning but it was so far back in eternity that it is impossible for the human mind to even begin to imagine. Her words show why she referred to Him at times as being eternal.

No vote on trinitarianism

The fact that in 1919 non-trinitarianism was still the official and continuing stance of Seventh-day Adventism is also confirmed by A.G. Daniells, the General Conference President. At this conference, also after making the claim that Ellen White’s *Desire of Ages* had changed his thinking about Christ, he said to the delegates

“Perhaps we have discussed this as long as we need to. We are not going to take a vote on Trinitarianism or Arianism, but we can think”. Let us go on with the study. (*A. G. Daniells, Notes on the discussions of the 1919 Bible Conference and Teachers Meeting held at Takoma Park in Washington D.C. July 6th*)

Here we can see that whilst Daniells tried to persuade the delegates that it was not the intention of the conference to take a vote either way (“[Trinitarianism or Arianism](#)”), it was, so he said, something to think about for the future. We can see therefore that Prescott’s daily presentations about Christ in which he attempted to introduce certain trinitarian principles into the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventism, was more than likely done so with the very purpose of cultivating this idea.

This then was probably one of the purposes of the conference itself, even perhaps the main one. It was to swing these delegates thinking to a trinitarian idea of God. By their response and their objections, we can see that this was also duly recognised by some of the delegates.

As was said at the beginning of this section, it is interesting to note that when the conference ended, it was decided not to go public with regards to the discussions that had taken place. This is why, until they were discovered in 1974 by Dr. Donald Yost (he had been appointed Archivist when the General Conference Archives department was established in 1973) that they remained unknown to Seventh-day Adventists. This is also why that up to that time (1974), which did include all the time throughout the transitional period of non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism, Seventh-day Adventists in general knew nothing concerning these discussions. It is therefore also true to say that neither did they know about the disputes over the trinity doctrine that had taken place at this

conference.

What they also did not know was that amongst the delegates there was a decided fear that these discussions would be generally made known amongst Seventh-day Adventists. We shall now look at some of the remarks that revealed those fears.

The 1919 Bible conference fears and reservations

When the time came to decide what to do about allowing others to know what had been discussed at the Bible conference, the delegates clearly portrayed both fear and reservation. Most it seems did not want the discussions known. Some of these remarks recorded by the stenographers were

A. G. Daniells (then General Conference president and chairman of the Bible conference): -

“I sometimes think it would be just as well to lock this manuscript up in a vault, and have anyone who wishes to do so come there for personal study and research.” (*A. G. Daniells, Notes of the discussions of the 1919 Bible Conference and Teachers Meeting held at Takoma Park in Washington D.C. July 16th*)

W. W. Prescott (member of the General Conference Committee and a General Conference field secretary): -

“I think that we should be careful about how we handle the matter in any publications.” (*W. W. Prescott, ibid*)

R. A. Underwood (then president of the Central Union Conference): -

“I think if we publish this in pamphlet form it will be used against us, even though an explanation may be made.” (*R. A. Underwood, ibid*)

Prof. William G. Wirth (religion teacher at Pacific Union College): -

“I am not going to tell them (Wirth’s students) everything about it. I am going to ask the Lord to give me wisdom. Because I do not think they are ready. I shall feel very badly if they get hold of this thing. One would take one side and one another.” (*William G. Worth, ibid*)

G. B. Thompson (a member of the General Conference Committee and a General Conference field secretary): -

“I think that the publishing of this matter would sow seeds of division and discord, and as far as I am concerned, I am not in favour of sending out anything.” (*G. B Thompson, ibid*)

F. M. Wilcox (a member of the General Conference Committee and editor of the *Review and Herald*, a post that he held until 1944. He was also the person who wrote out the statement of beliefs of Seventh-day Adventism that first included the word trinity)

“I would like to make this further suggestion that there be gotten out a brochure containing the historical extracts alone, that have been read in this convention, and furnish this to anyone whom wishes it, but that all the discussion and the papers be not printed.” (*F. M. Wilcox, ibid*)

We can now see why the record of these discussions remained undiscovered in the General Conference archives until 1974.

In the Adventist Review of January 28th 2010 there was an article called ‘Sifting through the Past’. This article concerned the 1919 Bible Conference. This was referred to in the previous section. Regarding the stenographers transcripts, M. W. Campbell wrote

“Although the transcripts were never published, there is no evidence to suggest that they were “hidden” or kept “secret” by church leaders. (*Michael W. Campbell, Adventist Review, January 28th 2010, ‘Sifting Through the Past’*)

If this referred to what was decided by our leaders at the conference, I would disagree. Their whole intention was to keep the discussions secret. Campbell did add though (referring to after these manuscripts were found in 1974)

“Some excerpts were published in *Spectrum*, which startled many Adventist academics in the 1970s who realized that they were not the first ones who were wrestling with the never-ending debate over Adventist hermeneutics and inspiration.” (*Ibid*)

A follow up article

Concerning the Bible conference and following its close, an article, written by A. G. Daniells (then the General Conference president), was published in the *Review and Herald* of August 21st 1919. Please take very careful note regarding what he wrote. I say this because after realising what was said at this conference I ask, would you agree with him? He said under the subheading of “**Harmony on the Fundamentals**”

“The Bible and history teachers, the editors, and the members of the General Conference Committee, who came together from all parts of North America, rejoiced to find themselves in agreement on all the great fundamental truths of the Bible. It was the first time that all these men had compared their views and teachings in this way. Time and again there was expressed the deepest gratitude and rejoicing over the unity and harmony that prevailed regarding the vital, saving truths of the gospel.” (A. G.

Daniells, Review and Herald, August 21st 1919, 'The Bible Conference')

Whether this is regarded as true or not is certainly a matter of personal opinion but it does not appear that Daniells' remarks convey a correct overall picture. Instead it seems that what was happening at this conference was that some were trying to defend the non-trinitarian position taken by both Ellen G. White and the other pioneers whilst some were trying to tear it down, hence the discord between the delegates. Daniells then said

“There was manifested throughout the conference, a cordial, brotherly spirit. No unkind word was uttered by any one when discussing differences of views regarding minor questions. It was a good and profitable meeting.”
(*Ibid*)

Conclusive proof

However the intentions and the outcomes of this 1919 Bible conference are regarded, we have seen that it is the ultimate proof that in 1919, which was four years after the death of Ellen White, our church was still decidedly non-trinitarian but that some were pushing for a change.

We are left to wonder though, seeing that this was so very soon after Ellen White's death, just how much of a desire there was with certain Seventh-day Adventists to do this whilst she was alive. From my studies, all that I can say is that I have not found record of anyone, at least whilst Ellen White was alive, openly and specifically confessing this idea of God being a trinity, except of course for John Harvey Kellogg whose beliefs were totally condemned by Ellen White (see section twenty-five, section twenty-six and section twenty-seven).

Once again the question springs to mind that if as some say today that Ellen White believed that God is a trinity of beings and that this is what God wanted the Seventh-day Adventist Church to teach, then why did she not tell our people that this was so? Why just leave it (after she was dead) as a matter for the church to both debate and conjecture, thus causing all sorts of rifts amongst God's remnant people?

This to me seems only to be a repetition of what happened when the original trinity doctrine was formulated. The canon of Scripture was closed but said nothing concerning God being a trinity. Usually the claim is that the formulation of this teaching was the work that God left the church to do. So it was that it was eventually formulated at the councils of Nicaea (AD 325) and Constantinople (AD 381). In other words, history is repeating itself (for a discussion of these two councils, also the ensuing results, see section seven, section eight and section nine).

These questions regarding why Ellen White did not say anything about God being a trinity are not easily answered, at least not by those who maintain that it was what she wrote in *Desire of Ages* that led our denomination from its long

time non-trinitarian stand to one that is trinitarian. After all, Ellen White lived for 17 years following the publishing of this book (1898) and never once, during this time, did she even suggest or even intimate that God was a trinity of divine beings or that our church, in the future, should adopt such a belief.

In fact as we have repeatedly seen, especially in section twenty-three, section-twenty-four and section twenty-nine, throughout the years immediately following the publication of this book, Ellen White stressed very strongly that Seventh-day Adventists we were to maintain their teachings concerning God and Christ. These were the teachings that she said they had taught for the previous 50 years. She did warn though, also as we have seen, that there were those who were trying to change these beliefs (see section one and section twenty-four). Obviously, by what happened at the 1919 Bible Conference, she was perfectly correct in what she had said.

We also have seen that during these same years (the early 1900's) which was after *Desire of Ages* was published, Ellen White repeatedly emphasised that just as the Son of God was a person, so too was God Himself a person. Never once did she say (or intimate) that God was a three-in-one substance of a trinity. In fact in one testimony where she condemned the beliefs of John Harvey Kellogg, she said that any illustrations making God appear to be this way was false and untrue (see section twenty-seven). These were beliefs that during the early 1900's had led to a crisis within Seventh-day Adventism.

The 1919 Bible conference and the word begotten

Before we leave off from commenting on the 1919 Bible conference, it is also interesting to note that W. W. Prescott, whilst presenting Christ as a separate personality from the Father, also said of Him that He was co-eternal with the Father. This led one of the delegates, namely John Isaac, to sum up this bewildered situation by saying

“What are we Bible teachers going to do? We have heard ministers talk one way. Our students have had Bible teachers in one school spend days and days upon this question. Then they come to another school, and the teacher does not agree with that. We ought to have something definite so that we might give the answer. I think it can be done. We ought to have it clearly stated. Was Christ ever begotten, or not, or this thing, or that thing.”
(John Isaac, Notes on the discussions of the 1919 Bible Conference and Teachers Meeting held at Takoma Park in Washington D.C. July 6th)

John Isaac was told that time was not available at the Bible conference to discuss whether Christ was begotten or not but today, just as it was then, it is the most crucial of all questions. As can be seen by the *Begotten Series* on this website, I certainly have not taken the attitude of A. G. Daniells who replied to John Isaac by saying

“Perhaps in another study we might have a study on the word begotten. I

thought this morning when Brother Bollman spoke of it, if we could have five or ten minutes on that word, bring in the law of precise meaning in that interpretation, it would be well. But we will have to drop it here this time.” (A. G. Daniells *Ibid*)

It appears from what Daniells said to the delegates that he believed that a “five or ten minutes” discussion on the word begotten would be sufficient time to determine its meaning. This was either a complete misunderstanding of the complexities involved in understanding this much-debated word or an attempt to play down its importance. Either that or it was a means of avoiding a discussion on it altogether. Whichever is true is left entirely to the imagination but certainly nothing would have been resolved by a “five or ten minutes” discussion on this word. To those who do know the issues and complexities involved in it, this much really is transparent.

Intriguingly we note that immediately following this remark about the word begotten, A. G. Daniells said to the delegates

“Now we will go on. Now let’s not get a bit nervous or scared.” (*Ibid*)

So what was it that Daniells was telling the delegates not to get scared or nervous about? His next words reveal the answer. Realising that over this trinity issue there was a mixture of feelings amongst the delegates, A. G. Daniells (remember here that at that time he was General Conference president) said

“Don’t let the conservatives think that something is going to happen, and the progressives get alarmed for the fear that it won’t happen. Let’s keep up this good spirit. Bring out what you have. Let us get all the light we have, believe what we can, and let the rest go.” (*Ibid*)

We can see from what Daniells said that there were those who wanted change in respect to what we, as a denomination, then taught about Christ, which was of course that He is truly the only-begotten Son of God. At the same time though, there were others who resisted the change.

It must be remembered here that all the time we were considered a non-trinitarian denomination, which included all the time of Ellen White’s ministry and beyond, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, by the trinitarian denominations, was regarded as a cult. Obviously our once non-trinitarianism played a major role in their attitude towards us because as we have noted so many times before, non-trinitarians are not generally regarded as being truly Christian.

Regarding our non-trinitarian status, some at the conference were pushing for a change whilst others decidedly resisted this move. The terminology ‘begotten’ was to be a deciding factor in this debate. It must be noted though that the original (orthodox) trinity doctrine is completely based on the reasoning that the Son of God is begotten (and the reason why He is the Son) therefore Seventh-

day Adventists today totally disagree with its concepts. In other words, our church leadership today do not believe, as did the pioneers, that Christ, in His pre-existence, is the Son of God. The *Begotten Series* is to help people understand the issues in this debate.

In section 37 we shall be taking a look at our past non-trinitarian books and articles. This will reveal what the standard beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists were during the time of Ellen White. When these beliefs are compared with what we presently confess are our fundamental beliefs, it will also reveal how much these beliefs have changed over the years. The eventual outcome of this change was an acceptance and an adoption of the trinity doctrine.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section thirty-seven

Non-trinitarian books and articles – no objections from Ellen White (Part 1 of 3)

At this juncture we need to give very serious consideration to a very important aspect of our history, namely, our past publications.

In our studies so far, we have noted that with the exception of John Harvey Kellogg (who in 1903 professed to have come to believe in the trinity) none of the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism ever confessed a belief in the trinity doctrine. At least the author of these notes has never found record of any. We have also noted that many of these pioneers were vocally anti-trinitarian, meaning that they spoke out against the trinity doctrine. This was even to the extent of consistently using Seventh-day Adventist publications to express their beliefs.

The fact is that whilst all of this anti-trinitarianism and non-trinitarianism was being expressed through our standard publications, Ellen White, God's messenger to the remnant, never once told these pioneers that they were wrong in what they were doing. In view of our church saying today that our pioneers had it all wrong concerning the trinity doctrine, this is an amazing realisation.

We must remember here that by the means of our publications, this non-trinitarianism/anti-trinitarianism was being sent around the world to Seventh-day Adventists and non Seventh-day Adventists alike. So it was that countless thousands were being led to believe that what we published concerning the Godhead was in fact the truth. In itself, this should be a cause for exercising very serious caution because why should Ellen White have allowed this to happen and not say anything if what the pioneers were saying was wrong?

If our present church leadership is correct in saying that our pioneers had it all wrong about the trinity doctrine, then it must be said that these same thousands of people were being taught error. This in itself is a very serious indictment which if true would also be a truly remarkable phenomenon. I say this because Ellen White spent the entirety of her adult life (a total of 71 years) amongst these pioneers as God's messenger to the remnant and nowhere can it be found where she complained of their non-trinitarian views or their anti-trinitarian attitude. Surely this demands some very serious consideration!

In other words, if in this area of their beliefs the pioneers had been wrong (their non-conformity to trinitarianism) then why did not Ellen White tell them so? This becomes even more remarkable when we realise that on many of an occasion, Ellen White did clearly tell people that their views regarding God were incorrect. Why then did she not tell the pioneers that they were wrong in their anti-trinitarianism (if they were wrong)? After all, she corrected them on many other things.

There is also something else here to which very important consideration is due. This is that one of the main proponents of this anti-trinitarianism within Seventh-day Adventism was James White, Ellen White's own husband.

Begin printing

Through a vision given to Ellen White, James White was told by God to begin printing a little paper. He was also told that this would send the truth around the world like streams of light. Yet throughout his lifetime (he died in 1881), James White used our publications to promote non-trinitarian concepts of God, even at times speaking out vehemently against the trinity doctrine. As we have seen in section twenty, this was only the same as was done, in one way or another, by many of the other pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism. This is because they were all non-trinitarian.

In other words, all of our publications, in whatever shape or form they came, all depicted a non-trinitarian view of the Godhead, at least they did whilst Ellen White was alive. Is this a significant realisation?

Important to note here is that never once did any of this trinity antagonism bring rebuke from Ellen White. The question must be asked again therefore, if James White and the other pioneers were wrong in this matter, then why didn't Ellen White tell them so because after all, she was God's messenger to the remnant?

The question is then (in summary), if the pioneers were wrong in using our publications to express their rejection of the trinity doctrine, then why did not God, through Ellen White, make any protest? I say this because He was the one who told Ellen White that her husband should start to print a paper that would herald the truth around the world. Is it possible that in all of this there is some significance that many pro-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists have been overlooking?

There is also something else to consider here. This is that throughout the world, our publications were the medium that God used to spread the truth that He wanted people to believe. This means that through the teachings found in our publications, tens of thousands of people world-wide were led to believe that the trinity doctrine was error. They were also led to believe that what the Seventh-day Adventist Church taught concerning the Godhead was the truth. It is also true to say that there were countless numbers of people went to their death believing what our publications were teaching. Why then, if Seventh-day

Adventists were wrong in this matter, didn't God do anything about it? After all, He was the one that ordained the printing of these publications and He did have His very own messenger in the church.

There is something else that is extremely important to consider here. This is that in the main, trinitarians believe that their trinity doctrine is sacrosanct. In other words, trinitarians believe that whatever else may be confessed, those who do not hold to this belief are not really Christian. This is why in itself, this non-trinitarianism was a very definite prohibition to many trinitarians even thinking about joining the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This was even though it did constitute God's visible remnant church.

To put all this in another way, this rejection of the trinity doctrine by our church would have effectively prohibited many trinitarians from even considering God's last day message (the Sabbath, the state of the dead, the sanctuary message, the investigative judgement etc). This is because they would have regarded any non-trinitarian denomination as not even being Christian. So why then, if God is a trinity and this is what He wants people to believe, did He not tell us this through Ellen White and thus have our publications express this belief? Why allow this non-trinitarianism to be a consistent barrier against many people coming to the truth?

On the other hand (some may reason), if God is not a trinity and the pioneers were correct in what they taught, then why does He allow our church today to teach it? This is a valid question and one that is very important, but it is very simple to answer.

Whilst today God does not have a messenger in the church such as Ellen White, meaning someone that He has endowed with the gift of prophecy, He still has, in the form of Ellen White's writings, the things that He has revealed through her to His people. God expects us therefore, as His remnant people, to read what she wrote and thus be a wiser people because of it. Certainly, through His Holy Spirit, God would not contradict today the things that He once inspired Ellen White to write. On the other hand it must be reasoned that if our pioneers had been teaching error, then what they were teaching could not have been revelation from God. This is a simple exercise of logic. Certainly it must be one way or another. Certainly also God would not deliberately lead people to believe error.

Many Seventh-day Adventists would agree that those things written by Ellen White are the truth. I believe that most would agree also that God would not send new light to contradict what He once revealed through her. Thus it behoves us, as God's remnant people, to study to see what He did reveal through His messenger. Today, Ellen White's writings still stand as a testimony to the truth that God revealed to His people. He therefore expects us, as His professed people, to read these writings for ourselves and discover (or re-discover) this truth.

In summary of all this, we know that through her ministry as God's messenger to the remnant, Ellen White rebuked and counselled those whom she believed were promulgating wrong views about God, yet never once during her lifetime did she object to the non-trinitarianism (and sometimes even anti-trinitarianism) of the pioneers. It must be said therefore that if the pioneers had been teaching error, then this would have been an amazing phenomenon.

Let's now consider our publications.

James White – the editor

As we have just previously noted, James White was instructed to begin printing a paper. God did this in the knowledge that this man, in 1848, was an anti-trinitarian. God also knew (quite obviously), that James White would always be an anti-trinitarian. This means therefore that God deliberately chose an anti-trinitarian, whom He knew would be an anti-trinitarian until he died, to begin to publish what Seventh-day Adventists believed. God also realised that James White would spend his entire life, as a Seventh-day Adventist, using Seventh-day Adventist publications to promote his anti-trinitarian views. Interestingly it was these views that God knew would go around the world like streams of light (see below). Does this tell us something today?

Yet knowing all of this, God still told Ellen White to tell her husband to begin to print this paper. Thus it was that throughout the lifetime of Ellen White, it was not only Seventh-day Adventists that were subjected to this continuing salvo of non-trinitarianism through our publications but also non-Seventh-day Adventists. They were told that this is the truth that they should believe. Should we today regard this with any significance?

I ask this because after Ellen White died, although God Himself had made no objections to what James White and the other pioneers had been publishing, the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church began to object to it. In other words, after Ellen White died, our church leadership began to complain about that which the pioneers had been teaching, particularly what they had been teaching about Christ. This was even though God had not complained. Is there something rather odd (strange) about this situation?

Referring to the experience of her husband being told to start to print a paper, Ellen White related

“At a meeting held in Dorchester, Mass., November, 1848, I had been given a view of the proclamation of the sealing message, and of the duty of the brethren to publish the light that was shining upon our pathway.” (Ellen White, vision of November 1848 ‘Life Sketches’ page 125, 1915)

This was four years after the great disappointment (1844). God was now saying to Ellen White that it was time for His people to start “publishing the light” that He had been leading them to believe. Ellen White then said

"After coming out of vision, I said to my husband: "I have a message for you. You must begin to print a little paper and send it out to the people. Let it be small at first; but as the people read, they will send you means with which to print, and it will be a success from the first. From this small beginning it was shown to me to be like streams of light that went clear round the world." (*Ibid*)

For many years and for various periods of time, James White (1821-1881) was the respected editor of what became affectionately known as the *Review and Herald*. He was also, from the time of its inception until the year that he died, the editor of the *Signs of the Times*. It is also true to say that except for a short period of time because of ill health James White was president and manager of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association. Notice here the remark about "streams of light" going around the world. According to present Seventh-day Adventism, what the pioneers taught concerning the Godhead through our publications was streams of error.

In the *Review and Herald* of June 17th 1880, James White recalled (this was the year before he died)

"We look back with a good degree of pleasure to the month of July, 1849, when we published the first number of the little paper called Present Truth. We sat down to prepare the matter for that little 'sheet, and wrote every word of it, our entire library comprising a three-shilling pocket Bible, Cruden's Condensed Concordance, and Walker's old dictionary, minus one of its covers. Destitute of means, our hope of success was in God." (*James White, Review and Herald, June 17, 1880*)

In the 100th anniversary edition of the *Review and Herald* (May 1949), the then President of the General Conference said (J. L. McElhany was also an associate editor of the *Review and Herald*)

"A few pioneers, animated with a lively faith and filled with energy and zeal, did the seemingly, impossible. Without printing facilities of any kind, without material resources or money, they followed a conviction born of the Spirit of God, and began to publish this journal. More than that, they gave specific point and direction to its contents and teachings. They used its pages to interpret and expound the Word of God. The prophecies were particularly stressed, especially those in relation to the second coming of our Lord Jesus. And thus in time the REVIEW AND HERALD became indeed the authentic voice of the Advent Movement." (*J. L. McElhany, Review and Herald May 5th 1949, 'What lessons does the centenary teach us?'*)

Notice well the last statement made by McElhany. He said that the *Review and Herald* (its full title then in 1949 was *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*) was "the authentic voice of the Advent Movement".

During April 9th and 10th 1949, a series of services were held in the Sligo Church at Takoma Park. These were to celebrate the anniversary. On the Sabbath afternoon meeting of April 9th, the editor of the *Review and Herald* said this

"With the publication of our church paper began our first united and continuing endeavor as a people. Across its pages there march with steady stride all those who have been leaders in the Advent Movement, James White, sure-footed, stands firmly on its editorial pages, often wielding a sword in defense of the faith. Joseph Bates, old sea captain, is there, ever courageous, ever confident that God is with us. Uriah Smith soon enters its pages to place an indelible footprint upon them for half a century. But time would fail me to mention all the ancient worthies. And if we mentioned all these men of God and noted their path across the pages, we would still not have mentioned the most sharply defined footprints of all, those of the frail but mighty handmaiden of God, Ellen G. White." (*F. D. Nichol, Review and Herald, May 12th 1949, 'Review and Herald Centenary Celebration, April 9 and 10, 1949'*)

Concerning Ellen White, Nichol added

"For sixty-five years we trace the footprints of the prophet through the pages of the REVIEW. They never waver; they never sink out of sight in doubt or despair. They place a sacred trademark on the church paper, and they give us our sense of direction for the days that still lie ahead.

The voices of those whose footprints we trace are the collective voice of the Advent Movement, expounding the doctrines, cheering the believers onward, reporting the progress of the work, and warning of dangers ahead. The old yellowed pages of past volumes are filled with the echoes of their voices, for the REVIEW is, indeed, the authentic voice of the Advent Movement." (*Ibid*)

Again the *Review and Herald* is called "the authentic voice of the Advent Movement". The editor concluded

"The REVIEW is a record and a reminder of the price that was paid by the pioneers to launch this movement in which we rather comfortably rejoice today. The REVIEW was born in faith, nursed on tears, and tutored in the school of adversity." (*Ibid*)

This was very well said because the various publications that came from the God-given instruction to Ellen White to begin printing a little paper were the very avenues through which James White and the other pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism published their anti-trinitarian and non-trinitarian doctrine. We must realise though that it was not just James White that allowed and promoted these views but all the editors of all our publications, at least this was the case whilst Ellen White was alive.

As has been said before, the entirety of this anti-trinitarianism was carried out without any rebuke from Ellen White and therefore, one would assume, without any rebuke from God. Surely this must be a very significant realisation.

All of this becomes even more significant when it is realised that when Ellen White came across those who were presenting what she believed were false ideas of God she often rebuked them for it. This can be seen in an article published a number of times in which she said of these experiences

“In New Hampshire there were those who were active in disseminating false ideas in regard to God. Light was given me that these men were making the truth of no effect by their ideas, some of which led to free-lovism. I was shown that these men were seducing souls by presenting speculative theories regarding God.

I went to the place where they were working, and opened before them what they were doing. The Lord gave me strength to lay plainly before them the danger of their course” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald 21st January 1904 ‘Beware of fanciful doctrines’*)

Remember here that the trinity doctrine itself is built on speculation. Remember too, this was when Seventh-day Adventists were strictly non-trinitarian. After relating other deceptive theories they were teaching she wrote

“This is only one of the instances in which I was called upon to rebuke those who were presenting the doctrine of an impersonal god diffused through nature, and the doctrine of holy flesh.” (*Ibid*)

Here again we must do some reasoning together. Here we see Ellen White rebuking those who were presenting wrong views of God. So why did she not rebuke the pioneers for their beliefs about God? These were beliefs that were totally non-trinitarian and sometimes very anti-trinitarian. Strange as it may seem to many pro-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists today, never once during her 71 years of ministry did she rebuke the pioneers for these views. In fact it is very true to say that she upheld the pioneers in their beliefs even saying that after they had died, certain of their articles should be reproduced.

All the time that Ellen White was alive, the articles in our publications concerning God, His Son and the Holy Spirit were all what can only be described as being non-trinitarian. This was also true of the many articles written by Ellen White herself. It is also true to say that whilst many of Ellen White’s statements about God and Christ would fit into trinitarianism, also that some of her statements border on trinitarianism, she herself never professed the trinity belief. This is why (I believe) that certain of her statements can take on the appearance of being trinitarian but when compared with other statements she made that were definitely not trinitarian, they quickly lose this appearance. I have noted also that many pro-trinitarians who say that Ellen White was a trinitarian, very seldom

quote these non-trinitarian statements. This is even though they are in abundance. Surely this must constitute a misuse of her writings.

Ellen White never once made any confession to believing that God is a trinity, in fact she completely denied it. She condemned all types of illustrations that made God three-in-one. If you wish to read where she did this then please go to the following link to read the testimony that she wrote with respect to what Kellogg was teaching about God. The article is called 'Come out and be separate.

<http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/SB-EGWarticles.htm>

Remember, Kellogg was someone who came to confess a belief in the trinity doctrine.

Before we move on, I would like to bring to your attention something that those who are seeking the truth should find very significant. This is that when rebuking those who were depicting views of what she termed an "impersonal god" (see above), Ellen White wrote

"I was shown that these men were seducing souls by presenting speculative theories regarding God." (*Ibid*)

The reason why I draw your attention to this is because as we noted in section four, the entirety of the trinity doctrine is built upon speculation but it is a speculation that Ellen White never once herself confessed (speculative means theoretical rather than practical – in this case something that cannot be proven from Scripture).

No objections from either Ellen White or the church leadership to anti-trinitarian or non-trinitarian books

As well as all the anti-trinitarian and non-trinitarian articles that were published by Seventh-day Adventists whilst Ellen White was alive, there were also the non-trinitarian books that were being printed. Four of these books I will mention here.

The first is E. J. Waggoner's *Christ and His Righteousness*. As we have already spoken of this book a number of times previously (especially see section twenty) we will not do so again here, although we did note that it was strictly non-trinitarian. It is also said to constitute the message of righteousness by faith that he had preached at the famous 1888 Minneapolis Conference. This is the message that Ellen White freely endorsed and said was sent from God.

A book that was decidedly anti-trinitarian was one written by J. H Waggoner (E. J. Waggoner's father). Its final printing was called, *The Atonement in the Light of Nature and Revelation*. We shall come back to this publication later.

Thirdly there is Uriah Smith's classic *Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation*.

This is the book that many Seventh-day Adventists today think they have on their bookshelves and now goes under the more simple title of *Daniel and the Revelation*. This latter revised edition, published in 1944 after Uriah Smith had died (1903), is far from being as he originally wrote it. As we shall see in the next section, in the process of our church becoming trinitarian, also to remove from its pages all of its non-trinitarianism, this book underwent such a massive editing that it is almost impossible in some places to compare it with the original. Certainly it cannot be said that the 1944 edition of *Daniel and the Revelation* is a book that was written by Uriah Smith.

The fourth book that I shall mention here is another that was written by Uriah Smith. This one was published exactly the same year as Ellen White's *Desire of Ages* (1898). It is called *Looking Unto Jesus*. Just like all the other publications that came off the presses of the Seventh-day Adventist Church during the lifetime of Ellen White, it is also non-trinitarian.

Starting with the book written by J. H. Waggoner (the father of Ellet Waggoner), we shall now briefly comment on our non-trinitarian publications but before we do this we shall consider one more thing that Ellen White said about the teachings of our pioneers.

She said (and this was with reference to Kellogg's apostasy, which, as we saw in section twenty-five did involve trinitarian theology)

"This large work and its sure results are plainly presented to me. I am so sorry that sensible men do not discern the trail of the serpent. I call it thus; for thus the Lord pronounces it. Wherein are those who are designated as departing from the faith and giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, departing from the faith which they have held sacred for the past fifty years? I leave that for the ones to answer who sustain those who develop such acuteness in their plans for spoiling and hindering the work of God." (*Special Testimonies Series B No 7, page 61 'Come out and be Separate 1906*)

As usual, Ellen White was permitted to see the bigger picture. She knew where all of this apostasy was leading. Note her appeal again, as we have seen so many times before, for Seventh-day Adventists not to give heed to "seducing spirits and doctrines of devils" but instead hold on to "the faith which they have held sacred for the past fifty years".

As this was written in 1906 when the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still non-trinitarian, it is quite apparent that Ellen White's mind was referring back to the faith that had been "held sacred" since at least the 1850's. This we need to consider now as we begin to take a look at some of the books that came off the presses of the Seventh-day Adventist Church during that very same fifty years (1850's – early 1900's)

J. H. Waggoner's book, 'The Atonement in the light of Nature and Revelation'

Joseph Waggoner joined the Sabbath keeping Adventists in 1852 whilst in 1881 (the year that James White died) he became the editor of *Signs of the Times*. Five years later in 1886, to help there in the establishment of our work, he was commissioned to go to Europe. He then became editor in chief of the German and French semi-monthlies, contributing greatly also to other periodicals. We can see therefore that within Seventh-day Adventism, Joseph Waggoner was a very well respected man of office.

In 1863, Waggoner had written a series of articles that initially had been published in the *Review and Herald*. These were called *The Atonement*. One of the reasons (perhaps the main one) why he wrote this was to specifically point out that the trinity doctrine denied the efficacy of what Jesus had accomplished at the cross, also that this teaching had taken away the true meaning of the atonement (see *Review and Herald*, 3rd November 1863 *The Atonement part II, The doctrine of a trinity degrades the atonement*, page 181).

In principle, these same articles were then re-produced in his book, the first printing of which was called *The Atonement in the Light of Reason and Revelation* (1868). This was then re-issued on two other occasions with its final publication being in 1884 as *The Atonement in the Light of Nature and Revelation*. These same articles were also published in the *Signs of the Times* in 1876.

In a paper in 2003, Denis Fortin, who at the time was Associate Professor of Theology and Associate Dean at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, wrote concerning what he believed was the theological differences between J. H. Waggoner and Ellen White. He said concerning Waggoner's publication

“Of interest to our study is the publication in 1863-1864 of a series of articles on the subject of atonement in the *Review and Herald*. “The Atonement: An Examination of the Remedial System in the Light of Nature and Revelation” appeared in seventeen issues of the denomination's official paper between June 2, 1863, and September 13, 1864. This series was later reprinted in book form under the same title in 1868 and reedited in 1872 (168 pages). A fourth publication of the series appeared in *Signs of the Times* in 1876. In 1884, Waggoner amplified the original series in a volume of 368 pages.” (*Denis Fortin, Andrews University Theological Seminary, The Cross of Christ: Theological Differences Between Joseph H. Waggoner and Ellen G. White. Paper for Adventist Theological Society, 2003*)

From all of this we can see that the Seventh-day Adventist Church must have considered Joseph Waggoner's work as being extremely important. During this time period (1863-1884), it was considered standard material.

Repeatedly published in one form or another for over twenty years, this pioneer's reasons for his anti-trinitarian views were certainly very well publicised. Seventh-day Adventists throughout the world would have read them, as would the non-Seventh-day Adventists. Obviously again, because the final printing of this work was in 1884, Waggoner's views at the time of the famous Minneapolis Conference (1888) can reasonably be considered to be very much the accepted view of Seventh-day Adventists throughout the world (the preponderant belief) at that time.

I would also draw your attention to the fact that Waggoner's publication (including its inclusion in the *Review and Herald* and *Signs of the Times*) had five different printings spread over 21 years (1863-1884), yet never once did the church or Ellen White ever object to what Waggoner had written. This really should be a very significant realisation.

Here are just a few of those statements that J. H. Waggoner penned. Notice his use of the word 'we' and 'our' etc, denoting that he was referring not just to himself but also to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In the chapter called *Doctrine of a Trinity Subversive of the Atonement*, he says

"It will no doubt appear to many to be irreverent to speak thus of the doctrine of a trinity. But we think they must view the subject in a different light if they will calmly and candidly examine the arguments which we shall present. We know that we write with the deepest feelings of reverence for the Scriptures, and with the highest regard for every Scripture doctrine and Scripture fact. But reverence for the Scriptures does not necessarily embrace reverence for men's opinions of the Scriptures." (*J. H. Waggoner, 'The Atonement in Light of Nature and Revelation', 1884 Edition, chapter 'Doctrine of a Trinity Subversive of the Atonement'*)

"The inconsistencies of Trinitarians, which must be pointed out to free the Scripture doctrine of the Atonement from reproaches under which it has too long lain, are the necessary outgrowth of their system of theology. No matter how able are the writers to whom we shall refer, they could never free themselves from inconsistencies without correcting their theology." (*Ibid*)

Waggoner sees only inconsistencies in the trinity doctrine, especially when it comes to the atonement. He then says

"Many theologians really think that the Atonement, in respect to its dignity and efficacy, rests upon the doctrine of a trinity. But we fail to see any connection between the two" (*Ibid*)

Waggoner here hit the nail on the head. This is exactly what is believed by trinitarians but Seventh-day Adventists then did not see it that way. Note the "we" here. Waggoner is referring to Seventh-day Adventists. As we shall see now,

Waggoner said that Seventh-day Adventists then believed that the trinity doctrine sullied the atonement. He said

“To the contrary, the advocates of that doctrine really fall into the difficulty which they seem anxious to avoid. Their difficulty consists in this: They take the denial of a trinity to be equivalent to a denial of the divinity of Christ. Were that the case, we should cling to the doctrine of a trinity as tenaciously as any can; but it is not the case. They who have read our remarks on the death of the Son of God know that we firmly believe in the divinity of Christ; but we cannot accept the idea of a trinity, as it is held by Trinitarians, without giving up our claim on the dignity of the sacrifice made for our redemption.” (*Ibid*)

Here we can see that Waggoner said that in the eyes of Seventh-day Adventists, the trinity doctrine corrupted the atonement. This is because this teaching says that the pre-existent divine Son of God never really died at Calvary (He is always alive in the substance of God) but only human nature died. Thus it is that as atonement for sin, trinitarians only have a human sacrifice. Certainly they do not have one that is divine. These were views expressed through our publications.

In a recent conversation that I had with a Seventh-day Adventist minister (a trinitarian), he attempted to convince me that at Calvary, the only thing that died was human nature and not the pre-existent Son of God (the minister also denied that Christ, in His pre-existence was really a son). He supported his trinitarian reasoning by quoting Ellen White where she says that at Calvary, it was human nature that died and not divine nature. Here I believe that the minister was failing to differentiate between nature and person. Ellen White wrote in 1898

“Jesus Christ laid off His royal robe, His kingly crown, and clothed His divinity with humanity, in order to become a substitute and surety for humanity, that dying in humanity, He might by His death destroy him who had the power of death. He could not have done this as God, but by coming as man, Christ could die.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 97, page 5. To "My Brethren in North Fitzroy," November 18, 1898, Manuscript No. 10, MR No. 812*)

Here it is clearly said that the pre-existent Son of God did die, in His humanity, thus He needed someone outside of Himself to release Him from His death. Ellen White referred to this when she said

“He who died for the sins of the world was to remain in the tomb for the allotted time. He was in that stony prison house as a prisoner of divine justice, and he was responsible to the Judge of the universe. He was bearing the sins of the world, and his Father only could release him.” (*Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor. 2nd May 1901, 'The Lord is risen'*)

Trinitarians do not believe that the pre-existent Son of God died at Calvary (if

they do then they are not really trinitarians). This is why this same minister said to me that although he believed Christ could have sinned, it would have not been the divine person that would have been lost but only the humanity of Christ. This is making a dichotomy of Christ (splitting him in two).

Speaking from a personal perspective, I believe that the minister did not really understand that at Bethlehem, the pre-existent Son of God really had become flesh and that when that flesh died the person of the Son of God acquiesced to His human nature and died in His humanity.

The minister also concluded that all that Christians needed for atonement was a human sacrifice therefore it was not necessary for the divine person to die, even if it was possible which it is not (according to him). This though is the reasoning of trinitarians but it was not the view of Joseph Waggoner. This is why he said that the trinity doctrine degraded the atonement.

Many who were trinitarian would have objected strongly to Waggoner's conclusions. This would have effectively prohibited many ardent trinitarians from becoming Seventh-day Adventists. This was apart from anything else we believed and taught.

The one very important thing that I am asking you not to overlook here is that on multiple occasions, through articles and books that were repeatedly published, Joseph Waggoner's views went without rebuke from Ellen White. It also went without rebuke from any one else within the church. Certainly no rebuke from God came through Ellen White even though Waggoner's work had five separate publications spread over 21 years (1863-1884).

It can be said therefore that as the famous 1888 Minneapolis Conference approached, this was the accepted and preponderant view of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. To Seventh-day Adventists and non-Seventh-day Adventists alike, this was the view that through our publications was then being taught throughout the world. We therefore need to ask again, how significant is this realisation?

Throughout his articles etc, Waggoner was making the point that it was the pre-existent Son of God that died and not just His human nature. Whilst his usage of the term divine nature is at times rather ambiguous and perhaps even out of harmony with that which was later revealed through Ellen White, the point that he (Waggoner) was making was that we have a divine sacrifice and not just one that is human. In other words, the pre-existent Son of God did really die, meaning that in the tomb He had no means of freeing Himself from death.

As Waggoner said in his article in the *Review and Herald* in 1863

“Of course we cannot believe what men say about his being equal with God in every respect, and that the Divine Son of God could not suffer nor die.”

These are mere human words.” (J. H. Waggoner, *Review and Herald*, November 10th 1863, ‘*The Atonement part II*’)

Waggoner here was referring to the belief held by the majority of trinitarians that the divine person was impassible, meaning not subject to suffering or pain etc, therefore it was not the divine person that was suffering or experiencing pain but the humanity of Christ. Trinitarians also say that it was not the divine person that died, only His humanity. This is making a dichotomy of Christ. Waggoner is here denying these beliefs.

We shall now proceed to section thirty-eight. This is where we shall see that Uriah Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation* (just like his *Looking Unto Jesus*) was totally non-trinitarian but was never objected to, either by Ellen White or any other of the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We shall see in fact that Ellen White said that not only should people regard Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation* as containing the truth that God had revealed but also that our colporteurs should make every effort to sell it to those outside of our denomination. This may seem very strange indeed to the pro-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventist today but it is a fact of our history

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section thirty-eight

Non-trinitarian articles and books – no objections from Ellen White (Part 2 of 3)

We noted in the previous section that throughout the ministry of Ellen White, all the books and articles that came off the presses of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were non-trinitarian. At least I have never found as yet any that can be said to be trinitarian. We noted also that some were positively anti-trinitarian (see section five for the difference in usage in this study of these two terms).

In this particular section (part 2 of Seventh-day Adventist publications), we are going to look at a book that many regard as a classic in Seventh-day Adventist literature. This is Uriah Smith's *Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation*.

The claim that this book is a Seventh-day Adventist classic is beyond a reasonable doubt. As Eugene Durand said in the *Review and Herald* (his article was based on an extract from his own book called *Yours in the Blessed Hope, Uriah Smith*)

“Remarkably, it is the only book printed by Adventists -- other than those written by Ellen White that has remained in print for more than a century, becoming the denominational classic in its field.

To a degree, Seventh-day Adventists continue to publish Uriah Smith's major work after 100 years as a result of its Ellen White endorsement.” (*E. F. Durand, Review and Herald Oct 28th 1982 'One hundred years of "hot cakes"'*)

In its various forms, this book that we refer to today (2008) as *Daniel and the Revelation*, has been in print for over 130 years but during the 1940's it underwent, by a team of Seventh-day Adventists, a massive editing. One of the reasons for this, perhaps the main one, was to bring it in line with the new theology (trinitarianism) that was then attempting to be established into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This editing of course was done after Uriah Smith had died (1903).

There was also the talk of plagiarism regarding Smith's work. Some claimed he had simply copied from other authors without giving them credit.

We shall return our thoughts to this later, suffice to say for now that not only were all the non-trinitarian statements removed from its pages but also from beginning to end the book was rewritten. Unfortunately for us today, the book was reissued as being written by Uriah Smith. This makes it look as though that it is this author's work when in reality it is not. This edited version bears the date 1944 and is more than likely the one that you have on your bookshelf.

Note also that Durand said that the reason why Smith's book is still in publication after 100 years is "To a degree" the "result of its Ellen White endorsement". Throughout this section we shall look at these endorsements and in the process ask a very simple question which is, "would Ellen White have approved of the editing that was done to this book"? We shall see emphatically that the only answer to this question must be, according to the evidence of her words, a decided and definite no.

An interesting beginning

The story of Smith's book(s) began in 1862. We shall see this now.

During 1945 there was a series of articles regarding Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation*. This included an article on the revision of Smith's book. The last of these articles was called *Uriah Smith and the Charge of Plagiarism*. Merwin Thurber wrote it. He had been secretary of the D&R revision committee. Whilst we shall not be dealing with the topic of plagiarism here, there were in Thurber's article some very interesting insights (these were tied in with explaining why Smith's book was not the work of a plagiarist). These were such as (paragraphs not necessarily contiguous)

"Thoughts on Revelation" first appeared in the Review and Herald as editorials from June 3, 1862, to February 3, 1863. James White was editor of the paper. According to a note in the issue of June 3, Uriah Smith was teaching a Sabbath school class in the Battle Creek church. The class had chosen to study the book of Revelation and had just completed the book. They had found the study so spiritually uplifting that a decision was reached to restudy the book. James White proposed to follow the class study in his editorials under the title "Thoughts on Revelation." (Merwin Thurber, *Ministry, June 1945, 'Uriah Smith and the Charge of Plagiarism'*)

"By the time the class had finished Revelation 9, Elder White found that his busy program would not allow him to finish his self-appointed task, and he asked Uriah Smith to finish the series on Revelation. His editorials had brought him up to the beginning of the seven trumpets, but he did not attempt an exposition of this line of prophecy. He merely recommended the reader to the booklet on the subject, already published by the Review and Herald. We mention this here because it has a bearing on what happened later, and is very closely connected with the charge of plagiarism." (*Ibid*)

"The book Thoughts on Daniel was first written as a series of editorials in

the Review, with several interruptions, from January 6, 1869, to May 16, 1871. During the time of the writing Uriah Smith was editor. As far as we know, there seems to have been no connection with a Sabbath school class.” (*Ibid*)

“In 1865 the Review and Herald published Uriah Smith's editorials on Revelation in book form. Those on Daniel were published in 1873. It was an established practice in those days to reprint in book form the more substantial doctrinal material which had first appeared in the paper. Naturally, Elder Smith worked over his old articles, improving them where he saw fit. He must have rewritten entirely the first nine chapters on Revelation, for while he follows the line of thought in Elder White's editorials, the wording is substantially different. He could have quite consistently used the material verbatim if he had wished, for he had been teacher of the class, and the convictions expressed by Elder White were equally his.” (*Ibid*)

In his article, Thurber explained that during the time in which Smith lived, it was not unusual for an author to use someone’s words without given the original author credit for them. He explained

“Uriah Smith lived in a different world from that in which we live today. Literary standards and practices were not the same as they are now. Men everywhere appropriated the literary efforts of others” (*Ibid*)

He later said

“Uriah Smith was a man of God, and deserves all the honors heaped upon our pioneers. Nevertheless, in order to remove the stigma cast upon this practice by many in our modern world, the revision committee felt that every effort should be made to raise the book above reproach in this matter.” (*Ibid*)

Thurber ended the article by saying of the work of the revision committee

“Accordingly, every place in Daniel and the Revelation in which it was discovered that Uriah Smith had used the words of others, quotation marks were inserted and credit was given the original author. If it is discovered later that instances of such copying were overlooked, the same procedure can be followed in future editions. Surely if Elder Smith, a sincere and conscientious writer, were alive today, he would do as much in order to meet the literary standards of a new age.” (*Ibid*)

To read the whole of Thurber’s article please go here.

<http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Periodicals/MIN/MIN19450601-V18-06.pdf>

We shall now see that the Seventh-day Adventist Church had no theological problems with Smith's original work, at least not whilst Ellen White was alive. It was simply straight down the line Seventh-day Adventism. This is why it was used so extensively in promoting our last day message.

No theological problems with Uriah Smith's publication (1867-1920's)

As assistant editor of the Review, Eugene Durand continued his article (see above) by relating how the single volume we know today as Uriah Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation* came to be published.

He begins by correctly saying that Smith had originally written this book as two separate volumes. The first part was called *Thoughts, Critical and Practical, on the book of Revelation*. It was published in 1867 whilst the second part, *Thoughts, Critical and Practical, on the book of Daniel*, was published in 1873. It can now be seen why I said that in its various forms, this book has been in publication for over 130 years.

Durand then relates how it was that at the very beginning of our colporteur work, we had emphasised our health message. He also said that in 1880, John Harvey Kellogg had produced a 1,600-page handbook about domestic hygiene and medicine. He then says

“The year before [1879], Ellen White had urged our publishing houses in Oakland and Battle Creek to utilize house-to-house canvassers in selling doctrinal books to the public. Though Dr. Kellogg's volume sold well, it did not meet the prophet's requirement of presenting the Advent message. So in 1881, George King arrived at Battle Creek with his request to the General Conference session that Ellen White's counsel be implemented” (*Ibid*)

Up to 1879, it was not the practice to promote through the colporteur work our doctrinal books. Here it is being said that Ellen White had advised that books “presenting the Advent message” should, in the same manner, also be promoted to the public. Durand then continues by explaining how George King, a well-known pioneer canvasser of Seventh-day Adventist literature, suggested that Uriah Smith's two volumes should be bound together and sold as one single book.

In a brief biography of George King in the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia it explains

“At the 1881 General Conference session, king urged those assembled to carry out the council given by Mrs. White in 1879 that SDA books should be sold widely among the public, and forcefully argued that two small books written by Uriah Smith, *Thoughts on Daniel* and *Thoughts on the Revelation*, could be published together in an attractive form for sale by canvassers to the public” (*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia, Volume 10, page 660, King, George Albert (1847-1906)*)

Thus it was that primarily because of Ellen White's council, George King not only advised that our doctrinal books should be "sold widely among the public" (notice it says that King "forcefully argued" the point) but that Uriah Smith's two books on Daniel and the Revelation should be brought to their attention. This is how it was that the one single volume we now know as Uriah Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation* came to be born. It was also our first book on Seventh-day Adventist doctrine to be sold to the public by our colporteurs. This was again referred to in 1917 when A. T. Robinson said

"A year or two later, following a similar agitation by Brethren Geo. A. King and Walter Harper, a venture was made by combining the two books by Elder Uriah Smith, " Thoughts on the Book of Daniel " and " Thoughts on the Revelation," publishing them as a subscription book. Later "Bible Readings for the Home Circle " -- successor to the Bible Reading Gazette -- was issued. Since that time millions of copies of these and other subscription books have been sold, and the denominational publications of Seventh-day Adventists have found a place in the world's literature market." (A. T. Robinson, *Review and Herald*, May 24th 1917, 'Agencies in the closing work of God')

As it says in the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia regarding Uriah Smith

"His books on Revelation (1867) and Daniel (1873) were combined into one volume, *The Prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation*, the first doctrinal book sold by Adventist colporteurs." (Nancy J. Vhymeister, *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia*, Volume 12, pages 8-9, 'Who are Seventh-day Adventists?')

With reference to the message from God through Ellen White to make and implement better plans for the selling of our literature, W. P. Elliot wrote in 1949 in an anniversary edition of the *Review and Herald*

"The leaders did not understand how to begin this work. At the General Conference session of 1880 a young man by the name of George King, who had experienced some success in taking subscriptions for our periodicals, urged the brethren to bind together the two small books by Uriah Smith, Thoughts on Daniel and Thoughts on Revelation. He felt confident he could sell such a book. Finally, but with some hesitancy, the Review and Herald managers consented to bind five hundred copies. They sold well." (R. P. Elliot, *Review and Herald*, May 5th 1949, 'What hath God wrought')

Referring back to Durand's article, he went on to say that by the 4th of July, more than 1,500 copies of Smith's work had been sold and that within two years that number had increased to 25,000. He also relates in this same article

"In 1900 the REVIEW carried an appeal for 10,000 people to work toward

selling 200,000 copies of the popular "D and R"." (E. F. Durand, *Review and Herald Oct 28th 1982 'One hundred years of "hot cakes"'*)

I would ask you to specifically note the date that this appeal was made because it really is very important.

It was the year 1900, two years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*. This is the book that we have seen in this study that certain pro-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists say today led our church to become trinitarian. This is very important to remember because Smith's book was decidedly non-trinitarian. This is why, in the 1940's, to help make the way for the new theology of Seventh-day Adventism (meaning trinitarianism), that it had to undergo such an extreme editing. Note though that in the year 1900, whilst Ellen White was still alive, our church as a whole did not have any problems with the theology in Smith's book. This is because the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1900, like it always had been up to then, was still a decidedly non-trinitarian denomination. It is only reasonable to conclude therefore that Seventh-day Adventist then, in 1900, did not see any clash between the theology found in Ellen White's book (*The Desire of Ages*) and that which was in Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation*. Does this realisation say something to us today?

Notice the vastness of this appeal. It said that "10,000 people" were wanted to sell "200,000 copies" of Smith's "popular" book. Does this sound as though anyone in Seventh-day Adventism had any problem with it? Note that at this time (1900), the Seventh-day Adventist Church only had a membership of about 75,000.

This same appeal asked its readers to consider what Alonzo Jones had preached at the Battle Creek Tabernacle in a sermon on January 27th that same year (1900). This is when Jones said

"The books of Daniel and Revelation contain the special, systematized present truth for the world at this time. "Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation" is the only book, outside of the Bible, that gives a comprehensive, simple, plain, and clear view of the whole field of the truth covered by the Third Angel's Message and comprehended in it. Therefore, "Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation" was chosen as the beginning book of study, in order that all the people might have a renewed view of the great prophetic field." (Sermon, A. T. Jones, January 27th 1900, as detailed in the *Review and Herald*, February 13th 1900, 'The meaning of the missionary reading circle'),

This is quite an accolade and certainly one that I cannot find said of any other Seventh-day Adventist publication. Note Jones says that outside of the Bible, Uriah Smith's work was "the only book" to clearly and extensively explain the "whole field of the truth covered by the Third Angel's Message". This covers everything about our God-given message, including of course our beliefs about

God and Christ. Note again that this was in 1900. At that time, Seventh-day Adventists did not have a problem regarding the theology in Smith's book – and remember, this was two years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*.

One of our greatest books

Drury Webster Reavis, who eventually became the Seventh-day Adventist circulation manager for religious publications, proudly claimed to have purchased the very first copy of Smith's book. He eventually donated this copy to the *Review and Herald* library where many years later it was discovered that he had pasted within it a note that began

"To my personal knowledge this is the first copy of the first large subscription books bound for the denomination by the Review and Herald Publishing Association." (*D. W. Reavis, May 14th 1920, as quoted in the Review and Herald of May 10th 1945, 'Earliest Dates in Our Colporteur Story'*)

Then, after explaining further about his experience of purchasing it he concluded about Smith's book

"Its value now cannot be estimated in money. It exists as a visible evidence of God's leadings in men's and institutional affairs for the development and the completion of His final message to the world." (*Ibid*)

Please give special consideration to the date when the note was written. It was 1920, which was 22 years after *Desire of Ages* had been published. By then (1920), this man did not see a clash between Seventh-day Adventist theology and the theology found in Smith's book. Referring to the late 1890's, Durand then went on to say in his article

"In those days most students aspiring to service in "the cause" canvassed with Daniel and Revelation. According to one contemporary, "Thousands of our church members and scores of our conference workers around the world are in the movement today because of the influence of Uriah Smith's great book. Another writer on Smith's life has concluded that "probably no other book has won so many converts to the teachings of Seventh-day Adventists as Smith's Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation." (*E. F. Durand, Review and Herald Oct 28th 1982 'One hundred years of "hot cakes"'*)

We need to remember here that Smith's book was decidedly non-trinitarian; hence, in the 1940's when trinitarianism was in the process of being introduced to Seventh-day Adventists, it was edited to suit this new theology. This non-trinitarianism therefore, before the book was edited, was the beliefs about God and Christ that were being circulated by Seventh-day Adventists to the hundreds of thousands of church members and our workers (ministers alike) throughout the world. Just in Smith's book alone these self same beliefs had been circulated

by then (the 1940's) for between 60 and 70 years. Durand then relates

“Because the records of sales were lost in the destruction of the Review building by fire in 1902, it is not possible to know the exact number sold in its five editions.” (*Ibid*)

We can see from all of the above the inestimable far-reaching effectiveness of Uriah Smith's book. Note the latter statement well. It said that by the early 1900's, Smith's book had no less than “five editions”. This, amongst other things, shows us the importance that the Seventh-day Adventist Church placed upon this book. Durand then noted

“Recommendations of the book by non-Adventist ministers were published in the REVIEW for canvassers to utilize in their presentations. Later denominational writers were to refer to it as “the standard work in this field, amid a notable group of commentaries and expositions,” “one of the greatest books that Seventh-day Adventists have ever published.” (*Ibid*)

Smith's book received its accolades not only from those of our denomination but also from those who did not belong to it. Note the reference to Smith's book being “the standard work in this field”.

Thoughts regarding Smith's book had not changed by 1918. When referring to the publishing work, J. B. Blosser wrote (this was 20 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*)

“The Lord, in planning for his closing work in the earth, had in mind the publishing work as an important agency. When the time came for this work, he inspired his servant to write “The Great Controversy,” “Patriarchs and Prophets,” “The Desire of Ages,” and gave special help to Elder Uriah Smith in writing his commentary on Daniel and the Revelation. Repeatedly God has sent us the word that these books should be sold far and near.” (*J. B. Blosser, Review and Herald, June 20th 1918, ‘What books best meet the demand of our times’*)

It was also said earlier in the year

“The orders for “Daniel and the Revelation” and “The Great Controversy” also show a decided increase over those of the previous year.” (*R. L. Pierce, Review and Herald, February 14th 1918, ‘The publishing work in the south’*)

Ellen White and Smith's publication (1899)

Durand then went on to remind his readers what Ellen White had said about *Daniel and the Revelation*. He referred to the time when she had said

“The interest in Daniel and the Revelation is to continue as long as

probationary time shall last. God used the author of this book as a channel through which to communicate light to direct minds to the truth. Shall we not appreciate this light, which points us to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, our King?" (*Ellen G. White, Manuscript Releases Volume one No. 26, page 63, "Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation," MS 174 1899*)

Again note the date in relation to the publication of Ellen White's *Desire of Ages* (1898). It was one year after it was published. Note also very importantly that Ellen White said, "God used the author". This cannot be emphasised enough. What an accolade to give to any author – especially when given by an inspired writer. Remember, Smith was a non-trinitarian to the day that he died (1903). Durand also related about Ellen White's views on Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation*

"Nine years earlier, in 1890, she had declared that Smith's book, along with *The Great Controversy*, should be circulated more widely than any others, that his work "should be kept before the people." (*E. F. Durand, Review and Herald Oct 28th 1892 'One hundred years of "hot cakes"'*)

In a similar statement she said

"In *Desire of Ages*, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, *The Great Controversy*, and in *Daniel and the Revelation*, there is precious instruction." (*Ellen G. White, Letter written from St. Helena, California to Edson White and W. C. White, 27th September 1903, manuscript releases Volume 21 No. 1594, see also 'Evangelism' chapter 10 page 366*)

Here we see Ellen White herself rating Smith's book with her own publications, including *Desire of Ages*, as containing "precious instruction". This leads us to ask, did Ellen White see any big problem between her book about the life of Christ and what Smith had written in his *Daniel and the Revelation* about Christ? Obviously not! She then added

"These books must be regarded as of special importance, and every effort should be made to get them before the people." (*Ibid*)

Note again that this was in 1903, the year that Uriah Smith died (*Desire of Ages* was published in 1898). Durand also pointed out that 2 years later in 1905, Ellen White had said

"Instruction has been given me that the important books containing the light that God has given regarding Satan's apostasy in heaven should be given a wide circulation just now; for through them the truth will reach many minds. 'Patriarchs and Prophets,' 'Daniel and the Revelation,' and 'Great Controversy' are needed now as never before." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald 16th February 1905. 'A call for Active Work'*)

This was now 7 years after *The Desire of Ages* was published.

To those who are tempted to say that Ellen White's approbation of *Daniel and the Revelation* only concerned Bible prophecy, I would say take note of this latter statement.

Ellen White made it clear here that this book was important because it explained the truth "regarding Satan's apostasy in heaven". This was regarded by Ellen White as a doctrinal book. As we noted previously, it says in the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia that Smith's book was "the first doctrinal book sold by Adventist colporteurs" (see above).

Ellen White's approbations of Smith's book were not just in regard to prophecy. Anyone reading what she said here would take this as being applicable to the entire book. Do we read anywhere where Ellen White said that she agreed with Smith in his book regarding interpretation of prophecy but not his theology? If we do not, then why believe it?

Referring back to the previous article in the *Review and Herald*, Ellen White said concerning *Patriarchs and Prophets*, *Daniel and the Revelation*, and *Great Controversy*

"They should be widely circulated because the truths they emphasize will open many blind eyes". (*Ibid*)

Notice here that again Ellen White promoted Uriah Smith's book along with her own publications. More importantly note that she said that they "will open many blind eyes". She also said in 1905 that these books were then needed "as never before" (see above). Note too that she said that she had been "given" this instruction about promoting these books. Who gave her this instruction? It was God Himself.

What an accolade for Ellen White's books and Uriah Smith's. Note the date again. It was 1905, 7 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*.

Daniel and the Revelation and theology

Note also very importantly that Ellen White gave this above approbation in the very midst of the early 1900's crisis (1905). This is when (see particularly section twenty-four and section twenty-nine) she had instructed the pioneers to hold fast to their non-trinitarian faith. This, as I am sure you will remember, is also the same time period when she repeatedly stressed that God and Christ were two separate, distinct personal beings (see above mentioned sections also section thirty)

This is exactly the same theology as was in *Daniel and the Revelation*; at least it was before it was edited to remove its non-trinitarianism. This is one of the reasons why, in the 1940's, that this book was edited. It was to bring it into line

with the new theology (trinitarianism) of Seventh-day Adventism.

Please take particular note again that Ellen White did say in 1905 that Smith's book was needed then "as never before" (see above). One of the reasons for this, one would assume, was because of what Smith had written in his book about God and Christ. I say this because it was the self-same theology that she was telling the delegates at the 1905 General Conference not to let go of but to hold fast (see section twenty-nine). This she said was because it was God Himself that had given them their beliefs.

In his book, Uriah Smith's theology of God and Christ was, in the early 1900's, the non-trinitarian faith of Seventh-day Adventists. No wonder Ellen White gave his book such approbation. Durand went on to say in his article

"It was important that new Adventists, who had not shared the experiences of the pioneers, should study Daniel and Revelation and become familiar with its teachings. Mrs. White also encouraged students in Adventist schools to study Daniel and Revelation carefully, for it covered much of the theology discovered by early Sabbathkeepers (sic) in their Bible conferences." (*E. F. Durand, Review and Herald Oct 28th 1982 'One hundred years of "hot cakes"'*)

This statement is very true. Uriah Smith's book did cover "much of the theology" of early Seventh-day Adventists. In fact I would say that it covered the vast majority of it if not all. This is why it is said that Ellen White encouraged students in Seventh-day Adventist schools to give it very careful study.

Durand then quoted Ellen White where she said of Uriah Smith's book

"I speak of this book because it is a means of educating those who need to understand the truth of the Word. This book should be highly appreciated. It covers much of the ground we have been over in our experience. If the youth will study this book and learn for themselves what is truth, they will be saved from many perils." (*Ellen G. White, Manuscript Releases Volume one No. 26, page 63, "Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation," MS 174 1899*)

What an accolade again for Uriah Smith's book and this time done with the specific purpose of having the youth in the Seventh-day Adventist Church read it. She said that by reading Daniel and the Revelation, the students would "learn for themselves what is truth" and that by doing this they would be "saved from many perils". Note again that this was written following the publication of *The Desire of Ages* (1898). Important to note is that in this same paragraph before she made the latter statement she had said

"Now is come the time of the revelation of the grace of God. Now is the gospel of Jesus Christ to be proclaimed. Satan will seek to divert the minds of those who should be established, strengthened, and settled in the truths

of the first, second, and third angels' messages. The students in our schools should carefully study Daniel and the Revelation, so that they shall not be left in darkness, and the day of Christ overtake them as a thief in the night." (*Ibid*)

It should go without saying that Ellen White regarded Smith's book as being all embracing (including theology) and not just a book concerning Bible prophecy.

God's helping hand

Durand also interestingly reported

"More than one Adventist worker recalled having heard Ellen White say that she had seen an angel at Elder Smith's side as he wrote". (*E. F. Durand, Review and Herald Oct 28th 1982 'One hundred years of "hot cakes"'*)

As this author went on to say, this did not mean that Uriah Smith's book was inspired as is the Scriptures but I believe from a personal perspective that with all that we have seen so far about that which Ellen White said about it, she gave it a higher recommendation than any other of the books that the pioneers had written. She even valued it (as we have seen above), along with her own books, even with *Desire of Ages*. What greater recommendation could she give it? As she said in 1901

"The grand instruction contained in *Daniel and Revelation* has been eagerly perused by many in Australia. This book has been the means of bringing many precious souls to knowledge of the truth. Everything that can be done should be done to circulate Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation." (*Ellen G. White, Manuscript Releases Volume 21 No. 1595 'Words of Instruction Regarding Camp Meetings, Soul Winning, and Truth Filled Books, 1901'*)

Note again that this was in 1901, 3 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*. She then added

"I know of no other book that can take the place of this one. It is God's helping hand." (*Ibid*)

Does anything else really need to be said?

Prophecy and non-trinitarian theology

In the main, Uriah Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation* is a book concerning Bible Prophecy. As the title itself reveals, it is a commentary on the Old Testament book of Daniel and the New Testament book of Revelation, both of which are best understood in connection with each other. Uriah Smith's book was also a book on theology. This is because much of Bible prophecy involves theology. In other words, prophecy cannot be separated from theology. This is why Smith in his book said much about God and Christ.

During the lifetime of Uriah Smith (this was also during the time of Ellen White's ministry), his *Daniel and the Revelation* underwent a number of different printings. On each occasion and with regards to God and Christ, it was in complete harmony with the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which, needless to say at each of these times, was a non-trinitarian belief. This is why, in the early 1940's, the transitional time from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism, it was edited to suit the up and coming new theology of Seventh-day Adventism, which was of course trinitarianism.

To put it another way again, as ongoing attempts were made during the 1940's to establish trinitarianism within our ranks, Uriah Smith's book, because it was such a denominational classic that it could not be suppressed or removed from publication (this was even though some may have like this to have happened) it underwent what can only be termed an extreme editing. This was done to remove from its pages the entirety of the non-trinitarian statements that were then, in the 1940's, in opposition to the then developing and newly found Seventh-day Adventist theology of trinitarianism. In fact in what some see as an attempt to cover up our non-trinitarian history, the entire book from beginning to end was re-written. This is even to the extent where it is almost impossible at times to compare it with what Smith had originally written. A vast multitude of sentences, just as were some of the paragraphs, were completely removed. Much was rephrased. Even entire pages were added that Smith had never written. The book was rewritten throughout. Such was the extent of its editing.

As we have seen though, Ellen White consistently promoted Uriah Smith's book as containing the truth that everyone, especially our young people should read. She also urged, with as much vigour as she promoted the sale of her own books, the sale of his book to those who were not of our denomination. Thus it was that through this book, our non-trinitarianism went around the world not only to Seventh-day Adventists but also alike to non-Seventh-day Adventists. This was one of the ways that these non-Seventh-day Adventists came to learn of the faith (including its non-trinitarianism) of Seventh-day Adventists. It goes without saying that Ellen White would not have given approval to this 1940's editing.

More of Ellen White's approbation for Daniel and the Revelation

Whilst space is limited here, thus preventing us to express everything that Ellen White said in approbation of Uriah Smith's book, we will note the following. She said such as (and note very importantly the dates that she said it because they were all made after the publication of her *Desire of Ages* which as we have said so many times before is the book that many of the new theology Seventh-day Adventist trinitarians say led our church to become trinitarian)

“Especially should the book Daniel and the Revelation be brought before people as the very book for this time. This book contains the message which all need to read and understand. Translated into many different languages, it will be a power to enlighten the world. This book has had a

large sale in Australia and New Zealand. By reading it many souls have come to a knowledge of the truth. I have received many letters expressing appreciation of this book.

Let our canvassers urge this book upon the attention of all. The Lord has shown me that this book will do a good work in enlightening those who become interested in the truth for this time. Those who embrace the truth now, who have not shared in the experiences of those who entered the work in the early history of the message, should study the instruction given in Daniel and the Revelation, becoming familiar with the truth it presents.”
(*Ellen G. White, Manuscript Releases Volume one, No. 26. page 60-61, "Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation," MS 174 1899*)

Advice also came from Ellen White to those in the ministry. Concerning how they should regard *Daniel and the Revelation* she said

“Those who are preparing to enter the ministry, who desire to become successful students of the prophecies, will find Daniel and the Revelation an invaluable help. They need to understand this book. It speaks of past, present, and future, laying out the path so plainly that none need err therein. Those who will diligently study this book will have no relish for the cheap sentiments presented by those who have a burning desire to get out something new and strange to present to the flock of God. The rebuke of God is upon all such teachers. They need that one teach them what is meant by godliness and truth.” (*Ibid*)

Notice here that apart from the approbation that Ellen White gives to this book and her urging that all should read it, she talks also of those “who have a burning desire to get out something new and strange”.

At this time (1899), the year following the publication of Ellen White’s *Desire of Ages*, the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still decidedly non-trinitarian. This much we know for sure so to our church at that time (1899), trinitarianism would certainly have been “something new and strange”. Like a lot more realisations that we have encountered in this study, this should be very significant.

She then added to the advice given to ministers about Smith’s book

“The great, essential questions which God would have presented to the people are found in Daniel and the Revelation. There is found solid, eternal truth for this time. Everyone needs the light and information it contains.”
(*Ibid*)

She then spoke of those who would present what she terms “cheap theories”

“God desires the light found in the books of Daniel and Revelation to be

presented in clear lines. It is painful to think of the many cheap theories picked up and presented to the people by ignorant, unprepared teachers. Those who present their human tests and the nonsensical ideas they have concocted in their own minds, show the character of the goods in their treasure house. They have laid in store shoddy material. Their great desire is to make a sensation." (*Ibid*, page 62)

She also said of those who study *Daniel and the Revelation*

"As they receive the knowledge contained in this book, they will have in the treasure house of the mind a store from which they can continually draw as they communicate to others the great, essential truths of God's Word." (*Ibid*)

To the young men in the church she said

"Young men, take up the work of canvassing for Daniel and the Revelation. Do all you possibly can to sell this book. Enter upon the work with as much earnestness as if it were a new book. And remember that as you canvass for it, you are to become familiar with the truths it contains. As you ponder these truths, you will receive ideas that will enable you not only to receive light, but to let light shine forth to others in clear, bright rays" (*Ibid* page 63)

We can see here from that which Ellen White personally said about Uriah Smith's book that she did not have any problems with it at all. In fact she even said that because it contained the very message that God had given to His people, the young men of the Seventh-day Adventist Church should do all they could to sell it to the public. Does this sound as though she did not agree with its theology? Note again that this was in 1899 when the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still non-trinitarian. It was also the year following the publication of *Desire of Ages*.

Note here Ellen White says that to learn for themselves just what the truth is and be saved by it, our youth should read Smith's book. This would have been a very strange thing for her to say if she believed that the non-trinitarianism in this book was error, particularly seeing that she was God's messenger to the remnant.

In a letter to her two sons, Ellen White wrote in 1903 (please note that this was now 5 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*)

"Many will depart from the faith and give heed to seducing spirits. Patriarchs and Prophets and The Great Controversy are books that are especially adapted to those who have newly come to the faith, that they may be established in the truth. The dangers are pointed out that should be avoided by the churches. Those who become thoroughly acquainted with the lessons in these books will see the dangers before them and will be able to discern the plain, straight path marked out for them. They will be kept from strange paths. They will make straight paths for their feet, lest the lame be

turned out of the way.” (Ellen G. White, *Letter written from St. Helena, California to Edson White and W. C. White, 27th September 1903, manuscript releases Volume 21 No. 1594, see also ‘Evangelism’ chapter 10 page 366*)

Notice first of all that Ellen White warned that many would give heed to seducing spirits and thus depart from the 1903 faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This was the same claim as we saw in section one where she called the end of this departing the omega. Now note that she urged that by reading *Patriarchs and Prophets* and *The Great Controversy* that new converts to Seventh-day Adventism would become established in the faith and not travel down “**strange paths**”. Remember, this faith from which Ellen White said that there would be a departing was a non-trinitarian faith. She then went on to say

“In *Desire of Ages*, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, *The Great Controversy*, and in *Daniel and the Revelation*, there is precious instruction. These books must be regarded as of special importance, and every effort should be made to get them before the people.” (*Ibid*)

Here Ellen White includes as books that she regarded as being of “**special importance**” both her own *Desire of Ages* and Uriah Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation*. This is intriguing seeing that our church today says that Uriah Smith’s book was so much in opposition to Ellen White’s *Desire of Ages* that when our church began to adopt trinitarianism, all the non-trinitarian statements about God and His Son had to be expunged from it (Smith’s book).

Ellen White rates Uriah Smith’s book ‘Daniel and the Revelation’ alongside the spirit of prophecy books

Hopefully by now it has been noted that all of Ellen White’s above approbation for Uriah Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation* all came from her pen after *Desire of Ages* was published.

Now the reason why I say this is because in 1903, which was 5 years after *Desire of Ages* was published and the very same year that Ellen White promoted it as being of “**special importance**”, *Daniel and the Revelation* underwent yet another republishing. So if it is true that *Desire of Ages* did present God as a trinity of three persons, which is something that I have never yet discovered, then why didn’t Ellen White or any one else in our church for that matter, on the basis that it was non-trinitarian, ever object to the republishing of Uriah Smith’s book? After all, 5 years had passed since *Desire of Ages* had been released. Had not anyone recognised that there was a difference in theology between Smith’s book and *Desire of Ages*? Obviously not! This is because there is none.

Interesting to note also is that there was another republishing of Uriah Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation* in 1911/1912. This was 14 years following the publication of *Desire of Ages* and still neither Ellen White nor anyone else objected to the fact that it was full of non-trinitarian statements about God and

Christ. This indeed was still the faith of Seventh-day Adventists, even in 1912. There was also in 1919 another printing of Smith's book. This was the year of the secret Bible conference (see section thirty-five and section thirty-six).

So, as we have seen, neither Ellen White nor our church at large had any problems with the glaring non-trinitarianism of Smith's book. Certainly Ellen White did not see this publication as being in conflict with her *Desire of Ages*. That much is for sure!

Consider here just one more statement from Ellen White about Uriah Smith's book; noting again particularly that it was made after her so-called trinitarian *Desire of Ages* was published. She said

"The light given was that Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation, The Great Controversy, and Patriarchs and Prophets, would make their way. They contain the very message the people must have, the special light God had given His people. The angels of God would prepare the way for these books in the hearts of the people." (*Ellen G. White, letter from "Sunnyside," Cooranbong, Australia March 11, 1899 to Brethren Irwin, Sisley, Smith, and Jones. See also Colporteur Ministry, page 12 also Special Instruction Regarding Royalties, p. 7. (1899)*)

Notice how Ellen White again rates Uriah Smith's book along with her own books as containing the truth that people should be given! Note too that she said that "the angels of God" would prepare the way for these books! Was Ellen White only referring to the prophecies in Uriah Smith's book and not the theology? Obviously not! This would be an absurd conclusion to draw.

Let's ask a question here.

Would Ellen White have said all that we have seen her say about Smith's book if she thought that it contained serious error, particularly if it were serious error concerning God and Christ as reckoned today by Seventh-day Adventist trinitarians? Of course she wouldn't have, yet the truth of the matter is that when our church began to adopt trinity theology and because Smith's book was completely out of harmony with it, the Seventh-day Adventist Church expunged from it all of the non-trinitarian remarks. Again I ask if this is significant because that last quoted statement of Ellen White, like the vast majority of all her other statements of approbation for Smith's book that we have seen, was made after her *Desire of Ages* was published.

Ellen White would never have promoted Smith's book in such a manner if she thought it as containing serious error, particularly if it was error regarding God and Christ. Common sense tells us this much. If she thought that he may have been in error on prophecy, this would have been different. This is because until prophecy is seen to be fulfilled, no one can say exactly how it is going to be fulfilled. This is not the same as with theology, especially theology about God

and Christ.

LeRoy Froom thought differently than Ellen White. He believed that the theology in Smith's book was indeed error (this was the very same theology as all the pioneers held). This is why he said with a note of triumph in his *Movement of Destiny*

“The removal of the last standing vestige of Arianism in our standard literature was accomplished through the deletions from the classic D&R (meaning Daniel and the Revelation) in 1944. And the lingering “sinful-nature-of-Christ” misconception was remedied by expunging the regrettable note in the revised Bible Readings of 1949.” (*Froom 'Movement of Destiny', page 465, chapter 'Changing the Impaired Image of Adventism', 1971*)

As we have noted in previous sections, the term “Arianism” is a much abused and misused terminology. Left without any further explanation as did Froom here it really is very misleading. In the common usage of this term it is meant to convey the thought that those who in their thinking are Arian believed that Christ was a created being. This was never the preponderant belief of Seventh-day Adventists. Earlier in his book Froom had said (note the term Arian again)

“Strong reactions of Smith adherents. - “The reaction of the minority who still held personally to the Arian view – and who regarded D&R as virtually inspired and therefore not to be touched or in any way altered – was rather vehement” (*LeRoy Froom, Movement of Destiny, page 424, '1931 opens new epoch of unity and advance – No. 2', 1971*)

This shows how, when Smith's book was edited, that objections were made to what was being done. Notice it says that the objections were “rather vehement”. We shall return to this thought in section forty-six.

What we see here is the end result of bringing trinitarianism into the ranks of Seventh-day Adventism. The books that were written by our pioneers, especially one that Ellen White said that God had led Uriah Smith to write, was now at variance with the new theology of trinitarianism. This is where, as a denomination, trinitarianism had led us. It was a rank denial that what the pioneers had written was the truth and it was also the claim that they had all been teaching error about God and Christ. What a repast for Seventh-day Adventists who consider themselves God's visible remnant church. We are now even saying that God did not give our pioneers the truth, also that what they believed and taught was error.

Thoughts on Smith as a man

In 1919, in an anniversary edition of the *Review and Herald* there was a write up of the various pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism. It was said of Uriah Smith

“The person above all others, however, who bore heavy editorial,

responsibility, and who did more than any other man to develop a strong church paper, was Uriah Smith. Clearly he was a man of God's own choosing to carry forward this responsible work. He was connected with the REVIEW for half a century, and nearly all that time he was editor-in-chief or one of the associate editors." (*L. W. Graham, Review and Herald, July 31st 1919, 'Historical Sketch of the Review'*)

Another comment was

"Urged by Elder White, Uriah Smith began to write for the REVIEW when he was a young man. In fact, he wrote and preached at first only as Elder White insisted upon his doing so. Though one of the meekest of men, he was also among the most talented men of the denomination, and was one of the great pillars of the cause in his time." (*D. W. Reavis, Review and Herald, July 31st 1919, 'Some of Our Pioneers'*)

Ellen White's personal thoughts concerning the man Uriah Smith

Note in closing how Ellen White personally regarded Uriah Smith. She did say in a letter to Mr and Mrs. S. N. Haskell in 1902 (this was after many of the original pioneers had passed away and the year before Uriah Smith died)

"We can easily count the first burden bearers now alive. Elder Smith was connected with us at the beginning of the publishing work. He labored in connection with my husband. We hope always to see his name in the *Review and Herald* at the head of the list of editors; for thus it should be. Those who began the work, who fought bravely when the battle went so hard, must not lose their hold now. They are to be honored by those who entered the work after the hardest privation had been borne.

I feel very tender toward Elder Smith. My life interest in the publishing work is bound up with his. He came to us as a young man, possessing talents that qualified him to stand in his lot and place as an editor. How I rejoice as I read his articles in the Review -- so excellent, so full of spiritual truth. I thank God for them. I feel a strong sympathy for Elder Smith, and I believe that his name should always appear in the Review as the name of the leading editor. Thus God would have it. When, some years ago, his name was placed second, I felt hurt. When it was again placed first, I wept, and said, "Thank God." May it always be there, as God designs that it shall be, while Elder Smith's right hand can hold a pen. And when the power of his hand fails, let his sons write at his dictation." (*Ibid*)

What a wonderful testimony from Ellen White. This was especially so seeing that she was God's messenger to His remnant people. This is so much different than what some Seventh-day Adventists today are saying about our pioneers

These words of Ellen White are probably a massive surprise to those who believe that Uriah Smith (like all the other pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism

who were decidedly non-trinitarian) was wrong in his beliefs about God and Christ. Ellen White thought differently. She said of his articles “so excellent, so full of spiritual truth. I thank God for them”. Enough said?

How much of a greater accolade could be given from one person to another, especially as the one who was giving the praise was Ellen G. White, God’s messenger to His remnant people? Is there any real need to say any more?

In conclusion

In the light of all that we have just read about how Ellen White regarded Uriah Smith’s book, we must ask if she would have agreed with the massive editing of it that took place in the 1940’s. From what we have just read, the answer must be a decided no. In fact we can safely say that she would have totally condemned any such happening.

Nevertheless, this editing did take place and you probably have a copy of this much-edited 1944 version on your bookshelf.

This editing is something that cannot and must not be hidden because as many realise, it was indeed a major step in the process of our denomination changing its image, especially in the eyes of the other denominations who, in the main were trinitarian.

Unfortunately, for those who only have the edited version, much of what Uriah Smith really believed and wrote has been lost to the editing of this book and is now confined, like many other of the pioneers’ publications, to the archives. If you can find an old copy, a pre-edited version, you will surely be blessed as you read it.

We now need to move on to section thirty-nine. This is where we shall be taking an extensive look at Uriah Smith’s *Looking Unto Jesus*. This is a book that was published the very same year as Ellen White’s *Desire of Ages* and is reckoned by today’s pro-trinitarians to be completely antagonistic to it. We shall see though that in Ellen White’s time, the Seventh-day Adventist Church did not think this way. They promoted both these books side by side just like they did with Uriah Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation*.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section thirty-nine

Non-trinitarian articles and books – no objections from Ellen White (Part 3 of 3)

The main book under review in this section is a book that is regarded by current Seventh-day Adventism as being totally contradictory to Ellen White's book *The Desire of Ages*. It is therefore considered by them to be directly in opposition with what Seventh-day Adventists today regard as the truth. Yet during the time of Ellen White's ministry, this book was very highly valued by Seventh-day Adventists. For many years it was actually advertised in our publications alongside *Desire of Ages*. This was when the faith of Seventh-day Adventists was still non-trinitarian, also when all of our literature depicted this very same view. The book in question is called *Looking Unto Jesus*,

Uriah Smith's book 'Looking Unto Jesus'

In the previous section we noted that in the early 1940's, also to bring it into line with the new theology of Seventh-day Adventism (trinitarianism), Uriah Smith's classic book *Daniel and the Revelation* underwent a massive editing. We now need to look at another of his books. This one is called *Looking unto Jesus*. Like his *Daniel and the Revelation* it was decidedly non-trinitarian. As we shall see though, like all the other Seventh-day Adventist non-trinitarian and sometimes quite anti-trinitarian literature, it was published without any objection, either from Ellen White or from anyone else. This book was published the very same year as Ellen White's book *The Desire of Ages*.

The claim by many of today's pro-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists is that in *Desire of Ages*, Ellen White depicted God as a trinity (tri-unity) of divine beings as in the trinity doctrine. This leads them to say that Uriah Smith's *Looking Unto Jesus*, which was a decidedly non-trinitarian book (trinitarians would say anti-trinitarian), conflicted with this spirit of prophecy publication. As Jerry Moon says in the recent Seventh-day Adventist publication *The Trinity*

*"Uriah Smith's *Looking Unto Jesus* was the most comprehensive and carefully nuanced exposition of the non-trinitarian view among Adventists."
(Jerry Moon, 'The Trinity', chapter 13 'Trinity and anti-trinitarianism in Seventh-day Adventist history' page 196, 2002)*

Jerry Moon rates Uriah Smith's *Looking Unto Jesus* as being a comprehensive explanation of the past non-trinitarianism of Seventh-day Adventism. This was the same non-trinitarianism that throughout the ministry of Ellen White, as well as for decades after she died, was the preponderant belief of Seventh-day Adventists.

Jerry Moon then goes on to say that Smith's views, along with the view of the Seventh-day Adventist Church at large, were that the Father alone was without beginning and that sometime in the very remote past, so far back in eternity that it was beyond the human mind to comprehend it, appeared the Word. He also says that Seventh-day Adventists believed that although the means by which the Son appeared is not clearly revealed in the Scriptures, it was believed that Christ had been brought forth of the Father. The non-trinitarians say that this is the begetting of the Son.

Moon makes it very clear that by saying that Christ is begotten of God, the early Seventh-day Adventists were not saying that Christ was created but that by some divine impulse or process from the Father (which is not creation), the Father gave existence to Christ (see page 196 of *The Trinity*). This is a very fair summation of the early Seventh-day Adventist faith.

The belief that *Looking Unto Jesus* was contradictory to *Desire of Ages* is really very interesting. I say this because the truth of the matter is that neither Ellen White nor our church at large, nor any of our church leaders, ever objected to it by saying that it was such. They did not object either to any of the non-trinitarianism that was printed in any of our publications. This was whether it was in our periodicals or in our books. We shall even see that the Seventh-day Adventist Church not only repeatedly promoted Uriah Smith's book but also highly recommended its reading. This was not only to Seventh-day Adventists but alike to non-Seventh-day Adventists. This was the same as was done with Uriah Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation*, which was also decidedly non-trinitarian. Is this telling us something today?

Note Moon's remarks about *Desire of Ages* refuting "traditional orthodoxy as well". This is with reference to the orthodox trinity doctrine. This is the doctrine that says that Christ is eternally begotten of God whilst current (2008) Seventh-day Adventist theology says that Christ is not begotten, at least not in His pre-existence.

As we noted in the previous section, after *Desire of Ages* was published in 1898, Uriah Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation*, as non-trinitarian as it was, underwent at least three major printings. In fact when it was given a reprint in 1912 (this was whilst Ellen White was alive), this was 14 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*. If the church or Ellen White thought that Uriah Smith's book was opposed to the truth, there had been plenty of time to cease its publication. They did not think it contrary to *Desire of Ages*. We know this because they still went on promoting it.

The reason why there were no objections from anyone to either *Looking Unto Jesus* or *Daniel and the Revelation*, not even from Ellen White, was because it was not regarded as detracting from anything that the church was then teaching about God and Christ. It was not seen to be in conflict with that which Ellen White had written, either in *Desire of Ages* or anywhere else. In fact in respect to God and Christ, Uriah Smith said no differently in his *Looking Unto Jesus* than he did in his *Daniel and the Revelation*, which by that time (in 1898) had been in print in one form or another for the best part of 30 years. As was his *Daniel and the Revelation*, Uriah Smith's *Looking Unto Jesus* was decidedly non-trinitarian.

This is clearly seen because in this book, Uriah Smith made such statements as (and this is that to which Jerry Moon was probably referring when he said that this book was the most comprehensive and carefully nuanced exposition of the non-trinitarian view among Adventists)

"God alone is without beginning. At the earliest epoch when a beginning could be, -- a period so remote that to finite minds it is essentially eternity, -- appeared the Word. 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' John 1:1. This uncreated Word was the Being, who, in the fullness of time, was made flesh, and dwelt among us. His beginning was not like that of any other being in the universe. It is set forth in the mysterious expressions, 'his [God's] only begotten Son' (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9), 'the only begotten of the Father' (John 1:14), and 'I proceeded forth and came from God.' John 8:42. Thus it appears that by some divine impulse or process, not creation, known only to Omniscience, and possible only to Omnipotence, the Son of God appeared." (*Uriah Smith, 'Looking unto Jesus', 1898, p. 10*)

Note the stress that Smith makes on saying that Christ is not a created being, also that as well as the process, the time of Christ's begetting is "known only to Omniscience". Smith then said about the Holy Spirit

"And then the Holy Spirit (by an infirmity of translation called "the Holy Ghost"), the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, the divine afflatus and medium of their power, representative of them both (Ps. 139:7), was in existence also." (*Ibid*)

Here again we see the early 1900's Seventh-day Adventist belief concerning the Holy Spirit. He was said to be the "Spirit of Christ" as well as the "Spirit of God", also that He (the Holy Spirit) was "representative of them both" (for the beliefs of Ellen White and the other pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism regarding the Holy Spirit please see section thirty-one, section thirty-two, section thirty-three and section thirty-four).

After a lengthy explanation by Smith regarding Christ creating all things, but making absolutely sure that his readers did not conclude that Christ was created, Uriah Smith said

“With the Son, the evolution of deity, as deity, ceased. All else, of things animate or inanimate, has come in by creation of the Father and the Son — the Father the antecedent cause, the Son the acting agent through whom all has been wrought. No ranks of intelligences, it matters not how high, above or below; no orders of cherubim or seraphim; no radiant thrones or extensive dominions, principalities, or powers, but were created by our Lord Jesus Christ.” (*Ibid page 13*)

This is decidedly non-trinitarian theology but it was completely in harmony with that which all the other pioneers like Joseph Waggoner, Ellet Waggoner, and James White had taught and was still, in 1898, the very same year that *Desire of Ages* was published, the accepted view of God and Christ as it was then held by Seventh-day Adventists. This of course was after they had been under the auspices of God’s messenger to the remnant for 54 years. Is this telling us something today?

We can be sure here that if Ellen White or anyone else of the church leadership had objected to this latter theology, then *Looking Unto Jesus* would never have been published. I say this because just a few years later in 1903, on the grounds that it was not in keeping with what Seventh-day Adventists believed about God and Christ, this same denomination refused to publish Kellogg’s *Living Temple*. We also know that through Ellen White, God sent testimonies saying that Kellogg’s teachings were error therefore our church should not publish his book. If Smith’s book had been teaching error, which is what the Seventh-day Adventist Church is saying today, then why were no testimonies received from Ellen White concerning it?

As it was, Uriah Smith’s *Looking Unto Jesus* was extensively promoted but it said nothing different about God and Christ than that which all the other Seventh-day Adventist publications for decades had been saying. This non-trinitarianism therefore, during the time of Ellen White’s ministry, was indeed the accepted and preponderant faith of Seventh-day Adventists.

Referring to 1898 when *Desire of Ages* was published, George Knight said in the *Ministry* magazine of Oct 1993

“That same year also saw the publication of *Looking Unto Jesus*, by Uriah Smith. According to Smith, “God [the Father] alone is without beginning. At the earliest epoch when a beginning could be--a period so remote that to finite minds it is essentially eternity-- appeared the Word.” Thus on this topic Smith was in harmony with one of his archrivals, E. J. Waggoner, who had published the exact sentiments earlier in the decade.” (*George Knight, Ministry, October 1993, ‘Adventists and Change*)

These “sentiments” that George Knight refers to here are those in Waggoner’s book *Christ and His Righteousness* (1890). This is the book that is said to depict his message at the 1888 General Conference session at Minneapolis.

As can be seen, this non-trinitarian theology was ongoing. It had not changed in one iota, not even by 1898. We have also in previous sections traced it back to very early Seventh-day Adventism and have seen the same.

Voluminous promotion

During my studies of the history of the trinity doctrine within Seventh-day Adventism, I have noted a great deal that during the early 1900's our church said with respect to the promotion of Uriah Smith's *Looking Unto Jesus*. Certainly this publication was very well promoted. It urged upon Seventh-day Adventists to be read as being reflective of everything that their denomination was then teaching, especially it's teaching about Christ.

The fact is that during the years following the publication of this book, there was so much promotion of it that for practical purposes it could not all be quoted here but we quote enough to show how our church did regard it at that time. I do realise that as well as voluminous these quotes will be found quite repetitive but this I have done for a very good reason. It is to show just how much that at that time the Seventh-day Adventist Church valued this book. In other words, if I were only to show you just a few examples of its promotion, then this value would not be so readily seen.

Advertising Looking Unto Jesus

In 1898, the very same year that *Desire of Ages* was published, *Looking unto Jesus* was advertised in the *Review and Herald*. This was prior to its publication. It said under its title *Looking Unto Jesus, or Christ in type and antitype*

“THIS is the title of a new and interesting book soon to appear, from the pen of Uriah Smith. It aims to present, at one view, the holy nature, the exalted position, and the supreme work of Christ, as the Creator and Redeemer of this world. A correct view of the position and work of Christ as Redeemer being of paramount importance now, this volume gives special attention to his priesthood and the types and shadows and ceremonies by which this was foreshadowed, from creation to the cross.” (*Review and Herald* May 10th 1898)

Here we can see that in pre-advertising Uriah Smith's book, the editor of the *Review and Herald* said that it gives “A correct view of the position and work of Christ as Redeemer”. Smith's book was not thought of as being out of harmony with what Seventh-day Adventists then believed and taught about Christ but rather was in complete harmony with it. Note particularly that this “correct view” is said to be of “paramount importance now”. This was in 1898, the same year that *Desire of Ages* was published. The review of Uriah Smith's non-trinitarian book continues

“No book now before the religious world presents so clear and comprehensive a view in so small a compass, of both the philosophy and

the *modus operandi* of that mystery of mysteries, the incarnation and sacrifice of Christ, as does this book. The light of both Scripture and history is concentrated upon this great question, and conclusions of the most thrilling nature unthought of by the ordinary reader, are brought out in a manner to present the Bible in a new light, and make new impressions upon the heart of the reader. In all the range of religious literature, there is no book like it." (*Ibid*)

This is quite an accolade. Very similar of course, if not the same, it was as made of Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation* (see section thirty-eight and section forty-one). The article follows on by saying

"Looking unto Jesus" will contain 280 pages and numerous engravings. The illustrations have been prepared especially for this book by our New York artist. The price of the volume will be announced later. Address Review and Herald Pub. Co." (*Ibid*)

There is "no book like it" said the promotion, not even in the whole of "the religious world". What an accolade for Smith's work, especially as it is totally non-trinitarian! Does this sound as if our church had problems with it?

A few months after its publication, Uriah Smith's book was again promoted in the *Review and Herald*. As well as noting what was said in the pre-publication write-up, it is well worth noting that this promotion said (note that once again this was a large illustrated advertisement)

"This (*Looking Unto Jesus*) is the title of a book which is a credit in every way, to both the author and the publishers. Without a copy of this book your library will be incomplete. It presents to the reader the holy nature, the exalted position, and supreme work of Christ as the Creator and Redeemer of this world." (*Review and Herald August 9th 1898*)

Once again it can only be said, what an accolade. Note the last sentence. It says that the book speaks of Christ's "holy nature" and His "exalted position" as our creator and redeemer. This write-up of Smith's book also said

"No book now before the religious world, presents so clear and comprehensive a view in so small a compass, of both the philosophy and modus operandi of that mystery of mysteries, the incarnation and sacrifice of Christ, "that whosoever belleveth in him should not perish, but bare everlasting life." (*Ibid*)

Can it be doubted how highly the Seventh-day Adventist Church regarded this book?

Concerning the incarnation and sacrifice of Christ, this article also said (as we have noted in the pre-publication advertisement)

“The light of both Scripture and history is concentrated upon this great question, and conclusions of the most thrilling nature, unthought of by the ordinary reader, are brought out in a manner to present the Bible in a new light, and make new impressions upon the heart of the reader. In all the range of religious literature there is no book like it.” (*Ibid*)

Notice now in the following quote how the Seventh-day Adventist publishers regarded the importance of Uriah Smith’s book. The promotion continued by saying

“All the illustrations were made expressly for this book, by our own New York artist, who devoted several months to this work alone. (*Ibid*)

Here we can see the importance that the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church placed upon this book. It says that it took “several months” just for the illustrations to be made. The write up also said

“Looking unto Jesus” contains over 300 pages, and is printed on an extra quality of paper with wide margins, making pleasant reading for the eyes.

PLAIN EDITION; bound in beautiful buckram, cover design in three colors, plain edges, post-paid \$1.

PRESENTATION EDITION; bound as above, back and cover design stamped in gold; beveled boards; full gilt edges, fancy cud papers, post-paid \$1.50.

Agents wanted.” (*Ibid*)

Needless to say, no expense was spared in getting out this book. The next month in the *Review and Herald* it said concerning *Looking Unto Jesus*

“We clip the following words from a letter just received from Brother Morris Lukens, general agent for Pennsylvania:-

"I believe that 'Looking unto Jesus' will occupy a place that none of our other books can till to-day. It cannot but interest all who read it. This book will not only make a good subscription book, but it will also be excellent to lend to those who are becoming interested in the truth." (*Review and Herald Sept 13th 1898*)

In another place in the very same *Review and Herald* promoting Smith’s book it said

“Not enough has been said of the new book, "Looking unto Jesus," that has just lately been issued by the Review and Herald Pub. Co.” (*Review and Herald Sept 13th 1898*)

After saying that it was based on the out-of-print book "The Sanctuary and Twenty-three Hundred Days", which belief in itself is the corner-stone of historic Seventh-day Adventism, the promotion continues

"This is one of the key-subjects of the third angel's message: therefore this book ought to be in every family where the third angel's message is believed. It is but the simple truth to say that there are thousands of Seventh-day Adventists, many of them of years' standing, who have no clear idea of the sanctuary, its services, and the two thousand three hundred days, unto the cleansing of the sanctuary. Until now there might have been some reason for this, because the first book on the subject has been out of print. Now, however, all may be fully informed upon this most important and truly heavenly subject." (*Ibid*)

The same promotion of *Looking Unto Jesus* then said

"As Jesus is the center and circumference, the sum and substance, of this great subject, the book is most fittingly entitled "Looking unto Jesus." We sincerely hope that He one will go any longer without a copy of this book. It has 288 large pages, with wide margins, is beautifully illustrated, and handsomely bound. The price is only \$1; gilt edges, \$1.50." (*Ibid*)

The very next week it said in the *Review and Herald* under the heading *Review of "Looking Unto Jesus"*

"This work, as its title indicates, considers the theme of themes, - our Saviour and Redeemer, the hope and source of everlasting life. Christ is regarded from every Scriptural point of view, - as present in creation, redemption and the final judgment, and as he is unfolded in history and prophecy from Genesis to Revelation. The volume is interesting as showing how completely the divine Son of God and his transcendent work have filled the Sacred Story, and in this way will furnish no small degree of aid to students of the Bible." (*Review and Herald Sept 20th 1898*)

Just seven weeks later In the November 8th edition of the *Review and Herald*, there was included another write up of Smith's *Looking Unto Jesus*. This was as it had appeared in the Lutheran Observer. This write-up said

"The object of the author of this volume is to present Christ to the world in his supreme divinity, over against the view that he is a created being with all human (im)perfections, but not "God over all, blessed forever." He draws his views and conclusions entirely from the Sacred Scriptures; and he considers first in order Christ is Creator and Redeemer, his incarnation and atonement, his priesthood, and the lesson of the cross. He explains the symbolism of the sacrificial system, of the temple and the sanctuary service and the new covenant. He also interprets the prophecy of Daniel, the seventy weeks, the seven last plagues, the close of probation and the

Judgment, in accordance with the views of the Second Adventists. The volume is illustrated with fine views of Scriptural scenes, and is issued in good style. Lutheran Observer, Sept. 23, 1898." (*Review and Herald, November 8th 1898 'Looking unto Jesus'*)

Important to note is that this write up is advertised in the *Review and Herald* alongside Ellen White's *Desire of Ages*.

In 1899, the year following the publication of *Looking Unto Jesus*, which was also the year following the publication of Ellen White's *Desire of Ages*, it said this about Uriah Smith's book in the *Review and Herald* (this particular promotion was first published in the *Sunday-School Times* for January 21st 1899)

"Those who have not purchased a copy of this book, in our opinion fail to see the vital importance of the subject therein discussed. This book discusses principles and facts lying at the root of the Seventh-day Adventist belief. It deals largely with the question of the sanctuary, and shows plainly the present work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, and what this work means to every person now living upon the earth. One hundred agents are wanted at once to solicit orders for this valuable book." (*Review and Herald February 7th 1899 page 95*)

Apart from the emphasis, note the latter sentence. This shows just how much the Seventh-day Adventist Church rated this book. The next month in the same publication it also said about Uriah Smith's book

"Now that so much is being said about the work of the judgment, it would be well for you to become thoroughly posted in regard to the entire subject of the Sanctuary Question, by a careful perusal of our book, "Looking unto Jesus, or Christ in Type and Anti-type," by Uriah Smith. A four-page descriptive circular of this book will be sent free on application. The book contains over three hundred pages, is fully illustrated, and bound in two styles as follows: standard edition, \$1, presentation edition, \$1.50." (*Review and Herald February 14th 1899*)

There was also on the very same page an advert saying that a postal card would bring to those requesting it

"Descriptive circulars of such interesting books as "Patriarchs and Prophets," "The Desire of Ages," "The Great Controversy," "Steps to Christ," "Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing," "The Coming King," "Empires of the Bible," "The Great Empires of Prophecy," "The Rights of the People," "A School without Books," "Looking unto Jesus," "Here and Hereafter," "The Eastern Question," "Christ Our Saviour," "The Gospel Primer," "The Gospel Reader," "Sketches from Bible Child Life," etc., etc." (*Ibid*)

Notice here, very importantly, that Uriah Smith's *Looking Unto Jesus* was

advertised amidst such as Ellen White's *Desire of Ages* and other spirit of prophecy books. Neither our church nor Ellen White saw any conflict here. Later the same year (1899), there was a large illustrated advertisement promoting *Looking Unto Jesus*. This one said

“Those who do not understand the great questions of the sanctuary and its cleansing, and who are at all interested in this subject of vital importance just now, will find a welcome friend in this exhaustive concordance on these very points, called “Looking Unto Jesus.” The Ram's Horn, Chicago, says it is a “well-written book, showing Christ in type and antitype””. (*Review and Herald September 5th 1899*)

There were also many other testimonials to *Looking Unto Jesus*. I include here snippets of these to show how, at that time, that this publication was regarded. These were such as

“We clip the following from a letter just received from Zach. Sherrig, general canvassing agent for District &, in regard to “Looking unto Jesus:” – “This is certainly an important book. I like the title very much; in short, the illustrations, paper, and workmanship are all good, and the price is reasonable.” (*Review and Herald September 27th 1898*)

One write up said that the publication *Christian Work* (New York City) said that Uriah Smith's book couldn't help but thrill the heart of the reader. The *Review and Herald* article then went on to quote the *Christian Work* review as saying

“The object of this book is to enable us to look unto Jesus from every Scriptural point of view. It lays special stress on the present position and work of our Lord, setting it forth in its true light. This is a prime necessity to a correct understanding of the great plan of salvation by Jesus Christ, and one of great practical advantage to every believer.” (*Ibid*)

Please note well the first sentence. Another testimony from the West Virginia Tract Society (after they first appraised the book) concluded

“We see no reason why it should not have a good circulation, and believe it will as soon as it is thoroughly advertised.” (*Ibid*)

In the same edition of the *Review and Herald* a testimony from Mrs S. M. Henry said

“It has a great work to do in helping the Holy Spirit to bring all these things to the remembrance of those who are older in the faith, and in teaching and admonishing those who are younger in years and in present-truth experience.” (*Ibid*)

Smith's book was said here to be helping the older members to remember the

Seventh-day Adventist message, also that it would teach it to the younger ones and those new to the faith. It was seen an all-embracing book.

The following week there was another testimony given regarding *Looking Unto Jesus*. This time it was under the title *Filled with the Gospel*. This was from the Pennsylvania Tract Society and included in its praise of Uriah Smith's work

"We are glad that the Lord is working upon the minds of our brethren to get out such good books as they are putting before the public at present. They all seem to be filled with the gospel, and have the right ring. We know that 'Looking unto Jesus' will be the means of awakening an interest in the hearts of many in the last message of mercy to the world." (*Review and Herald Oct 4th 1898*)

Another testimony, this time from the *Zion's Herald* (Chicago) said

"This is an attractive volume, written by a critical and comprehensive Bible scholar, and breathing a profound spirit of piety. The book is fully and handsomely illustrated" (*Review and Herald Oct 11th 1898*)

Regarding *Looking Unto Jesus*, this testimony came from the Manitoba literary agent

"I have carefully read the new book, 'Looking unto Jesus'. It is a beautiful volume; and while it covers a great amount of truth, reaching from the beginning of the plan of redemption to its close, it is summed up briefly, and in a clear and satisfactory manner. I wish the circulation of this book every success, and will do what I can to secure canvassers for it in our field." (*Review and Herald November 1st 1898*)

Two weeks later there was a press notice in the *Review and Herald* concerning *Looking Unto Jesus*. It had been quoted in the *Baptist Union* of October 22nd 1898. It said

"This author (Uriah Smith), deprecating, as he does, the indifference and laxity with which the vital truths concerning the nature of Christ and the meaning of his atonement are regarded by men who bear his name, makes a vigorous attempt to emphasize and enforce the truths concerning Christ that are vital, as opposed to those which are salutary but partial. The author treats the work of Christ today as real and of paramount importance." (*Review and Herald Nov 15th 1898*)

The *Baptist Union* concluded

"In thirty-five chapters Mr. Smith very fully discusses the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. Many readers will differ with him concerning points of interpretation, but the sincerity of his attitude and the earnestness of his

study can not be questioned. There is always room for the old-fashioned truth. *The Baptist Union (Chicago, Ill.), Oct. 22, 1898.*" (*Ibid*)

By this statement can be seen that many would "differ" from Uriah Smith with regards to interpretation. Although these differences are not stated, it is possible that it included the non-trinitarianism that Uriah Smith wove amongst the pages of his book. Baptists generally were trinitarian.

Desire of Ages and Looking Unto Jesus

Some who say that Smith's *Looking Unto Jesus* opposed what Ellen White had written in *Desire of Ages*, may also say that all these promotions and accolades as quoted above came before Seventh-day Adventists began to realise that in *Desire of Ages* Ellen White depicted God as a trinity. They may also say that when it was realised what Ellen White had written in that latter book, the Seventh-day Adventist Church ceased to promote *Looking Unto Jesus* (which of course was non-trinitarian).

Whilst this may at first sound logical and acceptable, the facts of history do not bear out this reasoning to be true. This is because for many years following the publication of *Desire of Ages*, Uriah Smith's *Looking Unto Jesus* was still being advertised as a book that all Seventh-day Adventists should read. This can be seen because on many of an occasion after 1898 (the year that *Desire of Ages* was published), *Looking Unto Jesus* was advertised as being

"An exhaustive treatise on the subject of the sanctuary. A well-written and nicely illustrated book of over 300 pages, on the work of Christ as revealed in prophecy from the beginning, by Uriah Smith" (*Review and Herald Sept 23^d 1902*)

Note that this was written in 1902, four years after *Desire of Ages* was published. It is also interesting to note that not only was *Looking Unto Jesus* continually advertised after the publication of *Desire of Ages* but was often advertised alongside of it.

One such time was in 1907, which was 9 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*. This is when, under the heading of *Our Publishing Work - The Lord gave the Word: great was the company of those that published it. Psalm 68:11* it said

"LOOKING UNTO JESUS is a book that will assist the reader to look unto Jesus from every Scriptural point of view. In the words of the author: "To look unto Jesus is one of the most prominent injunctions in the Word of God. In him we find the acme of all divine excellence. We are to look to him as one sent forth by the Father, to be, in his own person, his representative among men." (*Review and Herald March 28th 1907*)

Does it sound here that in 1907, which was 9 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*, that the Seventh-day Adventist Church had problems with

Uriah Smith's book? Note also that this was also 4 years after Uriah Smith had died. The article concluded

"Looking Unto Jesus" gives Christ in type and antitype, and is an exhaustive treatise on the subject of the sanctuary. It is a well-written and nicely illustrated book of over three hundred pages on the work of Christ as revealed in prophecy from the beginning. It will indeed enable the reader to look to Jesus more effectually, and will give him a clearer conception of the work of the Saviour." (*Ibid*)

Even after 9 years of realising what Ellen White had said in *Desire of Ages* concerning Christ, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still advertising Uriah Smith's *Looking Unto Jesus* as a book that all should read "to look to Jesus more effectually". It even said that it would enable its reader to look unto Jesus "from every Scriptural point of view". This promotion also said that Uriah Smith's book would also give its reader a "clearer conception" of the work of Jesus as our Saviour. Seeing that Ellen White's supposedly trinitarian *Desire of Ages* had been available to Seventh-day Adventists for 9 years, this was quite an accolade.

For those who still believe that *Desire of Ages* depicts God as a trinity and that when this was realised, Smith's *Looking Unto Jesus* was a book that Seventh-day Adventists denied to be true, it may be of interest to know that even in 1920, which was 22 years after the publication of Ellen White's book and 5 years after her death, *Looking Unto Jesus* was still being advertised for sale in the *Review and Herald* in both Norwegian and the Danish language (see *Review and Herald* 5th February 1920). Note this means that Uriah Smith's book was valued so highly that it was translated into other languages. It also means that 22 years after *Desire of Ages* was published, *Looking Unto Jesus* was still being promoted, even in foreign lands. Is this telling us anything today?

Worldwide promotion

During the second and third decades of the 1900's, Smith's book was advertised to Seventh-day Adventists worldwide. This was such as in the Australian *Signs of the Times*, the Australian Union Conference Record and the Indian Union Tidings etc. It was also advertised as an aid in studying Sabbath School Lessons and Bible studies offered in our publications.

Interesting to note is that in a cleverly written article called *An allegorical catalogue*, many of our then current publications were advertised. One of these publications was *Looking Unto Jesus*.

This article concluded concerning all of the books that it had highlighted

"The publications named in this allegorical catalogue, are advertised in our latest catalogues, and may be obtained by ordering through our tract societies." (*C. H. Nielsen, Australian Union Conference Record, August 12th*)

1918, 'An allegorical catalogue', see also the Australian Signs of the Times, January 27th 1919, Columbian Welcome Visitor, April 26th 1917 and Indian Union Tidings, May 15th 1918)

Note the dates these books were advertised in "our latest catalogues". It was 1917, 1918 and 1919. We can see therefore that 21 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*, *Looking Unto Jesus* was still being promoted amongst Seventh-day Adventists. Now note a promotion of *Looking Unto Jesus* in 1925. It said

"God gave a splendid gift of writing, as well as a wonderful power of clear and logical reasoning, to Uriah Smith, and no better book has been written upon the sanctuary question than "Looking Unto Jesus," by the author mentioned. This work should be in the homes of all our people, and should be diligently read and studied. The book is written in easy, graceful language, contains a large amount of useful Biblical information, and is so clear that every point may be easily grasped." (*Australian Union Conference Record, 25th May 1925, 'Knowledge of Sanctuary vital'*)

Where does it say that Uriah Smith's book should be? It says that it should be "in the homes of all our people, and should be diligently read and studied". Where is it today? It is out of print. In 1925 it appears that Seventh-day Adventists did not have any problems with Smith's book and this was 27 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*. Smith's book, like his Daniel and the Revelation, was decidedly non-trinitarian. This helps us to understand the faith at that time (1925) of the body of Seventh-day Adventists.

After an Australian Union Conference Council in 1925, the various reports were published in the *Australian Record*. In one such article it said that during the conference

"Pastor Fletcher gave daily Bible studies on the sanctuary question". (*J. E. Fulton, Australasian Record September 14th 1925, 'Our recent council'*)

It then went on to say that Fletcher had been invited to write on the sanctuary question but that

"In the meantime we trust all who do not have the book, "Looking Unto Jesus," by Uriah Smith, will procure a copy, and study this most important question. "Looking Unto Jesus" covers many important phases of the sanctuary subject, and is well written. The book is published by the Signs Publishing Company, Warburton, and is obtainable at all Conference offices." (*Ibid'*)

Note that this was in 1925 in Australia and Smith's book was still "obtainable at all Conference offices".

Under the heading of *Publications wanted*, it said in the *Review and Herald* also

in 1925

“Fred L. Pickett, Emmanuel Missionary College, Berrien Springs, Mich., desires to purchase copies of "Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene," by Sister White, and "Looking Unto Jesus," by U. Smith. M. E. Livingston, 116 Cannon St., Charleston, S. C. Continuous supply of our denominational literature for use in hospitals and reading-rooms, and in the sailors' home. Literature in other languages is also desired, to distribute to the sailors who come from different countries.” (*Review and Herald, April 9th 1925, 'Publications wanted'*)

Again we can see that Seventh-day Adventists highly valued Smith's book, even in 1925. It is also interesting to note that in 1938 when our Sabbath School lessons concerned the sanctuary, *Looking Unto Jesus* was promoted as a very great help (aid) to the studies. It said

“The Sabbath school lessons for the second quarter of 1938 are on the sanctuary. These are important and much needed lessons.” (*E. D. Thomas, Eastern Tidings, Southern Asian Division, March 15th 1938, 'Sabbath School members, attention'*)

It later said with regards to books that would be of lesson helps

“Among the other volumes are "Looking Unto Jesus," by Uriah Smith, and "The Cross and Its Shadow," by S. N. Haskell.” (*Ibid*)

We can see then that in 1938, Smith's decidedly non-trinitarian book was still highly regarded enough by Seventh-day Adventists to be used as an aid to studying the Sabbath School lesson. Putting together all of the above information, it must surely be agreed that it is very difficult to come to the conclusion that the *Desire of Ages* and *Looking Unto Jesus* were regarded by Seventh-day Adventists as being in opposition to each other. Certainly during the first three of four decades of the twentieth century our church did not see it this way.

Presently though (2008), because of our church leadership's attempt to justify the bringing in of the trinity doctrine by saying that it was Ellen White's *Desire of Ages* that led us to do it, it is now said these two books were in opposition to each other. This can clearly be seen as Merlin Burt put it in his paper he completed for Andrews University

“These two books ('The Desire of Ages' and 'Looking unto Jesus) both uplifted Christ but were diametrically opposed on the subject of the eternal deity of God the Son” (*Merlin D. Burt, 1996, Preface to 'Demise of Semi-Arianism and anti-trinitarianism in Adventist theology, 1888-1957'*)

From what my studies have revealed, I could not personally draw this

conclusion.

On page 323 of his *Movement of Destiny*, Leroy Froom notes that Smith's *Looking Unto Jesus* was the last of the major books to advocate a derived Christ, meaning a begotten Christ. It is interesting to note that Froom says that our major books had been advocating this view. If as Froom had purported in his book that our early denomination had been mainly trinitarian, then why were our major books presenting non-trinitarianism? Under the sub-heading *Two books in irreconcilable conflict*, Froom then says with reference to Smith's view of a begotten Christ

“These still appeared in his 1898 *Looking Unto Jesus*.” (*Ibid*)

This is hardly surprising because it was then the denominational faith of Seventh-day Adventists. They were non-trinitarian and all the trinitarian churches knew it. This is one of the reasons why they would have referred to us as a cult or sect, probably even the main reason. Froom then said

“*Looking Unto Jesus* was the last declaration, in book form, of the minority constricted-view concept of our Lord, who is in reality “*all the fullness of the Godhead bodily*.”(*Ibid*)

Note Froom's remark to the “*minority constricted-view concept of our Lord*”. This non-trinitarian view was in fact the majority view but it was not restricted in any way. Seventh-day Adventists have always believed in the full and complete deity of Christ, even though they expressed it in non-trinitarian terms (see section sixteen, section twenty, section twenty-one and section twenty-two). To say that it was only “the minority” that believed what Smith had written is about as far from the truth as it can possibly be. According to the above recommendations for the book, it was the denominational faith of Seventh-day Adventists. Froom then said

“The appearance of *The Desire of Ages*, with recognized authority, is doubtless the reason why there were no further printings of *Looking Unto Jesus* in North America, and only one small issuance overseas in Australia.” (*Ibid*)

Notice Froom here only mentions “*North America*”. He says nothing about what we have noted previously about it being advertised in the Danish and Swedish languages, or that they were also advertised in the Indian Union Tidings. He says nothing either about the extensive advertising that we have seen in the *Review and Herald* etc. Froom concluded regarding *Looking Unto Jesus*

“It exerted but little influence.” (*Ibid*)

From what we have read concerning how our church regarded Smith's work, I would certainly not see it as did Froom but you the reader will need to make up

your own mind on this one.

Let's now consider the claim that Smith's *Looking Unto Jesus*, as is alleged concerning his *Daniel and the Revelation*, was in conflict with Ellen White's *Desire of Ages*.

Advertising our non-trinitarian publications

During 1905, which was **7 years after** the publication of *Desire of Ages*, the three books, namely the supposedly trinitarian *Desire of Ages* and the decidedly non-trinitarian books of *Daniel and the Revelation* and *Looking Unto Jesus*, were together, in the *Review and Herald*, all advertised alongside each other. In a full-page advertising feature in the editions of June 29th and July 20th, both *Desire of Ages* and *Looking Unto Jesus* were advertised side by side. This was just one of a number of occasions that I have found that this happened.

Accompanied by all the preceding knowledge, what does this tell us about how the Seventh-day Adventist Church regarded Uriah Smith's non-trinitarian *Daniel and the Revelation*, his non-trinitarian *Looking Unto Jesus* and Ellen White's supposedly trinitarian *Desire of Ages*?

Regardless of the claims made today by the pro-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists who say that Smith's two books conflicted with *Desire of Ages*, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, during Ellen White's time, saw no conflict whatsoever between these three books, also, neither did Ellen White see any conflict between them because if she had, then she would have certainly spoken out against them just as she did with Kellogg's *The Living Temple*.

Here then is something else to consider! During 1905 when *Looking Unto Jesus*, *Daniel and the Revelation* and *Desire of Ages* were being advertised together as being a must to read for Seventh-day Adventists, we have noted already in previous sections that held at Takoma Park in Washington D.C. was a General Conference Session. This was the conference at which Kellogg's *The Living Temple*, because according to Ellen White it contained wrong theories about God and Christ, that she openly condemned it.

Now let's do some sanctified reasoning together.

By then (1905) and in its different forms, Uriah Smith's non-trinitarian *Daniel and the Revelation* had been in circulation amongst Seventh-day Adventists for about 40 years. By then also it had also undergone many different printings. We also know that by this time (1905), this same author's *Looking Unto Jesus* had been in circulation for around 7 years. As we also know, both of these books were decidedly non-trinitarian. In fact we can say that without a doubt, because of the pointed non-trinitarian remarks that these books made about God and Christ, these two publications were tantamount to being anti-trinitarian.

As I said, now let's do some reasoning together! If our denomination had

regarded Smith's non-trinitarian books as containing error, would they have continually advertised them as being a must to read for Seventh-day Adventists even 7 years after *Desire of Ages* was published and would they have advertised them in the *Review and Herald* alongside that latter named book as containing the truth that all should read?

Of course not! That much really is evident! Now let's do some more reasoning together. As we have said, it was at this 1905 General Conference Session that Ellen White openly condemned Kellogg's *Living Temple* as containing wrong views about God and Christ so why did she not condemn Uriah Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation* or his *Looking Unto Jesus* both of which were decidedly non-trinitarian as portraying wrong views concerning them as well? It was because she never regarded them as doing such.

In fact in the *Review and Herald* of May 11th 1905, which carried the first report of the General Conference session, many of Ellen White's books including *Desire of Ages* were advertised alongside Uriah Smith's non-trinitarian, *Daniel and the Revelation* and *Looking Unto Jesus*. So what does all of this tell us? It just shows that what was being taught in these publications were acceptable according to Seventh-day Adventist theology – and according to Ellen White. Again this much really is obvious. It said of these books

“Small and Standard Books

CLASSIFIED ACCORDING TO PRICES

Including a partial list of the principal Denominational Publications containing the message in all its phases ...” (*Review and Herald, May 11th 1905, 'Small & standard books'*)

As has been said, this list contained *Desire of Ages*, Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation*; also Smith's *Looking Unto Jesus*. It stands to reason that the Seventh-day Adventist Church saw no conflict between these books; neither did they regard them as being in conflict with what was then believed by Seventh-day Adventists. Note the date well. It was 1905.

It was also at this 1905 General Conference session that Ellen White told the delegates to hold on to their non-trinitarian faith. It was also here that she said that wrong views about God and Christ were on their way into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. These were views that conflicted with the non-trinitarianism that was espoused, at that time, by Seventh-day Adventists and that would eventually conflict with the non-trinitarianism that was written in Uriah Smith's *Looking Unto Jesus* and his *Daniel and the Revelation* etc.

Another interesting observation

I would like to bring to your attention something that I would term a very interesting observation. This is in connection with another write-up about Uriah

Smith's *Looking Unto Jesus*. This was again printed in the *Review and Herald*. This time it was in the final edition of this publication for 1903.

“This book was acknowledged by the author himself to be his best work, and the one into which, he often said, he put the best part of his life. It is an entirely new, original, and exhaustive concordance of the sanctuary question, showing the present work of Christ and its meaning to those who are now living – Christ in type and antitype, as revealed in prophecy from the beginning.” (*The Review and Herald, December 31st 1903 'Looking unto Jesus'*)

In 1903 therefore, even though Ellen White's supposedly trinitarian *Desire of Ages* had been circulating amongst Seventh-day Adventists for over 5 years, it is painfully obvious that our church was still actively encouraging its members to read Uriah Smith's comprehensively non-trinitarian *Looking Unto Jesus*, even saying that its author claimed that he had “put the best part of his life” into what he described as “his best work”. This shows emphatically how highly, not only Uriah Smith thought of his own work (*Looking Unto Jesus*) but also how highly the church regarded it. This same advert was found twice the following year in the *Review and Herald*. As we have noted, Smith's book was advertised as a must read for many years to come.

Interesting to note again is that on the very same page as this promotion, Uriah Smith's non-trinitarian *Daniel and the Revelation* was also being promoted, as was also the advertising of Ellen White's books. Interesting to note is that these very same adverts continued to be published in exactly the same way for another three weeks.

This though is not the interesting observation that I said I wanted to bring to your attention although in itself it is quite interesting.

What is really interesting is that this recommendation of *Looking Unto Jesus* and the encouragement to read this book was given after Uriah Smith had died meaning that if the church had wanted to drop Smith's book from publication, then they had the perfect opportunity to do so but instead they promoted it on the authors recommendation as being his “best work” and the one into which he had often said, “he put the best part of his life”. This surely is a very interesting observation!.

The Story of the Seer of Patmos (a 1905 non-trinitarian publication)

We mentioned this in section twenty-nine but it is well worth mentioning again. This is that in 1905, a book was published by our denomination called *The Story of the Seer of Patmos*. It was written by one of our most prolific and foremost ministers S. N. Haskell (he was affectionately termed "father of the tract and missionary work of the denomination"). This book was another that was non-trinitarian, yet it brought no objections from Ellen White, or any other of the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In fact Haskell's book came

about because of counsel from Ellen White although it was not exactly in keeping with it. We shall see this now. From Australia in 1899 she wrote

“We do not dwell sufficiently upon the Revelation and the book of Daniel. These books should be published together in pamphlet form, with a few explanations added, and they should be circulated everywhere. The words of inspiration will do their appointed work; for the Holy Spirit will impress hearts in regard to the prophecies given. In this pamphlet it should be made plain that a revelation is not a mystery which cannot be understood, but rather a mystery revealed. These two books may be prepared for publication in a pamphlet bound inexpensively, costing but a trifle, and small enough to be carried in the pocket. Printed together, the books of Daniel and the Revelation will speak to the people and tell their own story.” (*Ellen White, from "Sunnyside," Cooranbong, N.S.W., Australia, February 18, 1899*)

Uriah Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation*, albeit so highly approved of and recommended by Ellen White (see section thirty-eight), could never be said to be “small enough to be carried in the pocket”, so it was that Haskell produced a book called *The Story of Daniel the Prophet*. This was published in 1901. Two years later Ellen White wrote of this happening

“It is several years since light was given me in regard to the need of publishing small books containing Bible stories and others containing some part of the Bible printed as a whole. It pains me to see so many magazines in the homes of the people. Those who cultivate an appetite for such reading do themselves great harm. Can we not provide something better for them?” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 1 1903, to J. E. White and W. C. White, December 28th 1902*)

Then, after saying that books explaining Daniel and Revelation should be bound together and published (this was as “small books”) she said

“This is the suggestion that I made to Elder Haskell which resulted in the book he published. The need is not filled by this book [The Story of Daniel the Prophet]. It was my idea to have the two books bound together, Revelation following Daniel, as giving fuller light on the subjects dealt with in Daniel. The object is to bring these books together, showing that they both relate to the same subjects.” (*Ibid*)

Regardless of the fact that Haskell's book(s) did not fulfill Ellen White's counsel, *The Story of the Seer of Patmos* (1905) was especially well received by Seventh-day Adventists. It was also advertised very well in our periodicals (remember this book was strictly non-trinitarian – see section twenty-nine).

Right through to the late 1920's I can find evidence in our periodicals that it was consistently used in our work in reaching people with our message. Even in 1958

it was referred to in our Sabbath School Quarterly.

In our 1913 yearbook, read by Seventh-day Adventists throughout the world, it was included under the heading "Books you should have". Very interesting here is that topping the list was Uriah Smith's decidedly non-trinitarian *Daniel and the Revelation* and followed by Ellen White's supposedly trinitarian *Desire of Ages*. This was along with other of Ellen White's books such as *Steps to Christ*, *Christ's Object Lessons*, *Patriarchs and Prophets* and *The Great Controversy* etc. There was also included Uriah Smith's other seriously non-trinitarian publication *Looking Unto Jesus*. This was the book that later, in the 1940's when trinitarianism was making serious inroads into Seventh-day Adventism, was edited by a team of Seventh-day Adventists to remove its non-trinitarian statements. We shall cover this in detail in later sections.

Remember, this yearbook was 1913. By then, neither Ellen White nor the church at large, including the leadership, saw any serious conflict between any of these books. This is even though the church says today (2008) that these non-trinitarian books (*The Seer of Patmos*, *Daniel and the Revelation* and *Looking Unto Jesus*) were diametrically opposed to the trinity idea of God, also that they stand in opposition to Ellen White's *Desire of Ages*. This realization should give us something very serious to think about, especially regarding the claims that our once non-trinitarianism was error and not Biblical truth. It was not deemed so in 1913,

Now note a small portion of the advertising of Haskell's book from 1905 (the year that *The Story of the Seer of Patmos* was published) onwards.

1805

"Every family ought to have both "Story of Daniel" and "Seer of Patmos," as they treat on two of the most important books of the Bible." (*Review and Herald, September 21st 1905 'The Precious Seed and its Sowers'*)

1906

WE want our readers to remember that the Review and Herald is still handling "Story of Daniel the Prophet," and "Story of the Seer of Patmos," by S. N. Haskell. These books are among the best published on the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation. They are written in very attractive form, and will be found to be exceedingly interesting and profitable to the young. Price of each, \$1. (*Review and Herald, August 2nd 1906, 'Our publishing work'*)

1908

"Of late we have had to take on several new hands in the factory, to relieve the pressure in the different departments, but we are still extremely busy.

Last week we shipped over two and one-half tons of books and other matter to different places. In the press-room we have nearly finished an edition of "Seer of Patmos," and we have another 10,000 edition of "Desire of Ages" on the press." (*James Gregory, Australian Union Conference Record, January 6th 1908, 'Notes from Warburton'*)

Note that Haskell's book and Ellen White's *Desire of Ages* were being published alongside each other. No problems here.

1908

"BROTHER HAROLD BLUNDEN recently put in five days canvassing for the new book, "Seer of Patmos," on the Manning River, and during this time he succeeded in taking forty orders valued at £32 17s 6d. He considers this one of the best selling books we have, and feels sure that there is a good future before it." (*Australian Conference Record, March 16th 1908, 'Notes and personals'*)

1910

"If you have not read "The Story of Daniel" or "The Seer of Patmos," get them now and begin to do so at once. If you can borrow them from your neighbor, it will be well for you to do so, and after you have read them, we know you will want them in your own library to consult and pass on to others as opportunity affords." (*Review and Herald, 3rd March 1910, 'Two Strong Books'*)

There was far much more advertising of Haskell's book (not only in the *Review and Herald* but in many of our periodicals) but it is too much to quote here. What we will note is that in the Oct 25 1923 edition of the *Review and Herald* (this was under the heading of *Books by S. N. Haskell*), *The Story of the Seer of Patmos* was still being advertised. It even said as a special offer (this referred to *The Story of Daniel the Prophet, The Story of the Seer of Patmos* and *The Cross and its Shadow*),

"The above three books, in uniform jacket covers, and inclosed in an attractive box, will be sent postpaid to any address for \$5.00." (*Review and Herald, 25th October 1923, 'Books by Stephen N. Haskell'*)

Five years later (December 27th 1928), this time under the heading "Remember the pioneers of the message and have their books in your library", Haskell's book was still being promoted. Interesting is that like many times previous, this was alongside Uriah Smith's non-trinitarian *Daniel and the Revelation* and Ellen White's supposedly trinitarian *Desire of Ages*. Again this is proof that the church saw no serious conflict between these books. Note that this was as the 1930's approached. For more details regarding Haskell and his *The Story of the Seer of Patmos*, see section twenty-nine)

More observations and realisations

We noted in particular in section twenty-nine and section thirty that during the early 1900's, Ellen White repeatedly emphasised that God and Christ were two personal beings, each separate and distinct from the other. This was non-trinitarianism in the raw. This was also when both of Uriah Smith's non-trinitarian books, along with Haskell's *The Story of the Seer of Patmos*, were being promoted and circulated amongst Seventh-day Adventists. In the early 1900's, the faith that Ellen White was telling our pioneers to hold on to was exactly the same faith as was contained in these books.

Extremely interesting to note is that this was exactly the same time as Ellen White was condemning Kellogg for the views of God and Christ that he promoted in his book *The Living Temple* which, if you remember he said he could explain better after he had come to believe in the trinity (for details of this read section twenty-five). It was after he made this confession and after he had published this book that Ellen White openly condemned it. So again we ask, if she thought that Uriah Smith's and Haskell's books were wrong because they were non-trinitarian, then why didn't she condemn them as she did Kellogg's book? It is quite apparent, to the honest seeker for truth, that She did not regard these books, even with their non-trinitarian theology, as containing error.

We also noted in section twenty-nine that Ellen White said to the delegates at the 1905 Conference session at Tacoma Park in Washington D. C.

“You will hear men endeavoring to make the Son of God a nonentity. He and the Father are one, but they are two personages. Wrong sentiments regarding this are coming in, and we shall all have to meet them.” (*Ellen G. White to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Takoma Park Washington D. C., May 25th 1905 Review and Herald 13th July 1905, 'Lessons from the first Epistle of John'*)

Ellen White was here defending the 1905 non-trinitarian faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This was the same faith as in Uriah Smith's two books *Daniel and the Revelation* and *Looking Unto Jesus*.

These “Wrong sentiments” concerning God and Christ that Ellen White warned were on their way into Seventh-day Adventism were not non-trinitarian sentiments but something else. This much is obvious because non-trinitarianism was the preponderant faith that Ellen White was then defending. This was the faith then held by Seventh-day Adventists in 1905.

Very interesting to realise also is that in the April 27th edition of the *Review and Herald* of 1905, the coming General Conference Session was being advertised. Now remember, this is the conference session where we have just read that Ellen White would say that in the future, wrong views about God and Christ were going to make their way into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I say interesting because in this edition of the *Review and Herald*, as it would continue to do so

for many years in the future, the non-trinitarian books of *Daniel and the Revelation* and *Looking Unto Jesus* were being advertised. Never though did Ellen White say that these books contained wrong views about God and Christ but she did warn that wrong views were coming in the future! Do you again see the significance of this realisation?

So what does all of this say to us today concerning what our pioneers, including Ellen White, believed about these two books of Uriah Smith (meaning *Looking Unto Jesus* and *Daniel and the Revelation*)? What does it tell us also about that which the pioneers, along with Ellen White, believed about God and Christ?

It was at this 1905 General Conference Session that as we have seen already, Ellen White addressed the delegates in saying to them that the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church that constituted the old landmarks and pillars of our faith should remain unchanged. It was also at this Conference Session that she repeatedly emphasised that God and Christ were two separate and distinct personalities.

In the next section (forty) we shall consider whether Ellen White's *Desire of Ages* was non-trinitarian or trinitarian.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section forty

Ellen White, non-trinitarianism and the Desire of Ages

This is a very lengthy section. The reason for this is because it is dealing with what many believe to be the most important question of the current trinity debate within Seventh-day Adventism. That question is; “Was Ellen White a trinitarian or not?” This will necessitate a certain repeating of the things she wrote that we have already discovered in previous sections but this is the only honest way to determine what she really did believe.

As far as many Seventh-day Adventists are concerned, the two questions, (a) “Was Ellen White a trinitarian?” and (b) “Was the book *Desire of Ages* trinitarian?” are synonymous. This is because these same Seventh-day Adventists make the claim that it was what she wrote in *Desire of Ages* that in particular led our denomination to change from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism.

We have also previously noted that our church today alleges that regarding Christ, our pioneers were teaching false doctrine and not biblical truth. This is because our pioneers were not trinitarians. This is why - so says our church - it was necessary to adopt the trinity doctrine. This changeover took decades to complete. Today it is being objected to by an ever-increasing number of Seventh-day Adventists.

Non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism – a very gradual changeover

Before we review Ellen White’s writings, let’s briefly remind ourselves of just what it was that William Johnsson said concerning the beliefs of our pioneers - keeping in mind that Ellen White said that their faith (beliefs) had been given to them by God (see in particular section twenty-four, section twenty-eight and section twenty-nine). William Johnsson wrote

“Many of the pioneers, including James White, J. N. Andrews, Uriah Smith and J. H. Waggoner held to an Arian or semi-Arian view - that is, the Son at some point in time, before the creation of our world, was generated by the Father. Only gradually did this false doctrine give way to the Biblical truth, and largely under the impact of Ellen Whites writings in statements such as “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. (*Desire of ages* p 530).” (*William Johnsson, Adventist Review January 6th 1994 Article ‘Present Truth - Walking in God’s Light’, 1994*)

William Johnsson correctly described the non-trinitarian faith of the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism – although the word “generated” was not commonly used. Christ was said to have been begotten of the Father. We can see here that this one time editor of the Review is accusing our pioneers of teaching “false doctrine” and not “Biblical truth”. Very importantly note he says that this teaching only “gradually” gave way to the trinitarian idea of God. This really is very important to remember. His claim regarding Ellen White is much the same as made today by most of the pro-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists. As it says in the Seventh-day publication *Issues*

“The Seventh-day Adventist encyclopaedia attributes Adventism’s gradual adoption of trinitarianism to the influence of Ellen White’s writings, especially key statements found in ‘The Desire of Ages’ (1898).” (*Issues: the Seventh-day Adventist Church and certain private Ministries, page 39, ‘chapter 3, Historic Adventism – Ancient Landmarks and the Present Truth’*)

Regarding our denominational “adoption” of trinitarianism, this is a genuine assessment of our history. Its acceptance was only “gradual”. In other words, this changeover did not come about because of a series of Bible conferences wherein decisions were made by a vote but was rather something that happened very slowly over a long period of time. This is the truth of the matter - and it is very significant to understanding how Seventh-day Adventists adopted trinitarianism.

Note also it is said again (as similarly said by William Johnsson) that this changeover from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism came about because of “key statements” that Ellen White had written, particularly in *Desire of Ages*.

Important to recall to our minds is that at the 1905 General Conference (see section twenty-nine), Ellen White rigorously defended what was then the faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This was the faith she said had been held by them for the previous 50 years and should never be given up. Some say that at this conference she was only making reference to what was believed regarding the sanctuary message but as we have seen in section twenty-nine, this is far from being true. A careful review of what she did say will serve to clarify this conclusion. This faith she defended was a non-trinitarian faith.

Note also very importantly that this 1905 conference was 7 years after *Desire of Ages* was published (1898). This means that her views about God, Christ and the Holy Spirit that she expressed at this conference would not have contradicted that which she had written in *Desire of Ages*. In other words, her views regarding the personalities of the Godhead would have been just the same in 1905 as they were in *Desire of Ages*, meaning that because in 1905 she was upholding the non-trinitarian faith of the pioneers, this latter book must also be non-trinitarian. As far as I can reason, there is no alternative conclusion.

Look at this in another way for a moment.

If in *Desire of Ages* Ellen White did depict God as a trinity, how could she, 7 years later, appeal to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference to hold on to the same faith that they held for the previous 50 years - which we all know was non-trinitarian? This does not make any sense at all, at least not to any thinking person.

If the problem still cannot be seen, ask yourself this question. As regards to the pioneers' beliefs concerning God and Christ, if Ellen White knew that what the pioneers were teaching was error (non-trinitarianism), then why did she appeal to the 1905 delegates to hold on to this faith – which they had held for the previous 50 years?

At the 1905 conference, Ellen White said that our faith regarding God and Christ had not changed since our beginnings. She also said that it should never be changed. In other words again, when taken as a whole (and not various statements quoted here and there), the beliefs found in *Desire of Ages* were the beliefs that can only be described as non-trinitarian. This book was in keeping with what Seventh-day Adventists then believed (1898).

We must also take into consideration Stephen Haskell and his non-trinitarian book *The Story of the Seer of Patmos*.

Whilst as far as I know Ellen White made no comment about the book itself (which is significant because if she had thought it's non-trinitarianism to be depicting a wrong view of Christ then it would have been thought that she would have said something), she did say a great deal concerning its author. This was that he was “a mighty man in the Scriptures”, also that he “presents truth in a clear, earnest manner”. She was also very happy that he taught Bible at Avondale School. If Ellen White had thought his views of Christ were in error, then why did she say these things? She knew what he was teaching. In the early 1900's she only had praise for the man (see section thirty-eight). This was years after *Desire of Ages* had been published. The publication of this book had not changed Haskell's views.

Misconceptions and curiosities

Some Seventh-day Adventists appear to believe that when *Desire of Ages* was published in 1898, a great doctrinal change came about within Seventh-day Adventism but this is a terrible misconception of our history. I say this because when our church history is studied, there is no indication, whilst Ellen White was alive, that this book had any affect whatsoever on its denominational theology.

Very interestingly, in a paper that he completed for Andrews University, Merlin Burt said

“Up until the turn of the twentieth century Seventh-day Adventist literature was almost without exception opposed to the eternal deity of Jesus and anti-trinitarian.” (Merlin D. Burt, *Demise of Semi-Arianism and anti-*

trinitarianism in Adventist theology, 1888-1957 page 1, Chapter 1, 'Background: Adventist views on the deity of Christ and the trinity until about 1888', 1996)

Note the date referred to here. It was “Up until the turn of the twentieth century” meaning up to 1900 and the early 1900’s. This would have included the time period of the 1905 General Conference. Read it again to see the importance of what is being said here. Certainly it was the time period following the publication of *Desire of Ages*.

Burt’s words are only another way of saying that even into the early 1900’s, the faith of Seventh-day Adventists was still non-trinitarian (or anti-trinitarian as he puts it). This means that this non-trinitarian faith was still the same then as it always had been from our beginnings – meaning the same as the previous 50 years. Please note this very well. It really is extremely important. Burt is referring to the years immediately following the publication of *Desire of Ages* (1898).

It is also important to bear in mind that over the years a great deal of this non-trinitarian “literature” had come from the pen of Ellen White. It goes without saying that if what she had written in any of her books and articles etc had been different than what was being said by the rest of Seventh-day Adventism, this would have stuck out like a sore thumb. As it was, it did not.

Whilst I would agree with the latter part of Burt’s statement, I would not agree with him concerning his earlier remark that this non-trinitarianism was in opposition to the “eternal deity of Jesus”. This is because as a denomination, it is my belief that we have always correctly expressed that deity although as we have seen in previous sections, this was in terms that were strictly biblical and not as in the extreme speculations of the trinity doctrine. I would think that Burt probably means eternal existence as a personality separate from the Father rather than “eternal deity” as a nature. Seventh-day Adventists believed that Christ’s personality, separate from the Father, had come into existence at a point in eternity. This was the begotten faith. It was that Christ was God Himself begotten. Please note again Burt’s statement. He said

“Up until the turn of the twentieth century Seventh-day Adventist literature was almost without exception opposed to the eternal deity of Jesus and anti-trinitarian.”

A major part of “Adventist literature” was the writings of Ellen White. Is Burt saying here that Ellen White’s writings, along with the other writers of Seventh-day Adventist literature, were “opposed to the eternal deity of Jesus and anti-trinitarian” - or is he saying that the writings of Ellen White were an exception? If it is the latter then he must be saying that “Up until the turn of the twentieth century the writings of Ellen White stood in opposition to the rest of the writers in Seventh-day Adventism. This is quite a statement.

Those who have a correct understanding of our history will admit to the fact that Seventh-day Adventists have always believed in the deity of Christ. This is such as Jerry Moon who in the book *The Trinity*, published according to our church to help resolve the trinity debate within Seventh-day Adventism (although from a personal point of view I believe that it falls far short of that objective) says

“Those [Seventh-day Adventists] who rejected the traditional Trinity doctrine of the Christian creeds had no question about the biblical testimony regarding the eternity of God the Father, the deity of Jesus Christ “as Creator, Redeemer, and Mediator,” and the “importance of the Holy Spirit” (Gane, p. 109).” (*Jerry Moon, The Trinity, page 192, ‘Trinity and anti-trinitarianism in Seventh-day Adventist history’ 2002*)

Again this is very true indeed. Our pioneers did reject the trinity doctrine but they did not reject the deity of Christ. What they did object to was the way this deity is expressed in the trinity doctrine. Note also Jerry Moon’s remarks concerning the Holy Spirit. All of this is only as we have seen it in previous sections. It is also as Russell Holt said in 1969 when speaking of the time period leading up to the death of James White

“A survey of other Adventist writers during these years reveals, that to a man, they rejected the trinity, yet, with equal unanimity they upheld the divinity of Christ.” (*Russell Holt, “The doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination: Its rejection and acceptance”, A term paper for Dr. Mervyn Maxwell, 1969*)

Holt then wrote of the beliefs of the pioneers

“To reject the trinity is not necessarily to strip the Saviour of His divinity. Indeed, certain Adventist writers felt that it was the trinitarians who filled the role of degrading Christ’s divine nature.” (*Ibid*)

Jerry Moon also went on to say in the book *The Trinity*

“However, they [the pioneers] weren’t initially convinced that Jesus was without beginning, or that the Holy Spirit is an individual divine person and not merely an expression for the divine presence or power.” (*Jerry Moon, The Trinity, page 192, ‘Trinity and anti-trinitarianism in Seventh-day Adventist history’ 2002*)

Again this is very true. Even today, non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists still hold much to the same beliefs but this non-trinitarianism does not make the Son of God any less a divine being than God Himself - neither does it deny that the Holy Spirit is a personality. It is simply that it is not expressed in terms that are trinitarian.

In contrast, trinitarians will say that the only way to express Christ’s deity

correctly is as it is expressed in the trinity doctrine but remember, as we noted in section four, this teaching is only an assumed (implied) doctrine (not found in the Scriptures) therefore a purely biblical understanding of Christ's deity would be non-trinitarian.

On page 10 of his paper, Burt quotes two statements from *Desire of Ages* (we shall return our thoughts to these later). He then says concerning them (note that this is with reference to only two statements)

“Curiously, for years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*, the church generally ignored these statements” (*Ibid page 10*)

Note that Burt simply says “years”. No specific time period is mentioned. In reality, there is no curiosity at all concerning our church and these two statements. Our church regarded everything that Ellen White wrote in *Desire of Ages* as being in keeping with what they then believed - which of course in 1898 was non-trinitarianism. In other words, whilst Ellen White was alive, Seventh-day Adventists did not regard anything that was written in *Desire of Ages* as being trinitarian. Burt went on to say regarding the content of Seventh-day Adventist literature

“There continued to be plenty of oblique statements which stopped short of taking a clear position. Also there are inferential comments which suggest the traditional view.” (*Merlin D. Burt, 'Demise of Semi-Arianism and anti-trinitarianism in Adventist theology, 1888-1957 page 10, Chapter 2, 'A time of transition: 1888 to 1900', 1996*)

Burt does not actually quote any of these statements or the comments but by the phrase “traditional view” he is making reference to what was once the non-trinitarian faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This was the faith that was still held by them, in the early 1900's – meaning following the publication of *Desire of Ages*. This was the faith that said that Christ, in His pre-existence, was begotten of the Father and that the Holy Spirit proceeded. It is not surprising therefore that these type of statements continued to be found in the writings of Seventh-day Adventists. After all, this was still their denominational faith - even for decades after the publication of *Desire of Ages*. It was also their faith for decades after Ellen White had died. In summary, this “traditional view” that Burt speaks of here must be non-trinitarianism.

The principle of study

At this juncture, there is something very important to note - a principle in fact.

This principle is that when a study is undertaken of what any author believes, every aspect that the author says on any subject must be taken into consideration. This is exactly the same method that should be adopted when studying the Scriptures. If the latter is not done then there will be a total distortion of the facts. Allow me to explain what I mean.

I have been a Seventh-day Adventist for well over 30 years and as it is portrayed in our fundamental beliefs, I believe that when a person dies, then he or she has no more knowledge of things that happen in this life. In other words, those who are dead are in a state of unconsciousness. This is commonly known as soul sleep.

I will also admit that concerning the topic of state of the dead - if I so wished - I could deliberately omit certain texts of Scripture that tell of a person's condition in death and in so doing create a very good case for the belief that when a person dies, the spirit (or soul as some people say) continues to experience life. As most Seventh-day Adventist would agree, this would be a dishonest way to study and interpret the Scriptures. This is because regarding any teaching, whether it is the state of the dead, the Sabbath, the deity of Christ or anything else, everything said in the Scriptures must be taken into consideration.

The latter is also how Ellen White's writings should be treated – particularly as she was an inspired writer. When determining what she really did believe on any topic (or what God revealed through her on any topic), we should not quote just a part of what she said but everything she said should be taken into consideration. In other words, we must not quote certain statements here and there whilst omitting others that she made on the same subject. We must remember also that she was an inspired writer. This means that she was as much an inspired writer when she made her non-trinitarian statements as she was when making those that would be befitting to a trinity doctrine. Concerning those who would incompletely quote her, Ellen White said

“Why will not men see and live the truth? Many study the Scriptures for the purpose of proving their own ideas to be correct. They change the meaning of God's word to suit their own opinions.” (*Ellen G. White, Diary, January 10th 1890, MS 22 1890*)

The same can be done with the writings of what we call *the spirit of prophecy* (Ellen White's writings). Some statements that suit a certain line of thinking can be quoted whilst others that would modify that thought can be omitted. This would put a very biased and erroneous interpretation on the things that Ellen White wrote. The only honest way to treat her writings is to quote everything that she wrote on a particular subject and then draw a conclusion. After all, we make the claim that she was inspired. She then added

“And they do also with the testimonies that He sends. They quote half a sentence, leaving out the other half, which, if quoted, would show their reasoning to be false.” (*Ibid*)

It must be said that if we desire to know what God has revealed through Ellen White on any topic, we must not “quote half a sentence” here and “half a sentence” there, ignore something she said somewhere else and then draw a conclusion. This would be a dishonest way to use her writings. We noted in

section twenty-seven where this happened in our Sabbath School lesson for March 26th 2006. The omissions put an entirely different slant on what she had actually meant her words to say. This was an abuse of Ellen White's writings.

In making application of this study principle, if we are to determine whether or not in *Desire of Ages* that Ellen White did depict God as being a trinity, then we must take into consideration everything that she wrote, even if there is found in the book statements such as those Burt refers to as “oblique statements which stopped short of taking a clear position” and “inferential comments which suggest the traditional view” (see above). Only then can we draw an honest conclusion as to what she was saying by reason of this book and her other writings. From my own personal studies, I could not draw the conclusion that in *Desire of Ages* she did speak of God as a trinity. This is after 33 years of reading this book through on quite a number of occasions.

In *Desire of Ages*, as well as in her other writings, Ellen White wrote copiously on the relationship between God and Christ. Admittedly some of her statements do fit nicely into a trinitarian concept of God but if only these types of statements are used at the expense of the ones that are non-trinitarian, then this would depict her as teaching trinitarianism. As has been said though, if this is done, it would be a very deceitful way to treat her writings. Certainly it would be a dishonest way to determine what she believed. This should not be done with the Scriptures so why do it with the writings of Ellen White?

In *Desire of Ages* as well as in many other places, Ellen White penned certain statements that can only be termed as non-trinitarian (some would even say anti-trinitarian), therefore when deciding what she actually said in this book, particularly what she said concerning Christ, all of these need to be taken into account. After all, she was an inspired writer. It was not simply her own opinions that she was voicing.

Notice now what Ellen White says next in that testimony where she refers to people who only quote “half a sentence” from what she had written. She said

“God has a controversy with those who wrest the Scriptures, making them conform to their preconceived ideas” (*Ibid*)

I believe that is only reasonable to assume that God also has a controversy with those who do the same with the writings of Ellen White.

The traditional view (Christ begotten)

This “traditional view” that Burt spoke of in his paper (see above) he again mentions a few pages later. This is when he says concerning 1898 (this was the year that *Desire of Ages* was first published)

“The year 1898 was central to the development of Adventist understanding on Christ's eternal pre-existence. In that year Uriah Smith's *Looking Unto*

Jesus and Ellen White's Desire of Ages took opposite positions on Christ's eternity." (Merlin D. Burt, 1996, 'Demise of Semi-Arianism and anti-trinitarianism in Adventist theology, 1888-1957, page 9, chapter 2, 'A time of transition: 1888-1900')

Speaking from the perspective of my own personal studies I could not agree with Burt's conclusions. This is because the book *Desire of Ages* was not something that Ellen White wrote from cover to cover, but to a great degree is a compilation of her existing writings put together not only by herself but also by her secretaries and helpers. It was also a book that was decades in the making. This is one of the reasons why I see it as reflecting non-trinitarianism and not trinitarianism. Taken overall, Ellen White's writings were decidedly non-trinitarian.

There is also something else here that is very important to note. This is that concerning the doctrine of the Godhead, the pioneers and Ellen White were in harmony with each other, so why should her *Desire of Ages* take "opposite positions" with Smith's *Looking unto Jesus*? As we have seen in previous sections, Ellen White told the delegates at the 1905 General Conference session not to give up or change their long held beliefs about God or Christ, so why, seeing that their beliefs were still then (in 1905) non-trinitarian, should we regard Smith's non-trinitarian *Looking Unto Jesus* (1898) - which reflected the then non-trinitarianism of Seventh-day Adventism - be antagonistic to Ellen White's *Desire of Ages* (1898)? This is not a reasonable conclusion to draw. To put this in another way, in 1905, Ellen White was still telling Seventh-day Adventists to hold on to their non-trinitarian faith, the faith that they had held concerning God and Christ for the previous fifty years so why should her 1898 *Desire of Ages* be said to be trinitarian, also in opposition to Smith's *Looking Unto Jesus* (1898). This would not make sense.

In the previous section, which was the third section of three devoted to looking at a few of the old time books of Seventh-day Adventism, we took note of Smith's *Looking Unto Jesus*. We noted that it was advertised for years alongside Ellen White's *Desire of Ages*. Our church saw no conflict between these two books. In fact as they did with *Desire of Ages*, we have seen that they looked upon Smith's book with extremely high regard. Burt then says

"Looking Unto Jesus presented the traditional "old view" that Christ was "begotten" of the Father in the ages of eternity. Desire of Ages gave a "new view" that Jesus was the eternal self-existent second person of the Godhead." (Ibid)

It is true that throughout the entire time of Ellen White's ministry, the "old view" of Seventh-day Adventists was that Christ was begotten of the Father therefore it is not surprising that Smith's *Looking Unto Jesus* reflected that very same view. As Burt admits (see above)

“There continued to be plenty of oblique statements which stopped short of taking a clear position. Also there are inferential comments which suggest the traditional view.” (Merlin D. Burt, *Demise of Semi-Arianism and anti-trinitarianism in Adventist theology, 1888-1957* page 10, Chapter 2, ‘A time of transition: 1888 to 1900’, 1996)

The “new view” is the view that says Christ was never begotten. This is the view of the Seventh-day Adventist Church today. Never was the latter the preponderant view of our church in Ellen White’s time - even though some may have wished it to be so. Certainly it was not the view of Ellen White in *Desire of Ages*.

Interesting to note is that when *Desire of Ages* was published in 1898, there were no remarks in our publications to the effect that Ellen White had spoken in this book of Christ not being begotten - neither was it said that in it that God was depicted as being a trinity. This should be regarded as being highly significant. If Ellen White had spoken of Christ in this book as being not begotten, or in it had expressed concepts of the trinity doctrine, then this would have been in direct opposition to what was then believed by Seventh-day Adventists. Certainly we can imagine that something would have been said concerning it. As it was, nothing was said in this respect. Our publications will be searched in vain to find such remarks.

In section forty-one (a) and section forty-two, we shall see that during the two decades following the death of Ellen White, the denominational faith of Seventh-day Adventists was still that Christ was begotten of God therefore literally the Son of God.

There is also something else very important to consider here. This is that if in *Desire of Ages* Ellen White had spoken of God as a trinity, then why was there such a commotion when 5 years after the publication of this book, Kellogg claimed to have come to believe in this same teaching. In other words, why did not everyone say to Kellogg that he had interpreted Ellen White’s writings correctly, particularly what she said in *Desire of Ages*? Why say to him that he was misinterpreting what Ellen White wrote? As we also noted when condemning Kellogg’s book *The Living Temple*, Ellen White condemned all illustrations that depicted God as three-in-one (see section twenty-seven). She also condemned Kellogg himself for misusing her writings. This should be telling the wise something very significant. Burt continued

“Ellen White’s position would be the one generally accepted by Seventh-day Adventists by the 1950s as will be seen in the following chapters.” (*Ibid*)

Again I disagree with this view because as we have already seen in previous sections, Ellen White never disagreed with the belief of the pioneers that Christ was begotten of God, in fact in her own writings she even endorsed this view, even saying that the pioneers should hold on to their non-trinitarian beliefs. If

Ellen White's views overall are accepted, then that view would be that Christ truly is the begotten Son of God.

Burt is saying here that because (as he says) she was a trinitarian herself, Ellen White would have approved of this changeover to trinitarianism. The author of these notes could never accept that view. For a start, never could he accept that she would have said that Christ was not begotten. We shall see why now.

Ellen White and the begotten concept

In 1897, in a letter addressed to "My Ministering Brethren" Ellen White wrote

"Who is Christ? Whose Son is He? The only begotten Son of the infinite God. What distinction had He in the heavenly courts? He was Commander of all heaven." (*Ellen G. White, Letter 21 1897, to My Ministering Brethren, December 19th 1897*)

Three years earlier, with the youth in mind, she asked the same question

"Who is Christ? -- He is the only begotten Son of the living God. He is to the Father as a word that expresses the thought, -- as a thought made audible. Christ is the word of God. Christ said to Philip, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father." His words were the echo of God's words. Christ was the likeness of God, the brightness of his glory, the express image of his [the Father's] person" (*Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor, 28th June 1894, 'Grow in grace'*)

She also wrote the next year (1895)

"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." (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 30th May 1895, 'Christ our complete salvation'*)

We have here the clear statement that shows that Ellen White believed that Christ, in His pre-existence, is literally the begotten Son of God. Here she was speaking in opposition to two heretical views of His origins (creation and adoption). This statement is also in keeping with what was then the denominational faith of Seventh-day Adventists. Just 6 weeks later she confirmed this begotten concept by saying

"The Eternal Father, the unchangeable one, gave his only begotten Son, tore from his bosom Him who was made in the express image of his person, and sent him down to earth to reveal how greatly he loved mankind." (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald 9th July 1895 'The Duty of the*

Minister and the People')

Notice here that instead of the word “begotten”, she uses the word “made”. At first glance this may appear to mean created but we know for all that we have read from Ellen White’s writings that this is not what she meant (see previous quote). This is why a comparison of all that she said is imperative to understanding what God revealed through her.

As we have noted and commented on these quotes many times in previous sections (see particularly section fifteen) we shall not do so again here, suffice to say that Ellen White firmly believed that in His pre-existence the Son is begotten of God. This is the testimony of her writings.

The way that Ellen White wrote about Christ in *Desire of Ages* is exactly the same way as Uriah Smith wrote in his book *Looking Unto Jesus*. Certainly whilst Ellen White was alive, these two books were never thought of by Seventh-day Adventists as being in conflict with each other (see section thirty-nine). The fact is that this was claimed only with the introduction of trinitarianism. Prior to this, I cannot find this even implied.

This introduction of trinitarianism was when it was said that Christ, in His pre-existence - because He is not begotten of God - is not a true Son.

The trinity doctrine – 50 years to become normative within Seventh-day Adventism

There is also something else that is very important to remember here. This is that if something was true yesterday then it must be true today.

Why I say this is because the “old view” of Seventh-day Adventism was non-trinitarianism (Christ begotten in eternity). The “new view” as Burt calls it is trinitarianism (Christ never begotten). It is evident that both views cannot be correct - neither can one view develop into the other. This is because the principles that determine each view are diametrically opposed to each other. This means therefore that if the pioneers (including Ellen White) were correct in what they were teaching about Christ (a truly begotten Son) then the church today is wrong - either that or the pioneers (including Ellen White) were wrong in what they were teaching and the church today is correct. Certainly both cannot be correct. Note Burt says that it was not until the 1950s that this trinitarianism had become the norm within Seventh-day Adventism.

“One of the remarkable aspects of the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the development of its position of the trinity and the deity of Christ. These doctrines did not become normative in the church until the middle of the twentieth century”. (*Merlin D. Burt, 1996, Preface to 'Demise of Semi-Arianism and anti-trinitarianism in Adventist theology, 1888-1957'*)

If as Burt says here that the mid 1950’s are taken as the date when trinitarianism

became normative in Seventh-day Adventism, then this was something like 57 years after *Desire of Ages* was published. This surely is very significant.

“For the doctrines of the trinity and eternal deity of Christ, the change took over fifty years to become normative” (*Ibid* page 59, ‘Chapter 7, ‘Summary and conclusion’)

Fifty-years previous to the 1950’s (when the trinity doctrine is said to become normative in Seventh-day Adventism) would take us back to the early 1900’s. This is when Kellogg attempted to introduce trinitarianism into Seventh-day Adventism.

Seeing that for many years after *Desire of Ages* was published Ellen White advocated Seventh-day Adventists should not change their non-trinitarian faith (beliefs), how can it be claimed that it was her writings, particularly what she wrote in this latter named book (published in 1898) that led Seventh-day Adventists to gradually bring into its beliefs the doctrine of the trinity? It must be asked here, is this reasonable to believe?

A major theological shift – is Ellen White really responsible?

When it is realised that during the time of the pioneers the Seventh-day Adventist Church was constantly under the auspices of Ellen White (God’s chosen messenger to His remnant people) and that never once during her 71 years of ministry did she say that the non-trinitarianism of Seventh-day Adventism was wrong, then the need of this investigative study becomes very apparent.

As we have noted so many times previously, the continual claim of the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is that it was the writings of Ellen White that led our denomination to become trinitarian. This is a very serious claim but it is in keeping with what George Knight said in an article he wrote called, *Adventists and Change* (we looked at this article in section ten). This is when he said

“By now it should be obvious to our readers that Adventism has experienced major theological change across the course of its history and that Ellen White had a role in that change.” (*George Knight, ‘Ministry’ magazine October 1999, Adventists and Change*)

As a matter of passing interest here, George Knight also said in the same article

“The renewed emphasis on Jesus and His saving righteousness, however, called for views of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit, and the divine nature of Christ adequate to serve as a theological basis for the new soteriology. It was Ellen White whose writings led the way in the theological shift.” (*Ibid*)

Here we can see it admitted that over the years within Seventh-day Adventism, a

“major theological change” has taken place. Notice even more importantly that George Knight also says (this is in agreement with William Johnsson – see above) that in this “theological shift” it was Ellen White’s writings that “led the way”. Interesting to also note is that he says that it was our change in views regarding the Godhead that served as “a theological basis” for the changeover to the trinitarianism. This he refers to as being the “new soteriology” of Seventh-day Adventism.

If a person has knowledge of the trinity doctrine as portrayed in the Athanasian Creed, this latter statement of George Knight’s will be seen to be highly significant. This is because as we noted in section five, it says within this creed that if a person does not believe in the trinity doctrine, at least as it is therein presented, they cannot be saved. This leaves us to wonder, when George Knight calls this changeover to trinitarianism the “new soteriology” of Seventh-day Adventism, if this is what he is also saying.

We are also left to ponder that if in *Desire of Ages* that Ellen White does speak of God as being a trinity, then why didn’t our church recognise this in 1898 when it was first published? Even more intriguingly, why was it never recognised by Ellen White herself? The latter question is really intriguing because we know that for many years after this book was published, Ellen White consistently spoke of God and Christ in a non-trinitarian sense. This really is an intriguing situation. It becomes even more intriguing when it is realised that in the midst of this Godhead crisis in 1905, Ellen White told the pioneers to hold on to their non-trinitarian faith. This was the very same faith that they had held since their beginnings in 1844. The year 1905 was 7 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*.

Let’s look at all of this for a moment from a different perspective.

If in *Desire of Ages* Ellen White had spoken of God as a trinity, then why did our church wait until decades after her death to say so? This becomes a particularly relevant question when it is realised that all during the time that she was alive, as well as for many years after her death, the other denominations - because we were non-trinitarian and they were trinitarian - still regarded us as being a non-Christian cult. Our non-trinitarianism would have been one of the prime reasons for this allegation. So, if in the book *Desire of Ages* God is spoken of as a trinity, would it not have been better to make this changeover when Ellen White was alive - thus helping to rid ourselves as early as possible of this derogatory description? Why wait until many years after her death to do it? Even apart from this, if in this book (or anywhere else for that matter) Ellen White did speak of God as a trinity, then why was this never mentioned whilst she was alive? The latter appears to be the most important question!

These are all very serious questions and ones to which very serious consideration is due, especially as we have noted in section one that in 1904, Ellen White did warn about a so-called reformation that she said Satan himself

would suggest was necessary to the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists.

I say this because this warning in 1904 came when our denomination was still non-trinitarian), which was 6 years after *Desire of Ages* was published (1898). This, to any thinking person, should speak volumes because as we have clearly seen in previous sections, it means that 6 years after *Desire of Ages* was published, Ellen White was still advocating that Seventh-day Adventists should retain (not give up) their non-trinitarian faith.

Has this sounded any warning bells in respect to our changeover to trinitarianism? I do believe by now that they should be ringing - at least enough to warrant this investigation into her writings. This then is the motivation behind these studies. It is to find out the truth about the doctrine of the trinity within Seventh-day Adventism - also what Ellen White said concerning the Godhead.

Ellen G. White – justification for change?

The author of these notes finds it very strange indeed that the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church today is saying that it was the writings of Ellen White that brought about this changeover from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism. He finds it even stranger that it should be said that it was what she wrote in *Desire of Ages* that led to this change.

Why he says this is because in 1905, which was 7 years after the *Desire of Ages* was published (1898), Ellen White said

“The past fifty years have not dimmed one jot or principle of our faith as we received the great and wonderful evidences that were made certain to us in 1844, after the passing of the time.” *Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies series ‘B’ No. 7. ‘Standing in the way of God’s Messages’, page 58, December 4th 1905)*

She also said in the same paragraph

“Not a word is changed or denied. That which the Holy Spirit testified to as truth after the passing of the time, in our great disappointment, is the solid foundation of truth. Pillars of truth were revealed, and we accepted the foundation principles that have made us what we are--Seventh-day Adventists, keeping the commandments of God and having the faith of Jesus” (*Ibid*)

“Not a word” said Ellen White “is changed or denied”, neither is “dimmed one jot or principle of our faith”. This faith she said was as Seventh-day Adventists had held it for the “past fifty years”. This was written in 1905 so her mind was going back to the mid 1850’s.

Notice here the remarks with regards to “the solid foundation of truth” and “foundation principles”. These were what she termed the “landmarks” and

“pillars” of what was then, in 1904, still the faith (beliefs) of Seventh-day Adventists (see above). Notice too that she says “Pillars of truth that were revealed”. This is an allusion to the truths that at the beginning of Seventh-day Adventism that she said God had revealed to her and the other pioneers.

During the early 1880’s, a dispute, concerning the law in Galatians, arose within Seventh-day Adventism. Whilst it is not the purpose to elaborate on this dispute in detail here, some were making it appear that the belief that this ‘law’ was the ceremonial law (and not the moral law of the 10 commandments) was a landmark belief that should not be changed. In addressing herself to this situation, Ellen White made this observation

“The passing of the time in 1844 was a period of great events, opening to our astonished eyes the cleansing of the sanctuary transpiring in heaven, and having decided relation to God’s people upon the earth, [also] the first and second angels’ messages and the third, unfurling the banner on which was inscribed, “The commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.” [Revelation 14:12.] One of the landmarks under this message was the temple of God, seen by His truth-loving people in heaven, and the ark containing the law of God. The light of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment flashed its strong rays in the pathway of the transgressors of God’s law. The non-immortality of the wicked is an old landmark. I can call to mind nothing more that can come under the head of the old landmarks. All this cry about changing the old landmarks is all imaginary.” (*Ellen G. White, Ms 13, 1889, ‘Standing by the landmarks’*)

Some, by using this statement, have attempted to make it appear that because Ellen White did not mention our beliefs concerning Christ that these beliefs were not established then (in 1889) in Seventh-day Adventism but this would not make sense. She did not mention here either what Christ had achieved at Calvary or the second coming of Jesus. Are we then to believe that because she did not mention these things in this statement that these were not considered then, in 1889, to be one of the pillars of Seventh-day Adventism? That really would not make sense.

By the year 1889, over 40 years had passed since the ‘great disappointment’. During this time period, other truths had become established within Seventh-day Adventism. Undoubtedly these concerned what we believed concerning Christ. We can be sure that God had not allowed His remnant people to teach error for over 40 years concerning what most would agree was the most important teaching of Scripture (what is believed about Christ).

That truth is progressive cannot be denied but it must be remembered that truth never changes. In other words, if something was true yesterday then it is still true today. This would mean that if it is true today then it was true yesterday.

Four years later in 1893, Ellen White recounted an experience when a man

disputed what Seventh-day Adventists taught concerning Christ. This man claimed that we, as a denomination, by what we were teaching, were denying the divinity of Christ. We detailed this experience previously on pages 398-401 so we will not do so again here, suffice she made it clear that this man was told that what we were teaching then, in 1893, was the truth concerning Christ's pre-existence. Here actual words were

“This man may not have known what our faith is on this point, but he was not left in ignorance. He was informed that there is not a people on earth who hold more firmly to the truth of Christ's pre-existence than do Seventh-day Adventists.” (Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, 5th December 1893, ‘An appeal for the Australasian field’)

So we can see from this that by 1893, the truth concerning Christ's pre-existence was well and truly established within Seventh-day Adventism. This truth was that in eternity He was begotten of God and that because of this He is God. This is why I am saying that in the *Desire of Ages*, Ellen White would not have denied this truth.

Some may say that the revealing through Ellen White that the Holy Spirit was a personality was a change in the faith of Seventh-day Adventists but neither is this strictly true. Rather it was an ongoing of our faith (a progression of truth).

Our pioneers, including Ellen White, regarded the Holy Spirit as the omnipresence of both the Father and the Son when the latter two divine personalities were not bodily present (we noted this in sections 31-34). When Ellen White said that the Holy Spirit was a personality, this did not change this belief. They just continued to believe exactly the same as what they had always believed, which was that the Holy Spirit was the omnipresence of both the Father and the Son. They did not believe that the Holy Spirit was another person like the Father and Son. They also believed His nature to be a mystery.

The Desire of Ages and its so called trinitarian remarks

As we noted above, Burt said in his paper that certain statements in *Desire of Ages* were trinitarian. We shall now look at these statements. The first of these statements that Burt lists is

“He (Christ) had announced Himself to be the self-existent One, He who had been promised to Israel, "whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity." Micah 5:2, margin.” (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 469, ‘The light of life’)

As regards to identity of person, Christ was indeed “the self-existent One”. What is meant here is that because He is begotten of God, then He is God begotten, or, as the trinity creeds say, God from God, true God from true God - although with respect to individual personality, He is the Son of the eternal or infinite God. As Ellen White said in one way or another so many times

“Christ did not seek to be thought great, and yet He was the Majesty of heaven, equal in dignity and glory with the infinite God. He was God manifested in the flesh.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 8a, July 7th 1890, To M. J. Church, Manuscript Release Volume 20, MR1444*)

Notice she says that Christ is not the infinite God but that He was God manifest in the flesh. This is because the Son is God begotten (see above for Ellen White’s comments on Christ being a begotten Son). As she said

“The Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of the Father, is truly God in infinity, but not in personality.” (*Ellen G. White, Manuscript 116, Dec. 19, 1905, ‘An Entire Consecration’, see also The Upward Look, page 367*)

She also continually maintained

“The One appointed in the counsels of heaven came to the earth as an instructor. He was no less a being than the Creator of the world, the Son of the Infinite God.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies on Education page 173 1897*)

Much more could be quoted in this respect but it would only say the same as here. This is that Ellen White regarded the Son of God as begotten of God therefore God essentially yet a separate person from the infinite God (the Father). We have seen this throughout the previous sections of this study.

Ellen White also maintained that Christ has no existence separate from the Father.

"The world's Redeemer was equal with God. His authority was as the authority of God. He declared that he had no existence separate from the Father. The authority by which he spoke, and wrought miracles, was expressly his own, yet he assures us that he and the Father are one." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald 7th Jan 1890, ‘Christ revealed the Father’*)

When reading the statement found in *Desire of Ages* where Ellen White said that Christ is “the self-existent One” (see previous above), it is usually overlooked that whilst she quoted from the King James version of the Scriptures, she actually chose, as she did in other places, not to use the exact wording of it. Instead she used the margin notes. What I mean by this is instead of saying that Christ’s “goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (KJV), she said “from of old, from the days of eternity”.

If she wanted to make it look as though Christ, as a separate personality from God, has never had a beginning (as purported by the trinity doctrine), then why did she not use the words as in the KJV? I ask this because what better words - if the latter was her purpose - could she find than “from everlasting”? None I would suggest so why not use them? Is not this a very important question?

It is only reasonable to assume that Ellen White did not regard the words of the KJV text as being in keeping with that which God had shown her so these she substituted with those found in the margin. These latter words “from the days of eternity” do not necessarily make it appear, (as do the words “from everlasting”) that Christ, as a separate personality from God the Father, never had a beginning but that His “goings forth” (His existence) had been from such a long way back that it is far beyond human reasoning. In other words, “from the days of eternity” would show that Christ’s existence prior to coming to earth is indeterminable but not necessarily without beginning. We noted this in section sixteen so we will not do so again here (for an extended discussion see section seven of the *Begotten Series*).

This statement was drawn from the thoughts first penned in a manuscript that the Ellen White Estate confirms was written on February 18th and February 19th, 1895, at Granville, New South Wales. This was during the time that Ellen White was residing in Australia (1891-1900). This is when she said (this is quite possibly where her above *Desire of Ages* “eternal presence” statement comes from)

“I AM means an eternal presence; the past, present, and future are alike to God. He sees the most remote events of past history and the far distant future with as clear a vision as we do those things that are transpiring daily.”
(*Ellen G. White, Manuscript No. 1084, February 18, 19th, 1895, page 21*)

Two paragraphs later

“Then said the Jews unto Him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast Thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I AM. Then took they up stones to cast at Him” because of that saying [verses 57-59]. Christ was using the great name of God that was given to Moses to express the idea of the eternal presence.”
(*Ibid*)

This is very interesting because it means that this statement regarding Christ as “the eternal presence” (the ‘I AM’), was written by Ellen White 3 months before she wrote the article in the *Signs of the Times* (30th May 1895) saying that Christ is “a Son begotten in the express image of the Father’s person” (see above). It was also written almost 5 months before the article was written in which she referred to Christ as being “Him who was made” (see above). This means that even though she regarded Christ as the “I Am” and therefore the “eternal presence”, this did not stop her from saying that He was “begotten” (or “made”) of God (see above).

Christ’s life is the life of God

The second statement found in *Desire of Ages* to which Burt refers is

“In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived.” (*Ellen G. White, The*

Desire of Ages, page 530, chapter 'Lazarus, come forth')

More than any other statement, this is the one that is used by pro-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists in support of the trinity doctrine (in fact sometimes it is the only one), yet when reasonably considered, why should it promote God as being a trinity? At the very best it can only say that the Son is God essentially. In other words, there is no mention here of the Holy Spirit, neither is there mentioned trinity essentialness (threeness and oneness). In fact throughout the entirety of this book, trinity essentialness is totally absent (for an explanation of trinity essentialness see section six). In principle, that which Ellen White said here is exactly the same as John said in the prologue to his gospel, which was

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men.” John 1:1-4

Again there is no mention here of the Holy Spirit so to say (as some do) that this text of Scripture proves that God is a trinity is an incorrect assumption. At the very best (just like the above Ellen White statement), it could only support the reasoning of a binity, meaning two persons in God.

There is also something else to consider here. This is that Jesus said

“For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. John 5:26-27

Jesus said that it was His Father that had given Him to have life in Himself. This was the same life that Jesus said that the Father had within Himself. Ellen White referred to this very same text of Scripture when she wrote

“God has sent his Son to communicate his own life to humanity.” (*Ellen G. White, Home Missionary, 1st June 1897, 'A call to the work'*)

Note these words very well. Christ was communicating to humanity the “life” of God. Remember though that in section thirty we noted that Ellen White consistently said that God and His Son were two separate personalities. Ellen White continued

“Christ declares, "I live by the Father," my life and his being one.” (*Ibid*)

This divine “life” is the life of God. Ellen White said that Christ Himself said that He shared this life with the Father. Remember here that to Ellen White, the Father is God, a personal individual like His Son. As she said next

"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the

bosom of the Father, he hath declared him," "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of Man." The head of every man is Christ, as the head of Christ is God. "And ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." (*Ibid*)

Ellen White is saying here that the life of God and the life of Christ is one life, meaning that they share the same divine life ("my life and his being one"). In other words, it was the life of God the Father that was in Christ. No wonder Ellen White called this life "original, unborrowed, underived" (see *Desire of Ages* page 530). Christ's life was also the life of the Father. It was not something that Christ had independent and separate of the Father.

Notice here very importantly that this one life shared by the Father and Son Ellen White associated with the words of Jesus Himself found in John 5:26-27 (as quoted above).

This one life appears to have everything to do with the incomprehensible oneness that Ellen White said that the Son had with God the Father prior to the creation of this world. This was when she said (as we noted in previous sections)

"There are light and glory in the truth that Christ was one with the Father before the foundation of the world was laid. This is the light shining in a dark place, making it resplendent with divine, original glory. This truth, infinitely mysterious in itself, explains other mysterious and otherwise unexplainable truths, while it is enshrined in light, unapproachable and incomprehensible." (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald 5th April 1906 'The Word made Flesh'*)

Here we are told that prior to the creation of our world there was a certain oneness between the Father and Christ. Notice very importantly that Ellen White does not include the Holy Spirit in this oneness. As has been said previously, during her ministry, Seventh-day Adventists did not regard the Holy Spirit as a personal being like God and Christ are personal beings.

I would ask you to note something else here – also very important. In the *Signs of the Times* article in which this now infamous life unborrowed statement was originally made, Ellen White said this

"In him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). It is not physical life that is here specified, but immortality, the life which is exclusively the property of God. The Word, who was with God, and who was God, had this life. Physical life is something which each individual receives. It is not eternal or immortal; for God, the Life-giver, takes it again. Man has no control over his life. But the life of Christ was unborrowed. No one can take this life from Him. "I lay it down of myself" (John 10: 18), He said. In Him was life, original, unborrowed, underived." (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times April 8th 1897, 'Christ the life-giver'*)

Notice very importantly she follows this by saying

“This life is not inherent in man. He can possess it only through Christ. He cannot earn it; it is given him as a free gift if he will believe in Christ as His personal Saviour. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). This is the open fountain of life for the world.” (*Ibid*)

Here we are told that this “life, original, unborrowed, underived” can be passed on. In fact to those of fallen humanity who wish to be saved it is essential that they receive of it. Without this receiving there is no salvation. We shall return our thoughts to this statement later.

This unborrowed life is not inherent in fallen humanity but it was inherent in Christ. He is God Himself in the person of His Son. This is why He had the authority to lay down this life and pick it up again. No one else has this authority. To us it is a gift. To Christ it was His inheritance (see Hebrews 1:4). He is the only one begotten of God. He is the unique One, the one and only Son of God. It is as Ellen White also said of Christ (again in *Desire of Ages* – note well the chapter title)

“But turning from all lesser representations, we behold God in Jesus. Looking unto Jesus we see that it is the glory of our God to give. "I do nothing of Myself," said Christ; "the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father." "I seek not Mine own glory," but the glory of Him that sent Me. John 8:28; 6:57; 8:50; 7:18. In these words is set forth the great principle which is the law of life for the universe. All things Christ received from God, but He took to give. So in the heavenly courts, in His ministry for all created beings: through the beloved Son, the Father's life flows out to all; through the Son it returns, in praise and joyous service, a tide of love, to the great Source of all. And thus through Christ the circuit of beneficence is complete, representing the character of the great Giver, the law of life.” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 21, 'God with us'*)

Take note of where we are told this divine life originates and ends. Ellen White says it is with the Father, the one whom she says is “the great Source of all”. In other words, the life that is “original, unborrowed, underived” is the life of the Father that flows through the Son and to all who will be saved.

So in reality, there is no curiosity about our church and these so called trinitarian statements in *Desire of Ages* at all. Our church regarded everything that Ellen White had written in this book as being in keeping with what they then believed - which was of course non-trinitarianism. In other words, Seventh-day Adventists did not regard these statements in *Desire of Ages* as being trinitarian but what is now termed by many as being semi-Arian. This is the very same faith that they had held from their beginnings. It was that Christ is the only-begotten of the Father, God in the person of His Son (see section nine of the *Begotten Series*)

The personal testimony of M. L. Andreasen

A study of Ellen White's *Desire of Ages* in relation to the trinity debate would not be complete without giving due consideration to the testimony of M. L. Andreasen. This he gave in a 'Chapel Talk' at Loma Linda in 1948. This was when he was 72 years of Age.

Milian Lauritz Andreasen was born in 1876 at Copenhagen in Denmark. He confessed he was not brought up a Christian. He did not get baptised until his late teens (1894). In training for the ministry he first attended Battle Creek School in 1899. This was the year following the publication of *Desire of Ages*. In other words, when this book was first published, Andreasen was not in the ministry. It was not until three years later in 1902 at the age of 26 that he was ordained to the Seventh-day Adventist ministry. Three years later again he attended the 1905 General Conference where Ellen White told the delegates that they were to hold on to their faith concerning God and Christ that they had held for the previous 50 years (see section twenty-nine). This was their non-trinitarian faith.

Four years after this conference in 1909 – this was the very same year that he became an American citizen - Andreasen visited Ellen White in her home. In the book *Without Fear or Favor*, Andreasen is quoted as having written in his autobiographical notes

“My personal contact with Mrs. E. G. White was confined to the latter years of her life and was of short duration. I had read her writings and to some extent studied them from the time of my baptism as a young man in 1894, and had met her personally on several occasions.

It was not until 1909, however, that I began serious consideration of what the Testimonies meant to the remnant church. I was at that time president of the Greater New York Conference and had read with interest the various messages concerning the work that should be done in the larger cities of the land.” (M. L. Andreasen, as quoted in *‘Without Fear or Favor by Virginia Steinweg, page 74, ‘Visiting in Ellen White’s home.*)

This was after being in the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church for 7 years – also after being baptised for 15 years. By that time, it is apparent that Andreasen had not placed much importance on the Testimonies in relation to the church. Note that this was when he was “[president of the Greater New York Conference](#)” (1909).

He then said that after attending meetings at Carnegie Hall he began to give consideration of the Testimonies. He comments on the result of that experience

“This study led me to a review of such evidence as was available to me bearing on the question of the origin of the writings of Mrs. E. G. White. Hitherto I had accepted the testimonies of others without any critical

appraisal or profound conviction one way or the other. Now, however, I felt I had come to a point in life when I must make definite decisions for myself. This became the more necessary as I was shortly called to head the newly established seminary in Hutchinson, Minnesota, and would have to deal with young men about to enter the ministry. For their sakes I decided that I must know for myself and not depend upon any secondary authorities, however good they might appear to be.” (*Ibid*)

At this time – Andreasen is confessing – he had serious doubts that Ellen White was the originator of what she had written – the latter meaning that someone else had written these things. He then relates how he visited Ellen White in her home. He says

“This led me to consider a journey to St. Helena, California, where Mrs. White resided at that time. I wished to have firsthand knowledge as far as it was obtainable. I did not wish to be deceived, nor did I wish to deceive others.” (*Ibid*)

Andreasen then explained how Ellen White had warmly greeted him – also how he told her of his reason for coming to see her was to examine her writings in their manuscript form before anyone had edited them. He said he had brought quotations with him that was of interest to him - either because of their theological significance or poetic language. He said that he was greatly impressed by the poetic language in *Desire of Ages*. He said

“In my own mind I was convinced that Sister White had never written them as they appeared in print. She might have written something like them, but I was sure that no one with the limited education Sister White had could ever produce such exquisitely worded statements or such pronouncements on difficult theological problems. They must have been produced by a well-trained individual, conversant not only with theological niceties but also with beautiful English.” (*Ibid*)

Andreasen’s 1948 chapel talk

In his chapel talk at Loma Linda – this was when he was 72 years of age – Andreasen said

“I became an Adventist as a young man. I was not brought up an Adventist - - you might say not a Christian either. When I accepted the truth, I accepted it without knowing all that was involved as a part of a general program.” (*M. L. Andreasen, Chapel Talk, Loma Linda, California, November 30th 1948*)

Remember Andreasen was baptized in 1894. He then said

“I soon came face to face with the question of the Spirit of prophecy, as revealed in the writings of Sister White. I read her published volumes and

found them to be very good but I didn't find any special inspiration in them. Indeed, I did not know they were supposed to be inspired. However, I considered them very good writing. At that time I was taking work in Chicago University, and majored in English." (*Ibid*)

Andreasen was not baptized until 1894. He then would have been around 18 years of age (born 1876). I do find it difficult to believe that at that time (1894), no one had explained to him whom Ellen White was or told him that she had been given the gift of prophecy. I would even find this very strange in our day, let alone when the prophet was still alive.

Here is also where I find another great difficulty. I have read Virginia Steinweg's *Without Fear or Favor* – which is a book detailing the life of Andreasen - and the first time I find Andreasen even going to Chicago was in 1900. As she says

“While in Chicago he squeezed in some time at the university.” (*Virginia Steinweg's 'Without Fear or Favour', page 58, chapter 'Chicago 1900-1905'*)

As I said, this is the first time I can place Andreasen in Chicago. He says that “*At that time*” he did not realize Ellen White's writings were supposed to be inspired. By then (early 1900's) *Desire of Ages* had been published for 2 years – and he still did not realize that she had been given this prophetic gift. I find this very strange indeed. He had already been through his ministerial training at Battle Creek (1899).

Andreasen said he had read Ellen White's “*published volumes*”. By this time (1900), Ellen White had written a great deal. Apart from everything that she had written in our denominational periodicals etc, this would mean that by the early 1900's Andreasen had read something like - the Spirit of Prophecy volumes, Christian Education, *Early Writings*, Christian Experience and Views, Spiritual gifts, Gospel Workers, *The Great Controversy*, Patriarchs and Prophets, Sketches from the Life of Paul, Sufferings of Christ, and of course the volumes of the Testimonies that were written up to that time. This was as well as *Desire of Ages*.

Undoubtedly he was a good reader but how is it that he did not realize, after doing all of this reading, that her work was not supposed to have been inspired? It also makes me wonder, if he had not been told who she was, why he read all (or perhaps many) of her published works. I find it even more amazing that no one had told him who she was or that he had not twigged it himself. It really seems unbelievable. By the 1900's he had been at Battle Creek College for a year. Did it not dawn on him there? Perhaps I am missing something somewhere. I certainly hope so. It leaves me wondering whether Andreasen was becoming confused. Andreasen continued in his chapel talk

“I had read *Desire of Ages* before I came to the University of Chicago,

where I took a class in the life of Christ. We had many books for collateral reading, and I chose *Desire of Ages* as one of them. This gave me an opportunity to read it carefully day by day. I found there a beauty of expression that caught my attention, and I said to myself, "I do not see how Sister White could ever have written that; she was a woman of but little education, and hence would be unable to produce such a work." I said to myself again and again, "She never wrote that." (*M. L. Andreasen, Chapel Talk, Loma Linda, California, November 30th 1948*)

Now this I find very interesting. Andreasen says he did not know that Ellen White was supposed to be inspired yet he knew she had little education. He also said that "before" going to Chicago University he had read *Desire of Ages*. This he must have done between 1898 (when *Desire of Ages* was published) and 1900. He also said

"When I began to preach, I came directly face to face with the question of Sister White. If I were to teach others, I felt I must know for myself. Believing in direct action, I went out to California to see Sister White. (*Ibid*)

I find it very difficult understand what Andreasen meant by this remark. His preaching began when he attended Battle Creek College in training for the ministry. This was in 1899. This visit to Ellen White's home was ten years later in 1909. This was when he was "president of the Greater New York Conference"(see above) – which was 7 years after him being ordained to the ministry (1902) - throughout which time of course he had been preaching. So what he meant by this "When I began to preach" and "Believing in direct action, I went out [in 1909] to California to see Sister White" statement I do not understand. Perhaps again Andreasen is confused.

"She received me graciously and I stayed for some months. I told her what I had come for. She listened kindly to me and said that I might have access to her writings. I said, "I am not interested in that which has been printed. I think I have read it all. I want to know in what form it was before it was sent to the printer." I believed at that time that her copyists and proofreaders had fixed it up, for it seemed certain to me that she could not have written it in the form it appeared in print. I had with me a number of quotations that I wanted to see if they were in the original in her own handwriting." (*Ibid*)

"I remember how astonished we were when *Desire of Ages* was first published, for it contained some things that we considered unbelievable, among others the doctrine of the Trinity which was not then generally accepted by the Adventists. Some of the quotations concerned theology, others I had selected for their beauty of expression. I wanted to see how these quotations looked before they were corrected by the proofreaders. (*Ibid*)

This statement of Andreasen's is saying something very important – but I think a

lot of people miss it.

Andreasen is saying that up to the time when *Desire of Ages* was published in 1898, Ellen White had not spoken of God as a trinity. If some say that this was not being said by Andreasen then why does he say that this book “contained some things that we considered unbelievable, among others the doctrine of the Trinity”. In other words, if Ellen White had previously spoken of God as a trinity, why should anyone be surprised (particularly those of the ministry) when she spoke this way in *Desire of Ages*? Andreasen is saying that up to this time when *Desire of Ages* was published, Ellen White had not spoken of God as a trinity – or if she had – no one had noticed it. The latter would seem very strange indeed.

Andreasen then relates how he was given access to the manuscripts - and that being a fast reader he read all that Ellen White had written in her own handwriting

“I was particularly interested in the statement in *Desire of Ages* which at one time caused great concern to the denomination theologically; “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived.” p. 530. That statement may not seem very revolutionary to you, but to us it was. We could hardly believe it, but of course we could not preach contrary to it. I was sure Sister White had never written, “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived.” But now I found it in her own handwriting just as it had been published. It was so with other statements. As I checked Up, I found that they were Sister White’s own expressions.” (*Ibid*)

For a number of reasons I find this a very strange statement indeed. First of all note that Andreasen had said that by the early 1900’s he was still unsure whether Ellen White was an inspired writer – also that even in 1909 he still did not believe that she was the author of what had been written under her name.

The second is that when *Desire of Ages* was published in 1898 - although Andreasen had been baptised for 4 years - he was not then in the ministry. In fact even in 1899, which was the year following the publication of the book, he had not even gone to Battle Creek College in preparation for the ministry. In 1898, when this book was published, he was working in a children’s home.

To whom therefore, concerning Ellen White’s statement in *Desire of Ages* that “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived” that “We could hardly believe it, but of course we could not preach contrary to it.” was Andreasen referring? In other words, who are the “We” in this statement? Certainly in 1898 Andreasen could not identify himself with the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church – and certainly he did not accept that Ellen White was inspired.

The third reason why I find Andreasen’s statement rather strange is that I cannot find anything in our records (apart from this testimony of Andreasen’s in 1948) that shows that when *Desire of Ages* was published in 1898 it caused a

theological crisis within Seventh-day Adventism. All that I can find is that this book was regarded as a beautiful book on the life of Christ. In fact our records show that following the publication of this book, Seventh-day Adventists still believed and taught that Christ was literally the Son of God. We shall see this in section forty-one (a) and section forty-two.

There is also something else very interesting to note. This is that it was not in *Desire of Ages* that Ellen White first made this “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived” statement. She had penned it an article published in the *Signs of the Times* the year previously. This is when she had said

“In him was life; and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). It is not physical life that is here specified, but immortality, the life which is exclusively the property of God. The Word, who was with God, and who was God, had this life. Physical life is something which each individual receives. It is not eternal or immortal; for God, the Life-giver, takes it again. Man has no control over his life. But the life of Christ was unborrowed. No one can take this life from Him. “I lay it down of myself: (John 10:18), He said. In Him was life, original, unborrowed, underived. This life is not inherent in man. He can possess it only through Christ. He cannot earn it; it is given him as a free gift if he will believe in Christ as His personal Saviour. “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). This is the open fountain of life for the world.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, April 8th 1897, ‘Christ the life-giver’*)

This begs a question that is not easily answered. If Andreasen is saying that when this statement was found in *Desire of Ages* it shook up the brethren, then why did it not shake them up the year previously (1897)? This was when it was printed in the *Signs of the Times*? This seems very strange indeed.

As it is, I can find no record at all of this statement or the book *Desire of Ages* bringing any theological dispute within Seventh-day Adventism - at least not whilst Ellen White was alive. This only happened after she died. This was when attempts were first made bring trinitarian concepts into our teachings. Andreasen’s remarks therefore must remain something of a mystery. We need here to remember that Andreasen had said

“I remember how astonished we were when *Desire of Ages* was first published, for it contained some things that we considered unbelievable, among others the doctrine of the Trinity which was not then generally accepted by the Adventists.

What is a real mystery is that if Ellen White did speak in *Desire of Ages* of God as a trinity – and that this was “considered unbelievable” and “not then generally accepted by the Adventists” - then why, in 1905, at the General Conference session at Takoma Park Washington (where Andreasen himself was a delegate),

did she appeal to the delegates not to change from their faith concerning God and Christ that she said herself that God had given to them that they had held for the previous 50 years. This is another question that is not easily answered – particularly by those advocating that it was Ellen White and her book *Desire of Ages* that led our denomination to become trinitarian.

I would ask you to notice one more thing here. This is that this remark of Ellen White's – in Christ is “**life, original, unborrowed, underived**” – is usually taken, by the trinitarians, to mean that this life has its origins in Christ but as we can see, just because someone possesses this life it does not mean this to be so. Why I say “we can see” is because Ellen White wrote (see above)

This life [original, unborrowed, underived] is not inherent in man. He can possess it only through Christ. He cannot earn it; it is given him as a free gift if he will believe in Christ as His personal Saviour.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, April 8th 1897, 'Christ the life-giver'*)

This means that just because someone possesses this life (original, unborrowed, underived), it does not mean that it originated in him or her. In other words, it can be said of a true Christian that in him (or her) is ‘life, original, unborrowed, underived’. Would this mean that this life actually originated within the possessor of it? Of course it wouldn't! It simply means that in this person is “**life, original, unborrowed, underived**”. This is exactly what Ellen White is saying in *Desire of Ages* – that “**In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived.**” Notice though that she says that this life “**is not inherent in man**”. It was inherent in Christ. It was the life of His father.

Was Ellen White a trinitarian?

Within Seventh-day Adventism today, the question of whether Ellen White was a trinitarian or not, does appear to be the focus of attention, so how do we answer it?

Let's consider this for a moment.

As we have noted throughout this study, Ellen White did make it very clear that prior to the creation of this world, there was an unexplainable oneness between the Father (the infinite God) and Christ. We have also noted that whatever constitutes this oneness, it did not prohibit her saying that the Son, if in His humanity He had sinned, would have lost His eternal existence (see section thirteen). This means that whatever Ellen White believed concerning the Godhead, it could neither be termed orthodox trinitarianism or the trinity version held today by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This is regardless of what was believed by her with respect to the Holy Spirit.

We can reason though that as the Holy Spirit was deemed to belong to God (God's Spirit), it can be said that Ellen White believed in a certain tri-unity in God but it was certainly not a tri-unity as depicted in either the orthodox trinity

doctrine or the version of the trinity currently held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

If we are to conclude in any way that Ellen White was a trinitarian, then the formula itself must contain and allow for the following factors

- There must be an infinite God who is a separate personality (an individual being) from Christ. This infinite God is the Father.
- There must also be a true Son, begotten (made not created) of the infinite God in eternity but in personality not the infinite God.
- The Holy Spirit must be both the Father and the Son omnipresent when the latter two are not bodily present.
- By reason of the incarnation, the divine Son must have literally vacated Heaven and exiled Himself from the Father.
- The divine pre-existent Son must have died at Calvary and not just human nature.
- The divine pre-existent Son would need to be totally dependant on His Father for life.
- The trinity formula itself must allow for the Son, if He had sinned in His humanity, to go out of existence.

If the trinity formula that you personally are holding does not accommodate the preceding set of criteria, I would say without a doubt that your belief is not in keeping with what was believed by Ellen White.

To a degree, the beliefs of Ellen White were in keeping with those of trinity orthodoxy except that she did not say specifically that the Son was eternally begotten or that God was an indivisible unity of three divine beings. She did say in harmony with it though that the Son is begotten of the Father and that the Holy Spirit proceeds from them.

No true trinitarian would agree that the above set of criteria was in harmony with the orthodox trinity doctrine, neither can it be said that it is in keeping with the current Seventh-day Adventist Church version of it. This means that the above set of criteria, being the beliefs of Ellen White, does show that she was not in any sense of the term a trinitarian. Of this there is no doubt.

In conclusion

From the year that *Desire of Ages* was published, on through to the death of Ellen White (meaning from 1898-1915), it was not even suggested that this book depicted God as a trinity or that Christ was a part of a trinity. This was only claimed decades after she died when justification was sought for bringing in this teaching.

As we have also noted previously (and above), in an attempt to justify what he had written in his book *The Living Temple*, Kellogg said that he had come to

believe in the trinity. This was in 1903, 5 years after *Desire of Ages* was published. Kellogg though, never attributed his new belief to *Desire of Ages* (see section twenty-five).

Even if it is found that Kellogg made that claim, it is reasonably obvious that the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church did not see it his way. This is because they, including Ellen White, totally condemned his beliefs.

Returning our thoughts to the previous quotes of Merlin Burt (see above), he appears to me to be admitting that when *Desire of Ages* was published, it had no doctrinal affect whatsoever with regards to what Seventh-day Adventists believed about Christ. If this were what he is saying then I would wholeheartedly agree with him. If this book had an effect on these beliefs, then the records of our denominational history would certainly show it but as it is they do not.

The truth of the matter is that when Ellen White was alive, although regarded as a wonderful book about Christ, *Desire of Ages* did not bring about any theological disputes within Seventh-day Adventism. This was neither at General Conference level or laity level. That publication was just regarded as a beautiful book that God Himself had led its author to write.

In other words, our church never ignored any statements in *Desire of Ages*. They just saw them as being in harmony with what they then believed, which was of course, a non-trinitarian faith. In conclusion therefore it cannot be said that Ellen White's *Desire of Ages* depicted God as being a trinity.

In section 41 we shall be taking a look how the General Conference once prized Uriah Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation*.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section forty-one

Daniel and the Revelation - a once prized standard work

We have noted previously, although we have not discussed it in detail, that to accommodate the up and coming trinitarianism within Seventh-day Adventism, its most well established and famous book needed to be edited. This was to remove from its pages its non-trinitarianism. We shall be looking at how this editing was accomplished in later sections but for now we need to see how it was regarded by the General Conference prior to its editing. This book of course is Uriah Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation*

A matter of principle

There is more to the editing of Uriah Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation* than just the changing of its wording. There is also a very important principle at stake.

I say this because why make massive changes to any book (whatever the book is and whoever wrote it) and then re-issue it as the original thoughts of its original author? We must ask here, is this morally correct? The other side of the coin is that when a passage is quoted from the edited (1944) version of this book today, it is usually accompanied with the words "Uriah Smith said" when in reality he may not have said it at all. We must ask again, is this morally correct to lead someone to do this - whether they do it unwittingly or not?

From cover to cover, Smith's book was extensively edited. Passage after passage was either rewritten or completely expunged from its pages. Even entire pages were omitted whilst other pages (obviously not written by Smith because he had died almost 40 years earlier) were added to it. Such was the extreme editing of this much-loved book, making it anything but the work of Uriah Smith.

This tampering did not seem to bother certain of the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They wanted the non-trinitarianism stripped from its pages, also brought up-to-date, and this is exactly what was achieved. The desire was that this publication should cease to reflect the past theology (the non-trinitarianism) of Seventh-day Adventism. This is not mentioned in the *Forward* that explains the reasoning behind the revised 1944 edition. This *Forward* says

"In offering this book to the public, the publishers believe they are doing a great service to its readers." ("Forward" to the edited 1944 version of 'Daniel

and the Revelation')

It also says concerning Uriah Smith

“The author of this book lived and wrote a generation ago, and in the literary and polemic style of those times. His interpretation of prophecy, however, and the doctrines of truth he established through intensive study of the Scriptures, have borne the test of time and of diligent scrutiny by Bible students.” (*Ibid*)

Smith’s “interpretation of prophecy” is one thing but what exactly are the “doctrines of truth” that are referred to here? Certainly they were not Smith’s beliefs concerning God and Christ! We know this because all of these beliefs (at least its non-trinitarian theology) were completely removed from its pages. The publishers continue concerning Smith’s beliefs

“Indeed, they have borne the test so well that they are the more worthy of being perpetuated in a revised edition, and in the new setting of our times, which it is our great pleasure to offer in this present attractive form.” (*Ibid*)

In this *Forward*, no attempt is made to explain the details or the extent of the actual editing that was done to Smith’s work. Nowhere in the book is this done. Certainly there is no mention of the removal from its pages of its original theological non-trinitarian content.

So it was that *Daniel and the Revelation*, such a classic in the time of the pioneers, was re-issued to Seventh-day Adventists without it either reflecting the past non-trinitarianism of Seventh-day Adventism or explaining the real reason why this book was edited. We shall also see later that when it was republished in 1944, there was an extensive campaign (even selling the book cheaply), to get as many Seventh-day Adventists as possible to purchase it.

Questions of vital importance must be asked here.

Wouldn’t it have been more open and more up front to explain just what had been done to Smith’s book instead of just re-issuing it without a truthful and detailed explanation being offered? The answer is yes but as it was, this book was just re-issued in 1944 as being the work of Uriah Smith when in reality it was not. The question must be asked therefore, “Why didn’t the Seventh-day Adventist Church, in the *Forward* to this book, take the opportunity to explain to its readers why this editing was carried out? Surely this is a question that demands an answer.

The author

Uriah Smith (1832-1903) devoted his entire working life to the publishing work of Seventh-day Adventists. In 1919, in a special 70th anniversary edition of the *Review and Herald*, it was then said of him (this was 16 years after his death)

“The person above all others, however, who bore heavy editorial, responsibility, and who did more than any other man to develop a strong church paper, was Uriah Smith. Clearly he was a man of God's own choosing to carry forward this responsible work. He was connected with the REVIEW for half a century, and nearly all that time he was editor-in-chief or one of the associate editors.” (Lyman W. Graham, *Review and Herald*, July 31st 1919, ‘Historical Sketch of the “Review”’)

Here Smith is referred to as “a man of God’s own choosing”. This is quite an accolade. Note the date well. It was 1919. This means that it was 21 years after the release of *Desire of Ages*, 16 years after the death of Uriah Smith and 4 years after the death of Ellen White. It was also the year of the secret Bible council that we spoke of in section thirty-five and section thirty-six.

For something like 35 years (not continuous) over a period of almost 50 years (1855–1903), Uriah Smith had been editor of the *Review and Herald*. It is only reasonable to believe therefore that his personal beliefs, especially those of major importance, were in harmony with those of the main body of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. After all, as editor of this publication, he wrote many editorials that were published in it, also as its editor he answered many questions on doctrine that were sent in by its readers. Such was the continuing confidence that our church had in this totally devoted man.

Interesting to note here is that Smith became a Sabbath-keeper in 1852, joined the *Review* as a worker in 1853 and at the age of 23 in 1855 became its editor.

I believe it is only reasonable to conclude therefore that if Uriah Smith had not been in harmony with the major teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, then he would not have maintained his position as editor between the years of 1855 and 1903, the latter year being the year of his death (he died from a stroke on his way to the *Review and Herald* office).

It is also only reasonable to conclude that if Smith’s beliefs had been seriously out of harmony with the spirit of prophecy or with the church at large, then Ellen White would have told him so. At least she would have counselled the church to do something about him being editor of the *Review and Herald* for all those years. Certainly if she thought his book *Daniel and the Revelation* contained serious error then she would not have given it the approbation that she gave it, also she would not have allowed it to continue as a standard publication for 40 years, at least not without saying something about it (see section thirty-eight).

As we noted in that latter section, Ellen White did say that everyone, meaning Seventh-day Adventists and non Seventh-day Adventists alike, should read Smith’s book. If you also remember we noted that even though it depicted a non-trinitarian view of God and Christ, she also said it contained the truth that all should read. We also noted that much of this approbation came from her pen following the publication of her *Desire of Ages* (1898), the latter of which is said

to be the book that led Seventh-day Adventists to become trinitarian. This should be quite a significant realisation.

As far as unfulfilled Bible prophecy is concerned, we all know that it is ever unfolding but when it comes to non-trinitarianism and trinitarianism there is, in principle, a very marked difference. I say this because as we noted in section ten, neither of these teachings (non-trinitarianism or trinitarianism) can ever develop (change) into the other. This is because the principles that determine each of these beliefs (meaning what makes trinitarianism as opposed to what is entailed in non-trinitarianism) are diametrically opposed to each other. Thus it was that in his *Daniel and the Revelation*, the beliefs of Uriah Smith (its non-trinitarianism) reflected what were then, during the lifetime of both Uriah Smith and Ellen White, the accepted standard beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. Needless to say, during the 1940's it was fast becoming the old theology.

In complete contrast to the embarrassment that this book caused when Seventh-day Adventists adopted trinitarianism, we shall now take a look at the admiration that Seventh-day Adventists once had, especially those at General Conference level, for Uriah Smith's book. This will also show us how we once regarded the non-trinitarianism that permeated its pages. This is a very long read but well worth the effort.

A most established book (as seen by the General Conference)

From its very beginnings, Uriah Smith's *Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation* had been a resounding success (in section thirty-eight we noted it was originally written as two separate books). Certainly within Seventh-day Adventism it eventually became a classic. By taking a look at what was said about it at General Conference Committee meetings also at General Conference Sessions, this will be clearly seen in this section. We shall also see, as they went about their work of spreading the message by selling our books and other publications to the general public, how it was regarded by our colporteurs. In the main, these quotes speak much for themselves therefore very little comment will accompany them. At a General Conference session in 1881 it was noted

“WHEREAS, An edition of the volume entitled, *Thoughts on the Books of Daniel and Revelation* has been prepared in such a way as to render it quite attractive, in order to adapt it to the wants of those who wish to engage in the work of canvassing; therefore--

RESOLVED, That in our judgment proper persons should immediately be employed in the different parts of the field in the work of canvassing for this publication, and others which are in process of preparation.” (*General Conference Bulletin, December 12th 1881*)

In 1883 it was resolved at the General Conference session

“That we recommend that the work, [Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation](#),

be issued in the German, Danish, and Swedish languages.” (*General Conference Bulletin, November 12th 1883*)

Four years later it was decided

“RESOLVED, That this Conference earnestly recommend the extensive circulation of that important book, *Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation*; ...” (*General Conference Bulletin, December 6th 1885*)

The minutes then record the reasons for the “extensive circulation” of this publication described as “that important book”. They say

“ ... first, because it covers a large field in the great system of present truth, introducing many important doctrines in a clear and interesting manner, well calculated to favorably impress the reader; secondly, because there is in the public mind a desire more or less strong to understand the meaning of these prophetic books, which are supposed to be so mysterious, of which desire we should take advantage to bring before them the great truths of the message; thirdly, because we have no book better calculated to reach intelligent, influential, business men, who cannot find time to attend courses of lectures and long series of meetings, but who would purchase such a book and read it at home; fourthly, because such a book, bound in an attractive manner, presenting the truth in a permanent form, retaining its place on the center tables and in the libraries till the Lord comes, will command the attention of many persons in the aggregate, and has some advantages which the presentation of the truth in periodicals, tracts, and pamphlets does not possess; and finally, because our past experience has demonstrated beyond all dispute the usefulness of the canvass on *Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation*, and that we cannot afford to neglect it.” (*Ibid*)

First of all notice that it says here that Smith’s book “covers a large field in the great system of present truth, introducing many important doctrines”. Whilst it does not detail these doctrines, we do know that Smith’s book was replete with views on the Godhead (non-trinitarianism), the state of the dead, creation and the Sabbath etc. It was also replete where applicable with views on the love of God for fallen humanity, salvation through faith in Christ, the sanctuary, the investigative judgement, the second coming of Jesus and other of our major doctrines.

Notice too the emphasis here on Smith’s book containing “present truth”, “the great truths” and “the truth” etc, noting also that it was said that at that time (1885), our church had no other book “better calculated to reach intelligent, influential, business men”.

It would be very difficult to give this book a higher acclamation than was done here. There was nothing in it that was then seen to detract from what was then

the faith of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As we know today though, this all changed when our denomination espoused trinitarianism.

Concerning the canvassing work in 1888 (this was the year of the famous Minneapolis conference) it was reported at a General Conference Committee meeting

"The canvassing work among the West Indies Islands is proving a great success in selling Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation. We have shipped to this field within the past few months some six or eight hundred copies of that book. I have no recent report from the canvassers in Australia and New Zealand, but if I am to judge by the number of books ordered by the Pacific Press, I should say they are doing a good business." (*C. Eldridge, General Conference Committee Minutes, 15th March 1888*)

Regarding the work in Australia the same report said

"Prosperity has attended the work in this field the past year. Three laborers have been employed, two of whom have labored largely in Tasmania. A company of thirty embraced the truth in Hobart, the capital of that colony, and about seventy in other parts of Australia. Two canvassers have been in that field who have sold a great many books. Three hundred copies of Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation were sold in one town alone." (*Ibid*)

In 1888, our church was very keen to promote Smith's book. Such at that time was one of the ways that the non-trinitarianism of Seventh-day Adventism (an integral part of the faith of Seventh-day Adventists), as well as the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, was circulated amongst the peoples of this world. This was the year of the famous Minneapolis General Conference.

The next year (1889) at a General Conference Committee session it was noted concerning foreign missions

"A native of Honolulu has translated Thoughts on Daniel. Another native of one of the Sandwich Islands had translated Thoughts on Revelation. Brother Burgess is planning to have these translations printed. It was thought best to advise him not to go to the expense of printing these large works in the native language until it is certain that a good translation is made, but to print some of the smaller tracts at present." (*General Conference Committee Minutes, July 10th 1889*)

The latter was also referred to at the General Conference session that year (October 1889) where it was also noted concerning the work in Sydney Australia that

"Lately a brother of some influence has embraced the truth there and the interest to hear the 'truth is becoming very general, and the calls are urgent.

About one thousand copies of "Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation" have been sold in Queensland, and many people there are now desiring to hear more of the truth" (*General Conference Bulletin, October 23rd 1889*)

It was also reported

"When the two books "Thoughts on Daniel" and "Thoughts on the Revelation" were published, no one thought of them as subscription books or that they would circulate anywhere but among our own people. Brother King suggested that the two volumes be bound together and sold by subscription; another original idea. His plan was adopted, and that admirable book has reached a sale of many thousands, with a continually increasing sale, bringing more people into the truth than any other subscription book published." (*Ibid October 31st 1889*)

The report also went on to say

"Brother Arnold made a canvassing trip to the West Indies, and during an absence of nine months sold 1,260 copies of "Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation," proving that our publications can be sold in the isles of the sea" (*Ibid*)

The next year (1890) it was also noted at a General Conference meeting

"We need not call your attention to the fact that a few years ago we had neither canvassers nor books suitable for circulation by means of canvassers. Thoughts on Daniel and Revelation was the first subscription book placed in the field." (*General Conference Committee Minutes, July 24, 1890*)

Note the reference to Uriah Smith's book being the "first subscription book placed in the field" (we spoke of this in section thirty-eight).

In 1891 in a General Conference bulletin it was duly noted

"In South Africa more has been done. One native brother has canvassed extensively in the Transvaal, and sold a copy of "Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation" to the president of the Republic." (*General Conference Bulletin, March 10th 1891*)

Then again in 1895

"There is a call for new books, but the Third Angels message is all brought out in the publications we now have as far as it is developed, such as "Great Controversy," "Patriarchs and Prophets" "Bible Readings" "Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation" and "Two Republics." (*General Conference Bulletin, February 13th 1895*)

This is very important. If you remember (see section fifteen in particular), 1895 was the year that Ellen White made her 'begotten' and 'made' statements. This was in keeping with what was believed then by Seventh-day Adventists. Her book *Desire of Ages* was then in its latter stages of completion.

Note it says here that there was at that time a call for "new books" but as the report so clearly stated, in Smith's book, along with the other books mentioned, "the Third Angels message" (as far as it was then developed) "is all brought out". Notice here also how Smith's book was highly rated alongside those written by Ellen White. We shall see that this was repeatedly the case. Note the reference to *Bible Readings*. This was another book that was edited to suit the new theology. Six years later it was noted (this was 3 years **after** the publication of *Desire of Ages* in 1898)

"Some of our leading books are translated into the Dutch language. These include "Bible readings," "Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation," "Patriarchs and Prophets," "Great Controversy," "Steps to Christ," "Christ Our Saviour," and many smaller publications. All of these have been sold extensively to the Dutch speaking people." (*General Conference Bulletin, April 15th 1901*)

In 1901, Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation* was still rated, complete with all of its non-trinitarianism, as one of Seventh-day Adventism's "leading books". Note that all of the aforementioned books had been translated into the Dutch language but *Desire of Ages* published 3 years earlier in 1898, is not mentioned.

Three years later (1904), the continuing value of Smith's book can be clearly seen. This was when under the heading of "Missionary campaign supplies" it was agreed by the General Conference Committee

"We suggest the following books as being particularly appropriate in this movement as they may be used anywhere and at any time without consultation with the canvassing agent: "Object Lessons," "Story of Joseph," "Education," "Mount of Blessing," "Things Foretold," "Cobblestones," "Thoughts on Daniel" (paper), "Thoughts on the Revelation" (paper), "Great Nations to Today," "Little Folks' Bible Nature," "Sunshine at Home," in foreign languages, "Steps to Christ," and "Power for Witnessing." (*General Conference Committee Minutes, September 19th 1904*)

Note that this was 6 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages* and the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still promoting Uriah Smith's non-trinitarian book. Note well the first sentence. It says that these books were "particularly appropriate" to Seventh-day Adventists and that they could be "used anywhere and at any time without consultation with the canvassing agent". Note too that again, *Desire of Ages* is not mentioned here in this bulletin.

The next year (1905), in *The Missionary Worker* (an English publication) under the heading "The mission of our large books" it said

"Our large books, "The Desire of Ages," "Great Controversy," "Patriarchs and Prophets," "Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation," "Bible Readings" etc., are the pillars of our denominational literature." (*E. R. Palmer, The Missionary Worker, January 18th 1905*)

Uriah Smith's *Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation*, along with Ellen White's *Desire of Ages*, was rated in 1905 as making up the "pillars" of Seventh-day Adventist "denominational literature." Note that this was now 7 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*.

Amazingly though, when our church began to adopt trinitarianism, Smith's book was said to stand in opposition to *Desire of Ages*. This is why, in the 1940's, it underwent such a violent editing. The article then said of these same books

"But it remains for the large books to lay out before the world the broad, beautiful system of truth in the Third Angel's Message. They were not prepared in haste. They are the best ripened fruit of many years of toil and prayer. A half century of earnest labour by Sister White reached its best results in "Great Controversy" and "The Desire of Ages. Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation" was the fruit of one of the best and choicest gifts God has given to this people." (*Ibid*)

Note that this was 1905 and Uriah Smith's book was rated with Ellen White's *Desire of Ages* as "the best ripened fruit of many years of toil and prayer". It was also said of Smith's book that it was "the fruit of one of the best and choicest gifts God has given to this people. What greater accolade could it have possibly been given? This was when it still depicted the non-trinitarian faith of Seventh-day Adventists and whilst Ellen White was still alive. Does it sound here as though our church believed that Smith's book, replete with its non-trinitarianism, conflicted with what Ellen White had written in *Desire of Ages*? Obviously not! Again in 1905 it was said of the canvassing work

"First, if the larger books, containing the specific Message for this generation (as for instance, "Great Controversy," and "Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation"), were sold in place of the smaller books not containing the specific Message (as for instance, "Christ Our Saviour"), the end would be hastened, and the work of God would be finished much more quickly because of the spread of this special literature. (*A. Rodd, 'The Missionary Worker', September 27th 1905 'Our large books', An address given at the Canvassers Convention at Birmingham on August 9th 1905*)

Uriah Smith's book was considered here as "special literature" that would hasten the return of Jesus. Under the heading of "Patriarchs and Prophets, Daniel and the Revelation, and *Great Controversy*" on the publisher's page in the *Review*

and *Herald* of June 1st 1905 (recording the General Conference Bulletin), Ellen White's testimony of that same year is quoted in support of these same books. The bulletin recorded

"As to the present importance of these three books we quote the following written by Mrs. E. G. White, Jan. 16, 1905 : --

"Instruction has been given me that the important books containing the light that God has given regarding Satan's apostasy in heaven, should be given wide circulation just now; for through them the truth will reach many minds. 'Patriarchs and Prophets,' 'Daniel and the Revelation' and 'Great Controversy' are needed now as never before." (*General Conference Bulletin, Review and Herald, June 1st 1905 'Three books designated'*)

Ellen White described Smith's book as one of "the important books" that explains "Satan's apostasy in heaven". She then said (as it is written in the original statement in the *Review and Herald* just over three months earlier)

"They should be widely circulated because the truths they emphasize will open many blind eyes. Many of our people have been blind to the importance of the very books that were most needed. Had tact and skill been shown in the sale of these books, the Sunday law would not be where it is to-day." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 16th February 1905, 'A call for active work'*)

Notice that this testimony of Ellen White is not just with reference to Bible prophecy but also with respect to how the controversy between Christ and Satan first began in heaven. This shows us that Ellen White regarded Smith's book as being decidedly doctrinal as well as dealing with Bible prophecy.

If you remember in section thirty-eight we noted that E. F. Durand, when speaking of Smith's book said

"The year before [1879], Ellen White had urged our publishing houses in Oakland and Battle Creek to utilize house-to-house canvassers in selling doctrinal books to the public. (*E. F. Durand, Review and Herald Oct 28th 1882 'One hundred years of "hot cakes"'*)

We also noted that in the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia it says

"At the 1881 General Conference session, King urged those assembled to carry out the council given by Mrs. White in 1879 that SDA books should be sold widely among the public, and forcefully argued that two small books written by Uriah Smith, *Thoughts on Daniel* and *Thoughts on the Revelation*, could be published together in an attractive form for sale by canvassers to the public" (*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia, Volume 10, page 660, King, George Albert (1847-1906)*)

Notice in the previous Ellen White statement that she said that the books she mentioned (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, *Daniel and the Revelation* and *Great Controversy*) were needed then, in 1905, “as never before” and that “the truths they emphasize will open many blind eyes”. She also said that many Seventh-day Adventists had been blind to the importance of these books. Note that Ellen White did not mention here *Desire of Ages* as doing this work.

Following this there was a summary write up of each of these publications. It was also recorded in the Publication Committee report for the previous year (1903-1904) that paper editions of *Thoughts on Daniel* and *Thoughts on Revelation* were available. Regarding what was said at the 1905 General Conference with respect to the book work at Union College, it was noted in the *Review and Herald*

“We have made "Great Controversy," "Daniel and the Revelation," and "Patriarchs and Prophets," our leading books; and the way the Lord has blessed our feeble efforts is wonderful.” (*Review and Herald, June 15th 1905, 'Book work at Union College'*)

We can see that in 1905, our church still regarded Smith’s book as a blessing from God. It was said to be one of “our leading books”. Again no mention is made of *Desire of Ages*, even though it was now 7 years after its publication (1898).

As we noted in section twenty-nine, it was at this same conference (1905) by stressing that God and Christ were separate personalities that Ellen White openly gave her support to the non-trinitarian faith of Seventh-day Adventists. It was also at this conference where she clearly warned that wrong views concerning God and Christ would make their way into Seventh-day Adventism.

Concerning *Daniel and the Revelation*, there was an interesting observation made 4 years later at the General Conference Committee meeting of February 10, 1909 (11 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*). Here it was then noted

“The attention of the Committee was called to an error in one of the illustrations in "Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation," concerning which the following action was taken:-- (*General Conference Committee Minutes, February 10th 1909*)

In one of the illustrations in Smith’s book, someone had picked up on what was deemed to be an “error”. Could it have anything to do with the non-trinitarianism that permeated its pages? The report continued

“WHEREAS, There appears on page 699 of the revised edition of "Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation" a cut which represents the Pope's Tiara; and, --

WHEREAS, In our judgment no such cut should be used until reliable evidence can be produced of such a tiara containing the inscription "Vicarious Filii Dei;" therefore, --

VOTED, That we request the publishing houses issuing the edition of this book to discontinue the use of the above-mentioned cut, and also that the illustration be removed from all unbound signatures and from bound books as far as practicable." (*Ibid*)

As can be clearly seen, this error had nothing to do with Smith's views regarding God and Christ (non-trinitarianism) but was all to do with the prophecy in Revelation chapter 13 concerning the number "666", particularly the way that it was illustrated on what was supposed to be the Pope's tiara. As many know today, regarding the Pope's tiara and the number 666, there have been recent (2006) discussions within Seventh-day Adventism. This tiara though and '666' is not what I wish you to note.

What I wish to point out is that in 1909, which, as a matter of interest was 11 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages* and after Smith's book had undergone numerous printings, the previous one being (to the best of my knowledge) in 1903 the year that Smith died, there was pointed out an error that the General Conference Committee voted should be removed from future publications. Important to note though is that it had nothing to do with Smith's views of God and Christ (the book's non-trinitarianism). So what does that tell us today?

It tells us that in 1909, whilst Ellen White was still alive, the Seventh-day Adventist Church did not regard as error the non-trinitarianism in Smith's book. This should help to confirm, even to the most ardent sceptic, that throughout the time of the ministry of Ellen White, this non-trinitarianism was indeed the accepted faith of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

If the non-trinitarianism in Smith's book had been considered error, then it would have been pointed out as being such but as it was there was not one comment made about it, not even 11 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*. This latter realization should also tell us something very important. This is that Ellen White's book (*Desire of Ages*) was not regarded as being in conflict with Smith's book (*Daniel and the Revelation*). If it had been considered as such then something would have been said and done about it.

A continuing standard work

We shall now see that through to the 1930's, Uriah Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation* continued to be classed amongst Seventh-day Adventists as a standard work. In the autumn of 1909, the General Conference Committee voted

"That our standard subscription books, such as "Patriarchs and Prophets," "Great Controversy," "Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation," "Home and

Health," and "Practical Guide to Health," be issued in three bindings: cloth, marble edges; half leather, marble edges; full leather, marble edges, and that the retail prices throughout the United States and Western Canada be 3, 4, and 5 dollars respectively." (*E. R. Palmer, General Conference Committee Minutes, 8th October 1909, 'Report on the meeting of publication house managers'*)

Late in 1909, which was 11 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*, the General Conference was still promoting Uriah Smith's book. It was also still regarded, alongside certain books of Ellen White, as a "standard" work. This was before it was edited to remove its non-trinitarianism. Later that same month (October 1909), the General Conference Committee noted

"Word having come that the brethren in the Philippine Islands had half of "Thoughts on Daniel" translated into the Tagalog, and had figures on printing and promise of some help from Australia, it was--

VOTED, That we encourage the Philippine brethren to go ahead and bring out "Thoughts on Daniel" in the Tagalog, providing satisfactory arrangements can be made to accept Australasia's offer of assistance, and that instruction be given him as to the best method of handling the printing contract, so that if possible pay for the edition may be made as the books are sold.

VOTED, That I. H. Evans, W. W. Prescott, and W. A. Spicer be a committee to make arrangements for the authorization to translate and adapt the book to the needs in the Tagalog." (*General Conference Committee Minutes, October 24th 1909*)

Again in 1909 we can see that Uriah Smith's work was still being translated into various foreign languages (Tagalog is a Malayo-Polynesian language spoken in the Philippines).

In 1911, there was a report given in *The Missionary Worker* regarding an experience in door-to-door work. The canvasser said about one selling experience that he had with a lady Methodist

"After a preliminary talk of a few minutes we made known our mission and introduced our book, "Daniel and the Revelation." When we reached the chapter dealing with chapter dealing with the low spiritual condition of the churches, she said: "That is just right. We belong to the Methodist church in Clarksburg. They have done away with the usual series of meetings this winter and are installing a gymnasium in the church building. The minister seems dead spiritually." (*V. Leach from the Columbian Union Visitor, The Missionary Worker, 'An experience', July 8th 1911*)

In 1913 in a General Conference Bulletin, it said of a number of books including

Great Controversy, Patriarchs and Prophets, Daniel and the Revelation and *Desire of Ages* that a Seventh-day Adventist library would not be complete without them. It also said of the first of these three books (meaning *Great Controversy, Patriarchs and Prophets* and *Daniel and the Revelation*)

“The morocco bindings of the first three books are uniform and make an excellent series.

Even though you possess a copy of one or more of these books, you can use a complete set to good advantage. There should not only be a copy of each in your own home for reference and study, but you should have extra copies to lend to others. If every Seventh-day Adventist were to keep copies of these valuable books in circulation among friends and acquaintances the amount of good done would be inestimable.” (*General Conference Bulletin, May 23^d 1913*)

This was 1913. The General Conference was still pushing Seventh-day Adventists to buy more copies of *Daniel and the Revelation*, and *Desire of Ages* to circulate them amongst their friends. These two books were not seen as conflicting with each other.

In the bulletin of June 1st that same year, *Daniel and the Revelation* was again referred to as one of the main outreach books. In one place regarding the bookwork in South Africa it said

“We have used mostly "Daniel and the Revelation," "Great Controversy," and "Patriarchs and Prophets," with "Coming King" and "Christ Our Saviour" as helps. Two thirds of our orders are for the morocco binding. The people prefer this, even at a higher price.” (*General Conference Bulletin, June 1st 1913*)

No mention is here made of *Desire of Ages*. This report also said

“Several of our canvassers have been permitted to bring precious souls into the truth, and these in turn have become laborers together with God.” (*Ibid*)

Four years later in 1917 it was reported in the General Conference Committee minutes

“The representatives of the Publishing Departments respectfully submit the following:--

"1. That the prices on our standard subscription books, such as 'Bible Readings,' 'Daniel and Revelation,' 'Great Controversy,' 'Patriarchs and Prophets,' 'Prophets and Kings,' and 'Practical Guide,' be increased from \$3.50, \$4.50 and \$5.50, to \$4.00, \$5.00, and \$6.00.”

"2. That the prices on 'Desire of Ages' and 'Easy Steps' be fifty cents higher in each binding than the corresponding binding of the standard subscription books; viz., \$4.50, \$5.50, and \$6.50." (*General Conference Minutes, October 30th 1917*)

Here we can see that in 1917, Uriah Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation*, along with Ellen White's *Desire of Ages* was still considered as "standard" Seventh-day Adventist literature. It said in the *Review and Herald* in 1917 with regards to the work in South Africa

"I wish we had more Zulu books, but we have only three, -- the Bible, "Christ Our Saviour," and "Steps to Christ." I still want to sell some books spread the truth among the Matabeles. I wish Uriah Smith's book, "Daniel and the Revelation," was translated into our language." (*James Mayinza, Review and Herald, May 10th 1917, Selling books among the Matabeles*)

The regard for Smith's book was still the same in 1919. It said in the General Conference Committee minutes of October that year

"WE RECOMMEND 1. That, because of greatly increased cost of manufacture, changes in prices of our leading subscription books, "Bible Readings," "Daniel and Revelation," "Great Controversy," "Patriarchs and Prophets," "Prophets and Kings," "Desire of Ages," "Easy Steps," and "Practical Guide," be made as follows:

Cloth binding, from \$4.00 to \$4.50
Half-leather binding, from 5.00 to 5.50
Leather binding, from 6.00 to 7.00" (*General Conference Minutes, October 9th 1919*)

Notice that this was 1919 and Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation* was still considered as one "of our leading subscription books".

This statement was made following the secret 1919 Bible Conference. The latter had closed in the summer. This was the conference where by saying that the Son was co-eternal and coeval with God the Father that W. W. Prescott had attempted to bring in trinitarian concepts of Christ. Some resisted this move by saying that the Scriptures teach that Christ is begotten of the Father (see section thirty-five and section thirty-six). This had been the faith of Seventh-day Adventists whilst Ellen White was alive – hence the objections by some of the delegates to what Prescott was teaching.

In the discussions at this conference, it is obvious that not everyone in this elite gathering of delegates agreed with Prescott. On the second day of the conference, Prescott responded to the objections that Christ was coeternal with the Father by saying

“Not to teach that [that the Son is co-eternal with the Father] is Arianism. Ought we continue to circulate in a standard book a statement that the Son is not co-eternal, that the Son is not co-eval or co-eternal with the Father? That makes him a finite being. Any being whose beginning we can fix is a finite being.” (*W. W. Prescott. Notes on the discussions of the 1919 Bible Conference and Teachers Meeting held at Takoma Park, Washington D.C. July 2nd*)

That Christ’s personality (as a separate individual from God the Father) did have a beginning, was once the teaching of Seventh-day Adventists, at least it was all during Ellen White’s ministry. According to Seventh-day Adventist theology though, this did not make Christ a finite being (as Prescott claims here) but exactly the opposite.

This begotten faith said that Christ was God Himself in the person of His Son. Seventh-day Adventists had always believed and taught that the Son was equal to the Father therefore Prescott was guilty of setting up a straw man and then knocking it down. He realised what our faith had always been. He continued by saying (note how this confirms the past begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventism)

“We have been circulating for 40 years a standard book which says that the Son is not co-eternal with the Father. That is teaching Arianism. Do we want to go on teaching that?” (*Ibid*)

This “standard book” that Prescott twice mentioned here was undoubtedly Uriah Smith’s *Thoughts on Daniel and Revelation* (he was trying to make a point). In this book, Smith had presented what was then the denominational faith of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This faith taught that the Son was equal with the Father but a separate personality (individual) from Him. In other words, it was taught, that God and Christ were two separate personalities (two separate individuals), also that Christ was God Himself in the person of His Son.

Prescott was correct in saying that this begotten faith had been circulated for “40 years”. It had been the standard faith of Seventh-day Adventists all the time of Ellen White’s ministry. She made no more an objection to it than she did to Smith’s book; in fact as we have seen previously, she highly promoted it (see section thirty-eight). She also agreed with the begotten faith itself (see section fifteen).

Prescott’s statement concerning Arianism is extremely misleading. As well as being a term that some apply to those who believe that Christ is a created being, it is also used, more often than not, to denote anything that does not comply with the tenets of trinitarianism. Prescott made it sound as though as a church we had been presenting Christ as having been created. As has been said before, this teaching (Christ a created being) has never been the denominational stand of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, thus Prescott was setting up a straw man

and then knocking it down.

Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation (1921–1924)

Two years later at the October General Conference Committee session of 1921 it was recommended again that our standard books, including Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation*, should again be subject to a price increase (nothing really changes does it?). This was now 23 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages* and Smith's book was still considered standard.

In *The Missionary Worker* (a British publication) of February 16th 1921, there is an interesting experience recorded about a family named *Howie* that lived in a farmhouse called *Lochgoin* near Fenwick in Scotland. This is where their ancestors had hidden many Christians from persecution. From these past encounters, the family had accumulated a number of souvenirs. Of these Robert Haining wrote

"If you should call to see these old souvenirs, you might find the old lady, now well nigh one hundred years of age, eagerly reading Uriah Smith's book, "Daniel and the Revelation," sold to her by her great great grandson, James Howie. The latter is a descendant and namesake of the original James Howie who left France and settled at Lochgoin so many years ago.

Does it not make your heart glad to know that that [sic] brother whom God has richly blessed in his efforts to leave a "Daniel and the Revelation" in every farmhouse in Ayrshire, is carrying on the work so nobly begun-by those reformers? (*Robert Haining, The Missionary Worker, February 16th 1921. 'An experience in Scotland'*)

In his biennial report on behalf of the British Union Conference, its president Campbell reported concerning our publications

"Since our last Union session, - the long delayed book "Daniel and the Revelation" has been published and met with instant success. (*M. N. Campbell, The Missionary Worker, August 17th 1921, 'The Battersea Conference' 'Our president's biennial report'*)

This was with reference to another printing of *Daniel and the Revelation*. This edition was more than likely the 1919 British edition published by the Stanborough Park Press. Campbell then said of *Daniel and the Revelation*

"Probably no book issued from our press has received the hearty welcome which this has. Our field has suffered serious loss in past years in not having this valuable treatise on the books of Daniel and Revelation to place in the hands of the British reading public. No book has brought more people into the Truth than has this one." (*Ibid*)

It appears that this "serious loss" was with reference to the lack of recent

printings of this book. The next year, under the title "Press Circulating Department" it said

"If any of our brethren and sisters require a copy of "Daniel and the Revelation" for their own private use we have a few copies slightly damaged, defective, or shop soiled which we will supply for 5/- each, postage extra. This is a good opportunity to possess one of these books. Certainly no S.D.A. home should be without a copy of this denominational bulwark." (*The Missionary Worker, January 26th 1923*)

The next month it said in the same publication

"As we have fully decided to make the cities one of our chief objects of attack this year by encouraging our most efficient workers to enter into these practically unworked centres of population, and further as the price of "Daniel and the Revelation" has been greatly reduced as a special inducement to our workers to handle the large books in our cities, it does seem as though immediate and specific steps should be taken to procure this army of new colporteurs to sell this splendid message-filled book." (*E. M. Fishell, The Missionary Worker, February 9th 1923, 'Three hundred colporteurs wanted'*)

This is another wonderful accolade for Smith's book. Here it is called a "splendid message-filled book". Note that it says that an "army of new colporteurs" were needed to sell it". This was now 1923. The same year it was noted

"Suppose however, that a new book should be printed and the country territory re-canvassed, would that be fair to the cities? As Brother Fishell points out in his article, seventy-five per cent of the population of the British Isles live in the cities, and they have been practically untouched. Is it not time to take "Daniel and the Revelation" to them? And if it is time, that is, God's time, for the work to be done, does not that ensure success? (*The Missionary Worker, September 21st 1923, 'The editor's page'*)

The next month in the same publication

"Reader, would you not enjoy being used by the Lord for the advancement of His work as these consecrated brethren are being? It is your privilege. Make up your mind that God wants you to sell "Daniel and the Revelation." Pray for a burden for city work and you will have one of the greatest opportunities of Christian service ever given to man" (*E. M. Fishell, The Missionary Worker, November 2nd 1923, 'Success in the cities'*)

The following week this was also noted

"In harmony with these several requests that have come in from various sections of the field, the publishing house has decided to separate the book

"Daniel and the Revelation" into two volumes, "The Wonderful Book of Daniel" and "The Revelation Made Plain." As stated in the letter to the colporteurs, these two books comprise about 300 pages each and sell at 4/9 each, a very popular price." (E. M. Fishell, *The Missionary Work*, November 6th 1923, 'The right perspective')

The next year (1924), Smith's book was still at the forefront of the action. It said in *The Missionary Worker*

"WORD has already reached each of you regarding the decision to maintain the present price on "Daniel and the Revelation" while present difficult and trying conditions obtain in our field. Now I believe I can count on each one of you to manifest your gratitude in the following manner:- First, by working to the limit of your ability now that the better weather and longer days are ours in which to work. Second, while soliciting orders for "Daniel and the Revelation" (the book used of God to bring a saving knowledge of the truth more people than any other book printed by Seventh-Day Adventists that you put your whole soul into the exhibition of it. And having created the desire that has secured the order let it be in the very best binding the prospect can afford." (S. Joyce, *The Missionary Worker*, April 4th 1924 'A word to our bookmen')

Again of Smith's book it said

"This book is truly worth more than its weight in gold. We cannot speak too highly of its merits. Now for a long and vigorous pull until we get every copy of "Daniel and the Revelation" off the shelves at the Stanborough Press and into our good British homes." (*Ibid*)

This confirms that the edition being promoted was the one published by the Stanborough Press. The next year it was noted that there had been a build up of *Daniel and the Revelation*. It said in *The Missionary Worker*

"January 1, 1922, found the House with just under 25,000 copies of "Daniel and the Revelation" in signatures and bound books. That year the sales hardly reached 4,000 copies. If the same rate of sale should have continued, it would have taken six years to clear away the edition. After having received counsel from the chairman of our Board of Directors, a new policy was outlined--a less expensive binding was prepared which enabled colporteurs to place books in a much greater number of homes. During the year 1923 the sale of "Daniel and the Revelation" increased to 9,500 copies. The first half of 1924 saw 5,500 copies sold. This record makes it clear that the Lord helps when His people address themselves to the task in hand." (G. L. Gulbrandson, *The Missionary Worker*, September 5th 1924 'The Stanborough Press')

In his report, Gulbrandson told of this experience

"The following tribute to "Daniel and the Revelation" was received recently from "a complete stranger except where Christ is concerned," as the writer introduced himself. "Through the kindness of a friend, I have had the privilege of reading a book by Uriah Smith, entitled 'Daniel and the Revelation'. If the author is alive I tender my sincere thanks to him for the work. I have never read anything that has so enlightened and uplifted me as this book has done. I have read every word and firmly believe the writer's teaching. The reading of this book has been so inspiring and filled me with such fervency that I have taken the liberty to bring some of the truths and warnings to the notice of friends and neighbours, and I believe that the great God of all will crown with success the effort to win souls through its contents. It is like fire to my soul and must break out in some form of expression." (*Ibid*)

If this was the 1919 British edition then it was not exactly as Smith had written it therefore the words "firmly believe the writer's teaching" may not have application to Uriah Smith. This is the problem of changing the text of a book because it may not reflect the original author's views.

Into the 1930's and 1940's

Eight years later in 1932 (returning our thoughts to America) it was noted at a General Conference Committee meeting

"That in the operation of our field work we courage colporteurs to use as far as consistent, the existing books which have formed the backbone of our work in previous years, such as "Great Controversy, "Patriarchs and Prophets", " "Desire of Age" " "Bible Readings, " "Daniel and Revelation" and such medium priced books as are now available, or may be issued in harmony with these recommendations." (*General Conference Committee Minutes, October 20th 1932*)

Here we can see that along with certain of Ellen White's books (including *Desire of Ages*), that in 1932, Uriah Smith's book was still considered as part of the "backbone" of Seventh-day Adventist literature. Twelve years later in 1944 and relating how the work began and was progressing in Japan, V. T. Armstrong noted in the *Review and Herald*

"Under the leadership of S. Miyake, A. N. Anderson, and E. J. Kraft, colporteurs were trained and the distribution of literature promoted. Patriarchs and Prophets, Daniel and the Revelation, The Great Controversy, and other books translated into the Japanese language were widely circulated." (*V. T. Armstrong, Review and Herald, August 3rd 1944, 'The Far Eastern Division'*)

Note that Armstrong must have been referring to the original version of Smith's book and not the edited version issued that year (1944). This was 1944 and

Smith's book was still classed as a standard work.

Two months previous in June 1944, H. M. Blunden wrote about a convention of the representatives of the North American Publishing Department. He said (again this was prior to the publication of the edited version of Smith's book)

“One decision worthy of special notice was an action which calls for a great revival in the sale of the Spirit of prophecy books and Daniel and the Revelation by Uriah Smith. By no particular design, but perhaps by our "forgetting" the instruction touching these wonderful volumes, they have slipped into the background in our planning. And we feel confident that to revive their sale and to push them to the forefront in our planning will redound in great blessings upon the cause and in the gathering of many souls.” (H. M. Blunden, *Review and Herald* June 15th 1944)

In conclusion

In conclusion, we can see that since its beginnings, right through to when our denomination began to take on board the trinity doctrine, Uriah Smith's book was so highly rated that it is almost beyond words to describe it. Obviously, when the Seventh-day Adventist Church did begin to adopt trinitarianism then it did become an embarrassment.

Being the Seventh-day Adventist classic it was, certainly it could not be removed from circulation. This would have brought about an inestimable hue and cry. Thus it was that to bring it into line with the new theology (trinitarianism) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, it had to be edited.

Even this brought about many objections. As LeRoy Froom said in his *Movement of Destiny* (this was under the sub-heading of “Revision of Daniel and the Revelation inevitable”)

“Strong reactions of Smith adherents. - “The reaction of the minority who still held personally to the Arian view – and who regarded D&R as virtually inspired and therefore not to be touched or in any way altered – was rather vehement” (LeRoy Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, ‘1931 opens new epoch of unity and advance – No. 2’, 1971)

Notice who Froom said it was that did the objecting. He said it was those who still held to the “Arian view”. This shows that certain Seventh-day Adventists had realised exactly what had happened in this editing. Its non-trinitarianism had been removed. This is why they objected.

As we shall see in section forty-six and section forty-seven, this so-called minority, although we have no way of estimating the exact percentage of church members, did probably include some of the General Conference Committee. These were the ones who, after the editing of Smith's book was completed, listened to the report concerning it from Warren Howell the chairman of the

editing committee (he was also secretary to the General Conference president). We shall also see in that same section that some believed that via the editing committee, the few were making a pronouncement on doctrine, meaning stating what beliefs were held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This was not very acceptable to some.

We now need to move to the next section (41a). This is where we shall be taking a look at the events in transitional times.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section forty-one (a)

The Sonship of Christ – a continuing belief within Seventh-day Adventism

*Please note. This section was once included in with the next section (section forty-two) as one complete section but because it grew too large as information was added the author has thought it best to make two sections of it. Hence, temporarily, this section is called Section forty-one (a). (20th January 2010)

The purpose of this and the next section is to reveal the one-time faith (beliefs) of Seventh-day Adventists. This is as it was during the decades immediately following the death of Ellen White - meaning throughout the 1920's and into 1930's. This was as trinitarianism was making inroads into Seventh-day Adventism.

It will be seen that during this time period (the 1920's and 1930's), Christ was still regarded as truly (literally) the Son of God. It will also be seen that this belief was still the preponderant faith of Seventh-day Adventists although having said that, the author of these notes does recognise that by this time there was a relatively small group of people (leading Seventh-day Adventists) who wished this was not believed.

That during the 1930's this begotten faith was still the preponderant faith of Seventh-day Adventism is attested to by the fact that in the year 1936, this Sonship belief was still taught in our Sabbath School Lesson Studies. These were studies that were distributed throughout the world as the truth to multi-thousands of Seventh-day Adventists and non-Seventh-day Adventists alike. This is the evidence from our denominational history. We shall be taking a look at the latter studies in the next section.

In this section we shall in the main discover what was printed in our publications in the years immediately following the death of Ellen White. Having said that, it would be best for us to even back up a little bit more to the time when Ellen White was still alive.

Dudley Canright observes

Dudley Canright (1840-1919) was a volatile figure within Seventh-day Adventism – meaning that he ran both hot and cold. He was ordained to the Seventh-day Adventist ministry in 1865 but became discouraged and left a number of times

only to return later. In February 1887 he finally left the church to become a Baptist minister. This was one year previous to the famous Minneapolis General Conference.

After leaving the Seventh-day Adventist Church for the final time, Canright spent a great deal of time speaking and writing against his former denomination's fundamental (main) beliefs. This covered quite a large spectrum of them – particularly those that were distinctively Seventh-day Adventist – meaning those not commonly held amongst other Christian denominations. This included our understanding of the state of the dead, our sanctuary teachings, the seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday), also the spirit of prophecy as manifested in the life and writings of Ellen White etc.

Canright is said to have been a very powerful preacher. He was also an accomplished writer. He wrote much in the *Review and Herald*. At one time he wrote very much against the trinity doctrine but when he left the Seventh-day Adventist Church he espoused this doctrine – at least a certain version of it. This version denied the Sonship of Christ. Interestingly, whilst he was a Seventh-day Adventist - also in keeping with his denominational brethren - Canright believed in the Sonship of Christ – meaning he believed that Christ was truly the Son of God.

This can be seen an article he wrote in 1878 called *The Personality of God*. In this article he denied the trinity doctrine and said that Christ was truly the Son of God. He maintained that God was a personal being and that Christ was a separate individual person from Him. Excerpts for this article can be read in section twenty.

In section twenty-one can be seen an article he wrote called *The Son of God*. This was eleven years previously in 1867. In this article he said that Christ was begotten of God (not created) and that because of this Christ was God. This was then the denominational belief of Seventh-day Adventists. This was also the basis of E. J. Waggoner's message at the Minneapolis General Conference of 1888.

Why I mention Canright - also his belief concerning Christ's Sonship - is because in 1889 he wrote and published a book called *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced*. It must have been a very popular book because it had at least fourteen separate editions. In the preface to the fourteenth edition (1914) he wrote

“Being profoundly convinced that Seventh-Day Adventism is a system of error, I feel it my duty to publish what I know of it. I do it in the fear of God. Knowing the sorrow it has brought to my heart and to thousands, I must warn others against it. I do not question the honesty of the Adventists, but their sincerity does not sanctify their errors. I have had to speak plainly, but, I trust kindly. I have had to treat each subject briefly, and leave many

untouched, but I have taken up the main pillars of that faith! If these fall, the whole must go down.” (*Dudley Canright, Seventh-day Adventism Renounced, 14th Edition, 1914, ‘Preface’*)

Notice his aim in the book is to refute “the main pillars” of the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists - also that he said “If these fall, the whole must go down”. He then added

“It is now nearly twenty-five years since this book was first published. This is the fourteenth edition. It has been translated into several languages, sold by numerous publishing houses, gone to the ends of the earth wherever Adventism has gone, and has been the greatest obstacle that work has ever had to meet.” (*Ibid*)

This was a very popular book – also one that viciously attacked the main beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. This was Canright’s objective. He realised that if the main beliefs (foundation) crumbled then the whole structure would come down. Regarding the main beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists, Canright wrote in the first chapter (this was under the sub-heading *Their doctrines*)

“In doctrine they differ radically from evangelical churches. The main points are these as taught in all their books: They hold to the materiality of all things; believe in the sonship of Christ; believe that they only have a correct understanding of the prophecies to which they give most of their attention ...” (*Ibid, Chapter I, ‘Doctrines and Methods of Seventh-day Adventists’*)

Here, right at the front of the attack, was what Seventh-day Adventists believed concerning Christ. This was that He really was the Son of God.

We can see here that in 1914, Seventh-day Adventists were still said to believe in the “sonship of Christ”. In fact Canright said that it was one of the “main points” of Seventh-day Adventists beliefs. This belief was the concept that at some point in eternity, the Son had been brought forth of the Father. This was not a son by creation but by being brought forth of God Himself (begotten). In other words, this was not an external act of God (creation) but an internal one (begetting). It was this concept that explained how Christ could be God Himself and yet not the Father. Canright knew that to bring down this belief would help bring the rest of the message into disrepute. Canright’s book had a profound impact upon the outreach of Seventh-day Adventists with their very distinctive message. Whilst it would be too much to go into here, its impact was so severe that it led Ellen White to mention it a number of times.

Sabbath School quarterlies

We shall now take a further look at the one time faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This was as it was presented in our Sabbath School lesson studies leading up to and including the 1920’s - also the early 1930’s. This will reveal the faith of Seventh-day Adventists during the time period leading up to the formulation and

production of the 1936 Sabbath School lesson studies – which we shall look at in the next section. This therefore was during the decades immediately following the death of Ellen White.

Regarding Christ, Ellen White would have been in agreement with what was written in these studies - just as she would have agreed with the 1936 studies. In 1917, in a quarterly study called *Topical Studies*, it said in the Sabbath School notes with reference to John 1:1, 2 (“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.”)

“We may allow our thoughts to go back to that revealed "beginning," when only the self-existent Father and His only-begotten Son were in existence.”
(*SS lesson quarterly, 3rd quarter 1917, Topical Studies, page 4, lesson 1 for July 7th 1917, 'Foundation Principles of the Gospel'*)

Notice it said “revealed beginning” and not just beginning – also that the Holy Spirit is not mentioned (only the Father and the Son). It then said

“God here inhabited eternity. He was then the "true God," the "living God," the "everlasting King," or "King of eternity." Jer. 10: 10, including margin. Here is where God began His revelation of Himself, and here finite minds must stop. But in this eternity of the past, God was, and with Him was His Son—the Word.” (*ibid*)

This is very interesting.

First of all this statement shows that in 1917 the Holy Spirit was still not regarded by Seventh-day Adventists as an individual being like the Father and the Son, at least not “In the beginning” (John 1:1-2). As can also be seen, “the Word” is depicted as having been in this revealed beginning with God. In answer to the question “Through whom and for whom did the Father purpose to create a vast universe?” (Colossians 1: 13-17 cited) the study notes then said

“God might have remained alone with His Son. But, instead, He purposed to create other beings to enjoy His love and revealed goodness. So He chose to create other intelligences upon whom or to whom He could exhibit His attributes of holiness, justice, wisdom, goodness, and mercy.” (*Ibid*)

Here again we see the 1917 faith of Seventh-day Adventists. It was that in this “revealed” beginning, there was only God and Christ. This was prior to any other being, or anything else, having an existence. The Holy Spirit is not mentioned.

1920's theology

In 1920, William Prescott produced a book called *The Doctrine of Christ: A Series of Bible Studies for Use in Colleges and Seminaries*. We noted in section thirty-five and section thirty-six that at the 1919 Bible Conference he had led out

in a series of studies called *The Person of Christ*.

During these latter studies he attempted to guide the delegates away from the concept of a Christ who was not coeternal with the Father - the latter being the theology of the Seventh-day Adventists Church as it was during the ministry of Ellen White. This he found very difficult to do because he still believed that Christ had His source in the Father. Here was an attempt to blend two theologies (the Sonship of Christ and coeternity with the Father). We shall see this now. Prescott said (this was at the 1919 Bible Conference)

“There is a proper sense, as I view it, according to which the Son is subordinate to the Father, but that subordination is not in the question of attributes or of His existence. It is simply in the fact of the derived existence, as we read in John 5:26 :”For as the Father hath life in himself, even so gave he to the Son also to have life in himself.” (W. W. Prescott, *Notes on the discussions of the 1919 Bible Conference and Teachers Meeting held at Takoma Park in Washington D.C. July 2nd*)

Notice Prescott’s remarks concerning the “derived existence” of Christ’s life – also his reference to the words of Jesus as found in John 5:26 as having application to it. He also said

“Using terms as we use them, the Son is co-eternal with the Father. That does not prevent His being the only-begotten Son of God. We cannot go back into eternity and say where this eternity commenced, and where that eternity commenced. There is no contradiction to say that the Son is co-eternal with the Father, and yet the Son is the only-begotten of the Father.” (*Ibid*)

We can see here that Prescott was struggling to blend two concepts. One concept was that Christ was the begotten Son of God (the then present theology of Seventh-day Adventists), whilst the other was to say that He is coeternal with the Father (a new theology to Seventh-day Adventists). Putting this together is the same as the orthodox trinity doctrine (eternally or everlastingly begotten). This appears to have been the aim of Prescott – meaning a promotion of the orthodox trinity doctrine (not the one held today by Seventh-day Adventists which says that Christ is not begotten therefore He is not a son – at least not in any literal meaning of the word).

In his book published the next year (*The Doctrine of Christ: A Series of Bible Studies for Use in Colleges and Seminaries*) he wrote

“The Son is equal to the Father in everything except that which is conveyed by the terms *Father and Son*. He is equal to the Father in that he shares to the full the Father’s existence from eternity and his infinite power and wisdom and love. But inasmuch as the Father possesses these divine attributes from himself alone, whereas the Son possesses them as derived

from the Father, in this real sense and in this sense only, the Father is greater than the Son.” (*W. W. Prescott, The Doctrine of Christ: A Series of Bible Studies for Use in Colleges and Seminaries, page 20, 1920*)

Notice again that Prescott states very clearly that Christ’s attributes were “derived” from the Father. This is in contrast to the Father who possesses them “from himself alone”. Notice too that Prescott was saying that it was this difference alone that made the Father “greater than the Son”. In other words, Christ received all from the Father therefore the Father is the greater. Prescott also said

“Evidently in an eternal Father and an Eternal Son the ideas of older and younger can have no place. As we lift up the conception of sonship out of time into eternity, these elements of it, ever present in human fathers and sons, at once disappear. When they fall away, does any conception essential to our idea of son ship remain?” (*Ibid, Page 20*)

He then answers his own question by saying

“Yes; there still remains the chief idea, viz., personal existence and powers derived from another person. And this idea is plainly embodied in John 5:26, and in other express assertions from the lips of Christ describing his own relation to God.” (*Ibid*)

This was how Prescott explained that Christ was truly the Son of God. He maintained that Christ had derived His divine attributes from the Father and yet at the same time says that He was coeternal with the Father. This is the same as he was saying at the 1919 Bible Conference. We shall see later in this section that Prescott’s begotten concepts were still being taught within Seventh-day Adventism in 1935. In the next section we shall see that they were an integral part of that which was taught in our Sabbath School lesson studies.

Note in particular Prescott’s reference to the words of Jesus found in John 5:26 as showing that it was Jesus Himself who said that His own “personal existence and powers” were “derived” from the Father. Prescott, a leading Seventh-day Adventist, was teaching this in 1920. It was that Christ was literally the Son of God who derived everything from the Father – even His existence.

In 1921, in a set of Bible studies in the Sabbath School quarterly called *Our Personal Saviour Jesus Christ*, there was included one particular study that had the title *The Son of God*. This is patently relevant to our studies.

In this study - also with reference to Peter’s confession that Christ was “the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16), also in quoting Ellen White from *The Desire of Ages* where she said that “God has adopted human nature in the person of His Son” (page 25) it said

“Everywhere the New Testament sets forth Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God. The announcement of His birth declared the fact. Luke 1: 35. John the Baptist, who was sent to prepare the way before Him, bore testimony to the same effect. John 1: 34. One of His earliest disciples was convinced of it. John 1: 49. So were His other disciples on a later occasion. Matt. 14: 33. Martha confessed her belief in Him as the Son of God. John 11: 27. The wonderful works of Jesus recorded in the Gospel of John were written to convince us of His divine sonship. John 20: 30, 31.” (SS Lesson Quarterly, 1st quarter 1921, *Our Personal Saviour Jesus Christ*, page 17, lesson 6 for February 5th 1921, ‘The Son of God’)

This was exactly the same faith as we have seen in previous sections was professed by Seventh-day Adventists from their beginnings. This faith was the “divine sonship” of Christ. This was of the utmost importance to Seventh-day Adventists. This is why Canright referred to it as one of the “main beliefs” of Seventh-day Adventists (see above). The Lesson Study notes added

“To the man whom He had healed of blindness, Jesus revealed Himself as the Son of God. John 9: 35-37. To the Jews, Jesus claimed His oneness with the Father as His Son (John 10: 30, 36), to whom the same honor was due as to the Father (John 5: 23). Satan acknowledged His claim to be the Son of God. Matt. 4:3, 6. This claim was mockingly repeated by the chief priests as He hung upon the cross. Matt. 27: 43. At the crucifixion, a Roman centurion was led to acknowledge that He was the Son of God. Matt. 27: 54. His resurrection proved the fact. Rom. 1: 4.” (*Ibid*)

There is no need for explanation as to what belief this section of this Sabbath School study was conveying. It continued

“When Peter confessed his faith in Christ as the Son of God, Christ pronounced a blessing upon him as having received a divine revelation. Matt. 16:17. Jesus Himself tacitly accepted the testimony of Nathanael that He was the Son of God. John 1: 49. 50. The accusation made before Pilate was that “He made Himself the Son of God.” John 19: 7. (*Ibid*)

Ellen White is saying here that Peter, in saying that Jesus was “the Son of the living God”, “received a divine revelation”. She said the same in *Desire of Ages* (see page 412). As Jesus said to Peter “... Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 16:17). This was indeed divine revelation – not just a personal confession.

Continuing the same thought of Christ literally being the Son of God the Sabbath School study said

“Paul, after his conversion, declared that Jesus was the Son of God (Acts 9: 20), and so he continued to preach (2 Cor.1: 9). By a voice from heaven,

God Himself bore testimony to the same fact. 2 Peter 1: 16, 17. Our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary is still declared to be "Jesus the Son of God." Heb. 4: 14." ((SS Lesson Quarterly, 1st quarter 1921, Our Personal Saviour Jesus Christ, page 17-18, lesson 6 for February 5th 1921, 'The Son of God')

The inevitable conclusion was that

"God sent His Son into the world to be its Saviour (John 3: 17), and the future of every man depends upon his attitude toward this Son of God (John 3: 18)." (*Ibid* page 18)

In answer to the question "What announcement was made concerning Jesus before His birth? (Luke 1: 35 cited) the study explained

"Adam was a son of God by creation (Luke 3:38), being made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26). He was in fellowship with the life of the Creator. Through sin, he became "alienated from the life of God" (Eph. 4:18), and lost his place as a son of God. Only one who stood in the relation of divine Son could restore man to his place as a son (Gal. 4:4, 5), and bestow upon him the privilege of being once more in the true sense a child of God. Our hope of salvation from sin, and restoration to permanent fellowship with God, finds a sure foundation in the fact that God sent His only-begotten Son to be our Saviour." (*Ibid* page 18-19)

The next question asked "What testimony was borne by John the Baptist concerning Jesus [John 1:34 cited]?. The notes said

"Christ is Son of God, not in the sense in which angels, as a class of beings, are designated by this name, but as He who has taken His seat on the right hand of the Majesty on high. The greatness of His position is proportionate to the excellency of the name of Son. This name He has not obtained by favor nor attained by effort, but inherited by indefeasible right. . . . He is Son. Which of the angels was ever so addressed? To speak of the angels as sons and yet say that not one of them individually is a son may be self-contradictory in words, but the thought is consistent and true. . . . (*Ibid*)

The above notes referring to Christ as not being as a son adopted back into the family of God ("in the true sense a child of God"), nor like a son as the created angels ("a class of beings" who "are designated by" the name Son of God), are very reminiscent of a statement made by Ellen White in 1895. This is when she said

"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." (Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, 30th May 1895, 'Christ our complete salvation')

She also said six weeks later (as complimentary to the previous statement)

"The Eternal Father, the unchangeable one, gave his only begotten Son, tore from his bosom Him who was made in the express image of his person, and sent him down to earth to reveal how greatly he loved mankind." (Ellen G. White, *Review & Herald* 9th July 1895 'The Duty of the Minister and the People')

As can clearly be seen here, this being "begotten in the express image of the Father's person" was not with reference to the incarnation (as some in error say) but was with reference to the pre-existence of Christ. Here Ellen White uses the expression "made in the express image of his person". Again this can only have reference to Christ's pre-existence. This is also borne out by Ellen White saying in 1900 (2 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*)

"Before Christ came in the likeness of men, he existed in the express image of his Father". (Ellen G. White, *Youth's Instructor*, 20th December 1900 'Christ's humiliation')

The previous year, again depicting the begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventists (this was with reference to where Jesus said "Before Abraham was I am") she wrote

"Here Christ shows them that, altho they might reckon His life to be less than fifty years, yet His divine life could not be reckoned by human computation. The existence of Christ before His incarnation is not measured by figures." (Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, 3rd May 1899 'The Word made flesh')

There is a very strong implication here that Christ's "divine life" could be measured by some means (obviously by divinity) but not by human reasoning. If it could not be measured at all (if it was without beginning) then there was no point in making this statement.

Returning our thoughts to the Sabbath School quarterlies of the 1920's, it said in the 2nd quarter's lessons for 1921

"The Father gave His Son (John 3: 16), sending Him to be "the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 2:2); and His own people to whom He came "killed the Prince of life" (Acts 3: 15), crucifying Him (Acts 4: 10); yet He voluntarily laid down His life for our salvation (John 10: 17, 18). Thus He "gave Himself for our sins." Gal. 1: 4." (SS Lesson Quarterly, 2nd Quarter 1921, *The Work of*

Christ, page 8, Lesson 3 for April 16th 1921, 'The Death of Christ')

It also said in the lesson 4 weeks later

“Christ did not assume the office of priest, but became priest by the appointment of God, according to a statement which suggests both the incarnation and the resurrection. Heb. 5: 5. Compare Luke 1: 32; Heb. 2: 16, 17; Acts 13: 33. Here the fact is again emphasized that the priesthood of Christ is based upon, and grows out of, His unique relation to God as the only begotten Son, arising from His inherent nature rather than from a merely arbitrary choice. In view of such a preparation for this intercessory work, He is definitely commissioned as a priest, and the order of His priesthood is announced. Heb. 5: 6.” *(Ibid page 19, lesson 7 for May 14th 1921, 'Christ Our Priest — After the Work of Melchizedek')*

Here again the begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventists is revealed. It is where these notes refer to Christ as being “the only begotten Son, arising from His inherent nature”. His uniqueness is the fact that He is God’s one and only Son.

Moving on to 9 years later (1930), we again see this begotten faith concerning Christ. In answer to the question “What was He [Christ] declared to be (the first part of Romans 1:4 cited)? the lesson study said

““Declared to be.” Jesus was the Son of God before He was born of the Virgin Mary. He was the only-begotten Son of God from the days of eternity.” *(SS Lesson Study, 4th quarter 1930, The Epistle to the Romans, page 5, lesson 1 for October 4, 1930 'Servants of the Son')*

This is still a repeating of the very same faith of Seventh-day Adventists whilst Ellen White was alive. This faith was - that because Christ is begotten of the Father “from the days of eternity” - He is literally the Son of God. Note that this was now 32 years after the publication of Desire of Ages. This is the book that the current (2010) leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church maintain led our denomination to believe that Christ was not begotten – also that which led it to become trinitarian. As we can see here in this section, by the late 1930’s this certainly had not happened. The notes went on to say

“When on earth He was Divinity incarnate, clothed in human flesh with all its weaknesses. To the unbeliever, He was only a man. Selfish hearts could not read His motives; sin-blinded souls could not see His divinity of character.” *(Ibid)*

From all of the above we can see that throughout the 1920’s, which was the decade following the death of Ellen White, also throughout the next decade (the 1930’s), the faith of Seventh-day Adventists was still that from the days of eternity, Christ is literally begotten of the Father – meaning that He is literally the Son of God. Up to then (1930) and since the time of our pioneers, this faith had

remained unchanged. This we have seen from what was published in our Sabbath School Lesson Studies. In other words, this was what was then officially being taught, during the 1920's and early 1930's, by Seventh-day Adventists.

1934 theology ('Eastern Tidings')

By 1934, the Sonship of Christ was still very important within Seventh-day Adventism. This was two years previous to the formulation of the 1936 lesson studies on *Bible Doctrines*. These are the ones we shall be looking at in the next section.

In the *Eastern Tidings (Southern Asia Division)* of June 1st 1934, there was an editorial called *This day have I begotten Thee*. This was study No. 5 in the book of Hebrews. After quoting Hebrews 1:5-6 the author commented

“In our text in Hebrews we find revealed our Lord's unique relation to God, the Father, and also His unique mode of derivation from the Father. In another place Paul calls Jesus, "His own Son (Rom. 8: 8)," thus separating Him from all the created intelligences by an infinite gulf. The highest archangel in glory is but a created intelligence; the brightest of the angels who are the closest to God are but the creatures of His hand. Jesus Christ alone occupies the throne of the universe, reigning conjointly with the Father, and receives the adoration and worship of the celestial throng. Rev. 5:6-14.

There is light for us in the description here given of the mode of the Son's derivation.” (G. F. Enoch [editor], *Eastern Tidings*, June 1st 1934, ‘*This day have I begotten thee*’)

Twice here the editor of the *Eastern Tidings* refers to what he calls the “**derivation**” of the Son from the Father. This was the same as was said so many years earlier by W. W. Prescott (see above). As will be seen later, the editor did not mean that the Son is a lesser divine being than God the Father but rather that Christ is God Himself in the person of the Son. This again was the same as was said by Prescott.

At the time of Ellen White's death (1915), the latter belief was the standard teaching within Seventh-day Adventism. As we can see, it also continued for decades after her death. The Sonship of Christ was still then of absolute importance to Seventh-day Adventists.

Within Seventh-day Adventism though, the idea was developed, by some, that instead of being brought forth from the Father at a point in eternity, the Son was co-eternal with the Father. This means that if the teaching is maintained that Christ was brought forth of the Father (that He truly is the Son of God), this is the same as saying that Christ is everlastingly begotten of the Father (everlastingly a son).

As had Prescott, it appears that G. F. Enoch attempted here to blend these two thoughts (concepts) - i.e. that Christ was a true Son (a literal Son), also that He was co-eternal with the Father. This embraces the same reasoning regarding Christ as in the orthodox trinity doctrine (see section six). He explains

“But the idea of older and younger does not enter into this conception of God, Father and Son. In eternity we find revealed the Eternal Father and the Eternal Son. There can be no knowledge without someone to know; there can be no lover without someone to love. An eternity in which the Father alone existed is therefore irrational. Christians for this reason count as wrong that doctrine which would affirm that somewhere in eternity, they know not when, the Son of God had a beginning.

There is no place for a "beginning" when we lift our ideas into the realm of eternity. Of Jesus it is said. "Whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity. The Bible reveals the Son as the eternal Stream flowing from the eternal Fountain." Micah 5:2, margin." (*Ibid*)

This is orthodox trinity language. It was born out of the creed of Nicaea (AD 325). This was also the slow but sure progression towards Seventh-day Adventists adopting a rendering of the trinity doctrine.

The text of Micah 5:2 is very interesting. A study of it reveals that the inclusion of the word everlasting (as in the KJV) is somewhat misleading and is better said, as in other translations (see above quote), as “days of eternity”. After saying that some believed the text in question (Hebrews 1:5 which is a quotation from Psalm 2:7) spoke of Christ having a beginning, the editor of the *Eastern Tidings* wrote

“The expression "this day" has one meaning when used in connection with things of time, and quite another when used in connection with eternity. Dean Alford quotes the consensus of opinion of orthodox Christians as endorsing the view that the expression "this day have I begotten Thee" "refers to the eternal generation of the Son," and regards it as the "nunc stans" as it was called by the early Christian expositors. The church of Christ as a whole has stood stiffly through the centuries for the eternity of the Son of God.” (*Ibid*)

The words “eternal generation” are again orthodox trinity language. It is a way of saying that Christ is a true son (not created or adopted) - also that He is God Himself (not a lesser god) in the person of the Son.

This is not strictly true. There is much evidence to suggest that the early Christian Church believed that Christ was truly the Son of God - brought forth of God in eternity (see section two and section three of *The Begotten Series*). We also know that this same belief was the belief of Seventh-day Adventists even up to and following the death of Ellen White.

In his article, the editor was attempting to say that as a separate personality from the Father, the Son never had a beginning. Perhaps he would have been better off quoting Ellen White (or echoing her thoughts) when she wrote

“The Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of the Father, is truly God in infinity, but not in personality.” (Ellen G. White, Manuscript 116, Dec. 19, 1905, ‘An Entire Consecration’, see also The Upward Look, page 367)

During the time of Ellen White’s ministry, this was the standard belief within Seventh-day Adventism. In other words when speaking in terms of personalities (separate personages), the one true God is the Father (see John 17:3, 1 Corinthians 8:6) whilst Christ is the Son of God – two separate individual personalities. G. F. Enoch continued

“But the Son is subordinate to the Father. He has "life in Himself," but this attribute is the gift of the Father. Jesus Himself said, "The Father is greater than I." John 14:28. See also 1 Cor. 3:23; 11:3; 15:28. This subordination is directly traced to the derivation of His life from the Father. John 5:26; 6:57.” (G. F. Enoch [editor], Eastern Tidings, June 1st 1934, ‘This day have I begotten thee’)

Again this was once standard Seventh-day Adventist theology. It was not that Christ (in His pre-existence) was any less God than God the Father but that He was subordinate to God because the source of His personality is the Father. In other words, this is a true father/son relationship. Notice particularly the editor’s remarks that Christ’s subordination is *“directly traced to the derivation of His life from the Father”*. Again this speaks of the true Sonship of Christ.

After saying that *“the Son shares with the Father all those attributes that distinguish God, the Creator, from man, the creature”*, also that some have applied the words of Hebrews 1:5-6 to the incarnation and to the resurrection, also to the return of Jesus, the writer then says

“Prof. W. W. Prescott, in the Signs of the Times, Jan. 8, 1929, says: "The fact of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, 'the greatest fact in the world,' is the final and the all sufficient testimony that He was the Son of God.” (Ibid)

He then concluded in the same paragraph

“He who is absolute deity, who was the Son of God by eternal generation, became flesh as the Son of man and was designated to be the Son of God by the resurrection. We then have this blessed assurance, that the man Jesus of Nazareth, 'who made purification of sins' was also more than a man, that he was the eternal Son of God, As the absolute Son, He, who 'in the beginning was with God, and was God,' was begotten before times eternal; as the Son, who was the-God-man, He was begotten by the

resurrection from the dead. So shall we be 'sons of God, being sons, of the resurrection.' Luke 20:26." (*Ibid*)

As can be seen, in 1934, the literal Sonship of Christ was still very important within Seventh-day Adventism. This is just as it had been from the origins of the denomination. Later, when bringing in their present understanding of the trinity doctrine, the Seventh-day Adventist Church denied this Sonship. They say it is error (not Scriptural) - also that it belittles (demeans) Christ. This is their current reasoning. We can see though that as time was progressing, more and more emphasis was placed on Christ's eternal Sonship. Note the reference to the "eternal generation" of the Son of God.

1935 theology

In the Australian *Signs of the Times* in 1935, there was an article written by Raymond Bullas. He wrote

"What the apostles taught and wrote were the words which Christ had given them. Let us examine the apostolic teaching of the "deity of Christ" in this connection. Hand in hand with the "deity of Jesus" goes, (1) His equality with the Father; (2) His pre-existence; (3) His Creatorship; (4) His Sonship." (*Raymond Bullas, Australian Signs of the Times, 25th March 1935, 'The Authority of Apostolic Teaching - Truth or tradition?'*)

Note here "His Sonship". Under the sub-heading of "His Sonship" Bullas wrote

"The question of His Sonship assumes a very important place in the mind and thoughts of Jesus. In His day, as well as in ours, there were many who questioned, derided, and rejected His claims on this point, and many times He was called to answer His critics and defend His claims. When He asked the blind man whom He had healed if he believed on the Son of God, and the blind man asked who that one was, Jesus said: "Thou hast both seen Him, and it is He that talketh with thee." See John 9:33-37.

As the Son of God He claimed equality with the Father. See John 10: 29, 30. On the basis of His equality and His Sonship He claimed to have the power to forgive sins against God, raise the dead, cast out devils, pass condemnation on sinners, and to control nature itself. See John 5: 25; Luke 22: 70; Matt. 14: 33; John 4: 41." (*Ibid*)

Bullas then spoke of the equality of Christ with the Father. He said (under the sub-heading "His equality")

"THE terms "Son of God" and "God the Son" are equivalent expressions in the mind of Jesus. His Sonship rested upon a different basis from ours. We are "sons of God," being the product of His creation and redemption. He was neither created nor redeemed, but His Sonship comes by virtue of His derived power and attributes. This thought has been well expressed by

another in the following quotation:— “ (*Ibid*)

Note again the reference to Christ’s “derived power and attributes”, also that this makes Him a true (literal) Son. Note too that Bullas is only saying much the same as Ellen White when she wrote

“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.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 30th May 1895, ‘Christ our complete salvation’*)

The use of the word ‘trinity’

Although during the opening decades of the 20th century the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still a non-trinitarian denomination, this did not, in their publications, stop them from using the word trinity. Often it was used to describe the Father, Son and Holy Spirit without expressing the belief that they were all of one indivisible substance – the latter of which is crucial to be held in any doctrine that can truly be termed trinitarian. One prime example of this was in 1913. This is when as editor of the *Review and Herald*, F. M. Wilcox wrote

“For the benefit of those who may desire to know more particularly the cardinal features of the faith held by this denomination, we shall state that Seventh-day Adventists believe,—

1. In the divine Trinity. This Trinity consists of the eternal Father, a personal, spiritual being, omnipotent, omniscient, infinite in power, wisdom, and love; of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the eternal Father, through whom all things were created, and through whom the salvation of the redeemed hosts will be accomplished; the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, the one regenerating agency in the work of redemption.” (*F. M. Wilcox, Review and Herald, October 9th 1913, ‘The Message for Today’*)

Notice the wording “In the divine Trinity”. There is no mention here of God actually being a trinity (the one triune God). It only says that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit belong to a group of three. Certainly then, in 1913, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still not a trinitarian denomination – and certainly also this was not a trinitarian statement – which is that God is three persons in one indivisible substance (three-in-one).

In the *Review and Herald* of February 14th 1924 there was an article published called “Who is Christ?”. This had also been written by F. M. Wilcox. This was also 11 years following his previously quoted trinity statement (see above). Wilcox began this particular article by asking

“WHAT position does Christ occupy in the divine trinity? What is His relation to Deity? Is He divine in His own natural right? Is He very God, possessing inherently the nature and attributes of Deity?” (F. M. Wilcox, *Review and Herald*, 14th February 1924, ‘Who is Christ?’)

To someone who is a trinitarian, these questions would be totally nonsensical. This is because to a trinitarian – meaning someone who believes that God Himself is a trinity (as it is expressed in orthodoxy or the second of the Seventh-day Adventists fundamental beliefs) - Christ would be of the one substance of God therefore He would be God Himself. It is evident therefore that as it is used here, the word trinity is only meant to describe, in a very loose sense, the three divine personalities together in a group of three – not as in the trinity doctrine. It appears therefore that Wilcox was not truly a trinitarian. Certainly again it is not truly a trinitarian statement. Wilcox also said

“As to the nature and position of Jesus Christ, the Scriptures are by no means silent. They afford us very definite information as to His relationship to God the Father, to the celestial and terrestrial worlds, and to all created intelligences. This answer we will present in the form of definite propositions, supported, we believe, by the statements of Holy Writ.” (*Ibid*)

We will now see that Wilcox still expressed the Sonship of Christ. Needless to say he regarded this as being very important – as did the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a denomination. He wrote

“Christ is declared to be the only begotten Son of God. He is presented by John as the Word, and this Word which existed in the beginning was made flesh and dwelt among men:” (*Ibid*)

Here is expounded what was then the faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This is also as it had been throughout the time period of their existence. This faith was that Christ was truly “the only begotten Son of God”. Wilcox quoted the Scriptures as saying

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” “ And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” “ God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 1:1, 14; 3:16.” (*Ibid*)

These verses emphasise the Sonship of Christ. He also wrote later

“The marked difference between Christ and the angels of God is shown in the first chapter of Hebrews. God contrasts His only begotten Son with the angels. He calls Christ God, and recognizes the eternity of His reign; while the angels are but created beings, ministering spirits, to do the bidding of

the Only Begotten.” (*Ibid*)

Later Wilcox said (under the sub-title *The Testimony of Christ Himself*)

“Christ Himself claimed to be the Son of God, and taught this as a part of divine truth to His disciples. This was His testimony to Nicodemus, who came to Him seeking divine enlightenment.” (*Ibid*)

Wilcox followed this by writing concerning the confession of Christ to being the Son of God. He said

“Christ admitted this relationship in replying to the declaration of Simon Peter, and pronounced a blessing upon Simon because this great truth had been revealed to Him by the Father in heaven:

"He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven." Matt 16: 15-17.

Near the close of His earthly ministry the Master was arraigned before the Sanhedrin, who sought evidence against Him whereby they might accomplish His death. The leaders well knew of His claim to this divine relationship. Before the Sanhedrin body the officers sought to draw from Christ a new admission of this claim as a basis for His condemnation.

This is shown by the following record:

"But Jesus held His peace. And the high priest answered and said unto Him, I adjure Thee by the living God, that Thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." Matt. 26: 63, 64."

That Christ had answered their questions in the affirmative they understood. To Pilate's suggestions that they take the man and crucify Him themselves, they answered: " We have a law, and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God." John 19 : 7." (*Ibid*)

There is no doubt that Wilcox, as editor of the *Review and Herald*, still believed in the denominational view regarding Christ being the Son of God. In other words Wilcox still confessed the Sonship of Christ. In the same publication there was another article concerning Christ. This one was called *Relationship of the Father and the Son*. It began by saying

“Some are claiming at the present time that Christ was created an angel,

and was adopted by the Father as His Son. That this is in direct contradiction to the plain Scriptures of Truth, the preceding articles abundantly demonstrate.

Regarding this question the following statements from the pen of Mrs. E. G. White will be read with interest." (*Review and Herald, February 14th 1924, 'Relationship of the Father and the Son'*)

Who this "Some" were it does not say but we can see the point that is being made. That is that Christ is truly the Son of God – as said in the "preceding articles".

The article was meant to reveal the things we have been told through the writings of Ellen White. It was made up of some very interesting statements from her pen but there were far too many to quote here. All of them showed that Christ is the Son of God. Remember - this was in 1924. Here are just a few of these statements. These all come from Patriarchs and Prophets.

The first is from its very first chapter *Why was sin permitted?* (page 35). It spoke of the time prior to the creation of this earth when after the rebellion of Satan God called an assembly of all the Heavenly angels. It said

"The King of the universe summoned the heavenly hosts before Him, that in their presence He might set forth the true position of His Son, and show the relation He sustained to all created beings. The Son of God shared the Father's throne, and the glory of the eternal, self-existent One encircled both." (*Ibid*)

"Before the assembled inhabitants of heaven, the King declared that none but Christ, the only begotten of God, could fully enter into His purposes, and to Him it was committed to execute the mighty counsels of His will. The Son of God had wrought the Father's will in the creation of all the hosts of heaven; and to Him, as well as to God, their homage and allegiance were due." (*Ibid*)

"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 deceptions."—Id., p. 38." (*Ibid*)

"Christ was the Son of God; He had been one with Him before the angels were called into existence. He had ever stood at the right hand of the Father; His supremacy, so full of blessing to all who came under its benignant control, had not heretofore been questioned."—Id., pp. 38, 39." (*Ibid*)

It is quite evident, even in the 1920's (which was the decade following the death of Ellen White) Seventh-day Adventists, through their own publications, still professed their long held belief in the Sonship of Christ.

The early 1900's was not the first time we had used the word 'trinity' when expressing our beliefs. We had been doing so for 20 years previously. This was in a pamphlet designed for the public setting out our beliefs concerning the Godhead. This was tract No. 90 in the *Bible Student's Library*. It was a reprint of Samuel Spear's article *The Subordination of Christ*. We have spoken of this previously so we will not do so again here. A copy of it can be found here

[http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Articles\(others\)/Speararticle.pdf](http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Articles(others)/Speararticle.pdf)

A Query Answered

In 1920, this was the year following the 1919 Bible Conference (reported on in section thirty-five and section thirty-six) there was, under the heading of *A Query Answered*, a question published that was posed by a reader of the Review (a Seventh-day Adventist). He asked

"WILL some one please answer these questions through the REVIEW AND HERALD? I am an Adventist, but I do not understand the Trinity. Am I to understand that when we reach heaven we are to meet only God, and not his Son? If there is only one, to whom was Christ praying while on earth? I asked a Bible class teacher, and he said that there would be only one in heaven; and then I asked him to explain it to me, but he said he could not. I always thought that God and the Son were one, just as man and wife are one, but I cannot imagine Christ praying to himself. Will some one please take the trouble to answer through the REVIEW? There are many people just as ignorant as I am." (*Review and Herald, September 2nd 1920, 'A Query Answered'*)

It appears that by 1920 the word trinity was now circulating amongst Seventh-day Adventists (probably because of its inclusion in the above sort of articles regarding what was said to be believed by Seventh-day Adventists) although having said that - there seems to be confusion as to what it meant. Notice that the questioner had said that he had been told by an unnamed "Bible class teacher" that there would "be only one in heaven". Notice the questioner asked also that if we will, when we get to Heaven, "meet only God, and not His Son"? Regarding the trinity, there really was confusion.

It was C. P. Bollman, as an Associate Editor of the Review, who replied to this question (F. M. Wilcox was then editor). He wrote

"The Father and Son are not one in the sense of being the same identical person, but there is a very important sense in which they are one. This is made plain in John 17:20-23" (*Ibid*)

Then, after quoting John 17:20-23, Bollman explained

“The Father and the Son are one in purpose, in 'character; one in the sense of perfect union and cooperation, just as true believers become one with God and with one another. This thought — the oneness of believers — is emphasized in Romans 12 : 5 and Ephesians 4:1-6. Christian believers never become one in person. The individuals are never merged into an indistinguishable mass constituting one composite being with a single personality; but each and all are members of one body, of which 'Christ is the head, and thus all are members one of another, yet each retaining his own individuality.

And in the same sense the Father and the Son are one. It is Sabellianism — a heresy of the fourth century—to hold that Father, Son, and Spirit are one and the same person, who manifested himself in Judaism as the Father, in Christ as the Son, and from Pentecost and onward as the Holy Spirit.

True, Christ did say (John 10:30), "I and my Father are one," and again (John 14:9), "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; " but such statements, considered in the light of John 17:20-26, cannot be understood as teaching identity of personality, or, in other words, that the divine Being exists only as a single person in three offices or manifestations.” (*ibid*)

Bollman later added (this was after showing from the Scriptures that the name of the Father was in Christ)

“This serves to emphasize the fact that while Christ and his Father are one in the important sense that has been suggested, they are two distinct persons; and that while having one, or it may be more than one, name common to both, which name the Son bears because he is the Son, they likewise have, as distinct persons, distinctive names.” (*ibid*)

Nowhere in this explanation of Bollman’s was the word trinity mentioned. Only the questioner had mentioned it. Neither anywhere was it said that God the Father, Christ the Son and the Holy Spirit were of (shared) one indivisible substance – as in the trinity doctrine. In brief, this explanation excluded any description of God being a trinity. In fact it said exactly the opposite to God being a trinity. It said that God was a personal being – the Father. Nowhere did it speak of God as a composite being. As can be seen, Bollman only denied that this was so.

Very interesting is that at the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Conference held the year previously (1919), it was Bollman who spoke out against Prescott – the latter of whom led out each day in a series of talks concerning the person of Christ.

In his talks, Prescott was attempting to have the delegates accept – much against what was taught throughout the time of Ellen White’s ministry – that Christ was coeternal with the Father. Up to that time (1919), it was generally taught within Seventh-day Adventism that Christ was brought forth of God at an unknown point in eternity – and that for this reason He was God Himself in the person of His Son (see section thirty-five for the discussions between Bollman and Prescott).

Notice above that Bollman says “Christ and his father” – also that Christ bears the same names as the Father “because he is the Son”. That Christ truly is the Son of God was the continuing faith of Seventh-day Adventists – even in the 1920’s. It was here emphasised by Bollman. This was 5 years after the death of Ellen White.

Very interesting is that ten years later, it appears that Bollman had changed his thinking. He wrote in the *Review and Herald* under *Bible questions answered* (this was in answer to the question "Please to harmonize Exodus 24: 10, 11, and John 1:18; also 1 Timothy 6:16 and 1 John 4:12.")

“We are too prone to think of the three infinite persons of the Godhead much as we think of three finite beings co-operating together closely for the accomplishment of the same purpose. But the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, while not a single person in three different manifestations, as Sabellius taught in the second century, are three persons in the one Godhead, having one will, one mind, coeternal, and inseparable in nature, character, and purpose — indivisible.” (*Calvin P. Bollman, Review and Herald, February 6th 1930, 'Bible Questions Answered'*)

This is much the same as will be said by any trinitarian – although again the word trinity is not here used. Notice the wording “in the one Godhead”. This makes the word Godhead look as though it is comparable with the word trinity which it is not. As in the KJV of the Scriptures (see Acts 17:29, Romans 1:20 and Colossians 2:9), the word Godhead is translated to convey the idea of that which pertains to divinity. The original Greek words have no connotations of trinity.

As time progressed, some Seventh-day Adventists, particularly those of our leadership, began to adopt some of the principles (concepts) of trinitarianism. This eventually led to us accepting a version of the trinity doctrine – without the belief that Christ is truly the Son of God. As it was though, even in the 1920’s and 1930’s, this latter concept (the Sonship of Christ) was still of very high profile within Seventh-day Adventism – and it would take a lot more time for it to become frowned upon – mainly by the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Eventually though this did happen.

Today, those Seventh-day Adventists who profess that Christ is truly the Son of God are prone to be censured by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Even ministers who come to this belief are having their ministerial credentials

withdrawn. Such is the way it is within Seventh-day Adventism today (2010). As can clearly be seen, this is a far cry from how it used to be within our denomination.

Summary

In summary it can be said that even in the 1930's, the Sonship of Christ was still very important to Seventh-day Adventists – although by some, particularly those of our leadership, trinitarian concepts were being introduced into the thinking of Seventh-day Adventists.

Much more could be quoted to show that this pattern continued throughout the 1930's. Having noted this though, we shall see in the next section (forty-two) that in 1936, the Sonship of Christ was still the official position of the Seventh-day Adventist church – albeit the trend was to develop this belief into one that spoke of Christ's eternal Sonship with the Father.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section forty-two

The 1936 Sabbath School Lessons

**Please note: This section was originally included in with the previous section [section forty-one (a)] as one complete section but because it grew too large as information was added the author has thought it best to make two sections of it. (20th January 2010)*

We have seen in previous sections that during the time period of Ellen White's ministry (1844-1915) and beyond, the preponderant faith of Seventh-day Adventists was that Christ was truly the Son of God. This was because He was said to be begotten of God (the Father). This theology did not portray Him to be a lesser divine being than the Father, neither did it make Him another god or someone (or something) that was inferior to God but was God Himself in the person of His Son. For an understanding of this theology see the *Begotten Series*, in particular section nine.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church today denies the validity of this begotten belief (the true Sonship of Christ). They say it is error. In fact they maintain that Christ is unbegotten therefore He is not truly the Son of God (in His pre-existence) but is one of three coequal and coeternal divine beings in one indivisible substance (essence). The latter is known as the one God. This is the trinity God - the three-in-one God.

Needless to say, to be able to hold the trinity doctrine it must be said that the Holy Spirit is an individual like God and Christ. This is also something else that during the ministry of Ellen White was not believed by Seventh-day Adventists. How the Seventh-day Adventist belief concerning the Holy Spirit was changed we shall see in section forty-four.

In attempting to establish that God is a trinity, also to be regarded as a denomination that belongs to what is generally termed mainstream Christianity, our church today says that all three personalities have their being in the one indivisible substance of God. Without the latter belief they would not be trinitarian. In other words, simply making a profession of believing in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is not confessing the trinity doctrine. To be a trinitarian, the *one substance* (unity) theory must be believed.

The 4th quarter's lesson studies for 1936

In the Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly for the 4th quarter of 1936, the subject of the Godhead was discussed. As will be seen later, this particular quarter's studies were the first of seven consecutive quarters detailing what our church described as the "essential doctrines" of Seventh-day Adventists. This means that the lesson studies contained in the 4th quarter of 1936, right through to the 2nd quarter of 1938, were all detailing these denominational beliefs. It can be said therefore that this was still the denominational faith during the 1940's - at least the early part of them. This is only reasonable to believe. We shall return to this thought later.

After reviewing these lesson studies, the author of the notes you are now reading would heartily recommend them to be read by all who claim to be God's remnant people. This is because they detail every aspect of the one-time faith of Seventh-day Adventists.

The Sabbath School Lesson Study archives are here

<http://documents.adventistarchives.org/SSQ/Forms/AllItems.aspx>

In the lesson study for October 17th 1936 (the title for this lesson was *The Godhead*) the word trinity was used. In fact *The Trinity* was one of the sub-headings. This was not to denote that all three personalities of the Godhead are of one substance (as in the trinity doctrine) but to indicate the unity of the three. In other words, the word trinity was not used as in the trinity doctrine but as an alternative for Godhead. In fact it said of the word trinity that it was "A threefold name" (see lesson 3 for October 17 1936). Nowhere in the study was this elaborated upon to mean what is generally known as the doctrine of the trinity.

The study itself can be found on the Seventh-day Adventist Church archives website. To read it, please go to the following link and scroll down to Lesson 3 for October 17th (page 9).

<http://documents.adventistarchives.org/SSQ/Forms/AllItems.aspx?View={44C9B385-7638-47AF-BA03-CDDF16EC3A94}&FilterField1=DateTag&FilterValue1=1936-10-01>

Under the subtitle of *The Trinity*, the question was asked, "How does the Father address the Son? As Hebrews 1:8 was cited, the answer has to be that the Father addressed the Son as God. The author of the lesson study also supplied this note (this was in response to the question "What is the Holy Spirit called in the Scriptures?")

"It will be noticed that in Acts 5:3, Peter says, "lie to the Holy Ghost," while in verse 4, he says, "thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God," thus using the two names interchangeably. In the other references, the Holy Spirit is appropriately called "the Spirit of God." Hence in the scriptures cited in

questions 7 to 9, we learn that the name God is used of the Father, of the Son, and of the Spirit - a kind of heavenly family name. These three constitute the Godhead." (*Sabbath School Lesson Study, 4th quarter 1936, Lesson 3, October 17th 1936, page 10. 'The Godhead'*)

The study then asked (citing John 3:16, Galatians 1:4, Ephesians 2:18 as revealing the answer) "How do the three members of the Godhead, who wrought together in creation, also work together in making salvation possible?" In answer to this question it was said

"Summing up these scriptures, we see that God "gave His only- begotten Son," that Jesus "gave Himself for our sins," that it was "through the eternal Spirit" (Hebrews 9:14) that Christ offered Himself to God. Thus the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are united in making salvation possible." (*Ibid*)

It then quoted Ellen White as saying

"The Godhead was stirred with pity for the race, and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit gave themselves to the working out of the plan of redemption." - "Counsels on Health," p. 222." (*Ibid*)

The unity of the Godhead

Under the subtitle *The Unity of the Godhead*, the study asks (citing John 8:28; 5:19 and 14:31)

"How is the work of the Son related to that of the Father?" (*Ibid*)

The study notes said

"Here it is twice stated that the Son can do nothing of Himself, but that He speaks what the Father gives Him to speak, does what the Father does, and obeys the Father's commands." (*Ibid*)

The question is then asked (citing John 15:26 and 16:13)

"How is the work of the Spirit related to that of the Son?" (*Ibid*)

The answer is supplied

"The Son sends the Spirit as His personal representative. The Spirit does not speak of Himself (that is, His own words), but what He is given to speak, calling to remembrance whatever the Son has said." (*Ibid*)

The study then asks (citing John 14:26 and 15:26)

"How is the work of the Spirit related to that of the Father?" (*Ibid*)

The answer is returned

“The Father sends the Spirit in the name of the Son, that is, as the Son's representative. The Spirit "proceedeth from the Father," to do His work in the earth.” (*Ibid* page 11)

It then adds as a summary explanation

“Hence the Father sends the Spirit, and the Son sends the Spirit. The Son speaks what the Father gives Him to speak, and the Spirit speaks what the Son gives Him to speak. The Spirit is both the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ. How could there be more perfect accord, more complete unity? (*Ibid*)

That the Holy Spirit is “both the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ” was the long-time faith held by Seventh-day Adventists. We have seen this in the sections dealing with the pioneers’ beliefs regarding the Holy Spirit (see section thirty-one, section thirty-two, section thirty-three and section thirty-four).

In this 1936 Sabbath School lesson study, the question is then posed

“How is the place of the Son in the Godhead emphasized? Col. 2:9”

As Colossians 2:9 is quoted, the answer must be that in Christ dwells “all the fulness of the Godhead bodily”. Note here the phrase “in the Godhead”. This could make the word Godhead to appear something very similar to the word trinity. The truth of the matter is that these two words are not even similar.

The word Godhead - as translated in the KJV (Acts 17:29, Romans 1:20 and Colossians 2:9) - pertains to divinity but does not - as does the word trinity - include the idea of three in one. Interestingly, up to now, I have never found anywhere in the writings of Ellen White where she uses the phrase ‘in the Godhead’. All that I can find is where she says ‘of the Godhead’ (of divinity). For a study of the word Godhead see section one of the *What think ye of Christ* series.

The penultimate question in this sub-section was “How is the unity of the Godhead expressed? (John 10:30 and 14:11 cited). The author(s) of the study noted

“The Father is in the Son, and the Son is in the Father. The Spirit is "the Spirit of God" and "the Spirit of Christ." Hence all three dwell together, and the three are one.” (*Ibid*)

This was the faith of the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism. The oneness was not elaborated upon here although if you remember, the writer did say that “These three constitute the Godhead” (see above) – not that they constituted the

one God as in the trinity doctrine. This is saying two different things.

The deity of Christ - Christ a begotten Son

Under the sub-heading “Deity of Christ” (the main heading was *Deity and Pre-existence of Christ*) the following week’s lesson (lesson 4 for October 24 1936) asked this question

“Of whom was Christ begotten? (*Ibid, Lesson 4, October 24th 1936, page 12*)

This question is of major significance. It is one that as far as our studies are concerned is really very important. It shows that in 1936, the begotten faith held by early Seventh-day Adventists was still the accepted denominational faith of its members. We know this because this is exactly what was being taught in its Sabbath School lesson studies for that year (1936). This much is unmistakable and irrefutable.

The above question was asked of all who engaged in these lesson studies – meaning those participating as students and those who were teaching the studies (the Sabbath School teachers). It must also be remembered that these same studies went around the world to Seventh-day Adventists and non-Seventh-day Adventists alike – not only as teaching what was accepted as the truth concerning Christ but also as detailing what was then the denominational faith of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As we shall see later, these studies were endorsed by the General Conference. It can be assumed therefore, seeing that this was our denominational faith in the late 1930’s, that this same faith was the accepted denominational faith in the early 1940’s. This is because no denomination can change the preponderant belief of its membership overnight. It does take time - also death. We shall see this more clearly in section forty-five.

As containing the answer to this begotten question, the lesson study then cites Psalms 2:7 and John 1:14, so the expected answer is that Christ was begotten of God (the Father). This is in direct contrast to what is believed by Seventh-day Adventists today - which is almost 72 years on from the date of this lesson study (October 1936).

Today our church is saying that this begotten faith is false doctrine – meaning it is unscriptural. They also say that it demeans Christ. For details see section ten of this history series, also section ten of the *Begotten Series*. Such, during this time period (1936-2008), is the extent of the change in the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists.

The lesson study then cites Ellen G. White as saying

“He who had been in the presence of the Father from the beginning, He who was the express image of the invisible God, was alone able to reveal the character of the Deity to mankind.” - “Ministry of Healing,” p. 422.” (*Ibid*)

"Man was to bear God's image, both in outward resemblance and in character. Christ alone is 'the express image' of the Father; but man was formed in the likeness of God." (*Ibid*)

As we shall now see, the entire point of this section of the study was to show that Christ was literally begotten of God (the Father) therefore He was truly both the Son of God and God Himself. The quarterly then notes (because the Son is begotten of the Father)

"Hebrews 1:4 tells us that the Son's name, God, was "a more excellent name" than the angels received, because He obtained it "by inheritance," that is, as "heir of all things." A son is the natural heir, and when God made Christ His heir, He recognized His sonship." (*Ibid*)

Note that the study says "when God made Christ His heir". This is with reference to Christ's pre-existence. The study concludes

"This is why the Son bore the same name as His Father." (*Ibid*)

Here again we see the past begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventism. This is that Christ is truly (literally) the Son of God and is therefore God. The author of the lesson is saying that because Christ is begotten of God, then "by inheritance" He is God and the Son of God. This is not a denigrating of Christ but an uplifting Him to His true position as God's one and only Son. As the notes say, "when God made Christ His heir, He [God the Father] recognized His [Christ's] sonship".

Interestingly, the above conclusion ("the same name as His Father") is exactly the same as was taught by E. J. Waggoner at the famous 1888 Minneapolis General Conference session (see section ten of this history series and section seventeen of 'The begotten Series') – revealing that this had been the long-time faith of Seventh-day Adventists. You can read this here

<http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/SMTBS.htm>

With reference to Matthew 1:23, the lesson later said

"Here again the Son is called by the Father's name, "God." This is because He "was God." John 1:1." (*Ibid*)

After saying that the apostle Paul affirmed the deity of the Son the lesson says

"Paul's language is equivalent to John's when the latter says, "The Word was made flesh." John 1:14. He affirms that the Jesus who was "born of a woman" was really God." (*Ibid*)

It was stressed over and over again throughout the study that the Son of God is

God. This was no different than what had always been believed by Seventh-day Adventists. The study then asks

“What public announcement of His Son's deity did the Father make on two different occasions?” (*Ibid* page 12)

Matthew 3:17 and 17:5 is cited as containing the answer therefore we can see from this that it is being said that the Father confirmed Christ's deity by calling Him His Son (“this is my beloved son”). Again this is the very same begotten faith that throughout the time of Ellen White's ministry was held by Seventh-day Adventists.

Concerning the origins of Christ, the lesson quarterly then helps us to realise just what it was that Seventh-day Adventists believed and taught in 1936. After asking “What testimony concerning His deity did Christ Himself give”, also citing John 16:27, John 16:28 and 8:58 as containing the answer, the study notes said

“The direct statement of Jesus, "I came forth from the Father," reads literally, "I came out of the Father." Putting with this, His testimony in John 10:38, "The Father is in Me, and I in Him," we have His personal witness that He truly was "begotten of the Father," as John says in 1:14.” (*Ibid*)

This is another striking realisation. It reveals very clearly that through our Sabbath School lesson quarterlies in 1936, Seventh-day Adventists maintained - just as they had done so during Ellen White's ministry - that Christ literally “came out of the Father”. This is what is meant by “begotten of the Father”. Note the emphasis that the words of Jesus (as found in John 10:38) reveal that Christ “truly was begotten”. How much clearer could this be to show what was being taught in 1936 within Seventh-day Adventism. This was then the denominational faith of Seventh-day Adventists. We shall confirm this later.

On the next page of the study, the lesson asks (this was under the heading of *Pre-existence of Christ*)

“When does the prophet say the life of the Son began? Micah 5:2. margin.” (*Ibid*, page 13)

Again this is very striking. It shows that in 1936, it was still the preponderant belief of Seventh-day Adventists that the personality of the Son had a beginning but this did not make Him a lesser divine being than God. The begotten Son, because He is begotten of God, is God Himself in the person of His Son. This is best understood in contemplating these words from the spirit of prophecy

“The Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of the Father, is truly God in infinity, but not in personality.” (*Ellen G. White, Manuscript 116, Dec. 19, 1905, 'An Entire Consecration', see also The Upward Look, page 367*)

This can only be referring to the pre-existent Christ. It could not possibly be referring to the incarnate Christ. The man Christ Jesus was never “truly God in infinity”. The pre-existent Christ is God Himself in the person of the Son (John 1:1, 18). The incarnate Christ is God manifest in the flesh (John 1:14, 1 Timothy 3:16). As far as personalities are concerned, there cannot be two who are the one true God. This is why Jesus, as did Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, said that the one true God is the Father (see John 17:3, 1 Corinthians 8:6) The lesson study then says

“While we cannot comprehend eternity - without beginning and without ending - yet it is dearly affirmed here that the life which Christ possesses is “from the days of eternity.”” (*Sabbath School Lesson Study, 4th quarter 1936, Lesson 3, October 17th 1936, page 13. ‘The Godhead’*)

This is a reference to Micah 5:2 but not exactly as quoted in the KJV. Instead of the words “from everlasting” (as used in the KJV), the margin notes (“from the days of eternity”) are employed. With regards to Micah 5:2, this was common practise within Seventh-day Adventism. Ellen White also did it. As we have seen in previous sections, she wrote with reference to Jesus saying, “Before Abraham was I am” (John 8:58)

“Silence fell upon the vast assembly. The name of God, given to Moses to express the idea of the eternal presence, had been claimed as His own by this Galilean Rabbi. He had announced Himself to be the self-existent One, He who had been promised to Israel, “whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity.” Micah 5:2, margin. (*Ellen White, The Desire of Ages, page 469, ‘The light of Life’*)

Note the use of the “margin” reading. In this same book she had also said previously

“She [Mary the mother of Jesus] is of the lineage of David, and the Son of David must be born in David's city. Out of Bethlehem, said the prophet, “shall He come forth . . . that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity.” Micah 5:2, margin.” (*Ellen G. White, ‘The Desire of Ages, page 44, ‘Unto you a Saviour’, 1898*)

Ellen White also quoted the margin reading of Micah 5:2 in *Patriarchs and Prophets* (see page 697 - *The Coming of a deliverer*). It is apparent therefore, rather than from everlasting as in the KJV, the words “from the days of eternity” were better suited to what was then the faith of Seventh-day Adventists. The former could give the idea that Christ was not begotten of the Father. See section sixteen of this series. See also in particular section seven (part 4 of Begotten theology) of the *Begotten Series*. The latter section gives a more detailed explanation of Micah 5:2. The 1936 lesson study also said

“Cumulative evidence that the Son existed with the Father before creation

is abundant in the Scriptures. In the few passages we have studied here, we find that Christ was with the Father "before the world was," "from, the days of eternity," "before the foundation of the world," "before all things." He was therefore no part of creation, but was "begotten of the Father" in the days of eternity, and was very God Himself." (*Sabbath School Lesson Study, 4th quarter 1936, Lesson 3, October 17th 1936, page 13. 'The Godhead'*)

Over and over again this 1936 lesson study related the idea that Christ was truly begotten of the Father therefore He is "very God Himself". The lesson concluded concerning what the Scriptures say regarding Christ and His deity

"The teaching of the scriptures in this lesson is little short of over whelming in its marvelous meaning to us in the personal life. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and God Himself, who existed with the Father "from the days of eternity," who made the world and all things therein—even this Jesus "gave Himself for our sins," and by believing on the name of this Son of God, we obtain the gift of eternal life, and may share it with Him throughout the eternal ages, world without end." (*Ibid*)

That Christ is truly the begotten Son of God was, according to this lesson study, the overwhelming evidence that He is none other than God Himself. As it was explained in our Sabbath School Lesson Quarterlies in 1936, this begotten faith was undoubtedly a continuation of the faith of our pioneers.

The Sabbath School Lessons – the truth

In the *Review and Herald* of December 17th 1936, there was reference to the set of lesson studies that were being studied that very quarter (the 4th quarter 1936). These were the lessons that we have just been quoting from above. The title of the series of lessons was "Bible Doctrines". This was the first of 7 separate consecutive quarters of lesson studies designed to teach what was then the doctrines held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This was prior to the adopting of the trinity doctrine into our fundamental beliefs.

After making the appeal that the time had come when we should take what we learn from our Sabbath School lesson studies to a further audience than our Sabbath School classes and teachers etc, it was said

"Has not the time come when each Sabbath school student who studies the Seventh-day Adventist Sabbath school lesson should recite or teach that Seventh-day Adventist Sabbath school lesson to some one who is without its blessing of truth - to a neighbor, to some friend, to a group in a cottage meeting, as a Sunday night sermon in a tent or hall, or in some other way to some other persons?" (*G. A. Roberts, Review and Herald, December 17th 1936, 'The Sabbath School Lesson'*)

There was a very strong push for Seventh-day Adventist to share their

denominational faith with others. Roberts then added

“Should not each Sabbath school pupil lift up his eyes and look on the field of his own neighborhood or circle of acquaintances that is white to harvest, and carry to that field the message contained in the present Sabbath school lessons? Should not each thus become an open channel as well as a reservoir of truth?” (*Ibid*)

Then there came an appeal with reference to the studies of that quarter, also to the ones that were to follow for the next six quarters. As has been said, these were designed to cover all the essential doctrines of Seventh-day Adventism. This appeal said

“The opportunity of a lifetime is now before us to teach the truth to our neighbors and communities, for the Sabbath school lessons on Bible doctrines are well adapted to that very purpose.

The outline at the close of each lesson will helpfully guide in the matter; and as the present lessons on doctrines are fully authenticated by the lesson committee of the General Conference Sabbath School Department, any one can know that what he teaches as he presents the lesson as a Bible reading or a sermon is correct.” (*Ibid*)

Here we have the ultimate proof that the officially approved faith of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1936 was still that Christ is truly begotten of God (the Father) and that because of this He is a true Son (as seen in the lesson studies we have reviewed above). As it says here, these lessons were “fully authenticated by the lesson committee of the General Conference Sabbath School Department”. Notice too that it says that because of this, if anyone teaches these doctrines - as in the lesson studies - they can know that what they are teaching “is correct”. This is probably quite a realisation to those who say that the one time begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventists was error – or that by this time it had disappeared from Seventh-day Adventism.

There then followed an appeal that every Sabbath School teacher should be an instructor of the truth to those seeking baptism. It said

“With the instruction gained from week to week, when several quarters have passed the Sabbath school teachers should be competent instructors for baptismal classes, and can easily take charge of such classes for the evangelists. If there is no evangelist or pastor, the Sabbath school teacher can prepare candidates for baptism from the membership of his Sabbath school class, and then request that a minister be sent to baptize them.” (*Ibid*)

According to what is being said here, if the Sabbath School teacher instructed an individual in the teachings found in these 1936 lesson studies, this would be a

preparation for baptism. These beliefs were regarded as of prime importance – also that a belief in them was a prerequisite to church membership. It leaves one to wonder what would have been the result if a prospective baptismal candidate said that he (or she) did not believe that Christ was begotten of God (God’s true Son)?

Very interesting is that the following January (1937), also in the *Review and Herald*, there was an advert for a binder in which to keep these Sabbath School Lessons on “Bible Doctrines”. As we shall see very soon, this was because of a directive given at the previous 1936 General Conference held at San Francisco. It said in the *Review and Herald* concerning this binder

“It will preserve all your lesson pamphlets, covering Bible Doctrines as outlined in the Sabbath school lessons for seven full quarters. These lessons have been prepared under the careful supervision of the Sabbath School Department, and you will want to keep them. They are invaluable for continuous reference.” (*Review and Herald, January 14th 1937, ‘Preserve your Lesson Quarterlies on Bible Doctrines’*)

Again we can see that these sets of lesson studies were said to contain the truly authentic faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This was as it was during the time period leading up to the 1940’s. Notice how much care was taken in the preparation of these studies. They were said to be “invaluable for continuous reference”.

Regarding the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists, it was in the 1940’s that things began to change dramatically. We shall see this in later sections.

General Conference endorses the SS Lesson studies on “Bible Doctrines”

So how did these Sabbath School Lesson Studies come into being? In the General Conference Committee meeting notes of November 8th 1934 it is recorded

“We recommend, The following as ways and means for helping to foster and care for the large harvest of souls coming into our ranks annually:” (*General Conference Committee meeting minutes. November 8th 1934, page 1401*)

One of these “ways and means” was to produce a set of Sabbath School lessons explaining what were then the official beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. As the minutes went on to explain

“That the Sabbath School Department be requested to provide at an early date lessons as follows: On Bible doctrines.” (*Ibid*)

So it was that for the “foster and care” of people coming into our church, a set of Sabbath School lessons was to be prepared detailing our denominational beliefs.

These studies were to be known as “Bible Doctrines”. The same minutes also recorded the request

“That in the preparation of these lessons, our large and rapidly growing membership in mission lands be kept in mind, thus making it possible to adapt these lessons to the needs of the native mind.” (*Ibid*)

At the General Conference Committee meeting on December 6, 1935, it was reported under the heading of “Sabbath School Lesson Manuscripts”

“The Sabbath School Department desiring special help in their Lessons Committee during the time when they will be considering the manuscripts for the lessons on Bible doctrines, it was

VOTED, That I. H. Evans, W. H. Branson, O. Montgomery, M. E. Kern, F. M. Wilcox and W. E. Howell be appointed to read the manuscripts and sit with the Sabbath School Department Lessons Committee when consideration is given to the lessons on Bible doctrines,” (*General Conference Committee Minutes, December 6th 1935*)

These were the lesson studies that were to commence from the 4th quarter 1936. These leading figures of Seventh-day Adventism were voted to give “special help” to those compiling them (the Sabbath School Department). This reveals, at that time, how important these studies were to the General Conference. They did not wish them to contain error. As we shall now see, they were intended to tell the world what Seventh-day Adventists believed.

Note that F. M. Wilcox was appointed as one of the ‘helpers’ of the proposed Lesson Quarterlies. As we shall see in section forty-five, he was responsible for writing a statement of faith that was the first to include the word trinity. The latter was in 1931 – 5 years previous to these set of lesson studies we are now studying.

Prior to the above lesson studies being published (the 4th quarter of 1936 through to the 2nd quarter of 1938), they were also spoken of at the General Conference Session held previously that year (1936) in San Francisco. This discussion took place during the final day’s proceedings.

In the morning session, a number of items were discussed, one of which dealt with the question of music in the church. A resolution was passed encouraging all Seventh-day Adventists to cultivate a taste for only the best. There were also resolutions encouraging the youth to use only our songbooks in their meetings (rather than those books not of our denomination), also to use “old and tried advent hymns”. Apart from anything else, there was probably the worry that hymn books not published by our denomination could, in the songs it contained, include false doctrine. There was also passed a recommendation taking a strong stand against dancing - whilst it was also urged that the spirit of prophecy

writings should be earnestly studied and obeyed. A committee was also appointed to “study the advisability of preparing a new denominational hymnal”. The latter was approved and became the one we know as the *New Advent Hymnal* (1941).

After discussing a number of other items, there followed recommendations concerning the Sabbath School work. This included the “urging greater efforts toward the reaching of Sabbath School goals and standards” also “greater care in the selecting of Sabbath School teachers and officers”. There was concern that our teachings should be presented correctly. Other recommendations were made including the encouraging of branch Sabbath Schools.

In the afternoon session, the future Sabbath School Lessons came up for discussion. These were for the 7 consecutive quarters on “Bible Doctrines” spoken of above. In the *Review and Herald* report of the conference it said

“Beginning with the fourth quarter of 1936, the Sabbath school lessons for the denomination for seven consecutive quarters are to cover the essential doctrines of this message. It was recommended that our people everywhere be encouraged to use these lessons as a basis for conducting Bible readings and cottage meetings in the homes of neighbors and friends, and that Bible training classes be organized in every church for this purpose.”
(*Review and Herald, June 18th 1936, Report of the final day’s session at the 1936 General Conference held at San Francisco, ‘The Sabbath School Lessons for 1936’*)

We can now see why these Sabbath School lesson studies were so high profile. It was said at the General Conference session in 1936 that they were to cover “the essential doctrines” of our message. These studies were also recommended as a basis for conducting Bible Studies and organised cottage meetings etc. They were in fact the officially taught doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In the official report of the conference detailing the recommendations it said

“Beginning with the fourth quarter of 1936, the Sabbath school lessons for seven quarters will cover the essential doctrines of our faith; therefore, We recommend,

1. That in connection with the study of this important series of lessons, our people throughout the world be encouraged to use these lessons as a basis for conducting Bible readings and cottage meetings in the homes of their neighbors and friends.
2. That in preparation for this advance step, Bible training classes be organized in all our churches, as outlined by the General Conference Home Missionary Department.

3. That our publishing houses be requested to provide suitable loose-leaf folders for the use of those who desire to keep on file the series of Sabbath school lessons on Bible doctrines.” (*Review and Herald, June 18th 1936, ‘Proceedings of the General Conference, Thirty-second Meeting’*)

As can be seen from these few remarks, this set of studies on the “Bible Doctrines” of our church was indeed very high profile. This was not just another (an ordinary) set of Sabbath School lesson studies. Note too they were continued over 7 quarters, meaning from the 4th quarter of 1936 to the 2nd quarter of 1938. This is a very long time period for one set of lessons.

Four weeks later in the *Review and Herald* - this time under the title of *Home Missionary Department Meetings* - it spoke of the recent councils of the secretaries of the Home Missionary Department.

“All these departmental meetings interspersed through the General Conference session were marked by an earnest spirit of study to solve perplexing problems, and by intense desire to improve every moment of the opportunity afforded for binding off the discussions and plans developed in the pre-council, thus conserving and preserving the deliberations of the entire council for the future guidance of leaders in the layman's missionary movement when they will be widely separated throughout the great world field.

A great deal of time was required for the consideration of a topic of unusual interest,—how to make the most effective missionary use of the Sabbath school lessons on Bible doctrines which the Sabbath School Department has provided to be used beginning with the fourth quarter of 1936 and covering a period of seven consecutive quarters. The chairman explained that these lessons are prepared in a form which provides a simple outline for a Bible reading on each doctrinal subject.” (*Ibid*)

The chairman was then reported as saying

"For years there has been a demand from many parts of the field for a series of doctrinal Sabbath school lessons framed in such a way that our church members could use them as outlines for Bible studies in the homes of friends and neighbors. Now that we have such a set of lessons, we should thank God, and improve the opportunity to lead all our people into the broad field of Bible evangelism. It is estimated that there are about 100,000 Sabbath school teachers in our churches throughout the world, who will stand before their classes each week and give instruction on all doctrinal subjects. It would be wonderful if these hundred thousand Sabbath school teachers would spend a little time each week in teaching the lesson to groups of people or to individuals upon whose pathway the light of truth has not yet dawned.” (*Ibid*)

It is evident that these lesson studies were regarded as a blessing from God, therefore having His approval. It was even said that “we should thank God” for them. These lesson studies were also very much in demand from “the field”. The chairman also added

"But this is not all that we should aim to accomplish. Every member of each Sabbath school class should be encouraged to make contact with some person who is seeking for a better understanding of God's word, and in an informal way give him a Bible study each week on the lesson which he has already studied and received personal instruction upon in the Sabbath school class. What can we do, brethren, to lead the entire 'church at study' into the place where it becomes the entire 'church at work'?" (*Ibid*)

After reading the above, it should go without saying that these sets of studies on “Bible Doctrines” were highly recommended by the General Conference. They were to be used as teaching the truth to all those who had not yet received our message. According to the General Conference (this was as the 1940’s approached), this set of studies contained the “essential doctrines” of the faith of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We can safely assume therefore that these were still the denomination faith in the early part of the 1940’s. As has been said previously, it would be impossible to change the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists throughout the world overnight. To achieve this it would take time.

An interesting observation

In passing and as a matter of interest, I will now share something else with you. To some it may not seem very significant but I regard it as saying something very important.

In the final set of studies on “Bible Doctrines” (this was in the Sabbath School lessons for the 2nd quarter of 1938) it had as a sub-title to one section

“CHURCH MEMBERS SHARE FELLOWSHIP OF FATHER AND SON”
(*Sabbath School Lesson Studies, Bible Doctrines, Lesson 9 for May 28, 1938, page 26*)

Why do I regard this as significant? Ask yourself this question, why did not the lesson study say “Church Members Share Fellowship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit”? The answer is that just as it was during the time of the pioneers, the Holy Spirit was still not regarded as a person like God and Christ. To any thinking person, this statement will be very significant.

This same realisation also lends reality to the objections made to the trinity doctrine by Judson Washburn. This is because he said in a letter to the General Conference in 1940 (two years after these studies) objecting to the trinity doctrine

“This monstrous doctrine [the trinity doctrine] transplanted from heathenism

into the Roman Papal Church is seeking to intrude its evil presence into the teachings of the Third Angel's Message." (*Judson Washburn, The trinity, Letter to General Conference in 1939*)

Even though this may seem very surprising to some, the trinity doctrine in 1939 was not part of the fundamentals beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. As Washburn said, it was only then "seeking to intrude its evil presence into the teachings of the Third Angel's Message".

Judson Washburn was of the leading evangelists in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He had been baptised by James White and was a close friend of Ellen White. He kept her informed of the progress of the work wherever in the world it took him. He knew and understood perfectly the denominational faith of Seventh-day Adventists. He would also have agreed with these 1936 studies on the Godhead. It was the faith of Seventh-day Adventists that he had always taught.

One final but very startling realisation

What I am calling a startling realisation is that if someone today teaches within Seventh-day Adventism what was then - in the 1930's/1940's - the "essential doctrines" of this denomination (also endorsed by the General Conference as the truth) meaning that Christ is begotten of God and is truly the Son of God - then it is quite possible that this person would be frowned upon by our church - probably be called a heretic – also more than likely be subjected to some sort of church discipline. It may even be that they would be disfellowshipped from the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Even ministers could have their ministerial credentials withdrawn from them. Is not this a startling realisation? This shows how much, over the years, that the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists have changed.

Wrong interpretations of Seventh-day Adventist history

Since the beginning of this trinity controversy within Seventh-day Adventism, the claim has been made that it was the writings of Ellen White (especially what she wrote in *The Desire of Ages*) that led our church to become trinitarian. We shall see a few of these claims now. In 1969, in a term paper regarding the history of the trinity doctrine within Seventh-day Adventism, Russell Holt wrote with respect to the time period that we have been looking at in this section

"This period saw the death of most of those pioneers who had championed and held the anti-trinitarian position. Their places were being taken by men who were changing their thinking, or had never opposed the doctrine." (*Russell Holt, "The doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination: Its rejection and acceptance" 1969*)

Holt then said

"The trinity began to be published, until by 1931 it had triumphed and

become the standard denominational position. Isolated stalwarts remained who refused to yield, but the outcome had been decided.” (*Ibid*)

We can see from the above lesson studies, particularly those of 1936 (the set that detailed the essential, beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists) that Holt’s interpretation of our trinity history is not attested to by the facts. In 1936, we were still as non-trinitarian as we always had been. We still believed in the literal Sonship of Christ.

In a paper written in 1996, Merlin Burt wrote in opposition to Holt’s conclusions

“The [Seventh-day Adventist] church gradually shifted during from the 1930s to 1950s to the ‘orthodox’ Christian view on the trinity and deity of Christ” (*Merlin Burt, ‘Demise of Semi-Arianism and anti-trinitarianism in Adventist theology, 1888-1957 page 47*)

The latter is far more in keeping with the facts of history than that which was maintained by Russell Holt although I would not agree with Burt’s remarks concerning the deity of Christ. This is because as we have seen in previous sections, also in the Sabbath School lessons and articles above, Seventh-day Adventists have always believed in His complete and full deity - albeit it was from a non-trinitarian standpoint. In referring to the changed beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists over the years, William Johnsson, then editor of the *Adventist Review* said

“Some Adventists today think, that our beliefs have remained unchanged over the years, or they seek to turn back the clock to some point when we had everything just right. But all attempts to recover such “historic Adventism” fail in view of the facts of our heritage.

Adventists beliefs have changed over the years under the impact of present truth. Most startling is the teaching regarding Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord.” (*William Johnsson, Adventist Review January 6th 1994 Article ‘Present Truth - Walking in God’s Light’, 1994*)

This statement is most startling in itself. It is saying that over the years concerning Christ, the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists have changed. William Johnsson further explained

“Many of the pioneers, including James White, J. N. Andrews, Uriah Smith and J. H. Waggoner held to an Arian or semi-Arian view - that is, the Son at some point in time, before the creation of our world, was generated by the Father. Only gradually did this false doctrine give way to the Biblical truth, and largely under the impact of Ellen Whites writings in statements such as “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. (Desire of ages p 530)” (*Ibid*)

It is very sad that our present leadership is calling what was believed by our pioneers as “false doctrine” but this is how it is today within Seventh-day Adventism – but then again, we do not need to go as far back as the pioneers. We can see that William Johnsson is actually denying the faith of Seventh-day Adventists - as it was taught going into the 1940’s. This really is startling. He is saying that this begotten faith (Christ truly and literally the Son of God) was “false doctrine” - yet as we have seen above, the General Conference, during the late 1930’s, was calling it the truth – also that it should be taught to “groups of people or to individuals upon whose pathway the light of truth has not yet dawned” (see above). What is this saying about William Johnsson’s statement? Is it not saying that he believed that during the 1930’s (also going on into the 1940’s) our General Conference was teaching and promoting that which was false doctrine? This is quite a realisation.

In 1999, after referring to certain statements Ellen White made in *Desire of Ages* (also other statements she made around the time that this book was published), Gerhard Pfandl, Associate Director of the Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Research Institute wrote

“These statements clearly describe Christ as God in the highest sense. He is not derived from the Father as most Adventists up to that time believed, nor has divinity been bestowed upon him.” (*Gerhard Pfandl, Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Institute, ‘The doctrine of the trinity among Adventists’ 1999*)

Pfandl is making reference to the begotten Son concept. This was as it was held by Seventh-day Adventists during the time that Ellen White was alive, also as it was believed and taught decades after she died (see the 1930’s Sabbath School lessons above). His remark “up to that time” refers to when *Desire of Ages* was published (1898). As we have seen, this begotten concept was denominationally taught even going into the 1940’s.

This means that Pfandl is saying *as did William Johnsson) that what was being taught by Seventh-day Adventists in the late 1930’s/early 1940’s concerning Christ was error (false doctrine). These are very serious claims. In the next paragraph he says

“In spite of these clear statements from the pen of Ellen White, it took many years before this truth was accepted by the church at large.” (*Ibid*)

The “truth” referred to here is the belief of the co-eternity of Christ with the Father as portrayed in the trinity doctrine (the version held today by Seventh-day Adventists). The term “many years” is quite ambiguous. It could mean any length of time. As we can see from the above, trinitarianism took decades after Ellen White had died to become established within Seventh-day Adventism. Certainly it was not denominationally accepted as the 1940’s approached. Pfandl continued

“Not only did Uriah Smith, editor of the *Review and Herald*, believe until his death in 1903 that Christ had a beginning, but during the first decades of this century there were many who held on to the view that in some way Christ came forth from the Father, i.e., he had a beginning, and was therefore inferior to Him” (*Ibid*)

As can be clearly seen from what we have studied above, this “many” was the denomination as a whole – even the General Conference. Certainly it was not the minority. Notice that Pfandl presents the idea that because the belief was that “Christ came forth from the Father”, this made Him “inferior” to the Father. As we have seen from the above Sabbath School studies, this was definitely not the case. With their begotten faith, Seventh-day Adventists regarded Christ as God Himself in the person of His Son. Ellen White spoke of Christ many times in this way (see section nine of the *Begotten Series*). We can see therefore that Pfandl was setting up a straw man and knocking it down. Referring to certain discussions that took place at the 1919 Bible Conference, Pfandl also says

“This discussion indicates that twenty years after Ellen White’s clear statement on the eternal divinity of Christ and his absolute equality with the Father, many in the church still held on to the idea that Christ, although divine, had a beginning.” (*Ibid*)

As we can see from the above lesson studies, the begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventists continued long after the discussions of the 1919 Bible Conference. It went on into the 1940’s and beyond.

In Summary

From what we have read in this and the previous section, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as the 1940’s approached, was still teaching that Christ was truly begotten of God - therefore truly a Son and therefore truly God – and this was over 40 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*. Certainly this showed that God was not thought of as a trinity as purported in the trinity doctrine held by Seventh-day Adventists today (see No. 2 of their fundamental beliefs).

As we have seen from the above Sabbath School lesson studies for the 1920’s and the 1930’s - particularly the set for the final quarter of 1936 - statements of Ellen White regarding Christ - particularly those found in *Desire of Ages* – had not changed the denominational thinking of Seventh-day Adventists – even though it may have changed the thinking of some. As the 1940’s approached, the denominational belief was still the same as it always had been. This was that in the days of eternity, Christ was begotten of God therefore He is truly the Son of God and in conclusion God Himself.

All that I can reason in this matter (particularly of Ellen White saying that Christ had within Himself “life, original, unborrowed, underived”) is that by some it was misunderstood what she meant - and this is why by some, particularly as seen in the previous section, the two concepts (begotten and coeternal) were attempted

to be blended into one. I cannot see any other conclusion. It also seems that this was the forerunner of Seventh-day Adventists eventually adopting a trinity belief in which all three persons were unbegotten – meaning none of them having their source in the other.

The next section

In the next section (forty-three) we shall be taking a look at what I call an amazing experience. I find it amazing because I cannot fathom it.

What we shall see is that when he was challenged concerning the begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventists (this was in 1937, the year following when the first quarters set of Sabbath School lessons on *Bible Doctrines* was first published) a certain Seventh-day Adventist evangelist said that he was shocked that this had once been the faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This is truly an amazing testimony, particularly as it came from one of our evangelists.

For those who would like to read more about the 1936 lesson studies they can go here

<http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/godhead/1936sabbathschoolstudies.pdf>

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section forty-three

The Eckenroth experience

Although the 1940's were a state of flux for Seventh-day Adventist theology (meaning being in between theologies), trinitarianism was slowly but surely taking the place of what was once their non-trinitarian faith. In other words, in the 1940's within Seventh-day Adventism, trinitarianism was slowly but gradually becoming the norm although it had far from reached that latter stage.

Not every Seventh-day Adventist considered this development as progress - at least not in the sense of improvement. Some believed that this new theology was not in keeping with that which God had revealed to our pioneers (now becoming the old theology) so they would have regarded this move as a going back, (a returning) to one of the unscriptural traditions of Christianity. This transition therefore caused division amongst Seventh-day Adventists. We shall see this more clearly in later sections.

Whilst no exact date can be given for the actual establishment of trinitarianism within Seventh-day Adventism, it can be said that by the 1950's, particularly by the middle of this decade, our denomination was recognised as being trinitarian. We can see therefore that this changeover was very gradual. This is the way that it succeeded. Even today (2008), its theology is still evolving.

The revision of Adventist literature

As we have noted in previous sections, amongst the things that our denomination found crucial to accomplish in accommodating this new theology (trinitarianism) was that certain of the books that our pioneers had written were gradually allowed to go out of print. This was such as *Looking Unto Jesus*, which in its time was said to impressively depict the message of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, also *The Seer of Patmos* etc. This was the very literature that Seventh-day Adventists had once accepted as being standard (the norm). It had depicted a theology that can only be described as non-trinitarian.

As we also have noted, there was one particular book that could not be taken out of circulation therefore it needed a severe editing. This book was the classic publication *Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation* written by Uriah Smith.

Another such book that was edited to suit the new theology was *Bible Readings for the Home Circle*. This latter editing was accomplished in 1949. Whilst the

actual change in wording in this latter named book was minimal, it was absolutely crucial with regards to theology. This had to do with the human nature of the incarnate Christ. Whilst today many Seventh-day Adventists have both of these titles on their bookshelves, it is more than likely that they are not as they were originally written. In other words, they will probably have the edited versions of these books. Whilst we will not go into detail here about the actual editing that was done to either of these publications, it is interesting to note that in his *Movement of Destiny*, LeRoy Froom proudly summarised this so called achievement. He said to his readers

“The removal of the last standing vestige of Arianism in our standard literature was accomplished through the deletions from the classic D&R [meaning Daniel and the Revelation] in 1944. And the lingering “sinful-nature-of-Christ” misconception was remedied by expunging the regrettable note in the revised Bible Readings of 1949.” (*Froom ‘Movement of Destiny’, chapter ‘Changing the Impaired Image of Adventism’ page 465*)

This statement cannot be read without sensing the attitude of victory with which it was written. Froom’s emphasis is on the expunging of the non-trinitarianism (Arianism as he terms it) from two of our once standard books. Note he says that it was from “our standard literature”. This in itself helps to confirm that the views espoused in these books were not just the personal views of some (as Froom purports throughout his *Movement of Destiny*) but were in fact the accepted (standard) denominational view.

With regards to our past non-trinitarian literature, also with reference to our changeover to trinitarianism, there is a very interesting story that is well worth noting. This is because it not only highlights some of the problem areas that any denomination has when attempting to change their faith but also shows how Seventh-day Adventists accommodated this being in between (betwixt) theologies.

During the time period of our changeover from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism, this story is probably representative of the experience of many Seventh-day Adventists, thus this entire section is devoted to the relating of it.

Melvin Eckenroth and ‘Daniel and the Revelation’

In his book *Movement of Destiny*, Froom quotes from a letter written by Melvin Eckenroth.

Eckenroth was a Seventh-day Adventist evangelist who, as we shall see in this section, had an unwelcome experience with Uriah Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation*. This was in 1937 – which was the transition time between non-trinitarianism and trinitarianism. It was also the year following the publication of the set of Sabbath School Lesson studies that we reviewed in the previous section (the 4th quarter of 1936). Regarding the Godhead, these latter studies revealed that the faith we were teaching then in 1936 was the same faith as was

believed by Seventh-day Adventists whilst Ellen White was alive. This was the faith that maintained at some point in eternity, too far back for the human mind to even imagine it, the Son of God was begotten (brought forth) of the Father. As we duly noted, this to Seventh-day Adventists did not mean that the Son was a lesser divine being than the Father (or another god) but that He was God Himself in the person of the Son. To old-time Seventh-day Adventists therefore, the Son of God was God.

In his letter, Eckenroth recounted his experience with Smith's book but before we look at it we shall consider the man himself.

After holding a number of pastoral positions within Seventh-day Adventism, Eckenroth (1914-1975) held a number of other posts. These were such as associate secretary in the General Conference Ministerial Association (1947), chairman of the Department of Field Ministries for the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary (1951) and President for the New Jersey Conference (1958). In 1963 he joined the faculty of Columbia Union College where until his death in 1975 he remained chairman (head) of its Religion Department. We can see therefore that after having this unwelcome experience with Uriah Smith's book, Eckenroth eventually became a prominent figure in Seventh-day Adventism.

Note that Eckenroth was not born until 1914. This means that he did not intimately know any of the early pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism. The last of what I would call the original pioneers, John Loughborough, died in 1924 when Eckenroth was only 10 years of age. Note too that by the time that Eckenroth had reached his mid teens, the move towards trinitarianism was under way.

In his letter to Froom, Eckenroth recounted that the year 1937 had found him conducting what he terms his "first evangelistic Tabernacle' campaign". He also said that being fresh from college (he was now in his early 20's) he was eager to make it a success so he 'threw himself' into the meetings. He said of this experience

"Schooled as I had been in 'defense of the faith once delivered unto the saints,' I carried out the injunction literally.

I worked hard and long. The subjects were so completely camouflaged that our own people did not know when I was to speak on the Sabbath question and kindred truths".(M. K. Eckenroth, letter, as quoted in *Movement of Destiny* page 624, 'Assuring harbingers of the coming advance – No. 2')

As we shall see later, if by his remarks Eckenroth meant the "faith" (beliefs) of our pioneers then he did not defend that particular faith at all. Rather it seems he defended the new theology (trinitarianism). Interestingly, Eckenroth did admit that until each of the individual evangelistic meetings was actually presented, their content was kept well and truly secret. He said that this was particularly so

regarding the Sabbath. He said in his letter. With regards to the subject matter of each meeting, there is shown here a distinct reticence by Eckenroth to be up front about it. Typically, as we shall see later, these meetings were not advertised as being Seventh-day Adventist. As Eckenroth put it

“Thus, in an aura of anonymity and legalism, our meetings proceeded through the series” (*Ibid*)

Eckenroth then related how at times he had debated during these meetings with both a Nazarene and a Church of God preacher. He also said that at the close of one particular meeting (the one in which he had dealt with Daniel chapter 7), the Nazarene had publicly addressed him saying

“Some of my people are interested in joining the SDA Church. I therefore want publicly to ask you some questions, so they will know what they are getting into” (*Ibid*)

Eckenroth went on to say that because he considered this to be both a fair request and a wonderful opportunity (one assumes an opportunity to witness), he agreed to accommodate the Nazarene. What happened next though completely surprised him.

In front of the entire audience, the Nazarene held up a copy of Uriah Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation* (this was prior to its 1940’s editing) and then asked Eckenroth if the Seventh-day Adventist Church had published it. Eckenroth acknowledged this to be true. He also agreed when questioned that just as he was presenting them in his current meetings, this book detailed the prophecies of the Bible. Eckenroth also explained (again when asked) that Smith’s book was indeed a standard work in Seventh-day Adventism. The Nazarene then requested of Eckenroth

“Is this author [Uriah Smith] recognized as one of your leaders?” (*Ibid*)

Eckenroth answered

“Indeed so. He was one of our finest early writers and authors.” (*Ibid*)

The Nazarene then said to Eckenroth

“Then, sir, please explain your position on the nature of Christ as stated on page 430 (edition of 1926).” (*Ibid*)

It appears from this statement that Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation* had a printing in 1926 which was 28 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*. The latter is the book that pro-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists say today led our denomination to accept the trinity doctrine. It seems therefore that in 1926, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still happy to continue to print Smith’s book,

even though it was decidedly non-trinitarian. As we shall see later, the Pacific Press printed this book.

When considered - at least as far as their beliefs regarding Christ was concerned - why shouldn't Seventh-day Adventists be happy? What Smith wrote in his book concerning Christ was exactly the same as was said in the 4th quarter's Sabbath School lessons of 1936. It was that Christ, in His pre-existence, was truly begotten of the Father therefore He is truly a Son (see previous section).

According to Eckenroth, the Nazarene then proceeded to quote from Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation*. This is where Smith comments on the verses of Revelation 5:11-14. Important to note is that in *Movement of Destiny*, it is quite possible that the entirety of what the Nazarene had quoted at that meeting (or what Eckenroth quoted in his letter) is not cited. Certainly what is missing is Smith's reasoning for his conclusions (testimonies from the Scriptures as Smith called them).

Here is what Froom quoted was read by the Nazarene. Please note the ellipsis denoting missing words. We shall return our thoughts to this later. Froom quoted

“But while as the Son he does not possess a co-eternity of past existence with the Father, the beginning of his existence, as the begotten of the Father, *antedates the entire work of creation, in relation to which he stands as joint creator with God.* John 1:3; Heb. 1:2. Could not the Father ordain that to such a being worship should be rendered equally with himself, without its being idolatry on the part of the worshiper? He has raised him to positions *which make it proper that he should be worshipped, and has even commanded that worship should be rendered him, which would not have been necessary had he been equal with the Father in eternity of existence.* ... These testimonies show that Christ is now an object of worship equally with the Father; but *they do not prove that with him he holds an eternity of past existence.*” (*Ibid pages 624-625*)

Notice that Smith said that the Son of God was not equal with the Father in “eternity of existence”. He never said that the Son was not equal with the Father as far as His divinity was concerned.

Smith's view of Christ was indeed the non-trinitarianism that throughout the time of Ellen White's ministry was the faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This is why there were no objections to what Uriah Smith had written in his book - which was replete with similar statements and sentiments. Important to remember too is that up to the time of Eckenroth's evangelistic meetings (1937), Smith's book had been in circulation for almost 70 years. It also had numerous reprints. This was as well as having the endorsement and the approbation of Ellen White (see section thirty-eight for more details). It reflected to a great degree the theology (beliefs) of the early Seventh-day Adventist Church else it would not have existed for so long as being a standard book. This much is only reasonable to

believe. Remember also in section thirty-eight, we noted that it was the first of the doctrinal books sold by our colporteurs.

The above paragraph in Smith's original work, as well as its associated wording on the same page, was omitted in the 1944 edited version. In fact two entire pages were omitted. In the original, Smith had written almost 1050 words on revelation 5:13 whilst in the edited 1944 edition it was reduced to 340 words. Such was the severity in the editing' of this much loved and much-appreciated Seventh-day Adventist classic.

This 1940's editing was not the first editing to be done to Smith's book. To an extent it does appear to have been done previously. Allow me to explain.

As well as the edited 1944 of Smith's book, I have in my possession a 1903 edition that was printed in America, also a 1919 edition printed in England. In the 1903 edition (the year that Smith died), Smith's statement (as quoted above) is there but it is not in the 1919 edition that was published in England at the Stanborough Park Press. In that particular printing, these remarks in Smith's book (as quoted by the Nazarene and also as in the 1903 edition) have been completely removed. From this we can see that even prior to the 1940's editing, there were various editions in print that had some of the overtly non-trinitarian remarks already removed.

It looks as though the edition that Eckenroth referred to had been edited to a degree but only in the sense of rewording, meaning not taking away the import of what Smith had written. I say this because it says in a said to be 1911 edition that I found online (this is the same words as quoted by the Nazarene)

“But while as the Son he does not possess a co-eternity of past existence with the Father, the beginning of his existence, as the begotten of the Father, antedates the entire work of creation, in relation to which he stands as joint creator with God. John 1:3; Heb. 1:2.” (*Daniel and the Revelation, 1911? Edition, page 401*)

Note the first four words. Now note what Smith originally said in the 1903 edition

“But while he does not possess a co-eternity of past existence with the Father, the beginning of his existence, as the begotten of the Father, antedates the entire work of creation, in relation to which he stands as joint creator with God. John 1:3; Heb. 1:2.” (*Uriah Smith, Daniel and the Revelation, 1903 edition, page 401*)

This shows that the 1911 edition was edited. This editing can also be seen where in the 1911 edition it says (this is immediately prior to what Fromm said the Nazarene quoted)

“The Scriptures nowhere speak of Christ as a created being, but on the

contrary plainly state that he was begotten of the Father. [See remarks on Rev. 3:14, where it is shown that Christ is not a created being.]” (*Daniel and the Revelation 1911 edition*)

Smith had originally written

“The Scriptures certainly clearly intimate that the existence of Christ had a beginning. (John 1:1), which was not so in the case of the Father. (See remarks on Rev. 3:14, where it is shown that Christ is not a created being.) (*Uriah Smith, Daniel and the Revelation, 1903 edition, page 401*)

The 1911 edition is a slightly mellowed down version of what Smith had originally written. Here therefore are just two places where these two editions (1903 and 1911) differ. The author of these two notes has not yet studied to find more differences. What Smith had written in his book was no different than what was said in those 1936 Sabbath School lesson studies that we noted in the previous section. This study said (in citing John 16:27, 28 and John 8:58, also after asking “What testimony concerning His deity did Christ Himself give”)

“The direct statement of Jesus, "I came forth from the Father," reads literally, "I came out of the Father." Putting with this, His testimony in John 10:38, "The Father is in Me, and I in Him," we have His personal witness that He truly was "begotten of the Father," as John says in 1:14.” (*Sabbath School Lesson Study, 4th quarter 1936, Lesson 4, October 24th 1936, page 12. 'The Godhead'*)

The lesson also said

“Cumulative evidence that the Son existed with the Father before creation is abundant in the Scriptures. In the few passages we have studied here, we find that Christ was with the Father "before the world was," "from, the days of eternity," "before the foundation of the world," "before all things." He was therefore no part of creation, but was "begotten of the Father" in the days of eternity, and was very God Himself.” (*Ibid*)

This was no different than what Smith had said in his *Daniel and the Revelation*.

Referring back to what the Nazarene quoted (as found in *Movement of Destiny*), we noted the ellipses denoting words that had been omitted. These were the “testimonies” from Scripture that Smith had used to show that Christ warranted worship equally with the Father but “do not prove that with him he holds an eternity of past existence” (see above). Smith had written

“Christ Himself declares that “As the Father has life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself.” John 5:26. The Father has “Highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name.” Phil. 2:9. And the Father Himself says, “Let all the angels of God worship Him.” Heb.

1:6" (*Ibid*)

Note particularly here that Smith quite rightly points out that Jesus said that it was His Father who had given to Him "to have life in Himself" also that the Scriptures say that the Father commanded the angels to worship Christ. This is the point in the book when Smith says

"These testimonies show that Christ is now an object of worship equally with the Father; but *they* do not prove that with him he holds an eternity of past existence." (*Ibid*)

As has been previously noted, what Smith had written on these pages, as well as all of his other non-trinitarian remarks, were completely expunged from the edited 1944 edition of *Daniel and the Revelation* (the edition you probably have on your bookshelf) therefore his beliefs regarding Christ were deliberately obscured. This editing also eclipses what was then, in the early 1900's, the standard belief of Seventh-day Adventists. As we noted above, Froom referred to both the books of *Daniel and the Revelation* and *Bible Readings for the Home Circle* as being standard books. This non-trinitarian statement Smith had written in the 1903 edition of his book and it was the same in the 1911 edition but it was omitted in the edited 1919 (British) and 1944 versions of *Daniel and the Revelation*.

Returning our thoughts to Eckenroth's encounter with the Nazarene, Eckenroth said that he had tried to deny to the Nazarene that Smith had actually written these things. He wrote

"This was a challenge for which I was totally unprepared. My feeble response was, "Sir, you must be mistaken. Our Smith surely didn't write that. The book you have in your hand must be that of another". (*M. K. Eckenroth, letter, as quoted in Movement of Destiny' page 625, 'Assuring harbingers of the coming advance – No. 2'*)

It goes without saying that "another" had not written it. Uriah Smith had definitely written it. Eckenroth had encountered a very embarrassing ministerial moment.

Eckenroth embarrassed

Eckenroth appears to have been quite shocked at what he had heard read from Smith's book. This shows that his beliefs were not in keeping with the beliefs of Uriah Smith neither had he realised that Smith's belief had once been – and till were - the standard teaching of Seventh-day Adventists. We noted this in the previous section when we reviewed the 1936 Sabbath School Lesson Studies. In one sense, seeing that Eckenroth had been trained at the Emmanuel Missionary College and Andrews University, all of this was rather strange. Even so, he still did not appear to know what Seventh-day Adventists once believed.

It also seems strange that Eckenroth did not relate what was in Smith's book to

the previous quarter's Sabbath School lesson studies (4th quarter 1936). Did he not realise, even as a Seventh-day Adventist evangelist, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still teaching that Christ was begotten of the Father (see previous section)? This really does seem strange. Regardless of the answer to this question, there was no getting out of it. As Eckenroth related, the Nazarene clearly pointed out that the Pacific Press of Mountain View California had printed Smith's book. Eckenroth then concluded that he had been tricked (or so he says in his letter). On the basis of this he asked the Nazarene for 24 hours to come up with an answer. Eckenroth then promised that during the next evening he would discuss the matter publicly.

Eckenroth then related that when he returned home, he took his "trusted" *Daniel and the Revelation* and turned to the page from which the Nazarene had quoted. He says of this experience

"I hurried to my study and pulled from the shelf my trusted D and R – the copy we used as a text in college. I was sure I could show this preacher to be a trickster. Quickly I turned to page 430, confident the statement would not be there. Amazed, bewildered, and absolutely dumfounded, I read there the very words the Nazarene preacher had cited! (*Ibid*)

Then, in an explanation as to why he had never before seen these words, Eckenroth explains

"(In college we had somehow skipped this page.) I just couldn't believe my eyes! (*Ibid*)

This is quite an amazing confession.

When studying Uriah Smith's book with the students, are we to believe that the college teachers deliberately skipped this page - and what about all the other non-trinitarian statements in *Daniel and the Revelation*, the ones that caused this book to be totally rewritten - how did Eckenroth manage to miss all of them? Did the teachers skip them all? Note that Eckenroth does say that the copy of Smith's book that he had then was the copy that he and his fellow students had "used as a text in college". They were not using two different versions.

It must also be asked if Eckenroth had also missed seeing the previous quarter's Sabbath school studies. These were the ones that said that Christ was literally begotten of the Father and that His personality did have a beginning (see previous section). It would have been amazing if he had missed them. Did he not involve himself in these lessons? Eckenroth continued

"Crushed, disillusioned, and deeply perplexed, I called S. E. Wight, my conference president. He was well advanced in years – a living link with a most important era in Seventh-day Adventism that I had scarcely heard about. He invited me to his office the next day. I arrived early in the morning

and stayed all day. Patiently he told me all about '1888' - a date barely mentioned in class notes." (*Ibid*)

I find this another truly amazing confession. Eckenroth admitted that although he had gone through Seventh-day Adventist College and also his ministerial training, he had 'scarcely heard about' the past non-trinitarianism in Seventh-day Adventism. Is this the admittance that in our colleges in the 1930's we were already suppressing this part of our history? Again it must be asked, what about the previous quarter's lesson studies (the 4th quarter 1936) - and what about what Seventh-day Adventists generally believed at that time which must have been in keeping with those Sabbath school studies.

It is also amazing that with regard to 1888 (one of the most important dates in Seventh-day Adventist history) Eckenroth says that it was "a date barely mentioned in class notes". This leads one to wonder what really was then being taught to prospective ministers in our colleges. Our non-trinitarian faith was being played down - even in our teaching institutions.

We also need to ask here, how can ministers (or anyone else for that matter) teach to others what they do not know themselves? Obviously they cannot! The result of this I have experienced for myself. Just a few years ago a Seventh-day Adventist minister attempted to have me believe that Waggoner's message at Minneapolis was strictly trinitarian. As we have seen for ourselves in section twenty and section twenty-one (also other sections), it was definitely non-trinitarian. How could this minister therefore teach the truth concerning our history?

In keeping with what many came to regard as being the standard practice within Seventh-day Adventist evangelism, Eckenroth also admitted to hiding the fact that these meetings were run by Seventh-day Adventists. He said

"After the people found out that I was an Adventist – and especially following the Sabbath question – the crowd fell away. I was told this was to be expected – people were opposing us. I had been assured that this also was a sign of progress." (*Ibid*)

Eckenroth then admitted that it was not this falling away of the audience that had bothered him so much but his own ignorance about what his own church was then teaching about Christ. This, especially for someone who had gone through college and was running an evangelistic meeting on behalf of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, is quite an admittance. Eckenroth said in his letter

"But this issue was something else. The nature of my Lord was involved. Just what did my church believe anyway?" (*Ibid*)

There was total confusion in the mind of Eckenroth. He did not even appear to understand what Seventh-day Adventists then believed and taught about Christ.

Remember, this was when our theology regarding Christ was in a state of flux although our Sabbath school quarterlies were still advocating the begotten faith held by them during Ellen White's ministry.

There also seemed to be confusion in Eckenroth's mind as to what the pioneers had believed and taught about Christ - the latter being the most important teaching of the Scriptures. This lack of knowledge, seeing that he was the preacher in this evangelistic campaign, also that he had just come through Seventh-day Adventist College, is almost unbelievable. Eckenroth then relates

“Wight told me the story of the *Desire of Ages*, and its marvellous statement that ‘in Him is life, original, unborrowed, underived.’ I now began to understand both the Smith book and the issues back of it all. Smith's was a personal view.” (*Ibid*)

Eckenroth does not explain further what he means by his remark “and the issues back of it all” (or if he did then it is not related in Froom's book) but we can see that we have come back again to the idea, as is being purported today by so many Seventh-day Adventist trinitarians, that it was this famous statement (and seemingly the well most used) in *Desire of Ages* that changed the denominational thinking concerning Christ.

As has been said before, there is no evidence in our history to even suggest that this particular statement (or the publication of the book itself) affected our theology - at least not whilst Ellen White was alive. This happened only after she had died and was done in an attempt to justify the bringing in of the trinity doctrine. By this time of course, being dead, Ellen White could not make any objections to how her words were being used (or misused). The truth of the matter is that I cannot find anywhere in our history, whilst Ellen White was alive, where at anytime as a denomination we changed our beliefs about Christ. All that I can find are pleas and warnings from Ellen White not to change them (see especially section twenty-nine).

Speaking from a personal perspective, this claim of our church about this Ellen White statement always amazes me. This is because Jesus Himself was very clear when He said

“For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself. And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man.” John 5:26-27

It is no wonder then that Ellen White describes this life in Christ as “original, unborrowed” and “underived.” It is the life of the Father. We have also seen that Smith (in his *Daniel and the Revelation*) used this verse in exactly the same way (see above, also comments from Ellen White regarding this verse in the previous section).

Just personal views - again

Wight convinced Eckenroth that Smith's non-trinitarian view (as was read by the Nazarene and printed in the original *Daniel and the Revelation*) was contrary to that which during the time of Ellen White had been taught by Seventh-day Adventists. This we know because Wight said to Eckenroth (as we noted above)

“Smith's was a personal view.” (*Wight to M. K. Eckenroth, letter, as quoted in Movement of Destiny' page 625, Assuring harbingers of the coming advance – No. 2*)

Here we return to exactly the same reasoning of LeRoy Froom when in his *Movement of Destiny* he said that the majority of the early pioneers had been trinitarian (which we know today that they were not) and that it was only a few who had managed to get their non-trinitarian views into print (we shall see in section fifty-two that he said that these non-trinitarian views were just the personal views of some).

As has been said so many times before, we know that this latter reasoning is not true. This is because what Uriah Smith had written in his *Daniel and the Revelation* was indeed, all during the ministry of Ellen White, the basic faith of Seventh-day Adventists. We have also seen in the previous section that it was still the same in our Sabbath school quarterlies in 1936.

This letter of Eckenroth's was published in *Movement of Destiny* therefore we can rightly assume that even when in 1971 this book was published, Eckenroth still believed that these were just Smith's personal views and not the faith (in Smith's time) of Seventh-day Adventists. I say rightly assume because I would like to think that if Eckenroth had realised by then (1971) that these were not just Smith's personal views but were in fact the standard faith of the denomination, then he would have said so, not lead astray the readers of his letter as it was published in *Movement of Destiny*.

If this is true it is quite a realisation! I say this because it must mean that in 1971, Eckenroth, who as we have noted above had held such prominent positions in Seventh-day Adventism, still did not realise that during Smith's time (Smith died in 1903), Seventh-day Adventists in general were non-trinitarian. In other words, if Eckenroth did know by 1971 that Seventh-day Adventists (during the time of Uriah Smith) were non-trinitarians then why leave the readers of his letter to conclude that what Smith believed about Christ were just his personal views? The same could be said too of Wight. Unless he was telling lies to Eckenroth (which we must not assume that he was doing), then we must conclude that in 1937 he did not know either that Seventh-day Adventists were once a non-trinitarian denomination.

If this is true, then this is another amazing realisation because in his early years, Wight had attended the Battle Creek College and in his late 20's (in 1895), entered the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He was ordained in

1901 and then in 1902 became president of the North Michigan Conference. Ten years later in 1912 he was made president of the Southern Union Conference, a responsibility that he held for eight years. He was also for 8 years the president to the Central Union and served as president of the West Michigan Conference. When the Michigan conferences were united he became president of the combined conference.

It can only be assumed therefore that Wight must have known what Seventh-day Adventists believed in the late 1890's. He also knew exactly what they believed in the early 1900's when the crisis came about concerning Kellogg. He was also a delegate at the 1905 General Conference where Ellen White pleaded with the delegates not to change what she regarded as their God given faith. This was when their denominational faith was still non-trinitarian. He also had the privilege of recently reading the 1936 Sabbath school lesson studies on the Godhead. How Wight can say therefore that Smith's views regarding Christ were just his personal views is left totally to the imagination.

Eckenroth explains

Eckenroth related that when he reached the tabernacle that night it was packed. This he said was because word had gotten around that the Nazarene preacher had the Seventh-day Adventist preacher "over a barrel". Eckenroth said that after the opening exercises of the meeting he began to preach and in so doing explained how what Smith had written in his *Daniel and the Revelation* was just the author's personal views. Eckenroth then stated that he had recounted his visit to the president's office and explained

"I retold what little I could learn of 1888 in one day, and read the authoritative statements from the Spirit of Prophecy that had become a firm anchor to my faith, which had just been severely tested in the crucible of this challenge" (*M. K. Eckenroth, letter, as quoted in Movement of Destiny' page 625, Assuring harbingers of the coming advance – No. 2*)

It appears that Eckenroth had very little (if any) knowledge of what happened in 1888, even though he had gone through Seventh-day Adventist College. What I find strange here is that Waggoner's message at Minneapolis, which was said by Ellen White to have been the message that God wanted His people to hear, was in fact a strictly non-trinitarian message. It was a message that said that Christ had a beginning of days (see section twenty). I cannot understand therefore, why Eckenroth's emphasis was on 1888. Had he been persuaded by someone that Waggoner's message had been trinitarian?

We have also seen in section twenty that Ellen White endorsed Waggoner's views. This she did by saying that Christ was indeed begotten of God in eternity, although she did make it clear that our Saviour's pre-existent life could not be measured by human computation (see section fifteen also section seven of the *Begotten Series*). This was apart from other denominational literature that had said the very same.

In his letter, Eckenroth then related that he stated publicly that the Nazarene had done himself (Eckenroth) a great service and that he was sure that this evangelistic campaign would mark a turning point in his own life. Eckenroth then said to the Nazarene

“I long to know more of my transcendent Lord and preach Him, and His Deity, ever more completely. This is the mission of my church.” (*Ibid*)

Very interestingly, Eckenroth relates that following this episode with the Nazarene, he began to grasp what he calls “those amazing statements” found in the spirit of prophecy. He also said that he needed to know more. To achieve this end he relates that he requested study leave and that it was granted to him. He says of this experience

“I was majoring in systematic theology. My concentration was on the Trinity and the Nature of Christ. Then came another jolt.” (*Ibid, page 626*)

This makes Eckenroth’s experience even more amazing. He then explains what constituted that “jolt”. He says in his letter

“In my quest I found J. H. Waggoner’s book on the atonement, and read his denial of the Trinity, and his Arian like views on the nature of Christ. Contrasting this with his son, E J Waggoner’s views, I found the depth of these issues becoming ever more apparent.” (*Ibid*)

This “jolt” was the end result of not having a correct understanding of our history, also being ignorant of what we were then teaching. If Eckenroth had understood it then he would not have received such a surprise. This is much the same as it is today. When those who have an incorrect understanding of our denominational history hear the truth concerning it they are very often surprised.

Having said that, I still cannot understand what Eckenroth means when he says that when contrasting J. H. Waggoner’s views with those of E. J. Waggoner’s, that “the depth of these issues becoming ever more apparent”. Why I say this is because E. J. Waggoner was just as non-trinitarian as his father (see section thirty-seven for the views of J. H. Waggoner). We noted E. J. Waggoner’s views in section twenty. This is where he had said that God the Father had existed before the Son (the begotten faith).

The year following, E. J. Waggoner said exactly the same as he did at the Minneapolis Conference. This is when he said in 1889 (this was when defending the Seventh-day Adventist belief concerning the divinity of Christ) that the Son was not the same age as the Father (see section twenty-one). This really is anti-trinitarianism.

By the time of Eckenroth’s experience with Uriah Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation* (1937), books like J. H Waggoner’s non-trinitarian *The Atonement*

had ceased from publication whilst books of a new order were being published. These were books that unlike our publications in the past, were now presenting more of a trinitarian view of God and Christ.

In section thirty-seven we noted what J. H. Waggoner had said in his book, also what he had said in his articles on *The Atonement*, therefore we will not repeat it here, suffice to say that what he wrote really was anti-trinitarian, meaning that he stated very clearly that he believed that the trinity doctrine denied the efficacy of the atonement. This was because, so he said, that only divinity could pay the price of our redemption and not just humanity. He claimed that for atonement, trinitarians only had a human sacrifice and not one that was divine. Waggoner wrote

“Many theologians really think that the Atonement, in respect to its dignity and efficacy, rests upon the doctrine of a trinity. But we fail to see any connection between the two.” (*J. H. Waggoner, ‘The Atonement in Light of Nature and Revelation’, 1884 Edition, chapter ‘Doctrine of a Trinity Subversive of the Atonement’*)

Note the “we” here. Waggoner is referring to Seventh-day Adventists. As we shall see now, Waggoner said that Seventh-day Adventists then believed that the trinity doctrine sullied the atonement. He said

“To the contrary, the advocates of that doctrine really fall into the difficulty which they seem anxious to avoid. Their difficulty consists in this: They take the denial of a trinity to be equivalent to a denial of the divinity of Christ. Were that the case, we should cling to the doctrine of a trinity as tenaciously as any can; but it is not the case. They who have read our remarks on the death of the Son of God know that we firmly believe in the divinity of Christ; but we cannot accept the idea of a trinity, as it is held by Trinitarians, without giving up our claim on the dignity of the sacrifice made for our redemption.” (*Ibid*)

Here we can see that Waggoner said that in the eyes of Seventh-day Adventists, the trinity doctrine corrupted the atonement. This is because this teaching says that the pre-existent divine Son of God never really died at Calvary (He is always alive in the substance of God) but only human nature died. Thus it is that as atonement for sin, trinitarians only have a human sacrifice. Certainly they do not have one that is divine. These were views expressed through our publications. Note Waggoner says that Seventh-day Adventists “firmly believe in the divinity of Christ”. This was in 1884, four years previous to the famous 1888 Minneapolis General Conference.

All of this was no different than Waggoner had written in his article in the *Review and Herald* in 1863 that was a precursor to his book we have just quoted from – which was

“Of course we cannot believe what men say about his being equal with God in every respect, and that the Divine Son of God could not suffer nor die.” These are mere human words.” (J. H. Waggoner, *Review and Herald*, November 10th 1863, ‘*The Atonement part II*’)

Returning our thoughts to Eckenroth He said that when he contrasted J. H. Waggoner’s views with those of E. J. Waggoner, the situation became deepened. How could he explain it he reasoned? He said

“I took the statements to the head of the department, and asked, ‘Is it possible that we would ever publish this? Is this really our J H Waggoner? How do you explain it?’ In typical, cryptic fashion he [Wight] replied, ‘Yes, it is our J H Waggoner. Read on. It is for you to explain’.” (M. K. Eckenroth, *letter, as quoted in Movement of Destiny’ page 625, Assuring harbingers of the coming advance – No. 2*)

At that time, Eckenroth appears very ignorant of our past history (meaning what was once believed and taught by our pioneers). Why this should be, especially as he had only just recently graduated from college, really does leave one to wonder. Then comes what I regard as another amazing conclusion. Notice that Wight told Eckenroth that it was for him “to explain” how our past literature was once non-trinitarian. This is when Eckenroth says

“J H Waggoner’s also was a personal view.” (*Ibid*)

During Ellen White’s time, if what Eckenroth said is to be believed, there seems to be a lot of just personal views that were being printed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We know today though that these views were not just the personal views of some but were in fact the views of Seventh-day Adventists at large. This can even be seen in the 1936 Sabbath School lessons (see previous section)

In section thirty-seven we noted that J. H. Waggoner (a very well known man of high office) had his publication known as *The Atonement* printed five times over the space of 21 years. We also noted his use of ‘we’ and ‘us’ and ‘our’ etc, thus denoting that he was referring to Seventh-day Adventists as a whole. I would have thought that the fact that it had all these printings in the *Review and Herald*, also in the *Signs of the Times* as well as three printings as a book (especially as it was over a period of 21 years), would have been enough for anyone to realise that what he had written was not just his own personal views but that of the denomination he represented.

I find it truly amazing that anyone can believe that both Uriah Smith’s views and those of J. H. Waggoner were just personal views. I say this because by 1937, Smiths book had numerous printings over a period of about 70 years and was considered standard in Seventh-day Adventism (it was the first doctrinal book sold by our colporteurs) whilst Waggoner’s *The Atonement in the Light of Nature*

and Revelation had five printings over 21 years. Just a brief look at our history would have drawn the conclusion that these views were those of the main body of Seventh-day Adventists. That is not even taking into consideration that highly regarded book of Smith's *Looking Unto Jesus*. This is a book that was very highly acclaimed yet was decidedly non-trinitarian (see section thirty-nine). Eckenroth ended his testimony

“Forgive this extended recital of my own transformed experience. But, privileged to be a reader of the Movement of Destiny manuscript, my heart cried out in exultation over its presentation. I pray it will accomplish in the lives of all who read – especially our theological students – what its principles did in my own ministry. How I wish I had its message in my early ministerial years! Who can know how many more souls would have been born into the kingdom? And if we had all had the vision called for, perhaps the work could have been finished and we would all be home by now.” (*Ibid*, pages 625-626)

We shall see in section fifty-two that regarding the pioneer's beliefs concerning the Godhead, Froom's *Movement of Destiny* completely misrepresented the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We shall see too how I was once deceived by it. Eckenroth considered himself to have been privileged to read this book. This is how I once reasoned – that is before I knew the truth of the matter. Eckenroth's remarks regarding how he had wished that he had read the message of Froom's book in his early ministerial years and that if he had known of it then perhaps more souls would have been won to the kingdom, is very much I believe a degradation of the pioneers. This is because along with others, Froom maintains that the trinity doctrine is the truth whilst the pioneers were teaching error. This is the same as saying (as I see it) that if the pioneers had taught the truth as Froom was doing so in his book, then more people would have attained to eternal life.

In the next section (forty-four), we shall be taking a look at how the Seventh-day Adventists beliefs concerning the Holy Spirit underwent change.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section forty-four

A changed Holy Spirit

The major hurdles that needed to be overcome with regards to Seventh-day Adventists becoming trinitarian was their beliefs concerning both Christ and the Holy Spirit. As regards to the initial push to change our beliefs about Christ, we dealt with this in the previous two sections. This was at the 1919 Bible Conference. We now need to see how our beliefs concerning the Holy Spirit became changed.

As we have noted previously (see section twenty-six, section thirty-one and section thirty-two), during the early 1900's, Seventh-day Adventists still did not consider the Holy Spirit to be a person in the very same sense as they considered God and Christ to be persons (individual personal beings). This was even though they considered Him to be a personality. This we also took note was whilst they were still under the auspices of God's messenger, namely Ellen G. White. In one sense however, the one time Seventh-day Adventist theology regarding the Godhead was nothing different than that which is said here

“The Father is made of none, neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father, and of the Son neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.” (The Athanasian Creed)

This is a statement from the Athanasian Creed. This is the creed that is said to depict what trinitarians believe. In this statement we can readily see the difference between the three divine personalities of the Godhead. The Father is said to be unbegotten, the Son is begotten (albeit an eternal begetting according to orthodox trinitarianism) with the Holy Spirit proceeding. As to whether the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son or from them both is still a matter of debate amongst trinitarians.

With regards to the above quoted section from the Athanasian Creed, this is exactly the same as that which the Scriptures say about these three divine personalities. It is also exactly the same as that which was once believed by Seventh-day Adventists. It must be remembered here that in the Athanasian Creed, it also says that the three divine personalities subsist in the one being (one indivisible substance) of God, which of course is something that the Bible does not say. This is where the creed introduces speculation and where the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism departed company from it. As it says at the

very beginning of the creed

“Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith. Which Faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the Catholic Faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity. Neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance.” (*The Athanasian Creed*)

As well as this *one substance* (one being) part of this creed, it is the claim that Christ is eternally begotten that causes the major problem for those who are non-trinitarian. This is because it is not something that is stated in Scripture.

In the early 1900's, the belief that Christ was a begotten Son and that the Holy Spirit did proceed was the generally held faith of Seventh-day Adventists but they were certainly not trinitarians. This is not only because of their beliefs concerning the Holy Spirit but also because they did not believe that all three personalities have their subsistence in the one indivisible substance (the one being) of God as purported in the trinity doctrine. Certainly they did not believe that Christ, as a separate personality from God, has always had an existence. This is why at the 1919 Bible Conference when W. W. Prescott presented views of Christ as being ever existent (coeternal with the Father), it brought objections from some of the delegates, although it must be also said that others courted its favour (the details the 1919 Bible Conference as applicable to this study are found in section thirty-five and section thirty-six).

The old view versus the new

Very soon after the death of Ellen White, it really was becoming a matter of the old view (Christ a begotten Son) versus an impending new view (Christ not begotten), the latter being a view that says Christ has never, as a separate personality from God, had a beginning. As well as this, in contrast to many denominations (mainly trinitarian), Seventh-day Adventists did not regard the Holy Spirit as a person like God and Christ. This was even though they regarded Him as a personality.

In this section you are now reading, we shall see that in the 1930's and even through to the 1940's, this very same non-trinitarian view of the Holy Spirit (therefore non-trinitarian theology) had not totally disappeared from within Seventh-day Adventism. The facts of history testify to this much. The beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists throughout the world could not be changed overnight.

So regarding the Holy Spirit, how did the belief of Seventh-day Adventists become changed to one that could be termed trinitarian? This we shall now venture to discover.

Amazing assertions

It does appear that many have come to the conclusion that a man by the name

of LeRoy Edwin Froom (1890-1974) was one of the main instigators of bringing the trinity belief into Seventh-day Adventism. He is also said by some to have been one of our denomination's most foremost theologians and historians. Others question the validity of these claims. This is not only in respect of Froom's theological views but also of his conclusions regarding Seventh-day Adventist history. These latter conclusions, as some have duly recognised, are not as accurate as they could and should have been (we shall take more note of this in later sections).

Froom had what can only be described as an illustrious career within Seventh-day Adventism. As it said in the *Review and Herald* (this was 12 years after he had officially retired)

“For about 35 years Elder Froom was associated with editorial work. He worked on the Signs of the Times, both in English (Pacific Press) and Chinese (Shanghai), and his name is associated with the founding of two denominational magazines, The Shepherd's Voice in Chinese, and Ministry magazine. For 24 years he served the church in the General Conference Ministerial Association, first as an associate secretary, and then as head of the department.” (*Review and Herald, December 10th 1970, 'General News'*)

As can be seen by this very brief summary of his career, LeRoy Froom was a renowned figure in Seventh-day Adventism.

In 1930 (we shall see the significance of this date in later sections), A. G. Daniells commissioned him to write a book (*Movement of Destiny*) concerning the history of Seventh-day Adventism. This, as he explains in his book, is as it pertained to the principles, provisions and divine Personalities of the plan of redemption, particularly as this applied to Seventh-day Adventists from 1888 onwards (the year of the famous Minneapolis Conference). There was also to be a special emphasis on the 1888 conference itself.

As was noted in section ten, this was the book that led the author of these notes to believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church had always been a trinitarian denomination, which as we know today is not a correct view of its history. For now though, we shall take a look at what Froom had to say about our changeover in beliefs concerning the Holy Spirit. On page 322 of his *Movement of Destiny*, LeRoy Froom relates

“May I here make a frank personal confession? When, back between 1926 and 1928, I was asked by our leaders to give a series of studies on the Holy Spirit, covering the North American union ministerial institutes of 1928, I found that, aside from priceless leads found in the Spirit of Prophecy, there was practically nothing in our literature setting forth a sound Biblical exposition in this tremendous field of study. There were no previous pathfinding books on the question in our literature.” (*LeRoy Froom*

'Movement of Destiny', page 322 1971 'Decades of Varied Advances Follows 1888')

Note very carefully what Fromm is saying here because it really is very important.

He says that up to 1928, which was 13 years after the death of Ellen White, also 30 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*, which was 84 years **after the beginning** of Seventh-day Adventism (using 1844 as a starting point), he could find “**practically nothing**” in our literature that set out a sound Biblical exposition on the Holy Spirit. This is quite an assertion seeing that as we noted in section thirty-one and section thirty-two how much our pioneers did say concerning both the Holy Spirit and the importance of His work in the plan of redemption. Remember too that these latter mentioned sections only contained a small sample of what the pioneers had written. Would you term what you have read in those sections as being “**practically nothing**”?

I also find it amazing, especially in the light of what we have seen that Ellen White said about the Holy Spirit in section thirty-three and section thirty-four, that Fromm says that all he could find in the spirit of prophecy writings was “**priceless leads**”. This of course is only the same as saying that through the spirit of prophecy, God had been comparatively silent about the most important aspect of the Christian faith, - this of course being the personal presence (omnipresence) of both Himself and His Son. The Holy Spirit is also the very agency through which by revealing the gospel and dwelling within, God first seeks to justify a person and then brings about a dramatic change in behaviour.

We can see therefore that Fromm's assertion that regarding the Holy Spirit he could find “**practically nothing**” in the writings of the pioneers and only “**priceless leads**” in the spirit of prophecy really is quite a claim to make. In fact in one sense, it is even damning God Himself. This is inasmuch as it is actually saying that during the 71 years of Ellen White's ministry, God held back on revealing through her the most important aspect of our salvation, namely the agency through which He brings about conversion and salvation.

So why could not Fromm find that which he was looking for in the writings of the pioneers? Was it because the pioneers (including Ellen White) had not written about the Holy Spirit? Of course not! As we have seen, they had written plenty about Him, especially Ellen White. So what was it that Fromm was looking for that he could not find?

Fromm could not find in the writings of the pioneers (including the writings of Ellen White), views on the Holy Spirit that were trinitarian. All of the views that he found in the pioneers writings were non-trinitarian. This is why Fromm admitted

“I was compelled to search out a score of valuable books written by men outside our faith - those previously noted - for initial clues and suggestions, and to open up beckoning vistas to intensive personal study. Having these,

I went on from there. But they were decided early helps. And scores, if not hundreds, could confirm the same sobering conviction that some of these other men frequently had a deeper insight into the spiritual things of God than many of our own men then had on the Holy Spirit and the triumphant life. It was still a largely obscure theme.” (*Ibid*)

Froom was referring here primarily to those involved with the Keswick Conferences that are held in the Lake District in England. These conferences have been taking place since the 1870’s. They promote holy Christian living but have come under criticism inasmuch as some have said that they point the Christian to his own works rather than to Christ. The Wikipedia online encyclopaedia says of these conferences

“This conference is regarded by many as a turning point in the origins of the modern Pentecostal movement.” (*Wikipedia Online Encyclopaedia, William Boardman*)

Those in attendance at these conferences are multi-denominational. Froom says of the Keswick Conferences and the Northfield Bible Conferences founded by Dwight L. Moody in 1880 in North America

“The general emphasis and the simultaneous timing are both remarkable and significant. Of this we need to be aware, for they were obviously part of God’s larger plans and purposes in preparing His “people” everywhere — in a preliminary way — to meet God. They too must catch at least the spirit of the Message that was due.” (*LeRoy Froom, Movement of Destiny, page 320, ‘Decades of varied advances follows 1888’*)

Froom then lists out many who were involved in these conferences and said

“Untold numbers have known and been blessed by their writings. And this includes many of our own men.” (*Ibid*)

Froom went on to say that whilst these men did not understand our message, they did know God. He also said that they were amongst God’s reserves and His other shepherds. He also said that when we failed to be the front-runners in uplifting *Christ and His Righteousness* as the fullness of the Godhead, they did the work that we should have done. He also said that we had failed to place the Holy Spirit in His supreme place then some of these other men and organizations did it in our place. He then said

“Hundreds of thousands of hungry hearts have turned to these other godly men for spiritual help and deeper understanding of the things of God that we should ever have given to the world in the highest and fullest form of presentation. But we faltered for a time, and failed to do what we should have done.” (*Ibid, page 322*)

Froom was referring here to the fullness of Christ as depicted in the trinity doctrine as these other men would have presented it, also the same regarding the Holy Spirit. Froom considered these other denominations as doing the work that we should have done but failed to do. Froom spoke highly of these other men.

Going to the writings of Babylon

Froom admits that to find what he was looking for concerning the Holy Spirit, he went to the writings of other denominations. These were the writings of those who were trinitarian and whom Seventh-day Adventists have historically referred to prophetically as Babylon (see Revelation 14:8 and 18:1-5). These were also those who with respect to their trinity belief, believed the Holy Spirit to be an individual like the Father and Son. This of course was contrary to the way, during the time of Ellen White, that this divine personality was portrayed by Seventh-day Adventists, which, as we have seen, was as the personal presence of both the Father and the Son whilst the latter were not bodily present. In other words, the non-trinitarian view of the Holy Spirit was that He was both God (the Father) and Christ (the Son) omnipresent whilst the new view was that He was an individual being like the Father and Son

What Froom did was a startling thing for a Seventh-day Adventist to do, especially for someone who was such a well-respected theologian in the church. To obtain the view of the Holy Spirit for which he was seeking, Froom bypassed the Seventh-day Adventist pioneers, even bypassing Ellen White, and went to the teachings of Babylon.

This means that Froom went to the teachings of those who are vehemently opposed to everything that constitutes the distinctive beliefs of our God given last day message. These beliefs are namely, the perpetuity of the Ten Commandments, the seventh-day Sabbath, the sanctuary truth, the investigative judgement, the state of the dead and the spirit of prophecy etc. All of these beliefs, as well as the belief that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is God's chosen vehicle for the proclamation of His last day message before Jesus returns, are totally rejected by those to whom Froom went to seek for what he believed was the truth about the Holy Spirit. This then, in the decades immediately following the death of Ellen White, is where the attempts to bring in the trinity doctrine had eventually led us. We were looking to Babylon for our teachings. Thus it was that Froom was saying in effect that God had revealed to those not of our denomination, truths concerning the Holy Spirit that He had not revealed to the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism, not even to Ellen White. That is quite an assertion.

So it was that another of the major steps in changing Seventh-day Adventists from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism was underway. It was also a change that not only affected our views regarding the Holy Spirit but a change that brought us more into line with the other trinitarian denominations, particularly with those we term the evangelicals (sometimes termed mainstream Christianity).

In section forty-nine, we shall see that it was this changeover to trinitarianism that helped us, as a denomination, to be proclaimed Christian by the evangelicals. This was after having been regarded, throughout the time of Ellen White's ministry and for decades beyond, a non-Christian sect or cult. If we had remained non-trinitarian, then the evangelicals would never have accepted us as being Christian. This much we know for sure. They would have still regarded us as cultic.

A Changed attitude

There is a growing number of Seventh-day Adventists today who believe that since the time of the pioneers, there has been a tremendous change of attitude on the part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church towards other denominations.

That this relationship has changed is not in doubt. Whereas we once regarded these other denominations as being the Babylon of Bible prophecy and that God's people, prior to the second coming of Christ, should separate themselves from these organisations (meaning come out of them and into the truth proclaimed by Seventh-day Adventists), this is not so distinctively taught today within Seventh-day Adventism. It is also believed by many that our distinctive doctrines, these are such as the Sabbath, the investigative judgement and the state of the dead etc are not, as they used to be, urged today upon non-Seventh-day Adventists. This changed attitude was not something that came about overnight. It took decades for it to form.

In the Ministry magazine of March 1966 Leroy Froom wrote an article called "New approaches Imperative for a New Day", which, as we shall now see, is a title that speaks for itself. In this article he said

"Today the old largely negative approach -- emphasizing chiefly the things wherein we differ from all other religious groups-is past, definitely past. And that is as it should be (LeRoy Froom, Ministry, March 1966, "New approaches Imperative for a New Day")"

We must stop here to reason for a moment.

If as Seventh-day Adventists we do not emphasise the perpetuity of the law of God, if we do not emphasise the seventh-day Sabbath as opposed to Sunday, if we do not emphasise the sanctuary teaching, if we do not emphasise the investigative judgement that began in 1844, if we do not emphasise the nearness of Christ's return and if we do not emphasise the biblical view of the state of the dead, then how can we get our God given message across to those of other denomination? In failing to emphasise these beliefs, would we not also be failing to do what God has called us to do as His remnant people? This not emphasising was definitely the beginning of our newly found relationship with the other churches.

In his article, Froom referred to what were then our non-trinitarian beliefs, also

our beliefs that atonement was taking place in Heaven now in what we as Seventh-day Adventists term an investigative judgement. He then said

“Not until these constricted views were corrected, and that fact made known publicly in scholarly circles, did the old prejudices melt that had been based on those faulty minority views. The old canard about our being an "anti-Christian cult" was abandoned by the informed, and we were conceded to be truly Christian -- despite our Sabbath and sanctuary emphasis, and our position on conditional immortality.” (*Ibid*)

In his book *Movement of Destiny*, as we shall see in section 52, these “**faulty minority views**” is how Froom describes the one time non-trinitarian faith of Seventh-day Adventists. Froom claimed it was just a minority view, meaning the view of the few.

Notice too how Froom said that we were once regarded by these other denominations as “**being an "anti-Christian cult"**”. This is how it was throughout the time we did not uphold the trinity doctrine. Notice he says too that this image was eventually “**abandoned by the informed**”. This was after we had accepted the trinity doctrine and after had become established as a trinitarian denomination. This was in the mid 1950’s when the evangelicals recognised us as being truly Christian and offered to us, which our leadership very gratefully accepted, the right hand of fellowship (see section forty-nine for details).

There are those today of course who say that it was a good thing for the evangelicals to recognise us as being Christian but others disagree. This was exactly the same as it was in the 1950’s. As one Seventh-day Adventist minister said

“This is a most interesting and dangerous situation. As one official who was not in favor of what was being done stated to me: "We are being sold down the river." What a sight for heaven and earth! The church of the living God which has been given the commission to preach the gospel to every creature under heaven and call men to come out of Babylon, is now standing at the door of these churches asking permission to enter and become one of them. How are the mighty fallen!” (*M. L. Andreasen, letter No. 6 to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 1959, 'The Atonement'*)

Andreasen concluded

“This is more than apostasy. This is giving up Adventism. It is the rape of a whole people. It is denying God's leading in the past.” (*Ibid*)

Books of a new order

Froom eventually put his trinitarian views regarding the Holy Spirit into print. This he did in his book *The Coming of the Comforter* which is still being used today by Seventh-day Adventists. This publication does not depict the non-trinitarian

views of the pioneers but a trinitarian view. In other words, it was a book of a new order for Seventh-day Adventists, meaning, saying differently than what was once taught by our pioneers.

Froom's book was only the beginning of a change that was to come about in the reading material to which future Seventh-day Adventist would be subjected. This is how it was that in the main the changeover from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism was achieved. It was indeed a very gradual change, brought about by the slow but sure phasing out of the literature written by our pioneers and the publishing of new literature (new books) that taught something different.

This is why in the next three sections we shall be taking a look at the literature that throughout the time of Ellen White came off the presses of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. These publications, without any objection from Ellen White or objections from any other of the other leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, were all decidedly non-trinitarian. Surely this must be a very important realisation in our studies. I say this because if you remember from previous sections, Seventh-day Adventists did receive, through the spirit of prophecy, a very serious warning that Satan himself would suggest a change was necessary to the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. Ellen White actually said concerning this satanic reformation

“The enemy of souls has sought to bring in the supposition that a great reformation was to take place among Seventh-day Adventists, and that this reformation would consist in giving up the doctrines which stand as the pillars of our faith, and engaging in a process of reorganization. Were this reformation to take place, what would result? The principles of truth that God in His wisdom has given to the remnant church, would be discarded. Our religion would be changed. The fundamental principles that have sustained the work for the last fifty years would be accounted as error.”
(Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B No. 2, page 54 'The Foundation of Our Faith', 1904. Letter to leading Seventh-day Adventist Physicians)

She also said about the outcome of this reformation in respect to the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists

“A new organization would be established. Books of a new order would be written. A system of intellectual philosophy would be introduced. The founders of this system would go into the cities, and do a wonderful work. The Sabbath, of course, would be lightly regarded, as also the God who created it.” *(Ibid)*

We can see here that one of the major identifying marks of this satanic reformation would be that books of a “new order” would be written. These would be books that taught something different than what was once taught in those authored by our pioneers.

For now though let us look at why one man who was saddened when attempts were made by those of our denominational ministry to change the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists regarding the Holy Spirit. This man was Ellen White's son, namely William White

Ellen White's son saddened.

In section thirty-four where we looked at the beliefs of Ellen White regarding the Holy Spirit, we noted briefly that in 1935, a man by the name of H. W. Carr had sent a letter to W. C. White (Ellen White's son), asking him to relate his mother's views on the Holy Spirit (Ellen White had died 20 years earlier in 1915) but we did not elaborate on what was said in the exchange of dialogue that took place. Here we shall do so.

The response of W. C. White to Carr is well worth noting. This is because it does reveal that when this letter was written, this change in the thinking of Seventh-day Adventists regarding the Holy Spirit was taking place. It also reveals that by this time (1935), the trinity doctrine had not become so established within Seventh-day Adventism as many have been led to believe. It is also proof that even though Ellen White had said that the Holy Spirit was a personality, everyone did not accept this (not even by 1935) to mean that this mysterious divine personality was a person like God and Christ.

Carr had asked Willie White what his mother's views had been about the Holy Spirit. This was because of the debate and friction being brought about, amongst Seventh-day Adventists, by the attempted change in beliefs regarding the Holy Spirit. From's book *The Coming of the Comforter* had been published in 1928, 7 years before Carr wrote this letter. Carr wrote saying to W. C. White

“In the first pages of Great Controversy it is stated that the ‘Father had an associate - A co-worker...The only being that could enter into all the councils and purposes of God.’ ‘The Father wrought by His son in the creation of all heavenly beings...He holds supremacy over them all.’ ‘Sin originated with Satan, who next to Christ had been most honoured of God, and was highest in power and glory among the inhabitants of heaven. Next to Christ he was first among the hosts of God.’ ‘The Son of God had wrought the Father's will in the creation of all the hosts of heaven.’ The Son of God was exalted above Satan as one in power and authority with the Father.’ Christ created Satan. Ez.28:15.” (*H. W. Carr, letter to W. C. White, 24th January 1935*)

In none of these statements from Ellen White is mentioned the Holy Spirit. Carr added

“It is urged by some of our leaders now that The Holy Spirit is a third person **of** the same nature of the Father and Son, a member of the heavenly trio, cooperative in creation and personally active with the Father and Son.” (*Ibid*)

Here we can see a changing Holy Spirit. This was the transitional time. Carr then said to W. C. White

“For many years I have used these statements of Sr. White in combating false teachings relative to defining the Holy Spirit. “Will you kindly tell me what you understand was your mother’s position in reference to the personality of the Holy Spirit?” *(Ibid)*

Carr finished his letter by saying

“I know Brother White you would not depart from your mother’s teachings, and that you have as perfect an understanding of them as any one. I shall appreciate your opinion very much. Assuring you of the high esteem and respect I have had from my childhood in your father, mother and family, I am very truly yours in this blessed faith.” *(Ibid)*

Six weeks later White replied to Carr by saying

“In your letter you requested me to tell you what I understand to be my mother’s position in reference to the personality of the Holy Spirit.

This I cannot do, because I never clearly understood her teachings on the matter. There always was in my mind some perplexity regarding the meaning of her utterances, which to my superficial manner of thinking, seemed to be somewhat confusing. I have often regretted that I did not possess that keenness of mind that could solve this and other perplexities. And then remembering what Sister White wrote in “Acts of the Apostles”, pages 51 and 52, “regarding such mysteries which are too deep for human understanding, silence is golden”. I thought best to refrain from discussion and have endeavored to direct my mind to matters easy to understand.” *(W. C. White to H. W. Carr, letter, April 30th 1935)*

As we have seen in previous sections, the views of the pioneers regarding the Holy Spirit were far more complex than their views regarding God and Christ. This can also be clearly seen in this letter that Ellen White’s son wrote to Carr in 1935. W. C. White concluded concerning the Holy Spirit

“There are many Scriptures which speak of the Father and the Son and the absence of Scripture making similar reference to the united work of the Father and the Holy Spirit or of Christ and the Holy Spirit, has led me to believe that the spirit without individuality was the representative of the Father and the Son throughout the universe, and it was through the Holy Spirit that they dwell in our hearts and make us one with the Father and with the Son.” *(Ibid)*

This was the standard belief of Seventh-day Adventists. It was that whilst the Holy Spirit was regarded as a personality, He was not thought of as having an

“individuality” like the Father and the Son. He was to Seventh-day Adventists both God and Christ omnipresent. We have discussed this previously in section thirty-one, section thirty-two, section thirty-three and section thirty-four so we will not do so again here, suffice to say that at this point, I am going to ask you to do some sanctified reasoning.

W. C. White was Ellen White’s third son. He was not, as we shall see, someone who as we might say was a bit slow on the uptake or perhaps even naïve, neither was he ignorant of his mother’s views. Can you imagine over the years how many of his mother’s sermons that he had heard, also the number of Bible studies that he attended with her? Can you also imagine the number of private discussions that he had with his mother about matters of a spiritual nature, probably even about the Holy Spirit? These are inestimable.

Ellen White realised that he was God ordained to do the work he was doing. In 1899 (when in Australia) she wrote (these are just snippets from an 1899 manuscript

“In the night season, light came to me that W. C. White had from his childhood been trained for the Lord's work. Before his birth he was dedicated to God; and after his birth he was chosen of God to serve Him with singleness of purpose. He is to stand ready to serve where necessity requires. It is not possible to separate him from the general work in which he is so intensely interested.” (*Ellen G. White, Manuscript Releases Volume 18 MR1329, "Sunnyside," Cooranbong, N.S.W., Australia, August 1899*)

“It is essential also that he shall be connected with his mother's work. The preparation of my writings for publication in book form should receive his attention. And there are other responsibilities that he must bear in this country. He is better prepared than some others to see the needs of God's cause and to present these needs before the people in a way that will arouse them to give these matters proper attention.” (*Ibid*)

“Through his connection with the work of his mother, whom the Lord has instructed, W. C. White can give to the people the light that is essential in regard to plans and methods. The Spirit of the Lord will impress upon his mind the deep import of the matters laid out before him. I can communicate to him matters that the Lord has seen fit to present to me for many years-- even before my son's birth -- in regard to the principles upon which God's people should act.” (*Ibid*)

“W. C. White has a special work to do. He cannot disconnect himself from this work, for it is his lifeblood. It is his inheritance from the Lord. For this work he was born.” (*Ibid*)

“As this is the light given me, I now renewedly dedicate my son, W. C. White, to the Lord's work -- a work that includes the preparation, with as

little delay as possible, of the matter which the Lord has given me to present to the world, to our churches, and to individuals.” (*Ibid*)

At the age of 21 in 1876, Willie White, as he was known to his closest friends, had been elected to the office of president of the board and as business manager of the Seventh-day Adventist Pacific Press Publishing Association. This was the main body responsible for our publishing work. Throughout his lifetime, amongst his other responsibilities and duties, he was integrally involved in the publishing work (far too much to list here).

After the death of his father (James White) in 1881, Willie White spent much of his time assisting his mother with her literary work. He also travelled extensively with her wherever the work took her. In fact in a very brief space of time, this all-important responsibility absorbed the vast majority of his time. He even accompanied his mother to Australia and played a major part with her there in the establishing of the Seventh-day Adventist faith.

By 1901, Willie White had been a member of the General Conference committee for 36 years and when in 1915 his mother died, he was one of the five persons who were nominated in her will as trustees of her writings. Along with the others nominated, he was to take care of these writings for future publication. It was through his personal leading that certain books containing his mother’s writings were published after her death and also by him that her writings were so comprehensively indexed.

As it says in the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia (this was after saying that he was elected as one of the trustees of his mother’s writings)

“Since he had carried the burden of the business interests of her publishing work for many years, it was but natural that he should be asked to continue. As secretary of the board he led in the preparation of a number of posthumous books compiled in harmony with the provisions of Mrs. White’s will, and in the making of a comprehensive index to the then current works (1926).” (*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia, Volume 10, 1966 edition, page 1427, ‘White, William Clarence*)

At the time of his death at the age of 83 (1937), Willie White was still serving the cause that he had loved and embraced all his life. He was then, at that time, as well as being secretary of the Ellen G. White Estate, a member of the General Conference Committee. He was also on the boards of such as the St. Helena Sanitarium as well as the Pacific Union College.

Much more could be said of the positions that this man held in the Seventh-day Adventist Church but they would be far too many to detail here, suffice to say that what has been listed above shows that if any man in this world knew what Ellen White believed it was her son W. C. White. Yet when asked by H. W. Carr what his mother’s views were regarding the Holy Spirit, he said that they were far

beyond his comprehension.

Now what does this tell us? Is it that Willie White was mentally inadequate? The answer to this question is obviously a decided no. He was neither mentally inadequate nor naïve, neither was he ignorant of what his mother had written. This is because from what we have seen of his office and responsibilities, he was a very intellectually minded, as well as a very spiritually minded person (he was 60 years of age when his mother died).

Now let's reason together some more.

If as the Seventh-day Adventist Church claim today that Ellen White regarded the Holy Spirit as just another person like the Father and the Son, do you think that this would have been something that was beyond the intellectual capabilities of Willie White to grasp? Is that a fair question to ask? Let's put it this way. If you are a trinitarian, is it too much for you to grasp that the Holy Spirit is a person like God the Father and Christ? If it is, then why are you a trinitarian?

If Ellen White's view of the Holy Spirit was that He was just a third person like God and Christ, Willie White would not only have known about it but he would have quite easily understood it. Certainly it would not have been beyond his capabilities to fathom it. This is why we can see that Ellen White did not just simply believe the Holy Spirit to be a person like the Father and the Son but regarded His nature and being as a much more complex issue. This can be borne out by the words of W. C. White to Carr. This is when in his letter he said

“The statements and the arguments of some of our ministers in their effort to prove that the Holy Spirit is an individual as are God the Father and Christ, the eternal Son, have perplexed me and sometimes they have made me sad.” (*W. C. White to H. W. Carr, letter, April 30th 1935*)

Now what is this telling us? It is telling us that in 1935, there were those of the Seventh-day Adventist ministry who were trying to introduce a trinitarian concept (idea) of the Holy Spirit (that which Froom was seeking to introduce) into Seventh-day Adventism but it was saddening Ellen White's Son (W. C. White). We can readily and safely assume therefore that this trinity view of the Holy Spirit was not the standard view of either Ellen White, or the belief of the other pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism, neither was it, in 1935, the views of W. C. White and perhaps tens of thousands of other Seventh-day Adventists throughout the world.

It seems that in irony of this realisation (that some were attempting to make the Holy Spirit a person like God and Christ) W. C. White said to Carr

“One popular teacher said “We may regard Him (the Holy Spirit) as the fellow who is down here running things”. (*Ibid*)

This today is the way that many Seventh-day Adventists regard the Holy Spirit. They see Him as an individual person like the Father and the Son who is here on earth directing God's will in the affairs of men.

To read these letters between W. C. White and Carr go here

<http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/SB-Othersarticles.htm>

The 1934 Sabbath School lesson quarterly

It seems that this time period was the in between time for views on the Holy Spirit. Some were seeing Him as a person like God and Christ whilst others still held on to the old view. The lesson studies in the 1934 Sabbath School quarterly seems to support this reasoning. The subject for the quarter was the Holy Spirit. In lesson No. 4 for January 27, which had as its title "Personality of the Holy Spirit", there was a quotation from the *Desire of Ages*. It said

"Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power. It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world's Redeemer. It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure."—"The Desire of Ages," p. 671." (*Sabbath School quarterly for January 27th 1934, page 10. 'Personality of the Holy Spirit'*)

Note here the capitalised words "Third Person". Although I have not had the opportunity to prove this for myself, I have been told that this capitalisation was introduced in the 1931 edition of *Desire of Ages* whereas previously and originally it had been small case. The latter I know to be true. When it was published again in the *Review and Herald* in 1904 (19th May *Promise of the Holy Spirit*) and 1908 (19th November *Christ's Most Essential Gift to His Church*) it was still small case.

Whilst this difference may or may not mean a great deal as to what Ellen White meant by person, it does show that in an effort to promote trinitarianism within its ranks, our church has taken to altering Ellen White's writings. In the 1934 lesson quarterly there then followed this statement

"Beyond the fact that the Holy Spirit is the person or power associated with Christ and God in the work of creation (Gen. 1:2, 26), in the work of recreation through the new birth (John 3), in the regeneration of sinners, leading them in the paths of righteousness (Rom. 8:1), God has seen fit to make but little known." (*Ibid*)

Concerning the Holy Spirit, the statement continues

"Invisible, yet all powerful (John 3:8), unseen yet shaping the lives and characters of multitudes of hearts that have freely surrendered to Him (Acts 2:41-47; 5:14), comforting, instructing, guiding those who have given their

all to the Master, still the Spirit is unseen except in the revelation of the Christ in the daily life of human souls' (John 14:15-20) who are being reborn and prepared for the kingdom of heaven." (*Ibid*)

It appears from this that at that time (1934), it was still not the preponderant belief within Seventh-day Adventism that the Holy Spirit was an individual being like the Father and the Son. There seemed to be doubts. The study continued by asking

"What implies that God, the Father, was not alone in the work of creation? Verses 2, 3, 26." (*Ibid*)

The notes replied by quoting Ellen White as saying

"The Sovereign of the universe was not alone in His work of beneficence. He had an associate,—a coworker who could appreciate His purpose, and could share His joy in giving happiness to created beings. 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.' Christ, the Word, the only-begotten of God, was one with the Eternal Father,—one in nature, in character, in purpose, — the only being that could enter into all the counsels and purposes of God."—"Patriarchs and Prophets," p. 34." (*Ibid*)

Note that Ellen White does not say here that "the Sovereign of the universe" had two associates but that Christ was "the only being that could enter into all the counsels and purposes of God".

Continuing on, the lesson study asked "How much can human reasoning find out concerning the nature of the Godhead (Isaiah 40:28 cited). The notes again quoted Ellen White as saying

"The nature of the Holy Spirit is a mystery. Men cannot explain it, because the Lord has not revealed it to them. Men having fanciful views may bring together passages of Scripture and put a human construction on them; but the acceptance of these views will not strengthen the church. Regarding such mysteries, which are too deep for human understanding, silence is golden."—"Acts of the Apostles," p. 52." (*Ibid*)

Again this appears to be saying that by 1934, the preponderant belief of Seventh-day Adventist was not that the Holy Spirit was a being like God and Christ but that His nature is a mystery that God has chosen not to reveal. It could also be interpreted here that this is an appeal for Seventh-day Adventist to be silent on this matter ("silence is golden"). On the next page of the lesson study it quotes Ellen White as saying

"It is through the Spirit that Christ dwells in us; and the Spirit of God, received into the heart by faith, is the beginning of the life eternal."—"The

Desire of Ages," p. 388.

What is very interesting is that 2 years later in a letter that he wrote to T. S. Teters, Benjamin Wilkinson wrote

“Replying to your letter of October 13 regarding the doctrine of the Trinity, I will say that Seventh-day Adventists do not and never have accepted the dark, mysterious Catholic doctrine of the Trinity.” (*B. G. Wilkinson, letter to T. S. Teters, November 3rd 1936*)

Wilkinson wrote this letter whilst President of Washington Missionary College (now Columbia Union) where he served as president until 1946.

From the above we can see that the changeover to believing the Holy Spirit to be a person like God and Christ did take time. This also means of course that the changeover to trinitarianism took time.

A gradual changeover

That the changeover did take time is also seen in a book that was published in 1932. It was co-authored by Ellen White's son James Edson White (usually known as Edson) and Alonzo Baker. In the chapter called *The Leader of Israel* it said

“When the hosts of Israel left Egypt to go to the land of Canaan, they did not go alone. God said to them: "Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him, and obey His voice, provoke Him not; for He will not pardon your transgressions: for My name is in Him." Exodus 23:20, 31.

Only one Being in the universe besides the Father bears the name of God, and that is His Son, Jesus Christ. Hence this Angel that accompanied Israel in their wanderings was no other than Christ.” (*James Edson White and Alonzo Baker, The Coming King, page 27, chapter 'The Leader of Israel', 1932*)

Notice here the “Only one Being” part of this statement. This must exclude the Holy Spirit. It appears therefore that another of Ellen White's sons, by 1932, had not accepted that the Holy Spirit was a person like God and Christ. This can also be seen in a book that he had published in 1914 called *Past, Present, and Future*. This is when he wrote (this was when referring to Lucifer's desires to be on equality with God's son)

“Next to God and Christ he was, and still is, the wisest being in the universe; for God said through the prophet, " Behold, thou art wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that they can hide from thee." Vs. 3. "Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom." Vs. 12.” (*James Edson White, Past, Present, and Future, page 94, chapter 'Lucifer, son of the morning' 1914 edition*)

Again there is no mention of the Holy Spirit. If Edson White had considered the Holy Spirit to be a person like God and Christ he would have said something like “Next to God, Christ and the Holy Spirit he was, and still is, the wisest being in the universe”. He also wrote just 6 pages later (again referring to Lucifer’s ambitious desires to be equal with God)

“But Jehovah could not permit this. He Himself had established the order of heaven. No created being could be equal with God. The only begotten Son alone could occupy this position.” (*James Edson White, Past, Present, and Future, page 100, chapter “Celestial war, 1914 edition*)

Again the Holy Spirit is omitted.

From this written dialogue that transpired between W. C. White and Carr, also the book that was written by Edson White and Baker, we can see that up to the mid 1930’s, the belief that the Holy Spirit was a personal being as are the Father and the Son had not become the norm within Seventh-day Adventism, neither therefore had the doctrine of the trinity become the norm. This is because without three divine persons, it is impossible to have a trinity doctrine, at least in the traditional sense of its meaning. This was still future.

We can see therefore that this next statement, taken from a 1969 paper by Russell Holt, was somewhat exaggerated. This is when he said (this was concerning the time period 1900-1930)

“This period saw the death of most of those pioneers who had championed and held the anti-trinitarian position. Their places were being taken by men who were changing their thinking, or had never opposed the doctrine.” (*Russell Holt, “The doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination: Its rejection and acceptance” 1969*)

He then added

“The trinity began to be published, until by 1931 it had triumphed and become the standard denominational position. Isolated stalwarts remained who refused to yield, but the outcome had been decided.” (*Ibid*)

As has been said, this latter statement is very much exaggerated. It took another two decades before most Seventh-day Adventists referred to themselves as trinitarians.

A 1960 letter

In 1960, Froom sent a letter to Otto Christensen in which he gives us evidence that it was his (Froom’s) personal efforts that helped to bring about this change in beliefs about the Holy Spirit within Seventh-day Adventism. It shows us clearly too that the pioneers did not accept that the Holy Spirit is a person like God and Christ, also that there was decided resistance to this change. This is when

Froom said in his letter

“May I state that my book, THE COMING OF THE COMFORTER was the result of a series of studies that I gave in 1927 – 1928, to ministerial institutes throughout North America. You cannot imagine how I was pummelled by some of the old-timers because I pressed on the personality of the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Godhead.” (*L. Froom, letter to Otto Christenson, 27th October 1960*)

He then adds

“Some men denied that – still deny it. But the book has come to be generally accepted as standard.” (*Ibid*)

Froom is saying here that whilst some still deny that the Holy Spirit is a personal being (like God and Christ), this concept, as found in his book *The Coming of the Comforter* had by 1960 become the standard (norm) within Seventh-day Adventism but when he had introduced this thought in the late 1920's (1927-1928) he said that he was “pummelled by some of the old-timers”. These “old timers” were those who believed in the theology of Seventh-day Adventists whilst Ellen White was alive. This was when the Holy Spirit was not deemed to be a person like God and Christ but was the omnipresence of them both when they (God and Christ) were not physically (bodily) present.

A transitional trinity (between the ‘old’ established view and the establishing of the ‘new view’)

Beginning on September 26th 1936 and said to explain the doctrines of the Bible, there was a series of articles published in the *Signs of the Times*. Note that this was 5 years after the word trinity first appeared in our fundamental beliefs (1931 – see section twenty-three and section forty-four). As it said as a preface to the first of these articles

“This is the first of a series of articles dealing with the doctrines of the Bible, which will appear in the "Signs of the Times" during the next few months. In these articles various teachings of the Bible, both doctrinal and practical, will be examined and commented upon.” (*The editors, Signs of the Times, September 22nd 1936, ‘The Word of God’*)

The first two articles (*The Word of God* and *The Power of the Word*) were stated as being written by Gwynne Dalrymple but the third article called *I believe in the Trinity* did not have an author's name attributed to it (for this there was no explanation given). It had though, as a sub-heading

“The Bible teaches that the Godhead consists in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Though we may not fully understand this doctrine, it provides for us a clearer setting for the mercy of God.” (*Signs of the Times, ‘The Trinity’, October 6th 1936*)

Note here it says that it is the “Godhead” (not the trinity) that “consists in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”. There is also here the confession that as Seventh-day Adventists we may not understand this teaching. The article itself begins by saying

“I believe in the Trinity, though I do not understand it.” (*Ibid*)

We can see in this article (whoever wrote it) that the word Godhead is being used interchangeably with the word trinity. This was written during the transitional period when the trinitarian view was far from being established within Seventh-day Adventism. As we have noted before, these two words are not synonymous.

It must be remembered here that in 1936 and with regards to Christ, many Seventh-day Adventists world-wide would still be adhering to the old time non-trinitarian view of Seventh-day Adventism meaning that they would have still believed that Christ was a begotten son. Many would also have been holding fast to the belief that the Holy Spirit was the personal presence of both the Father and the Son (God and Christ omnipresent). Remember how Froom said that as the 1930’s approached, he was (as he put it) “pummelled by some of the old-timers” because he “pressed on the personality of the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Godhead” (see above).

This old view did not just disappear overnight. It would take many decades for this to lose its standing as the preponderate (dominating) faith of Seventh-day Adventists. It must also be remembered here that the trinity doctrine itself is a man-made doctrine, albeit trinitarians claim it to be based on what the Scriptures reveal about the three personalities of the Godhead. This though is only the same as is said about the doctrines of the immortality of the soul and Sunday sacredness, both of which Seventh-day Adventists believe is a misunderstanding of Scripture.

It is very difficult therefore to comprehend just why such a doctrine as the trinity (as claimed in the above quote) cannot be understood. After all, men formulated it to explain what God through His revealed Word had told us about three personalities of the Godhead. Why then, should it not be understood? The author of the *Signs of the Times* article (whoever it was) also added

“I believe in the Trinity, not because I understand it, but because the Scriptures teach it.” (*Ibid*)

Again we must remember that the latter is also said about the teachings of the immortality of the soul and Sunday sacredness but we know that these particular teachings are wrong. We also know that the trinity formula itself cannot be found in Scripture. In other words, nowhere in Scripture is it said that God is a three-in-one (triune) being (see section four). After quoting Matthew 28:19, the article then says

“At baptism, every Christian accepts the doctrine of the Trinity. He is baptized into the name of the Trinity.” *(Ibid)*

This is a total exaggeration. Not every one who is baptised in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit believes that these three divine personalities comprise a trinity. This is evident not only because none of our pioneers believed it but also that the non-trinitarians today who are baptised in these names do not believe it. This even applies to those non-trinitarians not of our faith. The article then continued

“Furthermore, the Bible expressly represents all three Members of the Godhead as concerned in our work of redemption.” *(Ibid)*

Again we see the word “Godhead” interchangeably used in this article with the term trinity. Later, in the stressing of the claim that there are three individual beings of the Godhead, the author (or authors) said

“God loves us so that He sends His own Son. The Son loves us so that He willingly comes to redeem us. The Spirit loves us so that He works in us, changing us, transforming us, daily molding' us into the image of the heavenly, and away from the image of the degraded and the earthly.” *(Ibid)*

As we noted in section thirty-one, nowhere in the Bible does it say that the Holy Spirit loves anyone, not even the Father and the Son. Neither does the Bible say that the Father and the Son love the Holy Spirit or that we as Christians are to love the Holy Spirit. Certainly it does not say in the Bible, as the article says, that the “Spirit loves us”.

After saying that there is a tendency in theological circles to take the attitude (as the article puts it) that “the three Persons of the Trinity are simply three modes or manifestations”) the writer said

“But an examination of the teaching of the Bible makes it quite clear that there are three Persons in the Godhead.” *(Ibid)*

As we noted in section forty-two, the phrase “in the Godhead” makes the word Godhead to appear something very similar to the word trinity but they are not the same. The word Godhead, as translated in the KJV (Acts 17:29, Romans 1:20 and Colossians 2:9), means pertaining to divinity but does not include the idea of three in one as does the word trinity. I have never found anywhere in the writings of Ellen White where she uses the phrase in the Godhead. All that I can find is where she says ‘of the Godhead’ (of divinity). The article also says under the heading “Holy Spirit Also Person”

“And the Spirit is referred to indifferently as the Spirit of God or the Spirit of Christ; for it is the Spirit of both God and Christ, which comes to us from the Father through the Son.” *(Ibid)*

This appears to be exactly the same as the pioneers once believed. Certainly it is not as taught by Seventh-day Adventists today which is that the Holy Spirit is another person like God and Christ. Note that this was in 1936, the year after W. C. White said that he was saddened because some ministers were attempting to make the Holy Spirit a person like God and Christ. Thus it appears that the old non trinitarian view of the Holy Spirit, even though the article was attempting to promote God being a trinity, was still in the thinking of old time Seventh-day Adventism.

After this article on the trinity, Gwynne Dalrymple is then named as continuing the studies. On November 24th 1936, in his article called *Come Holy Spirit* he said

“The Holy Spirit, as it comes to us, represents the grace of God working upon our hearts. It is the divine instrument used of God to woo us to better and higher things. It is the chain which links our hearts to the great heart of God. It is the cable along which passes the electrifying current of heaven's grace.” (*Gwynne Dalrymple, Signs of the Times, November 24th 1936, 'Come, Holy Spirit!'*)

Notice here that Dalrymple calls the Holy Spirit “the divine instrument” and keeps referring to this divine personality as an “it”. This is definitely the language of the pioneers. Later he said

“The Scriptures are important, and they are God's word to our souls. But we can and will find ways to evade that word, unless day by day the Spirit is bearing its witness to our souls.” (*Ibid*)

Again the Holy Spirit is referred to as ‘it’. Later in the article, Dalrymple did refer to the Holy Spirit as ‘He’. This though was only as do the Scriptures when they speak of the Holy Spirit as a comforter. We can see therefore that in his article, Dalrymple did use the language of the pioneers. Note that this was in 1936.

In the Sabbath School Lesson quarterly for the 4th quarter of 1936, it said this concerning the Holy Spirit

“NOTE. - The Father sends the Spirit in the name of the Son, that is, as the Son's representative. The Spirit "proceedeth from the Father," to do His work in the earth.

Hence the Father sends the Spirit, and the Son sends the Spirit. The Son speaks what the Father gives Him to speak, and the Spirit speaks what the Son gives Him to speak. The Spirit is both the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ. How could there be more perfect accord, more complete unity?” (*Lesson quarterly, 4th quarter 1936, Lesson 3 for October 17, 1936, 'The Godhead', page 11*)

This is the same belief as was held by the early pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism (see section thirty-one and section thirty-two). As the lesson previously noted

"In [Romans] verses 8-11, the Spirit is called both "the Spirit of God" and "the Spirit of Christ." (*Ibid, page 10*)

Another progressive view

O. A. Johnson was a very well known Seventh-day Adventist minister. We spoke of him in section twenty-one so we will not go into detail again here concerning his biography.

Johnson wrote a number of Bible textbooks for his students. From 1908 until 1922 he was head of the Bible Department at Walla Walla College. This should tell us a great deal. In 1900, in a study book called *Bible Text Book* (this was before being called to Walla Walla College), it said on the title page concerning him

"Instructor in Bible and History in Union College, College View, Nebraska" (*O. A. Johnson, Bible Text-Book, Title page, 1900*)

It also says in the preface

"In 1894 the author published "Bible Lessons for Bible Students," which was an outgrowth of the lessons given at the Evening Bible School, held in College View Neb., during the winter of 1893-94, and which was published at the earnest request of the members of that school. The book met with a ready sale, and in view of the fact that many calls have come for that book since the edition was exhausted, the author has been encouraged to revise and enlarge "Bible Lessons," so as to make it more of a Bible text book for those who desire to study the special subjects treated in the book." (*Ibid, Preface page 3*)

At the beginning of the study called *The Holy Spirit; Its Offices and Gifts* he says

"What is the Holy Spirit? (*Ibid, page 71, 'The Holy Spirit; Its Offices and Gifts'*)

He answers

"The Bible says nothing definite about what the Holy Spirit is; but it says much about its gifts and offices. It seems to be a power proceeding from God the Father, coming to his children in the name of Christ." (*Ibid*)

Note Johnson's remarks concerning not knowing about "what the Holy Spirit is". This is only the same as was said by Ellen White in 1911. This was in *Acts of the Apostles*. This is when she wrote

"It is not essential for us to be able to define just what the Holy Spirit is. Christ tells us that the Spirit is the Comforter, "the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father." It is plainly declared regarding the Holy Spirit that, in His work of guiding men into all truth, "He shall not speak of Himself." John 15:26, 16:13." (*Ellen G. White, 'Acts of the Apostles' pages 51-52, 1911*)

Ellen White never advanced on this reasoning. This statement was originally written in 1891 in a letter to a man called Chapman. This was 20 years before it was reproduced in *Acts of the Apostles*. She had said to this brother

"It is not essential for you to know and be able to define just what the Holy Spirit is. Christ tells us that the Holy Spirit is the Comforter, and the Comforter is the Holy Ghost, "the Spirit of truth, which the Father shall send in My name." (*Ellen G. White, letter to Brother Chapman June 11th 1891, Manuscript Release volume 14, No. 1107*)

After quoting the words of Jesus when He spoke of the coming of the Comforter as found in John 14:16 and 17 she then said

"This refers to the omnipresence of the Spirit of Christ, called the Comforter. Again Jesus says, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth" [John 16:12, 13].

There are many mysteries which I do not seek to understand or to explain; they are too high for me, and too high for you. On some of these points, silence is golden. Piety, devotion, sanctification of soul, body, and spirit--this is essential for us all. "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent" [John 17:3]". (*Ibid*)

We would do well to heed these words today. Johnson heeded them. We shall see this now.

Throughout his 1900 study, just as he does here, Johnson refers to the Holy Spirit as "It". There appears to be hesitancy when saying "It seems to be". This is more than likely because the nature of the Holy Spirit was shrouded with mystery (see Ellen White's comments). Interesting is that in a later book of his called *Bible Doctrines* (this is the second edition of the 1910 book originally called *Lessons on Bible Studies*), in the study titled "The Holy Spirit", these statements are made

"The Holy Spirit is the third name in the trinity." (*O. A. Johnson, Bible Doctrines, Lesson XI, 'The Holy Spirit', page 28, 1911 edition*)

This may appear to be an advance on his 1900 reasoning but this is not really

so. As we shall see now, he still refers to the Holy Spirit as “it”.

Note too the use of the word “trinity”. It was not commonplace to do this at that time (1911) but it was done occasionally. Certainly it did not convey then the three-in-one idea of God that was to later permeate the teachings of Seventh-day Adventism (as it does now). Johnson also says

“The Holy Spirit” is “the third person of the Godhead.” It “is Christ's representative, but divested of the personality of humanity and independent thereof.” *Desire of Ages*, large edition, pages 669, 671.” (*Ibid*)

Notice the Holy Spirit is called “the third person” but is still referred to as “it”. It does appear that as stated here by Ellen White, this was always generally believed by Seventh-day Adventists. This is that the Holy Spirit is Christ Himself, unrestricted by humanity. Seeing that throughout the Scriptures the activities of the Holy Spirit were very much different to those of an individual being (like God and Christ), He (or it) was not thought to be an individual person like them (for details of what the pioneers believed concerning the Holy Spirit, see section thirty-one, and section thirty-two. For Ellen White’s beliefs see section thirty-three and section-thirty-four).

The original quote (as above found in *Desire of Ages*) when Ellen White said this was in 1895. This is when she wrote (this was after referring to where Jesus said “before Abraham was I AM”)

“Cumbered with humanity, Christ could not be in every place personally; therefore it was altogether for their advantage that He should leave them, go to His father, and send the Holy Spirit to be His successor on earth. The Holy Spirit is Himself [Christ] divested of the personality of humanity and independent thereof. He [Christ] would represent Himself as present in all places by His Holy Spirit, as the Omnipresent.” (*Ellen G. White, Manuscript No. 1084, February 18, 19th, 1895, page 21*)

Notice that Ellen White said that it was Christ who is “the Omnipresent”. This is very similar to saying that He is the eternal presence (see section sixteen). See also Ellen White’s counsel to Chapman and what she wrote in *Acts of the Apostles* (see above). Johnson also says in his study

“The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and comes to us in the name of Christ.” (*Ibid*)

This is the same as saying that Christ is God in the person of His Son represented by the Holy Spirit (the eternal presence). In the next statement notice again the reference to “it”

“Since the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, it must have the same divine attributes as God.” (*Ibid*)

Johnson also refers to the Holy Spirit as being the

“Spirit of God and Spirit of Christ.” (*Ibid*)

This reasoning that the Holy Spirit was both God and Christ omnipresent (Johnson gave Romans 8:9 as a text reference) had, during Ellen White’s ministry, always been the standard denominational position of Seventh-day Adventists (see section thirty-one and section thirty-two). It was not that the Holy Spirit was a person like God and Christ but that He is the Spirit of them both when they are not physically present. Even when Ellen White stressed that the Holy Spirit was a personality, this still did not change anything. The Holy Spirit was still believed to be as such (the presence of the Father and the Son whilst the latter two were still physically in Heaven) and not an individual person like God and Christ. This can be seen here (1911). Remember, Johnson was head of the Bible department at Walla Walla College.

Now note something very interesting.

In the fourth edition of this same book *Bible Doctrines* (the third edition was issued in 1914 and is not available to the author of these notes), on the same study of the Holy Spirit (even the chapter number is the same), the reference to “it” is not there any more. The Holy Spirit is now referred to as “He”. On page 37 it says

“The Holy Spirit is the third name in the trinity.” (*O. A. Johnson, Bible Doctrines, Lesson XI, ‘The Holy Spirit’, page 37, 1917 edition*)

This says exactly the same as the 1911 edition. It also says

"The Holy Spirit" is "the third person of the Godhead." He "is Christ's representative, but divested of the personality of humanity and independent thereof." *Desire of Ages, large edition, pp. 669, 671.* (*Ibid*)

Note that this wording is the same as in the 1911 edition except that “it” has been replaced by “He”. It also says as in the 1911 edition

“The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and comes to us in the name of Christ.” (*Ibid*)

This was exactly the same as the 1911 edition. The 1917 edition also says

“Since the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, he must have the same divine attributes as God.” (*Ibid*)

Again the word “it” has been substituted with “he”. It may be reasoned here that Johnson had come to believe that the Holy Spirit was a person like God and Christ but this is not so. He said, just as he had done so in the 1911 edition, that

the Holy Spirit is called the

“Spirit of God and Spirit of Christ” (*ibid*)

The Seventh-day Adventist belief was that the Holy Spirit belonged to both the Father and the Son. It was not believed that He was a separate individual being like them and separate from them. This can be seen in the sections detailing the beliefs as mentioned above. This non-trinitarian belief was to change. This was as the trinitarian concepts of God, Christ and the Holy Spirit made their way into Seventh-day Adventism.

Eventual change

As we know today, this changeover from a non-trinitarian view of the Holy Spirit to one that is considered fully trinitarian did happen but it did take time and it was not an easy road. The latter we shall see later when as well as changing their views on the Holy Spirit, there had to be a phasing out of old time literature that spoke of the old theology of Seventh-day Adventism.

In the next section (forty-five) and the two that follow, we shall be taking a looking at some of our past publications. We shall also see what it was that made them non-trinitarian.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section forty-five

Transitional times (non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism)

From what we have read in section thirty-five and section thirty-six (this was concerning the 1919 Bible Conference), we can see that the year 1919 in Seventh-day Adventism marks the beginning of the transitional period from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism. This was when at a Bible Conference held that year (the first of its kind ever held within Seventh-day Adventism), W. W. Prescott began to present views of Christ that were not then in keeping with the preponderant belief within Seventh-day Adventism. This preponderant belief was that at some point in eternity, Christ came forth of the bosom of the Father, thus He was literally the Son of God. This was the begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventists (see section fifteen and section twenty). It was this faith that was held by them all during the time of Ellen White's ministry.

Up to 1914, the belief expressed in our published fundamental beliefs was that Christ is the "Son of the Eternal Father". We shall see this later. It was also the same when they were rewritten in 1931. This remained the same up to 1980. This was when the trinity doctrine, as it is now expressed in our fundamental beliefs, was first voted in at a General Conference session held at Dallas Texas. This means that for the very first time in our history, in our yearbook for 1981, we expressed God as being a trinity. We shall also see this later. It was also the first time that in any of our published fundamental beliefs, Christ was not referred to as the Son of God. He is referred to instead as "God the Son", a designation that is not found in the Scriptures or in the writings of Ellen White (the spirit of prophecy writings). It is in fact a trinitarian terminology.

To those at the 1919 Bible conference who were seeking to change this long held begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventists, it must have been reasonably obvious that this was not something that would be achieved overnight. I say this because of the objections that were made to the trinitarian concepts that at this conference W. W. Prescott had presented (Christ unbegotten and coeternal with the Father). In other words, because there were objections by those holding leading positions in the church, then there would surely be objections from the ministry in general and from the laity. It must have been realised therefore that if the thinking of Seventh-day Adventists worldwide was ever to be changed, it would need to be done very gradually. This is exactly what happened. It took until 1980 for the changeover to come to full fruition. This was almost 50 years after the word trinity was first added to our published fundamental beliefs.

Whenever I think of the 1919 Bible Conference, I am always reminded of the testimony of M. L. Andreasen who said in 1948 in a chapel talk at Loma Linda

“I remember how astonished we were when *Desire of Ages* was first published, for it contained some things that we considered unbelievable, among others the doctrine of the Trinity which was not then generally accepted by the Adventists.” (*M. L. Andreasen, Chapel Talk, Loma Linda, California, November 30th 1948*)

We have discussed this at length in section forty so we will not do so again here, suffice to say that as I have researched our history, I have not found any evidence that this book, published in 1898, affected in any way our theology, at least not whilst Ellen White was alive, She died in 1915.

Looking at this in another way: If *Desire of Ages* was recognised as revealing God as a trinity, then why was this not recognised at the Bible Conference in 1919, which was 21 years after the book was published (1898)? We must also ask why this was not recognised by the church itself because as we shall see later in this section, right up to the time of the death of Ellen White, our published fundamental beliefs remained exactly the same, word for word, from when they were published in 1872. This means that up to the time of Ellen White’s death, these published beliefs had remained the same ever since they were first published.

It is quite apparent that during the early 1900’s, the book *Desire of Ages* had not affected the theology (fundamental beliefs) of Seventh-day Adventists one iota. Concerning Andreasen’s testimony therefore, one is left to wonder who the “we” is that he mentions (see above).

As of yet, I have not discovered why this practise of putting our fundamental beliefs in our yearbook was temporarily stopped in 1914 but it was not continued again to 1931. This was when for the very first time in our history, the word trinity appeared in them. By then though, the trinity doctrine itself was far from being established within Seventh-day Adventism. There was still a long way to go before this was achieved.

From the early 1900’s

It all began in the early 1900’s. This was when attempts were made to bring into Seventh-day Adventism, trinitarian concepts of Christ. It all progressed from that time onwards. As Russell Holt in his 1969 term paper put it (this was concerning the time period 1900-1930)

“This period saw the death of most of those pioneers who had championed and held the anti-trinitarian position. Their places were being taken by men who were changing their thinking, or had never opposed the doctrine.” (*Russell Holt, “The doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination: Its rejection and acceptance” 1969*)

The years between 1900 and 1930 were indeed the time period when the last of the pioneers died (J. N. Loughborough is considered to be the last to die in 1924). It was also the time period when some Seventh-day Adventists, particularly those in a favourable position to push certain views on to the laity, began to change their thinking concerning the Godhead.

Up to the time of Ellen White's death, even though some may have inwardly harboured trinitarian ideas of the Godhead, there was still no denominational confession of the trinity doctrine. Even for decades beyond Ellen White's death, the denominational belief was that Christ was begotten of God (a separate personal being from the Father), also that He (Christ) and God His Father were two separate personalities (see section fifteen, section twenty and section thirty). To Seventh-day Adventists, Christ was always the Son of God.

We have also seen in previous sections that Ellen White warned that regarding the personalities of God and Christ, wrong views were on their way into Seventh-day Adventism (see section one, section twenty-four and section twenty-nine). This was in the early 1900's when the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still a decidedly non-trinitarian denomination. Never did Ellen White say that the non-trinitarian views of the pioneers were wrong. This realisation is very important.

After Ellen White died, trinitarian concepts of God and Christ, also of the Holy Spirit, were slowly but surely introduced into the thinking of Seventh-day Adventists. This eventually led to the establishing of trinitarianism within Seventh-day Adventism.

It should be noted here that this changeover made it so much easier for those belonging to other denominations, particularly those of the trinitarian denominations, to become Seventh-day Adventists. This is because after trinitarianism (of a sort) became acceptable in our ranks, to accept the message of the Seventh-day Adventist Church would no longer necessitate an abandoning of what would have been believed by them to be the central belief of the Christian faith, meaning of course, God being a trinity.

Prior to this changeover, the non-trinitarianism of Seventh-day Adventism would have been almost prohibitive to staunch (loyal) trinitarians becoming Seventh-day Adventists. Needless to say, those who are truly trinitarian do not usually ally themselves to denominations that do not uphold the trinity doctrine. This is regardless of what else that denomination may be teaching. This is why for the trinitarians who were considering joining our denomination, our once non-trinitarianism must have been viewed as a very big hurdle to get over. It is also true to say (although it is too much to go into here) that our sanctuary message regarding the investigative judgement, as well as the belief that Christ could have sinned and gone out of existence, would not have made sense to a trinitarian. In fact within trinitarianism, these beliefs are totally prohibitive (see section thirteen for a discussion of these subjects).

According to the reasoning of many trinitarians, to oppose the trinity doctrine is treachery. This is why they usually regard a non-trinitarian denomination as a sub-Christian sect or cult. Certainly genuine trinitarians would not regard non-trinitarians as being part of what is generally known as mainstream Christianity.

It is only reasonable to conclude therefore that during the time of Ellen White, those who joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church, in the main, did abandon the trinity doctrine. I say this because our publications were full of non-trinitarianism and anti-trinitarianism therefore we were readily recognised as a non-trinitarian denomination, even a sub-Christian cult. We shall see this more clearly in later sections. A true trinitarian would never have joined such a denomination. As of yet I have not discovered anyone who became a Seventh-day Adventist and who still retained a trinity belief.

More than likely it was this realisation (the necessary abandonment of the trinity doctrine to become a Seventh-day Adventist) that brought our leadership to believe that if a version of the trinity doctrine could be deemed acceptable by our denomination, many more converts would be won to Seventh-day Adventism. It is also probably true to say that because Ellen White had said that the Holy Spirit is a personality, this changeover was regarded as a logical and justifiable move to make.

Self-justification is very much a problem in Christianity. If pandered to it can eclipse what God demands of His people. Russell Holt then said

“The trinity began to be published, until by 1931 it had triumphed and become the standard denominational position. Isolated stalwarts remained who refused to yield, but the outcome had been decided.” (*Ibid*)

This statement is far from being true. Admittedly in 1931, the word trinity was for the very first time in our history used in our statement of fundamentals beliefs but it far from signifies that Seventh-day Adventists worldwide had accepted the trinity doctrine. Just one man did this inclusion: namely F. M. Wilcox. Even then, before it was published, it was not submitted to the church for approval. By this time also, in describing the three personalities of the Godhead, the word trinity itself was used more positively in Seventh-day Adventist literature although it fell far short of trinity essentialness. We need to keep this in perspective.

This changeover in thinking took many more years to accomplish. In 1931, the preponderant belief in Seventh-day Adventism was still non-trinitarian. It was just not possible in such a short space of time for the changeover to trinitarianism to be accomplished. Note particularly that Holt says that there were those who “refused to yield” to the new theology of trinitarianism. This shows that there was decided resistance to this changeover.

A gradual acceptance

Although in 1931 the word trinity was included in our statement of beliefs, it must

have been seen that rather than regarding this as any distinctive change of theology, the majority of Seventh-day Adventists would have accepted the use of this word as just being an alternative term for Godhead (remember here that at that time, the majority of Seventh-day Adventists around the world would still have been non-trinitarian). In fact the word Godhead is not synonymous with the word trinity. There is absolutely no way that the three-in-one concept of trinity (tri-unity) can be read into any of the Greek words translated Godhead as in the KJV (see Acts 17:9, Romans 1:20 and Colossians 2:9).

Nevertheless, this initial inclusion into our published fundamental beliefs of the word trinity was one of the early steps that was taken to introduce trinitarianism into Seventh-day Adventism. Note that this was only 12 years after the 1919 Bible conference where we saw in section thirty-five and section thirty-six that there was decided resistance by some to the bringing in of trinitarian concepts of Christ. This was even amongst the very higher ups of our leadership.

Certainly I have found no evidence to suggest that by the year 1931 our overall theology regarding the trinity doctrine was anywhere near established (as Russell Holt claims – see above). Instead, I can only conclude that this establishing came about only very gradually over a long period of time.

Very importantly it must be noted here that the Seventh-day Adventist version of the trinity doctrine is far different from the original trinitarian doctrine. The latter is the trinity teaching that in this paper is termed orthodox. This is where I only partly agree with Merlin Burt who completed a study on this very subject in 1996. This is when he says

“The [Seventh-day Adventist] church gradually shifted during from the 1930s to 1950s to the ‘orthodox’ Christian view on the trinity and deity of Christ” (Merlin Burt, ‘Demise of Semi-Arianism and anti-trinitarianism in Adventist theology, 1888-1957 page 47)

Here we see a different view than the one expressed by Russell Holt (see above). Holt said that by 1931 the trinity was well established within Seventh-day Adventism (“[the standard denominational position](#)”) whilst Burt says that between the 1930’s and the 1950’s there was a gradual shift from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism. Burt’s view is a correct view of what actually happened. It is a balanced view. Having said that, I do not regard the Seventh-day Adventist rendering of the trinity doctrine as “[the orthodox Christian view](#)” although it is completely understandable why Burt made this statement.

Usually, the orthodox view of the trinity doctrine is as this belief is expressed in the creeds that came out of Nicaea (AD 325) and Constantinople (AD 381). These are the creeds that say that the Father is the only one of the Godhead who is unbegotten whilst the Son is begotten, albeit this is said to be an eternal or everlasting begetting. These creeds also say that the Holy Spirit proceeds although as has been said before, different denominations have different ideas

about this procession. In orthodoxy also, the three personalities of the Godhead have their subsistence in the one indivisible substance of God, the latter meaning the *one being* of God. This is what makes the trinity doctrine truly trinitarian. Without this one indivisible substance belief, there is no trinity doctrine (see section six).

Along with many who describe themselves as evangelicals, the Seventh-day Adventist Church currently claims that each of the three members of the Godhead is unbegotten. This is not only a major difference in beliefs but also one that cannot be reconciled with orthodoxy. In keeping with orthodoxy and to maintain that God is a trinity, Seventh-day Adventist trinitarianism says that all three have their subsistence in the one indivisible substance (the one being) of God. This means that to a degree, we do have a sort of orthodoxy. This is why I said I can see why Burt says that Seventh-day Adventists gradually came to adopt “the ‘orthodox’ Christian view on the trinity and deity of Christ”.

As we noted in section twenty-three, Burt concluded his paper by saying (this was in his final concluding remarks – the last sentence in his paper)

“For the doctrine of the trinity and eternal deity of Christ, the change took over fifty years to become normative.” (*Ibid page 59*)

Although it is not specifically stated, I assume that Burt is referring to the time period between 1931 (the year that the word trinity was first added to our statement of beliefs) and 1980. The latter is the year when as it is articulated in our “Seventh-day Adventists Believe ...”, the trinity doctrine was first voted in at a General Conference session. If this is the case, then I agree with his conclusions although I do have very serious reservations concerning his remark concerning the “eternal deity of Christ”. This is because although our pioneers did express this deity in terms that can only be described as non-trinitarian, they did express it correctly.

If you have read all the previous sections, it will be realised that it is a serious error to believe the only way to describe the true divinity of Christ is by trinitarianism. This is because we know that the trinity doctrine is only an assumed doctrine and not one that is explicitly stated in Scripture (see section four). This means that a Bible only way to describe the deity of Christ must be non-trinitarian.

Time and death

Returning our thoughts to Burt’s study, he did say with reference to the fifty years that the trinity doctrine took to become normative within Seventh-day Adventism

“Finally, the passage of time helped settle the issue as various individuals died” (*Merlin Burt, ‘Demise of Semi-Arianism and anti-trinitarianism in Adventist theology, 1888-1957 page 59*)

Time and death were indeed two of the major component factors that enabled our church leadership to bring about a change in the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We shall also see later (and in section fifty-one) that these are the same two factors that Froom was told would be needed before he could safely publish his book *Movement of Destiny*. This is the book that was once described by the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as an accurate account of the history of Seventh-day Adventism, which we know today it was not.

With regards to the difficulties that would be encountered in publishing this book (not the writing of it) Froom wrote regarding what A. G. Daniells had told him

“He [Daniells] knew that time would be required for certain theological wounds to heal, and for attitudes to modify on the part of some. Possibly it would be necessary to wait until certain individuals had dropped out of action, before the needed portrayal could wisely be brought forth. He likewise envisioned the vast toil and time involved.” (*LeRoy Froom, ‘Movement of Destiny’ page 17, 1971*)

These “theological wounds” would have been brought about by theological warfare. This was warfare because of such as the changeover from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism. As we have already seen in previous sections, there was decided resistance against this change thus battles were fought and “wounds” were inevitable.

We can also see here that Froom was told that both time and death would help resolve the difficulties in publishing his account of our history although he was told also of the difficulty of actually producing it. He was told that on the part of some that “attitudes” would need to change (which does take time) and that it would be necessary for “certain individuals” to have “dropped out of action” (died) before his portrayal of our history “could wisely be brought forth”. Froom then wrote

“Some errors can be corrected only after those who cling to them pass off the scene” (*Ibid*)

It is unfortunate today that the one time faith of the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism is referred to as being error (which is what is being done here) but this is the way that it is today within our denomination. As we have noted previously (see section ten), some such as William Johnsson have claimed

“Many of the pioneers, including James White, J. N. Andrews, Uriah Smith and J. H. Waggoner held to an Arian or semi-Arian view - that is, the Son at some point in time, before the creation of our world, was generated by the Father. Only gradually did this false doctrine give way to the Biblical truth, and largely under the impact of Ellen Whites writings in statements such as “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. (Desire of ages p 530)”

(William Johnsson, Adventist Review January 6th 1994 Article 'Present Truth - Walking in God's Light', 1994)

This was the once standard non-trinitarian faith of the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism. Here we come back to the view that the trinity doctrine was only gradually accepted within Seventh-day Adventism, also that this came about because of the writings of Ellen White. It also reiterates that our pioneers were teaching “false doctrine” (error) concerning Christ.

As we have seen in previous sections, Ellen White did not see it this way. She regarded what the pioneers believed, especially what they believed about God and Christ, as being the truth that God had revealed to them (see section fifteen, section twenty-three, section twenty-four and section twenty-nine).

When in Australia in 1893, Ellen White wrote about those who were spreading false reports concerning what Seventh-day Adventists then believed. This was particularly regarding the pre-existence and divinity of Christ. She said of these people

“They do not, like honest, just men, come to those who are accused, and seek to find out what is the truth concerning what they have heard in regard to their faith; but without inquiry they spread false statements in order to prejudice the people against those who hold the truth.” *(Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 12th May 1893, 'An appeal for the Australasian field')*

Concerning one man who thought he knew what Seventh-day Adventists believed about the divinity of Christ (but obviously did not) she added

“This man may not have known what our faith is on this point, but he was not left in ignorance. He was informed that there is not a people on earth who hold more firmly to the truth of Christ's pre-existence than do Seventh-day Adventists.” *(Ibid)*

This non-trinitarianism of Seventh-day Adventism was firmly upheld by Ellen White. Never once did she decry it or say that regarding it the pioneers were in error (we need to bear this in mind when later we study our published fundamental beliefs).

As we have said before though, if Christ's divinity is not expressed in terms of the trinity, then trinitarians will claim that His full and complete deity is not correctly expressed. Ellen White would have not agreed with this reasoning. Never did she express Christ's divinity in terms of the trinity doctrine. In fact in one testimony at the height of the early 1900's crisis within Seventh-day Adventism, she said that all three-in-one illustrations (the type used by trinitarians to describe God's three-in-one being) were error (see section twenty-seven

Changing the beliefs of a church at large

We have previously noted that up to the time of the death of Ellen White (1915), also for decades beyond, our denomination was strictly non-trinitarian. This is easily established by reviewing our past published fundamental beliefs (we shall do this later). Certainly it was not just the beliefs of a few that made it such. So how does any denomination, as an entire body of people, change from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism?

The answer to this particular question is that it really does take time and death. Again, obvious to relate, no denomination at large can change its beliefs overnight. Can you imagine our church leadership publishing a statement in the Review to the effect that in the future we would be a Sunday-keeping Church? Even if our church leadership did desire the change, this of course would be a ridiculous way of going about it. Without even giving it consideration, our church membership at large would totally condemn such a move, even calling it insane!

It was exactly the same with our church becoming trinitarian. It would have been 'insane for our church leadership to make a statement to the effect that in the future we would be trinitarian and that the church at large would have to accept it. Without a doubt, the church as a whole would have totally rejected such a move.

In a small way this rejection can be seen at the 1919 Bible Conference. This was when W. W. Prescott attempted to introduce beliefs (concepts) about Christ that were not as then, believed and taught by our church at large. He met decided resistance by some and this was only a small select body of people. How would it have been if this had been known by the entire church? Remember, the details of this conference were not released to Seventh-day Adventists. This is one of the reasons why this conference was referred to as being secret. As it was though, what Prescott taught at this conference did start the trinity ball rolling.

At this conference, the introduction of these trinity concepts was an attempt to change the thinking of those high-ranking officials in our church who were still holding on to the belief that Christ was begotten in eternity. These were those who because of their offices within our denomination, were in a position to go away from the conference to teach others what they themselves had heard.

Whilst some of the delegates objected to Prescott's reasoning (see section thirty-five and section thirty-six), there were those who did accept them (and who believed them before the conference) and so went from the conference to teach others the same. This was even though it was not in keeping with what the majority of Seventh-day Adventists around the world must have still believed. This means that what was done at this conference was just one of the moves made by our leadership to gradually change the beliefs of our church from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism.

It must have been then realised (in 1919) that this changeover was going to

be a long drawn out affair, with time and death being two very important factors needed to change the beliefs of the majority. Needless to say, these beliefs could not be changed en bloc or overnight.

A changing attitude

Time and death certainly did take their toll. The pioneers who believed and taught non-trinitarianism did die off whilst the new members coming into our church, by some, were beginning to be taught trinitarianism. This was done through publications such as the *Adventist Review*, the *Signs of the Times*, the *Ministry* magazine as well as through our Sabbath School lessons etc. Our denominational books also began to publish and promote trinitarian views of God, as did many of our ministers from the pulpit. As becomes evident when we read section forty-eight, all were not converted to trinitarianism although as time passed, it did eventually become the accepted view of the ministry.

In consequence, the more members who accepted the new theology, the more it was taught. This the way that the main body of Seventh-day Adventists slowly but surely evolved from being non-trinitarian to trinitarian albeit it took from the time period immediately following the death of Ellen White (1915) until the early 1950's to accomplish it. As has been said previously, it was only by this latter date (the 1950's) that it can be said that trinitarianism was fully established within Seventh-day Adventism but even then it was not so pointedly expressed as it is today.

We need to take the time to look at this changed attitude within our denomination to trinitarianism. This of course was as the non-trinitarian pioneers passed from the scene. This we shall do by looking at the difference in statements of beliefs that throughout our denominational history have been issued by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Before we do this though, we shall consider the problem of past publications. These were the past articles and books etc that clearly showed that we were once non-trinitarian.

Changing non-denominational books to create a 'new image'

We have seen in section thirty-seven, section thirty-eight and section thirty-nine that in changing the image of Seventh-day Adventism, certain of our books like Uriah Smith's classic *Daniel and the Revelation* needed editing to bring it in line with that which was becoming the new theology (trinitarianism) of Seventh-day Adventism. Over the years also, books that promoted the old view were gradually phased out.

The problem in creating this new image of Seventh-day Adventism did not only concern Seventh-day Adventist books and magazines but also non-Seventh-day Adventist publications. Needless to say, each of these individual books that had been written about us could not be changed but then again, these types of books do not usually stay in print for very long.

This could not be said about such as encyclopaedias and reference books that spoke of our beliefs. These types of books would remain in print forever (so to speak). In *Movement of Destiny*, Froom made reference to this particular problem. Under the heading *Correction in Encyclopedias and Reference Works* he wrote

“Furthermore, after our corrected denominational declarations had become matters of historical record and common knowledge, and with regrettable statements still lingering in a few of our books eliminated, we were in a better position to take issue with certain published statements that gravely misrepresented our faith. Opportunity opened to make corrections in various encyclopedias and religious reference works, and even in the books of harsh critics – those classing us among the “anti-Christian cults,” et cetera” (*LeRoy Froom. Movement of Destiny, page 467, ‘Changing the impaired image of Adventism’*)

These “certain published statements that gravely misrepresented our faith” (as Froom puts it) was once the actual faith of our church, at least it was whilst Ellen White was alive. We have noted this over and over again in previous sections so we will not go into it in detail here. Here we can see the admittance, by someone of our leadership, that we were once reckoned amongst the “anti-Christian cults”.

Up to the 1950’s/1960’s it was quite normal for other denominations to think of us as a cult. We shall see more of this in future sections. This was the image that needed changing. This could not become possible just by changing our beliefs and editing our books but also by making sure that these other denominations became aware of our changed faith.

As we have reasoned before, this had to be done with a great deal of tact and diplomacy. This is why, when he wrote his book *Movement of Destiny*, Froom made it appear that regarding what is often termed the great fundamentals of the Christian faith (something he calls the eternal verities), it was only a few that had managed to get their misguided views into print and speak out against them.

Today we know that these so called misguided views were in fact the one time faith of Seventh-day Adventists whilst Froom incorrectly said that the eternal verities (meaning trinitarianism etc) had always been the preponderant faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This was like saying (with regard to these verities) that Seventh-day Adventists had always been in agreement with mainstream Christianity. This would of course take in such beliefs as the trinity doctrine (meaning that which trinitarians says truly depicts and is the only way of expressing the full and complete divinity of Christ), also the finished atonement at Calvary as well as the sinless human nature of Christ etc. As we know today, we were not in harmony with other denominations on these beliefs. Our pioneers taught very differently. They opposed what the trinitarian denominations taught. Froom was also seemingly very happy to write

“The readiness of many to correct misstatements concerning our beliefs, and misunderstandings of our basic positions, was most gratifying.” (*Ibid* page 468)

Froom was referring here to non-Seventh-day Adventist publishers. It appears that they were quite cooperative with the Seventh-day Adventist requests to correct their publications. Unfortunately, these “misstatements” and “misunderstandings” were in fact the early 1900’s faith of Seventh-day Adventists. The latter was also the faith (sacred truth) that Ellen White said that God had given to both her and the other pioneers that never should be changed (see section fifteen, section twenty-three, section twenty-four, section twenty-nine). Now though, in the 1950’s, the transformation (metamorphosis) to trinitarianism was almost complete and the world needed to be aware of it. At least, this was the view of the 1950’s church leadership. Froom concluded

“Many of these corrections went on behind the scenes, quietly accomplishing their objectives.” (*Ibid*)

A changing faith

Around the time period that the last of our pioneers died, which is often said to be 1924 (the year that J. N. Loughborough died), the leaders of our church began to openly show favour towards the trinity doctrine. Eventually, in 1931, which was 16 years after the death of Ellen White, the word trinity for the very first time in our history was included in our statement of beliefs. This must not be taken to mean that at this time our denomination had a published theological view of the trinity but simply that in this capacity (meaning in our published fundamental beliefs), the word trinity was used for the very first time. It is true to say that with regards to the trinity doctrine eventually being included in our fundamental beliefs, which was as voted in at the 1980 General Conference session, this evolved from that one small but very significant beginning.

From the beginning of our movement (1844), it was the consensus of opinion amongst our pioneers that any move to formulate a fixed statement of beliefs would be as formulating a creed, although from time to time statements were issued. We shall allow Russell Holt to articulate this when he wrote in his term paper

“A comparison of statements of faith issued at various times by the denomination, shows a marked change in the opinion of the church concerning the trinity. Separate statements appeared in 1874, 1889, 1894 and 1931. The first three of these are, for all practical purposes, identical in the articles dealing with the deity. A comparison of the statements of 1874 and 1931 shows the change. The 1874 statement could be subscribed to by either an anti-trinitarian or by one who adhered to the doctrine. The 1931 statement is definitely trinitarian, and is the statement currently printed by the denomination” (*Russell Holt, “The doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination: Its rejection and acceptance” 1969*)

We can see from this that over the years and since the time of our pioneers the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists have changed but I certainly would not agree with Holt where he says that the “1931 statement is definitely trinitarian”. We shall see why this is later in this section. I would also say that whilst the 1874 statement said nothing concerning the Father and Christ that trinitarians would object to, it fell far short of anything that can be described as being trinitarian. There was no statement made concerning the Holy Spirit, neither was there any remark about God being a trinity.

In the introduction to our denominational book “Seventh-day Adventists Believe ...”, it does confirm (as Holt says) that throughout the years, Seventh-day Adventists have been very reluctant to formalize a creed but from time to time have found it necessary to summarize their beliefs. This *Seventh-day Adventists Believe ...* publication says

“In 1872 the Adventist press at Battle Creek, Michigan, published a “synopsis of our faith” in 25 propositions. This document, slightly revised and expanded to 28 sections, appeared in the denominational *Yearbook* of 1889. This was not continued in subsequent issues, but it was inserted again in the *Yearbook* in 1905 and continued to appear through 1914.” (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe ... A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines*, ‘A word about the 27 fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists’)

Here we are told that in 1872, the leadership of our church did deem it necessary to issue a “synopsis of our faith” which, in a slightly modified (expanded) version, appeared in our 1889 yearbook. This same introduction then continues by saying that this practice was discontinued from then until 1905 when through to 1914 it was reinstated. We shall take a look at these statements later. This statement I do not find exactly correct. I cannot see that these fundamental beliefs were published in the 1906 yearbook. In the 1889 Yearbook, under the sub-heading *Fundamental Principles of Seventh-day Adventists*, a pre-ambule to the statement said

“As elsewhere stated, Seventh-day Adventists have no creed but the Bible; but they hold to certain well-defined points of faith, for which they feel prepared to give a reason " to every man that asketh" them. The following propositions may be taken as a summary of the principal features of their religious faith, upon which there is, so far as we know, entire unanimity throughout the body.” (*The 1889 Yearbook of Seventh-day Adventists*, page 147, ‘*Fundamental Principles of Seventh-day Adventists*’)

This last sentence is very important to our studies. It can be seen that in the view of the church, there was “entire unanimity throughout the body” on the “principal features” of our faith. We shall return to what these beliefs were later. Note that this was in 1889, the year after the famous Minneapolis General Conference session.

From the very year that Ellen White died (1915) until 1931, this non-trinitarian statement of beliefs was discontinued to be put in our yearbooks, the latter date being when for the very first time in Seventh-day Adventist history the word trinity appeared in our fundamental beliefs. As it says in our *Seventh-day Adventists Believe ...*

In response to an appeal from church leaders in Africa for “a statement [that] would help government officials and others to a better understanding of our work,” a committee of four, including the president of the General Conference, prepared a statement encompassing “the principal features” of belief as they “may be summarized.” (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe ...A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines*, ‘A word about the 27 fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists’)

Note here that to accomplish the request for a statement of beliefs, “a committee of four” (that included the then General Conference president) was set up to formulate the statement. The introduction continues

“This statement of 22 fundamental beliefs, first printed in the 1931 *Yearbook*, stood until the 1980 General Conference session replaced it with a similar but more comprehensive, summarization in 27 paragraphs, published under the title “Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists.” (*Ibid*)

As expressed in the 1931 yearbook, this statement of beliefs continued until it was replaced by the summaries in our current *Seventh-day Adventists Believe ...*. This is the book that explains the summaries of our faith that was voted in as official in 1980 at a General Conference session held at Dallas Texas. This was the very first time in Seventh-day Adventist history that the trinity doctrine as such was officially voted into the beliefs of our denomination. We now need to look in detail at the differences in these statements and see why the 1931 one was unofficial.

Differences in the statements of beliefs

Prior to 1931, all the statements of our beliefs concerning God and Christ were very much the same. In the Seventh-day Adventist publication *Issues: The Seventh-day Adventist Church and Certain Private Ministries*, there is reference to an 1872 statement of faith. This was published in pamphlet form. It makes this observation

“The nonbinding, noncreedal status of the statement is of special interest. Even more significant, however, is the fact that the statement is distinctly non-trinitarian. Jesus is described as Creator and Redeemer but is nowhere identified as God or as eternal. He simply is “the Son of the eternal Father” (*Issues: The Seventh-day Adventist Church and Certain Private Ministries*’ page 39, chapter, ‘Historic Adventism – Ancient Landmarks and Present Truth’)

Notice first of all that this publication, authorised by the Officers and Union Presidents of the North American Divisions, says that the statement was, as they put it, “nonbinding” and “noncreedal”. This is because the intent of our pioneers in publishing this and other subsequent statements was not to fix our beliefs as unchanging but was to make known to the public in general, a synopsis of the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. To put this in another way, the purpose of this 1872 statement was to make known our beliefs to those who were not acquainted with Seventh-day Adventism. It was also to serve as refuting error that was then being circulated about what we really did believe. The latter was very important because just as is done today, wrong sentiments about what we believed were being circulated. As a prelude to these statements of beliefs it was said

“In presenting to the public this synopsis of our faith, we wish to have it distinctly understood that we have no articles of faith, creed, or discipline, aside from the Bible. We do not put forth this as having any authority with our people, nor is it designed to secure uniformity among them, as a system of faith, but is a brief statement of what is, and has been, with great unanimity, held by them. We often find it necessary to meet inquiries on this subject, and sometimes to correct false statements circulated against us, and to remove erroneous impressions which have obtained with those who have not had an opportunity to become acquainted with our faith and practice. Our only object is to meet this necessity.” (*Ibid*, Appendix XL1, ‘Declaration of the fundamental principles taught and practiced by Seventh-day Adventists’, page 437)

It then said

“As Seventh-day Adventists we desire simply that our position shall be understood, and we are the more solicitous for this because there are many who call themselves Adventists who hold views with which we can have no sympathy, some of which, we think, are subversive of the plainest and most important principles set forth in the word of God.” (*Ibid*)

From the very beginning, our pioneers were very much against anything that might be interpreted as fixed beliefs or a creed. This revealed their willingness to be led by the Holy Spirit, also to have their beliefs modified as God saw fit to reveal truth to them. This would have been as the truth was revealed through collective Bible Study and through the ministry of Ellen G. White.

Regarding God and Christ, this 1872 set of beliefs (principles) were exactly the same as was later set out in 1874 (June 4th) in the *Signs of the Times*, also in the 1889 yearbook. This shows that throughout this time period (17 years) which covered the time of the Minneapolis General Conference (1888), they had not changed. The first belief said

“That there is one God, a personal, spiritual being, the creator of all things,

omnipotent, omniscient, and eternal, infinite in wisdom, holiness, justice, goodness, truth, and mercy; unchangeable, and everywhere present by his representative, the Holy Spirit. Ps. 139:7.” (1872 declaration of the fundamental principles taught and practiced by Seventh-day Adventists as quoted in ‘Issues: The Seventh-day Adventist Church and Certain Private Ministries’, Appendix XL1, page 437, see also *Signs of the Times*, June 4, 1874 and 1889 year book page 147)

The second belief said

“That there is one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Eternal Father, the one by whom God created all things, and by whom they do consist;” (*Ibid*)

As we have seen in previous sections, this is exactly the same as Ellen White said throughout her entire ministry. That is that God and Christ were two separate and distinct personages. Note first of all the very first declaration in this statement. It says very clearly that, “there is one God, a personal, spiritual Being”. This “one God” is not referred to here as a trinity but as an individual in His own right.

We can see also that Christ, in His own right, is also referred to as a personal individual. Notice it says of Christ that He is “the Son of the Eternal Father” meaning the Son of God. This is with reference to what we term the pre-existence of Christ. Here we see that in our 1872, 1874, also 1889 published fundamental beliefs, both God and His Son were designated as two separate divine personalities, just as was repeatedly emphasised by Ellen White during the early 1900’s (the time of the Kellogg crisis). In other words, according to this statement of beliefs, God and Christ are two separate personalities. It really is that simple.

Nowhere in this set of beliefs is it mentioned (or even implied) that these divine personalities, as purported by trinitarians, are part of (belonging to) the one indivisible substance of God (the one being of God). In other words, in this and prior statements of beliefs, God and Christ are not spoken of as having *one being* but as two separate individuals. Certainly the Father and Son are not portrayed as being part of the three-in-one idea of a trinity God. Note too that in belief No.1, this was the only place in this declaration of fundamental beliefs where there is anything like a definition of the Holy Spirit. We can see that He was not concluded to be a person like God and Christ (Father and Son).

Now we come to something even more interesting. This is the 1905 yearbook. This is the year that at a General Conference session held at Takoma Park, Ellen White pleaded with the delegates not to change their denominational beliefs. We noted this in section twenty-nine. Under the heading of *Fundamental Principles of Seventh-day Adventists* it said

“Seventh-day Adventists have no creed but the Bible; but they hold to

certain well-defined points of faith, for which they feel prepared to give a reason" to every man that asketh" them. The following propositions may be taken as a summary of the principal features of their religious faith, upon which there is, so far as is known, entire unanimity throughout the body." (1905 *Seventh-day Adventist yearbook*, 'Fundamental Principles of Seventh-day Adventists', page 188)

Are you saying these words sound familiar? This is hardly surprising. These were exactly the same as was said 16 years earlier in the 1889 yearbook. Now look at beliefs No. 1 and No. 2 that followed. No. 1 stated

"That there is one God, a personal, spiritual being, the Creator of all things, omnipotent, omniscient, and eternal; infinite in wisdom, holiness, justice, goodness, truth, and mercy; unchangeable, and every where present by his representative, the Holy Spirit. Ps. 139: 7." (*Ibid*)

This was followed by No. 2, which stated

"That there is one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Eternal Father, the one by whom he created all thing's, and by whom they do consist;" (*Ibid*)

This is exactly the same as it was expressed in the 1872, 1874 and 1889 published beliefs. They were also published in the *Signs of the Times* in 1878 (February 21st), again in the *Review and Herald* in 1912 (August 22nd), also in our yearbooks for 1905 and 1907 through to 1914. This shows that from 1872 until 1914 there was regarding God and Christ no change in the published fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. This was over a time period of 42 years.

Please note something very important.

Each time these fundamental beliefs are expressed, it is preceded by the statement that throughout the body of Seventh-day Adventism there was unanimity on these beliefs. To any thinking person, this should be very significant.

Here now is something even more interesting. This is that each year from 1907 through to 1914, the fundamental beliefs expressed in our yearbooks for those years was exactly the same as the statements of 1872, 1878, 1889, 1905 and 1912. Even the preamble saying that there was unanimity on these beliefs throughout Seventh-day Adventism was the same. This means that the statements of beliefs regarding God and Christ were exactly the same from 1872 through to 1914. This time period of 42 years was throughout the time of Ellen White's ministry.

Whilst we are on the subject of things that are interesting, note that Uriah Smith had formulated this set of beliefs. He died in 1903. This is the same Uriah Smith

whose classic book *Daniel and the Revelation* was edited in the 1940's to remove from its pages all of its non-trinitarianism (see section forty-six and section forty-seven). It is the same Uriah Smith whose non-trinitarian beliefs were said to be his own personal views and not those of the denomination (see section forty-two). These published fundamental beliefs in our yearbooks show that they were the beliefs of the denomination. This is summarised in the magazine *Spectrum*. After making reference to the 1872 published beliefs it said

“This statement was reprinted several times - in *Signs of the Times* in 1874 and 1875, in *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* in 1874, and as a pamphlet in 1875, 1877-78, 1884, and 1888 - always introduced by a statement that Adventists "have no creed but the Bible, but they hold to certain well-defined points of faith, for which they feel prepared to give a reason.” (Fritz Guy, *Spectrum*, Summer 2004, Volume No. 32, Issue No. 3, ‘*Uncovering the Origins of the Statement of Twenty-seven Fundamental Beliefs*’)

“It was revised and expanded to twenty-eight sections in the 1889 denominational Yearbook, then disappeared for fifteen years, but was reprinted in the Yearbook annually from 1905 to 1914, and in the *Review and Herald* in 1912, where it was designated "Fundamental Principles" and described as "by the late Uriah Smith." It was also reprinted in pamphlet form, with an additional, twenty-ninth section on religious liberty.” (*Ibid*)

The only query I have with this statement is that I cannot find these fundamental beliefs in the 1906 yearbook, neither as yet have I seen the pamphlets of “1875, 1877-78, 1884, and 1888” or found it yet in the *Signs of the Times* for 1875.

The Son of the Eternal Father

In each of the published fundamental beliefs above (between 1872 and 1914) it says of Christ that He is “the Son of the Eternal Father”. This reminds us that in the book *Issues* (also see above), it said concerning the 1872 statement of belief concerning Jesus

“He simply is “the Son of the eternal Father.” (*Issues: The Seventh-day Adventist Church and Certain Private Ministries*’ page 39, chapter, ‘*Historic Adventism – Ancient Landmarks and Present Truth*’)

The belief that in His pre-existence Jesus is the literal (natural) Son of God was the belief consistently held by our pioneers. As we have seen over and over again, this included Ellen White. Today though (2008), also since the reformation within Seventh-day Adventism from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism, this past belief is now denied. As is seen in the theology sections on begotten, the present day Seventh-day Adventist theology prohibits the belief that in His pre-existence Jesus was the literal Son of God. Instead it is said that He is one of three unbegotten co-equal, co-eternal beings that all have their subsistence in the one being of God. He is often termed now God the Son. We shall return our thoughts

to this later.

In saying that Christ is unbegotten, it is also concluded by our church today that as they are used in the Bible with reference to God and Christ, the terms 'Father' and 'Son' should only be used in a metaphorical (figurative) sense and not one that is literal. As we have seen in section fifteen, this is out of harmony with the writings of Ellen White. She says that He was begotten of God therefore He is the literal Son of God.

Creeds etc

Much could be found where creeds were spoken out against but in summary we quote James White as saying

"But the Seventh-day Adventists have no human creed or discipline, therefore give room for God to teach through the gifts of the Spirit. They ardently desire to cast aside the traditions and fables of men, and keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus Christ. Their weekly practice in keeping the Sabbath is a standing rebuke on the churches and the world, and on almost every point of Bible 'truth they stand in direct opposition to the popular doctrines of the churches. And, besides this, there has been an unceasing testimony among us, warning us to stand out separate from the world." (James White, Review and Herald, 1st October 1861, 'Organization')

At the 1861 General Conference held at Battle Creek, John Loughborough stated (when discussing covenants and creeds)

"I am still of the opinion I advanced sometime since through the Review: The first step of apostasy is to set up a creed, telling us what we shall believe. The second is, to make that creed a test of fellowship. The third is to try members by that creed. The fourth to denounce as heretics those who do not believe that creed. And, fifth, to commence persecution against such. I plead that we are not patterning after the churches in any unwarrantable sense, in the step proposed." (J. N. Loughborough, Review and Herald, October 8th 1861, 'Michigan General Conference')

Although today we say we do not have any creed but the Bible, what we do have is what we call a set of fundamental beliefs. It is only by saying that each of these 28 beliefs is believed that a person will be baptised and accepted into the fellowship of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Those who are already Seventh-day Adventists, if they say they do not believe any of these fundamentals, will often be classed as heretical. They will probably be refused the right to hold office, take Sabbath School lesson studies, or preach sermons etc. This is particularly so if it is said that the trinity doctrine is not believed. I can speak from personal experience on this one.

James White, after saying that he agreed with John Loughborough, also after quoting Ephesians 4:11-13 where it says "And he gave some apostles, and

some prophets", said

"Here we have the gifts of the church, presented. Now I take the ground that creeds stand in direct opposition to the gifts. Let us suppose a case: We get up a creed, stating just what, we shall believe on this point and the other, and just what we shall do in reference to this thing and that, and say that we will believe the gifts too. But suppose the Lord, through the gifts, should give us some new light that did not harmonize with our creed; then, if we remain true to the gifts, it knocks our creed all over at once." (*James White Ibid*)

Making a creed is setting the stakes, and barring up the way to all future advancement. God put the gifts into the church for a good and great object; but men who have got up their churches, have shut up the way or have marked out a course for the Almighty. They say virtually that the Lord must not do anything further than what has been marked out in the creed. A creed and the gifts thus stand in direct opposition to each other." (*Ibid*)

The conclusion was

"Now what is our position as a people? The Bible is our creed. We reject everything in the form of a human creed. We take the Bible and the gifts of the Spirit; embracing the faith that thus the Lord will teach us from time to time. And in this we take a position against the formation of a creed. We are not taking one step, in what we are doing, toward becoming Babylon." (*Ibid*)

Interesting to note is that although 21 years later at the General Conference of 1882 there was voted a committee to prepare a church manual for the purpose of deliberation, and even though 18 articles appeared in the *Review and Herald* concerning this proposal, the very next year (1883) at a General Conference Session it was voted against adopting it. Note that this was almost 40 years after our beginnings as a movement of people (1844). As it said in the *Review and Herald* of 1883 concerning the report of the committee to the General Conference that year

"It is the unanimous judgement of the committee, that it would not be advisable to have a church manual. We consider it unnecessary because we have already surmounted the greatest difficulties connected with church organization without one and perfect harmony exists among us on this subject. It would seem to many like a step toward formation of a creed, or a discipline, other than the Bible, something we have always been opposed to as a denomination." (*Review and Herald, November 20th 1883, 'General Conference Proceedings, Twenty-second Annual session'*)

The next statement is really very interesting. How well we would do to adopt this attitude today. The report continued

“If we had one [a church manual], we fear many, especially those commencing to preach, would study it to obtain guidance, in religious matters, rather than to seek for it in the Bible, and from the leadings of the Spirit of God, which would tend to their hindrance in genuine religious experience and in knowledge of the mind of the Spirit. It was in taking similar steps that other bodies of Christians first begun to lose their simplicity and become formal and spiritually lifeless. Why should we imitate them?” (*Ibid*)

This attitude prevailed until 1932. This was one year after a new formulation of statement of beliefs was detailed in our Yearbook. This is the statement that we have noted for the very first time included the word trinity. As we shall see, this very same statement was also included in our very first church manual (1932). The article then went on to say that although the committee’s recommendation was accepted, it was voted

“That the President of the General Conference be requested to write an article for the REVIEW, explaining [sic] the action of the Conference on the subject of the manual.” (*ibid*)

The next week (November 27th 1883), in the *Review and Herald*, there was an article written by George Butler explaining why the proposal to have a church manual was rejected. It was called simply *No Church Manual*. Whilst it would make this section far too large to quote it here, Butler concluded by saying

“Thus far we have got along well with our simple organization without a manual. Union prevails throughout the body. The difficulties before us, so far as organization is concerned, are far less than those we have had in the past. We have preserved simplicity, and have prospered in so doing. It is best to let well enough alone. For these and other reasons, the church manual was rejected. It is probable it will never be brought forward again” (*G. I. Butler, Review and Herald, November 27th 1883, ‘No Church Manual’*)

George Butler did not envisage the way things would work out in Seventh-day Adventism. I wonder what he would think if he could see how things are today? After referring to the 1883 objections and rejection of creating a church manual, D. F. Neufeld, Associate editor of the *Review and Herald* said in 1974

“The churches managed for a while longer to conduct their business without a written guide. But in 1907 J. N. Loughborough published a book entitled *The Church, Its Organization, Order and Discipline*. It was a personal undertaking, but was for years considered to be the standard manual for the operation of local churches.

Finally, in 1932 the General Conference published a church manual. It since has had several revisions. In 1946 it was voted by the General Conference in session that all changes in the manual must be authorized by

the General Conference in session.” (D. F. Neufeld, *Review and Herald*, August 8th 1974, ‘*The church manual is born*’)

That latter statement is very important. This is because from then on (1946 onwards) we have had a set of fundamental beliefs that could not be changed unless voted in by a majority at a General Conference session. In other words, what is voted in is not necessarily the preponderant faith of the body but an acceptance by a representative body of church members. Many saw this 1946 decision as the beginning of Seventh-day Adventism making a creed.

In June 2005, a paper was presented to the General Conference Executive Committee regarding a proposed new fundamental belief. This was to be included in the agenda of the 2005 General Conference Session. This new belief was in addition to the 27 then held by Seventh-day Adventists.

Through the Adventist News Network (ANN), also under the heading of *Proposal for a New Fundamental Belief* it said

“In 1872 Uriah Smith listed 25 doctrines, while the list published in the 1889 *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* contained 28 articles. In 1894 the Battle Creek Church issued a statement of faith with 31 elements. In 1931 F. M. Wilcox prepared a statement of faith authorized by action of the General Conference Committee. It had 22 articles. This statement remained in place (with slight changes) up until the new formulation in Dallas in 1980. The General Conference Session of 1946 voted that no revision of the Fundamental Beliefs shall be made at any time except by approval of a General Conference Session. (*Adventist News Network*, July 2005, ‘*Proposal for a new fundamental belief*’)

The 1931 statement of beliefs

In comparison to the non-trinitarian synopsis of beliefs as issued during the time of the pioneers (this was up to 1914 as above), the 1931 statement of beliefs said

“That the Godhead, or Trinity, consists of the Eternal Father, a personal, spiritual Being, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, infinite in wisdom and love; the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Eternal Father, through whom all things were created and through whom the salvation of the redeemed hosts will be accomplished; the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, the great regenerating power in the work of redemption. Matt. 28:19.” (1931 *Yearbook*, ‘*Fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists*’, page 377)

This was the first statement of beliefs that had been put in our yearbook since 1914 (see above). Notice that this statement begins by saying “Godhead, or Trinity”. No other published statement had ever been worded as such.

There is in one sense regarding the Father and the Son, very little difference in

wording. Here they are both still spoken of as two separate and distinct personages. This is just as they had always been described. Compare the wording with the pre 1931 published beliefs and you will see what I mean. Again the Father is called “a personal, spiritual Being” whilst Christ is called “the Son of the Eternal father”. This is much the same as previously published statements. Different from the previous published beliefs is that the Holy Spirit is referred to as the “third person of the Godhead”.

This 1931 statement must be seen as an essential step in our church formulating a fully fledged trinitarian statement although there is no mention here of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit all belonging to the same indivisible substance (the one being of God). This means that this statement is lacking trinity essentialness.

Whilst the word trinity is used in this statement, it can be clearly seen that it was only as an alternative for the term Godhead, nevertheless, this was the first step in introducing trinitarianism into the fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventism. There is no essential trinitarianism in this statement. All that is said is that there are three personalities of the Godhead but no trinity oneness. This means that it is not a true trinity formula. Note too that neither does it say anything about the Son being begotten or unbegotten. This statement therefore could be seen as being tritheistic (three Gods).

As this statement falls short of the true trinitarian confession (that says all three members of the Godhead all have their subsistence in the one being of God), it can only be considered as being rather ambiguous. Certainly it can be interpreted as being both non-trinitarian and trinitarian even though the word trinity was used here. To put this in another way, this 1931 statement would have been just as acceptable to the non-trinitarians as to the trinitarians, even though the statement included the word trinity. Such was the ambiguity of its wording. Having said this, it would be rather unfair not to take note of statement No. 3 which said at its beginning

“That Jesus is very God, being of the same nature and essence as the eternal Father” (*Ibid*)

Again this is rather ambiguous. Is it meant to depict that God and Christ are two persons who possess the same nature or is it saying that they both subsist in the one and the same nature (the type of oneness as in the trinity doctrine)? Notice also in this statement that the Lord Jesus Christ is still designated as a son. It actually refers to Him as “the Son of the Eternal Father”.

As has been said in the *Brief History Series* (section five), it was just as though Wilcox was attempting to construct a bridge across an otherwise impossible to cross divide. Remember, as has been said previously, non-trinitarianism can never develop into trinitarianism. It was therefore necessary to build a bridge to cross this chasm. This is why the 1931 statement contained the word trinity yet

failed to include all the elements of trinity essentialness. This was particularly regarding, as is contained in all trinity theology, the indivisible oneness of God. This is the unity part of the three-in-one concept of the trinity. This is what makes a teaching truly and explicitly trinitarian. Without it there is no trinity doctrine.

Very interestingly and probably very surprising to many, the aforesaid statement of beliefs was not voted in by our church at large (or by any committee) but was just formulated by one man, namely F. M. Wilcox (then editor of the *Review and Herald*) and then published in our year book.

As it said in a paper prepared at the 2004 spring meeting of the General Conference committee (this was preparatory to the new belief “Growing in Christ” that was eventually submitted at the 2005 General Conference Session – see above)

“In 1931 F. M. Wilcox prepared a statement of faith on behalf of a committee of four authorized by action of the General Conference Committee. This statement, titled "Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists," had 22 articles. Although it was never formally adopted, it appeared in the 1931 *Yearbook* and in all subsequent year books. In 1932 it was printed in tract form. This was the statement that remained in place (with slight changes) up until the new formulation in Dallas in 1980.” (*Paper presented at the 2004 Spring Meeting of the General Conference Committee at Silver Spring*)

As we noted in section thirty-six, Wilcox was one of the delegates who did not desire the details of the 1919 Bible Conference to be made known to Seventh-day Adventists – not even to the ministry in general. He wanted them kept secret.

As the formulation of this 1931 statement was carried out without further reference to the General Conference itself and certainly not voted upon at a General Conference session (as it says above “never formally adopted”), it must therefore be considered as being an unofficial statement, at least by present-day standards in Seventh-day Adventism. Speaking of the authorizing and the producing of the 1931 statement of beliefs, LeRoy Froom wrote

“It was a delicate assignment — after 87 years of differing views on the intrinsic nature of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Trinity. As frequently noted, from the first there had been divergent views as to whether Christ was eternal, or had a beginning. And whether His life was "original, unborrowed, underived" —or derived, conferred, and dependent.” (*LeRoy Froom, Movement of Destiny, page 411, 1931 Opens New Epoch of Unity and Advance—No. 1*)

As we have seen so often in previous sections, prior to the early 1900’s trinitarian push, there was no difference in beliefs amongst Seventh-day

Adventists regarding Christ or the Holy Spirit, at least none that brought about division and dispute. There was only unity amongst us; hence here we have a misrepresentative view of our history. Froom then added

“This presents no problem for us today. But it was a very real one in our early decades, because of conflicting religious backgrounds. And it even spread over into the twentieth century. But time had now mellowed certain strongly partisan feelings, and old resistances were melting. A new generation was coming to the fore. The hour was opportune.” (*Ibid*)

Again it can only be said that as we have seen in previous sections, there was not in the “early decades” of our history any serious division over the Godhead. It was as Russell Holt said when speaking of the years prior to the death of James White (1881)

“A survey of other Adventist writers during these years reveals, that to a man, they rejected the trinity, yet, with equal unanimity they upheld the divinity of Christ.” (*Russell Holt, “The doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination: Its rejection and acceptance”, A term paper for Dr. Mervyn Maxwell, 1969*)

The 1980 statement of fundamental beliefs

Note now the differences between the 1931 unofficial statement of beliefs (this is the first one that contained the word trinity) and our current statement. The latter is the one that appears in the publication *Seventh-day Adventists Believe ...*, also the one that was voted in at the 1980 Dallas General Conference therefore it is official. It says under the heading “The Trinity”

“There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons.” (*The Seventh-day Adventist Lesson quarterly, 2nd quarter 2006 Sunday March 26th page 7*)

It then says

“God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. He is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation. (Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2; 1 Tim. 1:17; Rev. 14:7.) (*Ibid*)

Note the difference between this and the 1931 statement of beliefs. In the 1931 statement, the word trinity is just a word such as Godhead that is used to describe the three divine beings but the 1980 statement clearly and undeniably says that God is a unity (trinity or tri-unity) of divine persons. There is a world of difference between these two statements.

Notice very importantly also that in this 1980 statement of beliefs, this one trinity

God is described as a 'He'. Note also that this 'He' is described as having a centre of consciousness, meaning that 'He' is described as "immortal, all-powerful" and "all-knowing". I draw your attention to this because following this statement, the beliefs numbers three, four and five depict respectively the Father, Son and Holy Spirit all of whom are also spoken of as having centres of consciousnesses. Thus one is left to wonder how many centres of consciousness there are in this trinity as expressed by Seventh-day Adventists, one, two, three or four?

As we all know, there is nothing in the Scripture that can validate this belief. The trinity doctrine is just an assumed doctrine. We need to bear in mind here that in *The Great Controversy*, Ellen White did say

"The Roman Church reserves to the clergy the right to interpret the Scriptures. On the ground that ecclesiastics alone are competent to explain God's word, it is withheld from the common people. Though the Reformation gave the Scriptures to all, yet the selfsame principle which was maintained by Rome prevents multitudes in Protestant churches from searching the Bible for themselves. They are taught to accept its teachings as interpreted by the church; and there are thousands, that is contrary to their creed or the established teaching of their church." (*Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, page 596, 'The Scriptures a safeguard'*)

Needless to say, after the trinity statement of beliefs was finally accepted at the 1980 General Conference, everyone who has since joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church is expected to express this trinity belief as part of their baptismal beliefs. Even so, one is left to ponder just how much is understood by those who say that they believe this trinitarian theology. I wonder too how much of this trinity history is known to Seventh-day Adventists in general.

In summary

In summary it can only be said that the changeover within Seventh-day Adventism from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism was one that was certainly very gradual. Certainly it did not come about because of a Bible conference or specific decisions being made by committees or the church at large. To put it another way again, through a succession of different steps (stages) over a long period of time, Seventh-day Adventists were steered very gradually into trinitarianism. Certainly it did not happen in any other way. It really did, as Burt says, took "over fifty years to become normative." (*Merlin Burt, 'Demise of Semi-Arianism and anti-trinitarianism in Adventist theology, 1888-1957 page 59'*)

In section 46 we shall take note of the decisions of the General Conference with regards to the editing of Uriah Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation*. This was to bring it into line with what was fast becoming the 'new theology' of Seventh-day Adventism.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section forty-six

Accommodating the 'new theology (part 1) - the General Conference decides

In section thirty-eight and section forty-one we took note of the very high esteem that Seventh-day Adventists once had for Uriah Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation*. This was as Uriah Smith had originally written this book, not the 1944 edited version.

In this section we shall be taking note of the explanations that were given regarding its editing when during the 1940's, it was realised that it had become an embarrassment to Seventh-day Adventists. This was because in its original form (as it was then in the 1940's), Smith's book continued to highlight what had once been the non-trinitarian faith of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In the 1940's, Smith's book was standing in opposition to what was fast becoming the Seventh-day Adventist new-found faith of trinitarianism. Not everyone agreed with this new faith neither did everyone agree with the editing of Smith's book. We shall see this now.

Explanations

In 1942, this editing of *Daniel and the Revelation* was explained to the members of the 1942 Cincinnati Autumn Council. This was done by Warren Eugene Howell (1869-1943) who, as well as being the chairman of the editing committee, was also from 1930 until the year of his death, the secretary to the General Conference president. In 1945, almost two years after the death of Howell, a similar explanation was given to the readers of the magazine *Ministry*. We shall be taking a look at both of these explanations later.

This particular *Ministry* article did not give specific details as to why at that particular time (1945) it had been written but it does appear by reading it that at that time there was a great deal of concern, as well as many objections, as to what our church had done. During the early part of the same year (1945) there was a series of articles on Smith's book. There was even an article on the charges of plagiarism that was levelled at Uriah Smith (see section thirty-eight).

Perhaps a heated situation had arisen (or was arising) in the church and the *Ministry* article(s) was written in an attempt to pacify it. Perhaps a reader of this study can shed more light on what was happening then.

We shall see later that LeRoy Froom said that the objections to this editing (using his words), were “rather vehement” (we already noted this in section forty-one – we shall see this again later in this section).

We shall also discover in this section that there were those who feared that in this editing of Smith’s book, meaning by stripping it of all its non-trinitarianism, just a few of the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, via this *Daniel and the Revelation* editing committee, were deciding as to what was said to be believed by our denomination. In section fifty we shall discover that during the next decade (the 1950’s), this fear was well and truly realised. Overall, this shows us that not every Seventh-day Adventist was in harmony with what was then, in the 1940’s, being done at General Conference level, particularly regarding Smith’s book.

We shall also take note that this new theology of trinitarianism, particularly as we know it today within our denomination, was not as established in the 1940’s as many seem to think. In fact we shall see that at this time (the 1940’s) there was a definite division over it. It was only with this introduction of trinitarianism within our beliefs that division broke out concerning our Godhead beliefs. Before this happened there was no division over it.

Merlin Burt recognised this holding on to the old faith (non-trinitarianism) by some Seventh-day Adventists and duly noted it in his paper on the *Demise of Semi-Arianism and anti-trinitarianism in Adventist theology, 1888-1957*. This is when referring to a Seventh-day Adventist minister by the name of Charles Longacre he wrote

“Ray Cottrell observed that “there were a number of survivors of Arianism back there in the 1950’s, but to my knowledge it has quietly died out since then as the people who held Arian views died. And when C.S. Longacre died, its primary exponent died also.” (Merlin Burt, *Demise of Semi-Arianism and anti-trinitarianism in Adventist theology, 1888-1957* page 52-53)

Longacre was a very well known and very much loved minister but concerning Christ he always held to the belief of the early pioneers which, generally speaking, is thought of as being semi-Arianism. We shall return our thoughts to Longacre in section forty-eight. This is when we shall be taking a look at some of those ministers who would not give up the early 1900’s begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventism.

Changing times and changing faces

It is a fact of life that time tends to bring about change. It was no different within Seventh-day Adventism.

At the 1936 General Conference session held at San Francisco, F. M. Wilcox (1865-1951) who had been the editor of the *Review and Herald* since 1911,

reported that since the time of the previous General Conference session (1930), a number of well known Seventh-day Adventists had passed to their death. After reading out a list of these names he said

“Thus it is that the years bring changes to the work and to the personnel of the workers. It seems to us who are older that only a few short years ago James White and Mrs. E. G. White and George I. Butler and O. A. Olsen and J. N. Andrews and Joseph Bates and G. A. Irwin were living, active factors in this work and movement. But a new group of younger workers has come onto the stage of action. Will they be true to the ideals of this message, and hold aloft the standards upreared by the pioneers of this movement? I have great confidence to believe that they will. As I look into the faces of the younger men at this Conference, I feel great confidence in their integrity and faithfulness. God has made them consecrated and efficient workers, and I feel that they are well able to press the battle to its final consummation.” (*F. M. Wilcox, General Conference Bulletin, May 28th 1936*)

By the 1930's, new workers had certainly come to the fore within the Seventh-day Adventist Church and changes were afoot. These changes were not only to the leadership but also with regards to doctrine.

With regards to bringing Smith's book into line with the new theology of Seventh-day Adventism, we shall now see how the General Conference of the 1940's (a new group in comparison with the pioneers) dealt with this situation.

General Conference decisions

At a General Conference Committee meeting on January 16th 1940, the revision and re-publication of the book *Daniel and the Revelation* was discussed. It was duly noted in the minutes

“The Chairman stated that the matter of the republication of the book "Daniel and Revelation," was brought up at the last Autumn Council, and in the discussion it was agreed that if the book were to be republished it should be a project undertaken by all the North American publishing houses, and that the book should be modernized.” (*General Conference Session Minutes, January 16th 1940*)

Here we can see that with regard to the revising of Uriah Smith's book, the word “modernized” is used. Note it was said that at the previous Autumn Council, discussions regarding this had already taken place. When thinking about it, why should any of our books need modernising? Why change what someone else has written? Why not just print new books with updated knowledge – if that is what is wanted? As you read through this study, bear this in mind.

As a matter of passing interest here, I have not found as yet any record of these particular discussions mentioned above, therefore I cannot bring them to your

attention or comment on them although I did request this information from Bert Haloviak of the General Conference archives. He replied to me saying (note he abbreviates Autumn Council to AC)

“AC minutes are also online (included with GCC minutes). The Review also gives the AC Minutes. BUT neither source gives minute information on the discussions. Neither do our holdings reveal the content of the discussions.”
(Email, Bert Haloviak, Director of the Seventh-day Adventist Archives and Statistics, to Terry Hill, 23rd August 2006)

Bert Haloviak confirms that regarding the 1939 Autumn Council discussions on the revision of *Daniel and the Revelation* (as mentioned in the above minutes) nothing is recorded – at least it cannot be found. One is left to wonder why this was so. We can only conjecture. The minutes of January 16th 1940 then noted

“However, although suggestion had not been made that the book be revised, it was agreed that the Southern Publishing Association, if they did revise it, might submit their copy for study, with the idea that the resultant revision be submitted to the various publishing houses and other representative workers in the North American field.” *(General Conference Session Minutes, January 16th 1940)*

With regards to the forthcoming editing of Smith’s book, the word “revise” is now being used. Note here that there is the suggestion that “the Southern Publishing Association” might revise Smith’s book but before it was published they were to submit it for study by the parties noted. This was to see if it was the editing they wanted to see done to it, also to get their approval. This appears to be what was discussed at the previous Autumn Council. Nothing appears to be mentioned concerning the 1919 British edition that removed some of the non-trinitarianism (see section forty-one).

The committee minutes then recorded the result of a vote that was taken regarding this revision. They tell us

“VOTED, That it is the sense of this Committee that the procedure suggested by the Chairman, with regard to the republication of “Daniel and Revelation” be followed.” *(Ibid)*

Except for what has been already quoted, nothing more is detailed in the minutes of this “procedure” but 9 months later (October 1940) it was recorded in the committee minutes

“Consideration was given to the question of the revision and republication of the book “Daniel and Revelation,” which was allowed to go out of print some years ago. It was reported that there is a large demand from the field for its republication in subscription book form.” *(General Conference Session Minutes, October 23rd 1940)*

The possible publishing of a revised version of Smith's work had become something of a big thing. We can also see that by the time of this council (October 1940), this revising had been well and truly discussed. Note also that it said concerning Smith's book that it "was allowed to go out of print some years ago". The minutes added

"While it was agreed that we ought to have a book for circulation at the present time on the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation, there was quite a difference of opinion as to the advisability of attempting to revise this book. After discussion of the arguments offered in favor of, and opposed to the republication of the book, it was

VOTED, To refer the matter to the officers of the General Conference and the heads of the three publishing houses for further study." (*General Conference Committee Minutes, October 23rd 1940*)

It is very apparent that not everyone on the committee was in favour of revising Smith's book. As the minutes record, there was "quite a difference of opinion" over it. It appears that some believed that instead of Smith's book being revised it would be better to publish a separate new book. Note too that it says that there was a "large demand" for a republication of this book "in subscription book form". This was October 1940. We shall come back to this point later. It is very important.

Whilst we are not specifically told here as to whom these "officers of the General Conference" were who along with "the heads of the three publishing houses" were to give this problem further consideration, it was explained by F. M. Wilcox (then editor of the *Review and Herald*) in the first of the 1936 General Conference bulletins

"The officers of the General Conference consist of a president, one or more vice-presidents, a secretary and associate secretaries, a treasurer and associate treasurers. The Executive Committee of the General Conference is made up of these officers, together with secretaries and associate secretaries of the various General Conference departments, such as Sabbath School, Educational, Home Missionary, etc., together with other persons not to exceed fifteen in number." (*F. M. Wilcox, General Conference Bulletin, May 28th 1936*)

An unwanted revision

In 1942, whilst the revision of Smith's book was still under discussion, a hiccup appears to have occurred in the proceedings. It was recorded in the minutes

"Question as to the republication of the book "Daniel and Revelation" has been up for some time."

It can be seen that the proposed editing of Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation*

had been suggested quite a while previously. There had probably been a great deal of discussion over it. It then said

“The General Conference Committee at the time of the 1940 Autumn Council appointed a committee consisting of the managers of the "three publishing houses and the General Conference Officers, to give attention to the bringing out of a revised edition, which has in turn appointed a committee on the revision of the book. This committee is not yet ready to report.” (*General Conference Committee Minutes, January 1st 1942*)

The committee appointed 2 years previous at the 1940 Autumn Council (see above) had got together and decided to appoint another committee “on the revision of the book”. One would assume that the second committee had not yet reported back to the first committee. The minutes then added

“The Southern Publishing Association is now requesting permission to sell a 5,000 edition of "Daniel and Revelation" that they have recently printed. This edition contains some changes mainly perhaps having to do with statistical matter contained in the book. It was

VOTED, That a committee of five be appointed to review the new edition of "Daniel and Revelation" as published by the Southern Publishing Association, and report back to this Committee. “Appointed: L. E. Froom, F. M. Wilcox, I. H. Evans, O. Montgomery, Roger Altman.” (*Ibid*)

The minutes of January 1st reveal that at that time, the committee that had been appointed to give consideration to this revision was not yet ready to report its findings but the Southern Publishing Association requested permission to sell a 5,000 revised edition they had recently printed (remember from above that 2 years previous it was thought that they might publish a certain revised edition). Whilst it was recognised that minor changes had been made to their edition, it was voted that “a committee of five be appointed” to review it. This committee was then to report their findings to the main *Daniel and the Revelation* revision committee appointed by the General Conference. It appears that the General Conference Committee were very concerned as to what changes to the book had been made by the Southern Publishing Association. The minutes of January 19th 1942 record that

“A reconsideration of the request of the Southern Publishing Association for release of the special revised edition of "Daniel and Revelation" which they have printed led to a review of the work which has been done following the General Conference Committee consideration of the question of the republication of the book, at the time of the 1940 Autumn Council. This revealed that the committee appointed to give further study to the bringing out of a new edition of "Daniel and Revelation" is working on the matter and plans to have its report ready to submit at the time of the Spring meeting of the General Conference Committee. In view of this the following actions

were taken:

VOTED, That the committee appointed in our meeting of January 1st to review the book printed by the Southern Publishing Association be discharged.

VOTED, That we earnestly recommend to the Southern Publishing Association that their edition of "Daniel and Revelation" be withheld from circulation pending decision on the report of the committee appointed at the time of the Autumn Council of 1940." (*Ibid, January 19th 1942*)

Note that this was now 1942 and that the committee formed at the 1940 Autumn Council were said to be still "working on the matter". Almost 15 months had passed by. Note well the earnest recommendation that the Southern Publishing Association's edition of Smith's book "be withheld from circulation" pending the report of the editing committee appointed by General Conference. The minutes then said

"A draft of a letter addressed to the officers of the Southern Publishing Association was submitted, conveying word concerning the status of the work of the committee appointed by the General Conference Committee following the 1940 Autumn Council, and setting forth the counsel of this Committee regarding the matter."

VOTED, That the said letter be approved." (*Ibid*)

The die is cast

During the 1942 spring meeting of the General Conference Committee, W. H. Branson who was the secretary of the General Conference revision advisability study group reported its conclusions. It was noted in the minutes that he reminded the committee that

"At an executive meeting of the General Conference Committee following the Council in St. Paul, a committee was appointed, consisting of the officers of the General Conference and the managers of the three publishing houses, to give study to the question as to whether or not it would be advisable to revise and reprint this book." (*General Conference Committee Minutes April 7th 1942*)

The original committee set up to do this work was in the October of 1940. There had been a great deal of discussion over it and probably a lot of disagreements. The minutes then said

"This committee met at the time of the 1941 Autumn Council in Battle Creek, and agreed to look with favor upon revising the book, and a subcommittee was appointed, consisting of W. E. Howell, F. M. Wilcox, and the Book Editors of the three publishing houses, to see what could be done

in the way of editing the manuscript, with a view to its republication as a subscription book, said subcommittee to report back to the large committee. Such a report was submitted when the subcommittee met with the large committee in Washington about two weeks ago.” (*Ibid*)

Notice that the sub-committee was appointed to “see what could be done in the way of editing the manuscript”.

Now that the Seventh-day Adventist Church was taking on board trinitarianism, Uriah Smith’s book, as it was originally written, would not be representative of its denominational new theology therefore it could not continue as a subscription book. In its original state, Smith’s book depicted the old theology of Seventh-day Adventism, meaning non-trinitarianism therefore it was originally in harmony with the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. At least it was whilst Ellen White was alive. The report then goes on to give the recommendations from the large committee. It said

“Elder Branson called attention to the changes and revisions suggested in the report of the subcommittee, and then presented a report from the large committee, which was adopted as follows:

We recommend, 1. The republication of "Daniel and the Revelation" as a subscription book in a revised Volume.

2. That a special book committee of eleven members on revision, be appointed with representation from the three publishing houses of North America, giving them power to act in revising and preparing the book for publication.

3. That the revised edition of "Daniel and the Revelation" be published by the three publishing houses.

4, That the proposed revised edition of "Daniel and the Revelation" take the place of all editions now published.” (*Ibid*)

The various committees had done their work and the die had been cast. Uriah Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation* was to undergo a massive editing. Note that the suggested changes by the sub-committee, as were reported to the General Conference committee by Branson, were not recorded in the minutes. By this time (April 1942), what was required must have been approved in principle. Almost 18 months had now passed by since the original feasibility study committee had been set up (see above General Conference Committee Minutes, October 23rd 1940).

Notice that “eleven members” would be on the revision committee. This was to include representatives from the three publishing houses that were to print the book. Note also that this committee had the “power to act in revising and

preparing the book for publication". There was also the emphasis that the revised edited version should "take the place of all editions now published". This would include the revised edition printed by the Southern Publishing Association.

In passing, it is interesting to note that in the minutes of May 21st 1942, it was voted that at his own request, F. M. Wilcox be released from serving on the editing committee. In the minutes, no other information was tendered. Wilcox retired as editor of the *Review and Herald* in 1944.

There was also mention that the revision committee were then doing their work. It was voted therefore that it should be arranged for the representatives of the three publishing houses involved in the publishing of the revised book, as soon as the revision was complete, should come together to discuss the details. This was now the month after the setting up of the revision committee (see above General Conference Committee Minutes April 7th 1942)

Warren Howell reports

October 23rd 1942 was a big day regarding the editing of Smith's book. This was when Warren Howell, then chairman of the editing committee, gave his report to the General Conference Committee.

Much could be said with regard to Warren Howell and his employment in the Seventh-day Adventist Church but it would be far too much to detail here. We will note though that in 1884 he was baptised (this was four years before the famous Minneapolis conference of 1888) and in 1894 acquired his B. A. from Battle Creek College. He also received in 1919 (the year of the 'secret' Bible Council) an honorary M. A. from the Emmanuel Missionary College. He also taught at Healdsburg College from 1894-1897. Until 1903 he also taught at Emmanuel Missionary College. He also became the first president of the Loma Linda College of Evangelists. This was as well as principle of the *Fireside Correspondence School*. He was also the editor and associate editor of various publications. As previously noted, from 1930 till the time of his death (1943), he was secretary to the president of the General Conference.

From all of this we know that Howell was well known and a much respected member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is obvious therefore that he was well aware of the faith held by Seventh-day Adventists whilst Ellen White was alive and that how, since her death, it was in the process of being changed (meaning that he was very aware of the changing from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism).

After reviewing the history of Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation* (relating that it had begun with a series of articles in 1862 in the *Review and Herald*) Howell reported that

"In 1912 the book was somewhat revised, but gradually it was displaced until in later years it has been used principally as a text book in our

schools.” (*General Conference Committee Notes, October 23rd 1942*)

We have noted before that there was a 1919 revision of Smith’s book (see section forty-one) but this was a British edition.

As regards to the words “in later years”, they can be taken to mean any length of time therefore they really are very ambiguous. We did note in section forty-one that just 10 years previous to Howell’s report (meaning 1932) it was recorded

“That in the operation of our field work we courage colporteurs to use as far as consistent, the existing books which have formed the backbone of our work in previous years, such as "Great Controversy, "Patriarchs and Prophets", "Desire of Age" " Bible Readings, " "Daniel and Revelation" and such medium priced books as are now available, or may be issued in harmony with these recommendations.” (*General Conference Committee Minutes, October 20th 1932*)

We can see here that just 10 years previous to Howell’s report, Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation* was still regarded with the greatest of esteem and was urged to being sold by our colporteurs. Perhaps this is why only 8 years later in 1940, the Southern Publishing Committee wished to release their 5000 copies of this book that they had printed. As we noted above, they were advised by the General Conference not to do so. Howell then went on to report at the 1942 meeting

"The stirring times of the past few years have led to a request from the field for a new and improved edition of the book adapted for sale as a subscription book, and at the Autumn Council of 1941 a committee was appointed to undertake the work of revision, the final work being done by a committee of seven, consisting of W. E. Read, A. W. Cormack, M. Blunden and W. E. Howell of the General Conference, James Shultz of the Southern Publishing Association, M. R. Thurber of the Review and Herald, and Merlin Neff of the Pacific Press” (*General Conference Committee Notes, October 23rd 1942*)

Notice particularly the words “adapted for sale as a subscription book”.

This book, as we noted previously, had been a used by our colporteurs for 60 years (since the early 1880’s). Now it was being said, in 1942, that it was to be revised to become a subscription book. Remember too how we noted in section thirty-eight that it was the very first doctrinal book sold by our colporteurs. In other words, it was not just regarded as a book on Bible prophecy but contained the very core of our last day message.

It can be clearly seen here that Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation*, a one-time classic that was once in harmony with the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (this was when this denomination was non-trinitarian) was now unsuited

to this denomination's fast becoming new theology of trinitarianism. This meant therefore that to become a subscription book again, it had to be revised. As I am sure you will agree, this really is a very significant realisation.

Note too the reference to the "final work" that was done. This was only to be done by a committee of seven and not the original eleven (see above General Conference Committee Minutes April 7th 1942). The minutes then said of this committee of seven

"Professor Howell reported that during the five weeks this committee sat together, the work was carried on in a spirit of unity and brotherly love, the work being done in the Seminary building, away from all disturbances, and they felt that they had had special help in the task." (*Ibid*)

Some would debate from whence came this "special help". Howell then reported

"An agreement was entered into at the beginning of the work that in all matters touching doctrine or the rights and privileges of the author, no action would be recorded to be carried out until it could be made unanimous in the committee, and that resolution was carried through, there being unity and harmony throughout the work." (*Ibid*)

Notice with respect to "doctrine" that it did not say that nothing would be changed or that the "rights and privileges of the author" would be respected. What was actually said was that with regards to both of these issues, nothing would be carried out "until it could be made unanimous in the committee". That is saying something entirely different. If you are not sure of what is being said here, read the statement again.

Smith's book was seemingly now under scrutiny as to make sure that everything in it was in harmony with the changing doctrine of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The editing committee would decide. The report concluded

"The work of the committee is now practically done, and soon after the close of this Council the dummy will be sent to the Southern Publishing Association, and it is expected that the book will be brought out some time next summer." (*Ibid*)

This was recorded in the October of 1942, meaning that the "next summer" would be the summer of 1943. This date was never realised because the book was not actually published until the end of 1944.

Warren Howell, who chaired this editing committee and who gave this report, never saw the end product of the work that he had personally helped to produce. This is because on July 5th 1943 he died. This was just 8 months after he gave this report to the committee.

Two months later in September 1943, a committee of 6 were called to deal with a matter of a minor revision to the edited version of Smith's book whilst in the October of the same year it was voted that J. L. McElhany, then General Conference president, be asked to serve as chairman of the committee in dealing with certain business matters that would arise out of its publication.

The necessity of correcting certain books

In his *Movement of Destiny* (Page 424), in a chapter called "1931 Opens New Epoch of Unity and Advance – No. 2" (please note well the title of this chapter), LeRoy Froom says that even at the time the decision was made to edit *Daniel and the Revelation* (1942), there were those who so highly esteemed Smith's work that they regarded it as being almost inspired. Froom even related that it had been reported that Ellen White had said that when Uriah Smith was writing this book, she had seen an angel standing at his side. If you remember we noted in section nineteen that J. B. Blosser had said that

"The Lord, in planning for his closing work in the earth, had in mind the publishing work as an important agency. When the time came for this work, he inspired his servant to write "The Great Controversy," "Patriarchs and Prophets," "The Desire of Ages," and gave special help to Elder Uriah Smith in writing his commentary on Daniel and the Revelation. Repeatedly God has sent us the word that these books should be sold far and near." (*J. B. Blosser, Review and Herald, June 20th 1918, 'What books best meet the demand of our times'*)

Notice here the high regard for Smith's book. We can see that some thought it almost inspired (note the words "special help"). This was in 1918, the year before the 'secret' Bible Council (see section thirty-five and section thirty-six). Note that it is rated with Ellen White's publications. We can see from this why Froom said that the opposition to the editing of Smith's book was "rather vehement" (see page 424 *Movement of Destiny* also section forty-one). Nevertheless, it still took place. This was by decision of the General Conference, the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Would Ellen White have approved of this editing? From what we have read in section thirty-eight regarding how she rated this book, the answer is definitely no. We noted she said

"This book [Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation*] has been the means of bringing many precious souls to knowledge of the truth. Everything that can be done should be done to circulate Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation." (*Ellen G. White, Manuscript Releases Volume 21 No. 1595 'Words of Instruction Regarding Camp Meetings, Soul Winning, and Truth Filled Books, 1901'*)

Note again that this was in 1901, 3 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*. She then paid Smith's book the highest possible compliment.

"I know of no other book that can take the place of this one. It is God's

helping hand.” (*Ibid*)

Again it can only be said that this is quite an accolade but would we say this today of the revised version?

In the same chapter that Froom made this statement regarding the objections to the editing of Smith’s book, he also wrote (this was under the heading “Correction of certain books necessary”)

“The next logical and inevitable step in the implementing of our unified “Fundamental Beliefs” involved revision of certain standard works so as to eliminate statements that taught, and thus perpetuated, erroneous views on the Godhead.” (*LeRoy Froom, ‘Movement of Destiny’, page 422, chapter ‘1931 Opens New Epoch of Unity and Advance – No 2’, 1971*)

Here can be seen the so-called necessity of changing Adventist literature to suit the new theology. This is where this change had led the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Their once standard non-trinitarian literature was now out of harmony with their new belief of trinitarianism.

Not too many years previous, our standard books had been in harmony with what Seventh-day Adventists had believed but in the 1940’s, these same books were at variance with what was now (in the 1940’s) being referred to as our “unified “Fundamental Beliefs””. Froom went on to say about our one time theology of the Godhead that was depicted in Smith’s book

“Such sentiments were now sharply at variance with the accepted “Fundamental Beliefs” set forth in the *Church Manual*, and with the uniform “Baptismal Covenant” and “vow” based thereon, which, on certificate form, was now used for all candidates seeking admission to membership in the church.” (*Ibid*)

Here we have the confession that Smith’s book, because of what was said in it originally concerning the Godhead, was now “sharply at variance” with our professed fundamental beliefs as expressed in both the church manual and the baptismal vow. This does not mean that every Seventh-day Adventist was opposed to what Smith had written in it because quite obviously, many still believed it. What it did mean was that those wishing to join our church from that time onwards had to confess to a certain set of beliefs (like a creed), one of which referred to the trinity.

After saying that standard books like *Daniel and the Revelation* were out of harmony with declarations concerning Christ from the spirit of prophecy (a statement with which many would disagree) Froom then added

“These productions must therefore be brought into harmony with the now declared Faith of the church” (*Ibid*)

The question must be asked, was this really the “now declared Faith” the faith of the church at large (the preponderant belief) or was it just the beliefs of some of the leadership of Seventh-day Adventism? This is a very important question. Froom goes on to say

“The first and most conspicuous of these involved certain erroneous theological concepts that had long appeared in *Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation* by Uriah Smith, who had died in 1903.” (*Ibid*, pages 422-423)

Froom then relates how Smith’s book had been in circulation for more than 70 years and had been “accorded an honored place throughout those years” (*Ibid*). He even says, “its unique place was recognized by Ellen White” (*Ibid*) but added

“But she also said that errors in our older literature “call for careful study and correction” E. G. White, Ms11, 1910; 1SM, p. 165) (*Ibid*)

He then says concerning that counsel with regards to the editing that was done to Smith’s book

“That was now applied” (*Ibid*)

Note that Froom only quotes Ellen White as saying, “call for careful study and correction”. Nothing else is quoted.

Here is the complete paragraph as Ellen White wrote it. See if you can make application of this to Uriah Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation*, also to the editing that was done to it to expunge all of the non-trinitarianism from its pages. She says

“In some of our important books that have been in print for years, and which have brought many to a knowledge of the truth, there may be found matters of minor importance that call for careful study and correction.” (*Ellen G. White, Ms No. 10, 1910*)

First of all note that her words “call for careful study and correction” are with respect to what she terms “matters of minor importance”. Would you describe our beliefs concerning the Godhead that have been circulated through Seventh-day Adventist publications since our beginnings as “matters of minor importance”? I would hope not. Now note the rest of the quote

“Let such matters [of minor importance] be considered by those regularly appointed to have the oversight of our publications. Let not these brethren, nor our canvassers, nor our ministers magnify these matters in such a way as to lessen the influence of these good soul-saving books. Should we take up the work of discrediting our literature, we would place weapons in the hands of those who have departed from the faith and confuse the minds of those who have newly embraced the message. The less that is done

unnecessarily to change our publications, the better it will be.” (*Ibid*)

Ellen White would have completely condemned the massive editing that was done to Uriah Smith’s book. All that she had declared concerning his classic work had been words of praise (see section thirty-eight).

Froom completely misused Ellen White’s council (he only partially quoted her). In fact it originally concerned the controversy that was then taking place concerning the daily of Daniel 8:11-13. Certainly it was nothing to do with what Seventh-day Adventists believed about God and Christ. That would have been regarded as a very important matter not something of minor importance. Such though is how Ellen White’s writings are being used. This is even by the leadership of our church.

Treading on delicate ground

I would now ask you to note a statement found on the next page of Froom’s *Movement of Destiny*. This reminds us that whilst Ellen White was alive, the faith of Seventh-day Adventism was non-trinitarian therefore with regards to what Smith had written in his book about God and Christ, it was in keeping with what was once the faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This is why Ellen White only gave approbation to this book and said that everyone, including non Seventh-day Adventists, should read it for themselves (see section thirty-eight for Ellen White’s views on *Daniel and the Revelation*). Froom says with regard to the editing and revision of Smith’s book

“Such an undertaking meant treading on delicate ground.” (*LeRoy Froom, ‘Movement of Destiny’, page 423, chapter ‘1931 Opens New Epoch of Unity and Advance – No 2’, 1971*)

Froom then goes on to explain why he made this remark. He says

“To some – still of personal semi-Arian persuasion – Daniel and Revelation was holy ground, as it were. Some, particularly in one geographical area, sincerely felt that this book was virtually “inspired”. (*Ibid*)

Here we see again a reference to the old theology of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Froom though, by saying “personal semi-Arian persuasion”, attempts to make it appear that this was only the personal views of some (the few) and not the faith of the church at large. This he does throughout his book. As we know today, even up to and beyond the death of Ellen White, non-trinitarianism was indeed the recognised faith of Seventh-day Adventists.

There were those, according to Froom, who in the 1940’s were still holding on to the old faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This shows us that it was not just the few that were non-trinitarian or that non-trinitarian remarks were just the personal views of the few. It had been the denominational faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This was now almost 100 years after our beginnings (1844). It also tells us that

objections were made because of the removal of Uriah Smith's theology concerning Christ – which as has been said, was in reality then the denominational faith of Seventh-day Adventists.

Froom does not state who it was in the “one geographical area” that “sincerely felt that this book was virtually “inspired”, therefore we are again left to conjecture. He did say later on the same page though

“So in 1944, - soon after the adoption of the uniformed Baptismal Covenant, Vow and Certificate of 1941 – the revision of “D&R” (as it was familiarly known), was undertaken.” (*Ibid*)

On the next page, LeRoy Froom wrote that at that spring council in 1944, W. H. Branson, the General Vice President of the General Conference, was asked to give a covering statement to the General Conference Committee. This was on behalf of the editing committee (we noted this above). Froom reported.

“This was because any revision of D&R was still a highly sensitive matter, with a relatively small group still personally holding the semi-Arian view” (*Ibid page 424*)

Here we can see it said again that in 1944, there were still those who were holding on to the old theology of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Froom calls this “a relatively small group” but it is impossible to number and may be (and probably is) a serious distortion of the facts. This is because up to the time of the death of Ellen White and beyond, even until into the 1930's, this old theology was the teaching about God and Christ that still permeated our literature.

This theology therefore was the belief that was spread amongst Seventh-day Adventists throughout the world meaning that by 1942 (the time when this report was being given to the General Conference Committee) it was still the belief that was accepted by a countless number of Seventh-day Adventists worldwide. For this situation to change, these Seventh-day Adventists would need to die off (or have their beliefs changed) and a new breed accepting trinitarianism would need to take their place. This then was the delicate situation that existed in 1942. As Froom said in his *Movement of Destiny*, because there were those who were still holding on to the old theology of Seventh-day Adventism, the revision of Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation* was indeed “a highly sensitive matter”.

Froom then confirms that this is true because he was there and therefore personally heard Branson's report. He says of himself

“This writer was present at the council in New York, and personally heard the report, and observed what followed” (*Ibid*)

Froom then goes on to say that Branson reported that the edited version of *Daniel and the Revelation* would be reissued as Uriah Smith as its author therefore his views on prophecy should not be changed.

He did say though, because Smith's theological views were ...

- not an interpretation of prophecy,
- out of harmony with the fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventism and the new baptismal certificate
- out of harmony with statements from the spirit of prophecy

.... that they should be eliminated from the book.

Froom then says concerning these spirit of prophecy statements

“These statements were all written in the decades following the writing of Smith's book – and especially in the decade after his death. He was therefore not acquainted with them”. (*ibid*)

This is an extremely misleading statement. I say this because by the time of Smith's death (1903), his work (either as two books or one) had been in circulation for around 40 years (from the late 1860's and early 1870's) therefore since the time it had been written, many statements regarding God and Christ were made by Ellen White. In 40 years of revelation there would be.

Smith knew exactly what Ellen White believed. Ellen White also knew exactly what Smith had believed. She also knew what he had written in his book and she gave it only glowing praise (see section thirty-eight).

Note too that Smith died in 1903. This means that prior to his demise he had 5 years of understanding just what it was that Ellen White wrote about God, Christ and the Holy Spirit in *Desire of Ages* (published 1898). This knowledge though did not change his thinking. He still died believing in the non-trinitarian faith of Seventh-day Adventists. We can see therefore that Froom's remarks about Smith not knowing about some of the spirit of prophecy statements concerning the Godhead cannot be made applicable to that which Smith knew that Ellen White had written in *Desire of Ages*. He knew them only too well, just as did the others of the leadership.

But what about Froom's remark about the spirit of prophecy statements concerning God and Christ after Smith had died? Quite obviously, Smith would not know about these but just as it was originally written, apart from some minor changes, Smith's book was given various printings, one of which was in 1912 whilst Ellen White was still alive. Smith's book was also, during the decade after Smith's death, given a tremendous accolade by Ellen White. She certainly did not see this book as being in conflict with anything that God had shown her about Christ since Smith had died - not even by 1912 (this was 14 years after the

publication of *Desire of Ages*). If she had done so then she would certainly have said something about it. Certainly she would not have encouraged our church to promote and sell this book the way that she did.

There is also something else very important to remember here. That is that throughout the early 1900's (the decade referred to by Froom), Ellen White stressed to our church that they should not change their beliefs concerning God and Christ. These she said were the beliefs (faith) that they had held for the previous 50 years, which as we know was not trinitarian. This shows us that what Smith had written in his book was in keeping with what Seventh-day Adventists believed, at least whilst Ellen White was alive.

If you remember in section twenty-nine, we did note that at the 1905 General Conference Session, Ellen White did warn the delegates

“You will hear men endeavoring to make the Son of God a nonentity. He and the Father are one, but they are two personages. Wrong sentiments regarding this are coming in, and we shall all have to meet them.” (*Ellen G. White to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Takoma Park Washington D. C., May 25th 1905 Review and Herald 13th July 1905, ‘Lessons from the first Epistle of John’*)

Ellen White was warning Seventh-day Adventists not to change from the non-trinitarian beliefs that they had held for the previous 50 years although she did warn also that “**wrong sentiments**” regarding the Father and the Son (God and Christ) would make their way into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This was two years after Uriah Smith had died. She did not regard Smith's views concerning God and Christ, as in his *Daniel and the Revelation* as being error. That much really is very obvious.

Returning our thoughts to Froom's remarks, he wrote on the same page (this was under the heading of “Strong reactions of Smith adherents”)

“The reaction of the minority who still held personally to the Arian view – and who regarded D&R as virtually inspired and therefore not to be touched or in any way altered – was rather vehement”. (*LeRoy Froom, ‘Movement of Destiny’, page 424, chapter ‘1931 Opens New Epoch of Unity and Advance – No 2’, 1971*)

Again we see it said that in the 1940's, there were still those who held on to the old theology. This was the theology as held by them whilst Ellen White was alive. Notice that Froom calls this a “**minority**”. This number of people though cannot be calculated. This is because they constituted Seventh-day Adventists throughout the world. Who could count or know how many were still adhering to this non-trinitarian faith?

Notice that Froom says, “**still held personally**”, attempting so it seems, to make it

look as though this so called “[Arian view](#)” was just the personal views of some (of the few). It should go without saying that they were personal views (all views are personal), but this non-trinitarian view was also once the recognised and established faith of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Notice also Froom’s use of the word “[vehement](#)”. Froom was an excellent writer. His use of English was exceptional. Therefore his use of “[vehement](#)” is very significant. This word is a very strong word. It means ‘passionate’, ‘intense’, ‘fervent’, even ‘violent’. This reveals the strength of the opposition and of the objections to the editing of Smith’s book. If Froom had wished this not to sound so violent he was well able to find other words to describe it. As it was, he chose to use “[vehement](#)”. This must be telling us something today.

There is a link between this “[minority](#)” group and the non-trinitarianism in Smith’s book. In other words, those who opposed the editing of Smith’s book would probably have been the non-trinitarians. Does this tell us something today? On page 425 of *Movement of Destiny* Froom reports

“The Council proceeded to approve the report of the Committee. And the [several](#) Arian statements in Daniel and the Revelation were accordingly eliminated.” (*Ibid* page 425)

The use of the word “[several](#)” here (usually denoting more than two but not many) I find is rather an understatement. Smith’s book was replete with non-trinitarian statements. Whilst these are too many to print here, a compilation of these statements (still under construction) will appear later on this website.

For now though we shall continue to section 47. This is where we shall see that in the editing of Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation*, it was feared by some as being the few making a pronouncement in what it was that Seventh-day Adventists were said to believe.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section forty-seven

Accommodating the ‘new theology’ (part 2) - making a pronouncement on doctrine

This is the fourth section in which Uriah Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation*, also its editing, is highlighted but this is done for a very good reason.

When this book was edited, there was, as Froom puts it in his *Movement of Destiny*, “vehement” opposition to it (see page 424 of *Movement of Destiny*, also previous section). This was not simply because it was wrong to change what a person had written after he was dead but also for some a far deeper principle was involved. That principle was (and still is), who says what is believed by Seventh-day Adventists? Is it the church at large (the majority belief) or is it the church leadership?

We do not know how widespread exactly this opposition was to the editing of Smith’s book (at least my studies to date have not revealed it) but we do know for sure that there were those, even at General Conference level, who regarded it as the few, on behalf of the church at large, making a pronouncement on doctrine. In other words, some saw this editing as a handful of select people (leadership) stating what Seventh-day Adventists are said to believe. Obviously, in the 1940’s when this book was edited so meticulously, there were those who were still holding on to what was once the non-trinitarian belief of Seventh-day Adventists. This is why they objected to this same faith being removed from Smith’s book.

As we know today, this editing of Smith’s book succeeded in expunging all of its non-trinitarianism from its pages thus removing from the view of its future readers not only the beliefs of its author Uriah Smith but also contributing to concealing what Seventh-day Adventists once believed about God and Christ. This is because Smith’s book, in its original form, was once representative of the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists.

Some, even those of the General Conference Committee, regarded this editing as a move to establish a doctrine that was supposedly believed by Seventh-day Adventists as a whole. Here was the problem. Some saw this as the few making a pronouncement on doctrine whilst our preponderant beliefs (the beliefs of the majority) should have reflected the denominational belief.

This then was a most dangerous problem. It was a case of who was it that was going to decide what was said to be believed by Seventh-day Adventists? Was it just the few at General Conference level or the majority? I am sure that the few did say that it reflected the majority view but would this have been the truth of the matter? Certainly not all agreed that Smith's work should have been changed.

A most dangerous problem

In the *Ministry* magazine of May 1945, in an article called "Revised D & R in Relation to Denominational Doctrine" (remember here that the revised *Daniel and the Revelation* was published in 1944), there was a report given concerning the editing of this book.

There was also in the same article a report of the address that was given by Professor Warren Howell to the 1942 Cincinnati autumn council. Important to note here is that Howell (then the secretary to the president of the General Conference) had been the chairman of the *Daniel and the Revelation* revision committee whilst Merwin Thurber had been the secretary to it. Both knew therefore exactly what was done to Smith's book.

Merwin Thurber began his article by getting to the very heart of the problem. He said

"Perhaps the most difficult and potentially dangerous problem which faced the committee appointed to revise *Daniel and the Revelation* lay in the relation of their work to denominational doctrine and fundamental beliefs. This was recognized by denominational leaders everywhere, and expressed to committee members frequently by word of mouth and by letter." (Merwin Thurber, 'Ministry' magazine, May 1945, article "Revised D & R in Relation to Denominational Doctrine")

There had been a great deal of discussion regarding this editing. He then said

"Even before the committee was appointed, denominational thinkers recognized the difficulties and endeavored to discover a proper path through the maze." (*Ibid*)

Here the secretary of the *D & R revision committee* relates what was then recognised as he put it, "the most difficult and potentially dangerous problem" that faced the group of Seventh-day Adventists who edited Smith's book. He said it concerned our "denominational doctrine and fundamental beliefs". Notice too that he says that it was "denominational leaders everywhere" that had done this recognising thus it can be said that it was these same leaders that had realised the seriousness of editing Smith's book. Notice more than anything else that Thurber said it was like endeavouring "to discover a proper path through the maze". Remember it was said in section thirty-eight that Smith's book was the first doctrinal book sold by our colporteurs.

Throughout his book, Uriah Smith had depicted a non-trinitarian view of God and Christ. This, as it was held during the time and ministry of Ellen White (1844-1915), had been in keeping with the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Such was the difficulty in separating these denominational beliefs from all the prophecies concerning God and Christ as portrayed in the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation. As well as not tampering with prophetic beliefs that had direct application to both our very existence and our last day message (this was with regard to 1844 and the investigative judgement etc), the difficulty must have been separating prophetic interpretation from other doctrinal beliefs (these were such as the Godhead, the Sabbath and the state of the dead etc). As Thurber said, this difficulty was duly recognised by the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Once again we also see the problem of changing denominational doctrine. We can also see the problem of changing from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism. The past doctrinal position of Seventh-day Adventism would be interwoven within our past publications, whatever the subject matter. This was particularly applicable to Uriah Smith's book.

The editing of Smith's book was not an official pronouncement on doctrine (says the secretary of the editing committee). In this same *Ministry* article, Thurber related the primary considerations of the committee regarding the editing of Uriah Smith's book. He said

“Foremost among the considerations was a desire to avoid anything like an official pronouncement on doctrine.” (*Ibid*)

Here can be seen what the General Conference believed could have been the interpretation, by some, of the reasons for editing Smith's book. It could have been seen (and was seen by some) as though the church was making a “pronouncement on doctrine”. Note the word “official”. This was included because regarding the declaration of any doctrine (as we noted in section forty-five), no official declaration can be made outside of a duly called General Conference Session. Thurber then said to the readers of this *Ministry* article

“It is no secret to the readers of THE MINISTRY that there are those who hold divergent views in regard to certain aspects of prophetic interpretation.” (*Ibid*)

Certainly, concerning Bible prophecy, this is as it has always been within Seventh-day Adventism, particularly regarding prophecies that have yet to be fulfilled. In this respect it must be accepted that differences of opinion will always exist. This is because from person to person, conjecture as to how certain prophecies will eventually develop will differ. This is understandable.

Thurber continues his article by saying

“On the fundamental prophecies, the foundational doctrines, Seventh-day Adventists are united as one man.” (*Ibid*)

The problem is (at least as I see it), what was it that Thurber and the committee regarded as “foundational doctrines”?

Thurber went on to say that Seventh-day Adventists were firmly fixed on such teachings as the Sabbath, the second coming of Jesus, the state of the dead, certain prophecies, tokens of Christ’s reappearance etc, etc, but fails to mention our beliefs about God and Christ. In other words, Thurber did not mention anything about the personalities of the Godhead, the Godhead itself or the trinity, thus it appears that he or the committee did not include this in the fundamental (foundational) beliefs of Seventh-day Adventism.

From reading previous sections, we know that Ellen White did include in the landmarks and pillars of Seventh-day Adventism what our denomination believed about God and Christ. We know this because at the 1905 General Conference session (this was when she warned about wrong views about God and Christ being brought into our fundamental beliefs in the future) she clearly stated

“Those who seek to remove the old landmarks are not holding fast; they are not remembering how they have received and heard. Those who try to bring in theories that would remove the pillars of our faith concerning the sanctuary or concerning the personality of God or of Christ, are working as blind men. They are seeking to bring in uncertainties and to set the people of God adrift without an anchor.” (*Ellen G. White to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Takoma Park, Washington D. C., May 24th 1905, Ms 62, 1905, "A Warning against False Theories," MR 760*)

Here we can see clearly that what Seventh-day Adventists then (in 1905) believed about God and Christ, which was a non-trinitarian belief, Ellen White did regard as being one of the “old landmarks” of Seventh-day Adventism. We can see also that she also regarded it as one of the “pillars of our faith”. It was these self same beliefs that were being expunged from Smith’s book therefore it is obvious that some believed that by editing Smith’s book, a pronouncement was being made on doctrine as to what was believed then, in the 1940’s, by Seventh-day Adventists.

As we noted in the previous section (and shall see again now in Thurber’s address), at that time in the 1940’s, there was a dispute that was taking place, within our denomination, over our beliefs about God and Christ. Some were trying to hold on to the old views (these were the non-trinitarian views that the church had held during the time of Ellen White) whilst others were advocating the new views that come under the heading trinitarian. This was in 1944. Thurber denied that this editing of Smith’s book constituted a pronouncement on doctrine. We know this because he said

“Would the revision of Daniel and the Revelation at this late date, either by what was changed or by what was left untouched, constitute an official pronouncement of denominational belief? The answer was No.” (Merwin Thurber, *Ministry* magazine, May 1945, article “Revised D & R in Relation to Denominational Doctrine”)

Note the reference to “late date”. This signifies that a lot of theological water had gone under the bridge since our beginning (1844). In other words, it was late in our history. 100 years had come and gone. Thurber also made it clear that

“It would be extremely dangerous and entirely out of harmony with denominational principles for anyone to take the position that the revising of this book constitutes an official statement of belief.” (*Ibid*)

The question must be asked here. If this editing was not to be regarded as an “official statement of belief” then what was it to be regarded as being? In other words, why change what Smith had written? There must have been a reason for it.

Later in his article, Thurber explained that it had been thought best for the three major publishing houses in America, as well as the General Conference Committee, to give special study to the revision of Uriah Smith’s book therefore a committee was set up to do the work (see previous section for details). He also explained about the revision committee itself

“That committee was given power to act. It has never reported to anyone the details of the revision. Its decisions have not been subject to review by the body which appointed it, and its work could in no sense be considered official.” (*Ibid*)

This is quite a statement. Note the accent again on the editing of Smith’s book as not being “official”. There seems to be a stress by Thurber to make this clear.

We can see here that the revised *Daniel and the Revelation*, also the changes that were made to it, were never subjected to a higher authority than those who did the editing. In other words, no higher authority outside of this editing group checked to see what had been done, therefore it could be in “no sense be considered official”. This in turn means that by removing the non-trinitarianism from Smith’s book, it could not be asserted that the General Conference, outside of a General Conference Session, were making an “official pronouncement on doctrine” (see above). This though was a definite move to remove the old theology from our current publications (remember that Smith’s book was such a classic within Seventh-day Adventism that it would have been impossible to take it out of print altogether, hence the reason for its editing).

Thurber also explained that the editing committee agreed that they realised that they had not been appointed to settle denominational doctrine and that the

revised work should be essentially the work of its author. He even said that in this revised work

“He [Uriah Smith] must not be made to teach a view he did not hold.” (*Ibid*)

The reasoning here seems to be that if Smith’s views of God and Christ were completely removed from his book, then because these views were not changed to say something different, then this would not constitute making it look as though he believed something that he did not believe. In brief, Smith’s non-trinitarian views of God and Christ were totally expunged from this book. This was without any reference to them ever being there. In other words, by reading the edited version alone and not having knowledge of what Smith had originally written in it, now one would even suspect that anything had been removed or changed.

Thurber on disputed doctrines and interpretations

Thurber also said in his article

“The committee took the position that disputed doctrines and interpretations should be left as they were, since there is no unanimity of opinion to dictate new expositions. And after all, the book bears the signature, and is the writing, of Uriah Smith.” (*Ibid*)

Note Thurber said that in this editing of Smith’s book that “disputed doctrines” should be left as they were.

At that time, our beliefs about the Godhead (trinity) were hotly in dispute. This much is reasonably obvious. As we noted in the previous section, some Seventh-day Adventists were trying to hold on to the old view whilst others were advocating the new view. On this basis therefore of Thurber saying that “disputed doctrines and interpretations should be left as they were”, then why were the non-trinitarian statements removed from Smith’s book? Remember too that Thurber had previously said that regarding “foundational doctrines”, Seventh-day Adventists were then “united as one man” (see above). Thurber then went on to say

“Seventh-day Adventist writers today probably all feel that what they write should be entirely in harmony with what has been revealed through the Spirit of prophecy. But apparently Mrs. E. G. White herself never checked up her brethren on this matter, for there were several places in *Daniel and the Revelation* where the revisers were able to produce a better harmony with the Testimonies.” (*Ibid*)

As I regard it, the implication here is that Smith was not in harmony with what God had revealed through the spirit of prophecy writings of Ellen White. There is also the implication to the unsuspecting reader that Ellen White had “never checked up” on what Smith had written in his book so she did not realise what he

had written in it.

If this is what Thurber was saying then this would be a ludicrous suggestion. I say this because by the time of the death of Ellen White (1915), Smith's work had been in existence almost 50 years and had, as we have seen, numerous printings. We also only need to look in section thirty-eight to see that Ellen White knew exactly what Smith had written.

In section thirty-eight, it is seen that Ellen White made it very clear that what was in Smith's book was the truth that God wanted people to know therefore she gave it her highest approbation. She even said that it should be widely promoted. This was not only amongst Seventh-day Adventists but also amongst non Seventh-day Adventists. Particularly she said our young people should read and promote it. She even said (amongst other statements saying much the same thing)

"I speak of this book [Daniel and the Revelation] because it is a means of educating those who need to understand the truth of the Word. This book should be highly appreciated. It covers much of the ground we have been over in our experience. If the youth will study this book and learn for themselves what is truth, they will be saved from many perils." (*Ellen G. White, Manuscript Releases Volume one No.26, page 63, "Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation," MS 174 1899*)

Ellen White knew exactly what Smith had written in his book. Even apart from this, what Smith had written had been, since their beginnings, the consistent faith of Seventh-day Adventists. It was not exactly a surprise to anyone. Note that Thurber said that the committee had found testimonies of Ellen White that were in better harmony than what Uriah Smith had written in his book. In other words, the committee were saying that they had found in the writings of Ellen White (not in the Scriptures) statements that said something different than what Smith said in his book therefore on this basis (one would assume) they felt justified to remove what Smith had believed.

The truth of the matter is that this editing was done because this book, *Daniel and the Revelation*, was required by the General Conference Committee to once again become a subscription book and therefore it was necessary to bring it up to date with the teachings of the church which by this time was fast becoming trinitarian in its concepts. At least this was the desire of some of the leadership.

Thurber then quotes Warren Howell, the chairman of the revision committee. This is when Howell said to the Cincinnati Autumn Council on October 22, 1942

"In dealing with matters of fundamental doctrine in our work, we found only one instance in which it seemed advisable to make a change, namely, in the teaching on the eternity of Christ." (*Warren Howell October 22nd 1942 report to the Cincinnati Autumn Council of Seventh-day Adventists as*

quoted by Merwin Thurber in the 'Ministry' magazine, May 1945, article "Revised D & R in Relation to Denominational Doctrine")

Now we come to the nub (nitty-gritty) of the matter. It is over the "eternity of Christ".

As a matter of interest here, I cannot find this report in the October 22nd General Conference Committee minutes so I will need to quote it here as stated by Thurber in the *Ministry* magazine of May 1945.

Here we see the admittance that as regards to what is termed "fundamental doctrine", the editing committee found only "one instance" where it "seemed advisable" to make a change, yet Howell also said that this committee wanted "to avoid anything like an official pronouncement on doctrine."

When it is realised that one of the main purposes of this editing was to deliberately remove all the non-trinitarian remarks from Uriah Smith's book (which would be too much to quote here), the words, "Seemed advisable to make a change" seems rather an understatement.

We can also see that because of the number of statements that needed to be taken out of Uriah Smith's book, the words of "one instance" could easily, by future Seventh-day Adventists who did not know the full story, be misunderstood.

What I mean by that is that it is possible that these words of Howell could be taken to mean that just one statement that Uriah Smith had made had been omitted. As the committee would have fully realised, this would not have been true. This is because by quoting Scripture after Scripture, Uriah Smith had woven non-trinitarianism throughout the entirety of his book. This is why it is more than likely Thurber said that the Seventh-day Adventist leadership realised the difficulties in editing Smith's book was like trying "to discover a proper path through the maze" (see above). It is also probably why the committee appointed to do the work of editing this book took 10 months to complete their task.

This "one instance" therefore constituted absolutely everything that Uriah Smith had written in his book concerning his non-trinitarian beliefs about God and Christ, which was of course the same beliefs that Seventh-day Adventists had held all through the time of the ministry of Ellen White. It was this theology that was to be removed from Uriah Smith's book.

Uriah Smith – Christ created or begotten?

In his address to the autumn council of the General Conference, Howell went on to say (according to Thurber)

"It is a matter of record that Uriah Smith once believed that Christ was a created being.* But later he revised his belief and teaching to the effect that Christ was begotten sometime back in eternity before the creation of the

world.” (*Ibid*)

Whilst it is true to say that Uriah Smith did, in his 1865 edition of *Thoughts on the Revelation*, use the word ‘created’ in relation to Christ, it is very difficult to imagine that He would have meant it to mean that in the very same way that God created Adam and Eve, so too he believed that God created Christ.

In 1895, at the time that she and others were still gathering together the materials for *Desire of Ages*, Ellen White wrote (and remember this was after 50 years of receiving revelations from God in visions and dreams etc)

“The Eternal Father, the unchangeable one, gave his only begotten Son, tore from his bosom Him who was made in the express image of his person, and sent him down to earth to reveal how greatly he loved mankind.” (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald 9th July 1895 ‘The Duty of the Minister and the People’*)

Here Seventh-day Adventists are told, through the spirit of prophecy, that God “made” His Son and then “sent Him down to earth” yet in my six years of study on this trinity issue, I have never come across one single instance where the Seventh-day Adventist pro-trinitarians (the ones who advocate that it was the writings of Ellen White that led our denomination from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism) have ever quoted this statement in support of their beliefs. This of course, from the standpoint of mere human nature, is for very obvious reasons. What I mean is, why quote a statement, particularly from Ellen White, that would defeat a desired objective?

Here though, when referring to the origins of the pre-existent Christ, Ellen White uses the word “made”. Remember too, as has been said before, this was after 50 years of receiving dreams, visions and revelations from God as His messenger to the remnant.

Now let me ask you a question. How much difference is there between Ellen White using the word “made” (when referring to Christ’s origins) and Uriah Smith using the word ‘created’? Please note here that Ellen White is using this expression with regards to Christ’s pre-existence, meaning prior to God sending Him to earth. She is certainly not referring to the incarnation.

The fact that Uriah Smith used this word ‘created’ when referring to Christ does not necessarily mean that he believed that Christ was literally a created being like Adam and Eve. This is no more than Ellen White believed this to be so because she said that Christ was “made” in the express image of God’s person.

In the finality, Uriah Smith and Ellen White believed very much the same. Certainly they both believed that Christ, in His pre-existence, was begotten in the express image of God’s own person and therefore was God essentially. This is one of the reasons why Ellen White gave such approbation to Smith’s work and

did not in any way condemn it. As she said just 6 weeks earlier to her “made” statement (see above)

“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.” (Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times* 30th May 1895 ‘Christ Our Complete Salvation’)

Here we can see that Ellen White says that Christ was a Son because He was “begotten in the express image of the Father's person”. As has been noted before, this word begotten has been dealt with extensively in the series regarding the trinity theology. Please to go to the following link to read this series. See also section fifteen for Ellen White’s ongoing views regarding Christ being begotten.

<http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/SMTBS.htm>

From reading previous sections, we know that Ellen White, as did Uriah Smith, believed that Christ was God essentially, so we will not go into that again here, suffice to say that Smith in his *Looking Unto Jesus* said

“With the Son, the evolution of deity, as deity, ceased. All else, of things animate or inanimate, has come in by creation of the Father and the Son — the Father the antecedent cause, the Son the acting agent through whom all has been wrought. No ranks of intelligences, it matters not how high, above or below; no orders of cherubim or seraphim; no radiant thrones or extensive dominions, principalities, or powers, but were created by our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Uriah Smith, ‘*Looking unto Jesus*’, page 13)

We can see here that just as the trinity creeds say, Smith believed that the Son was God from God, true God from true God. This “evolution of Deity” was obviously the begetting of the Son. Note well Smith’s remarks to the Father (God) being “the antecedent cause”. Regardless of what he once believed about God and Christ, this was now, in 1898 (the same year as *The Desire of Ages* was published), his belief. This was the same belief that was expunged from the pages of his *Daniel and the Revelation*. All throughout the time of Ellen White’s ministry, Smith’s beliefs had been the denominational faith of Seventh-day Adventists.

More observations from Warren Howell

Returning our thoughts to Warren Howell’s report on the editing of Uriah Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation* he said

“Since his [Uriah Smith’s] day, later books of the Spirit of Prophecy, such as

Desire of Ages came out in the nineties and later on, making clear with the support of the Scriptures that Christ is coeternal with the Father.” (Warren Howell’s October 22nd 1942 report to the Cincinnati Autumn Council of Seventh-day Adventists as quoted by Merwin Thurber in the ‘Ministry’ magazine, May 1945, article “Revised D & R in Relation to Denominational Doctrine”)

This statement is with reference to the spirit of prophecy statements that supposedly the editing committee found were out of harmony with what Uriah Smith had written in his book (see above).

I find this a really strange and very misleading statement. I say this because it appears to me to be sadly lacking in verification as to what is really meant by it. Certainly Ellen White never said that Christ is coeternal with the Father. Very noticeable here also is that there is no Ellen White statement quoted here to give support to these assertions.

There is also something else that is very important to consider here. This is that when *Desire of Ages* was published in 1898, Uriah Smith was still alive so what did Howell mean by saying that “since” Uriah Smith’s “day” books like *Desire of Ages* have come to us showing differently than he believed? This I find is very difficult to fathom, especially seeing that after *Desire of Ages* was published, Smith’s book was given at least four other printings (two of which were whilst Ellen White was alive) that were as Smith originally wrote it. Note though that it is very similar (as we noted in the previous section) to when Froom said about certain spirit of prophecy statements

“These statements were all written in the decades following the writing of Smith’s book – and especially in the decade after his death. He was therefore not acquainted with them”. (LeRoy Froom, ‘*Movement of Destiny*’, page 422, chapter ‘1931 Opens New Epoch of Unity and Advance – No 2’, 1971)

If you remember in section thirty-eight we noted that over and over again in the early 1900’s (years after *Desire of Ages* was published), Ellen White advocated that Uriah Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation* contained the truth that God wanted people to know. Smith died 5 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages* so he had all of this time to realise what Ellen White had written in this book.

Perhaps the one statement that came from Ellen White’s pen that encapsulates all that she said on this matter would be that

“God used the author of this book as a channel through which to communicate light to direct minds to the truth”. (Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases Volume one No. 26*, page 63, “*Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation*,” MS 174 1899)

Need anymore be said? Certainly, neither Ellen White or the Seventh-day

Adventist Church at large regarded Uriah Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation* as being in conflict with *Desire of Ages*. This we know because even for many years after Smith's death (1903), his book was often advertised in the *Review and Herald* even alongside *Desire of Ages* (see section thirty-eight). As Ellen White said herself (and this was after her own *Desire of Ages* was published)

"The light given was that Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation, The Great Controversy, and Patriarchs and Prophets, would make their way. They contain the very message the people must have, the special light God had given His people. The angels of God would prepare the way for these books in the hearts of the people." (*Ellen G. White, letter from "Sunnyside," Cooranbong, Australia March 11, 1899 to Brethren Irwin, Sisley, Smith, and Jones. See also Colporteur Ministry, page 12 also Special Instruction Regarding Royalties, p. 7. (1899)*)

As we have seen so many times before, the non-trinitarianism in Uriah Smith's book was at one time completely in harmony with the beliefs of the main body of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, including Ellen White. Of this there is no question. This is the reason why there was no problem with this book being part of the standard literature of Seventh-day Adventists.

Eventual differences inevitable

By the 1940's (with the introducing of trinitarian concepts into the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventism), there was now promoted amongst Seventh-day Adventists concerning God and Christ a different belief than was portrayed in Uriah Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation*. This new belief was also different of course than what was believed by Seventh-day Adventists during the time of Ellen White. This led Warren Howell to say in his report regarding the editing of Uriah Smith's book

"Since there is some difference of view among us on this point [the coeternity of the Son with God], it seemed to the committee wise to omit this teaching without comment. This was easy to do, because it had no direct bearing on the interpretation of prophecy." (*Warren Howell to the Cincinnati Autumn Council of Seventh-day Adventists October 22nd 1942, as quoted by Merwin Thurber in the 'Ministry' magazine, May 1945, article "Revised D & R in Relation to Denominational Doctrine"*)

What was the reason for Howell making this statement? It was because he reasoned that if what Smith had written in his book did not concern Bible prophecy, then it was justifiable to either change or remove it. We shall return to this thought later.

Here we can see given the official reason for our church, via this editing committee, sanctioning the removal all the non-trinitarian statements from Uriah Smith's book.

It was, according to the chairman of the committee that revised Smith's book, because at that time (1942), opinion was divided within Seventh-day Adventism over whether or not Christ was co-eternal with the Father. We can see therefore that this report shows us clearly that even by this time (1942), the trinity doctrine was far from being established within Seventh-day Adventism. This much really is evident. It also shows us that at that time there was controversy over it. Some were still holding on to the old theology (Christ the begotten Son of God) whilst others were pushing for a coeternal Christ. As Howell said "there is some difference of view among us on this point". This seems a contradiction to a previous statement made by Warren Howell. This is when he said

"The committee took the position that disputed doctrines and interpretations should be left as they were, since there is no unanimity of opinion to dictate new expositions." (Merwin Thurber, *Ministry* magazine, May 1945, article "Revised D & R in Relation to Denominational Doctrine")

This present (1942) division was caused because during the time of Ellen White, the majority belief of Seventh-day Adventists was that the Son was begotten at a point in eternity, too far back for the human mind to imagine, whilst the new theology of Seventh-day Adventism (introduced after Ellen White had died) was saying that Christ was co-eternal with the Father, meaning coeval and unbegotten. There was therefore a tug-of-war between those who were attempting to hold on the old theology as held by the pioneers during the time of Ellen White and the new theology that was then, in 1942, after Ellen White was dead, being attempted to be established within the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Note very importantly that this was 11 years after the word trinity was first added to our statement of beliefs (1931). This shows us very clearly that by that time (1931) the trinity doctrine was not then established (even though the word trinity was added to our published fundamental beliefs). It was also 27 years after the death of Ellen White (1915), 44 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages* (1898) and almost 100 years after our beginnings as a denomination (1844). This shows that even by 1942 trinitarianism was far from being the accepted stance by Seventh-day Adventists as a whole. This division was even amongst the leadership of our denomination.

Such then was the difficulty in changing the beliefs of a denomination. It certainly could not be accomplished overnight. It would take time and the process would be very gradual.

Note also that Howell says concerning that which the revision committee had removed from Uriah Smith's book that it was "wise to omit this teaching without comment". In other words, Uriah Smith's beliefs about God and Christ were totally removed from the book without denoting (showing) where they once had been. This made sure that in the future, those reading the edited 1944 edition of this book (which is the one that most Seventh-day Adventists would have on

their bookshelf) would not even realise that anything had been omitted and therefore would not query it. Thus a step was taken that in the future would not only avoid unnecessary controversy but also to a very great extent, conceal what Uriah Smith and the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a whole had once believed about Christ.

Without going into too much detail here I would disagree with Howell when he said that the eternity of Christ has “no direct bearing on the interpretation of prophecy” (I did say that we would return to this thought). A brief look at Micah 5:2 would show my reasoning (for a discussion on Micah 5:2 and the word everlasting as used in this text please refer to section seven of *The Begotten Series*). William Johnsson, who was then the editor of the Review, summed all of this up by saying

“Many of the pioneers, including James White, J. N. Andrews, Uriah Smith and J. H. Waggoner held to an Arian or semi-Arian view - that is, the Son at some point in time, before the creation of our world, was generated by the Father.” (*William Johnsson, Adventist Review January 6th 1994 Article ‘Present Truth - Walking in God’s Light’, 1994*)

This was indeed the non-trinitarian faith of the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism. William Johnsson then said

“Only gradually did this false doctrine give way to the Biblical truth, and largely under the impact of Ellen Whites writings in statements such as “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. (Desire of ages p 530)” (*Ibid*)

Here we can see why Smith’s book was edited to suit the new theology (the co-eternity of Christ with the Father) of Seventh-day Adventism. The old theology was now considered to be false doctrine. Johnsson added

“Likewise, the trinitarian understanding of God, now part of our fundamental beliefs, was not generally held by the early Adventists. Even today, a few do not subscribe to it”. (*Ibid*)

A second address

Six days after his first address to the Cincinnati autumn council, Howell again addressed this group with reference to the editing of Smith’s book. This was because (as Thurber reports in his article) some Seventh-day Adventists were concerned that this editing constituted the establishing of doctrine. It appears therefore that during those six days, serious objections had been made. As Thurber put it

“This report raised the question in some minds as to whether this decision did not constitute the settling of a doctrine for the church by a small group of men.” (*Merwin Thurber, ‘Ministry’ magazine, May 1945, article “Revised D & R in Relation to Denominational Doctrine”*)

The dispute that was taking place at that time was over the eternity of Christ. The concerns were obvious. Some believed that via this editing committee, the General Conference was deciding what the Seventh-day Adventist Church was said to believe (making a pronouncement on doctrine). There were those, even on the General Conference Committee, who considered this as being a very important issue because Thurber said that Howell addressed the council by saying

"I want to say a few words in addition to my extemporaneous talk on the revision of Daniel and the Revelation." (*Warren Howell to the Cincinnati Autumn Council of Seventh-day Adventists October 28th 1942, as quoted by Merwin Thurber in the 'Ministry' magazine, May 1945, article "Revised D & R in Relation to Denominational Doctrine"*)

Howell, with what appears to be an element of exasperation then said

"Apparently I did not make clear to all what I said as spokesman for our revision committee on the doctrine of the eternity of Christ. Let me say it more clearly. Our committee had no thought of making a pronouncement on the doctrine for the denomination. But knowing there are some differences of view among us, it was our judgment that it would be better to omit the subject altogether from the book, without comment, and leave the matter open for all to study without let or hindrance." (*Ibid*)

The first question that springs to mind is why edit Smith's book in the first place, not query what should be deleted from it. Why not just publish a new book saying what the church then believed showing that we had changed our views? This certainly would have saved all this hassle. As it was though, our church wanted this well established *Daniel and the Revelation* to be at the forefront of our subscription books. It also wanted all of its non-trinitarianism removed.

As has been said already, it appears from this that there were those on the General Conference Committee who had made objections to what the editing committee had done. Why else would Howell have found it necessary to come back to the committee and say what he did? These objectors were saying that by removing all the non-trinitarianism from Smith's book, this did constitute "making a pronouncement" on doctrine. This was an objection of the highest proportions.

Note that Howell again admits that in 1942, the differences in beliefs concerning God and Christ were so prevalent (these differences were those between the old guard defending the non-trinitarianism of the pioneers and the new theology of the trinity) that he said that the committee thought best to leave out from the revised edition of Uriah Smith's book all that this author had said on this subject. Again we see that by doing this, no one in the future who did not know about this dispute would realise that these statements had been there or that at one time they constituted the faith of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Even on the General Conference Committee, there were those who thought that what Uriah Smith had said about God and Christ should have remained in his book (for whatever reason). Obviously too, this matter of the supposed co-eternity of Christ with the Father was a hotly disputed doctrine that was then, at that time (1942), producing a lot of heated discussion and debate within Seventh-day Adventism – even amongst the leadership.

Notice too Howell's remark about leaving "the matter open for all to study without let or hindrance". What was this supposed to mean? Were now the beliefs in Smith's book considered a hindrance to Bible study? There were books at that time promoting the new theology. This was such as LeRoy Froom's *The Coming of the Comforter*. Would Howell have regarded this book as a hindrance? Why say that any book promoting a view was a hindrance? This does not make any sense. Removing these statements was just a way of not allowing Smith's views and reasoning to persuade others.

Nevertheless, regardless of the objections, the non-trinitarianism that was removed from *Daniel and the Revelation* was to make way for the new theology of Seventh-day Adventism. As we have previously seen, this was recognised by Froom when in his *Movement of Destiny* he said

"The removal of the last standing vestige of Arianism in our standard literature was accomplished through the deletions from the classic D&R in 1944." (*Froom 'Movement of Destiny', chapter 'Changing the Impaired Image of Adventism' page 465*)

Thurber reported that after they had finished editing Uriah Smith's book, the committee that did the work thanked God that He had led them in this work. Thurber also said that the committee rejoiced to find that they had all been in harmony with each other and so they signed a declaration prepared for them by Warren Howell. Part of this said

"First of all, we wish to say that we have felt the special blessing of the Lord in finding a solution to the problems that have arisen in pursuance of the difficult and delicate task of reviewing and revising a book written sixty to eighty years ago, and in doing our work some forty years after the author's death." (*Warren Howell to the Cincinnati Autumn Council of Seventh-day Adventists October 22nd 1942, as quoted by Merwin Thurber in the 'Ministry' magazine, May 1945, article "Revised D & R in Relation to Denominational Doctrine"*)

Not everyone would agree that what was done to Smith's book had the blessing of God. Certainly Ellen White would not have agreed with what our church has done. She had only praise for Smith's work. There is also the question of why change it in the first place. Why not simply be open about it and publish another book saying that the views of Seventh-day Adventists over the years had changed? Why change one man's work and then pass it off as though it was his

original thoughts? This declaration also said

"In reaching our conclusions that affected the teachings of the book or the rights and privileges of the author, while preserving the right of every man to his individual convictions, we have followed the practice of recording no action until our decision could be made unanimous." (*Ibid*)

It is this author's opinion that Smith's book should never have been edited. Particularly he believes it should not have been revised and then re-issued as though Smith had written it. If the church was not satisfied with what Uriah Smith had written then they should have produced a brand new book saying that what the pioneers did believe was error. At least those who were (and still are) unaware of this editing would not have believed that this was Smith's original work, which probably some still do believe. It would also have served to highlight the change in beliefs, which maybe was not what was wanted.

The promotion of the new Daniel and the Revelation

The year following the publication of the new edited version of *Daniel and the Revelation*, there was a decided push, by the General Conference, to have all Seventh-day Adventists read it. As was noted in the minutes of November 19th 1945

"WHEREAS, The book "Daniel and the Revelation" since its appearance in the early days of this movement as our first subscription book, has been the means of bringing to thousands a knowledge of the third angel's message, and believing that a book which will turn souls to this truth will also keep the certainty and hope of the message burning brightly in their hearts; and,

WHEREAS, This volume has recently been revised and re-illustrated and should have the widest possible circulation at this time; therefore,

We recommend, 1. That the union conferences of the North American Division plan for a campaign through their urging the members to procure one or more copies of the prophecies of "Daniel and the Revelation."

2. That the publishing houses make the regular subscription edition of this book available for a period of 90 days to the Book and Bible Houses on a special basis to be supplied to the churches at a price not to exceed \$1.95 per copy, post-paid, the books purchased at this special price being for home use and missionary evangelism, and are not for resale.

3. That the General Conference arrange with the Review and Herald office to present a series of outline studies on the book "Daniel and the Revelation" through the columns of the Review and Herald, and that the whole church be invited to enter upon this course of study.

4. That the union conference papers support this campaign by giving it

generous publicity through special articles by leading workers, urging church members to take advantage of this unusual opportunity.” (*General Conference Committee Notes, November 19th 1945*)

Earlier the same year, A. L. White (Ellen White’s grandson) who was then Secretary of the E. G. White publications, wrote an article in the *Ministry* magazine concerning the revised (new) *Daniel and the Revelation*. In an attempt to justify this revision, he explained that even though previous minor revisions had been made to Smith’s work, the book still prospered. He then wrote

“For reasons similar to the foregoing, *Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation* has recently undergone a most careful revision, and as it now comes from the presses we believe it is destined to have a very wide distribution, continuing to fill the important place in our literature which Ellen White said that it should have:” (*A. L. White, Ministry, January 1945, ‘Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation’*)

Note that Ellen White’s grandson calls this editing of Smith’s book “a most careful revision”. Some would regard this as rather an understatement.

Whilst I would agree with A. L. White about how his grandmother regarded Smith’s book, I do not believe for one fleeting moment that she would have agreed with the editing that was done to it. I say this not only because it contained what was once the long held faith of Seventh-day Adventists (whilst Ellen White was alive), or because of how highly she prized this book but because of her views about changing the content of any of our books, especially this one. I believe she would have regarded it as immoral.

Severe warnings from Ellen White

In 1910, Ellen White wrote a letter to A. G. Daniells about the dangers of changing the wording in our already published literature. This we can see when she said

“Representations have passed before me which indicate that you [A. G. Daniells] and Elder [W. W.] Prescott and others united with you have been inclined to search out things to be criticized or condemned in our printed publications. Were encouragement given you, changes and revisions would be made in accordance with the ideas that you have in mind. But you must never forget that Satan, disguised as an angel of light, is always ready to encourage anything that would lead to a loss of confidence in our denominational literature. He would be pleased to keep many minds employed in picking flaws in publications that God has blessed.” (*Ellen G. White Letter 70, August 11th 1910, Manuscript Releases Volume 10 No. 842, ‘Councils concerning W. W. Prescott and A. G. Daniells’*)

This counsel would apply to Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation*. Ellen White added later in the letter

“Satan and all his hosts are on the battlefield. The enemy of our souls has acted the part of a busy agent in presenting the thought that many of our books now in print are in need of general revision. He would be glad to have our brethren receive the impression that many changes must be made. He would delight to insinuate questioning and doubt into the minds of many of our people.

I have been instructed that the Lord is not the author of the proposal to make many changes in books already published. If information regarding this sort of work, even as regards the few instances where revisions are needed, should become widespread, seeds of doubt would spring up in many minds. Satan would be busy at work implanting seeds of distrust and unbelief, and it would require much labor to remedy the evil that would be wrought.” (*Ibid*)

Would Ellen White have approved of the editing that was done to Uriah Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation*? Did God approve of it? The author of these notes believes that the answers to those questions are so obvious that they do not need comment!

In summary

In summary it is important to point out that with the editing of *Daniel and the Revelation*, it was not just a case of removing Uriah Smith’s non-trinitarian remarks and then re-publishing the book. The truth of the matter is that from cover to cover the entire book was totally re-written.

Uriah Smith’s wording was changed extensively. Countless sentences, paragraphs and even pages were omitted whilst other statements (and whole pages) formulated by the revision committee were added. In my opinion there is no way whatsoever that this book can honestly be called the work of Uriah Smith, even though the book was re-issued under his name.

The extent of this editing is only truly seen by those who make the effort of acquiring an original copy of Uriah Smith’s book and then comparing it with the 1944 edited version but the extent can be somewhat understood when it is realised that the revision committee took the best part of a year to complete the work. Such was the amount of editing that was done to this faithful pioneer’s classical work to which Ellen White gave such glowing approbation (see section thirty-eight for how Ellen White regarded Smith’s work).

As we can see therefore, even though the word trinity was included for the very first time in our statement of beliefs in 1931, the trinity doctrine itself was not at that time (1931) fully established within Seventh-day Adventism. In fact this was far from being the case. If it had been well established then Howell would not have said in 1942 (11 years later) that on this subject, the division was still so great within Seventh-day Adventism that it is “better to omit the subject

altogether from the book, without comment, and leave the matter open for all to study without let or hindrance" (see above). Whether Christ was begotten or not (the issue of the eternity of Christ) was the major factor in this 1940's dispute. This eventually led to the Seventh-day Adventist formulation of the trinity doctrine itself.

This eternity of Christ issue was also the problem that Eckenroth had encountered (see section forty-three). Even today within Seventh-day Adventism it is the major part of the dispute that is taking place between the trinitarians and the non-trinitarians.

We now need to move on to section 48. This is where we shall see that some of the old timers, the ones who still held on to the old theology of Seventh-day Adventism, objected to the new theology (trinitarianism).

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section forty-eight

Voices in the wilderness

In 1931 (this was the year when the word trinity was first included in our statement of beliefs), it is only reasonable to believe that there were many Seventh-day Adventists who still were devotedly non-trinitarian. We only need to refer to the previous section to see that this is true. This was where we noted that even in the 1940's there was amongst Seventh-day Adventists (even those of our leadership), a division in beliefs regarding Christ. Some were pushing for a Christ that was coeternal with the Father (the new theology) whilst some were contending for the original faith of Seventh-day Adventism. The latter was the faith that Ellen White said had been given to them by God (see section twenty-three, section twenty-four and section twenty-nine).

In 1996, Merlin Burt wrote a paper for Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist theological Seminary. In his paper he penned these words (remember here that the word trinity was first included in our statement of beliefs in 1931)

“During the 1940s an ever increasing majority of the church was believing in the eternal underived deity of Christ and the trinity, yet there were some who held back even actively resisted the change.” (*Merlin Burt, 'Demise of Semi-Arianism and anti-trinitarianism in Adventist theology, 1888-1957 page 48)*

This reveals that during the 1940's, trinitarianism was becoming more and more rife within Seventh-day Adventism. By the words “[the eternal underived deity of Christ](#)”, Burt is referring to the current theology of Seventh-day Adventism. This is the theology that says that Christ is unbegotten and coeternal with the Father. This is in opposition to the once begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventists. The latter is the faith that all the time of Ellen White's ministry was held by our denomination.

Note Burt says that during this time period (the 1940's), some Seventh-day Adventists did not accept the new theology but instead “[actively resisted the change](#)”. As we noted in section fifteen, also other sections, Ellen White did say that Christ is a begotten Son. This is one of the reasons, perhaps even the main one, why there was decided resistance to the new theology.

We have mentioned many times before that early Seventh-day Adventists did not dispute the complete deity of Christ. They believed in every respect that He

was God but they believed also that He was a separate personality from the Father. This was not believed in a trinitarian sense but that He was brought forth of God (begotten of God) at a point in eternity. They believed also that this bringing forth was so far back in eternity that it is incomprehensible to the human mind to even imagine it. Certainly they believed that as a separate personality from the Father, His existence was not calculable by any means known to humanity (see section fifteen, section twenty and section twenty-one etc). It was like saying almost forever. Note Burt's next words. He says

“This group was mainly comprised of some older ministers and Bible teachers.” (*Ibid*)

Here we can see that in his own personal studies, Merlin Burt came to the same realisation as the author of the notes you are now reading. This realisation is that even in the 1940's there were those Seventh-day Adventists, even amongst the ministry, who objected to the new theology of Seventh-day Adventism. Note very significantly he says that they were “older ministers and Bible teachers”. This tells us quite a lot. These older ministers etc were contending for the faith that was once taught in Seventh-day Adventism. This means that the objectors to the up and coming new theology were not just those of the laity.

Being true to their convictions, these ministers and Bible teachers would have been teaching the old theology of Seventh-day Adventism, meaning non-trinitarianism. This was as opposed to the new theology of trinitarianism. We shall see this now.

We shall now take note of just three of these older ministers who did not give up the one time faith of Seventh-day Adventists. These were Judson Washburn (1863-1955), Charles Longacre (1871-1958) and W. R. French (1881-1968). First we shall take a brief look at the views of Washburn.

Judson Washburn (1863-1955)

During the late 1930's/early 1940's, Judson Washburn can only be described as being very vocal in objecting to the General Conference concerning the attempts to make trinitarianism part of the teachings of Seventh-day Adventism. So that we can see the importance and the relevance of his objections, we need to know a few facts concerning the man himself.

Judson Washburn was a prolific preacher/evangelist. Through his ministry there were countless numbers who were brought to the knowledge of the saving grace of God. Washburn knew Ellen White very well. He often communicated to her the progress with regard to the spreading of the message of Seventh-day Adventism.

The people of England and Wales should know particular of the work of Judson Washburn. This is because in our denominational history, it is said that the work here in the British Isles owes so much to his endeavours. His ministry in England

and Wales was between the years 1891-1902. In 1903, after returning to America, he played a major part in transferring the denominational headquarters to Washington D. C. He was a well esteemed man.

Although in this section we see only a brief overview of the man himself, also his objections he made to the General Conference regarding the trinity doctrine, a larger view would be quite advantageous. This is particularly with regards to understanding some of the issues that are involved in this debate.

At the age of twelve, Washburn had been baptised by James White, the husband of Ellen White. This was following being convinced of the truth by J. N Andrews. J. N. Andrews whom many regard as a brilliant theologian was also a non-trinitarian. He wrote in 1855 regarding the trinity doctrine

“This doctrine destroys the personality of God and his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. The infamous, measures by which it was forced upon the church which appear upon the pages of ecclesiastical history might well cause every believer in that doctrine to blush.” (*J. N. Andrews, Review and Herald, March 6th 1855, 'The Fall of Babylon'*)

This was much the same view as most of the early pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism. In relation to our last-day message, they regarded the separate personalities of God and Christ to be of paramount importance.

In 1884 at the age of 21, Washburn joined the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. During this time, he remained very good friends with Ellen White. It would not be presumptuous to believe therefore that he knew exactly what her views were on the relationship between God and Christ. Certainly he knew of the warning of the omega (the final falling away from the Seventh-day Adventists faith) that in 1904 Ellen White had given to Seventh-day Adventists. Just like many have come to believe, he reasoned that it could possibly be linked to the trinity doctrine. We shall see this later.

Washburn's heart (as we say) was set on fire for the gospel. This eventually came about because of the preaching of the message of righteousness by faith as Waggoner and Jones had presented it at the famous 1888 Minneapolis General Conference. In commenting on the 1919 Bible and history teachers conference, Bert Haloviak, Director of the General Conference Archives and Statistics, reported

“Washburn claimed a rich SDA heritage. He was converted by J. N. Andrews at 11, baptized by James White at 12 and began preaching Adventism at 21. In a state of confusion and dismay after the 1888 General Conference session that he attended, Washburn, who was a nephew of George Butler, had an interview with Mrs. White at Ottawa, Kansas. Washburn considered that interview a turning point in his life. From that time onward he maintained complete confidence in the inspiration of Mrs.

White.” (Bert Haloviak, *ATissue ‘In the shadow of the daily: Background and aftermath of the 1919 Bible and history teachers conference’*)

Washburn fully supported Ellen White. This was especially so when she said that instead of presenting the beauty of Christ’s perfect righteousness as Waggoner had presented it at Minneapolis (1888), the ministry of the Seventh-day Church were still dwelling too much on the keeping of the law. Here we can see the reason for Washburn’s unparalleled success in the preaching of the gospel.

The word success does not truly reflect the effect of Washburn’s preaching. His was a prolific contribution. In a 1974 Centennial Historical Special Edition of the *British Messenger*, it relates that in 1893 at the Victoria Rooms in Southampton, Washburn began a series of evangelistic meetings. It reports

“The attendances were so large that, despite the fact that no fewer than four meetings were held each Sunday, a move had to be made to the more commodious Philharmonic Hall, while retaining the Victoria Rooms for subsidiary meetings. Even so it was found impossible to control the crowds desiring to gain admittance and as a result the Victoria Rooms were abandoned altogether.” (D. S. Porter, *‘A century of Adventism in the British Isles’ 1974*)

In itself, this statement speaks volumes so further comments are really unnecessary but note the comments made in another magazine that was issued to celebrate the year 2000. This magazine relates that one particular researcher had concluded that British Seventh-day Adventism might well have perished but for Washburn’s contribution. This reveals how highly this one man’s contribution to the work in the British Isles is rated. This magazine recounts (take note the title of the article)

“In Bath and in the south Welsh cities, Sunday preachers thundered against Washburn by name. They printed tracts against the advent faith. Nevertheless, Washburn could explain to Ellen White: ‘You see, all who know anything about us, know that we believe in the Gospel and that our doctrine is not simply a legal theory’” (*‘A century of Adventism in the British Isles’, 2000, ‘Judson Washburn’ (1863-1955) - The man who made the difference’*)

Here again is revealed the secret of Washburn’s success. It was the preaching of righteousness by faith, a living faith in God. The article then continues

“In the Britain of the 1890s the work of an evangelist was still sufficiently newsworthy as to attract the hacks from the local newspapers. In Bath, Newport and Cardiff, Washburn’s sermons were reproduced verbatim” (*Ibid*)

Without saying any more, it can be clearly seen that Washburn’s dynamic

preaching brought about a varied and animated response from the inhabitants of the British Isles. This was so much so in fact that the article said that in the local newspapers his sermons were “reproduced verbatim”. Washburn had a tremendous memory. Bert Haloviak said of him

“In addition to his intense study of the spirit of prophecy and desire to obtain “everything that Sister White wrote,” Washburn's amazing memory enabled him to memorize much of the Bible and spirit of prophecy writings.” (*Bert Haloviak, AT Issue 'In the shadow of the daily: Background and aftermath of the 1919 Bible and history teachers conference'*)

Haloviak explains

“By 1918 he claimed to have memorized Revelation, Romans, James and Second Peter. He noted that his memory improved “with the study of the Bible and spirit of prophecy.” By 1948 he claimed to have memorized the entire New Testament and was working toward committing Isaiah to memory.” (*Ibid*)

It should go without saying that Seventh-day Adventists today would do well to emulate Washburn.

As regards to the 1919 Bible Conference (of which we have spoken in section thirty-five and section thirty-six), Washburn was clearly not very impressed. He said in a letter to F. M. Wilcox (Wilcox was the man who was later responsible for the wording of the 1931 statement of beliefs in which the word trinity was used for the very first time)

“You were in that secret Bible Council which I believe was the most unfortunate thing our people ever did, and it seemed to me you were losing the simplicity of your faith.” (*Washburn to F. M. Wilcox, letter July 3, 1921*)

Here we have a renowned Seventh-day Adventist minister calling the 1919 Bible conference “that secret Bible Council”. He was saying that it was the worse thing that Seventh-day Adventists had ever done.

Particularly note here that Washburn accused Wilcox of “losing the simplicity” of his faith. From one Seventh-day Adventist minister to another, this was quite an accusation. It also speaks volumes as regards to the difference between believing the philosophical speculations of the trinity doctrine and the simplicity of what the Bible has to say concerning the three personalities of the Godhead (see section four, section five, section six, section seven and section eight).

The next year (1922), then with thirty-eight years experience in the ministry, Washburn wrote again concerning the 1919 Bible Conference. This time it was in an open letter to A. G. Daniells as well as to the General Conference (1922 was the year that A. G. Daniells relinquished the post of presidency to become

General Conference secretary). In this letter Washburn said to Daniells

“Under the authority, and sanction or permission at least of this so called Bible Institute, teachers were undermining the confidence of our sons and daughters in the very fundamentals of our truth, while the parents were not allowed to inquire into the sacred secrets of this private council. . . . One of our most faithful workers said the holding of this Bible Institute was the most terrible thing that had ever happened in the history of this denomination.” (*J. S. Washburn, "An Open Letter to Elder A. G. Daniells and an Appeal to the General Conference," 1922, pp. 28-9*)

Washburn regarded the 1919 Bible Conference as being extremely detrimental to both the message and the work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He also saw it as a very serious indictment against our claim to be God’s remnant people. He certainly regarded it as undermining the faith of Seventh-day Adventists which he still regarded as non-trinitarianism. We shall see this later.

In this respect, much more could be spoken of but we need to move on although we must not do so without remembering that Washburn came up through the ranks of Seventh-day Adventism. This means that he knew only too well the message that was preached by the other pioneers. This included James and Ellen White. Does this tell us something today?

This leads us to the letter that Washburn wrote to the General Conference objecting to the doctrine of the trinity being introduced into the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We shall now note some of the comments he made.

Washburn’s 1939 letter to the General Conference

It was in response to a sermon that was preached by W. W. Prescott that Washburn wrote his letter to the General Conference. Prescott was the very same man whose presentation on the person of Christ, because it contained trinitarian concepts, brought about a very mixed reaction amongst the 1919 Bible Conference delegates (see section thirty-five and section thirty-six).

Concerning what he regarded as trinitarian views being preached by Prescott, Washburn strongly made his objections known to the General Conference. In his letter he said such things as

“The doctrine of the Trinity is regarded as the supreme test of orthodoxy by the Roman Catholic Church”, ... “The leading doctrines of the Roman papacy were taken directly from heathenism”, ... “The doctrine of the Trinity is a cruel heathen monstrosity, removing Jesus from his true position of Divine Savior and Mediator” as well as “Satan has taken some heathen conception of a three-headed monstrosity, and with deliberate intention to cast contempt upon divinity, has woven it into Romanism as our glorious God, an impossible, absurd invention.” (*Judson Washburn, The trinity,*

Letter to General Conference in 1939)

Washburn was no more impressed with the doctrine of the trinity than he was with the 1919 Bible Conference. Note particularly that in his opinion the trinity doctrine removed Jesus from “his true position of Divine Savior and Mediator”. This was a very serious allegation and it was coming from a man who had spent his lifetime in the ministry of the gospel. This was especially so as this very same gospel was preached by Ellen White and the other pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism. This must give us something very serious to think about, particularly as Washburn’s preaching, which was decidedly non-trinitarian, won so many people to Jesus Christ.

In his letter to the General Conference, I would ask you now to particularly contemplate one very important statement that was made by Washburn. Concerning the doctrine of the trinity (and remember, this was in 1940, nine years after the word trinity was first used in our fundamental beliefs) he said

“This monstrous doctrine transplanted from heathenism into the Roman Papal Church is seeking to intrude its evil presence into the teachings of the Third Angel’s Message.” (*Ibid*)

Notice here the emphasis. Washburn said that the trinity doctrine was (as he put it) “seeking to intrude its evil presence” into Seventh-day Adventism. This was in 1939, therefore it can be seen that at this time, the trinity doctrine was not as well established within Seventh-day Adventism as many Seventh-day Adventists have been led to believe. Washburn still regarded non-trinitarianism as the recognised belief of Seventh-day Adventism.

If you remember, we have quoted previously from Russell Holt’s paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within Seventh-day Adventism. He said of the time period leading up to the death of James White (1881)

“This period saw the death of most of those pioneers who had championed and held the anti-trinitarian position. Their places were being taken by men who were changing their thinking, or had never opposed the doctrine. The trinity began to be published, until by 1931 it had triumphed and become the standard denominational position. Isolated stalwarts remained who refused to yield, but the outcome had been decided.” (*Russell Holt, “The doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination: Its rejection and acceptance” 1969*)

As we now know from what we have previously read, by 1931 the trinity doctrine had not triumphed. Certainly it had not become the standard denominational position. This is very much an exaggeration. Non-trinitarianism within the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still the accepted denominational stand. This was even for many years following the death of Ellen White.

Much more could be said about the man Washburn, also regarding his views on this new theology that he could see was fast becoming a part of the message of Seventh-day Adventism. Suffice to say for now though that many of those Seventh-day Adventists today who are against the trinity doctrine (the non-trinitarians) are still against it for the very same reasons as was Washburn.

The main reason why Washburn objected to the trinity doctrine was that he believed it taught that at Calvary, the pre-existent Son of God did not die, thus in his opinion, the trinity doctrine directly affected the efficacy of the atonement (if you remember, this was the same view as held by J. H Waggoner that we noted in section thirty-seven whose publications concerning the trinity doctrine destroying the atonement was spread over twenty-one years).

Washburn was referring here to W. W. Prescott whose sermon he had objected to by writing a letter to the General Conference. In this same letter, Washburn even concluded that the inculcation into the beliefs and teachings of Seventh-day Adventism of the trinity doctrine might be the omega of deadly heresies that Ellen White said would be accepted by Seventh-day Adventists. This, as we have seen in section one, is the same view as some hold today. Whoever understands the trinity doctrine can well sympathise with Washburn's reasoning. In his letter he had previously said

“Seventh-day Adventists claim to take the word of God as supreme authority and to have “come out of Babylon,” to have renounced forever the vain traditions of Rome. If we should go back to the immortality of the soul, purgatory, eternal torment and the Sunday Sabbath, would that be anything less than apostasy? If, however, we leap over all these minor, secondary doctrines and accept and teach the very central root, doctrine of Romanism, the Trinity, and teach that the son of God did not die, even though our words seem to be spiritual, is this anything else or anything less than apostasy?” (*Ibid*)

He then added

“and the very Omega of apostasy?” (*Ibid*)

That the trinity doctrine denied the death of the pre-existent Son of God was a major issue with Washburn. This is because throughout his sermons he emphasised that this was the sinner's only hope. It is no wonder that he was so much against this speculative teaching.

Washburn was far from being the last of our members, particularly those in the ministry, who objected to the trinity doctrine. There were others. One such person was Charles Longacre.

Charles S. Longacre (1871-1958)

In his paper of the demise of semi-Arianism and anti-trinitarianism within

Seventh-day Adventism, Merlin Burt refers to Charles Smull Longacre as being another non-trinitarian minister who did not yield to the new theology of Seventh-day Adventism. He also points out that Longacre was actually present at the 1919 Bible Conference. He even reports an interesting recollection of Raymond F. Cottrell, a very good friend of Longacre. We shall relate it here now. Burt obtained this in an interview with Robert Olson in 1996, the year he wrote his paper.

This recollection was that Longacre was called away one Sabbath and could not take his normal Sabbath School class at the Takoma Park Church so he asked Cottrell to take the lesson study for him, which as it happened that week was on the deity of Christ. Burt records

“Cottrell attempted to teach the class with great delicacy. During discussion one of the class members spoke up and said “Elder Cottrell, we want you to know that we are all Arians” (Merlin Burt, *Demise of Semi-Arianism and anti-trinitarianism in Adventist theology, 1888-1957* page 50)

Here we have a suggestion of the influence that Longacre had on his Sabbath School class although we must not jump to conclusions as to what is meant by the term Arian. In section eight we realised that what Arius actually believed is not altogether in harmony with what many people today say that he believed. In other words, regarding Arius, there is today a maligning of his beliefs.

Certainly Arian or Arianism is a term that is used by many to denote any belief that is not in harmony with the trinity doctrine. We can see therefore that unless it is explained each time that it is used, its definition is very ambiguous.

Merlin Burt continues his paper by commenting on the *Bible Research Fellowship* that was organised in 1940 by the North American Bible teachers. This, as he says, was chaired in 1944 by L. L. Caviness whom we noted at the 1919 Bible Conference was then decidedly opposed to the trinity doctrine (see section thirty-five and section thirty-six)

Burt also recorded that this fellowship, comprising of teachers and Bible workers, met together monthly to discuss different papers, some of which he says were very often controversial. He noted that in the January of 1947, one paper presented by Longacre to the fellowship called “The Deity of Christ” was very controversial.

This paper Burt says, articulated “[With careful precision](#)” the earlier views of the pioneers. He then said that when Longacre used the Bible and the writings of Ellen White to support his views, he met serious opposition from the fellowship members (nothing really changes does it?). We shall quote from this paper later. It certainly reveals what was once the faith of Seventh-day Adventists, even up to and beyond the death of Ellen White. Burt concludes his section on Longacre by saying

“Ray Cottrell observed that “there were a number of survivors of Arianism back there in the 1950’s, but to my knowledge it has quietly died out since then as the people who held Arian views died. And when C.S. Longacre died, its primary exponent died also.” (*Ibid page 52-53*)

Perhaps to a very great extent the old views of Seventh-day Adventism did die out in the 1950’s (the time when trinitarianism had become more or less established within the Seventh-day Adventist Church) but they certainly were not completely dead. This does not mean either that these views were wrong.

These old views are still held by many Seventh-day Adventists today and are once again coming into vogue as being Biblical truth. Interesting to note here is that in the 1950’s, these non-trinitarian ideas of God and Christ, as held by the pioneers, were still acceptable within the Seventh-day Adventist ministry but today they are not acceptable. Such is the changed attitude within Seventh-day Adventism. In other words, there is today far less tolerance afforded to those who maintain, as did the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism (including Ellen White), that a non-trinitarian view of God and Christ is a correct biblical understanding.

As confirmation of what was generally believed by Seventh-day Adventists in earlier times, we shall now quote from Longacre’s paper. Note that Burt says of Longacre that he was the “primary exponent” of the one time faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This faith he calls “Arian views”.

Burt also records that not long after presenting his paper at the Pacific Union College (January 1947), Charles Longacre preached a sermon on the very same topic at the Takoma Park Church. He also relates that in an interview with Robert W. Olsen, he discovered that at that time (the late 1940’s), the subject of Christ’s deity was a very much-debated topic. This is as we realised through reading section forty-six and section forty-seven. Burt records that in his interview with Olsen, the latter said

“While I was there, I discovered that this matter of Christ’s deity was a hot issue. And Elder C. S. Longacre had preached a sermon in the old Takoma Park Church - I didn’t hear it, but I was told about it - in which he gave all the Biblical reasons and whatever else he might have been able to give as to why Christ was not eternal.” (*Robert Olson, Interview with Merlin Burt, Loma Linda University, October 4th 1996*)

Olsen told Burt that all the students of the seminary were talking about Longacre’s sermon. He also said that Andreasen, so that he could deny what Longacre taught, wanted to take the pulpit the next Sabbath. It was therefore agreed with the pastor of the Takoma Park Church that he should do this but when it came to be known to J. L. McElhany (he was then President of the General Conference) he said that Andreasen should not be allowed to do so. Olsen related that the President had said

“We’re not going to have a great big controversy right here. You must not allow Elder Andreasen to have your pulpit. You must deny him that privilege.” (*Ibid*)

It could have been that McElhany thought that there was enough controversy around already without having more added to it. Note again that this was in 1947. This was just a few years after the controversy brought about by the editing that was done to Uriah Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation*. We noted this in section forty-six and section forty-seven. It was also now 32 years after the death of Ellen White, 49 years after the publication of her *Desire of Ages*, 16 years after the addition for the first time in our history of the word trinity to our published fundamental beliefs and 103 years after our beginnings as a movement of people (1844).

Very interesting to note is that Longacre was selected as one of the six guards to Ellen White’s bier at her funeral. He was highly respected within Seventh-day Adventism.

We shall now take a look at some of the things that Longacre said in his paper. This will reflect what was being taught within Seventh-day Adventism during the time of Ellen White’s ministry.

The old-time religion of Seventh-day Adventists (as seen through the eyes of Charles S. Longacre)

Charles Longacre was no run of the mill Seventh-day Adventist minister. He was a very well known figure. Go here to read his biography. It is included in an article regarding Longacre’s *The Deity of Christ* paper (mentioned above).

[http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Articles\(pioneers\)/DeityofChrist\(Longacre\).htm](http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Articles(pioneers)/DeityofChrist(Longacre).htm)

In his paper, Charles Longacre expounded and explained his beliefs concerning Christ. History relates, as we have seen in previous sections, that these were as held by Seventh-day Adventists during the time of Ellen White’s ministry. Longacre not only stressed these beliefs but also by quoting much from the Scriptures and from the writings of Ellen White, he explained his reasons for holding them. Unfortunately, because of limited space, we cannot detail all of his reasoning here but suffice to say that a great deal of it is exactly the same as found in this study. Whilst we can only quote a small portion of what he said, we shall show enough to gain a reasonable balance of these beliefs. After quoting two beliefs concerning Christ that he believed were error he wrote

“We now come to the third group which hold that Christ was the only begotten Son of God, the Father, and that He was such from the days of eternity and was the only one who proceeded directly from God, being begotten by the Father before all creation, before anything was created in an empty universe. This group hold that the Son of God is equal to the Father, is the express image of the Father, possesses the same substance

as the Father, the same life as the Father, the same power and authority as the Father, but that all these attributes were given to the Son of God by the Father, when He was begotten by the Father.” (*Charles S. Longacre, The Deity of Christ, paper presented to the Bible Research Fellowship Angwin, California January 1947, page 3*)

He also said two paragraphs later

“This group believe that the Son of God existed “in the bosom of the Father” from all eternity, just as Levi existed in the “loins of Abraham,” as the apostle Paul said; “And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him.” Heb. 7:9, 10.” (*Ibid*)

After quoting Revelation 1:11 Longacre said

“Not everything has a beginning nor does everything have an ending. God Himself never had a beginning and He will not have an ending. He is the self-existent One, who never had a beginning. Eternity itself never had a beginning and never will have an ending. Space has no beginning and no ending. Everything else had a beginning, but not all things that have a beginning are going to have an end.” (*Ibid page 4*)

As we shall now see, Longacre included Christ as having a beginning of personality although he firmly believed that He is God. He then said

“Of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, it is said in the Scriptures, “He is the only Begotten of the Father.” The Son of God was not created like other creatures are brought into existence. He is not a created but a Begotten Being, enjoying all the attributes of His Father. Christ Himself explains His own relationship to the Father as follows: “As the Father had life in Himself,” unborrowed, underived, original, independent, and immortal, “so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself. John 5:26” (*Ibid*)

This is truly one time Seventh-day Adventist theology. It is that Christ really is the Son of God. Longacre later said

“God “only hath immortality.” He alone is the only self-existent God. But He gave His Son when He was Begotten the same life he had in Himself, therefore when Christ offered His life as a ransom for the sins of the world, He and He only could make an atonement for all the sins of all the world, because he made “infinite sacrifice,” and it required an Infinite sacrifice” to atone for all the sins of mankind and angels who had sinned, in order to satisfy the demands of the law of God and infinite justice.” (*Ibid, page 7*)

Longacre also said in the next paragraph

“Christ had unconditional immortality bestowed upon Him when He was Begotten of the Father. Angels had conditional immortality bestowed upon them when they were created by Christ in the beginning. Angels are immortal but their immortality is conditional. Therefore angels do not die but live on after they sin just as Satan or Lucifer lives on in sin. But since Lucifer and the fallen angels only enjoy conditional immortality, God ultimately will destroy them and take from them the gift of immortality which Christ bestowed on them when He created them. Whatever God bestows he can take away whenever He sees fit.” (*Ibid*)

Almost at the end of his paper, Longacre explained

“Christ always existed in the bosom of the Father, even before He was Begotten as the Son of God, and God and His prophets counted "things which are not," as though they were even before they were manifested. Thus we read that Christ was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," and that "Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot... was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifested in these last times." So Christ existed in the bosom of the Father from all eternity but was manifested when He was begotten by the Father as His Son, as the apostle Paul says, "before all creation." (*Ibid, page 19*)

Earlier in his paper, after saying that at the resurrection “immortality will be bestowed upon every saint that is raised to life through Jesus Christ” he says

“But Christ, the only Begotten of the Father, made in the "express image" of the Father in person. God not only appointed [Him] to be the Saviour of men, but He appointed Him "heir of all things," "being made so much better than the angels, as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said He (God) at any time, Thou art My son, This day have I begotten thee?" Heb. 1:2-5.” (*Ibid, page 8*)

“Here we are told that the expression "Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten thee," refers only to Christ and not to any of the angels. Then there must have been a time, a day, when the Son of God was begotten by the Father. On that day, the Father saith unto His only Begotten Son: "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever ... therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. And Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thine hands." Heb. 1:8-10.” (*Ibid*)

Again this is strictly non-trinitarian reasoning.

Although it is far too much to quote here, in confirmation of his beliefs (faith), Longacre quotes abundantly from the spirit of prophecy. In the main it is much the same as is quoted in these studies. We will quote him as saying

“The Spirit of Prophecy says that there was and still is a difference in rank between God - the Father, and God's Son. We read in Vol. 1 of the old Spirit of Prophecy [p.17] thus: "Satan in Heaven, before his rebellion, was a high and exalted angel, next in honor to God's dear Son." The implication is that God stands first in honor, His only begotten Son comes next, and Lucifer was next to the Son of God. If God and His Son were co-eternal, co-equal, and co-existent so that there was no difference between them then we should not say Lucifer was next to the Son of God but next to God as well” (*Ibid, page 9*)

Did you notice something very interesting? Longacre does not mention the Holy Spirit. It seems that he reasoned the same way as the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism. This is that the Holy Spirit is not a person like God and Christ are persons. Longacre further explains concerning Christ

“Again we read: "Jesus, God's dear Son, had the pre-eminence over all the angelic hosts. He was one with the Father before the angels were created. Satan was envious of Christ, and gradually assumed command which devolved on Christ alone." Why on Christ alone? Why not on God? Because Satan knew that the Son of God had come forth from the Father and was His Son, and he felt he should share equal honors with the Son.” (*Ibid*)

He also added later (this is with respect to Ellen White's remark in *Desire of Ages* that in Christ is “life original, unborrowed, underived”)

“What kind of life did the Father have in Himself? In God "is life original, unborrowed, underived," "immortal," "independent." "He is the source of life." Christ says, "As the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given" - the same life, original, unborrowed, underived life to the Son. It was "given" to Him by His Father. Christ was made the source of life just as the Father was the source of life. Christ had the same life the Father had in Himself in His own right. He did not have to derive or borrow it, it was now original with Christ just as it was with the Father. Christ's life was independent of the Father, hence not dependent, derived, or borrowed. He could bestow and give life and create just as the Father could, but the Father gave this life to His Son.” (*Ibid, page 10*)

Again Longacre explains

“When this same life the Father had in Himself was given by the Father to His Son so He too had it "in Himself," we are not told. Nor does it make any difference how long it was before anything was created, the fact remains that the Son of God proceeded from the Father, that He was in the bosom of the Father, that His life, "underived, unborrowed" and "given" to Him by the Father, that the Father "ordained" His Son "should be equal with Himself;" that the Father "invested" His Son "with authority," and that the

Son does "nothing of Himself alone." (*Ibid pages 10-11*)

In his paper, one of the things that Longacre greatly stresses is the risk that in the plan of redemption was taken by the Father and the Son. According to Longacre, the trinity doctrine totally obscures this risk. This is one of the reasons why he was so much against the trinity doctrine. It denies that any risk was taken by the Father or the Son, at least as far as the eternal existence of the Son is concerned. The author of these notes agrees with this reasoning (see section thirteen). Longacre said such as

"If it were impossible for the Son of God to make a mistake or commit a sin, then His coming into this world and subjecting Himself to temptations were all a farce and mere mockery. If it were possible for Him to yield to temptation and fall into sin, then He must have risked heaven and His very existence, and even all eternity. That is exactly what the Scriptures and the Spirit of Prophecy say Christ, the Son of God did do when He came to work out for us a plan of salvation from the curse of sin." (*Ibid page 13*)

After quoting some of the same things from the spirit of prophecy as is quoted by the author of these notes (see section thirteen), Longacre concluded

"If He [Christ] had failed, His immutability as well as His eternity would have been forfeited and eternally lost." (*Ibid page 14*)

Longacre later concluded

"Our life is finite - His is infinite. Ours is mortal - His is immortal. Our spirit is finite, His is infinite. We cannot take up our life after we lay it down. He could, so long as He did not commit sin. But if he had yielded to temptation and become guilty of sin, - and this was possible - His very existence, his eternal existence and heaven itself was possible of being forfeited. If it was not, then He never took a risk; and we are told He "risked all," even heaven itself, as "an eternal loss." This being so, then His corporeal body was not only put in jeopardy but His Deity. Because, if He could exist as a separate Deity, independent of His corporeal body, after He yielded up His life on Calvary, then He did not risk heaven nor would He have suffered "all" as "an eternal loss." (*Ibid page 15*)

Longacre also said that the trinity doctrine undermines the atonement made by Christ at Calvary. Again this is too much to quote here suffice to say he reasoned much the same way as the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism. He said

"Since His spirit did not go to heaven, but the Father committed Christ's spirit to the tomb and it slept with His body in the tomb, and "all that comprised the life and the intelligence of Jesus remained with His body in the sepulchre," we must conclude that if Christ had sinned all that ever

belonged to Christ would have forever remained in the tomb and Christ would have suffered the "loss" of His eternal existence. Then God would have taken back to Himself what He gave to His son, namely, the same life He gave His only Begotten Son when He proceeded from the bosom of the Father in the beginning when He became "the First-born before all creation," as Paul puts it." (*Ibid*)

There was so much more that Longacre said with respect to his objections to the trinity doctrine but it is far too voluminous to quote here. If you would like to read his paper in its entirety please go here

[http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Articles\(pioneers\)/DeityofChrist\(Longacre\).htm](http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Articles(pioneers)/DeityofChrist(Longacre).htm)

We now need to move on to another stalwart of Seventh-day Adventism. He was another minister who, up to the time of his death in 1968, upheld the old theology of Seventh-day Adventism. This was the theology that said that Christ was truly the Son of God. The man's name is W. R. French.

W. R. French (1881-1968)

In the book *Light Bearers to the Remnant*, R. W. Schwarz said that in the second decade of the 1900's, Seventh-day Adventist colleges were "increasing the amount of practical experience required of theology students". He then said

"At Emmanuel Missionary College during the 1920s, for example, students in the four-year ministerial program were required to take "Pastoral Training" and "Ministerial Field Work," in addition to the traditional Bible courses in doctrines, Daniel and Revelation, Old Testament Prophets, and New Testament Epistles. They were expected also to participate in at least two evangelistic crusades." (*R. W. Schwarz, 'Light Bearers to the Remnant', page 485, chapter 29, 'Developing a professional Ministry'*)

Schwarz then said

"The brothers T. M. and W. R. French, who successively headed the Theology Department, had been successful evangelists themselves and sparked an interest in this work among their students. During the seven years W. R. French led out, his students conducted fifty-three winter evangelistic campaigns. Frequently baptisms were scheduled to follow commencement exercises." (*Ibid*)

From this we can see that both of the French brothers were very active and very well known in our church. They both served our church for over 40 years. In a write-up of the 65th wedding anniversary of W.R. French and his wife, it said in the Pacific Recorder in 1968

"Elder and Mrs. French went to India as missionaries in 1910. Upon their return he taught at Oshawa Missionary College in Canada from 1918-1922;

at Emanuel Missionary College in Michigan from 1922-1929; at Washington Missionary College in Washington, D.C., from 1929-1936 and again from 1947-1950 when he retired. Elder French taught at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California, from 1936-1943; and then went to Phoenix, Arizona, as pastor of the Phoenix Central Church from 1943-1947. In 1953 he taught at Newbold College in England, and returned to Phoenix where they lived until 1961.” (Sally Harris, *Pacific Union Recorder*, February 5th 1968, ‘Retired Minister-Teacher and Wife Have 65th Anniversary’)

W. R. French was a very well known teacher. He was also, as we shall see later, a non-trinitarian. This shows that non-trinitarianism was acceptable to be taught all through the time of the ministry of French. Note in 1953 that he was teaching at Newbold College in England. The article then said

“Elder French has built many churches and has held evangelistic meetings many summers.” (*Ibid*)

In the same interview that Merlin Burt had with Robert Olson (we mentioned this previously), the latter spoke of W. R. French.

French had been the chairman of the Religion Department at Pacific Union College when Olson was there as a student. Olsen related that French was a highly respected man who had a “thorough” knowledge of the Scriptures. Olson related

“And when Elder French said something, brother that was it! Nobody argued with him. We didn’t.” (*Robert Olson, Interview with Merlin Burt, Loma Linda University, October 4th 1996*)

Olson also recounted the day when the students were invited to a special afternoon session with French. French asked them, because they would soon be beginning their ministerial work, were there any questions they wanted to ask him. Olson recorded that one student asked

“Was Christ eternal like his father, or did Christ have a beginning?” (*Ibid*)

This may reveal that at that time (the early 1940’s), this subject was at least being debated. This we have seen in previous sections. This was also the time period when the decision was made to edit Uriah Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation* (see section forty-one, section forty-six and section forty-seven). This was to remove the non-trinitarian statements from within its pages. We know that from what we have read that this did bring about controversy. This was even amongst our leadership (see the previous two sections). Olson then related

“And Elder French was positive on that Christ did have a beginning ...” (*Ibid*)

This was the view that was generally held within Seventh-day Adventism all the time of Ellen White's ministry. It was also this belief that was expunged from Uriah Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation*. As proof of his belief Olsen said that French cited John 1:18 explaining that

“... somehow Christ had been produced from the bosom of the Father and before that He did not have an existence” (*Ibid*)

Again this was the reasoning of the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism. This was the begotten concept. Olson continued by saying

“Well that made sense to me. It was Bible; he was a man whom I respected, and we all did. He knew the Scriptures; he was chairman of the Religion department, and as far as I knew, all Seventh-day Adventists believed that way. I had no idea that anybody else thought any different. Why would anyone differ from Elder French?” (*Ibid*)

The long-held begotten belief concerning Christ was still then, in 1942, prevalent within Seventh-day Adventism – and acceptably being taught in our colleges etc. Olson concluded by saying

“So that was the fall of '42. So, most of us who finished that year had the same concept.” (*Ibid*)

We can see from this that these students (Olson was in his early 20's then) were not taught trinitarianism, at least not by W. R. French. It appears that they went away satisfied with the begotten concept of Christ.

Olson also said that in 1946 he had gone to Loma Linda to work but because the church wanted him to achieve a Master's Degree he spent the first quarter of 1947 (February to May) at the Takoma Park Seminary. He said (remember this was 1947)

“While I was there, I discovered that this matter of Christ's deity was a hot issue.” (*Ibid*)

As we noted above, this was the time (January 1947) when Longacre had presented his paper on *The Deity of Christ* to the Bible Research Fellowship. It was also just after this that Longacre had presented a sermon on the same subject at Takoma Park (see above). Olson had gone to Takoma Park for the first quarter of 1947 (February – May) so he walked right into the debate. He was then around 26 years of age.

All of what Olsen said goes to confirm what we have already realised in our studies of the previous sections. This is that in the late 1940's, there was a theological tug of war going on between the supporters of the new theology and those holding on to the old theology (the begotten concept). This also shows us

that by then (1947), trinitarianism was far from being established within Seventh-day Adventism. Remember as we noted above, Judson Washburn had said in 1940

“This monstrous doctrine [the trinity doctrine] transplanted from heathenism into the Roman Papal Church is seeking to intrude its evil presence into the teachings of the Third Angel’s Message.” (*Judson Washburn, The trinity, Letter to General Conference in 1940*)

It is interesting that Burt asked Olson if French had made this begotten concept prominent when teaching his students. Olson’s answer was very interesting. He said

“Well, he may have but, you see, I wasn’t aware that it was a point of discussion. And so he may have said things that I just swallowed along with everything else, and I wouldn’t remember now that it was a controversial point. In fact, I didn’t think much about that meeting that afternoon with the juniors and seniors until later.” (*Robert Olson, Interview with Merlin Burt, Loma Linda University, October 4th 1996*)

“It was some years later when I woke up to the fact that Christ was eternal. My mind went back to that meeting then as being the time when I probably was pretty well persuaded on it as to Elder French’s position. So, there was just no controversy that I can recall at that time.” (*Ibid*)

Olson was 76 years of age when he had this interview with Burt (1996). He was referring to events that had happened 54 years previous (1942). The passing of time does at times obscure past events but you would have thought that he would have remembered if then there had been any debate.

By 1947 though, he does admit that there was debate. We know this because when arriving at Takoma Park for the beginning of his Masters Degree he said that he had “discovered that this matter of Christ’s deity was a hot issue” (see above).

French was indeed a prolific Bible student. He must have been an excellent teacher. He is said to have memorised the entirety of the New Testament Scriptures. Burt also records that one of his students remembered that just for the fun of it, the students would quote a Bible text to which French responded by quoting the verses that came before and after it.

In his interview with Burt, Olson also related that French never made any notes from which to preach. Instead he memorised all of his sermons. French gave Olson the reason for it. He said

“I never write anything out. I don’t want the devil to know what I’m thinking.” (*Ibid*)

He also added in confirmation (this was after saying that some ministers took two sets of notes into the pulpit so the devil would not know what they were going to talk about)

“Elder French never in his lifetime ever used sermon notes. He never wanted the devil to know what he was thinking about” (*Ibid*)

Burt said in his paper

“To his students, French was an oracle – the very voice of truth.” (*Merlin Burt, 'Demise of Semi-Arianism and anti-trinitarianism in Adventist theology, 1888-1957 page 53)*

Burt reports that to his dying day, W. R. French taught the old views of God and Christ. This was as the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church had expressed them. In one such statement French had said (this was the year that the word trinity was first added to our published fundamental beliefs)

“Shall not the God of all the earth do right ? Shall not the Father respect the rights of the Son to judge His own servants, even as the Son respects the rights of the Father to supremacy?” (*W. R. French, Review and Herald, September 3^d 1931 'Christ in the Holy of Holies'*)

Although said to be equal with God the Father as far as His identity was concerned, Christ was considered to be brought forth of the Father. This made the Father the source of the Son. It also made the Son equal with God. This is why Christ is the Son of God. This was once the faith of Seventh-day Adventists, at least during the time of Ellen White's ministry.

Burt records that in his conversation with Olsen regarding how things used to be, Olsen told him that French, at the age of 87 in 1968 at the 25th anniversary of his graduating class at Pacific Union College, was invited to take the ten-minute vespers spot. This the veteran readily accepted.

French, with the realisation that his life on earth was fast ebbing away (he did in fact die the same year), gave a discourse from the Scriptures of his views of the Son of God. This was as believed by our pioneers of old (the old theology). That evening in articulating these one time views of Seventh-day Adventism, French held the pulpit so long that the chairman on the platform had to get the message to him that he had to stop. Such was the conviction of French that the pioneers had it right about the person and the deity of the Son of God. Sadly though, Burt records in his paper

“W. R. French died on December 6, 1968, only eight months after what was probably his final public presentation. With the death of French an era ended for the church. He was probably the last of the well known expositors to uphold the “old” view.” (*Merlin Burt, 'Demise of Semi-Arianism and anti-*

Burt concludes

“By the 1950’s and 1960’s, men like Washburn, Longacre and finally French had become an anomaly in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. History teaches that sometimes opinions die hard and that some opinions only pass into memory when those who hold them finally go to their rest” (*Ibid*)

It really is very sad today that within Seventh-day Adventism, the pioneers who did such a great work for God and who were so greatly loved by Him, are now referred to as anomalies.

It is also sad that the views of God and Christ as were held by the pioneers during the time of the ministry of Ellen White are now simply referred to as “opinions” that “die hard”. If you remember in section twenty-four, section twenty five, section twenty-six and section twenty-seven, we noted that Ellen White said that the beliefs held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church was the “sacred truth” that God had given to the pioneers therefore it should never be given up. Certainly it is strange how this truth is now referred to as just being “opinions”.

This though is the year 2008 and things are different now. Certainly we have now a different faith than we had during the time of Ellen White. That much really is for sure!

I also found it sad that in the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia, the service of French, in our church, was spoken of so briefly. After serving the church for over 40 years it said of him

“Minister, Bible teacher. He was born in Cedar Grove, Texas and was a member of the first graduating class at Keene. In 1899 he began nurse’s training, and five years later he began his work in the ministry in Keene. He was a minister and a Bible teacher in several of our colleges, and a number of churches were built under his direction. He and his family served in India for one term of mission service.” (*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia, Volume 10, page 571, 1996, French, William Robert*)

That is it! That is all that is said of W. R. French.

Summary conclusion so far

I believe that in summary of that which we have already studied, we have seen that our church leadership today is correct in saying that during the course of its history, the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church have undergone a major theological change. This is particularly so concerning God, the person of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. This much really is undeniable.

We now need to move on to section 49. This is where we shall see that up to the

middle of the 1950's, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still regarded by the other Christian denominations as a cult. We shall also see that by dialoguing with the evangelicals and compromising our God given faith, we gradually lost that image. This was the outcome of where our quest to be trinitarian had led us. What though, to God's remnant people, would be the cost?

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section forty-nine

Seventh-day Adventism - a once non-Christian cult (say the evangelicals)

Throughout the ministry of Ellen White, the non-trinitarianism of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, along with its other distinctive doctrines, had quite a distancing affect on the relationship that it had with what many refer to as mainstream Christianity. This is because all of these denominations held the trinity doctrine as their core belief whilst Seventh-day Adventists did not. They rejected this teaching. History attests that even through to the 1950's these trinity denominations still regarded us as a non-Christian cult.

Seventh-day Adventists were not the only denomination that was non-trinitarian. There were others but they too were regarded as cults. These were such as Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (the Mormons) and the Christian Scientists etc. As Seventh-day Adventists, we were usually linked (classified or categorised) with them. This is even though our beliefs concerning Christ was nothing like theirs. In other words, there is non-trinitarianism and there is non-trinitarianism.

One well-known figure in Seventh-day Adventism who freely admits that even during the 20th century our denomination was still regarded as a sect (or cult) is George Knight. He is Professor of Church History at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University.

In his book *A brief History of Seventh-day Adventists*, he said of this situation (note the title of the chapter)

*"Ever since the seeming failure of Millerism in the 1840's most Protestants had regarded Adventists with suspicion. ... Throughout the early 20th century, most Protestants considered Adventism a sect to avoid because of its heretical viewpoints. Many classed Adventists with Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Christian Scientists as being sub-Christian" (George Knight, *A Brief Look at Seventh-day Adventists, Chapter 8, page 142, 'The Challenges and Possibilities of Maturity 1955 onwards')**

"Sub-Christian" was indeed how the trinitarian denominations once regarded Seventh-day Adventists. Notice the time period referred to here is the latter years of Ellen White's ministry. She died in 1915.

Another well-known name in Seventh-day Adventism who made such admittance is Gerhard Pfandl. He is Associate Director of the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. In 2004 in the *Ministry* magazine he said (this when reviewing the recently published annotated version of *Questions on Doctrine* and when referring to our denominations 1950's meetings with the evangelicals)

“Because of its adherence to such teachings as the Sabbath, the nonimmortality of the soul, the investigative judgment, and the prophetic gift in the life and work of Ellen G. White, the Adventist Church, since its origin, was often viewed as a "cult" by other Christians.” (Gerhard Pfandl, *Ministry*, August 2004 page 30, ‘Book review’)

Neither George Knight nor Gerhard Pfandl mentions that one of the reasons why we were considered a cult was because we were once a non-trinitarian denomination but this is not inconsistent with the way that others have treated our history. I say this because it does appear that it has been the policy in the past for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to keep this particular part of its history somewhat suppressed.

Take my own personal experience for example. Before I discovered that during the entire time of the ministry of Ellen White we had been a non-trinitarian denomination, I had been a Seventh-day Adventist for over 24 years. I also know that many Seventh-day Adventists can tell the self-same story. Even today, with all the trinity debate that is taking place within Seventh-day Adventism, I know that there are still those who believe that since our beginnings we have been a trinitarian denomination. Even when confronted with the facts, some still find the truth very difficult to accept.

Notice that George Knight says that during the early part of the 1900's, because of our so-called “heretical viewpoints”, “most Protestants considered Adventism a sect to avoid”. As was said above, this would have included the time period when Ellen White was still alive (1900-1915). This is also, as we have seen in previous sections, when our beliefs were strictly non-trinitarian. For these denominations to amend their view concerning us, something major had to change between then (the early 1900's) and the mid 1950's.

Notice too that Knight says “Many classed Adventists with Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Christian Scientists as being sub-Christian”. This is more than likely because these three denominations were, and still are, non-trinitarian.

Needless to say, our estrangement from the various trinity denominations was also compounded because of our non-orthodox (heterodox) doctrines. These we call our distinctive doctrines and are such as the seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday), the state of the dead, the sanctuary, the investigative judgement and the spirit of prophecy etc. Again as George Knight put it

“The fact that they [Seventh-day Adventists] claimed a modern prophet in Ellen White and aggressively preached the perpetuity of the Ten Commandments, including the seventh-day Sabbath, aggravated the problem.” (George Knight, *A Brief Look at Seventh-day Adventists, Chapter 8, page 142, ‘The Challenges and Possibilities of Maturity 1955 onwards’*)

Along with our non-trinitarianism, these latter beliefs, although understated, made it impossible for us to be recognised as being part of what is known as mainstream Christianity (orthodoxy). This I believe is the real reason why we adopted the trinity doctrine. In other words it is the author’s opinion that we adopted the trinity doctrine because we wanted to be regarded as orthodox and considered as part of what is known as mainstream Christianity. As it was, just as it is today, it was realised that any denomination that does not make a profession of the trinity doctrine can never be regarded as such. So it was that after Ellen White had died, our church leadership began to engineer moves that not only would make us trinitarian (orthodox/mainstream) but also, more importantly, have the trinitarian denominations regard us as being truly Christian.

Regarded as a cult

There is no question that up to the mid 1950’s the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still regarded as a cult. In the pro-Seventh-day Adventist online magazine *Adventist Today* it said in 1996

“During the 1950s, evangelical leaders Donald Barnhouse and Walter Martin, of *Eternity* magazine, shocked the Christian world by declaring that Seventh-day Adventists are not cultic but rather should be welcomed as fellow Christians.” (Larry Christoffel, *Adventist Today, Sept/Oct 1996 issue, ‘What Evangelicals say about Seventh-day Adventists’*)

At the time this article was written, Larry Christoffel was Pastor for Church Ministries at the Loma Linda, Campus Hill Church in California. This was as well as being an adjunct professor for foundational studies at Loma Linda University School of Religion. Walter Martin was a Baptist minister who was renowned for his exposing of cults whilst Donald Barnhouse was editor of the evangelical magazine *Eternity*. Walter Martin was also a major contributor to ‘Eternity’ as well as a well-respected man amongst the evangelical wing of Christianity. As Christoffel pointed out in this article

“Walter Martin founded and directed the Christian Resource Institute (CRI), a well-respected evangelical resource on the cults.” (*Ibid*)

We shall read in the next section how Martin came to the conclusion that Seventh-day Adventists could just about be classified as truly Christian therefore not a cult, although he did totally reject our distinctive teachings. This is because he regarded these beliefs as not Christian and believed that they should never be taught within Christianity. Certainly he rejected our claim that we were God’s remnant people. In other words, Walter Martin never accepted the Seventh-day

Adventist Church as God's remnant people; neither did he ever accept their last day God given message. Needless to say, one belief ties in with the other.

Note that Christoffel says that when Walter Martin declared us to be Christian it "shocked the Christian world". This shows exactly what the other Christians thought of us, even in the 1950's. Christoffel continued concerning Walter Martin's conclusions

"Seventh-day Adventists ring true, declared Martin, on the verities of the Christian faith: Scripture as the basis of faith and practice, the Trinity, justification by faith alone, the new birth experience, and Jesus Christ's eternal deity, virgin birth, sinless life, vicarious substitutionary death, bodily resurrection, and literal second coming." (*Ibid*)

It was our profession of beliefs in these fundamental doctrines of Christianity that led Martin to say that we could be called Christian. Note the inclusion of the teaching of "the trinity" and the "eternal deity" of Christ.

Like a lot of others have done, as is also done in our list of fundamental beliefs in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe ...*, he places this next in rank to believing that the Bible is the basis for the Christian "faith and practice". The fact that this is done should be regarded as very significant. It reveals how important this doctrine is regarded. Christoffel added regarding Walter Martin's conclusions

"He [Walter Martin] totally disagreed, however, with Adventist stands on the investigative judgment, the Sabbath, conditional immortality of the soul, annihilation of the wicked, the writings of Ellen G. White, and other issues." (*Ibid*)

Here we can see it said that like the rest of the non-Seventh-day Adventist Christian world, Walter Martin rejected the distinctive doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. These are amongst the truths that make the Seventh-day Adventist Church God's remnant people. In other words, these special or distinctive beliefs are an integral part of what constitutes God's last day message to the world. Here it is said that Walter Martin totally rejected these beliefs. So it is that he rejected God's last day message. Martin concluded in his book *Kingdom of the Cults* (1965)

"For over a century Adventism has borne a stigma of being called a non-Christian cult system." (*Walter Martin, The Kingdom of the Cults, page 360*)

Again this shows us how, up to the mid 1950's, the rest of the Christian world (at least mainstream Christianity), regarded Seventh-day Adventists whilst we regarded ourselves as a people bearing God's end-time message.

In a Review article in 1949 (this Review marked the 100th anniversary of its publication), L. H. Christian listened the claims of early Seventh-day Adventists

1. The Advent message is the last invitation of mercy God will give humanity, and it is also the last warning to mankind. 2. It contains the complete gospel truths of God as revealed in the Bible. 3. The salvation of all who hear and understand it depends on its acceptance. To reject this message is verily a rejection of Christ, as was the rejection of Christ by the Jews at the first advent. 4. The purpose of the Advent message is to prepare a people to meet Christ at His second coming, now near at hand. (*L. H. Christian, Review and Herald, May 5th 1949, 'The Advent Movement'*)

Walter Martin never accepted any of these conclusions but he did explain that since its beginnings the Seventh-day Adventist Church had dramatically changed. He said

"Whether or not this [being called a non-Christian cult system] was justified in the early development of Adventism, I have already discussed at length in my earlier book, but it should be carefully remembered that the Adventism of 1965 is different in not a few places from Adventism of 1845, and with that change the necessity of re-evaluation comes naturally." (*Walter Martin, The Kingdom of the Cults, page 360*)

Note first of all that Martin implies that there may be a doubt that it was justifiable to call us a cult "in the early development of Adventism" but he also says that in 1965, Seventh-day Adventism was different "in not a few places" (meaning in many areas) from what it was in its beginnings. I wonder how many Seventh-day Adventists realise this to be true.

In this book published in 1965, Walter Martin is saying that for over 100 years we had been known as a cult but now, in 1965, because of the changes that have been made within Seventh-day Adventism, "re-evaluation comes naturally". This really is very significant to our studies. I say this because without a doubt, Walter Martin recognised that since our beginnings, a great change had taken place regarding the beliefs and teachings of Seventh-day Adventists. This he also noted was a change that had brought Seventh-day Adventism more in line with the beliefs of other denominations. This is quite a realisation, especially as this was a non-Seventh-day Adventist who was saying it. It is just unfortunate that many Seventh-day Adventists today do not realise it.

Whilst in the next section we shall be discussing the ongoing impact of Walter Martin's 1950's dialogue with our church leadership, also our eventual acceptance by the evangelicals as being truly Christian, suffice to say for now that we can see that by the other denominations, even into the mid-1950's and well beyond, we were still regarded as a non-Christian cult. This is the way that most mainstream denominations have always regarded non-trinitarian denominations (and still do). This is apart from any other heterodox teachings they may hold.

Here now, as Seventh-day Adventists, is a question for us to ponder. Should we, as God's remnant people, regard this coming more in line with the beliefs of other denominations as being significant, particularly with respect to the ongoing affect of these doctrinal changes? I ask this because not only did we once believe that these other denominations constituted the fallen and falling Babylon of Bible prophecy (see Revelation 14:8 and 18:3 etc) but also, when Ellen White was alive, we did actively teach it. In other words, during the time of Ellen White, our message to Christians of other denominations was that they were to come out of their system of beliefs (the wine of intoxication of which the whole world has partaken) and join us in proclaiming the three angels messages of Revelation chapter 14 (see verses 6-12 in particular). Certainly we were not to adopt their beliefs and become more like them.

This wanting to be in with the evangelicals certainly began a softening down process of the message of Seventh-day Adventism (or as some say a watering down of it), thus Walter Martin was told (as we shall see in the next section), just as Froom said in his book *Movement of Destiny*, that it was just a few Seventh-day Adventists that were out of line with mainstream Christianity and not the main body of Seventh-day Adventists. This though, as has been proven throughout these studies, is not a true reflection of our history.

Keeping in with the evangelicals

In the realisation of this mid-1950's acceptance by the evangelicals, it can be seen more clearly the reason why concerning LeRoy Froom's misrepresentation of our history, Merlin Burt said in his paper

“One is left with the impression that Froom chose not to present the facts, possibly out of fear that it might undermine someone's faith or of jeopardizing the Church's evangelical standing”. (Merlin Burt, *Demise of Semi-Arianism and Anti-Trinitarianism in Adventist Theology, 1888-1957*, page 47, 1996)

The suggestion here is that Froom may have not wanted to upset this mid-1950's alliance with the other denominations so he reported that from our beginnings, not only were we predominantly a trinitarian denomination but also that we were in harmony with all the other basic fundamentals of the Christian faith. He even said that it was only what might be termed today a few dissenters that believed otherwise. This of course, as we have seen for ourselves in previous sections, is just not true. This is because the Seventh-day Adventist Church was strictly a non-trinitarian denomination and all the trinitarian denominations knew it. This is one of the reasons, even the main one, why they regarded us as a cult.

Misunderstandings and realisations

In one sense, it is very strange indeed that non-Seventh-day Adventists recognise that a great change has taken place within the Seventh-day Adventist

Church whilst many of its own members do not. Although having said that, when it is realised that some have incorrectly presented this history, this strangeness is quite understandable. This, as we shall note in section fifty-one, was as done by Froom in his highly acclaimed *Movement of Destiny*.

I found one very misleading statement regarding our history in A. W. Spalding's *Captains of the Hosts*. This was written explaining our history. In chapter 13 he wrote

“The pioneers dug for truth as for hidden treasure. James White, Joseph Bates, Hiram Edson, John N. Andrews, and others quarried out the building stones to make the temple.” (*A. W. Spalding, Captains of the Host, page 214, chapter 13 ‘The Blessed Hope’, see also Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists, Volume 1 1961*)

Spalding then relates their biblical discoveries. He says

“First, they found therein, and they believed in, the fatherhood of God.” (*Ibid*)

At the very beginning of the next paragraph he says

“Second, they found the ineffable mystery of the oneness of God in the Trinity: the Father of all, the Son who is the Saviour of mankind, and the Holy Spirit through whom the grace of God is ministered to men.” (*Ibid*)

This is a very misleading statement. As we know today, our pioneers firmly rejected the trinity doctrine. Spalding statement could easily be read as though they accepted this belief.

The reason for misunderstanding our history can also be seen in such as the 100th anniversary edition of the *Review and Herald* of May 5th 1949 (we mentioned this edition previously). This is when L. H. Christian (1871-1949), who had held prominent positions in Seventh-day Adventism such as president of the North Illinois Conference, president of the Lake Union Conference, General Conference associate vice-president for Europe, president of the European Division, president of the Northern European division, a general vice-president of the General Conference (10 years) and field secretary of the General Conference, proudly said to Seventh-day Adventists who would read this milestone publication

“This Advent message and this movement are precious heritages. They are our light, our very life.” (*L. H. Christian, the 100th Anniversary edition of the Review and Herald, May 5th 1949, ‘This Advent Movement, A Fulfillment of Bible Prophecy*)

This was very well said but Christian then went on to say to his readers (those

who would eventually make up the 1950's membership of Seventh-day Adventism)

“Hitherto we have kept this message unchanged, and it needs no revision today.” (*Ibid*)

In the light of what we know today with respect to the changes that since the death of Ellen White have been made to the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists, this really is a remarkable statement.

In the same article, Christian lists the claims made by our denomination (we noted some of them above). He relates

“Our pioneer preachers taught them, and our early members all believed them, and found great strength and inspiration in this conviction. These claims, briefly stated, were as follows:” (*Ibid*)

After listing these claims, also after saying that the Advent message is the last invitation of mercy that God will give to this world he writes

“It [the Advent message] contains the complete gospel truths of God as revealed in the Bible”. (*Ibid*)

It is only reasonable to believe here that any reader of this article would include in these “complete gospel truths” what the Seventh-day Adventist Church was then teaching regarding the doctrine of the trinity, after all, he had said that our doctrines had never changed. Christian then says

“The salvation of all who hear and understand it depends on its acceptance. To reject this message is verily a rejection of Christ, as was the rejection of Christ by the Jews at the first advent.” (*Ibid*)

If Christian did intend to include the trinity in “this message”, then not only did he revert to a Roman Catholic understanding of salvation (creedal thinking) but he is also saying that because of their rejection of the trinity doctrine, all the pioneers are not saved. This really is quite a realisation! On the other hand if Walter Martin found this statement in his studies, it certainly would have upset him and the other evangelicals. They totally rejected our last day message.

The Athanasian Creed was once a much-used creed and is still considered authoritative by many denominations. This is the creed that begins

“Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith. Which Faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the Catholic Faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity. Neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance.” (*The Athanasian Creed*)

This is the three-in-one concept of God. It is the trinity doctrine. Note here this creed says that anyone who does not believe it will not be saved. This in itself is a violation of the gospel of Jesus Christ because no ones salvation is dependant upon believing any particular doctrine or creed, not even the trinity doctrine, but is dependant on a personal faith in Christ as a personal Saviour. This involves a study of righteousness by faith, which is outside of the scope of this paper.

L. H. Christian, who along with his other duties had taught religion at the Seventh-day Adventist theological Seminary, must have known full well that our denomination had changed its faith from what it was during the time of Ellen White to what it had become but as we can see, he was then telling Seventh-day Adventists that since its beginnings, the church to which they belonged, had never changed its message. So it was, as we entered the 1950's, Seventh-day Adventists throughout the world were misinformed about their historical roots and would, because it is what people normally do, pass this misinformation on to others.

Today, in the light of the mass of publicity that has attended this present trinity dispute within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, our current leadership has been compelled to admit that since the death of Ellen White, our beliefs (faith) have changed dramatically. This lack of knowledge of their history by Seventh-day Adventists, we have seen admitted by our current church leadership. As William Johnsson said in 1994 (this was when he was editor of the Review)

“Some Adventists today think, that our beliefs have remained unchanged over the years, or they seek to turn back the clock to some point when we had everything just right. But all attempts to recover such “historic Adventism” fail in view of the facts of our heritage. Adventists beliefs have changed over the years under the impact of present truth. Most startling is the teaching regarding Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord.” (William Johnsson, *Adventist Review* January 6th 1994 Article ‘Present Truth - Walking in God’s Light’, 1994)

Again we see here that if a person’s salvation depended on believing the trinity doctrine, then none of our pioneers, including Ellen White, would be saved. This really is something to ponder! There have also been such statements as

“Most of the founders of Seventh-day Adventism would not be able to join the church today if they had to subscribe to the denomination's Fundamental Beliefs. More specifically, most would not be able to agree to belief Number 2, which deals with the doctrine of the Trinity.” (George Knight, ‘Ministry’ magazine, October 1993 page 10, ‘Adventists and Change’)

We can see then today that the blinkers are off and no longer can Seventh-day Adventists make the claim that their denominational beliefs have remain unchanged. So it behoves us, as God’s chosen people, to check out this

change for ourselves. This is to prove for ourselves whether it is one that is justifiable or whether it is the so called reformation that Ellen White said Satan would suggest was necessary to the beliefs and teachings of God's remnant people. This was when in 1904 she warned

"The enemy of souls has sought to bring in the supposition that a great reformation was to take place among Seventh-day Adventists, and that this reformation would consist in giving up the doctrines which stand as the pillars of our faith, and engaging in a process of reorganization. Were this reformation to take place, what would result? The principles of truth that God in His wisdom has given to the remnant church, would be discarded. Our religion would be changed. The fundamental principles that have sustained the work for the last fifty years would be accounted as error" (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B No. 2, page 54 'The Foundation of Our Faith', 1904. Letter to leading Seventh-day Adventist Physicians*)

We have here a very serious warning from Ellen White. Given in 1904 when the Seventh-day Adventist church was still decidedly non-trinitarian, she said that Satan would suggest a reformation was necessary to the beliefs and teachings of Seventh-day Adventists. Note particularly that she said that if this reformation did take place it would mean giving up the doctrines that in 1904, she regarded as "the pillars" of the faith of Seventh-day Adventism. Amongst these, as we have seen so many times before, is that both God and Christ are personal beings, meaning two distinct, separate persons (see section twenty-three). Notice too that Ellen White said that if this reformation were to take place, then not only would the truth that God had given to our denomination "be disregarded" but also that the principles that had sustained the church for the previous fifty years "would be accounted as error" and that "our religion would be changed".

Since Ellen White gave this warning, has our religion changed? It certainly has! Has now what we once taught about God and Christ been accounted as error? It certainly has, in fact our leadership is still saying this today. This they say is why we eventually adopted the trinity teaching. It was, so they say, to correct the errors made by our pioneers. Ellen White followed this by saying concerning this so called reformation

"A new organization would be established. Books of a new order would be written. A system of intellectual philosophy would be introduced. The founders of this system would go into the cities, and do a wonderful work. The Sabbath, of course, would be lightly regarded, as also the God who created it. Nothing would be allowed to stand in the way of the new movement. The leaders would teach that virtue is better than vice, but God being removed, they would place their dependence on human power, which, without God, is worthless. Their foundation would be built on the sand, and storm and tempest would sweep away the structure." (*Ibid*)

In this changeover to trinitarianism, have “[Books of a new order](#)” been written? They certainly have! Our denominational books are now trinitarian, not non-trinitarian as they used to be.

Have we now developed a “[system of intellectual philosophy](#)”? We certainly have because after all is said and done, philosophy is that upon which the trinity doctrine is built. This is because this trinity three-in-one formula for describing God is certainly not found in Scripture. This much we know for sure. It is not even found in the writings of Ellen White. In fact she condemned such reasoning. Read that particular testimony by going [here](#).

[http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Articles\(EGW\)/ComeOut.htm](http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Articles(EGW)/ComeOut.htm)

Remember, the latter was written regarding Kellogg who claimed to have come to believe in the trinity doctrine (see section twenty-seven).

We must ask now therefore, in the light of all that we have seen has happened regarding this change of beliefs within Seventh-day Adventism, has this so-called reformation taken place or not?

Our heritage and our identity

At this juncture, it is interesting to note that Jan Paulsen, who in 2005 was re-elected to serve again as President of the World-wide Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, addressed 45 church leaders in 2002. They were gathered together to consider the subject of "Theological Unity in a Growing World Church".

This group, which met between April 29th and May 8th, 2002, consisted not only of General Conference personnel but also the majority of the presidents of the world divisions and a number of other Seventh-day Adventist Scholars (very similar really to the 1919 Bible Conference).

The purpose of the calling together of this elite group was to discuss a series of papers on various theological topics at a conference organized by the Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Research Institute. In his opening address to this group of high-ranking Seventh-day Adventists (which was also read by all those who subscribed to the Advent Review in June 2002 when this address was put into print) Jan Paulsen said

“I wish to reflect on the theological landscape as I see it, with primary reference to our church and our mission. I realize that this could be almost never-ending; therefore, you will understand my need to be selective. And also, while I will give some pointers that will indicate directions, as I see them, a number of my observations will simply be by way of identifying the issues, stating why I think they are important to us, and why they should be addressed.” (*Jan Paulsen, ‘The theological Landscape’ Advent Review June 13th 2002*)

Jan Paulsen said that he would focus his address on ten topics. These were

- The second coming -- do we still believe?
- The question of identity
- Interchurch relations
- The idea of "remnant"
- The diversity of the church
- How about unity?
- Allowing for local difference
- The importance of nurture
- Involvement with society
- Living with differences

Regarding differences in the church (this was under the sub-heading of *Living with differences*, Jan Paulsen said

“No one should be surprised at their existence, nor should we expect that there will ever come a time when they will be gone. Eschatology and apocalyptic preaching -- which are part of the treasured heritage of our church -- will produce strongly held and very focused convictions.” (*Ibid*)

This is very true. Our end-time preaching as to how things will work out that will eventually lead to the return of Jesus will always be a matter of different reasoning and conjecture. He said in the next paragraph

“I say we learn to live with it, with the proviso that the church, in its teachings, programs, and activities, must at all times be visibly loyal to our heritage and our identity, and never give just cause to the charge of having "gone astray". (*Ibid*)

What did Jan Paulsen mean here by “our heritage and our identity”? He later said

“A further word needs to be said about our being "loyal to our heritage and to our identity."

This subject was very important to our president. He then said

“Some would have us believe that there have been significant shifts in recent times in regard to doctrines that historically have been at the heart of Seventh-day Adventism.” (*Ibid*)

In the light of this statement, there is a very important question that is necessary to ask here.

This is - what does Jan Paulsen mean by “recent times” and what does he mean

by “doctrines that historically have been at the heart of Seventh-day Adventism”? Certainly by “recent times” he could not be referring to the time period of the ministry of Ellen White; neither when he talks of “doctrines” can he be talking about the doctrines of Seventh-day Adventists that were held by them during her time period. This is because since the death of Ellen White, as we have all clearly seen so many times in this study, our doctrines have changed dramatically. So what did Jan Paulsen mean by being “loyal to our heritage and to our identity” and what did he mean by “historically” held doctrines? This is a very difficult question to answer.

In particular, Jan Paulsen could not have been referring to what our pioneers taught about God, Christ and the Holy Spirit. This we know because as we have already seen in previous sections, this is so much different today than what it was in the time of the pioneers. Even some of our own church leadership today freely admit to that much being true (see above and section ten).

Reading Jan Paulsen’s statement very quickly and without having prior knowledge of our changeover from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism, there could be a strong implication here, although not specifically stated, that there has never been any change to the major doctrines held by Seventh-day Adventists. Is this the thought that the General Conference President meant to convey? Once again, one is left to wonder.

Jan Paulsen immediately went on to talk about our sanctuary message but no mention was made concerning our changeover from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism. Once again we are left to wonder whether this would suggest that our General Conference president does not regard this trinity change as a major theological shift or did he just choose not to mention it? On the other hand, perhaps he does not regard what Ellen White (as well as the other pioneers) taught about God, Christ and the Holy Spirit as being part of our heritage. Whilst we may never know what Jan Paulsen did have in mind when he said these things, it does appear as though it was probably the latter, meaning that what our pioneers taught about God and Christ is not part of our heritage. I say this because how can it be regarded as our heritage if we have changed (substituted) their beliefs (as we have freely admitted) for something entirely different? In other words, how can we say that what our pioneers taught about God and Christ is part of our heritage if it is said today to be error? This does take some reasoning.

In summary, I suppose it all boils down to what each individual considers being what Jan Paulsen refers to as the “heart of Seventh-day Adventism” and “our heritage”. Does it include that which Ellen White and the other pioneers believed about the three personalities of the Godhead or does it not include it? This perhaps is the main question and the one that this trinity dispute today within Seventh-day Adventism is really all about.

To put all of this another way, are the things that Ellen White (as well as the

other pioneers) believed about God, Christ and the Holy Spirit the truth that God had given to us or not? This perhaps is the more underlying question because if it was not, then it is neither part of our heritage or our identity. On the other hand, if it was the truth that God gave to us then it is still part of our heritage and identity. Seventh-day Adventists therefore need to make up their minds just which way that it is.

So what do you the reader think? Was that which Ellen White (as well as the other pioneers) taught about God and Christ part of our heritage therefore we should still be teaching it today or was it error therefore better not spoken of again? You will need to choose! I have already made my choice.

In the same *Review*, William Johnsson also wrote an article. Johnsson was then editor of the *Review*. He explained the reasons for this conference. He began by saying

“Some 45 church leaders gathered in Europe April 29 - May 8, 2002 to consider the topic "Theological Unity in a Growing World Church." Comprised of General Conference personnel, most of the presidents of the world divisions, and several scholars, the conference was called by the General Conference and organized by the Biblical Research Institute.

In order to provide a biblical setting, the conference convened in first, Greece and then Turkey. The group interspersed theological discussions with visits to Athens, Corinth, Istanbul, some of the sites of the seven churches mentioned in Revelation 2-3, and finally Patmos. Retracing the footsteps of Paul and John proved deeply inspiring to the participants.”
(*William Johnsson, Advent Review, June 13 2002, 'Field Conference Targets Theological unity'*)

It should go without saying that this was a very nice 10 days for our leading personnel; also it appears, no expense was spared in accommodating this meeting. In one article I read it was estimated that the cost to our church would be something like one million USA dollars. This may be exaggerated but whatever the exact cost, the fact that it was held at this type of expense does show how important this meeting was to those who called it (“the **General Conference**”). There appears to be the fear of a split in Seventh-day Adventism. William Johnsson then explained

“A series of papers on theological topics provided the structure for the deliberations.” (*Ibid*)

I was very surprised to realise that the present debate on the trinity doctrine was not one of the topics up for discussion at this conference. The editor of the *Review* explained

“The areas covered in the papers were: Issues in archeology (Randall

Yunker), forces in church development and the Adventist future (George Reid), theological thinking in the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Ekkehardt Mueller), issues in revelation and inspiration (Peter van Bemmelen), issues in biblical interpretation (Greg King), creation (Elaine Kennedy), eschatology (Gerhard Pfandl), Ellen G. White (Alberto Timm), the remnant (Angel Rodriguez), independent ministries (Woodrow Whidden), and soteriology (Woodrow Whidden).”

Whether the trinity doctrine was mentioned within one of these topics I do not know. Perhaps it came under the discussions on “theological thinking in the Seventh-day Adventist Church”. At the end of his article, William Johnsson said

“As the field conference drew to a close, participants focused their energies on developing a statement for the world church. Concerned that leaders at all levels, both clergy and laypeople, be alert to trends and the need of theological unity, they issued a call to obedience to the Lord and His Word. The statement is not an official action of the church; nevertheless it expresses the convictions of the leaders present at the conference and will be taken up by the appropriate bodies of the world church.” (*Ibid*)

Whilst this statement is too much to quote here, it was a call to theological unity. It explained near its beginning

“The focus of our meeting was on subjects critical to the identity and mission of the church as reflected in the call to unity found in Section B below. Several factors demand that not only we but the entire Seventh-day Adventist Church give serious attention to theological integrity at this time:” (*Ibid*)

Whilst no particular doctrine is mentioned in this statement (except in making an appeal to make the Bible the centrality of both our faith and witness so that once again we can be called the “people of the book”), we are left wondering whether the trinity doctrine was mentioned under “subjects critical”. The statement concluded by quoting Ephesians 4:3-6

"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit-just as you were called to one hope when you were called - one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all in all" (Eph. 4:3-6)." (*Ibid*)

You will find Jan Paulsen’s article here

<http://archives.adventistreview.org/2002-1524/story3.html>

The shaking of Adventism

In his book *The Shaking of Adventism*, Geoffrey Paxton (an ordained Anglican clergyman) also portrays the changing face of Adventism. This he does

particularly in relation to the doctrine of justification by faith.

Whilst we will not embark on the principles of this latter study here, suffice to say for now that throughout his book, Paxton recognises that since its beginnings, the beliefs and attitudes of Seventh-day Adventism have undergone a tremendous change. He begins his book with the words

“Seventh-day Adventists have been very misunderstood” (G. J. Paxton, *The Shaking of Adventism*’ chapter ‘Adventists: Heirs of the reformation, page 17, 1977)

He also says at the beginning of the next paragraph

“The impression that Seventh-day Adventism is little better than a non-Christian sect will not stand investigation” (*Ibid*)

Here we can see that Paxton is attempting, as did Walter Martin in the mid 1950’s, to invalidate the view that our denomination is a non-Christian sect (or cult). Obviously he is dealing with a view that still existed in the minds of some in 1977 when this book was published or else there would have been very little point in saying it. Paxton then explains just why this is by saying

“Adventists believe in the Holy Trinity, the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, the sinless life and atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and His bodily resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father.” (*Ibid*)

Note that Paxton puts the trinity doctrine first in his list of teachings that in his view (and very often in the view of what is known as mainstream Christianity) identifies a denomination as Christian. On page 83 of his book he says

“The modern era in Adventism is definitely different in important aspects from all that has gone before. Hence, it is new in a very real sense” (*Ibid* page 83)

As we have already said, like others, Paxton recognised that since its beginnings in 1844, Seventh-day Adventism has changed dramatically, even saying that it can be called “new in a very real sense”. Again it can only be said that it is unfortunate that many Seventh-day Adventists do not have this same realisation. Paxton also says

“From saw the 1888 struggle largely in terms of a conflict between Adventist "distinctives" and the "eternal verities" of the Christian church. In the early period (1844-1888) Adventism began to recapitulate to some extent the history of the Christian church.” (*Ibid*)

He then says

“Cut off from the main Christian stream, the Adventists of that time were unsettled on some of the great Christian truths— principally the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the sinless human nature of Christ, and His finished atonement on the cross. Froom saw 1888 as a great step forward in that it led Adventism to be fully settled on the doctrines of the Trinity and the full deity of Christ.” (*Ibid*)

Seventh-day Adventists in 1888, and all through Ellen White’s ministry, were no more unsettled on the trinity than they were about the deity of Christ. To an extent, Paxton is simply repeating what Froom said in his *Movement of Destiny*. Perhaps he is basing his reasoning on that book. In reality it was as Russell Holt said in his term paper about the years leading up to and around the death of James White (1881)

“A survey of other Adventist writers during these years reveals, that to a man, they rejected the trinity, yet, with equal unanimity they upheld the divinity of Christ. To reject the trinity is not necessarily to strip the Saviour of His divinity. Indeed, certain Adventist writers felt that it was the trinitarians who filled the role of degrading Christ’s divine nature.” (*Russell Holt, “The doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination: Its rejection and acceptance”, A term paper for Dr. Mervyn Maxwell, 1969*)

In an article called *Essential Adventism or Historic Adventism?* Woodrow Whidden suggests certain remedies for the problems that were then, in 1993 when he wrote the article, accumulating within Seventh-day Adventism. This was over various doctrinal issues, one of which of course was the trinity doctrine. Interesting to note here is that his article was followed by the one written by George Knight in which he latter attempts to justify the bringing in of the trinity doctrine (*Adventists and Change*)

Amongst the first things that Whidden deals with in his article are well-used expressions such as ‘historic Adventism’, It appears that he suggests this has become both meaningless and divisive. He refers to these when he says

“The term historic Adventism has become so loaded and pejorative that we need new terms and a more inclusive theological framework and atmosphere if we are to find some resolution to the present divisive impasse.” (*Woodrow Whidden, Ministry, October 1993, Essential Adventism or Historic Adventism*)

He then says with regards to resolving certain issues within Seventh-day Adventism (remember this was in 1993 when the trinity doctrine was being challenged within Seventh-day Adventism hence George Knight’s article in the same magazine)

“I would urge that such expressions as historic Adventist, traditional Adventism, and new theology be laid aside as divisive buzzwords and

needless red flags that bring neither constructive doctrinal resolution nor accurate historical insight.” (*Ibid*)

The term “new theology” was with reference to such as the trinity doctrine and its associated beliefs whilst both “historic Adventist” and “traditional Adventism” was what was once believed by Seventh-day Adventists but has been discarded as not being biblical. Whidden then goes on to suggest alternative expressions. He says

“I would suggest instead the following terms: Christian verities, or eternal verities for basic doctrines embraced by Adventists and held by most other Christians, essential Adventism for that which is distinctively Adventist, processive Adventism for those issues that are important but still unsettled, and nonessential Adventism for that which is interesting but not central to Adventist self-understanding.” (*Ibid*)

This first suggestion of course (“Christian verities, or eternal verities”) was not unique to Whidden, neither was it original. This we know because in his *Movement of Destiny*, Froom used these very same terms (and similar) as being applicable to the trinity doctrine and what he termed the complete deity of Christ (see section fifty-one and above).

These Christian or eternal “verities” therefore, according to Whidden, are those that make a person Christian. Again here we must ask a question. By separating “Christian verities, or eternal verities” from “essential Adventism”, is there here a suggestion that providing a person accepts the former the latter is not essential to salvation. Again this involves a discussion of righteousness by faith but it is a question well worth considering.

Whidden later details the beliefs that he places within the boundaries of “Christian verities, or eternal verities”. This is when he calls them “great verities”. He says

“First, the broadly Christian beliefs. Adventism is primarily Christian in the sense of affirming the great verities of the faith. We strongly affirm such doctrines as the full deity of Christ, the Trinity, the personhood of the Holy Spirit, the bodily resurrection of Christ, and the Lord's Supper.” (*Ibid*)

Whidden places the trinity doctrine, the deity of Christ (or as he says full deity) and the personhood of the Holy Spirit in category of eternal and Christian verities (“the great verities”). This is no different than was said by Froom in *Movement of Destiny* and Walter Martin (see above).

Whidden’s next words are also in harmony with Froom who said

“We are thus broadly in agreement with the basic orthodoxy of the Christian tradition and we are thoroughly Protestant. All of this is certainly essential to

our Christian self-understanding.” (*Ibid*)

Whidden does not elaborate here on what he means by these “verities” being “essential to our Christian self-understanding” but if he means that those who do not believe them are not Christian then this leads to the conclusion that not only were none of our pioneers Christian but neither were the vast majority of Seventh-day Adventists who lived during the time of Ellen White. This of course is because they too were not trinitarians. We could also include here the tens of thousands of people who, after the death of Ellen White, continued to believe exactly the same as the pioneers.

With regards to the pioneer’s beliefs concerning the eternal deity of Christ (as is depicted in the trinity doctrine) and the atonement, Froom said in his *Movement of Destiny*

“These, as frequently stressed were the two main areas of confusion, occasioned by certain unfortunate statements published by individuals representing their own personal views — not the declared united view of the body.” (*LeRoy Froom, ‘Movement of Destiny’, page 493, chapter “Deity” and “Atonement” Attain Destined Place – No. 1*)

Here we have it from our very own denominational publication that unfortunately (as Froom regards it), some of our pioneers put regrettable statements into our publications. Froom also maintained, just as he did throughout his book, that these were just the “personal views” of certain individuals but “not the declared united view of the body”. This though, as we have seen so many times in previous sections is just not true. This is because these non-trinitarian statements, all made during the time of the ministry of Ellen White, were the actual faith of the main body of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Froom then went on to say

“These regrettably published expressions, gave rise in turn to a feeling among scholars not of our faith that Adventists were actually an anti-Christian cult holding originally – and doubtless generally – to definitely heretical views”. (*LeRoy Froom, ‘Movement of Destiny’, page 493, chapter “Deity” and “Atonement” Attain Destined Place – No. 1*)

Summary

We have seen that from our beginnings in 1844, right through to the end of that century and beyond, even until many years after the death of Ellen White, our denomination had been non-trinitarian.

Thus it was that as we faced the future without God’s messenger to the remnant, we also faced the stigma of being continually thought of, by the trinitarian denominations (mainstream Christianity), as being a non-Christian cult. This is how it was all the time that Ellen White was alive. It was in fact the price that we paid for believing the sacred truth that God had given to us (see section twenty-

two, section twenty-three, section twenty-four and section twenty-nine for details as to how Ellen White regarded the beliefs of the pioneers).

Nevertheless, changes were looming on the horizon and they were changes not unseen by Ellen White. This is why during the early 1900's, warning after warning came from her pen concerning reformation and changes that were to be suggested as necessary to the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. As we have seen (see above), these were changes that she said would be suggested by Satan.

Certainly the early 1900's were a time of very serious crisis for the Seventh-day Adventist Church and it was a crisis that to see us through it called for all the leadership skills that Ellen White could muster. This she did relentlessly but after she died, also to guide us through the storms to come, there was no audible voice to be heard. There were though her written warnings. These were the warnings that told us that Satan himself would make every effort to pervert the early 1900's faith of Seventh-day Adventists.

The question is, has Satan perverted the teaching of Seventh-day Adventism? I ask this because now, in 2008, instead of regarding God as a person and Christ as a separate person from Him (as we did when Ellen White was alive), we now regard God as an indivisible *tri-unity* of beings, comprising, Father, Son and Holy Spirit (the trinity). As it is articulated in our fundamental beliefs

“There is one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons.” (Seventh-day Adventists Believe ... A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines page 16)”

This book then describes this unity “one God” by explaining

“God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. He is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation” (Ibid)

Note here that this unity “one God” (the trinity) is said to be “immortal”. This really is important because it is saying that this same “one God” can never cease to be therefore the Son of God who is part of this unity God also cannot cease to be. This teaching according to many non-trinitarians, invalidates the risk that God took in allowing His Son to become human therefore it fails to reveal the true love that God has for humanity (see section thirteen)

As can be clearly seen, there is a vast difference between how God is described in our *Seventh-day Adventists Believe...* and how Ellen White repeatedly described Him (see section thirty). She regarded God as an individual personal being in His own right, just as she did the Son. Never did she describe Him as done so here by current Seventh-day Adventism.

The way that Ellen White described God and Christ was reflected in our past published denominational beliefs. This is when it said in belief No. 1

“That there is one God, a personal, spiritual being, the Creator of all things, omnipotent, omniscient, and eternal; infinite in wisdom, holiness, justice, goodness, truth, and mercy; unchangeable, and every where present by his representative, the Holy Spirit. Ps. 139: 7.” (1914 *Seventh-day Adventist yearbook*, ‘*Fundamental Principles of Seventh-day Adventists*’, page 293)

This was followed by No. 2 that said

“That there is one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Eternal Father, the one by whom he created all thing's, and by whom they do consist;” (*Ibid*)

This was the last published statement of beliefs before Ellen White died.

In the above current statement of fundamental beliefs, God is no longer described as a personal being separate from Christ. In fact He is not even described as a person at all. God is here portrayed as a unity of persons, which supposedly includes the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, three separate individual persons (for a more detailed comparison of our various published statements of faith see section forty-five).

Without a doubt, God is here described as something of a non-entity, not a person. This surely is the type of teaching that Ellen White said would make God nothingness.

None of the pioneers, including Ellen White, ever described God in such a manner as in our fundamental beliefs today. This is why George Knight is correct in saying that because of the huge difference between the beliefs of the pioneers and the present day Seventh-day Adventist theology, the pioneers could not today join the very church that they once pioneered into being. It must be reasoned also that this would include Ellen White because in the light of what we have read throughout this study concerning her beliefs regarding God and Christ, she would no more subscribe to this belief than would the other pioneers.

It does appear that everything that Ellen White warned Seventh-day Adventists about has indeed transpired. Our religion has been changed. Our former beliefs have been discarded. According to present day theology, as depicted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, God and Christ are no longer separate individuals. In fact in the present-day theology, God has now become a non-entity, a unity of persons, nothingness, even a substance.

This is why today, our faithful pioneers could never become Seventh-day Adventists and for all we know, after seeing what our beliefs are now, they would not even want to be. This is probably the most startling of all realisations, the

rejection of the Seventh-day Adventist Church by our pioneers. Where do we go from here?

In the section 50 we shall see the end result, or the near end result, of the Seventh-day Adventist Church adopting the doctrine of the trinity.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section fifty

The 1950's acceptance by the evangelicals

As we noted in the previous section, the original message of the Seventh-day Adventist Church was never a popular one. In fact prior to professing a belief in the trinity doctrine (this was as well as its associated beliefs), it was quite normal for us to be regarded as a cult.

In the 1950's, all this began to change. This happened when an evangelical Baptist minister named Walter Martin, renowned for his exposing of cults, declared to the evangelical world that Seventh-day Adventists were truly Christian. At that time, this was a declaration that shocked many non-Seventh-day Adventists. It also shocked many Seventh-day Adventists. This is because on the part of evangelicals, it was definitely a U-turn in attitudes.

The dawning of a new era

The middle of the 1950's was indeed the beginning of a new era for Seventh-day Adventists. It all began when Walter Martin (it appears via Donald Barnhouse, then editor of the magazine *Eternity*) came into contact with T. E. Unruh. He was then the president of the East Pennsylvania Conference of North America. As I have read a few different versions regarding how this contact initially came about, I will not make any further comment suffice to say that I will share with you what I found in an interview that *Adventist Currents* had with Walter Martin in February 1983, also what Froom wrote in his *Movement of Destiny*. Douglas Hackleman is said to have conducted this interview for *Adventist Currents* (*Adventist Currents* was a magazine published in 1983 by certain independent North American Seventh-day Adventists. It ceased publication in 1988). The interview began by Martin being asked by *Currents*

“I understand that you have recently solicited from the General Conference President, Neal Wilson, a statement affirming the validity of Adventist doctrine as presented in the 1957 publication *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*. Could you tell us why you are looking for such a statement at this time from the General Conference president? Have you received any response? (*Interview, Douglas Hackleman and Walter Martin February 1983, Adventist Currents, Volume 1, No. 1. July 1983*)

Martin replied by saying

“The request has been sent to Mr. Wilson. The reason for it is because increasingly, over the last few years, I have met Adventists pastors, teachers, and evangelists around the country who felt that the denomination had taken such a powerful stand in Questions on Doctrine, with such good scholarship behind them - amassing some of the best brains they had at the time - and really trying to come to grips with the issues which were facing the denomination and separating them from fellowship with other evangelicals. And they could not understand why there was a muffling of the book, why it was taken out of circulation; many felt that I was being misled.” (*Ibid*)

He continued his reply

“The men who dealt with me dealt with me in integrity and in honor, and I believe that. But afterwards, a "Pharaoh arose who knew not Joseph." And as a result of that, the "old guard" - some of whom followed the school of Uriah Smith on Christology, M.L. Andreason on sanctuary doctrine, and some of Mrs. White's earlier unfortunate statements (which need not be defended as infallible) - were in a position to influence the publication of the book and the continued dialogue with evangelicals on which it is based. After 150,000 copies, Questions on Doctrine was permitted to go out of print. That was a bad mistake. It was a very popular book.” (*Ibid*)

Martin also said in respect to him saying that the book was “permitted to go out of print”

“I am being kind. I believe it was deliberately removed by people who felt that it was a thorn in their theological flesh.” (*Ibid*)

Current's asked Walter Martin how the initial contact with our church came about. Martin answered

“Well, I received literature critical of the position I had taken in *The Rise of the Cults*, where I listed Adventism as a cult. T.E. Unruh contacted me in Reading, Pennsylvania, where I believe he was a Conference president or had some official position there. He was a very winsome and loving man. But he was quite upset by the fact that I had taken this very strong position, that so many people read my material, and that Adventism would suffer as a result - unjustly, he felt.”

“We had a confrontation, which was the best thing. I said to him that I had a considerable amount of evidence from Adventist publications which are heretical. I said, "It does not have anything to do with like or dislike of Adventists as people, or their accomplishments, or their zeal - the cults are very accomplished; they are very zealous. I can introduce you to marvelous Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses who are moral, ethical, tithe-giving people who imitate Christian ethics and Christian morality. The fact that you

do these things doesn't make you a Christian. What makes you a Christian is whether or not you really are in accord with biblical theology and whether you know Jesus Christ as your Saviour." (*Ibid*)

According to Martin, Unruh said "Well, I do," Martin then replied

" ... I am not challenging you, but your literature is a hodge-podge of contradictions. I am a logician. I am a student of comparative religions, and I intend to make it my life work. I collect data. I am a documentary research man." (*Ibid*)

Martin then related that Unruh suggested that they have some dialogue on this matter to which Martin replied

"... "All right. I will talk to Dr. Barnhouse of *Eternity Magazine* (I was contributing editor at the time); and if he is interested, we could make this a joint project with the General Conference and the Evangelical Foundation. We will discuss, we will go into dialogue, and I'll be happy to represent the Foundation. And if my position is in error, I'll be happy to correct it. If it is not in error, then you will sustain that what I have said is true." (*Ibid*)

In his *Movement of Destiny*, Froom put this initial contact in another way. He said (this was under the sub-heading of *Wholesome results from contacts*)

"It will be helpful for the reader—and especially our worker groups—to have the gist of the story. It all started when T. E. Unruh, then president of our East Pennsylvania Conference, here in North America, listened to a series of weekly radio broadcasts on the book of Romans, impressively setting forth Righteousness by Faith. These were given by Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse, pastor of the Tenth Presbyterian church, of Philadelphia, and at the same time editor of *Eternity* magazine, speaker on a large radio network, and teacher of an extensive weekly Monday night Bible class in New York City, which he had conducted for some ten years.

Unruh wrote to Barnhouse commending him on the Biblical soundness and spiritual helpfulness of his presentations over the airwaves on Righteousness by Faith. This unexpected commendation puzzled Barnhouse, for he had understood that Seventh-day Adventists held to righteousness by works.

This incident, and what grew out of it, ultimately led Walter R. Martin - Baptist polemicist and cult specialist, contributor to *Eternity* magazine, and affiliated with the National Foundation of Evangelicals and the Stony Brook School, as well as director of the Division of Cult Apologetics of Zondervan Publishing House - to locate Unruh as the point of contact with the Adventists. And this for a writing assignment that had been given him." (*LeRoy Froom, Movement of Destiny, chapter 'Questions on Doctrine' page*

477, 1971)

From also said on the same page

“Martin asked for copies of our most representative and authoritative doctrinal books. He also requested a series of interviews with responsible Adventist leaders, who could answer a battery of probing questions that he had drawn up pertaining to our faith. This was all in preparation for a book on the doctrinal errors of Seventh-day Adventism that he had been commissioned to write. But he wanted to be fair, he said, and to have the full facts before writing - and so asked our cooperation.” (*Ibid*)

From also reports (this reveals how much was discussed)

“After a long-distance telephone contact with our headquarters by Unruh, assurances were given. The books would be provided for Martin's scrutiny, and a committee of three representative men was named. T. E. Unruh would act as initial chairman, to get the conferences under way. These four met as a team, with Walter Martin and a colleague, Dr. George Cannon, professor of New Testament Greek at a college on the Hudson. There were eighteen conferences, lasting one to three days and usually with three sessions a day. These were held periodically, in Washington D. C., Reading, Philadelphia, and New York City over a period of eighteen months.” (*Ibid*)

Whatever it was that led to this initial contact with the evangelicals, also to the dialogue that followed, we are informed that Martin became convinced that Seventh-day Adventists should be termed Christian and not a cult. This was because he was told that as a denomination, as did all the other denominations encompassed in the term mainstream Christianity, we did confess a belief in such as the trinity, the virgin birth, a finished atonement at Calvary, salvation by grace and the sinless nature of Christ.

Let's back up now and see what has been written in our own denominational publications concerning these meetings.

Seventh-day Adventist leaders dialogue with the evangelicals

In the August 1958 issue of the *Ministry* magazine, in an advert for a book that was prepared by Seventh-day Adventist leaders called *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* (usually referred to just as *Questions on Doctrine* or QOD), it says in an article that was originally published by Bethany Baptist Church (we shall speak in more length about this latter named book in section fifty-one)

“The question of what Seventh-day Adventists really believe has been brought to the fore in the last few years once more. Particularly, the matter has been raised as to whether they can be considered Christians.”

(Ministry, August 1958 as written by Herbert Henry Ehrenstein, Editor in Chief, Vital Horizon as published by Bethany Baptist Church Philadelphia)

Here then was the issue at stake. Could Seventh-day Adventist be “considered Christians”? The article went on to say

“The Reverend Walter Martin of the staff of Eternity magazine has done a monumental piece of research into Seventh-day Adventist doctrines. Out of his research and earnest desire to represent Adventists fairly in his writings, Mr. Martin prepared a series of pertinent questions that most evangelical Christians would like to have answers for. Questions about Christ, about the relation of Ellen G. White's writings to Scripture, about law and grace, about the Sabbath and other issues.” *(Ibid)*

Two years later, this time in the *Review and Herald* of April 7th 1960, it said of Walter Marin

“Some time back he [Walter Martin] undertook an assignment of writing on the so-called cults. Adventists were classed among them”. *(R. R. Figuhr, Review and Herald, April 7th 1960 ‘The presidents page’)*

In two brief sentences, this General Conference president (1954-1966) had summed up the entire situation. For a long period of time in their history, Seventh-day Adventists had been termed a cult. Figuhr then added concerning Walter Martin

“Investigation on his part, however, as well as personal contact with representatives of our church, led him to take Adventists out of this class. He came to the conclusion that Seventh-day Adventists are true Christians; that they and their teachings have been misrepresented and unfairly treated by many former writers. A series of pointed questions in written form were asked us about our doctrines. We, in turn, gave written replies.” *(Ibid)*

These “written replies” are what we find in *Questions on Doctrine*. In the *Ministry* magazine of August 1966, E. D. Syme, then of the Religion and Biblical Language Department, Pacific Union College said

“A few years ago Walter Martin and Donald G. Barnhouse visited the General Conference brethren for discussion on our religious beliefs. At the conclusion of their inquiry, they took our hand in Christian fellowship, on the basis that we share with them the same evangelistic hope.” *(Eric D. Syme, Ministry, August 1966, ‘The Sabbath - New Concepts on Its Importance’)*

In 1966, this statement “the same evangelistic hope” was very much disputed. This was not only by some who were not Seventh-day Adventists but also by some who were Seventh-day Adventists. On both sides, this conclusion is still in dispute today.

Nevertheless, this was the official beginning of our present day affiliation with the evangelicals. This was where our desire to be like the other denominations had finally led us but as we shall see in the next section, it was not all over yet. There was more to come.

Syme continued by saying that although Martin and Barnhouse (then editor of *Eternity* magazine) considered Seventh-day Adventists to be truly Christian, these two evangelicals did not believe that the distinctive teachings of our faith (these are such as the Sabbath, the investigative judgement and the state of the dead etc) were of God, meaning that they did not believe that these teachings were Christian. Certainly these evangelicals did not regard the writings of Ellen White as coming under the heading of inspired writings. Syme said of Martin and Barnhouse

“But they also made clear that they continued to think of the Sabbath, as well as some of our other unique concepts, as extraneous to the centrality of the gospel. If we cared to retain such peripheral issues, that was all right, provided we remained within the broad compass of the Christian witness.”
(*Ibid*)

This “broad compass” was the basic fundamentals of the Christian faith (i.e. the trinity etc) as held by the protestant evangelicals (see above). Notice that Syme said that if we retained these particular doctrines then Martin and Barnhouse said it would be “all right”. By this I assume it means that these evangelicals would still consider us as being Christian, also belonging to mainstream Christianity. It seems that Barnhouse and Martin believed that they had the authority to determine who would be deemed Christian and who were not Christian. In 1982 in a *Ministry* magazine article called *Thinkers versus doers* it said

“Then Walter Martin, a researcher who was preparing a book on our church, pushed us for more official and precise theological statements. He recognized that our theology was dynamic and had been changing over the years; and so, for the sake of accuracy, he wanted us to make up our minds.” (*James L. Londis, Ministry, August 1982 'Thinkers versus doers'*)

Notice first of all that it is said that Walter Martin recognised that our theology had been “changing over the years”. This is more than can be said that many Seventh-day Adventists have noticed. Take note also that he said “he wanted us to make up our minds”. This is a reflection of our changing beliefs. Take particular note also that Martin wanted “official” statements concerning our beliefs. This, as we shall now see, is very important. Londis then said about Martin

“He was not interested in the "consensus" view in the field, only in the presently held beliefs of church leadership.” (*Ibid*)

This is really very important. Martin was not concerned with what Seventh-day Adventists in general believed, whether it was of the ministry or the laity, but rather what our “church leadership” believed.

This is rather strange really because the true faith of any protestant denomination should be determined by the belief (on any doctrine) that is currently held by the majority of its membership (meaning the preponderant belief of the body) and not just some of its leadership. The latter though, “the presently held beliefs of church leadership”, is what Martin really wanted to know about. It seems that he was not interested in the views of the Seventh-day Adventist ministry at large, neither was he interested in the views of the average layperson.

One probable reason for his request was because it was thought that Walter Martin, concerning the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists, had been getting mixed messages. This could have been mainly due to our ongoing transition to trinitarianism. As we have seen in previous sections, this certainly caused division amongst Seventh-day Adventists. Some were pushing for the new theology of trinitarianism whilst some were attempting to hold on to what was once taught by our pioneers (non-trinitarianism). Note the next words of Londis. These are even more important than the above. He said

“For the first time in recent memory, the issue of who would decide Adventist theology had to be addressed. Walter Martin wanted "official" answers.” (*Ibid*)

As can be seen (and as we shall see further in the next section), it was the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church who were going to dictate what Seventh-day Adventists were said to believe, even if some of its ministry or lay people did not agree with it, which as we shall see, they often did not.

Such was 1950’s Seventh-day Adventism. It had now become somewhat dictatorial in its manner. This was so much different than what it had been during the time of the pioneers. This was when a consensus of belief was the established faith of the body. In fact many have regarded this change of attitude as a major step in making a creed (which is how some now regard the 28 fundamentals of Seventh-day Adventists). Remember too how in section forty-seven we discovered that there were those who believed that by the editing out of all the non-trinitarianism from Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation* that just the few were making a pronouncement on doctrine. What we have here is an ongoing of that very same situation.

Under the sub-heading of “Evangelical-Adventist controversy”, all of this is summed up rather neatly in the Wikipedia Online free dictionary. It says concerning Walter Martin

“Perhaps the greatest public controversy of his early career arose from his

studies of Seventh-day Adventist theology. From its earliest days until the 1950s, the Seventh-day Adventist church was regarded by Evangelicals and mainstream Protestants as either an extreme sect or heretical cult. Martin had initially accepted the received Protestant opinion about the heretical status of the Seventh-day Adventists. He indicated his opposition to Adventist teachings in a brief paragraph in the inaugural edition of his book *The Rise of the Cults*, published in 1955.” (Wikipedia Online dictionary, *Walter Ralstone Martin*)

Please note well the latter sentence. This was the same year (1955) as the initial contact with Donald Barnhouse. This is more than likely why our church contacted Walter Martin (see *Adventist Currents* interview with Walter Martin above). The article continues

“However, he [Walter Martin] reversed his views after a series of interviews with various leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist church, and on reading Adventist literature. Martin reported his initial findings to Barnhouse, and between 1955-56 a series of small conferences were held with Barnhouse and Martin meeting Adventist leaders like T. E. Unruh and LeRoy Froom. Barnhouse and Martin then published some of their findings in a series of articles that appeared in *Eternity* between September and November 1956.” (*Ibid*)

After this consultation with certain of our church leaders, Walter Martin concluded that Seventh-day Adventism, which by this time (the mid 1950's) had become trinitarian as well as becoming more mellowed in some of its once very distinctive views, was now more acceptable to mainstream Christianity. This is why the Wikipedia article continues

“The standpoint taken by Barnhouse and Martin was that Adventists were largely orthodox on central doctrines, but heterodox on lesser doctrines, and so could be classified as belonging in the Evangelical camp. Martin later expanded his position in a book length treatment in 1960 in *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism*.” (*Ibid*)

These “largely orthodox” “central doctrines” included the trinity doctrine whilst others were the deity of Christ, the resurrection of our Saviour, salvation by grace, the atonement and the sinless nature of Jesus etc. The “lesser doctrines” would have been what we term our distinctive doctrines. These were such as the state of the dead, the seventh-day Sabbath, the investigative judgement, the sanctuary and the spirit of prophecy etc.

Both Barnhouse and Martin totally rejected the idea that these distinctive teachings were scriptural. They also rejected the idea that they had anything to do with God's last day message for this world. Never, as far as I know, did these two evangelicals change from this view. They both rejected the message of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

A remarkable state of affairs

Martin's self-confessed problem now was how to write about Seventh-day Adventists expressing the view that we should be regarded as Christian, whilst at the same time say that he completely rejected as being not Christian our beliefs that made us distinctive. The latter of course were the "lesser doctrines" as noted above that to a great extent constituted God's end time message.

So what did Martin do to help him resolve his problem? We will allow LeRoy Froom to articulate this as he explained it in his *Movement of Destiny*. He said

"Martin did not, of course, agree with certain special Adventist positions – on the Sabbath, Sanctuary, Nature of Man, and the like – the specific Testing Truths, as we regard them, for emphasis in these last days. But he nevertheless definitely believed that we are fundamentally Christians and brethren in Christ. His problem loomed so large that, in his concern, he then and there asked us to join him in praying for divine guidance and wisdom in his newly developed writing problem." (*LeRoy Froom 'Movement of Destiny' page 480-481, chapter 'Questions on Doctrine'*)

Can you imagine this situation? Froom says that Walter Martin was praying for "divine guidance and wisdom" to write a book saying that our teachings about the sanctuary, the investigative judgement, the Sabbath, the spirit of prophecy and the state of the dead etc were all wrong (not from God) but that in spite of this we were still Christians. So what did Martin request our leadership to do? He wanted them to pray with him. What a situation for Seventh-day Adventists to find themselves in. Froom then added

"This we did, all six of us dropping to our knees around the table, and praying to that end." (*Ibid*)

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I find all of this an almost unbelievable situation but this is where our manoeuvrings to be accepted by the other (trinity) denominations had led us!

Here we are as God's remnant people, in the 1950's, a people who should be existing solely under the unction of God and having the authority of the Word of God as well as the Testimony of Jesus Christ as justification of our existence, now praying with Walter Martin to enable him to write things about us that would put us in a good light with other denominations although saying in the process that our distinctive end-time message was not of God (not Christian). What a remarkable state of affairs for Seventh-day Adventists but this is how it was in the 1950's.

These other denominations, including the one to whom Walter Martin belonged, were those who then, also still are today, completely antagonistic to the message that God has ordained should be given to the world. In fact these same denominations say that this message is not biblical (not from God) at all.

These are the very same denominations that have always been decidedly against the belief that the Ten Commandments (the moral law) is still 100% binding on Christians (the Sabbath has been changed to Sunday so they say), thus they are antagonistic to our seventh-day Sabbath message. These are also the same denominations that are against our judgement hour message. This is in addition to being against our belief that God will not burn people forever in the fires of hell (in other words, in the main, these other denominations believe in a punishment of continual burning).

Some from these other denominations even say that the investigative judgement message deprives Christians of their assurance of salvation, reasoning therefore that it is satanic. Such is the way that the evangelicals regard the distinctive aspects of our message even though because of our beliefs in the basic fundamentals of Christianity (the trinity etc) they may have come to class us as 'Christian.

So here we were, in the 1950's, with Walter Martin, asking our leaders "to [join him in praying for divine guidance and wisdom](#)". This was to help him convince the Christian world that we were definitely Christian whilst believing at the same time that the distinctive part of our message is false. What a sad state of affairs for God's remnant people! One is left to wonder if this is the omega that Ellen White warned about (see section one) – or at least is tied in with it. She did say that it would be of a "most startling nature" (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B, No. 2 page 16, 'A Letter to Leading Physicians', July 24th 1904, 'Teach the Word'*). To read the entire testimony, please go here

<http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/SB-EGWarticles.htm>

As has been said previously, this is where all of our trinitarian manoeuvrings had brought us. As God's remnant people we were seeking credibility and justification for our existence from those who were in the process of rejecting the message that God had given to us to take to the world. These other denominations are the very same churches of Babylon out of which we were supposed to be calling God's people and thus join us in the keeping of, as well as in the proclamation of, the final curtain call to salvation (the three angel's messages).

M. L. Andreasen objects

When these talks between the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the evangelicals took place, Milian Lauritz Andreasen (1876-1962) was a very high profile retired Seventh-day Adventist minister. He openly objected to what was then happening. As a result of his objections, he had his ministerial licence taken away. I have also been told that the books he had written were ceased from being advertised and that his sustenance (his Seventh-day Adventist pension) was stopped. As of yet I have no confirmation of the latter. Andreasen was selected as one of the six guards to Ellen White's bier at her funeral.

Even though Andreasen attempted to meet with our church leadership to discuss this issue, this meeting never materialised. This is because our church refused to hold council with him and allow him at the same time to keep a record of what would be said during these meetings. Consequently, through frustration and the belief that the church at large should be informed of what was happening between our leaders and the evangelicals, Andreasen wrote six open letters to the church.

In his final letter (letter No. 6 headed *The Atonement*), with respect to both the meetings with the evangelicals and the publication of the answers that our church leadership gave to the questions of the evangelicals (this was as they were published in *Questions on Doctrine*), Andreasen noted

“This is a most interesting and dangerous situation. As one official who was not in favor of what was being done stated to me: “We are being sold down the river.” What a sight for heaven and earth! The church of the living God which has been given the commission to preach the gospel to every creature under heaven and call men to come out of Babylon, is now standing at the door of these churches asking permission to enter and become one of them. How are the mighty fallen!” (*M. L. Andreasen, letter No. 6 to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 1959, ‘The Atonement’*)

Andreasen concluded

“This is more than apostasy. This is giving up Adventism. It is the rape of a whole people. It is denying God's leading in the past.” (*Ibid*)

From a doctrinal aspect, Andreasen's main objection to what was printed in *Questions on Doctrine* concerned the human nature of Christ. This was because our church leadership had told Walter Martin that we believed that He (Christ) was exempt from human passions, ultimately meaning as Andreasen appears to have understood it, that the Son did not experience temptation like as we do. Interestingly, after Andreasen had died, his ministerial licence was returned to him.

The Truth about Seventh-day Adventism

Walter Martin eventually wrote a book especially about Seventh-day Adventists. He called it *The Truth about Seventh-day Adventism*. In the *Ministry* magazine, a periodical that is not only distributed to Seventh-day Adventists ministers but also those ministers not of our faith, H. W. Lowe said under the heading of “Books - - for your library”

“The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism! Walter R. Martin, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 252 pages, \$3.50.

This is the long-awaited book that Walter R. Martin, contributing editor of *Eternity Magazine*, was commissioned by a certain evangelical organization

to write as part of "The Modern Cult Library" series.

We can safely say that no critic of Adventism ever took more pains to ascertain the real teachings of that body, and certainly none ever tried to handle his subject with more Christian grace than did Dr. Martin." (*H. W. Lowe, Ministry, May 1960, Books – for your library*)

Lowe confirms this by saying later in the article

"The author read every major anti-Adventist publication, as well as every pro-Adventist book and pamphlet, and his book is based upon seven years of intensive study, interviews with hundreds of Adventist believers and laymen, including a mission field survey in Europe and Asia." (*Ibid*)

Earlier he had made this comment

"In 1949 when the author [Walter Martin] studied SDA history and theology in New York City, he "concluded that Adventists were a cult of Christian extraction, but with enough heretical error in their doctrine to exclude them from the body of Christ." However, in 1955 he began a research project "to discover just what comprises Seventh-day Adventist theology. As he burrowed under the surface of Adventist semantics and teaching, the number of doctrinal heresies markedly diminished." (*Ibid*)

By saying such things as our once non-trinitarian stand had been just the personal views of a few, these so-called "doctrinal heresies" certainly would diminish, at least in the eyes of the person who was being told such things.

This was the outright denial that these beliefs had ever been a part of our denominational faith. As we have seen in previous sections, this was far from being the truth of the matter because not only were these beliefs certainly not heresies, they were also the preponderant beliefs of the church all the time that Ellen White was alive. Lowe then added

"Adventists could wish that they had all disappeared, but this statement, and others like it in the book, represents the best attempt we have yet seen to examine with an unbiased mind the beliefs of another fold. More we could hardly expect in the field of Christian apologetics." (*Ibid*)

After saying that Martin had drawn his conclusions after 7 years of study with laymen and Seventh-day Adventists, Lowe commented

"The areas in which the author [Walter Martin] finds his major disagreements with Seventh-day Adventism are: The gift of prophecy through Ellen G. White, the Sabbath, the law, the sanctuary question, and the punishment of the wicked." (*Ibid*)

Once again we see it said that Martin totally disagreed with the distinctive beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists (our God-given end-time faith). Needless to say, “the sanctuary question” covered a lot of ground, including the investigative judgement. After describing how Martin in his book details his disagreements, Lowe said

“A book review is not a forum for the refutation of opposing theological opinions. They will be dealt with by others in the appropriate place, but this writer hopes that those who engage in discussion on, or answer to, the book under review will do so in the same spirit of Christian love and fellowship that obviously motivated Dr. Martin.” (*Ibid*)

Whether Martin said the things he did about the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists out of “Christian love and fellowship” is up to each individual to decide. All that I can say is that after reading and listening to recorded sermons as to what Martin said about our distinctive teachings I can honestly say that I never heard him speak kindly of them. This was in keeping with that which he wrote on his book *The Truth about Seventh-day Adventists*.

Important to relate here is that Walter Martin’s disagreements with our distinctive teachings did get “dealt with by others in the appropriate place”. This was when for almost a year in the *Ministry* magazine (1960/1961), Martin’s objections were subjected to detailed Bible scrutiny by such as R. Hammill (the Sabbath question), W. E. Read (the investigative judgement), R. A. Anderson (the non-immortality of the soul) and D. E. Mansell (the nature of man).

A 1962 explanation

In 1962, also in the *Ministry* magazine, Roy Allen Anderson spoke of interviews that he and others had with Donald Barnhouse (close friend of Walter Martin’s and editor of the magazine *Eternity*). Anderson was then editor of *Ministry*. He wrote

“A few years ago a group of Christian scholars deeply concerned about the Adventist teachings and their effect upon the church as a whole, came to the General Conference headquarters to inquire just what are our beliefs in these areas of truth. These men represented conservative and evangelical theology, and they were eager to know firsthand what we believe. An interview that was to have lasted at most but a few hours, lengthened into a series of eighteen interviews, or intensive Bible studies, which took place over a period of many months - two and one-half years, to be exact.” (*R. A. Anderson, Ministry, February 1962 ‘Evangelical Inconsistency’*)

This is a bit different that was said by Froom. He said these meetings lasted “eighteen months” (see above). Anderson also reported

“During those intensive weeks of earnest prayer and study, all our doctrines were put to the test of the Word. Later their evaluation of Seventh-day

Adventism was published in both the religious and secular press.

Two of those study conferences, lasting over a period of days, convened in the home of the late Dr. Donald G. Barnhouse, of Philadelphia. Those of us who were there will never forget those interviews and the earnest statement made by that Christian leader [Donald Barnhouse], when at the close of a long day and evening around the Word, he rose and said, "Brethren, for thirty years I have misunderstood Adventists, and during all that time I have been fighting you. But I did it conscientiously. Even now I do not believe all that you believe, and cannot accept the 'special truths' that you feel called to preach; but when it comes to the real heart of Evangelical faith we can clasp hands, because I have now discovered that we stand together at the cross. I am now ready to declare from my heart that you are my brethren in Christ.

It was a moving moment, because this good man had used both his pen and the radio to defame Adventists, not once or twice, but scores of times."
(Ibid)

Whether "good man" or not, Donald Barnhouse along with Walter Martin, rejected outright the distinctive message of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This is the message that God had given to Seventh-day Adventists that they were to give to the world.

In all of this there is one thing of which we can be sure. This is that after all of the publicity given to our distinctive message through these meetings with Barnhouse and Martin, the Christian world cannot claim to be ignorant of it. God used this means to convey His curtain call of salvation to these evangelicals. Perhaps it can even be said that through this means, this was probably done with more effect than anything that Seventh-day Adventists in themselves could have achieved (God will use whatever means He chooses to accomplish His purposes). Anderson continued to quote Barnhouse as saying

"In the past two years, several Evangelical leaders have come to a new attitude toward the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The change is a remarkable one since it consists in moving the Seventh-day Adventists, in my opinion, out of the list of anti-Christian and non-Christian cults into the group of those who are brethren in Christ.

That article sparked interest around the world and became a center of real controversy in the religious press. A few misinformed Evangelicals disagreed violently, while others recognized the truth of Dr. Barnhouse's statement." *(Ibid)*

This could never have happened whilst we were a non-trinitarian denomination but now we were trinitarian, the gates were wide open to us. Anderson himself commented. Not all the evangelicals agreed with the

conclusions of Barnhouse and Martin concerning Seventh-day Adventists being Christian. Some “disagreed violently”. Such though, even during the 1950/1960’s, is how Christians of other denominations regarded Seventh-day Adventists. Even today this has not changed.

Anderson then went on to say that the religious editor of *Time*, “Sensing the deep public interest in this question” request an interview with Barnhouse and Martin. This led him to write an article which appeared in the December 31 1956 issue of *Time*, entitled "Peace With the Adventists." Anderson records

"On issue after issue," declared the [Time] editor, Martin found Adventists "hewing to the line of conservative Protestantism." Then he quoted the following words from Dr. Barnhouse: "We are delighted to do justice to a much maligned group of sincere believers, and in our minds and hearts take them out of the group of utter heretics like the Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Christian Scientists, to acknowledge them as redeemed brethren and members of the Body of Christ." (*Ibid*)

Those who were here putting us into the classification of “redeemed brethren and members of the Body of Christ” belonged to what we, as Seventh-day Adventists, have historically taught as being the Babylon of Bible prophecy. In other words, they belonged to the denominations out of which we were to call God’s people (see Revelation 14:6-12 and 18:1-5). These were also the people that were rejecting the distinctive truths of God’s last message of salvation (the Sabbath and the investigative judgment etc). Anderson later said

“We recognize that, important as those "special truths" are which we proclaim, yet these do not save us, nor do they add to us any virtue. We are saved by grace, and grace alone. Nothing that we can do can add a single thing to what our Lord has done for us. Moreover, of ourselves we are unable to keep His commandments. But Christ, who dwells in the heart of the believer, gives victory over sin.” (*Ibid*)

Here it appears that our “special truths” were given back seat status. Certainly they have been divorced from the gospel. This makes it appear that whether we believe them or not does not affect our salvation. Is this a true representation of our end-time message? Is it the message that God wants us to give to the world – that whether we accept the Sabbath or reject it we can still consider ourselves truly amongst the saved? All of this of course comes under the heading of righteousness by faith but that is the subject for another study.

It reminds me though of where Ellen White said (this was at the time of the Kellogg crisis although it was a testimony originally published in 1902 in Testimonies Volume 7)

“God is testing his people, to see who will be loyal to the principles of his truth. Our work is to proclaim to the world the first, second, and third angels’

messages. In the discharge of our duty, we are neither to despise nor fear our enemies. To bind ourselves up by contracts or in partnerships or business associations with those not of our faith is not in the order of God. We are to treat with kindness and courtesy those who refuse to be loyal to God, but we are never, never to unite with them in counsel regarding the vital interests of his work; for this is not the way of the Lord." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 4th August 1904, 'God's Chosen People', see also Testimonies to the Church Volume 5, page 107, 'Our Sanitarium Work'*)

She also said two paragraphs later

"I pray that my brethren may realize that the third angel's message means much to us, and that the observance of the true Sabbath is to be the sign that distinguishes those who serve God from those who serve him not. Let those who have become sleepy and indifferent awake. We are called to be holy, and we should carefully avoid giving the impression that it is of little consequence whether or not we retain the peculiar features of our faith. Upon us rests the solemn obligation of taking a more decided stand for truth and righteousness than we have taken in the past." (*Ibid*)

In Volume 9 of the Testimonies she also said (this was quoting Exodus 31:12-17)

"Do not these words point us out as God's denominated people? and do they not declare to us that so long as time shall last, we are to cherish the sacred, denominational distinction placed upon us? The children of Israel were to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations "for a perpetual covenant." The Sabbath has lost none of its meaning. It is still the sign between God and His people, and it will be so forever." (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies Volume 9, page 18, 'For the Coming of the King'*)

She also said in the following chapter

"In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the word of God. They have been given a work of the most solemn import -- the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels' messages. There is no other work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention.

The most solemn truths ever entrusted to mortals have been given us to proclaim to the world. The proclamation of these truths is to be our work. The world is to be warned, and God's people are to be true to the trust committed to them." " (*Ibid, page 19*)

Returning our thoughts to Anderson's article he added

“When once those Evangelical leaders came to understand our position on this central truth of the gospel they stretched forth hands of fellowship, and together we knelt and thanked God for the grace of Jesus Christ, which makes all true believers one in Him.

It was this that urged Walter Martin to withdraw the chapter he had written against Adventism in the book referred to, *The Rise of the Cults.*” (R. A. Anderson, *Ministry, February 1962 'Evangelical Inconsistency'*)

Anderson also quotes Martin as saying in his book *The Truth about Seventh-day Adventism*

“We hope that many who have looked upon Adventists as dangerous non-Christian cultists will revise this view. In the providence of God, and in His own good time, we trust that evangelical Christianity as a whole will extend the hand of fellowship to a group of sincere, earnest fellow Christians, distinguished though they are by some peculiar views, but members of the Body of Christ and possessors of the faith that saves.” (*Ibid*)

Here we can see Martin saying that he hoped that evangelicals as a whole, through the providences God and in God's own time, would accept Seventh-day Adventists as belonging to the Christian fold, even though they hold “**some peculiar views**” (our distinctive doctrines). Should this be comforting to Seventh-day Adventists? You the reader will need to answer that particular question. Anderson concludes concerning Walter Martin

“No one could write that way unless he had definite convictions. And in this volume, while he disagrees with certain of our teachings, yet he makes it clear to the Christian world that Adventism is not a "cult." And Dr. Barnhouse in his foreword to this book likewise clearly states that "Seventh-day Adventists are a truly Christian group, rather than an antichristian cult." --Page 7.” (*Ibid*)

From this it seems that Anderson is more interested in us not being called a cult rather than anything else.

We can definitely see here the stress that Anderson is making that Martin and Barnhouse had declared us not to be a cult but “truly Christian. This was in 1962 when many Christians of other denominations still regarded us as a cult.

Our past history denied

During his meetings with certain of the Seventh-day Adventist leadership, Walter Martin brought documentation to the group showing where our pioneers had made statements that denied, as Fromm in his *Movement of Destiny* put it so often, the complete deity of Christ (I counted almost 50 times) or eternal deity of

Christ (at least 13 times). These of course were just some of the many non-trinitarian or anti-trinitarian statements that in abundance our pioneers had written within our publications.

Martin also brought statements from the pioneers saying that Jesus was making the atonement now in the heavenly sanctuary. The evangelicals were horrified over this because they say that the atonement was completed at Calvary. Whilst in one sense the latter is believed by Seventh-day Adventists, there are also explanations necessary that show that in another sense, Jesus is making atonement now, in the sanctuary in Heaven. This is often referred to as the final atonement. Even Ellen White referred to it as such. See *Early Writings* page 253, *The Great Controversy* page 480 (this is in the chapter called *Facing Life's record*), twice in *Patriarchs and Prophets* pages 357 -358, and *Spiritual Gifts* (1858) Volume 1 page 161. This is otherwise known as the investigative judgment.

All of this led Walter Martin to ask how we, as a church, accounted for these statements that he believed were not Christian. Leroy Froom answers this question on page 493 of his *Movement of Destiny*. This is where concerning the atonement and the eternal deity of Christ, that latter of which, in effect, concerns the trinity doctrine, he says

“These, as frequently stressed were the two main areas of confusion, occasioned by certain unfortunate statements published by individuals representing their own personal views — not the declared united view of the body.” (LeRoy Froom, ‘*Movement of Destiny*’, page 493, chapter “Deity” and “Atonement” *Attain Destined Place – No. 1*)

Here we have it from our very own denominational publication that unfortunately (as Froom states it), some of our pioneers put regrettable statements into our publications. As Froom also put it, this were just the “personal views” of certain individuals but was “not the declared united view of the body”. As we have seen so many times in previous sections, this was just not true. This is because these non-trinitarian statements, also the statements regarding the final atonement etc, all made during the time of the ministry of Ellen White, were the actual faith’ of the main body of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Froom then went on to say

“These regrettably published expressions, gave rise in turn to a feeling among scholars not of our faith that Adventists were actually an anti-Christian cult holding originally – and doubtless generally – to definitely heretical views”. (*Ibid*)

These “heretical views” Froom says were just the “personal views” of some (see previous quote) and not the views of the church at large. So, according to Froom, it was just some (a few) of the pioneers that made our message unacceptable to other Christians. He says that this few were the ones to blame for us not being accepted as Christians by mainstream Christianity.

Walter Martin was not satisfied with this confession. He asked, because as a denomination we had allowed the printing of these things in our publications, if we had ever put on record the repudiation of these so-called “personal beliefs”. Obviously, because at that time we had not before as such made public these accusations against our pioneers, we had to answer no, we had not made a public denial of their remarks (see *Movement of Destiny* page 483).

After saying that Martin insisted that we would be held responsible for these “personal views”, Froom recorded that Martin had also said that many Christians had accepted these remarks of our pioneers as being the actual teaching of the Seventh-day Adventist Church therefore a disavowal of them was necessary (here Martin was pushing our leadership to deny that these so-called personal views were once the beliefs of the main body of Seventh-day Adventists). This Martin said was necessary because as a denomination we would be “justly held accountable for them” (see *Movement of Destiny* page 483). As Froom said

“Further, they said that many hostile critics thought that such personal expressions really constituted our actual and general early teaching on these cardinal points. That surely called for a disavowal.” (*LeRoy Froom, Movement of Destiny, Significant part played by 1957 Questions on Doctrine, page 483, 1971*)

Froom goes on to report that those who dialogued with Martin put together a statement that was eventually published in *Questions on Doctrine* that repudiated what these few pioneers had taught.

This statement, after making it clear that many of these “personal views” concerned the deity of Christ and His position in the trinity said

“All this has made it desirable and necessary for us to declare our position anew upon the great fundamental teachings of the Christian faith, and to deny every statement for implication that Christ, the second person of the Godhead, was not one with the Father from all eternity, and that his death on the cross was not a full and complete sacrificial atonement. The belief of Seventh-day Adventists on these great truths is clear and emphatic.” (*Questions on Doctrine, chapter, ‘Relationship to past positions, page 31-32*)

Regarding the atonement, this is cleverly worded. This is because it says “sacrificial atonement”. As a sacrifice for sin, Seventh-day Adventists have always taught that the death of Jesus is a complete atonement but they also taught a final atonement.

As far as the coeternity of Christ with the Father is concerned, this is a denial of what was once believed by Seventh-day Adventists. All the time of Ellen White’s ministry it was taught that He was begotten of the Father in eternity therefore He was truly the Son of God. The statement then concluded (and this is what Walter

Martin wanted to see)

“And we feel that we should not be identified with, or stigmatised for, certain limited and faulty concepts held by some, particularly in our formative years.” (*Ibid*)

This time in *Questions on Doctrine*, here again we see a few of our pioneers being stigmatised for the Seventh-day Adventist Church being regarded as an anti-Christian cult. Notice particularly that this statement says that as a denomination, we should not be identified with what these pioneers wrote. Quite an amazing statement isn't it seeing that Ellen White upheld the beliefs of the pioneers as being from God (see section fifteen, section twenty-one, section twenty-two, section twenty-three, section twenty-four and section twenty-nine for details). This though, in the middle of the 1950's, is where we were, as a denomination. We were denying that it was God that had given the pioneers their beliefs. Could this be part and parcel of the omega?

In the preface to his book *The Truth about Seventh-day Adventism*, Walter Martin said that he, whilst still an undergraduate student in 1949, had concluded that Seventh-day Adventists were a cult of Christian extraction but that they held enough error in their teachings to exclude them from the body of Christ. He then said of himself

“He read every major anti-Adventist publication, and was considerably disturbed because quotations from some Adventist books were at variance with statements made by the great majority of Adventist writers. This condition, however, is now being remedied by the Adventist church with a renewed effort toward consistency.” (*Walter Martin, The truth about Seventh-day Adventism, page 9 'Preface'*)

Notice Martin said that he encountered statements in some of our publications that were contradicted in other places. Whilst no details were given, it did say that this situation is being “remedied by the Adventist church”.

Martin then goes on to say that his book was based upon 7 years of research of Seventh-day Adventist materials. He also said that he had held personal interviews with hundreds of Adventist leaders and laymen alike as well as enjoying the cooperation of our church leadership. He even said

“The officials graciously gave whatever information was requested, even when findings did not favor their cause.” (*Ibid*)

He then goes on to say that the information included in his book had been checked and rechecked by those in authority in our church and those in authority outside of it. He then says he drew heavily on *Questions on Doctrine* (as well as other Adventist writers) of which he said

“This definitive work, which presents the true position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, was written to answer questions about their theology and doctrine. Its very title indicates willingness to meet evangelicals halfway, and nowhere is this better illustrated than in the following quotation from the Introduction where, speaking of this writer’s questions their answers, they state:” (*Ibid*)

Martin then quotes *Questions on Doctrine* as saying (see page 8 *Questions on Doctrine* 1957 edition)

“The replies were prepared by a group of recognized leaders in close counsel with Bible teachers, editors and administrators. . . . This was not to be a new statement of faith, but rather an answer to specific questions concerning our faith. It was natural that these answers would come within the framework of the official statement of Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists which appears in the *Church Manual*. In view of this fact, these answers represent the position of our denomination in the area of church doctrine and prophetic interpretation.” (*Ibid*)

He also quoted *Questions on Doctrine* as saying (see page 9 *Questions on Doctrine* 1957 edition)

“Hence this volume can be viewed as truly representative of the faith beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church” (*Ibid*)

Martin drew the conclusion that

“Since the General Conference issued *Questions on Doctrine*, and it is fully empowered to represent Adventist thought, this volume certainly is the primary source upon which to ground an evaluation of Adventist theology” (*Ibid*)

As we have seen and will see again in the next section, not every Seventh-day Adventist agreed with Walter Martin. Some even came to the conclusion that those who had written *Questions on Doctrine* had sold us out to the enemy (see above). Certainly we shall see that although our church published *Questions on Doctrine*, it was never classed as being official. Certainly the “General Conference” did not publish it. Martin believed though that it was “fully empowered to represent Adventist thought”.

The end result

So it was that in the 1950’s as God’s remnant church, we came to the place in our history when the beliefs and teachings of our pioneers, especially regarding our rejection of the trinity doctrine was publicly denied as having been the actual beliefs of the early Seventh-day Adventist Church (see *Questions on Doctrine*, pages 29-32). Just as did Froom 14 years later in his *Movement of Destiny*, the authors of *Questions on Doctrine* (of which Froom was one) said that these had

just been the personal views of some (the few).

Remember here that *Questions on Doctrine* was issued in its thousands, not only to Seventh-day Adventists but also to those outside of our faith. Thus was given the impression that the anti-trinitarian and non-trinitarian remarks of our pioneers were made by just a few dissenters who managed somehow to get their unorthodox views into print. Such was the intended effect of the book *Questions on Doctrine* as was the intent years later of *Movement of Destiny*. *Questions on Doctrine* concluded about the few that had caused our Christian image to be impaired

“This statement should therefore nullify the stock “quotations” that have been circulated against us. We are one with our fellow Christians of denominational groups in the great fundamentals of the faith once delivered to the saints. Our hope in a crucified, risen, ministering, and soon-returning Saviour” (*Questions on Doctrines, page 32, ‘Seventh-day Adventist relationship to past positions*)

Again these “great fundamentals” would have included the doctrine of the trinity as well as the finished atonement at Calvary and the sinless human nature of Christ etc.

We will leave the final quote in this sub-section to Roy Allen Anderson who said in his *Ministry* article concerning Barnhouse and Martin declaring Seventh-day Adventists to be Christian

“Naturally we have been seeking to be understood, and we regret that some have taken this to mean that we have changed our basic beliefs.” (*R. A. Anderson, Ministry, February 1962 ‘Evangelical Inconsistency’*)

Needless to say we had changed our basic beliefs. At least we had changed them from what they were when Ellen White was alive. This is why then, in 1962 when Anderson made this statement, the evangelicals accepted us as being Christian, whereas before we changed our beliefs, we were not acceptable as such to them. This much is blatantly apparent. Anderson then says

“But in no way have we compromised our doctrines.” (*Ibid*)

You the reader will need to decide as to how true is this statement.

Seventh-day Adventists at large and the meetings with the evangelicals

As we shall now see, the testimony of Andreasen was that regarding these meetings that our leadership had with the evangelicals, Seventh-day Adventists at large, including both ministry and laity, knew very little or even nothing about them. This is of course until it was too late to do anything about it. As Andreasen noted in his first letter to the church

“Our members are largely unaware of the conditions existing, and every effort is being made to keep them in ignorance. Orders have been issued to keep everything secret, and it will be noted that even at the late General Conference session (1958) no report was given of our leaders' trafficking with the evangelicals and making alliances with them.” (M. L. Andreassen, 1st letter to the church, 1959 *‘The Incarnation’*)

Such was the Seventh-day Adventism of the 1950's.

In summary

Have we compromised our doctrines? Have we now rejected what Ellen White and the other pioneers once taught? Our leadership seem to think so because as William Johnsson said

“Some Adventists today think, that our beliefs have remained unchanged over the years, or they seek to turn back the clock to some point when we had everything just right. But all attempts to recover such “historic Adventism” fail in view of the facts of our heritage. Adventists beliefs have changed over the years under the impact of present truth. Most startling is the teaching regarding Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord.” (William Johnsson, *Adventist Review* January 6th 1994 Article *‘Present Truth - Walking in God's Light’*, 1994)

The question that must be asked here is “what is our heritage” and “what is present truth”? Should we today be standing loyal to what God revealed to Ellen White as well as the other pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism or should we be supporting the current views of today's Seventh-day Adventist Church? This for many Seventh-day Adventists, because it does involve a question of loyalties, is not an easy question to answer. George Knight, in the *Ministry* magazine in 1991 said

“If a specific date can be given for Adventism's arrival at "adulthood," it may best be seen as 1956, when the denomination had the "right hand of fellowship" extended to it by Donald Grey Barnhouse, editor of *Eternity* and a highly influential fundamentalist leader. The acceptance of that fellowship unfortunately (but predictably) split the Adventist ranks between those who viewed it as a step forward and those who saw it as a "sell-out" to the enemy.” (George Knight, *Ministry*, June 1991, *‘Adventism, institutionalism, and the challenge of secularization’*)

This same author concluded though

“Like it or not, the denomination did reach its adulthood.” (*Ibid*)

One is left to wonder what this “adulthood” is really all about. Certainly we have seen that Seventh-day Adventists today have rejected what the pioneers once believed which Ellen White said herself was the truth, therefore this being the

case, then this “[adulthood](#)” can only be described as an apostasy.

Today, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is saying that the non-trinitarian pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism, which must include Ellen White herself, were wrong about what they taught about God, Christ and the Holy Spirit but this is something that at the end of the day is the responsibility of each individual to decide for themselves.

It is sad that so many Seventh-day Adventists today do not understand their own denominational history but the question must be, when all is said and done, who is to take the blame for it? Is it the church itself or is it the average church member or do they share the blame?

In our next section (fifty-one) we shall be looking at a book that many say sold out Seventh-day Adventism to the devil. This book is *Questions on Doctrine*.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section fifty-one

Questions on Doctrine: – a creedal or a preponderant faith?

Any compilation of the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, particularly one concerning the trinity doctrine, would not be complete without due consideration being given to the book *Questions on Doctrine* (or to give its full title, *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*). This is why this entire section is devoted to this task.

This book had a substantial impact on Seventh-day Adventism. It still has today. We shall see this now.

Seventh-day Adventists and the evangelicals

We noted in the previous section that the middle of the 1950's marked the beginning of a change in relationships between Seventh-day Adventists and the evangelicals. This was when, after questioning some of the leaders of our church concerning our faith (beliefs), also after examining much of our major literature concerning the same, the well respected Walter Martin declared to the Christian world that we were truly Christian.

As we shall see later, this declaration had quite an effect on non-Seventh-day Adventists. It also had a profound effect on Seventh-day Adventists, although not everyone saw it in exactly the same way as did Walter Martin. It was from this dialogue with the evangelicals that emerged the book we generally refer to as *Questions on Doctrine*. This is the book that is said to contain the questions that Martin asked of our leadership. It also contains the answers that he was given by our leadership.

It would appear that to many of the Seventh-day Adventist leadership (not all), this book was regarded as an evangelistic tool that like our changed relationship with the evangelicals, was probably viewed as a step forward in our mission to promulgate and advance the three angels messages of Revelation 14. Some probably reasoned that the eradication of the term cult that other denominations for decades had so readily applied to Seventh-day Adventists would make this task considerably easier. This I believe was probably one of the reasons for adopting the trinity doctrine, but that is a matter of personal opinion.

In the chapter where Fromm deals with the questions that Martin asked of our leadership, also where he comments profusely on the resultant *Questions on*

Doctrine (a book that he helped to produce) he said

“The question of the eternal pre-existence and complete Deity of Christ, as the Second Person of the Eternal Godhead, or Trinity, had been the first of the great stumbling blocks in Evangelical circles to recognizing Adventists to be fellow Christians.” (*LeRoy Froom, Movement of Destiny page 482,, ‘Significant part played by 1957 Questions on Doctrine’, 1971’*)

Froom is stating quite clearly here that the main stumbling block between the evangelicals and us was our beliefs concerning the deity of Christ. This was because by Seventh-day Adventists, not only was Christ depicted as the begotten Son of God but also the trinity doctrine was rejected. Conversely, the evangelicals were trinitarians therefore believed in the coeternity of Christ with the Father. As we have noted before, if Christ is not said to be part of the trinity God, then the trinitarians say His deity is not correctly expressed.

Trinitarians regard non-trinitarians as falling short of the Christian faith. In other words, trinitarians often refuse to accept as Christians those who are not trinitarians. This of course is a traditional belief and not one that is biblical. It had its beginnings from the initial bringing in of the trinity doctrine (see section nine).

As we have noted previously, a Bible only way to depict Christ must be non-trinitarian. This is because nowhere in Scripture is the trinity doctrine expressed. It is only an assumed doctrine (see section four). Notice that Froom says that the trinity aspect was “the first of the great stumbling blocks”. This tells us that it was not the only major one. He then added

“And along with this was the inseparable issue of the personality of the Holy Spirit, as the Third Person of the Eternal Godhead, or Trinity.” (*Ibid*)

Again we see the trinity doctrine being the everything to other denominations. As held by the evangelicals, this teaching eventually came to be accepted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Today it appears that it has become absolutely everything with us. Our ‘official views of the Holy Spirit, which were once decidedly non-trinitarian (see section thirty-one, section thirty-two, section thirty-three, section thirty-four and section forty-four), are now in line with the belief of the evangelicals. Froom also noted in his *Movement of Destiny*

“Above all, its clear declarations, in *Questions on Doctrine*, on the eternal pre-existence and complete Deity of Christ, His sinless nature and life during the Incarnation, and the transcendent Act of Atonement consummated on the Cross, are the determining factors, many non-Adventist scholars frankly tell us, that have caused us to be recognised as truly Christian believers – and thus to consider our other beliefs without the well-nigh insurmountable barrier of prejudice.” (*Ibid page 492’*)

As can be seen from the above two statements, this “insurmountable barrier of

prejudice” between us and other Christians was not, as some have believed, only to do with our distinctive beliefs, the latter meaning the Sabbath, the state of the dead, the spirit of prophecy and the investigative judgement etc, but was in fact with respect to our beliefs concerning the trinity doctrine, which of course involves the deity of Christ. To put it another way, Froom was saying that now the other denominations could see that we were in harmony with them on the very basics of Christianity (including the trinity, the deity of Christ and the atonement etc), this would remove the prejudice against us and in the process would make it easier for us to evangelise them with “our other beliefs” (our unpopular distinctive doctrines). As has been said previously, from the very start of this push to bring in the trinity doctrine, this could have been the very intention. Froom concluded concerning the non-Seventh-day Adventist scholars

“They accept *Questions on Doctrine* as representative and reliable, and trustworthy for citation. That was the hope and purpose all though its preparation.” (*Ibid*)

As we shall see later, not every Seventh-day Adventist regarded *Questions on Doctrine* this way. Even amongst the ministry some regarded it as selling us out to the enemy. As it was, the non-Adventists did not know any different. They just regarded it as a genuine reflection of what Seventh-day Adventists believed, also their history. Froom then adds (remember this was now 1971, 14 years after the publication of *Questions on Doctrine*)

“And that has been realized. Its influence is steadily on the increase, as continuing letters and citations attest.” (*Ibid*)

Speaking from a personal perspective, I would say that in all of this, if our leadership had not sincerely believed that God was leading them to have these meetings with the evangelicals and from this produce *Questions on Doctrine*, I am sure that they would never have done these things. The problem is though, just as it always has been, sincerity of belief does not make something correct. We know this because many Christians sincerely believe that Sunday-keeping is in God’s order of things but this sincerity does not make this teaching correct. Just as Ellen White also once said of the apostle Paul and his persecution of the early Christians

“Paul verily thought that he was doing God service when he was persecuting the followers of Christ and putting them to death. He was sincere in his belief; but sincerity will not make error truth, nor truth error.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 5th January 1886, ‘Rejection of Light’*)

Doing something (regardless of what it is) and sincerely believing that God’s wants us to do it is not the ultimate proof that it is His ordained will. This is something of which we should be constantly aware. The big doubt here therefore is whether God actually wanted Seventh-day Adventists to have this dialogue/alliance with the evangelicals. You the reader will need to make up your

own mind on this one. Many evangelicals were very upset with Walter Martin's conclusions. They were even more upset that he had made them public knowledge.

On account of Martin's declaration, thousands withdrew their subscription to the *Eternity* magazine of which Martin was one of its major contributors. This was because, even though Martin had concluded and professed that we as Seventh-day Adventists were Christian, they, the readers of *Eternity*, still regarded us as a non-Christian cult. These same evangelicals must have reasoned that although our denomination may hold to what was then regarded as the basic fundamentals of Christianity (meaning the trinity, salvation by grace, the sinless nature of Christ and the finished atonement at Calvary etc), our distinctive doctrines (meaning the Sabbath, the investigative judgement, the state of the dead and the writings of Ellen White etc) were still non-Christian. In *Crosscurrents in Adventist theology*, E. C. Webster wrote

“The appearance of *Questions on Doctrine* in 1957 was well-received by the non-Adventist world and indicated what a wealth of theological common ground actually exists between Adventists and the rest of the Christian world. This has often been lost sight of as points of variance have been emphasized.” (E. C. Webster, *Crosscurrents in Adventist Christology, Chapter 1, Historical perspective and Adventist orientation*)

What about Seventh-day Adventists though? What was their reaction to our leadership's dialogue with the evangelicals and how did they regard *Questions on Doctrine*? We shall see later that through the testimony of a minister named M. L. Andreasen, our denomination at large, including the ministry, knew very little if anything about these meetings but first we need to consider the book itself.

Questions on Doctrine – another set of problems.

The publication of *Question on Doctrine* brought about its own set of difficulties and problems. When commenting on the new and revised (annotated) version (published 2003), Woodrow Whidden noted in the Ministry magazine

“Andrews University Press recently released a new edition of the groundbreaking 1957 book, *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*. While the original turned out to be a watershed factor when it came to Seventh-day Adventist/ Evangelical relations, it also proved to be one of the most controversial publishing events in the history of Adventism.” (Woodrow Whidden, *Ministry*, August 2003, page 14, ‘*Questions on Doctrine: Then and now*’)

Here we can see it said that the original *Questions on Doctrine* (1957) was a “groundbreaking” book as well as a “watershed factor” (a determining event in the beginning of a new era) as regards to what is termed “Seventh-day Adventist/ Evangelical relations”. As was noted in the previous section, some

Seventh-day Adventists regarded *Questions on Doctrine* (when it was first published in 1957) as selling us out to the enemy. Some still reason the same today. We shall come back to this thought later. Initially, no one person actually took the responsibility for the production of this book. The title page simply says

“Prepared by a Representative Group of Seventh-day Adventist Leaders, Bible Teachers, and Editors” (*Title page, ‘Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine’, 1957*)

LeRoy Froom, then General Conference Field Secretary, did admit in his *Movement of Destiny* that he was one of its authors (see pages 480-1) whilst the others it is said were T. E. Unruh (then president of East Pennsylvania Conference), Roy A. Anderson, (then ministerial secretary and editor of *Ministry*) and W. E. Reed (then General Conference Field Secretary). In what seems a tone of triumph regarding *Questions on Doctrine*, LeRoy Froom says in *Movement of Destiny*

“The molding influence of “Questions on Doctrine” upon non-Adventist scholars – especially preachers and teachers, Protestant and Catholic – has been more widespread and profound than many have realized. This writer and other members of the Questions on Doctrine team – and various men on the large authorizing committee – have been the recipients of periodic letters from non-Adventist scholars ever since its publication in 1957” (*LeRoy Froom ‘Movement of Destiny’, pages 488-489, chapter ‘Questions on Doctrine’*)

As can be seen, *Questions on Doctrine* was well and truly distributed, especially amongst non-Seventh-day Adventists. Froom does not relate though what these letters actually said that he and others received concerning this book (whether they are of praise or condemnation) but notice his emphasis on “non-Adventist scholars”. Froom then added

“Many thousands of copies have been placed with clergymen and theology teachers not of our faith – in a few instances thousands in a single conference. And they have had their wholesome effect. Its total circulation by 1970 had exceeded 138,000.” (*Ibid*)

The whole emphasis is again on how *Questions on Doctrine* affected those who were not Seventh-day Adventists. Notice the number of copies that Froom said went to those who were “clergymen and theology teachers not of our faith”. He said it was “Many thousands”. Notice too how many copies were in circulation in 1970. This was the year before *Movement of Destiny* was published. Froom also said on page 492 of the same publication

“Questions on Doctrine was (by 1965) in several thousand seminary, university, college, and public libraries. Many have been placed overseas. This is a remarkable record for only a decade of distribution” (*Ibid page*)

Who can argue with Froom's conclusion? This distribution really was "remarkable".

Again we see Froom's emphasis on the distribution of *Questions on Doctrine*, especially to the public in general (non-Seventh-day Adventists especially) over a short period of time. This is quite a statement because as we shall see later, this very same book flatly denied that the non-trinitarianism of our pioneers was the actual teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (as a corporate body) but said instead, just as Froom did later in his *Movement of Destiny*, that it was just the view of the minority (of the few).

So it was that through this book, a wrong concept of our history was not only circulated amongst non-Seventh-day Adventists but also amongst our own members.

Observations from Questions on Doctrine

Section No. 1 in the original *Questions on Doctrine* (1957) is called *Preliminary questions*'. It is divided into three sub-sections.

The first sub-section deals with the beliefs that our church leadership said that we then, as a denomination, shared with "conservative Christians" (see below). These beliefs of course included the trinity confession, the belief that Jesus is very God and has existed with the Father from all eternity, also the personhood of the Holy Spirit etc. All of the beliefs stated in this section come under the heading

"In Common With Conservative Christians and the Historic Protestant Creeds, We Believe - " (*Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine, page 21, 'Preliminary questions', 1957*).

After citing these beliefs (a total of 19), there is then listed the beliefs that are sometimes controverted in Christian circles. These are beliefs concerning such as the freedom of the will, the Ten Commandments, the mode of baptism and the state of the dead etc whilst the third section lists our distinctive doctrines. The latter were listed as the sanctuary, the investigative judgement, the spirit of prophecy writings, the seal of God and the three angel's messages.

Continuing on in the chapter, we find that the second sub-section deals with our belief concerning the Holy Scriptures whilst the third sub-section carries the title "Seventh-day Adventist Relationship to Past Positions". It is with regards to this latter-named sub-section that we shall now focus our attention because this is integral to our study of Seventh-day Adventist history.

On page 29, two very important questions are asked. The first is

“Have Seventh-day Adventists changed from some of the positions advocated by certain adherents of earlier years, from whom citations are still currently circulated? (*Questions on Doctrine*, 1957, page 29, ‘*Seventh-day Adventist relationship to past positions*’)

Here it is being implied that in the 1950’s, certain beliefs were being circulated (one would assume in our publications), that revealed the old theology of Seventh-day Adventism. It is important to remember here that the questions in *Questions on Doctrine* are the ones that Martin had asked our leadership. This question here alluded to certain quotations, from our pioneers, which were still then (in the 1950’s) in circulation. It does not take much imagination to believe that such citations concerned the once non-trinitarianism of Seventh-day Adventism (we shall see later that these questions had much to do with the personalities of the Godhead, i.e. the trinity). Martin was asking if we had changed from these views. Now note the second question and note it well.

“Do such citations misrepresent the present teachings of Adventist leadership?” (*Ibid*)

I would ask you to take particular note of this question because this is absolutely crucial to our understanding of what was then taking place. This was not only in this dialogue with the evangelicals but also with the eventual publication of *Questions on Doctrine*.

This question asks if citations from “certain adherents of earlier years” (with reference to certain beliefs of our pioneers that some were still citing) misrepresented what was then, in the mid-1950’s the “teachings of Adventist leadership”. Note that the question does not ask whether these citations misrepresent what were then the beliefs held by our denomination at large (the preponderant faith of Seventh-day Adventists) but by our leadership.

This really is very important because as we shall see later, Walter Martin (the one who was putting these questions to our leadership) said quite plainly that he was not interested in the beliefs of either the laity or the ministry at large but was only interested in their beliefs. This is why even today there are those who believe that the answers given in this book to the questions that Martin asked was not the preponderant belief (majority belief) of Seventh-day Adventists but was rather the views of just a few of our then leadership.

In answer to this question, the authors of *Questions on Doctrine* explain that at our very beginnings, our pioneers had come out from various faiths therefore they all had different views on certain subjects (which in one sense is a fair statement to make).

After saying that “relatively little attention” was given to the “merits” of Arminianism (freedom of the will) as compared with Calvinism (limited salvation), the authors said (I would ask you to please read this very carefully)

“Nor did they, at first, seek to define the nature of the Godhead, or the problems of Christology, involving the deity of Christ and His nature during the incarnation: the personality and deity of the Holy Spirit: the nature, scope and completeness of the atonement: the relationship of law or grace or the fullness of the doctrine of righteousness by faith: and the like.” (*Ibid*, page 30)

After reading this list though (if this statement is believed), one is left to wonder what it was that the pioneers were “at first” concerned about. I say this because regarding basic Christian doctrine, there does not seem to be very much left that is not covered in this list. Read it again and you will see what I mean. Note the final words in this statement “and the like”. One is left to wonder what this open-ended phrase (in the minds of the authors), actually embraced seeing that the supposed fundamental basics of Christianity had already been detailed.

To say the very least, the words “at first” are indeed very ambiguous and just like the phrase “and the like” is very open-ended. This is because “at first” could cover any length of time whilst “and the like” could refer to anything that the imagination conjures up. All that can be done here is that you the reader, after having read in the previous sections concerning what the pioneers did believe, will need to make up your own mind as to what really did concern them. I am sure that when this is done, this “at first” in your mind will become an extremely short length of time.

In other words, I am saying, in a very short space of time, especially through the revelations given by God through the spirit of prophecy, our pioneers came to an agreed consensus of beliefs on most things, particularly their beliefs regarding God and Christ. Note that much of that previously quoted list of beliefs concerned the trinity. In his term paper, referring to the time period leading up to the death (1881) of James White, the husband of Ellen White, Russell Holt said

“A survey of other Adventist writers during these years reveals, that to a man, they rejected the trinity, yet, with equal unanimity they upheld the divinity of Christ. To reject the trinity is not necessarily to strip the Saviour of His divinity. Indeed, certain Adventist writers felt that it was the trinitarians who filled the role of degrading Christ’s divine nature.” (*Russell Holt, “The doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination: Its rejection and acceptance” 1969*)

Through to the death of James White, according to the studies of Russell Holt, our pioneers were in total unanimity in their beliefs about God and Christ. In other words, there was no division at all (with this I would agree). They all believed (again according to Holt) that it was “the trinitarians who filled the role of degrading Christ’s divine nature.” Can this have been said more clearly? Note that this study was carried out in 1969, 12 years after *Questions on Doctrine* was published and 2 years before the publication of *Movement of Destiny*. Returning our thoughts to *Questions on Doctrine*, immediately following this ambiguity

there is another very ambiguous and open-ended statement. This one says

“But with the passage of years the early diversity of view on certain doctrines gradually gave way to unity of view” (*Questions on Doctrine, 1957, page 30, ‘Seventh-day Adventist relationship to past positions’*)

One is left to wonder here what is meant here by the phrase “passage of years”. What length of time is this meant to convey to the reader? We also need to ask what is meant by “early diversity”. These questions are no more answerable than what is meant by “certain doctrines”. This entire statement leaves the reader completely up in the air about almost everything. The authors of *Questions on Doctrine* continue

“Clear and sound positions were then taken by the great majority in such doctrines as the Godhead, the deity and eternal pre-existence of Christ, and the personality of the Holy Spirit. Clear-cut views were established on righteousness by faith, the true relationship of law and grace, and on the death of Christ as the complete sacrificial atonement for sin.” (*Ibid*)

So when was “then”? Just as the words “at first” do not convey anything about what length of time they allude to, so too the words “were then” are just as ambiguous. In other words, it is nigh impossible for the reader of *Questions on Doctrine* to determine what length of time is covered between the terms “at first” and “were then” but it is was bound to be the equivalent of the unspecified time period of “the passage of years”.

To the reader of *Questions on Doctrine*, all this would all convey the idea that although for a period of unspecified time (as a denomination) we were divided on various (unspecified) subjects, eventually (an unspecified length of time), we came to a unity on them. As the church then in 1957 (when *Questions on Doctrine* was published) professed a belief in both the trinity doctrine as well as its associated beliefs, it makes it look as though we came from total diversity on this issue to the unity that we had then in 1957, which of course is a total misrepresentation of our history.

This is because as a body of people (Seventh-day Adventists), also with regards to our beliefs concerning the Godhead (our preponderant belief regarding God, Christ and the Holy Spirit), our denomination, all during the time of Ellen White’s ministry (1844 - 1915), was completely united on these subjects. This though, as we have seen so many times previous, was a non-trinitarian belief (faith). This is one of the reasons, probably the main one, why mainstream Christianity (the trinitarians) regarded us as a cult (see above where Froom says that this was the first of the major stumbling blocks)

In other words, we did not come from diversity to unity on the subject of the Godhead but from unity (on non-trinitarianism) to unity (on trinitarianism) with diversity in between. This ‘in between’ was when the trinity doctrine was being

inculcated into Seventh-day Adventism. This is the truth of our history. We actually changed our beliefs (our denominational faith) from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism with diversity in between because of the changeover. This is the truth concerning what happened over the “[passage of years](#)”. We certainly did not come from diversity to unity.

Much I am sure to the surprise of many, it would be totally impossible to refer to Ellen White as a trinitarian. She was in fact as much a non-trinitarian as was all the other pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism (see section forty).

Our denominational unity regarding non-trinitarianism is not mentioned in *Questions on Doctrine*. This is even though for decades after Ellen White had died (1915) this very same faith, meaning non-trinitarianism, was still the preponderant belief of Seventh-day Adventists. In other words, this non-trinitarianism was not, as we have seen, the localised faith of a minority (just a few) but the faith of Seventh-day Adventists throughout the world. This was even for decades after Ellen White had died. This is what led Arthur White (Ellen White’s grandson) when Froom was gathering information for his *Movement of Destiny*, to tell him (Froom) that it must be conceded that our pioneers were not trinitarian. As Merlin Burt in his research paper put it

“Records show that Froom for many years was active in seeking an understanding of the early period. He wrote letters during the 1930’s and 1940’s to various ones asking for their recollections. Arthur White, secretary of the Ellen G White estate, even tried in 1955 to correct Froom’s position writing “I think that we will have to concede that our early workers were not trinitarians”. (*Merlin Burt’s research paper, ‘Demise of Semi-Arianism and anti-trinitarianism in Adventist Theology, 1888-1957’, page 46, December 1996*)

As we have mentioned previously, Froom wanted to portray our history in a light that is misrepresentative of the facts. He conveyed the idea that the majority of our pioneers were trinitarian when in fact they were all non-trinitarian. As Woodrow Whidden (co-author of the recent Seventh-day Adventist publication *The Trinity*) once wrote concerning our past non-trinitarianism

“Some, such as prominent Adventist historian/apologist Leroy Edwin Froom, have been so embarrassed that they have even sought to distort the Arian historical record by making it appear that such views were something like an “encapsulated cancer” -- certainly there, but not very widespread” (*Woodrow Whidden, a paper presented to The Tenth Oxford, MI [USA] Institute of Methodist Theol. Studies Working Group titled ‘Arianism, Adventism and Methodism: The healing of Trinitarian Teaching and Soteriology*)

Froom was co-author of *Questions on Doctrine*. In this book, he and the other authors painted no different a picture than was to be portrayed later in *Movement*

of *Destiny*. This we know because following on from the last statement that we quoted from *Questions on Doctrine* (re the “Godhead, the deity and eternal pre-existence of Christ, and the personality of the Holy Spirit”) it said

“A few however, held to some of their former views. And at times these ideas got into print” (*Questions on Doctrine, 1957, page 30, ‘Seventh-day Adventist relationship to past positions’*)

As there is no specific time period mentioned here and because these “former views” are not specifically detailed, this statement, just as was the one noted above in *Questions on Doctrine*, is very ambiguous. In other words the reader of this book is left with the allusion that it was only the “few” that were out of step with the main body of Seventh-day Adventism. This would mean that it was only the few that were out of step with mainstream Christianity.

In the eyes of the reader of *Questions on Doctrine*, this latter statement would tend to justify the existence in our publications of certain declarations of faith that were not then, in 1957, in accord with the beliefs (trinitarianism) of Seventh-day Adventists. In other words, only an in-depth research of our publications would reveal whether any belief, non-trinitarianism or trinitarianism, was the one held by the majority. Who would undertake such a task though except someone who was devoted to doing so? *Questions on Doctrine* continued

“However, for decades now the church has been practically at one on the basic truths of the Christian faith” (*Ibid, pages 30-31*)

This again is a very open-ended statement. It is also one that is replete with both ambiguity and silence, thus leading, if one is ignorant of the facts, to a misunderstanding of our history. I say this because what is meant by “for decades now” and “basic truths”? Again the former is an unspecified length of time, meaning that it could be twenty or even ninety years whilst the latter could be any teachings.

As we have noted throughout these studies, history attests that right through to the death of Ellen White, our denomination at large was in unity regarding what they believed concerning the Godhead. This does not mean that every single Seventh-day Adventist believed exactly the same way regarding absolutely everything about God, Christ and the Holy Spirit because as with any denomination, this would be a total impossibility.

Seventh-day Adventists were at one regarding their non-trinitarian faith and they were especially at one with the things that God had revealed through Ellen White. It was only after she died (1915) that discord openly broke out amongst our ranks and as we have seen in previous sections, all this had to do with our non-trinitarian faith (particularly a begotten Christ). By the middle of the 1950’s, this diversity became unity but unlike during the time of the pioneers when this unity was regarding non-trinitarianism (the rejection of the precepts of the trinity

doctrine), it was now unity on trinitarianism.

Some may question this last statement but it must be accepted that most Seventh-day Adventists, even though they may not understand what truly constitutes trinitarianism, do profess to be trinitarian. This is what I am saying here. Notice that this last statement from *Questions on Doctrine* said “**practically at one**”. This was probably because the authors realised that even in 1957 when *Questions on Doctrine* was first published, there were still those who were holding on to a non-trinitarian faith (see section forty-eight).

So why was no denominational statement made to this effect? Why was there only silence about it? *Questions on Doctrine* says

“The very fact that our positions were now clarified seemed to us to be sufficient. Our teachings, we felt, were clear. And no particular statement of change from those earlier ideas appeared necessary.” (*Ibid*)

Here we have the reason from our leadership as to why no statement came from the church saying that our beliefs, from earlier times, had clarified to almost total unity on a trinitarian view of the Godhead. The same authors then conclude regarding our past faith

“But the charges and attacks have persisted. Some continue to gather up quotations from some of our earlier literature long since out of date, and print. Certain statements are cited, often wrested out of context, which give a totally distorted picture of the beliefs and teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church today” (*Ibid*)

Here we have the admittance that what we had said in our “**earlier literature**” was far different than what was said in our literature then in 1957. Notice it said “**long since out of date, and print**”. This would include of course our past non-trinitarian literature. Here we have our leadership saying that whatever these “**quotations**” were (from our pioneers) they were not now, in 1957, the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists (or perhaps better said, not the beliefs of some of the leadership of Seventh-day Adventism). In defence of the so called few managing somehow to getting their peculiar views into print, *Questions on Doctrine* said

“It would be strange indeed if from some Adventist writer there did not appear an occasional statement that was out of line with the consensus of Seventh-day Adventist belief. Most religious bodies face this problem and embarrassment from time to time” (*Ibid*)

Whilst this statement in itself is very true, if it is levelled at the non-trinitarianism of our pioneers then to say that it was only “**an occasional statement**” is far from being true. Our publications were totally replete with non-trinitarianism, at least whilst Ellen White was alive (see section twenty).

As we have repeatedly said, non-trinitarianism, all the time that Ellen White was alive, was the preponderant faith of Seventh-day Adventism and as we know today, all the other denominations knew it. This is one of the reasons why they referred to us as being a non-Christian cult. It is also why they believed that we did not believe in the complete divinity of Christ (see section twenty-two). This full divinity of Christ, the trinitarians believe, is only possible by depicting Christ as in the trinity doctrine.

It is evident that this latter statement from *Questions on Doctrine* is aimed at the pioneer's non-trinitarianism. This is clearly evident because of the words of the next paragraph. They say

“All this has made it desirable and necessary for us to declare our position anew upon the great fundamental teachings of the Christian faith, and to deny every statement for implication that Christ, the second person of the Godhead, was not one with the Father from all eternity, and that his death on the cross was not a full and complete sacrificial atonement. The belief of Seventh-day Adventists on these great truths is clear and emphatic. And we feel that we should not be identified with, or stigmatised for, certain limited and faulty concepts held by some, particularly in our formative years.”
(*Questions on Doctrine*, chapter, ‘Relationship to past positions, page 31-32’)

These “certain limited and faulty concepts held by some”, which later in Froom's *Movement of Destiny* became the beliefs of the few, were once the predominant belief of Seventh-day Adventists.

These remarks are to do with the once non-trinitarianism of Seventh-day Adventism, also the belief of the investigative judgement. The former was with respect to the belief that Christ was begotten of the Father in eternity whilst the latter was with respect to the belief that Christ was making atonement now in the heavenly sanctuary. Both of these beliefs were anathema to the evangelicals. Their belief is that Christ is coeternal with the Father, also that the atonement was complete at Calvary. Whilst the latter is true as far as the sacrifice of Christ is concerned, He is, for God's people, making atonement now in the investigative judgment.

We know today that it was not just the misguided few that believed and said these things but was in fact the faith of the church as a whole. So it was that the book *Questions on Doctrine*, issued in its thousands to Seventh-day Adventists and non-Seventh-day Adventist alike (mainly non-Adventist scholars), misrepresented our past history. This misrepresentation was later duplicated in *Movement of Destiny* (see section fifty-one for details). The purposes of *Questions on Doctrine* were clearly delineated in one single statement made by Alden Thompson. This is when in 2004 he said

“As a result of extensive dialogue in the 1950s between leading

Evangelicals and key Adventist leaders, Adventists published *Questions on Doctrine* (1957), seeking, among other things, to demonstrate to the larger Christian world on biblical grounds that we are indeed part of Christianity proper and not a cultic deviation.” (Alden Thompson, *Ministry* Feb 2004, page 30, ‘Response to Dale Ratzlaff’)

This then was the said purpose of *Questions on Doctrine*. It was to show the rest of the Christian world (meaning, one would assume, all those Christians who were still part of the Babylon of Bible prophecy) that we were “part of Christianity proper and not a cultic deviation”. This of course would mean to say that we were part of what Seventh-day Adventists once believed and taught was the Babylon of Bible prophecy. This is quite a confession to make. It is indeed quite a startling realisation. Concerning the way that many non-Adventist scholars regarded *Questions on Doctrine*, LeRoy Froom said in his *Movement of Destiny*

“They accept *Questions on Doctrine* as representative and reliable, and trustworthy for citation. That was the hope and purpose all though its preparation” (LeRoy Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, page 492, ‘Questions on Doctrine’)

As we have seen, this book’s primary purpose was to put us in a good light with the evangelicals. It was also meant to be a book from which non-Seventh-day Adventists could quote to show what was supposed to be, according to our leadership, the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. What though about Seventh-day Adventists in general? What did this book accomplish for them?

Questions on Doctrine - a divisive and creedal book

Rather than unite Seventh-day Adventists, *Questions on Doctrine* did exactly the opposite. It really did prove to be very divisive. This was because, as has been said before, some Seventh-day Adventists, even those of the experienced ministry, regarded this book as selling us out to the enemy. That this book had this particular effect on Seventh-day Adventists was duly recognised, not only by those within our denomination, but also by those without. As George Knight said when he wrote in 1994 about the progression of Adventist theology between 1844 and 1944

“Then in 1960 Zondervan Publishing House released Walter Martin's *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism*. In the book's foreword Barnhouse indicated that a major split in Adventist ranks had arisen over *Questions on Doctrine* and evangelical recognition.” (George Knight, *Ministry*, August 1994 page 13, ‘Adventist theology 1844 to 1994’)

Here we can see that according to George Knight, Donald Barnhouse, the editor of the magazine *Eternity*, recognised that there had been a “major split” amongst Seventh-day Adventists, not only over *Questions on Doctrine* itself but also over “evangelical recognition”. According to this reasoning, not all Seventh-day Adventists appreciated either the book or this type of recognition. From a

personal perspective, I did not find this even implied in this forward to Walter Martin's book. What I did find is that there was, as Barnhouse put, it "a storm of protest" from the evangelicals (we shall look at this quote later).

Possibly, the edition of Walter Martin's book that I have read is a different edition to the one read by George Knight. Perhaps the *Forward* read by him was different.

Ask yourself this question. Why should a denominational book on our doctrines, if it did correctly portray the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists as a whole (the majority or preponderant belief), cause "a major split in Adventist ranks"? Does this make sense? This is something else we shall return our thoughts to later. Note for now that George Knight then went on to say

"He [Barnhouse] went on to write that "only.., those Seventh-day Adventists who follow the Lord in the same way as their leaders who have interpreted for us the doctrinal position of their church are to be considered true members of the body of Christ." (*Ibid*)

Without a doubt, this latter sentence is creedal reasoning. What I mean by this is that in the eyes of the evangelicals, particularly Walter Martin and Donald Barnhouse, an acknowledgement of the beliefs as stipulated by our church leadership was what now determined whether a person was a Christian or not. Note the words well. The only people who were to be considered to be "true members of the body of Christ" were those who accepted the doctrines as they were "interpreted" by the "leaders" of our church. These doctrines included of course, what was believed by the leadership regarding God, Christ and the Holy Spirit meaning trinitarianism. It is no wonder therefore that George Knight then wrote

"At that point the stage had been set by both Adventist insiders and outsiders for a split in Adventisms' theological ranks." (*Ibid*)

In the same *Forward* to Walter Martin's book, *The truth about Seventh-day Adventism*, Donald Barnhouse wrote

"As the result of our studies of Seventh-day Adventism, Walter Martin and I reached the conclusion that Seventh-day Adventists are a truly Christian group, rather than an antichristian cult. When we published our conclusion in *Eternity Magazine* (September 1956), we were greeted by a storm of protest from people who had not had our opportunity to consider the evidence." (*Donald Barnhouse, The truth about Seventh-day Adventism, 'Forward', page 7*)

He then said

"Let it be understood that we made only one claim; i.e., *that those Seventh-*

day Adventists who follow the Lord in the same way as their leaders who have interpreted for us the doctrinal position of their church, are to be considered true members of the body of Christ.”(Ibid)

Here again we come back to the thought that the evangelicals only recognised as Christians those who believed as the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church believed. Barnhouse then added in clarification of what he had previously said

“We did not, and do not, accept some of their theological positions which we consider to be extravagant, or others which we consider to be non-biblical.” (Ibid)

These “theological positions” that Barnhouse said that he and Martin did not accept would have been our distinctive beliefs. These were such as the Sabbath, the investigative judgement, the spirit of prophecy writings and the state of the dead etc.

Barnhouse then went on to say that he and Martin kept Sunday in honour of the resurrection. He also explained how they believed in the eternal existence of the soul and that after death, people are still conscious. He also said that he believed that the investigative judgment had no basis whatsoever in Scripture and that it was just promulgated as a means of “softening the harsh blow” of the great disappointment of 1844. He apparently did not have very much time for what we believe to be the distinctiveness of our God-given faith (the three angel’s messages of Revelation 14) yet here we were in the middle of the 1950’s seeking from them the right to be termed Christian. What a deplorable situation for God’s remnant people to find themselves in. Barnhouse then added concerning Martin’s book

“Since leaders of Adventism agree that this book fairly present their theological position, this work is a milestone in Christian apologetics; for, during this study, brethren talked and prayed together assessed each other’s position and agreed to disagree while still obeying the Lord’s command to love one another.” (Ibid)

In conclusion Barnhouse said

“In the present context, I am sure that Adventist leaders will not take it amiss if I express the hope that Mr. Martin’s incisive refutation of Adventist doctrinal differences will keep wavering souls from embracing those errors! And they probably hope that their volume will have a corresponding effect!” (Ibid)

To put this in summary fashion, Barnhouse was saying he hoped that Walter Martin’s book would stop people accepting the peculiar (distinctive) doctrines taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church (“errors” as Barnhouse calls them).

As has been said previously, these doctrines were such as the Sabbath, the state of the dead, the sanctuary teaching (which includes the investigative judgement) and the spirit of prophecy writings etc. These of course are all the teachings that make Seventh-day Adventism just what it is and is in effect, an integral part of the message that God has given to the world in these last days. Here, both Barnhouse and Martin were rejecting them as not being biblical. Note that Barnhouse also says that conversely, Seventh-day Adventist leaders will probably hope that “[their volume](#)” (*Questions on Doctrine*) would have a winning effect. George Knight also said in his *Ministry* article (as quoted from above)

“A new crisis and theological alignment erupted with the 1956 publication of Donald Grey Barnhouse's *Eternity* magazine article entitled "Are Seventh-day Adventists Christians?" ([George Knight, Ministry, August 1994 page 13, 'Adventist theology 1844 to 1994'](#))

Note that this *Eternity* article was published the year before *Questions on Doctrine*. George Knight also said

“Meanwhile, the denomination, under the influence of Froom, Anderson, and W. E. Read, published *Questions on Doctrine*, a book that fanned the flames of the developing controversy.” (*Ibid*)

George Knight admits that with the publication of both the *Eternity* article and the book *Questions on Doctrine*, a “[new crisis](#)” developed within the ranks of Seventh-day Adventism. It should go without saying that if what the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church had written in this book had really been the preponderant beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists (meaning the established faith and reasoning of the body of our church, also the truth concerning our history) then there would have been no major crisis at all. This much is only too obvious. To put it another way again, why should there have been a crisis in our church if what was written in *Questions on Doctrine* was the majority belief of Seventh-day Adventists? We know therefore that what was written was not the majority belief therefore this was why George Knight said that with the publication of this book, “[theological alignment erupted](#)”.

Note too that George Knight said that *Questions on Doctrine* “[fanned the flames of the developing controversy](#)”. There was already, when this book was first published (1957), a controversy taking place within Seventh-day Adventism. This must have been regarding these talks with the evangelicals although our church at large was not made aware that they were going to take place. We shall come back to this thought later. As we noted in the previous section concerning Martin's request to know our official position regarding our beliefs

“Then Walter Martin, a researcher who was preparing a book on our church, pushed us for more official and precise theological statements. He recognized that our theology was dynamic and had been changing over the years; and so, for the sake of accuracy, he wanted us to make up our

minds. He was not interested in the "consensus" view in the field, only in the presently held beliefs of church leadership" (*James L. Londis, Ministry, August 1982 'Thinkers versus doers'*)

Note the latter sentence very well. Londis is saying that Walter Martin was not interested in what was believed by the vast majority of the laity and ministry, meaning that which would constitute the preponderant or majority faith of Seventh-day Adventists, but wanted a "more official" view. Londis did conclude though

"For the first time in recent memory, the issue of who would decide Adventist theology had to be addressed. Walter Martin wanted "official" answers." (*Ibid*)

This was the major issue. Who was it that was going to decide what Seventh-day Adventists believed? Was it the church leadership or the church as a whole? As far as Walter Martin and the church leadership (the authors of *Questions on Doctrine*) were concerned, it was the church leadership.

As we also noted in the previous section, it was the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church who were going to dictate what Seventh-day Adventists believed, even if its ministry or lay people did not agree with it. Such then indeed was 1950's Seventh-day Adventism. It had now become dictatorial (creedal even) in its manner. This was so much different than what it had been during the time of the pioneers when a consensus of belief was the established faith of the body. In fact many have regarded this turn-about as a major step in the making of a creed that some now see as being the 28 fundamentals of Seventh-day Adventists. As has been said above, if that which had been written in *Questions on Doctrine* had been then the majority belief of Seventh-day Adventists then there would not have been any crisis, no major theological dispute and certainly no major controversy. As it was though there were all three. As Richard Rice wrote

"It is ironic that a book intended to summarize Adventist beliefs for those outside the church should prove to be the source of such intense debate among those inside. But instead of providing the Christian world the doctrinal of Seventh-day Adventists, *Questions on Doctrine* proved to be the stimulus for vigorous, and often heated, disagreement. The book exposed serious rifts among Adventists on a range of important theological questions." (*Richard Rice, 'Questions on Doctrine and "Questions About Christ"', page 4*)

Questions on Doctrine not official

Very important to note here is that even though *Questions on Doctrine* was compiled by those of our leadership and published by our denomination, it never constituted an official statement of beliefs. This is because what was written in it was never officially voted upon by Seventh-day Adventists. It simply contained

the answers (when Walter Martin asked about our faith) that just a few of our leadership gave to him. In other words, this book did not necessarily contain the answers as regards to what was then believed by the majority of Seventh-day Adventists; neither was it an official statement of beliefs. It was in fact the views of the few of our leadership. This must be recognised! As Froom noted in his *Movement of Destiny* (this was as a footnote)

“Distinction is rightly made between Questions on Doctrine as an “authorised” and “authoritative” work, but not as an “official” denominational pronouncement. The reason is simply this: Only endorsement or adoption by a General Conference in session could make it “official.” (LeRoy Froom. *Movement of Destiny*, page 492, ‘Questions on Doctrine’)

As Froom said, what had been written in *Questions on Doctrine* was not voted upon at a General Conference Session therefore it is (still) unofficial. He then added

“And we do not make pronouncements on doctrine in General Conference sessions. That is a well-established principle and practise. We there simply affirm, and confirm, what has been adopted by common consent, previous acceptance, and established belief and usage.” (*Ibid*)

From what we have read, many believed that *Questions on Doctrine* was not based on that which had been “adopted by common consent, previous acceptance, and established belief and usage”. This is why there was such a major controversy about it.

Protesters: - overly prejudiced zealots or keepers of the faith?

Later the very same year that Martin had held dialogue with the leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (1956) he had published in the magazine *Our Hope* a 12-page article called ‘Seventh-day Adventism Today’.

As we look now at one particular statement found in this article, we need to remember, as we have noted, that Froom maintained in *Movement of Destiny* that it was only a few non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists who were out of line with the main body of Seventh-day Adventists, the latter of which he said had been mainly trinitarian. These of course were the same few that regarding the trinity doctrine and the atonement etc, Froom also said had managed to get their misguided personal views into print that made us appear to be, in the eyes of the other denominations, a cult.

What we know today is that these non-trinitarian and anti-trinitarian views (see section five for the difference in usage of these two terms) were not just the views of a few but was in fact the preponderant belief (majority belief) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In other words, the non-trinitarian beliefs of Froom’s the few was, when Ellen White was alive, the denominational faith of Seventh-day Adventists. We now need to look at the statement that Martin made

in his article regarding the faith and beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists.

“I have been interested in facts and figures alone. I am still interested in facts but not in the opinions, charges, and rantings of outraged and overly prejudiced zealots, and until it can be shown conclusively and beyond doubt that the massive accumulation of evidence I now possess regarding Seventh-day Adventism is in error, I shall vigorously contend for the rights of Adventists to be called Christians, and the obligation on the part of other Christians to recognise them as such in fellowship as brothers in Christ” (*Walter Martin, November 1956, 'Our Hope' magazine, pages 283-284, as quoted in LeRoy Froom's 'Movement of Destiny', page 475, 'Changing the impaired image of Adventism'*)

It does appear that Walter Martin had been sold the idea that those who believed and reasoned contrary to the answers given to his questions by some of the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were nothing more than “overly prejudiced zealots”, meaning that their views were not to be regarded as being representative of the denominational faith.

Notice now how Barnhouse, the editor of *Eternity* magazine, according to George Knight, regarded those Seventh-day Adventists who had attempted to uphold certain of the old theology of their denomination. Knight wrote with reference to an article that had appeared in the magazine *Eternity* of which Barnhouse was editor

“In that article, with the apparent approval of L. E. Froom and R. A. Anderson (foremost Adventist leaders), Barnhouse publicly relegated M. L. Andreasen (Adventism's leading theologian in the 1930s and 1940s) and his theology to the "lunatic fringe" of Adventism and inferred that Andreasen and his type were similar to the "wild-eyed irresponsibles" that plague "every field of fundamental Christianity." (*George Knight, Ministry, August 1994 page 13, 'Adventist theology 1844 to 1994'*)

Andreasen was not a very early pioneer but to a degree, particularly with regards to the human nature of Christ, he held on to the old theology of Seventh-day Adventism. Whilst we will not go into this here as a theology, we will note that in the 1950's, just as it still is today, it was something that divided Seventh-day Adventists.

As a reward for standing for what he believed and for the protests that he made concerning *Questions and Doctrine*, Andreasen eventually had his ministerial licence withdrawn, although it must be said that later, after he had died it was returned to him. I have also been told that his books were withdrawn from being advertised thus effectively having them removed from the bookshelf (so to speak) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church but this I have yet to be confirmed. Such was the antagonism though, of the 1950's/1960's leadership, towards both Andreasen and his theology.

Strange to relate, according to Andreasen, the leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church refused to hold a meeting with him, at least one with records being kept of which he could personally have a copy, although he was just about the most respected of theologians and minister of our church. Strange to relate, only a short while previous, our leadership had held dialogue with those who openly and vehemently opposed our distinctive faith, meaning of course the evangelicals. What a strange contrast in happenings!

It was because of this refusal of our church to hold such talks with Andreasen that in 1959 (this was 2 years after the publication of *Questions on Doctrine*) he wrote open letters to the churches that detailed his objections (similar really to Luther nailing his 95 objections to Roman Catholicism to the door of the church at Wittenberg).

In the first letter, after having begun expressing his views on the human nature of Christ, he wrote with respect to the so-called few that so say managed to get their odd views into print.

“In explanation of how these writers "got into print" with their views, our leaders told Mr. Martin that "they had among their number certain members of their 'lunatic fringe,' even as there are similar wild-eyed irresponsibles in every field of fundamental Christianity." I think this is going too far. Mrs. White did not belong to the "lunatic fringe" who got into print, nor did the authors of *Bible Readings*.” (*M. L. Andreasen, Letter No. 1 to the churches, 1959*)

Andreasen was making reference to what he believed that Ellen White, as well as the authors of *Bible Readings for the Home Circle*, had said about the human nature of Christ. He then adds

“Our leaders should make a most humble apology to the denomination for such a slur upon their members. It is almost unbelievable that they should ever have made such statements. But the accusation has been in print nearly three years, and there has been no protest of any kind. I am humiliated that such accusations should have been made, and even more so that our leaders are completely callous in their attitude toward them.” (*Ibid*)

Andreasen was not very happy with the way that our church leadership spoke of those who held to the old theology of our pioneers. He even referred to the attitude of our leadership as being “completely callous”.

We now need to move on to section 52 of our exploration of the history of Seventh-day Adventism. This is where we shall be taking a look at LeRoy Froom’s *Movement of Destiny*.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section fifty-two

A disputable history

We have seen in the previous section that in 1957 with the publication of *Questions on Doctrine*, Seventh-day Adventists were led to believe that it was only the few that had caused our denomination to be regarded as a non-Christian cult. These few were said to be the ones who in contrast to what was believed by Seventh-day Adventists in general, managed somehow to get their so-called personal views into print.

The mid 1950's was the time period that we dialogued with the evangelicals, the result of which was that for the very first time in our history, we were declared by them to be genuine Christians, at least with a certain proviso. As was explained by Donald Barnhouse, editor of the magazine *Eternity* and close friend of Walter Martin who labelled us Christian

*“Let it be understood that we made only one claim; i.e., that those Seventh-day Adventists who follow the Lord in the same way as their leaders who have interpreted for us the doctrinal position of their church, are to be considered true members of the body of Christ.” (Donald Barnhouse, *The truth about Seventh-day Adventism*, ‘Forward’, page 7)*

Here we have it said that the only Seventh-day Adventists that the evangelicals would class as Christian would be those who believed exactly the same as our leadership. These were those who would believe in the fundamentals of Christianity as believed by the evangelicals. These fundamentals included the trinity doctrine (which meant the coeternity of Christ with the Father) free grace as the evangelicals understood it (this was without the necessity to keep the law of God), a completed atonement at Calvary (as opposed to an atonement taking place in the sanctuary in Heaven at the present time in the judgment as was once taught by Seventh-day Adventists) and the sinless humanity of Christ (this was opposed to Christ taking on human flesh identical to His mother Mary as was once taught in Seventh-day Adventism). See previous three sections for more details on these meetings with the evangelicals.

It must be remembered here that these very same evangelicals are those who reject in totality the distinctive doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist faith. This means that they reject as error (unscriptural) such as the seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday), the sanctuary message which includes the pre-advent judgment (the investigative judgment), the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the state of

the dead (as opposed to the evangelicals who believe in the eternal suffering of the unrighteous) and the inspiration of Ellen White. None of the latter beliefs were accepted by the evangelicals as being Scriptural. They totally rejected them. In other words they totally rejected the last day message that God is giving through Seventh-day Adventists.

The publication of the book *Questions on Doctrine* was the direct result of this dialogue with the evangelicals. This was in the 1950's. In the quest for our true history we now bring ourselves to a more recent time period, that of the 1970's. In particular we shall centre our thoughts on 1971. This was the year that Seventh-day Adventists were presented with another denominational book, this time on the history of their denomination. LeRoy Froom, one of the authors of *Questions on Doctrine*, wrote it. This publication was called *Movement of Destiny*.

Erroneous conclusions

After becoming a Seventh-day Adventist in 1975, one of the first books I read was *Movement of Destiny*. This is how I came to believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church had always been a trinitarian denomination.

I continued in this belief for 25 years. This was until I came to the realisation that this information was incorrect and that for the first 100 years of our existence we had been a strictly non-trinitarian denomination. Significantly, during the first 71 of these years, we were under the auspices of God's messenger to the remnant, namely Ellen G. White and she said nothing to our pioneers about them being wrong regarding their Godhead beliefs.

When I realised the truth about our history I was both shocked and saddened. This is because at that time (2000), not only did I personally confess a belief in the trinity doctrine but I also regarded this teaching as being of so great importance that I believed if any denomination rejected it, then it was very doubtful whether they could even be termed Christian. This is a somewhat traditional view that is held today by many Christians, even some belonging to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I even held doubts about any professed Christian who denied it (see section ten for more details). This in turn led me to wonder about our pioneers. Seeing that they had consciously rejected the trinity doctrine as error, where did that leave them? As you probably realise, this was and still is, a very important question.

Such was how I once regarded the trinity doctrine but again I need to be honest and make a personal confession. This confession is that regardless of my one-time regard of this teaching, my knowledge of its theological concepts was sadly lacking. This I believe is true of many Christians today (see section five)

At the beginning of my trinity studies, in the year 2000, I simply regarded the trinity doctrine as a means of defending and exalting the divinity of Christ but other than that I had no real understanding of it. This of course is with the

exception that it taught that the Holy Spirit was a person, which was something that I must admit that I did have honest doubts about. This was because in my heart of hearts, because of His activity in the salvation of mankind, He did not really seem to be a person in the sense that I thought of someone being a person. Nevertheless, in keeping with the trinity doctrine, also in my zeal to uphold it, I still taught that He is a person like God and Christ.

It is true to say therefore that regarding both the history and theology of the trinity doctrine, I had not really given it very much thought. This was even though I held it then (2000) in such high regard. Today, after intensely studying this doctrine for over 8 years, my knowledge of it has increased and my views have somewhat changed.

I wonder though, if they were asked, how many Seventh-day Adventists would confess that they are in the same position today as I was in prior to beginning my studies? What I mean is, I wonder how many Seventh-day Adventists today are just as sadly lacking in a knowledge of the trinity doctrine as I once was, yet doggedly confess, as I once did, that this is a doctrine that must be believed else it is doubtful that a person can call themselves Christian? From my many conversations with others about this teaching, I would think quite a lot!

Needless to say, my initial realisation that all of our pioneers had been non-trinitarian did cause me a great deal of concern. I was left wondering, because they had totally rejected what I then believed was the central belief of Christianity, what this was actually saying about them. This I know has been a cause of major concern for many sincere Seventh-day Adventists. This is one of the reasons why I have written out this paper. It is to explain the pioneers' views regarding their rejection of this teaching.

High acclaim

When I first read *Movement of Destiny*, which as I said was not too long after becoming a Seventh-day Adventist (1975), which in turn was four years after it was published, I must admit that I was really very impressed. This was because it came highly recommended for its so-called accuracy of content.

As well as many others who were supposedly well informed about our church history, the president of the General Conference (Robert H. Pierson) and the Vice-President General Conference for the North American Division (Neal C. Wilson), gave it their personal recommendation (see pages 13, 15 and 16 of *Movement of Destiny* 1971). So it was that innocently I accepted this book as being a very accurate account of our denominational history.

In passing and interesting to note is that in the 1978 revised edition of From's book, the *Foreword* that in the 1971 edition had been written by Pierson (then General Conference President) was replaced by a *Foreword* written by the founder of the Voice of Prophecy Bible School, namely H. M. S. Richards. No reason for this was given therefore we can only conjecture. Although having both

editions in my possession, I have not as yet compared the text of these two books. As there is something like 700 pages to compare, this would take a tremendous amount of time and study. As yet therefore, apart from a frontispiece depicting Christ in the sanctuary, also a facing page called "Adventism in Complete Conspectus" (no credit is given for this page), the only thing I can see is changed is the *Foreword*. In the October of 1978, to the surprise of many, Pierson announced his retirement from the presidency. This was because of the fear of a stroke from the pressure of work. As it said in the Review of October 26th it said

"In a dramatic announcement that caught those attending the Annual Council by surprise, Robert H. Pierson, with his wife standing by his side, told a hushed audience that for health reasons he is laying down the duties of his office." (*Review and Herald, October 26th 1978, 'General Conference President Announces Retirement'*)

This was less than two years away from when at the 1980 General Conference Session at Dallas, also for the very first time in their history, Seventh-day Adventists would vote in as part of their fundamental beliefs the doctrine of the trinity. Pierson's resignation took effect from January 3rd 1979.

Returning our thoughts to *Movement of Destiny*, its author also did much in promoting my confidence in his book. At its very beginning and under the title "Helpers of My Pen" he said of his own publication

"Its realization was made possible by the contribution of hundreds of priceless source documents from individual and institutional donors, archivists, librarians, and collectors, as well as by the affidavits of actual participants in the 1888 Minneapolis Conference, and rare documents from descendants of pioneers." (*LeRoy Froom, 'Movement of Destiny', page 8, 'Acknowledgements', 'To the Helpers of My Pen, 1971'*)

If all this was not enough to convince me of its accuracy of content Froom then added

"When finally in manuscript form, it was read critically by some sixty of our ablest scholars – especially in denominational history and Adventist theology. By experts in the Spirit of Prophecy. By key Bible teachers, editors, mass communication men, scientists, physicians. And by veteran leaders with vivid memories and extensive backgrounds." (*Ibid*)

As most would agree, this is quite an accolade. It is easy to see why this book should be regarded as a genuine account of our denominational history.

In 1971, just before it was released for sale (this was under the heading of "Forty Years of Research Yield Monumental Work"), it was said of *Movement of Destiny* in the *Review and Herald*

“A monumental work depicting the birth and growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, a work that will be of interest to every Adventist, is about to be released. The author, LeRoy E. Froom, has expended some 40 years of research and study on this volume, to be titled *Movement of Destiny*.” (*Review and Herald*, January 7th 1971, ‘World news at press time’)

Again prior to the publication of *Movement of Destiny*, in his *Heart to Heart* corner, the General Conference President (Robert H. Pierson) also promoted *Movement of Destiny*. He wrote

“L. E. Froom, scholar and long-time leader in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, is well qualified to refresh the history of this church in our minds today. He verily grew up with this movement. For years he was close to the administrative heartbeat of the church. He lived and moved with many of these men of God who, under divine leadership, prayed and preached this movement from obscurity to a worldwide church.

Movement of Destiny is a must for every worker, every theological student, and every church officer--in fact, for every church member who loves this message and longs to see it triumph in the near, very near, future.” (*Robert H. Pierson, General Conference president, Review and Herald, August 6th 1970, ‘Heart to heart’, page 5*)

In the promotion of this book in the December of the same year, Pierson also wrote

“In the last days God's truth and God's movement will be challenged. The faith of this people will be tried to the uttermost. We must know well the certainties upon which this truth has been built. We do well to remind ourselves frequently of God's marvelous interpositions on behalf of His remnant church. LeRoy E. Froom, scholar and long-time leader in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, is well qualified to refresh our minds on the history of this church.

Movement of Destiny is a must for every worker and for every church member who loves this message and longs to see it triumph in the near, very near, future.” (*Robert H. Pierson, General Conference president, Review and Herald, December 10th 1970, ‘Stop! Find out’, page 29*)

On the very same page in his promotion of the book, Neal C. Wilson who was Vice-President General Conference for the North American Division said

“This is a story that will confirm our faith. It will rekindle the fires of dedication and commitment. Most of all, it will conclusively substantiate the fact that we have nothing to fear except as we forget how God has led His people.” (*Neal C. Wilson, Vice-President General Conference for the North American Division, Review and Herald, December 10th 1970, ‘Stop! Find*

out', page 29')

The year after this book was published, one of its readers in a letter that he sent to the *Review and Herald* said

"I have recently read *Movement of Destiny*, by L. E. Froom, and have found this to be a monumental work indeed. Vast areas of denominational history have been opened up that have not been available heretofore. While no book written by human beings can be regarded as perfect, I could surely recommend this book to anyone who wants to be abreast of some of these landmarks in our church history" (*Thomas Durst, Review and Herald, April 27, 1972 'Response from readers'*)

Durst also said about *Movement of Destiny*

"This book deals very frankly with certain aspects of our denominational history and shows that individuals in important positions have erred seriously at times. But the evidence seems overwhelming to me that charges made by some of denominational apostasy are without foundation." (*Ibid'*)

This was typical of the various write-ups given concerning *Movement of Destiny*. As can be seen, there was still talk in 1972 of Seventh-day Adventists apostatising from their God given faith. This is more than likely a continuing response from the publication in 1956 of *Questions on Doctrine*, a book that brought about an outcry and controversy within Seventh-day Adventism. For details see previous section. Notice that Durst says that Froom in his book shows where "individuals in important positions have erred seriously at times". He then goes on to say

"Thank God that we have men in our midst who are vitally concerned about the spiritual condition of our people and are seeing more and more that the answer to our problems lies in the realm of the glorious truth of righteousness by faith. I deeply regret that I have been responsible in the past for circulating certain publications that have given the impression to our people that our leaders were in apostasy from the third angel's message. The integrity of the organized Seventh-day Adventist Church is established beyond question." (*Ibid*)

Again we see evidences of talk of apostasy within Seventh-day Adventism. Durst also quotes Ellen White as saying

"We are living in perilous times, and it does not become us to accept everything claimed to be truth without examining it thoroughly; neither can we afford to reject anything that bears the fruits of the Spirit of God."--*Counsels to Writers and Editors, p. 35.*" (*Ibid*)

In an advert for *Movement of Destiny* in 1973 (2 years after its initial publication) it was described as

“An accurate account of how God led in the development of His church and how He will continue to lead His people until He comes to gather His own.”
(*Review and Herald January 18th 1973 ‘Especially for you the pastor’*)

If they are sought, many more accolades can be found concerning *Movement of Destiny*. This is both within and external to the book itself.

Misinformation

Throughout his book, Froom promotes the idea that it had just been a few Seventh-day Adventist pioneers who had been non-trinitarian. He also says that unfortunately, within our own publications, this few had managed to get their misguided (anti-trinitarian/non-trinitarian) views into print. Froom says therefore that these views were not the faith of the early church at large (the preponderant faith) but just the personal views of some (a minority). In other words, according to Froom, non-trinitarianism was not the preponderant view of the early Seventh-day Adventist Church but was just the personal views of what we might term today a few dissenters. As we have seen throughout this study, this conclusion is far from being true. This is because whilst Ellen White was alive and for decades beyond, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was considered a strictly non-trinitarian denomination. This was by its own members and non-Seventh-day Adventists alike.

In his book *Movement of Destiny*, Froom claimed that these published minority views had led some, not of our persuasion, to erroneously believe that we were a non-trinitarian denomination. This of course, as we know today, was not an erroneous conclusion at all because in reality we were once a non-trinitarian denomination.

Unfortunately, by reading *Movement of Destiny*, just as probably did many thousand of others who have read it, I was misinformed about our denominational history. After saying that early in our history we were united on our distinctive beliefs but were not united on what Froom refers to as “certain of the saving provisions and Divine Persons of the Everlasting Gospel”, the author of *Movement of Destiny* says

“There were variant views of the Godhead, the Deity of Christ, and the Holy Spirit, and on aspects of the Atonement, as well. Yet allegiance to these saving truths — the Eternal Verities — has been the heart of the true Church's faith in all periods of its greatest purity. This was true of the early church, the Reformation times, and the Wesleyan period. And it must be for us today.” (LeRoy Edwin Froom, *Movement of Destiny* page 35, Chapter one, ‘Pushing back our horizons’)

As of yet, on these topics, I have found no serious disagreement by early

Seventh-day Adventists. All that I can find is unity. Under the heading of “Contentions of Minority Created Prejudice” Froom wrote (note well it says that it was the minority that caused the prejudice)

“A majority of our founding fathers had a true concept of the eternal Christ and the Godhead — having come out of Trinitarian churches.” (*Ibid*)

Whilst the latter is not necessarily a wrong statement in itself, it does tend to make it look as though that when they joined the seventh-day Sabbath movement, these trinitarians, whoever they were, retained their trinitarian views.

Whom Froom is referring to here (“our founding fathers”) he does not say, therefore his statement cannot be investigated. As far as my studies have taken me, all those who were counted amongst the spiritual leaders of our church were all non-trinitarian. Some were even vocally anti-trinitarian. We noted this in section twenty. Froom then said

“And they [meaning the early pioneers that had come out of the Trinitarian churches] sensed the atoning Act as made on the Cross, with its benefits then ministered by Christ as our Heavenly High Priest, and now since 1844 functioning as our Judge, as well. Ellen White was of this group. But a minority of strong minds held and came to teach publicly certain variant views on these great gospel primaries through their published writings. They were men of prominence. But these were their personal views.” (*Ibid*)

Froom does not elaborate here on who were these “strong minds” but by the “great gospel primaries” he is making reference to what many term to be, as held by many of the evangelicals, the basic fundamentals of the Christian faith. These we shall elaborate more on later suffice to say that these fundamentals do include amongst other teachings the doctrine of the trinity.

Froom says here that these “variant views” were just the “personal views” of “a minority of strong minds” who somehow managed to get these views into print within our publications. Notice he says that they were “men of prominence”. This latter assertion is true. These were all leading pioneers. They were all non-trinitarian. These were such as James White (the husband of Ellen White), J. N. Andrews, Uriah Smith, M. E. Cornell, Joseph Bates, R. F. Cottrell, J. H. Waggoner, and the like. All of these actually spoke out against the trinity doctrine, saying that it was a false teaching. As of yet I have not found any belonging to that time period in our church history that was trinitarian.

There were many who just like Ellen White, whilst not actually stating openly that the trinity doctrine was error, did write articles that can only be described as non-trinitarian (remember here my usage in this paper as described in section two of anti-trinitarianism and non-trinitarianism). E. J. Waggoner of Minneapolis fame was one of them. I have not found anywhere yet (although he may have done so) where he spoke out against the trinity doctrine. Certainly he wrote articles

that can only be described as non-trinitarian. This was the same as his message at Minneapolis in 1888. It was strictly non-trinitarian. Now note what Fromm wrote next. He said

“And decades were required before we came into unity thereon.” (*Ibid*)

This really is a very misleading statement.

Like every other denomination, it is only reasonable to believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church had those who did not agree with the main body of the church, the latter meaning the majority view, but there is no record of any dissent amongst this main body of Seventh-day Adventists on the Godhead, at least, in my studies, I cannot say that I have found any. Up to the early 1900's, all that I can find is unity upon non-trinitarianism. What I have concluded though is that dissent did come in when attempts were made to bring trinitarianism into Seventh-day Adventism. This was in the early 1900's. Fromm then said concerning these so-called “personal” non-trinitarian views

“Though long since repudiated, these early defective views, because they were found upon the pages of certain of our published books, came to be regarded by non-Adventist critics as constituting the real, generally accepted, original Adventism — irrespective of their actual dimensions at the time, and of later authoritative repudiation. One can easily understand the natural conclusions of these cavilers.” (*Ibid*)

Fromm is saying that those not of our denomination (those who were mainly trinitarian) had come to regard what he terms these few “personal views” as being the “real, generally accepted, original Adventism”. As we have seen for ourselves in previous sections, these non-trinitarian views were not just the “personal views” of some (the few) but were in fact what constituted “the real” Seventh-day Adventism. His latter remark concerning repudiation was when we denied, in our leaderships 1950's dialogue with the evangelicals, that these were the beliefs of the majority (see previous section). Note that Fromm refers to these so-called “personal views” as being “early defective views”. These of course were the views of our pioneers.

We know today that Fromm is really making reference to the present day rejection of the beliefs of the pioneers but to those who read his book ignorant of our real history, he was saying that it was just a few “personal views” that were authoritatively repudiated. Such is this distortion of our history. Fromm then added

“It was this unhappy situation that gave rise to the widespread misconception, bandied about in the theological circles of the religious world, that we were actually an "anti-Christian cult" — for a cult, according to the definition of many Evangelicals, is a religious body that denies (1) the eternal pre-existence and complete Deity of Christ, and (2) that His Act of

Atonement was completed on the Cross.” (*ibid* pages 35-36)

This “unhappy situation”, according to Froom, was that Christians of other denominations were led to believe that what he calls the “personal views” of the few was the beliefs of the church at large. This he says was a “misconception” that led them to believe we were an “anti-Christian cult”. We know today that these views were the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Froom also added

“It was the variant views among us on these two points—more than our Sabbathkeeping, "soul sleep," and "investigative judgment" positions — that constituted the real reason for such a regrettable classification and castigation, with resultant prejudice and ostracism.” (*Ibid* page 36)

What Froom is really saying is that the “real reason” why we were called a cult was because we denied the trinity doctrine; therefore we denied the coeternity of the Son with the Father, also that we said that there was at this time a final atonement taking place in the sanctuary in Heaven. As we have said before and have seen in previous sections, any denomination that does not believe in the gospel primaries as believed by the evangelicals is classed as a cult. This is how it always has been and probably how it always will be. Very interesting is Froom’s next paragraph. This is when he wrote

“This resultant popular aversion often drove us, in turn, into hiding our denominational identity and affiliation in our public evangelism. This was to obviate, if possible, this barrier of prejudice until we had first established confidence on the part of the public in the Biblical soundness of our main positions — before disclosing our identity. But this well-intentioned but dubious procedure similarly caused us to be regarded as deceptive, and not straightforward or honest, and actually as sheep stealers operating under false pretenses.” (*Ibid*)

It is true that in our evangelistic campaigns and out of embarrassment, we did hide our name (we saw an example of this in section forty-three). It is also true to say that we were once classed as “sheep stealers”.

In reality this is what we should be (sheep stealers). This is because our message to Christians of other denominations should be that they were to come out of their denomination, also out of their confusion of beliefs, and accept the three angels’ messages of Revelation chapter 14. This is in preparation of meeting our Lord at His second advent. In other words, part of our task is to call people out from the other denominations to prepare them to stand in the last days of this earth’s history. This is what the evangelicals term as sheep stealing.

The probable reason for this is because of how evangelicals believe a person is saved. This comes under the heading of saved by grace without works and rejects the commandment of God to honour His Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

According to evangelical reasoning, it is by accepting certain teachings that a person is saved. This is such beliefs as the trinity doctrine and the completed act of atonement by Christ at Calvary etc (we noted this in previous sections). This means that if a person considers himself or herself born again, and accepts these various evangelical saving beliefs, then they are saved. Sabbath keeping and a belief in what we term our other distinctives is therefore considered unnecessary to salvation. This is why they would look upon those who urged this message upon Christians of other denominations as being “sheep stealers”. In other words, according to evangelical theology, these other Christians will be saved even if they do not believe our distinctives. For reasons that do not need an explanation, this is very dangerous reasoning. As Froom then said

“Not until that image was changed, as we emphatically affirmed our basic loyalty to the primary Gospel Fundamentals — the Eternal Verities, as our most authoritative literature (the Spirit of Prophecy) had ever done—and came out in frank denominational identification, with our clarified positions on these great Fundamentals of the Christian Faith clearly declared, have we been reclassified by many Evangelicals, and increasingly recognized as truly twice-born Christians and brethren in Christ.” (*Ibid*)

Froom concluded

“We have come, thank God, to a new day of frankness and soundness, with resultant better understanding, recognition, and acceptance that is preparing the way for the tremendous world witness and triumph that now lies shortly before us. We are no longer regarded as mere doctrinarians and legalists, but increasingly as true Christians, with our hope and our teachings centered wholly in Christ and the fullness of His Deity, His complete Act of Atonement on the Cross, His atoning ministry in heaven, and with salvation by faith in Christ and His righteousness as primary in the broadest and fullest sense of the term. Happy day! (*ibid*)

A strange realisation (according to Froom’s reasoning)

Under the heading of “Certain Early Diversities Not Reproved” Froom wrote

“The guiding counsels and helpful reproofs given through the Spirit of Prophecy during our early decades often dealt with digressions from Bible-based doctrinal truths. These also frequently included unsound interpretation of prophecy. On these Ellen White did not fail to speak out.”(*LeRoy Froom. Movement of Destiny page 119, ‘Bible Based; Spirit of Prophecy Confirmed—No. 1’, 1971*)

He said in the next paragraph

“But there was a paralleling fact and an area of silence that must be noted.” (*Ibid*)

He continued concerning this “area of silence”

“Mrs. White did not, during those same early decades, reprove certain erroneous minority positions held by some on the Eternal Verities of the principles, provisions, and Divine Personalities involved in the plan of salvation. Not once, however, did her own writings share or echo those faulty views. Hers was often a contrasting voice. Her writings were simple declarative statements of truth.” *(Ibid)*

The first thing to note here is that Froom is saying that regarding what he terms “the eternal verities”, also the “Divine personalities” Ellen White was at variance with what he says are “certain erroneous minority positions”. In other words, regarding beliefs concerning the Godhead, Ellen White was at variance with the non-trinitarianism of Seventh-day Adventism. We know this because he said next

“But the areas of deviation pertained primarily to the eternal preexistence and complete Deity of Christ, the truth of the Trinity, the personality of the Holy Spirit, and certain related questions. And similarly with the view, of some, that the Atonement was entirely separate from the Act of the Cross. Strange as it may seem, viewpoints on these two areas were generally regarded as optional with the individual.” *(Ibid)*

Froom maintained that Ellen White was a trinitarian, also that this was what she had always been. What he was saying here was she was out of harmony with the non-trinitarianism of Seventh-day Adventism but did not seek to correct the pioneers in their beliefs. This was even though she did correct them on other doctrines (according to Froom).

This really is strange, if it were true, because if our pioneers did have it wrong, why should the messenger of the Lord stay silent on the most important doctrine of the Christian faith? This would not make any sense at all. The truth of the matter is that this “area of silence” was simply because regarding the personalities of the Godhead; Ellen White was in harmony with the beliefs of our pioneers. This we have seen in previous sections (see section fifteen, section twenty-one, section twenty-two and section twenty-nine in particular). The same could be said of the atonement. Like the pioneers, Ellen White did say that as a sacrifice it was complete at Calvary but there was still an atonement going on today within the sanctuary in Heaven. She referred to this as the final atonement.

Two very different perspectives

Froom also concluded about our very early pioneers (and here again we can see that he claims that it was the minority that were not trinitarian)

“The majority were Trinitarians, and held to the complete Deity of Christ as did the Spirit of Prophecy with consistency. A few were Arian.... Then in the 1860’s and 1870’s a few began to put into print their personal minority Arian

views on Christ, and denied the trinity and the personality of the Holy Spirit.”
(*Ibid*, page 73)

We can see here the idea that in very early Seventh-day Adventism, meaning prior to the “1860’s and 1870’s”, the majority were trinitarian. The evidence of history does not bear this out to be true. Without even reading masses of what was said in our earlier publications (we have done this in previous sections), this can be verified by reading just one letter that was sent to the *Review and Herald* in 1856. It said

“BRO. DANIEL BAKER writes from Tioga Co., Pa.: "After contending against the Trinitarian doctrine and all sectarian disciplines for about sixteen years, and against the doctrine of the soul's immortality eight years, and for the seventh-day Sabbath three years, it is truly refreshing to find in your paper the same views proved by Scripture. (*Review and Herald*, March 13th 1856, *Extracts from letters*)

Note that this was in 1856, which really was, very early Seventh-day Adventism. What we have here therefore, is two entirely different perspectives of our history. From then said of the views of “the few” (these were what he termed the “personal minority Arian views” that denied the trinity and the personality of the Holy Spirit).

“This caused increasing misunderstanding and criticism, both outside and inside the Adventist Church. Amazingly, the Spirit of Prophecy was kept from being influenced by the positions of this vocal minority of strong minds. And remarkably, Ellen White's published utterances from 1846 to 1888 never needed revision, repudiation of position, or withdrawal on these points. These early enunciations of truth were developed with amazing fullness following 1888, with continuity of harmony.” (*LeRoy Froom, Movement of Destiny*, page 73, *Chart No. 2*, 1971)

Regarding Christ, the views published in our periodicals etc brought about no criticism from within the church. Neither were there any misunderstandings amongst us. There was only unity. This can be seen in section twenty, section twenty-one, section twenty-two and section twenty-three. Criticism did come from without regarding what we believed, particularly about Christ, but this is always how it has been, at least whilst we were a non-trinitarian denomination. It must also be said that these non-trinitarian views that Froom wrote of here were not those of the few. It was the denominational view. Note here that Froom speaks of the beliefs of these pioneers as though they were out of harmony with the spirit of prophecy.

Admittance

As we have seen so many times in previous sections (see section ten in particular), our church leadership today freely admit that most of our early pioneers were non-trinitarian although as of yet, in my studies, I have not found

any who were trinitarian. Froom makes it look as though the majority were trinitarian and that the same majority also believed that the Holy Spirit was an individual person like God and Christ. As we have seen in section thirty-one and section thirty-two, this is far from being true. Up to the time when Ellen White spoke of the Holy Spirit as a personality, the vast majority regarded Him as a power or influence, albeit our pioneers never in any way denigrated Him although some, maybe the trinitarians, would think differently.

As we noted in section forty-four, Froom himself admitted that he could not find in the writings of our pioneers anything he was looking for on the Holy Spirit. Even in Ellen White's writings he said, he could only find what he termed priceless leads. This in itself reveals that throughout the time of the ministry of Ellen White, also for decades beyond, our denomination was still preponderantly non-trinitarian.

At least today we are a little bit more honest about our non-trinitarianism past even if some wish that it did not exist. This we know because since the truth of our history has become so well-publicised, our church leadership today freely admit that these non-trinitarian views were not, as Froom says, just the personal views of some (a few) but was in fact the views of the church as a whole (i. e. the preponderant believe of Seventh-day Adventists).

More misinformation

By his assertions and to the uninformed, Froom made it look like there was no unity in our early church regarding the Godhead. Referring to what he terms the two categories that our fundamental beliefs were divided into he said concerning the second category

“Second, there were the eternal verities of the Everlasting Gospel, in which there were two areas of major difference: (1) Over the deity of Christ, Trinity, and personality of the Holy Spirit; and (2) the Atonement in relation to the Act of the Cross. Our early position on these was *optional*. The majority were Trinitarians, and held to the complete Deity of Christ as did the Spirit of Prophecy with consistency”. A few were Arian”. Because of this division, Adventists pressed united on the “Commandments of God,” but were reserved as to the “Faith of Jesus” – because of varied concepts of Christ” (*Ibid*)

It is true that by the 1880's, we were stressing the keeping of the law at the expense of the matchless charms of Christ (as was said by Ellen White) but regarding His deity there was only unity within Seventh-day Adventism.

As Russell Holt, who, in 1969 (note that this was two years before Movement of Destiny was published) said in a paper he completed for Dr Mervyn Maxwell on the rejection and acceptance of the trinity doctrine within Seventh-day Adventism (this was concerning the time period leading up to the death of James White in 1881)

“A survey of other Adventist writers during these years reveals, that to a man, they rejected the trinity, yet, with equal unanimity they upheld the divinity of Christ. To reject the trinity is not necessarily to strip the Saviour of His divinity. Indeed, certain Adventist writers felt that it was the trinitarians who filled the role of degrading Christ’s divine nature.” (*Russell Holt, “The doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination: Its rejection and acceptance”, A term paper for Dr. Mervyn Maxwell, 1969*)

Holt’s term paper did not take forty years to complete as did *Movement of Destiny* but I do find it a somewhat more accurate account of our history than the one compiled by Froom. Unfortunately, it was not Holt’s paper that was circulated amongst thousands of Seventh-day Adventists and non-Seventh-day Adventists alike. Holt’s conclusions are the same as the conclusions of the author you are now reading. He believes that amongst our pioneers there was only unity regarding their belief concerning the personalities of the Godhead although common sense dictates that there may have been a few dissenters. The majority view though was non-trinitarianism. Of that there can be no doubt. Interesting to note is Froom’s words on page 33. This is when he says

“Further more, it is their collective teaching, the preponderant view of the Church, that constitutes the image of Adventism. It is not independent voices or deviating minority opinions. That is the strength and the genius of true Adventism.” (*LeRoy Froom, Movement of Destiny, Chapter one ‘Pushing back our horizons’*)

All the time that Ellen White was alive, the majority view in Seventh-day Adventism was definitely non-trinitarianism, sometimes even outright anti-trinitarianism. In fact I can say that during this same time period, nowhere in our publications can I find any trace of trinitarianism promoted at all. This is why it can only be concluded that during Ellen White’s time, the “collective teaching” or “preponderant view of the Church” (as Froom called it) was non-trinitarianism. It was non-trinitarianism therefore that was what was once the “the strength and the genius of true Adventism” not trinitarianism.

Misinformation circulated

It says in *Movement of Destiny*

“Then a greathearted Adventist physician (who remains anonymous) made it possible - along with the dedicated royalty - the initial simultaneous presentation of 1,500 gift copies, on the day of publication, to 550 selected university, college, academy, and mission-land training school Bible teachers, along with twoscore overseas editors and fifty broadcasters around the globe - and certain other important key groups. This provision included 500 copies for the libraries of our 114 mission-land training schools, for use by our national students in training.” (*LeRoy Froom, Movement of Destiny, ‘Acknowledgements, To the Helpers of my pen’, page 8*)

As can be seen here, an initial 1500 free copy's of Froom's book was sent to a number of very important destinations, meaning that its contents were promulgated worldwide to thousands. Those who read this book would then have passed the information on to others. So it was that erroneous perceptions of our history were well and truly circulated.

Recognised - Froom's distorted view of Seventh-day Adventist history

Throughout *Movement of Destiny*, the view consistently presented is that during its pioneering days, the Seventh-day Adventist Church had been predominantly trinitarian. As I have said previously, this is the reason why for such a long period of time I believed the same. Froom's distortion of this particular part of our history was duly noted in a paper written by Merlin Burt for Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological seminary. He said on page 47 of this 1996 paper

“One is left with the impression that Froom chose not to present the facts, possibly out of fear that it might undermine someone's faith or of jeopardizing the Church's evangelical standing”. (*Merlin Burt, 'Demise of Semi-Arianism and Anti-Trinitarianism in Adventist Theology, 1888-1957, page 47, 1996)*

The more-than-likely reason why Froom chose not to convey the facts of our history was because of Burt's latter suggestion. This was so that our standing with other evangelical churches was not jeopardised. This was a standing that by the middle of the 1950's had changed dramatically from how it had been even up to decades after Ellen White had died (see section forty-nine and section fifty). This was when we were regarded by much of what is known as mainstream Christianity as a non-Christian sect or cult, which was of course when we were still considered a non-trinitarian denomination. Even our leadership today admits to this one (see section ten).

This change came about when we persuaded Walter Martin, a renown evangelical who was going to write about us as being a cult, that because we believed in the great fundamentals of Christianity, which of course included the trinity doctrine, we should be considered along with the evangelicals as being part of mainstream Christianity. See section fifty. It must be noted therefore that this changed image of Seventh-day Adventism, only came after we had become trinitarian, also after we had this dialogue with the evangelicals (the mid 1950's). This is because the evangelicals would never have classed non-trinitarians as being Christian.

On pages 35 and 36 of *Movement of Destiny*, Froom freely admits that it was not until we, as a denomination, had gone on record as repudiating what he calls the “**personal views of some**” (or of the few) that mainstream evangelicals stopped regarding us as a cult. This is when we denied to them that during the time of Ellen White, our church had been a non-trinitarian denomination. In other words, during the 1950's, our church leadership led other denominations, as well as

Seventh-day Adventists who did not know any different, to have an incorrect view of our history. As Froom said in his *Movement of Destiny*

“These, as frequently stressed were the two main areas of confusion, occasioned by certain unfortunate statements published by individuals representing their own personal views — not the declared united view of the body.” (LeRoy Froom, *‘Movement of Destiny’*, page 493, chapter “Deity” and “Atonement” *Attain Destined Place – No. 1*)

Here we can see that with respect to the eternal deity of Christ, meaning the trinity view of Christ and the atonement (this was as they were discussed during these meetings with the evangelicals), Froom says that certain “unfortunate statements” in our publications were only “the personal views” of some and “not the declared united view of the body”. This though, as we know today, is far from being the truth.

Another person who recognised that Froom had not truly conveyed the facts of our non-trinitarian history is Woodrow Whidden. In a paper that he wrote on the non-trinitarianism and trinitarianism within Seventh-day Adventism he made the observation

“Some, such as prominent Adventist historian/apologist Leroy Edwin Froom, have been so embarrassed that they have even sought to distort the Arian historical record by making it appear that such views were something like an “encapsulated cancer”—certainly there, but not very widespread” (Woodrow Whidden, *a paper presented to The Tenth Oxford, MI [USA] Institute of Methodist Theol. Studies Working Group titled ‘Arianism, Adventism and Methodism: The healing of Trinitarian Teaching and Soteriology’*)

Whidden says that it was probably out of embarrassment that Froom sought to cover up the truth about our non-trinitarian history. This must be in respect of Froom saying that it was only a few that were non-trinitarian whilst the truth of the matter is that our church, all during the time of Ellen White and the other pioneers, was a completely non-trinitarian denomination. This non-trinitarianism was well and truly recognised by those who are generally termed mainstream Christianity, those that historic Seventh-day Adventism has always regarded as the Babylon of Bible prophecy. They regarded us as a non-Christian cult.

As a matter of passing interest here, Woodrow Whidden is co-author of a recent Seventh-day Adventist publication called *The Trinity*. This is the book that is said by the Seventh-day Adventist Church to set out the issues involved in this present trinity debate within our denomination. From a personal perspective and having read this book through on quite a number of occasions, I believe that a number of what I would term the main issues in this debate, as seen today by non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists, are not discussed at all in this book.

Jerry Moon, who also co-authored the book *The Trinity*, draws much the same conclusion about Froom as did both Whidden and Burt. He says in the latter publication

“Froom’s final word was his 700-page *Movement of Destiny*, published in 1971. Despite “instances of special pleading” and problems of historical bias that “diminish the work as dependable history” (Maxwell), it thoroughly documents the progression of Adventist theology toward a biblical Trinitarian consensus.” (Jerry Moon, ‘*The Trinity*’ chapter ‘*Trinity and Anti-Trinitarianism in Seventh-day Adventist History*, page 200-201, 2002)

I am not too sure that I would describe Froom’s book as thoroughly documenting “the progression of Adventist theology toward a biblical Trinitarian consensus”, neither would I refer to its misrepresentation of our history as an “historical bias” but like everyone else, Jerry Moon is entitled to his personal view. Note though that Moon quotes Maxwell (this is Mervyn C. Maxwell) as saying that this “bias” does “diminish the work as dependable history”. Notice also the reference to “instances of special pleading” to Froom. This was probably referring to a letter that Arthur White (Ellen White’s grandson) sent to Froom when the latter named was collating materials for his book. Merlin Burt refers to this letter when he says in his thesis

“Records show that Froom for many years was active in seeking an understanding of the early period. He wrote letters during the 1930’s and 1940’s to various ones asking for their recollections. Arthur White, secretary of the Ellen G White estate, even tried in 1955 to correct Froom’s position writing “I think that we will have to concede that our early workers were not trinitarians”. (Merlin Burt’s research paper, ‘*Demise of Semi-Arianism and anti-trinitarianism in Adventist Theology, 1888-1957*’, page 46, December 1996)

Froom chose to ignore what Arthur White had told him. In 1948 when joint editor of the *Ministry* magazine Froom wrote

“As heralds of truth, we are to proclaim the truth truthfully. No fabrication should ever becloud our presentation of truth. The present truth of the threefold message is so overwhelming in its logical appeal, and so inescapable in its claims, that it needs no dubious evidence or illustration to support it. Recourse to any unreliable and fraudulent evidence discounts the very message that we are commissioned of heaven to give to men, and reflects upon the honesty of the messenger.” (LeRoy Froom, *Ministry*, November 1948, ‘*The query column*’)

He also said in his article such as

“Truth does not need fabrication to aid or support it. Its very nature precludes any manipulation or duplicity. We cannot afford to be party to any

fraud. The reflex action upon our own souls should be a sufficient deterrent.” (*Ibid*)

“We must honor the truth, and meticulously observe the principle of honesty in the handling of evidence under all circumstances.” (*Ibid*)

By 1971, Froom thought it best, probably out of sincere embarrassment, not to correctly present our history, probably thinking that he was doing the best for the future well being of our church. Unfortunately, this was not the case. It would have been much better if he had published our history as it really was and not how he wished it had been.

Theological wounds

Near the very beginning of his book, Froom relates how his portrayal of Seventh-day Adventist history came to be written. He also writes about the difficulties that A. G. Daniells recognised would need to be surmounted prior to it being published.

When searching for information for his book, Froom says that he sent out a questionnaire to many of our older members, particularly those who had been delegates at the 1888 Bible Conference. This was requesting that they in turn relay to him their own personal memories of our denominational history. This Froom said was so that his book could honestly reflect this history.

It is very interesting to note that in initially giving this commission to Froom, A. G. Daniells, who had been the General Conference President for twenty years, told him that despite his young years he was definitely the man for the job. Froom then follows on in this chapter explaining just how the book came to be written. He then said about the timing of when it was to be published

“But he [Daniells] said, it is to be later, - not yet, not yet” (*LeRoy Froom, ‘Movement of Destiny’, chapter ‘From Author to Reader’ page 17*).

It was in 1930 that Froom was commissioned to write this book but Daniells told him that it was not to be published until “later”. True to the request of Daniells, Froom’s book was not published until over forty years later. Why such a long delay some may be asking? Did Daniells think that it would take Froom all that time to collate the information and to write it out? Froom says on page 17 under the sub-title “Difficulties to be surmounted”

“Elder Daniells recognised the serious problems involved, and sensed almost prophetically certain difficulties that would confront.” (*LeRoy Froom ‘Movement of Destiny’, page 17, ‘From Author to Reader’ 1971*)

Here we must ask a question. What “serious problems” or “certain difficulties” would be encountered in publishing a genuine record of a denominational history? In fact why should there be problems or difficulties at all? Froom

explains

“He [Daniells] knew that time would be required for certain theological wounds to heal, and for attitudes to modify on the part of some. Possibly it would be necessary to wait until certain individuals had dropped out of action, before the needed portrayal could wisely be brought forth.” (*Ibid*)

Here was the answer concerning the difficulties that Daniells saw in From publishing (not writing) this account of our history or as Daniells himself put it (according to From) before this history “could wisely be brought forth”.

From says that Daniells (General Conference president from 1901-1922) recognised that before the book could be released, “certain theological wounds” would need to heal and for “attitudes to modify on the part of some”. He even said that it would be necessary for certain individuals to have “dropped out of action”, meaning, one would assume, to have died off. Certainly he was not saying to wait until these individuals had dropped out of our church. These then were the “difficulties” and “serious problems” that Daniells said would confront not the writing of this book but the publication of it.

So what “theological wounds” and certain “attitudes” are being referred to here?

It can only be assumed that these “wounds” were those that came about (amongst other things) through the changeover from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism, whilst the “attitudes” must be those of the non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists who resisted this changeover. I say this because our history attests that from the beginning of our movement until now (1844 - 2008), no other changes have been made to the fundamental beliefs of our denomination although having said that, there are affiliated (associated) beliefs such as the atonement and the human nature of Christ that have also been affected by this changeover.

It is therefore concluded by the author of these notes that the wounds that Daniells thought needed healing were those caused in theological battles such as that of non-trinitarianism versus trinitarianism.

Throughout *Movement of Destiny*, the view is portrayed that from its beginnings, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was preponderantly trinitarian, which, as we have already seen, is certainly not true. This is one area of our denominational history that From did not correctly portray. Suffice to say that even up until many years after the death of Ellen White, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still a non-trinitarian denomination. This is why it was recognised by Daniells that before this book could be published, “theological wounds” needed to be healed and “attitudes” of some needed changing even with some having to die off. This part of our history (non-trinitarianism) was not something that many of the new theology (trinitarian) thinkers wished to be spoken of or were proud of, so they probably wished it as far as possible to be obscured.

A basic problem

The biggest problem confronted by those who would like to bring change to any denominational faith (belief) is always the beliefs of the majority. In other words, it is often the minority that want the change. This is why any changeover in belief has to be of a very gradual nature and not something that can be achieved overnight. Can you imagine a headline in the *Review and Herald* saying that by reason of a decision made by the General Conference Committee, Seventh-day Adventists were going to change from being Sabbath-keepers to Sunday-keepers? An extreme illustration maybe but I am sure that you see the point. The fact that the General Conference had made this decision would count for nothing. This is why any changeover in beliefs (of any denomination) has to be carried out rather imperceptibly and over a very long period of time, else there will be very strong (and probably overwhelming) objections to it even being attempted.

This is how the changeover from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism within Seventh-Adventism took place. It was accomplished very slowly, almost imperceptibly, over a long period of time, yet there was still resistance. History attests that it was not until the 1950's that trinitarianism became fully established within Seventh-day Adventism but even then there were still some, even those of the ministry, who objected to this changeover. We have seen this in section forty-eight. This changeover from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism was a huge project to undertake. It was in fact a major change of theology.

I have also noted of late that there is today a much more liberal view of the investigative judgement found in certain articles that I have read. This is a teaching that I also believe has been affected by this changeover to trinitarianism but this is another story. As we have also seen, the very same year that Froom was commissioned to write this book concerning our history (1930), our church commissioned a statement of beliefs to be compiled that would, for the very first time in our history, include the word trinity. This must be regarded as either very significant or very coincidental. If you wish to read about this change in our statements of fundamental beliefs then please read section forty-five.

More could be said here about Froom's misrepresentations of our history but enough has been said already, meaning that there is no need to highlight it any further. What we will see in the next section (fifty-three), also the one following it, there are those who wish to make it look as though whilst Ellen White was alive, trinitarianism was acceptably taught within Seventh-day Adventism and that during her time also, there was a breakthrough in the solid wall of non-trinitarianism. As we shall see when investigated, this evidence is not really evidence at all. These then are more misrepresentations of our history.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section fifty-three

Refuted evidences of trinitarianism within early Seventh-day Adventism (Part 1 of 2)

Within our own (Seventh-day Adventist) publications, there is found the admittance that during the time period of Ellen White's ministry, we were a decidedly non-trinitarian denomination. This we have duly noted in previous sections (see section ten in particular). In spite of this confession, there are amongst us today some who would like us to believe that during this same time period (meaning during the ministry of Ellen White), there were those who were trinitarian and that trinitarianism was acceptably taught within our denomination. There is also the continuing thought that after the 1888 General Conference session at Minneapolis, the solid wall of non-trinitarianism was slowly broken down. As we shall see in this section, none of these things are true.

Whilst it must be admitted that there may have been those who were dissatisfied with our non-trinitarianism (every church has its dissenters), this never came to the fore, at least not during the time of Ellen White's ministry although as we have seen in section twenty-five, Kellogg did say in 1903 (15 years after the Minneapolis Conference) that he had come to believe in the trinity doctrine. This helps to show that even then (1903), trinitarianism was not the accepted teaching in our church. Important to remember here is that this had nothing to do with Kellogg being dissatisfied with how our church portrayed the divinity of Christ (our non-trinitarianism) but was for the reason of justifying what he had written in his much-debated book *The Living Temple*. This is very important to bear in mind, else it could cause confusion. I have found nothing in our history to suggest that Kellogg had any grievance with the church regarding the way that Christ's Godhead was portrayed. Kellogg's conversion to trinitarianism was just for the purpose of justifying himself for what he had written,

Evidence or not evidence

In an attempt to prove (establish) that trinitarianism was being taught within Seventh-day Adventism, also that our solid wall of non-trinitarianism was being broken down whilst Ellen White was alive, some have produced certain evidence which, as we shall see in both this and the next section, is not all that it first seems to be. In other words, this evidence does not hold up under investigation, hence the title of these sections, *Refuted evidences of trinitarianism within early Seventh-day Adventism*.

We need to remember here that in the previous sections we have discovered that not everything our church has published concerning the history of the trinity doctrine within our church has been in harmony with the facts. We also need to remember that misinformation will often be the cause of very serious misunderstandings and confusion.

Regarding the alleged existence of trinitarianism within Seventh-day Adventism whilst Ellen White was alive, I do believe that if no concrete evidence can be produced in support of this claim, then it is only reasonable to believe that it did not exist. It must also be said that it is only reasonable to believe that if during Ellen White's ministry there could be found trinitarianism within our publications, then the various commentators who have attempted to have us believe that it did exist would have produced the trinitarian statements to prove it. As it is, no such statements have ever been produced (at least I have not encountered them) therefore I can only assume that no trinitarianism has ever been found within our publications. To think otherwise is to deny everything that can be properly termed common sense and reason.

In other words, if we cannot find the evidence that whilst Ellen White was alive there was trinitarianism within Seventh-day Adventism, then it should not be believed that it existed. This is only reasonable thinking. Why believe trinitarianism did exist but no evidence can be found for it? This would not make sense.

The Spear article of 1889

In an attempt to show that some Seventh-day Adventists were trinitarian and that trinitarianism was acceptable to be taught within Seventh-day Adventism, some have used as so-called proof an article that was published on the 14th November 1889 in a religious journal called the *New York Independent*. This was the year following the Minneapolis Conference. This same article, written by Samuel Spear who was not a Seventh-day Adventist, was later, with certain modifications, included as No. 90 in the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Students Library. This was in 1892. You can read the entire article by gong here

[http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Articles\(others\)/Speararticle.pdf](http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Articles(others)/Speararticle.pdf)

For those who are unaware of what the Bible Student's Library was, also why it existed, we will allow Gerhard Pfandl to explain (Gerhard Pfandl is Associate Director of the Bible Research Institute). He said

"The Bible Students' Library was "a series of pamphlets, designed for the public, containing brief and pointed essays on Bible doctrines, the fulfillment of prophecy, and other aspects of SDA teachings." (Gerhard Pfandl research paper 'The Doctrine of the Trinity among Adventists', page 4 June 1999)

It should be needless to say that whatever was included in this "series of

pamphlets”, it was that which was officially believed by Seventh-day Adventists (the preponderant faith of the church as a whole). This shows that whatever was said by Spear in his article regarding the Godhead, in 1892 it was what was believed and taught by Seventh-day Adventists. This again is only reasonable to believe.

At first glance, the fact that what Spear wrote was accepted into our *Bible Students Library* series, may appear to be the sound evidence that in the 1890’s the trinity doctrine was acceptable to at least some Seventh-day Adventists but as we shall see, if we do not wish to make $1+1=3$, we must learn to reason much deeper than just the superficial. In other words, unless we learn that we cannot tell the contents of book by looking at its cover (or in this case not assuming what an article is all about just by looking at its title) we are ultimately doomed to draw the wrong conclusions. This we shall see as we read on.

There is also something else that is important to note here. That is that when this article was first published in the *New York Independent*, it had as its title *The Subordination of Christ*. It was also called the same when it was republished in the *Signs in the Times* over two weeks in 1891. This was on December 7th and December 14th of that year. Interestingly, when it was reprinted by the Pacific Press in tract form and included as No. 90 in our Bible Students Library, it was called *The Bible Doctrine of the trinity*.

Max Hatton, a retired Australian Seventh-day Adventist minister, also author of the Seventh-day Adventist publication *Understanding the Trinity*, makes the following observation regarding Spear’s article

“The pamphlet is defective in some of its statements but this is not the important point. What is important to note is that an Adventist Publisher in 1892 could include an item on the Trinity as one of its publications. Certainly, this must indicate that the doctrine was quite acceptable to at least many Seventh-day Adventists at that time.” (*Max Hatton website article ‘Ellen G. White and the Trinity’*)

It was certainly not very unusual for early Seventh-day Adventists to publish an article on the trinity doctrine or to use the word trinity. This they did on many of an occasion but it was usually written in opposition to the teaching, not in favour of it. The publication of such an article therefore (meaning on the trinity) was not in itself unusual.

By his remarks, Hatton is trying to convince his readers that simply because the Seventh-day Adventist Church allowed this item concerning the trinity doctrine to be reproduced in one of its publications, this in itself “must indicate that the doctrine was quite acceptable to at least many Seventh-day Adventists at that time” (meaning in 1892). As a matter of passing interest, the overall purpose of Hatton’s website article is to prove that Ellen White was a trinitarian.

As the above remarks are the totality of what the author in this article says concerning Spear's article, we will confine our comments only to these observations, suffice to say that in another article on his website he also says

“In the formative years of our Church we had no statement of beliefs but it gradually became apparent that such a statement was necessary. Some of our leading pioneers were quite vocally non-Trinitarian. They came from a group that did not believe in the doctrine. They were initially quite Arian in their belief but gradually moved to semi-Arianism and as the Church matured and settled down it became very clearly Trinitarian.” (*Max Hatton, Website article, 'The Checkered History of the Trinity Doctrine'*)

The term “formative years” is an open ended statement, meaning that it could convey any length of time but what we do know is that as a denomination on quite a number of occasions, we did issue a statement of our beliefs.

If you remember we covered this in section forty-five. This is where we noted that in 1872 we issued a statement of beliefs in pamphlet form, then in 1874 (June 4th) and 1878 (February 21st) in the *Signs of the Times*, then in 1889 it was included in our yearbook, also in our 1905 Yearbook. It was also published in our yearbooks from 1907 through to 1914. In the meanwhile it was also published in the *Review and Herald* of 1912 (August 22nd). We can assume therefore that when Hatton says “In the formative years of our Church we had no statement of beliefs” he was making reference to pre 1872. I say this because it is reasonably obvious that from that year onwards, we did have a published statement of beliefs.

Admittedly a small handful of our pioneers did come from “a group” that did not accept the trinity doctrine but to use this as a reason for the entire Seventh-day Adventist Church for so many years (even up to after Ellen White had died) to be non-trinitarian is not a reasonable conclusion to draw. Most (if not all) were Sunday keepers but God did not leave us in this condition. Instead He gave us the truth concerning the seventh-day Sabbath.

The above mentioned published statements of beliefs were all strictly non-trinitarian. It must also be remembered that for this length of time (1844-1915) we were under the auspices of God's messenger to the remnant, namely Ellen G. White. It is not reasonable to believe therefore that throughout this time period, Seventh-day Adventists were non-trinitarian simply because a few of our original pioneers came from a non-trinitarian group. This is pushing the limits of credibility to the point of absurdity.

Again it is difficult to assess what is meant by “Arian” and “semi-Arianism” but what we do know for sure is that since its inception, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has always upheld the full and complete deity of Christ. This is even though it was explained in terms that are non-trinitarian. We have seen this so many times in previous sections.

If Arian means a literally created Christ, then this has never been the preponderant belief of Seventh-day Adventists. They have always believed that Christ was the literal Son of God, begotten of the Father in eternity. This established Him as divine and equal with God, also a separate person from the eternal God, at least in terms of personages. In other words, God the Father and Christ were always regarded as two separate personages although both were regarded as being God. Never in the time period of Ellen White's ministry (1844-1915) were God and Christ regarded as having *one being* as purported by the trinity doctrine.

Concerning Hatton's statement that as our church "settled down it became very clearly Trinitarian", we need to remember that it did not become an established trinitarian denomination until well into the 1950's. This is quite a long settling down period. By reading Hatton's statement it could be reasoned that we became a trinitarian denomination very much earlier, even perhaps whilst Ellen White was alive. This of course would be error. Hatton continues in his article

"While there were still many Arians in the Church it was nevertheless moving into Trinitarianism in the late 1800's but the matter was not settled in all minds. Samuel Spear, a non-Seventh-day Adventist had an article, Bible Doctrine of the Trinity published in the New York Independent on November 14, 1889. The Seventh-day Adventist Pacific Press published it as number 90 in the Bible Student Library series in 1892." (*Ibid*)

There is an error here but it is understandable. Although when Spear's article was included in the Bible Students Library it did have the title *The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity*, when it was originally published in the New York Independent it was called *The Subordination of Christ*. Hatton then says concerning what Spear wrote

"The pamphlet is defective in some of its statements but this is not the important point. Obviously, to publish the pamphlet would be unthinkable if Trinitarianism was not acceptable among Adventists at the time." (*Ibid*)

If the title alone of Spear's article (as when a tract in the Bible Students Library) is accepted as being the only proof that the trinity was acceptable to many Seventh-day Adventists, then this would indeed be a very superficial conclusion to draw but would it be a correct one? Conversely of course it may also be asked (possibly by the trinitarians), if we were a non-trinitarian denomination, then why at that time (1892), was this article (namely *The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity*) accepted into the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Students Library?

These are very good questions and they do deserve an answer. We shall undertake to do this now!

The truth concerning Spear's trinity article

The truth of the matter is that Spear's article, whether it is termed *The*

Subordination of Christ or 'The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity', regardless of the claims that the publication of it by our denomination is proof that trinitarianism was acceptable to many Seventh-day Adventists, actually proves exactly the opposite. I say this because this article shows that Samuel Spear was just as much against the extreme speculations of the trinity doctrine as were the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism. In other words, what Spear wrote in his article was what was then believed by Seventh-day Adventists. This is why it was included in our publications.

Spear wrote his article to show that with respect to certain of its concepts, the trinity doctrine was nothing more than just the mere speculations of men (remember we noted in section four that the trinity doctrine was only an assumed teaching). In other words, Spear's article was written with the intent of speaking against the trinity doctrine, not in favour of it. This is why Hatton draws the conclusion that the pamphlet "is defective in some of its statements". Obviously it would be seen this way (defective) if read by a trinitarian because after all, it was anti-trinitarian, meaning that it denied as being true the very basics that makes any teaching concerning God, Christ and the Holy Spirit essentially trinitarian.

One of the trinitarian basics that Spear denies is that the Son is eternally begotten of the Father (this is in contrast to the orthodox trinity doctrine). He also denies that all three personalities (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) are all of one indivisible substance, which as all trinitarians will confess is the most important aspect of any trinity teaching. It is this latter concept (the one substance part of this doctrine) that makes this teaching trinitarian. In other words, if this *one substance* concept is not accepted, then however it is explained, any belief concerning the three personalities of the Godhead cannot be said to be trinitarian. This is why Spear's article was non-trinitarian. He did say that there was a unity of the persons of the Godhead but not as the trinity doctrine purports, therefore he fell far short of expressing the doctrine of the trinity.

The fact that Hatton makes the observation that the leaflet "is defective in some of its statements" leads one to assume that he has read it but we must now ask ourselves - how relevant is his claim that this defectiveness is "not the important point".

I believe that after realising that the article was actually non-trinitarian (even anti-trinitarian), these so-called 'defects' are the important point and that they are indeed very relevant, particularly to our studies. It is why it was acceptable to Seventh-day Adventists. Certainly it does not prove that at that time (1890's) trinitarianism was acceptable in our ranks.

As we shall now see, Spear's pamphlet was in complete harmony with that which in 1892 the Seventh-day Adventist Church was then teaching (meaning its non-trinitarianism). This is why it was included in the Bible Students Library. Remember that at this time (1892), we were still a non-trinitarian denomination and the article was written against the extreme speculations of the trinity

doctrine, not in support of them.

This is also the reason why this article cannot be used as evidence that the doctrine of the trinity was, as Max Hatton puts it, “quite acceptable to at least many Seventh-day Adventists at that time”. In fact as far as I am concerned, it only serves to prove exactly the opposite.

Samuel Spear’s article (please note again the emphasis that is placed on the title), ‘The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity’, agrees with the reasoning that the only things that we should believe about God, Christ and the Holy Spirit is what the Bible says about them. I would reason that this was the whole point of our church calling it ‘The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity’ and not just The Trinity. In other words, the article concerns what the Bible alone has to say concerning the three personalities of the Godhead, meaning without the speculations of the trinity doctrine.

In 1894, an explanation of this tract was given in the *Signs of the Times*. Under the sub-heading “No.90. The Bible Doctrine of the trinity” it said

“This tract of 16 pages is a reprint of an article in the New York Independent, by the late Samuel Spear, D.D. It presents the Bible view of the doctrine of the Trinity in the terms used in the Bible, and therefore avoids all philosophical discussion and foolish speculation.” (*Signs of the Times, 28th May 1894, Bible Students Library, No.90, The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity*)

Note here very importantly the emphasis. It is on the fact, according to our church, that Spear did not get himself involved with “philosophical discussion and foolish speculation”. This is with reference to the philosophical concepts and the speculations of the trinity doctrine. This is what our pioneers and our church was very much against.

If you remember, we did note in section four that whichever version is accepted, meaning either the version known as orthodoxy or the one held by Seventh-day Adventists, the conclusion is the same. This is because both are based on speculation. This is why at that time (1892), Spear’s article was so acceptable to Seventh-day Adventists. It was totally devoid of such reasoning and employed only “terms used in the Bible”. This is why it was non-trinitarian. As we have also noted previously, if the Bible only is used then any teaching of the Godhead must be non-trinitarian. This is because there is not found in either the Old or New Testament the concept of God being a trinity. The latter is purely a man made teaching. This write-up of Spear’s article concluded

“It is a tract worthy of reading.” (*Ibid*)

To this I would wholeheartedly agree. Two years previously (this was when the tract was first introduced to the Bible Students’ Library) it said in the *Signs of the*

Times

“No. 90 is entitled “The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity,” by the late Samuel T. Spear, D.D., and is reprinted from the New York Independent.” (*Signs of the Times, April 4th 1892, Volume 18, No. 22, page 352*)

It then added

“While there may be minor thoughts in this worthy number which we might wish to express differently, on the whole we believe that it sets forth the Bible doctrine of the trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit with a devout adherence to the words of Scripture, in the best brief way we ever saw it presented.” (*Ibid*)

I would ask you to note here that this write up did not say that Spear’s article “sets forth the doctrine of the trinity” but said that it “sets forth the Bible doctrine of the trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit”. Rather than alluding to the trinity doctrine itself, it is with reference to the trinity of (meaning three) personalities.

To the accolade given in this write-up, I would give my unreserved support. Without question, Spear’s article is the finest article that I have ever seen published regarding the three personalities of the Godhead.

It did say that there was certain “minor faults” in Spear’s article but they must have been considered so small that they did not matter. It does leave one to wonder though what they were. When this article was first published in the *Signs of the Times* (this was under its original title), this was said of it

“We call attention to the article entitled “The Subordination of Christ,” by the late Samuel T. Spear, taken from the Independent. It was so long that we found it necessary to divide it. We trust that this candid setting forth of the Trinity will be read with care.” (*Signs of the Times, December 7th 1891*)

The next week when publishing the second part of Spear’s article it said

“In this number is included Dr. Spear’s article on the “Subordination of Christ”. To this candid setting forth of the Trinity we believe that no Bible student will object. It is worthy of careful reading, not only for the subject matter it contains but for the way in which it presented.” (*Signs of the Times, December 14th 1891*)

To the latter I would agree. Spear’s article is a brilliant rendering of what the Bible says concerning the three personalities of the Godhead. I cannot see how anyone who is seeking the truth can find fault with it.

A very interesting observation

I would now like to point out something very interesting. It is also very relevant to

our studies, particularly in respect of what was believed by Seventh-day Adventists as the 20th century approached.

I am now going to quote a portion of Spear's article. This is as it was printed in No. 90 of our Bible Students Library. I would ask you to note the ellipsis. It denotes that something has not been quoted that was there originally. I am then going to quote it as it was in Spear's original article in the New York Independent. In this quote I am going to highlight in blue what was removed when it was made into tract form for the Bible Students Library. You will see it is very significant. Here is the quote as it was in No. 90 in the Bible Student's Library (note the ellipsis)

"The distinction thus revealed in the Bible is the basis of the doctrine of the tri-personal God. ... This doctrine, as held and stated by those who adopt it, is not a system of tri-theism, or the doctrine of three Gods, but is the doctrine of one God subsisting and acting in three persons, with the qualification that the term "person," though perhaps the best that can be used, is not, when used in this relation, to be understood in any sense that would make it inconsistent with the unity of the Godhead, and hence not to be understood in the ordinary sense when applied to men. Bible trinitarians are not tritheists. They simply seek to state, in the best way in which they can, what they regard the Bible as teaching." (Samuel T. Spear, D. D., published in the New York Independent on November 14th 1889 as 'The Subordination of Christ' and by the Pacific Press in 1892 as 'The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity'. The latter was in pamphlet form as a tract and included as No. 90 in the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Students Library. It was also published in the Signs of the Times of December 7th and 14th 1891. This was under its original title of 'The Subordination of Christ')

Now take a look at it as it was originally in the New York Independent (highlighted in light blue is what was omitted when it was reproduced in tract form)

*"The distinction thus revealed in the Bible is the basis of the doctrine of the tri-personal God or **tri-une God, which has so long been the faith of the Christian Church.**" (Samuel T. Spear, D. D., as published in the New York Independent on November 14th 1889 as 'The Subordination of Christ')*

It was the reference to the "tri-une God" being "the faith of the Christian Church" that was removed. This was not in keeping with what Seventh-day Adventists then believed. It appears that in their tracts to the general public they did not wish to be identified with this statement so these words were omitted. Even more interesting to note is that these words were the only ones that were omitted. The rest of the article was left as Spear had written it. When this article was reproduced in the *Signs of the Times* of December 7th and 14th of 1891, the entirety of Spear's article was published. It then carried the title of *The Subordination of Christ*.

Does this tell us anything about the trinity doctrine and Seventh-day Adventism in the 1890's? It certainly should do so. Along with what we shall see in the remainder of this section regarding Spear's article, it tells us that trinitarianism was not acceptable to be taught within Seventh-day Adventism, in the 1890's, meaning as the 20th Century approached.

Samuel Spear and the doctrine of the trinity

In his trinity article, Samuel Spear lists a number of observations as to why he personally believes that the trinity doctrine is nothing more than mere speculation and therefore should not be taught within Christianity. He also relates that everything the Bible says concerning the three personalities of the Godhead should be taken just as it is and no more added. He says

“These facts — namely, the absolute unity of the Godhead, excluding all multiplicity of gods, the absolute divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ and the subordination of Christ in some respect to God the Father — when taken together, have led Biblical scholars to consider the question which relates to the method of harmonizing them. What shall be said on this point?” (Samuel T. Spear, D. D., published in the New York Independent on November 14th 1889 as ‘The Subordination of Christ’ and by the Pacific Press in 1892 as ‘The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity’. The latter was in pamphlet form as a tract and included as No. 90 in the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Students Library. It was also published in the Signs of the Times of December 7th and 14th 1891. This was under its original title of ‘The Subordination of Christ’)

In support of the principle of believing only what the Bible says (remember here that Spear was not a Seventh-day Adventist), he says in observation No. 2 of the facts (he lists 7 observations in total)

“So the matter stands in the word of God; and if Christians were to confine their thoughts to simply what that word says, they would never raise any serious questions in regard to the subject, which is, perhaps, on the whole, the best course to pursue” (Ibid)

This was also the view of the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism. Spear also goes on to say in his article (observation No. 3)

“It is not necessary, for the practical purposes of godliness and salvation, to speculate on the point at all, or know what biblical scholars have thought and said in regards to it. It is enough to take the Bible just as it reads, to believe what it says, and stop where it stops.” (Ibid)

In this we can see that Samuel Spear maintains that we should only believe what the Bible tells us - no more and certainly no less. He also says that it is not necessary to know the thoughts and words of “biblical scholars”. Speculation therefore, according to Samuel Spear, was something that was totally

unnecessary.

If you remember, it was said in section four that the trinity doctrine is built on nothing less than speculation. Spear agrees with this in his article. In fact this is his whole point. In observation No. 4 Spear wrote

“All the statements of the Bible must be accepted as true with whatever qualifications they mutually impose on one another. The whole truth lies in them all when taken collectively” (*Ibid*)

This is a very well worded and very true. In another observation in which Spear speaks of and denies tri-theism (three separate Gods) he says

“Bible trinitarians are not tritheists. They simply seek to state, in the best possible way in which they can, what they regard as Bible teaching.” (*Ibid*)

As we all know, the Bible only speaks of three personalities of the Godhead. It does not say anything about them partaking of one indivisible substance (of one being as in the trinity doctrine). Spear concludes therefore that just to speak of these three personalities as portrayed in the Bible alone, even though they are not spoken of in one triune unit, is not tritheism (three Gods).

As we have seen in previous sections, Ellen White maintained that there were three personalities of the Godhead but never once did she say anything about them as subsisting in one being (of the one and the same indivisible substance) as portrayed in the trinity doctrine.

Spear's conclusion therefore is a view that according to some people, would simply amount to tri-theism (three Gods) but here he is making the point that this is just not so. He simply says that all that the Bible reveals is that these three divine persons make up the Godhead and that is where we should leave it. Spear also said in observation No. 5

“The subordination of Christ, as revealed in the Bible, is not adequately explained by referring it simply to His human nature. It is true that, in that nature, He was a created and dependent being, and in this respect like the race whose nature He assumed; and yet the Bible statement of His subordination extends to His divine as well as his human nature.” (*Ibid*)

This was exactly what Seventh-day Adventists believed in the 1890's. He added

“Paul tells us that God “created all things by Jesus Christ,” and that He is the person, or agent,” by whom also He [God] made the worlds.” Eph. 3:9; Heb. 1:2. Neither of these statements can have any relation to the humanity of Christ, and yet in both God is represented as acting in and through Christ, and the latter represented as the medium of such action. So, also, God is described as sending forth His Son into the world, as giving “His only

begotten Son” for human salvation, and as not sparing “His own Son” but delivering “him up for us all.” Gal 4: 4; John 3:16; Rom 8:32. These statements imply that this Son who is none other than Christ Himself, existed prior to his incarnation, and that, as thus existing, He was sent forth, given, not spared, but delivered up, by God the Father. The act assigned to God the Father in thus devoting “His own Son” to the work of human redemption, relates to Him as he was before He assumed our nature in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and supposes in the Father some kind of primacy in making this devotement.” (*Ibid*)

All of these things were exactly as was believed at that time by Seventh-day Adventists. This is why we included Spear’s article as No. 90 in the *Bible Students’ Library* (1892). Note that the latter was 4 years following the 1888 Minneapolis Conference. This shows that this begotten Son concept (Christ a literal Son) was still in 1892 the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. This had remained the same since their beginnings.

Samuel Spear wrote his article in contrast to (and in opposition to) the speculations found in the trinity doctrine or, to put it another way, because the trinity doctrine includes concepts that cannot be supported by scripture, Spear spoke out against it. Hence his reasoning that we should believe only what the Bible says concerning the three personalities of the Godhead and not include speculation (things that God has not revealed).

Spear’s views on the trinity doctrine

Concerning the trinity doctrine itself, Spear opened the reasoning in his article by saying

“The Bible, while not giving a metaphysical definition of the spiritual unity of God, teaches His essential *oneness* in opposition to all forms of polytheism, and also assumes man’s capacity to apprehend the idea sufficiently for all the purposes of worship and obedience.” (*Ibid*)

Here we can see Spear denying the indivisible oneness as it is portrayed in the trinity doctrine but he does not deny that Christ is God in every sense. He says next

“The same Bible as clearly teaches that the adorable Person therein known as Jesus Christ, when considered in his *whole* nature, is truly divine and truly God in the most absolute sense. John 1:1-18; 1 John 5:20; Rom. 1:3, 4; 9:5; Titus 2:13.” (*Ibid*)

He also says in opposition to the trinity teaching (at least to the original trinity doctrine, the one that I term orthodox)

“The theory of the eternal generation of the Son by the Father, with the cognate theory of the eternal procession of the Holy Ghost from the Father,

or from the Father and the Son, while difficult even to comprehend, and while at best a mystical speculation, is an effort to be wise, not only above what is written, but also beyond the possibilities of human knowledge.”
(Ibid)

As can be clearly seen, Spear was decidedly against the speculations of the doctrine of the trinity (“eternal generation” or eternal begetting). We can also see here clearly the very reason why this article came to be accepted into the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Students Library. This article was definitely in keeping with the non-trinitarian faith of 1890’s Seventh-day Adventism. The latter believed that Christ was begotten (came out of the Father) at a point in eternity. In closing his article Spear says

“The simple minded Christian, when thinking of these wants, and contemplating the divine trinity, as he finds it in the Bible, has no difficulty with the doctrine” *(Ibid)*

Here again Spear is advocating that we should only believe that which the Bible says about the three personalities of the Godhead. This he said, in regard to “the divine trinity”, will supply all that is necessary to know. He concludes by saying

“It is only when men speculate outside of the Bible and beyond it, and seek to be wiser than they can be, that difficulties arise; and then they do arise as the rebuke of their own folly. A glorious doctrine then becomes their perplexity, and ingulfs them in a confusion of their own creation.” *(Ibid)*

He then adds in confirmation of what he has said already

“What they need is to believe more and speculate less.” *(Ibid)*

This indeed summarises what many believe concerning the trinity doctrine. They say it is a merely man-made doctrine, based on speculation (that which God has not revealed) and that those who promote it (as Spear concludes) are trying to be wiser than they possibly can be (meaning going beyond what God has revealed).

Spear also says that these speculations are the very reasons why difficulties arise that when all is said and done only serve to be “the rebuke” of the trinitarians “own folly”. He also says that this same speculation “ingulfs” those who believe it “in a confusion of their own creation”. He concludes therefore that what they need to do is to “believe more and speculate less”. Could he be any more anti-trinitarian?

It would be quite beneficial here to read the entirety of Samuel Spear’s article because if we did, we would then certainly see that when it was included in our students Bible Library series in 1892, it never, in any way, denied the non-trinitarian faith that the Seventh-day Adventist Church was then teaching - rather

it upheld it. This is why this article cannot be used as evidence (as some attempt to do) to prove that many or even some Seventh-day Adventists were trinitarian. It cannot be used either to show that trinitarianism was acceptable, in 1892, within Seventh-day Adventism. Spear's article can only in fact do exactly the opposite. In other words, it can only be used to prove that the Seventh-day Adventist Church was opposed to trinitarianism not in favour of it.

Interesting to note here is that Samuel Spear's article is also against the trinity concepts as held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church today. This is because Spear is adamant that Christ, in His pre-existence, really is the Son of God. This was as believed by all the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism. Spear wrote

“There is, however, a sense in which the Christ of the Bible, while essentially divine, is, nevertheless, in some respects distinct from and subordinate to God the Father. He is spoken of, and frequently speaks of Himself, as the Son of God, as the only-begotten of the Father, as being sent by God the Father into this world, and as doing the will of the Father. He is never confounded with the Father, and never takes His place.” (*Ibid*)

Spear also said

“There is no difficulty in finding in His ministry abundant references to God the Father as in some respects distinct from and superior to Himself, and, hence, involving the idea of His own subordination.” (*Ibid*)

Spear's reasoning is exactly the same as that of R. F. Cottrell. He once said when writing about the trinity doctrine

“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.” (*R. F. Cottrell Review and Herald 1st June 1869 'The Doctrine of the Trinity'*)

Cottrell's comment, “I believe all that the Scriptures say of him” is exactly the same as Samuel Spear's attitude. Regarding this there is no difference.

Now that it is explained what Spear's article was actually all about, it can now be understood and appreciated just why in 1892 it was that the Seventh-day Adventist Church included it as No. 90 in the Bible Students Library series. The article was totally non-trinitarian. This is also why Max Hatton, a trinitarian, says that Spear's pamphlet “is defective in some of its statements”. If you remember he does say in his website article

“The pamphlet is defective in some of its statements but this is not the important point. What is important to note is that an Adventist Publisher in 1892 could include an item on the Trinity as one of its publications. Certainly, this must indicate that the doctrine was quite acceptable to at least many Seventh-day Adventists at that time.” (*Max Hatton article ‘Ellen G. White and the Trinity’*)

He also said in his other article on the trinity

“Obviously, to publish the pamphlet would be unthinkable if Trinitarianism was not acceptable among Adventists at the time.” (*Max Hatton, Website article, ‘The Checkered History of the Trinity Doctrine’*)

Just like everyone else in this world, Max Hatton is entitled to believe as he sees fit. This is his God-given prerogative. Whether his conclusion that the so-called trinity defects in this pamphlet “is not the important point” I will leave for you to decide but the way that I reason things through, it appears to be the entire point. I will also leave you to decide whether Spear’s article being included in the *Bible Students Library* shows that trinitarianism was “quite acceptable to at least many Seventh-day Adventists at that time”. To me it shows exactly the opposite.

Froom’s use of the Spear pamphlet

We have now seen why Samuel Spear’s pamphlet was included in our Bible Students library in 1892. As a denomination we had no argument with it. As far as we were concerned, in relation to what the Scriptures reveal, it was a valid and acceptable view of the Godhead. Certainly it was non-trinitarian or as some might even say (particularly the trinitarians), anti-trinitarian.

In his book *Movement of Destiny*, LeRoy Froom appears to leave his readers with the impression that Samuel Spear’s article was in favour of the trinity doctrine. First he makes reference to what he sees as the outcome of the Minneapolis Conference in 1888. He says

“When once the sublime truth of the complete Deity of Christ as “all the fullness of the Godhead” was affirmed by a growing number at and after the Minneapolis session, emphasis on certain inseparably related truths followed inevitably.” (*LeRoy Froom, ‘Movement of Destiny’ page 322-3, Chapter 19, ‘Decades of varied advances follows 1888’*)

Again this must be regarded as a very misleading statement. Froom makes it appear that it was only from Minneapolis onwards that we came to accept the full deity of Christ but as our denominational history shows, our pioneers have always stressed it but it was from a non-trinitarian standpoint, not one that was trinitarian (see section twenty-one and section twenty-two). In other words, our pioneers used only divine revelation to support their beliefs concerning Christ and did not resort to using the extreme speculations of the trinity doctrine. Note that Froom does not identify this “growing number”.

Waggoner's message at Minneapolis was strictly non-trinitarian. He was even teaching non-trinitarianism years later. This we have seen in section twenty and section twenty-one. Note too Froom mentions "certain inseparably related truths". He does not say what these are but it is more than likely they were with respect to the atonement and the humanity of Christ (see section fifty-two). Froom then says

"Thus the truth of the Trinity was set forth in tract form by the Pacific Press – where E. J. Waggoner was editor – in February, 1892. This was just three and a half years after Minneapolis. It was not written by one of our own men, but by the "late Dr. Samuel Spear". This was reprinted, "by permission", from the New York *Independent* of November 14, 1889." (*Ibid*)

To say the very least, Froom's statement that Spear's article depicted "the truth of the trinity" is extremely misleading but it is not exactly a lie. This is because in his article Spear did actually state what the trinity doctrine teaches but what Froom fails to point out is that Spear said he did not believe it. This was because it was merely the speculations of men. It is on this point of silence where Froom's remarks are extremely misleading. Froom then adds (remember he is here referring to 1892)

"The fact is, we had nothing in print at the time." (*Ibid*)

Now this really is a very interesting remark. I say this because as we have seen in section fifty-two, in his *Movement of Destiny*, Froom maintained that the majority of our pioneers were trinitarian, giving the idea that our denominational stance was trinitarian. If this was the case, which as we know it was not, then why didn't we, at the time that Spear's article being accepted by our church, have anything "in print" on the question of the trinity? If we had been a trinitarian denomination, we would have had plenty in print concerning it. That much again is only reasonable to conclude. Interesting really isn't it?

The answer to all of this of course is that the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still, in 1892, a strictly non-trinitarian denomination. Certainly it was not one that was majority trinitarian. This is why no articles can be found in our publications in support of the trinity doctrine. This is the same reason why Froom says "The fact is, we had nothing in print on the question at the time." (*Ibid*)

Here is another question to ponder. Why didn't Froom, as proof that our denomination was then trinitarian, quote from any articles in our publications supporting the trinity doctrine? The answer to that question is for the very same reason that no one else can quote them. They simply do not exist. We, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, were undoubtedly a non-trinitarian denomination, even up to 1892 and well beyond, even to decades after the death of Ellen White. Froom then says on page 323 regarding the Spear pamphlet

"This sound and helpful tract by Spear – The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity

(1892) – necessarily deals with the complete deity of Christ” (*Ibid*)

Here again, Froom makes it appear that Spear’s article is being said to support the trinity doctrine when in fact it was speaking out against it. Froom follows this by listing all the points in Samuel Spear’s tract that were in keeping with the orthodox trinity doctrine but nowhere does he mention that Spear does not accept them all as being true. Froom certainly does not mention the fact that Spear believed that the trinity doctrine contains non-Biblical “mystical speculation” (see Spear’s remarks above). Froom also says of Spear’s article

“It [Spear’s article] notes the "diversity in offices, relations, and actions toward men" on the part of the Godhead (p. 9), and how "Trinitarians are not tritheists" (p. 9). (*Ibid*)

I would ask you here to note here the final part of this statement because Froom completely misquotes Samuel Spear. Spear had actually said

“Bible trinitarians are not tritheists. They simply seek to state, in the best way in which they can, what they regard the Bible as teaching.”

As can be seen, Froom omits to say “Bible trinitarians” but says instead “Trinitarians”, making it look as though Spear was referring to those who believe in the trinity doctrine. Spear though was making a contrast between the speculations of the trinitarians to what the Bible says. Note also the change of case (Froom says “Trinitarians” making it look like a beginning of a sentence when it was not).

Now note the next sentence. Froom said

“It [Spear’s article] touches on the one all-encompassing "name" (singular) in the baptismal formula, and the " 'one Spirit,' " " 'one Lord,' " and " 'one God and Father of all' " (p. 10) — the " 'divine Trinity' " (p. 14).

Notice how Froom takes certain very small amounts of words and makes it look as though Spear was in favour of the trinity doctrine. This is an appalling way to quote someone. Notice particularly the words “divine Trinity”. Spear had actually said

“The simple-minded Christian, when thinking of these wants, and contemplating the divine Trinity, as he finds it in the Bible, has no difficulty with the doctrine.”

Again Froom makes it look as though Spear’s words were with respect to the trinity doctrine when in fact Spear was speaking of what the Bible alone says concerning the three personalities of the Godhead. As Spear said of this, “as he [“The simple-minded Christian”] finds it in the Bible”.

So it was that these trinitarian phrases were taken completely out of the context of Spear's reasoning, making it appear as though they are meant by him to uphold the original trinity doctrine, which was not his intention. Froom then says about Spear's article

“It was simple, but adequate, as the first step in recognition and declaration. It was the logical aftermath of 1888” (*LeRoy Froom, 'Movement of Destiny' page 323*)

As we have seen, the acceptance of Spear's article was certainly not as Froom says “the first step” towards the acceptance of the trinity doctrine within Seventh-day Adventism and it was certainly not “the logical aftermath of 1888”. This is because Spear's article was decidedly non-trinitarian, just like Waggoner's message at Minneapolis (1888) was non-trinitarian. This much we know for sure. Note that Spear's article was published in the *New York Independent* the year after the Minneapolis Conference of 1888. Someone thought it ideal as representing our 1890's faith regarding God and Christ, the same faith as Waggoner had preached at Minneapolis.

If you would like to see why Waggoner's message at Minneapolis was non-trinitarian, then please go to section twenty and review what he said in his book *Christ and His Righteousness*. This is the book that he maintained depicted his message at Minneapolis. See also section twenty-one to see that in 1891, three years after Minneapolis, Waggoner was still teaching non-trinitarianism.

Erwin Gane and Spear's article

Erwin Gane, in his master thesis on the doctrine of the trinity within Seventh-day Adventism, also refers to the Spear article as suggesting evidence that trinitarianism was gaining acceptance in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He says

“The publication in 1892, by the Pacific Press, of a Trinitarian article, written by a non-Adventist writer, would seem to indicate a growing acceptance of this doctrine in the Adventist Church. The article entitled, "The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity" was written by Samuel T. Spear and published in 1889 in the *New York Independent*. The Pacific Press reprinted it in 1892 as No. 90 of the Bible Student's Library.” (*Erwin Gane, Masters thesis, Andrews University*)

Note that Erwin Gane calls Spear's article “a Trinitarian article” thus giving the impression that it was written in favour of the trinity doctrine. He also says that the acceptance of it did “seem to indicate a growing acceptance of this doctrine in the Adventist Church”. This is very misleading. Gane then relates

“The Spear article clearly defines the Trinitarian position as teaching the unity of the Godhead consisting of three persons.” (*Ibid*)

As we have already noted, Spear did definitely define how the trinity doctrine explains the unity of the Godhead but Erwin Gane fails to mention that Spear did not accept this teaching. By omitting certain sentences from the Spear article, Gane then makes it appear that Spear is upholding the trinity doctrine. This he does by quoting Spear as saying

“This doctrine, as held and stated by those who adopt it, is not a system of tri-theism, or the doctrine of three Gods, but it is the doctrine of one God subsisting and acting in three persons, with the qualification that the term "person", though perhaps the best that can be used, is not, when used in this relation, to be understood in any sense that would make it inconsistent with the unity of the Godhead, and hence not to be understood in the ordinary sense when applied to men.” (*Ibid*)

We have noted before that trinitarians do not see the three personalities of the Godhead as personal beings as we are (see section six) so we will not comment again here.

Gane makes it look as though by saying “This doctrine”, Spear was referring to the trinity doctrine but this is not true. What Spear was referring to was what the Bible says concerning the three personalities of the God as opposed to the trinity doctrine. How Gane achieved this was by not quoting the first and last two sentences of the paragraph. If these sentences had been included then it would have been that Spear was referring to what the Bible says about Father, Son and Holy Spirit and not the trinity doctrine.

What we shall look at now is the paragraph as Spear originally wrote it. Note that the three missing sentences are in a lighter blue. Spear said

“The distinction thus revealed in the Bible is the basis of the doctrine of the tri-personal God. ... This doctrine, as held and stated by those who adopt it, is not a system of tri-theism, or the doctrine of three Gods, but is the doctrine of one God subsisting and acting in three persons, with the qualification that the term “person,” though perhaps the best that can be used, is not, when used in this relation, to be understood in any sense that would make it inconsistent with the unity of the Godhead, and hence not to be understood in the ordinary sense when applied to men. Bible trinitarians are not tritheists. They simply seek to state, in the best way in which they can, what they regard the Bible as teaching.” (*Samuel T. Spear, D. D., published in the New York Independent on November 14th 1889 as ‘The Subordination of Christ’ and by the Pacific Press in 1892 as ‘The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity’. The latter was in pamphlet form as a tract and included as No. 90 in the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Students Library. It was also published in the Signs of the Times of December 7th and 14th 1891. This was under its original title of ‘The Subordination of Christ’*)

As can be seen, if this whole paragraph is read as Spear wrote it and not as

Gane quoted it (missing out sentences) then it would have been obvious that Spear was referring to what the Bible says concerning the three personalities of the Godhead and not giving support to the trinity doctrine. It is the omitting of the sentences that causes this misrepresentation. Spear, in this paragraph, is justifying those who believe only what the Bible says. This is in opposition to the speculations of the trinity doctrine that say that all three personalities subsist in the one indivisible substance (the one being) of God.

In the Seventh-day Adventist publication *The Trinity*, Jerry Moon said exactly the same. After saying that a statement made by D. T. Bourdeau in 1890 showed that anti-trinitarianism in Seventh-day Adventism was “showing some cracks” (we shall be taking a look at Bourdeau’s statement in the next section), he wrote

“Further evidence that it was the case appeared two years later, in 1892, when Pacific Press published a pamphlet titled “The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity,” by Samuel T. Spear. The pamphlet corrected two prevailing misconceptions of the Trinity doctrine, showing that it “is not a system of tritheism, or the doctrine of three Gods, but it is the doctrine of one God subsisting and acting in three persons, with the qualification that the term ‘person’ . . . is not, when used in this relation, to be understood in any sense that would make it inconsistent with the unity of the Godhead.” (*Jerry Moon, The Trinity, Chapter 13, Trinity and anti-Trinitarianism in Seventh-day Adventist History, pages 195-196, 2002*)

Here again Spear is being misquoted. His words that it is “not a system of tritheism” are with respect to what the Bible says concerning the three personalities of the Godhead without the oneness speculations of the trinity doctrine. By omitting sentences that came before and after this statement, Moon, like Gane, makes it look as though Spear is referring to the trinity doctrine when he is not.

Those who refuse to say that all three personalities are of one substance (trinity speculation) are normally called “tritheists”. This is why Spear said (these are two of the missing sentences)

“Bible trinitarians are not tritheists. They simply seek to state, in the best way in which they can, what they regard the Bible as teaching.” (*Samuel T. Spear, D. D., published in the New York Independent on November 14th 1889 as ‘The Subordination of Christ’ and by the Pacific Press in 1892 as ‘The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity’. The latter was in pamphlet form as a tract and included as No. 90 in the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Students Library. It was also published in the Signs of the Times of December 7th and 14th 1891. This was under its original title of ‘The Subordination of Christ’*)

As has been said so many times before, this was said by Spear in opposition to the speculations of the trinity doctrine not in favour of it.

In just the same way as Spear explained the three personalities of the Godhead, this was also the way it was with Seventh-day Adventists whilst Ellen White was alive. They spoke of the three personalities of the Godhead but did not imbibe in trinity speculations that cannot be found in the Scriptures.

Spear's words as found in his article fitted perfectly into the non-trinitarian 1890's beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. What they believed could never have led people to call them tritheistic. They did believe in the one God who is the Father. They also believed that Christ (God's Son) was a separate personality from God and that He was God essentially. They also believed that the Holy Spirit was a personality but not in the same way as they regarded the Father and the Son as personal individual beings.

Admittedly Gane makes reference to the fact that Spear regarded the view of the eternal generation of the Son as being that which is only mystical speculation but again he fails, as did others, to say specifically that Spear wrote his article against this particular aspect of the trinity doctrine.

Here we see again (in Gane's article) that our acceptance of the Spear pamphlet is incorrectly used to suggest that at that time in 1892, trinitarianism was acceptable to Seventh-day Adventists or as Gane put it, "would seem to indicate a growing acceptance of this doctrine in the Adventist Church". This statement is rather unfortunate because it leads to horrendous misunderstandings concerning how Seventh-day Adventists (whilst Ellen White was alive), regarded the doctrine of the trinity.

Gerhard Pfandl and Spear's article

Another person to comment on the Spear article is Gerhard Pfandl (Associate Director of the Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Research Centre). This he did in a research paper in 1999 called *The Doctrine of the Trinity among Adventists*. On page 4 of his paper he says

"The first positive reference to the Trinity in Adventist literature appeared in the Bible Students' Library series in 1892. The Bible Students' Library was "a series of pamphlets, designed for the public, containing brief and pointed essays on Bible doctrines, the fulfillment of prophecy, and other aspects of SDA teachings." Pamphlet number 90 was entitled "The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity." What is significant is the fact that the author, Samuel Spear, was not an Adventist. The pamphlet was a reprint of an article from the New York Independent of November 14, 1889." (*Gerhard Pfandl research paper 'The Doctrine of the Trinity among Adventists', page 4 June 1999*)

Pfandl makes much the same claim as does the others we have just noted, saying that in 1892 the publication of Spear's article was "The first positive reference to the Trinity in Adventist literature". This we have seen is not a correct understanding of this matter therefore it is a very misleading statement to make. As we have noted, Spear's design in his article was to speak out against the

speculations of the trinity doctrine not to have people believe them. Pfandl concluded with reference to what Spear had written

“Although this pamphlet was certainly an improvement on previous positions it still fell short of the true picture of the Trinity. Nevertheless, the fact that it was printed by Pacific Press indicates that the concept of the Trinity was beginning to be accepted by the church.” (*Ibid*)

Again we see someone saying that Spear’s article (as Pfandl puts it) “fell short of the true picture of the trinity”. This is not surprising when it is realized that the article was written with the intention to oppose this teaching. This is why the Pacific Press chose to publish it. Certainly it does not show as Pfandl says that “the concept of the Trinity was beginning to be accepted” within Seventh-day Adventism. In reality it does exactly the opposite therefore as far as the author of these notes is concerned, Pfandl’s remarks are very misleading.

In his article, Spear only concluded to be true what the Bible reveals concerning God, Christ and the Holy Spirit (remember here that Spear was not a Seventh-day Adventist therefore it is more than likely that he did not take into account that which Ellen White had written). Spear’s article did not, as does the trinity doctrine, involve itself with speculation (that which makes it trinitarian). This is the main reason why, as Pfandl says, that it “fell short of the true picture of the trinity”.

C. M. Taylor and Spear’s article

In a thesis presented to the faculty of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Society in 1953 (this was in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Bachelor of Divinity). Christy Mathewson Taylor wrote

“The most striking acknowledgement of Trinitarianism [within the Seventh-day Adventist Church] was made when the denomination published a fourteen page pamphlet entitled “The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity” as one of the numbers in the Bible Student’s Library.” (*Christy Mathewson Taylor, A Thesis presented to the faculty of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Society, August 1953, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Bachelor of Divinity, page 35*)

Taylor then added

“This tract, issued in 1892, was a reprint of an article written in 1889 by Samuel T. Spear, D.D., a Baptist and a Trinitarian. Spear took a very forthright position concerning the Trinity.” (*Ibid, page 36*)

To the best of my knowledge, Samuel Spear was a Presbyterian not a Baptist and what we have seen is that he did take “a very forthright position concerning the Trinity”. He opposed its extreme speculations. Taylor also said on the next page

“No Adventist writer had, up to this time, declared himself freely upon the doctrine, but the Pacific Press Publishing Association, a denominational publishing house, reached out in 1892 beyond previous denominational doctrinal expressions, and made use of a thoroughly Trinitarian paper in its leading series of pamphlets.

Spear’s article was not “thoroughly trinitarian” no more than is the paper you are now reading. Taylor concluded

“One must conclude from these circumstances that Trinitarian thinking had come to predominate in the staff of the Pacific Press Publishing Association by this time. It is not known what personalities were concerned in approving the publication of the Spear’s document. Wilcox was still editor of the Signs of the Times, which was also published at the Pacific Press. Statements from his writings quoted in a previous chapter show that he had not accepted Trinitarianism at this time.” (*Ibid, page 37*)

That chapter concluded with the thought

“The use of the Spear article was very significant. It indicates a changing view on the doctrine of the Trinity.” (*Ibid, page 39*)

Spear’s article did not indicate anything of the sort. The Seventh-Day Adventist Church was still as non-trinitarian as it always had been. In fact even 44 years later in 1936, as we noted in section forty-two, our church, in its Sabbath School lesson quarterlies, was still saying that Christ’s personality had a beginning. This is about as non-trinitarian as it gets.

Merlin Burt and Spear’s article

One person who portrayed Samuel Spear’s article almost correctly is Merlin Burt whom we have previously mentioned in this study. He said in his 1996 research paper

“Samuel Spear on the Trinity. The first positive reference to the term “trinity” in Adventist literature was by Samuel Spear, a non-Adventist, in a reprint from the New York *Independent* of November 14 1889. It was published as number 90 in the Bible Students Library series in 1892.” (*Merlin Burt, ‘Demise of Semi-Arianism and anti-trinitarianism in Adventist Theology, 1888-1957’, pages 5-6, December 1996*)

This was much the same wording as Gerhard Pfandl’s (see above).

As has been said already, Merlin Burt, to a great degree, summarises Samuel Spear’s article correctly but he does say (again quite misleadingly) that this article was “The first positive reference to the term “trinity” in Adventist literature”. Why I say misleading is because in reality, this article was against the doctrine of the trinity, particularly its man made speculations. Certainly it cannot be said to

be “positive” in favour of it. Burt then quite correctly says

“The title, *Bible Doctrine of the Trinity*, implied that the work would be sympathetic to the doctrine of the trinity. Upon reading the tract, one finds almost nothing which nineteenth-century Adventists would have found objectionable.” (*Ibid*)

Burt has caught the picture perfectly. This is because, as we have noted over and over again, Spear’s article was non-trinitarian. In other words it was in keeping with that which the Seventh-day Adventist Church then believed and taught. Before we leave Samuel Spear’s article I would like to make one more observation. This is in reference to Merlin Burt’s statement

“Spear also argued against the idea of tritheism, and for the separate personalities of the Father and Son, both important concepts in Adventist literature up to 1892.” (*Merlin Burt, ‘Demise of Semi-Arianism and anti-trinitarianism in Adventist Theology, 1888-1957’, pages 5-6, December 1996*)

This really is a very important statement. It is simply telling us that up to 1892 (this was when Spear’s tract was included in the Students Bible Library series), the concept of “the separate personalities” of the Father and Son (God and Christ) was very important to Seventh-day Adventists.

The reason why I have drawn your attention to this fact is that even after 1892, this very same concept was still extremely important to this denomination. This was especially so in the early 1900’s when concerning our beliefs regarding the personalities of the Godhead, a crisis came about within Seventh-day Adventism. This is the crisis that led Ellen White to repeatedly emphasize, even many years after *Desire of Ages* was published, that God was one personality whilst Christ was another personality, meaning that they were two separate and distinct personages. This is why the concept that the Father and Son were of one indivisible substance as part of a triune God was just as foreign to Ellen White as it was to the other pioneers. As we have seen, it was not until long after her death that this particular concept was introduced into Seventh-day Adventism.

Interesting to note here is that I can find Spear’s article advertised in our publications up to the year 1911. This was in the *Review and Herald* and the *Signs of the Times* etc. It was also advertised for many years leading up to and including 1900 in our Sabbath School Quarterlies. The 1900 quarterly was on *The Life of Christ*.

Before we leave Samuel Spear’s article, it would only be right to mention again that he was not a Seventh-day Adventist. This would mean that He probably did not have the same knowledge of the writings of Ellen White as did Seventh-day Adventists (or did not accept them). I say this because in his article, Samuel

Spear makes reference to certain things that the Bible does not make quite plain whilst through Ellen White God has given further revelation. This is not a criticism of Samuel Spear but simply an observation. His was simply an article on the Bible doctrine of the trinity and did not include from any other sources.

We shall now go to section 54, which is part two of this study on the refuted evidences of trinitarianism within early Seventh-day Adventism. This is where we shall see again that this evidence is not all that it seems.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section fifty-four

Refuted evidence of trinitarianism within early Seventh-day Adventism (Part 2 of 2)

This is the second of two sections showing that the evidence that some have produced of trinitarianism existing within early Seventh-day Adventism is not really evidence at all.

Early Adventism

In an article called, *Salvation Pilgrimage, The Adventist journey into justification by faith and trinitarianism*, Woodrow Whidden spoke of the events of the now famous 1888 Minneapolis Conference. Following this he said

“Prior to this time, Arianism had been quite pervasive in the writings of early Seventh-day Adventism. Interestingly, Arianism (which owes its origin to Arius [d. 336], who denied the divinity of Christ and held that Christ was a created being), has had a natural attraction for religious movements that concentrate on personal obedience while neglecting the importance of justification by faith in the Christian salvation experience.” (*Woodrow Whidden, Ministry 1998, page 5, ‘Salvation Pilgrimage, The Adventist journey into justification by faith and trinitarianism’*)

I could never assent to what Whidden is alleging here. First of all Arius did not believe that Christ was literally a created being; neither did he deny Christ’s divinity. What he did deny was the concepts of the up and coming trinity doctrine. We need to remember that this was in the 4th century therefore Christianity had been on its feet then for almost 300 years. By that time, the identity of Christ, meaning who Christ was (that He was God Himself manifest in the flesh), was well and truly established within Christianity. We discovered this in section eight.

This Arian controversy began when Arius, a presbyter in Alexandria, disagreed with what his bishop, Alexander the ecclesiastical primate of Alexandria, was teaching. In a letter written to his friend Eusebius of Nicomedia, Arius explained his and his followers’ beliefs. He wrote

“But we say and believe, and have taught, and do teach, that the Son is not unbegotten, nor in any way part of the unbegotten; and that He does not derive His subsistence from any matter; but that by His own will and

counsel He has subsisted before time, and before ages, as perfect God, only begotten and unchangeable, and that before He was begotten, or created, or purposed, or established, He was not. For He was not unbegotten.” (*The Ecclesiastical History of Theodoret, Book 1, Chapter 3, ‘Letter of Arius to Eusebius of Nicomedia’*)

In keeping with the belief of Christianity at large, Arius believed that the Father was unbegotten whilst the Son was begotten of the Father. At that time, also during the following centuries, this was the established faith of Christianity (see section two and section three of the *Begotten Series*. See also section eight of this series). L. E. Kimball summed it up this way

“To Alexander’s opinion that there is but one Deity, who appears sometimes as the Father, and again as the Son, or as the Holy Ghost, or, if not exactly this, that three persons existed in one God, distinct, and yet of the same substance and the same eternity, Arius rejoined that, although the Son was of the same or like substance, yet he was the off-spring of the Father, and had a beginning.” (*L. E. Kimball, Signs of the Times, June 25th 1894, ‘The Arian Controversy’*)

The latter said belief of Arius was once the begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventists.

In the early centuries of the Christian era, there can be no doubt that all Christendom believed that Christ was a begotten Son. It seems that everyone at the Council of Nicaea believed exactly the same although the small handful of trinitarians that were present went to the extremity of believing that this begetting was from all eternity (everlastingly begotten). In opposition to the trinitarians, Arius believed that Christ was begotten at a point in eternity. The other difference was that the trinitarians believed that Christ was of (belonged to) the same substance as the Father whilst Arius and his followers correctly believed that there was no Scriptural evidence for such a belief. Arius believed that Christ, in His own right, was a separate personage from God (also a personal being in His own right). We have noted previously that this is much the same faith as Seventh-day Adventists held all during the time of Ellen White’s ministry. It was a faith based on the testimony of the Scriptures.

Whidden makes it look as though Christ not being divine (Arianism) was once the preponderant faith of Seventh-day Adventism. My studies have revealed no such thing. All that I have ever found is that Seventh-day Adventists have always upheld the complete divinity of Christ. This we have seen in such as section fourteen, section fifteen and section sixteen. We also noted this in section twenty-one and section twenty-two etc. This evidence is totally overwhelming. This was even though they did not depict His divinity as in the trinity doctrine which as we have noted so many times before is only an assumed doctrine (see section four). To say the very least therefore, Whidden’s statement is very misleading. He then went on to say

“By the time of the Minneapolis revivals, Jones was forthrightly Trinitarian, emphasizing the full deity of Christ. However, E. J. Waggoner, like many Adventists of his day, had moved from a predominant Arianism to a semi-Arian position.” (*Woodrow Whidden, Ministry 1998, page 5, ‘Salvation Pilgrimage, The Adventist journey into justification by faith and trinitarianism’*)

Concerning Whidden’s remarks about the beliefs of Jones this is impossible to be. This is because at Minneapolis he would have believed exactly the same as the main body of Seventh-day Adventists. To have been preaching trinitarianism whilst everyone else around him was preaching non-trinitarianism would have been so divisive that there would have been uproar. As it was, no controversy existed, at least not concerning the divinity of Christ (or the Holy Spirit). If Jones at Minneapolis had been teaching trinitarianism, this would have been a very strange happening. I say this because apart from Ellen White, the other main preacher at the conference was E. J. Waggoner who, as we have seen in section twenty and section twenty-one was devotedly non-trinitarian. We shall return our thoughts to this later.

Regarding what Jones believed concerning Christ there is no need to conjecture. Seven years after the Minneapolis Conference, in a sermon preached at the 1895 General Conference he said

“He [Christ] who was born in the form of God took the form of man.” In the flesh he was all the while as God, but he did not appear as God.” “He divested himself of the form of God, and in its stead took the form and fashion of man” “The glories of the form of God, he for awhile relinquished.” (*A. T. Jones, General Conference Bulletin, March 4th 1895, ‘The Third Angel’s Message – No. 23’*)

It goes without saying that this is outright non-trinitarianism. Jones speaks of Christ as being “born in the form of God”. Remember this was 7 years following Minneapolis. The latter part of this statement (“The glories of the form of God, he for awhile relinquished”) we spoke of in section seventeen and section eighteen. This is when we noted that in the foregoing of His rights as God, the Son of God walked this earth as a fully functioning human being, even putting at risk His own attributes of deity and His eternal existence (see also section thirteen).

Four years later (1899), again at a General Conference session, Jones preached the same non-trinitarian faith of Seventh-day Adventism. As has been said previously, if he had preached trinitarianism, there would have been pandemonium in the church. It would have been directly against all that was then believed by Seventh-day Adventists. We noted in section thirty-five and section thirty-six that even 20 years later at the 1919 Bible Conference trinitarianism caused problems. This was when W. W. Prescott attempted to have the delegates believe trinitarian concepts of Christ (Christ coeternal with the Father) that was not then believed by Seventh-day Adventists in general. This shows

that by then (1919), the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still mainly non-trinitarian (Christ a begotten Son). At the 1899 General Conference Jones said of Christ

“He was born of the Holy Ghost. In other words, Jesus Christ was born again.” (A. T. Jones, *Sermon preached on March 6th 1899 at the General Conference Session in South Lancaster, Massachusetts, see Review and Herald, August 1st 1899, ‘Christian perfection’*)

Again this shows that Jones believed that in eternity, Christ was “born” of the Father. This we know because he said that [at Bethlehem] “Jesus Christ was born again”. Again it can only be said that this was once the begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventists. Note this was in 1899, the year following the publication of the supposedly trinitarian *Desire of Ages*. Jones then added concerning Christ

“He came from heaven, God's first-born, to the earth, and was 'born again'. But all in Christ's work goes by opposites for us: he, the sinless one, was made to be sin, in order that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. He, the living one, the prince and author of life, died that we might live. He whose goings forth have been from the days of eternity, the first-born of God, was born again, in order that we might be born again.” (*Ibid*)

Jones could not have said it any clearer. At Bethlehem, “God’s first-born” (in eternity) was “born again” (on earth). This is about as non-trinitarian as it gets. This “first-born” is with reference to our Saviour being begotten of God (God begotten) in eternity. Eleven years after Minneapolis, also one year after the publication of *Desire of Ages*, Jones was still non-trinitarian. This is regardless of what Whidden says (see above). Jones also said

“He [Christ] was born again, and was made partaker of the human nature, that we might be born again, and so made partakers of the divine nature. He was born again, unto earth, unto sin, and unto man, that we might be born again unto heaven, unto righteousness, and unto God.” (*Ibid*)

As can be clearly seen, it was not as Whidden says that at “the time of the Minneapolis revivals, Jones was forthrightly Trinitarian” (see above). At Minneapolis, like most (if not all) Seventh-day Adventists, he was very much non-trinitarian. He was still the same 11 years after Minneapolis. That much we know for sure.

Waggoner also misunderstood

Whidden had also said in his *Salvation Pilgrimage* article (see above)

“However, E. J. Waggoner, like many Adventists of his day, had moved from a predominant Arianism to a semi-Arian position.” (*Woodrow Whidden, Ministry 1998, page 5, ‘Salvation Pilgrimage, The Adventist journey into justification by faith and trinitarianism’*)

The only way that I can understand what Whidden is saying here is that Ellet Waggoner changed from believing that Christ was not divine (a created being) to believing that He was begotten of the Father. I say this because as we noted above, Whidden said that Arianism “denied the divinity of Christ and held that Christ was a created being”.

If this is what Whidden is saying then I can find no evidence to support this claim. The only evidence that I can find is that just like his father (Joseph Waggoner), Ellet Waggoner believed that Christ was fully divine. This was in keeping with the rest of Seventh-day Adventism. They believed exactly the same. Perhaps Whidden has access to certain documentation that I have never yet come across. Either that or I am misunderstanding what he is saying. We know that Joseph Waggoner believed in the full and complete divinity of Christ because he said of the trinitarians

“Their difficulty consists in this: They take the denial of a trinity to be equivalent to a denial of the divinity of Christ. Were that the case, we should cling to the doctrine of a trinity as tenaciously as any can; but it is not the case. They who have read our remarks on the death of the Son of God know that we firmly believe in the divinity of Christ; but we cannot accept the idea of a trinity, as it is held by Trinitarians, without giving up our claim on the dignity of the sacrifice made for our redemption. They who have read our remarks on the death of the Son of God know that we firmly believe in the divinity of Christ; but we cannot accept the idea of a trinity, as it is held by Trinitarians, without giving up our claim on the dignity of the sacrifice made for our redemption.” (*J. H. Waggoner, 'The Atonement in Light of Nature and Revelation', 1884 Edition, chapter 'Doctrine of a Trinity Subversive of the Atonement'*)

Trinitarians do not believe that the divine Christ died at Calvary. They believe that only His humanity died. This is why Waggoner was so much against the trinity doctrine. It affected the atonement. We have covered this in section twelve and section thirteen. Continuing his article, Whidden went on to say

“By the late 1880s Ellen White was unequivocally Trinitarian in the expression of her convictions regarding the full deity of Christ. This is truly remarkable, given the strongly Arian and semi-Arian views that were so dominant in the Adventism of that time, and given the fact that even her strong-minded, forthright husband, James White, held such views until relatively late in his life.” (*Woodrow Whidden, Ministry 1998, page 5, 'Salvation Pilgrimage, The Adventist journey into justification by faith and trinitarianism'*)

Again I must say that I have not found that “By the late 1880’s”, Arian views (Christ created - not divine) were “dominant” within Seventh-day Adventism. All that I can find usually comes under the heading of semi-Arianism, meaning that Christ is begotten (brought forth) of the very being of God.

It must also be said that never once did Ellen White confess the trinity doctrine. She even condemned illustrations that depicted God as three-in-one. She said that these types of depictions were all imperfect and untrue (see section twenty-seven). An overall view of what she believed concerning Christ (as we have done so in previous sections) will also show that she was not a trinitarian (see in particular section forty).

There is also something else to consider here.

This is that Whidden says “By the late 1880’s Ellen White was unequivocally Trinitarian”. This implies that previous to this time (prior to the late 1880’s), Ellen White had not been trinitarian. Does this mean that Whidden is saying that concerning her beliefs about God prior to this time, Ellen White never had it quite right?

Whatever Whidden meant, what we have here is the confession that up to that time (the late 1880’s), non-trinitarianism (whatever form it took) was dominant in our church. This is so much different than what Froom said in his *Movement of Destiny*. He said that trinitarianism was the predominant belief. Both views cannot be correct. In Whidden’s statement there is also the implication that Ellen White could have been persuaded by her “strong-minded, forthright husband”, also by the dominant views of the church at large. Ellen White was given revelation directly from Heaven. Never in her beliefs was she even tempted to be persuaded by the pressure of others – certainly not by her husband.

There is also another implication here. This is when Whidden says of James White that he “held such views until relatively late in his life”. This strongly implies that he changed his views from what they once were. Again this is not the testimony of history. From the beginning to the end of his association with God’s remnant people, James White believed that Christ was divine but that the trinity doctrine was error. In the year of his death he wrote

“In his exaltation, before he humbled himself to the work of redeeming lost sinners, Christ thought it not robbery to be equal with God, because, in the work of creation and the institution of law to govern created intelligences, he was equal with the Father. The Father was greater than the Son in that he was first. The Son was equal with the Father in that he had received all things from the Father.” (*James White, Review and Herald, 4th January 1881, ‘The Mind of Christ’*)

This again is non-trinitarianism. It speaks of the “exaltation” of Christ (in His pre-existence) and the belief that He was second in existence to the Father thus receiving from the Father “all things”. Here James White is referring to the belief that at sometime in eternity Christ was begotten of the Father. This was the begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventism. It was that Christ was equal with God because He had been begotten of God.

James White never became a trinitarian. His beliefs concerning God, Christ and the Holy Spirit were only the same as the other early pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism. These were non-trinitarian beliefs.

Trinitarians within Seventh-day Adventism

Speaking of the 1850's outreach of Seventh-day Adventists, Woodrow Whidden went on to say in his article

“This audience, at first, was mainly defined as North American churchgoers. This new outreach, which began in the early 1850s, resulted in a growing influx of Trinitarians from other evangelical bodies into Adventism. These converts were attracted to the prophetic teachings and other strongly biblical doctrines and practices of Adventism; they, however, were not prepared to give up their Trinitarian beliefs.” (*Woodrow Whidden, Ministry 1998, page 5, 'Salvation Pilgrimage, The Adventist journey into justification by faith and trinitarianism'*)

Whidden offers no evidence for his claim (that trinitarians from other churches did not give up their trinitarian beliefs) therefore it cannot be commented upon here. All that I can say is that I cannot name anyone who on becoming a Seventh-day Adventist had retained their trinitarian belief. Perhaps a reader can supply some names.

I would have thought it very strange indeed that any trinitarian who wanted to retain his trinitarian beliefs would wish to be part of a growing number of Christians who very vocally at times rejected the trinity doctrine (see section twenty). To them, meaning to the trinitarians, the latter would have been an anathema. We have noted this in previous sections so we will not pursue this thought again here. Whidden continued

“However widespread, Arianism was never formally or officially adopted by the church, something that can be best understood as one remembers the early movement's strong anti-creedal stance. Because of their vivid memories of the ill-treatment they received from the creedal churches of 'Babylon' in the heated last stages of Millerism, many early Adventists developed an intense "live and let live" attitude on a number of doctrinal issues. In other words, there was strong resistance to any creed. Thus any new convert could be a Seventh-day Adventist and Trinitarian.” (*Ibid*)

I am left wondering what Whidden really meant here. This is because “Arianism” (Christ created - not divine) was never the denominational (preponderant) belief of Seventh-day Adventists. Certainly it cannot be said that because our church was “anti-creedal” this was “never formally or officially adopted by the church”. As a denomination they never believed “Arianism” anyway. Perhaps Whidden really means that because we were “anti-creedal” the semi Arian faith “was never formally or officially adopted by the church”. It is difficult to tell.

Whilst our denomination was very much against a fixed and unchangeable set of beliefs (a creed), this does not mean that they never issued on behalf of its membership statements of belief. They did this at numerous times. As we noted in section forty-five, a statement was issued in pamphlet form in 1872, also in the *Signs of the Times* in 1874 (June 4th) and 1878 (February 21st). It was also published in our yearbooks for 1889, 1905, also from 1907 through to 1914. It was also published in the *Review and Herald* of 1912. This shows that whilst we did not have a creed as such, we did have an official set of beliefs that was recognised by the church.

Regarding God, Christ and the Holy Spirit, all of these statements of belief were undoubtedly non-trinitarian. This means that they were no different in 1914 (the year prior to the death of Ellen White) than they were 42 years previous in 1872. Seeing that this very same statement was issued in our publications (made public) over a time period of over 40 years, it can surely be termed the official belief of Seventh-day Adventism.

Again I can only say that I have not as yet found any evidence of early Seventh-day Adventist trinitarians but I do agree that whatever Whidden means by "Arianism", it was not made into a creed. As he suggests, this was because early Seventh-day Adventists refused to be creedal on any doctrine, particularly concerning the Godhead. This we also noted in section forty-five. Whidden continued

"Perhaps this growing number of Trinitarians were simply making their presence felt." (*Ibid*)

This is quite a claim. Whidden is saying that perhaps the reason why Arianism was never "officially adopted" by our church was because of the influence of the "growing number of Trinitarians". If by Arianism he means a begotten Christ, then this is overly misleading. As we have seen from our published beliefs, non-trinitarianism was official Seventh-day Adventism. After all, it was included in our yearbooks for quite a number of years. Perhaps Whidden means Christ not a created being. This is the problem with the terms Arian and Arianism. They are often so loosely used it is difficult at times to know what people mean by their use of them. This is especially as we see that the beliefs of Arius are misunderstood. The entire thing becomes very confusing. This is why each time they are used, these types of terms need explanation.

Who these "Trinitarians" were that Whidden mentions I have no idea. This is because I cannot name any trinitarians in early Seventh-day Adventism. All that I know is that all of our leading pioneers were non-trinitarian with many being vocally anti-trinitarian. This is the evidence of our history. To say that the trinitarians were exerting an influence within our church cannot be proven. Who were these trinitarians? Perhaps a reader can inform this author.

We noted in the previous section that some of the evidence that supposedly

shows that there was an element of trinitarianism within the early Seventh-day Adventist Church is not really evidence at all. In fact we noted that it could only serve to confirm that non-trinitarianism was indeed the preponderant faith.

We shall now be taking a look at more of this evidence that supposedly shows that whilst Ellen White was alive that there was trinitarianism within Seventh-day Adventism and that there was (again supposedly) dissatisfaction with non-trinitarianism. We shall see though that when investigated, this also is not really evidence.

The mysterious Bourdeau statement of 1890

I would like to bring to your attention here something that I regard as an absolutely amazing piece of supposed evidence that there was within the early Seventh-day Adventist Church (meaning whilst Ellen White was alive) a breakthrough in the stand it took against the trinity doctrine.

This so-called evidence is in the form of a statement made in 1890 by a man by the name of Daniel T. Bourdeau (1835–1905), which, if the great disappointment of 1844 is taken as the beginning of Seventh-day Adventism, would mean that by then, our denomination had been on its feet for around 46 years (1844-1890). By then, Bourdeau had been a Seventh-day Adventist for 35 years. He was ordained to the Seventh-day Adventist ministry in 1858.

This Bourdeau statement is taken from an article that was published in two parts over the weeks of November 18th and 25th 1890. It is called *We may partake of the Fullness of the Father and the Son* and was published in the *Review and Herald*. Note that in the title of this article only the “Father and the Son” are mentioned and that nothing is said (not even in the article itself) about partaking of the Holy Spirit. This is because Seventh-day Adventists then, in 1890, did not regard the Holy Spirit as an individual person like the Father and Son (for our pioneer’s views on the Holy Spirit see section thirty-one and section thirty-two. For Ellen White’s views see section thirty-three and section-thirty-four)

The actual statement made by Bourdeau that is supposed to show a breakthrough in the non-trinitarianism of Seventh-day Adventism says

“Although we claim to be believers in, and worshippers of, only one God, I have thought that there are as many gods among us as there are conceptions of the deity” (*D. T. Bourdeau, ‘We may partake of the Fullness of the Father and the Son’, Review and Herald November 18th 1890*)

I need to be completely up front here and say that I cannot understand why this statement should be taken as evidence that in 1890 there was a breakthrough in the solid wall of the non-trinitarianism of Seventh-day Adventism. Read it again and ask yourself if you can regard it as revealing such. Nevertheless, as we shall now see, this very claim is made by some who say that at that time (1890), trinitarianism was beginning to make its way into Seventh-day Adventism and

that this statement of Bourdeau was proof of it.

Jerry Moon and the Bourdeau statement

In the book *The Trinity*, Jerry Moon makes the claim that Bourdeau's statement shows that within Seventh-day Adventism there was a growing lack of confidence in anti-trinitarianism. He also suggests that Ellet Waggoner's 1888 message of righteousness by faith at Minneapolis provided the dissatisfaction for the anti-trinitarianism that then existed (so he claims) within the Seventh-day Adventist Church although personally speaking I have never found any evidence for it. As we have noted in previous sections, even after 1888, both Waggoner and Ellen White depicted Christ as being begotten at a point in eternity, albeit that it was so far back in eternity that it was impossible for the human mind to conceive it. This was the non-trinitarianism of Seventh-day Adventism. As we noted in the previous section, Alonzo Jones, the other main speaker at Minneapolis was also non-trinitarian. I have not found any dissatisfaction concerning these beliefs,

After confirming that Waggoner was not a trinitarian (which is what we already have seen for ourselves in previous sections), Jerry Moon then goes on to say

“Thus the dynamic of righteousness by faith and its consequences for the doctrine of God provide the historical context for the provocative statement of D. T. Bourdeau in 1890 that “Although we claim to be believers in, and worshippers of, only one God, I have thought that there are as many gods among us as there are conceptions of the deity”. (*Jerry Moon, ‘The Trinity’ page 195, 2002, ‘Trinity and anti-trinitarianism in Seventh-day Adventist History’*)

Here we can see it claimed that the 1888 message of righteousness by faith provided what Moon terms the “**historical context**” for Bourdeau's statement that he (Jerry Moon) concludes as “**provocative**”. Again I need to be honest here and say that I cannot see why it should be termed as such. In the context in which it is written, it is easy to understand why Bourdeau made this statement (this we shall discover later) and it had nothing at all to do with trinitarianism. Jerry Moon then says regarding this so-called “**provocative**” statement

“Such a comment from a highly respected evangelist and missionary seems to indicate that “the collective confidence in the anti-Trinitarian paradigm was showing some cracks.” (*Ibid*)

Here, by a current Seventh-day Adventist researcher, is the very frank admission that at that time (1890), the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still, to say the very least, very much opposed to the doctrine of the trinity.

Now note that Moon says that this “**collective confidence**” in anti-trinitarianism was, as he put it, “**showing some cracks.**” What is the evidence that he produces to support this reasoning? It is that which he terms Bourdeau's “**provocative**

statement". This statement (as we have already seen) says

"Although we claim to be believers in, and worshippers of, only one God, I have thought that there are as many gods among us as there are conceptions of the deity". (D. T. Bourdeau, Review and Herald, 18th November 1890, 'We may partake of the fullness of the Father and the Son)

This is very interesting because when the article is read, the one thing that cannot help but be realised is that from beginning to end, there is no discussion or reference to the doctrine of the trinity. There is no comment either or discussion of the Godhead, nor any mention of the relationship of its respective personalities, namely Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In fact in the article, the Holy Spirit is not even given a mention.

In other words, Bourdeau's article has nothing whatsoever to do with any discussion of the trinity doctrine neither had it anything to do with any debate at all on the personalities of the Godhead. As we have just noted, even the title of the article omits to mention the Holy Spirit. Read the article for yourself and you will see what I mean.

<http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/SB-Pioneerarticles.htm>

Note that Bourdeau says "conceptions of the deity". That to which he is making reference is the responsibilities of each individual person, particularly those who realise the ample provision that God has provided for salvation, for the way that each conducts his or her own life. The article is also about the failure to study the character of both God and Christ as it should be studied; hence Bourdeau reasons that God's character, in the individual's daily life, is often misrepresented by Seventh-day Adventists. This is why concerning the individual conceptions of the character of deity Bourdeau said

"And how many there are of these, and how limited are most of them! Rather, how limited are all of them!" (D. T. Bourdeau, Review and Herald November 18th 1890, 'We may partake of the Fullness of the Father and the Son')

Here Bourdeau is saying that all of our individual conceptions of the character of deity are limited. He then goes on to say

"We do not half study the character of God the Father and of God the Son, and the result is that we make God and Christ such beings as ourselves. In approving sin in ourselves, we sometimes make God a sinner. This is true when we would make it appear by an appeal to God or to the Bible, that wrong is right, and that when we are tempted to do evil, we are tempted of God to do right." (Ibid)

Now we can see Bourdeau saying that when we sin and at the same time say

that we are representing both the Father and the Son, we are also making these two divine personalities as ourselves (sinners). This is the conclusion that led Bourdeau to say (this is his so-called “provocative statement”).

“Although we claim to be believers in, and worshippers of, only one God, I have thought that there are as many gods among us as there are conceptions of the deity”. (*Ibid*)

This statement had absolutely nothing to do with the trinity doctrine; neither does it have anything to do with the relationship that exists between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So why did Jerry Moon use it, as he puts it, as seeming “to indicate that the collective confidence in the anti-Trinitarian paradigm was showing some cracks”? Only Jerry Moon can answer that one, I certainly cannot.

After reading Bourdeau’s article as a whole and not just one singular sentence from it, also taking into consideration Bourdeau’s intent of it, I would never have made the claim. All that I can say is that it is my sincere belief that this statement made by Bourdeau should never be used with any reference to the current trinity debate within our church. This is simply because neither the article nor the statement has anything to do with any kind of debate on the personalities of the Godhead. It is simply to do with Seventh-day Adventists, by the lives that they were living, misrepresenting the character of God.

What does appear to be happening is that this is leading people to believe that Bourdeau is saying something in his article that he never even meant to imply let alone say. In other words, the statement is being taken out of its context. I am also sure that if Bourdeau today could see how his statement is being used, he would be totally shocked. Jerry Moon, immediately after sharing with his readers this so called evidence, says again with reference to cracks appearing in the solid wall of Seventh-day Adventist non-trinitarianism

“Further evidence that it was the case appeared two years later, in 1892, when Pacific Press published a pamphlet titled “The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity,” by Samuel T. Spear.”” (*Jerry Moon, ‘The Trinity’ page 196 2002*)

We have already seen in the previous section (so we will not go into again in detail here), that under investigation, the claim that Spear’s article shows that trinitarianism was acceptable to Seventh-day Adventists in 1892 does not stand up. This is because the article was actually non-trinitarian and was, during the lifetime of Ellen White, totally in keeping with the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists.

Jerry Moon makes it appear as though the Samuel Spear pamphlet gives support to the idea that the trinity doctrine was then (in 1892) becoming acceptable to Seventh-day Adventists. In reality, it only supported the non-trinitarianism of Seventh-day Adventism. This is because it was a non-trinitarian article.

Jerry Moon did say though that Spear did correctly portray the doctrine of the trinity but what he (Moon) fails to say is that the article was written with the intent of saying that the trinity doctrine was mere speculation about that which God has chosen to be silent upon. We noted this in the previous section.

Erwin Gane and the Bourdeau statement

Another person who uses the Bourdeau statement is Erwin Gane in his Master's Thesis' on trinitarianism within Seventh-day Adventism. This is when under the heading of "Bordeau [sic] regrets diversity of opinion" he says

"There can be no doubt but that in 1890 there was no unity of understanding in regard to the nature of God, in Adventist circles." (*Erwin Gane, Masters Thesis for the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University June 1963 as quoted at <http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/trinity/gane-thesis/e-gane09.htm>*)

In my own personal studies, I could never have come to this conclusion. All that I have found is that on this subject of the Godhead, there was only unity, albeit it was unity on non-trinitarianism. Gane's statement also appears to contradict Jerry Moon's statement about the "collective confidence" of anti-trinitarianism (see above). As Russell Holt also said concerning the time period leading up to the death of James White (the husband of Ellen White)

"A survey of other Adventist writers during these years reveals, that to a man, they rejected the trinity, yet, with equal unanimity they upheld the divinity of Christ. To reject the trinity is not necessarily to strip the Saviour of His divinity. Indeed, certain Adventist writers felt that it was the trinitarians who filled the role of degrading Christ's divine nature." (*Russell Holt, "The doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination: Its rejection and acceptance", A term paper for Dr. Mervyn Maxwell, 1969*)

In my own personal studies, I have found no disagreement over the "nature of God" within early Seventh-day Adventism. This was to come later in the early 1900's when, as we have seen in previous sections (see in particular section twenty-five), John Harvey Kellogg, one of the most famous names in Seventh-day Adventist history, confessed in opposition to the beliefs of the Seventh-day Church, a belief in the doctrine of the trinity. This is when concerning the Godhead, the "no unity of understanding" began within Seventh-day Adventism and is also why Ellen White called these wrong views the alpha of heresies (see section one). This was not said by Ellen White prior to the early 1900's.

In his Masters Thesis, in an attempt to prove his point that "in 1890 there was no unity of understanding in regard to the nature of God, in Adventist circles") Gane, as did Jerry Moon, then quotes the same D. T. Bourdeau statement (see above). He then says

"Unfortunately for our purpose Bourdeau (sic) does not elaborate on the

nature of the prevailing conceptions of the Deity. Whether he is referring to an Arian verses (sic) Trinitarian disagreement among believers is difficult to say” (Erwin Gane, *Masters Thesis for the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University June 1963 as quoted at <http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/trinity/gane-thesis/e-gane09.htm>*)

There is a question that needs to be asked here. That question is, why is it difficult to say that Bourdeau’s article had anything to do with the trinity argument or not? All that needs to be done is to read it. It really is that simple.

Erwin Gane is completely correct when he says in his article that Bourdeau does not elaborate on the *nature* of the “prevailing conceptions of the Deity” but what he does not say is that these “conceptions” are actually concerning God’s character and not His nature. What is obvious is that these varying “conceptions” are nothing whatsoever to do with an Arian versus trinitarian disagreement (the nature of God). It appears to me that the purpose of Gane’s remarks is to show that at this time (in 1890 whilst Ellen White was alive), trinitarianism was gaining a foothold within Seventh-day Adventism.

I find it extraordinary that it can be freely admitted (as does Gane) that in the Bourdeau article there is no discussion on the Godhead and then say that it is difficult to say whether his remarks were applicable to this issue. Why should we even think that Bourdeau statement was made with any reference to this subject? Bourdeau never mentioned the trinity, or the Godhead, or any debate concerning the three divine personalities, so why should we draw the conclusion that he was making reference to it? There is just no mention in his article of any such discussions. Bourdeau had no intention here of implying the article was about anything other than the misconceptions that some Seventh-day Adventists had about the character of God and His Son. When Bourdeau’s article is read, this much really is obvious.

Bourdeau’s article must be accepted just as he wrote it. This is without implying that it concerned something other than he mentioned. His article was about the lifestyle of some Seventh-day Adventists. This was the whole point of the article. Interesting to note is that the part two published the following week was just as silent to discussion of the Godhead as was the first part. Bourdeau’s article was certainly not a covert way of showing that there was, among Seventh-day Adventists in 1890, a division on the subject of the personality relationships of the Godhead. Gane then goes on to say in his thesis about Bourdeau

“The evidence he presents is valuable in so far as it indicates that the church was by no means united in its concept of God, and the remark would seem to suggest that the vocal, influential anti-Trinitarian writers were not, at this time, representing the views of the Church as a whole.” (*Ibid*)

I find that this is a totally incredible statement. How Bourdeau can be said to suggest that the anti-trinitarian writers were not reflecting the views of the church

as a whole, also that it suggests that Seventh-day Adventists were not united in their concept of God, particularly as Gane means with respect to their nature I cannot understand. This I find is an absolutely amazing conclusion to draw, especially in a Master's Thesis. Bourdeau's article concerned Seventh-day Adventists who were not reflecting the character of God. Nature and character are two entirely different things.

Gane is here saying (as did Froom on his *Movement of Destiny*) that those who wrote these anti-trinitarian articles in our publications were not "representing the views of the Church as a whole" (meaning not reflecting the views of the majority). This I believe, as we have seen in this study so far, is just not true. A view of any doctrine consistently produced in the articles and books of a denomination over a long period of time must show the accepted view of the church at large (as a whole). This is only reasonable to conclude. This is especially as we have seen that our non-trinitarianism was published as a statement of beliefs in our periodicals and in our yearbooks. How much more evidence do we need that this non-trinitarianism was the reflection of the views of the Seventh-day Adventist Church at large.

It must be asked therefore how Gane manages to read so much into Bourdeau's statement that is not there? This, as far as I am concerned, is not a sound exegesis. At the very least it is not a conclusion that I would have drawn. In his thesis therefore, the place where Gane arrived at is a similar place as to where Froom led the readers of his *Movement of Destiny*. It is to the suggestion that the views of the anti-trinitarian pioneers may only have been the views of the *minority* and did not reflect the beliefs of the main body of our church, which as we know today they did reflect.

Regarding Gane's conclusions (and Froom's) there are a number of questions that come to mind. One such question is; how can it be thought that our church was decidedly trinitarian but no articles in support of the trinity can be found within our publications? To put it another way, why believe our denomination was trinitarian when the only articles that can be found in our publications are those that are non-trinitarian and anti-trinitarian? If we were a preponderantly (majority) trinitarian denomination, would it not be reasonable to believe that we could find at least some pro-trinitarian articles? In other words again, if we were a majority trinitarian organisation, then our publications should reflect that fact and thus be full of trinitarianism! As it is, all that we find is exactly the opposite. Throughout the lifetime of Ellen White, our publications were strictly non-trinitarian. Gane even admits

"There may have been many converts who retained their Trinitarianism, but the present writer has not been able to discover evidence for this." (*Ibid*)

Here Gane is admitting that he could find no evidence of any of the converts to Seventh-day Adventism retaining their trinitarian beliefs. Why say therefore that the anti-trinitarian articles in our publications were not "representing the views of

the Church as a whole” (see above). That does not make sense.

If no evidence can be found for converts retaining their trinitarianism then why even think that there may have been some? The fact, as Gane says that he “has not been able to discover evidence for this” should be evidence enough that there was not, in 1890, any trinitarianism within the ranks of Seventh-day Adventism. Why say that there may have been trinitarians within our denomination but no evidence can be found for it? This is like saying that parts of the moon may be made of green cheese yet the evidence for this belief has not yet been discovered. If the evidence is not there then why push the idea that it may be true?

Gane’s remarks seem to be somewhat different than what was said by Woodrow Whidden in his article *Salvation Pilgrimage. The Adventist journey into justification by faith and trinitarianism*. This is when speaking of the 1850’s outreach of Seventh-day Adventists he (Whidden) said (see above)

“This audience, at first, was mainly defined as North American churchgoers. This new outreach, which began in the early 1850s, resulted in a growing influx of Trinitarians from other evangelical bodies into Adventism. These converts were attracted to the prophetic teachings and other strongly biblical doctrines and practices of Adventism; they, however, were not prepared to give up their Trinitarian beliefs.” (*Woodrow Whidden, Ministry 1998, page 5, ‘Salvation Pilgrimage, The Adventist journey into justification by faith and trinitarianism’*)

He also wrote

“Because of their vivid memories of the ill-treatment they received from the creedal churches of 'Babylon' in the heated last stages of Millerism, many early Adventists developed an intense "live and let live" attitude on a number of doctrinal issues. In other words, there was strong resistance to any creed. Thus any new convert could be a Seventh-day Adventist and Trinitarian.” (*Ibid*)

As was said in the previous section, I have never found any evidence of trinitarianism within early Seventh-day Adventism. Erwin Gane said exactly the same. So why should we believe it existed?

Erwin Gane and the S. B. Whitney article

As part of the conclusion of his thesis, Erwin Gane wrote

“The Whitney article proves that in 1862 it was not unusual for a new convert to be inducted into the Arian belief.” (*Ibid*)

This “Whitney article” (called *Both sides*) certainly does show that those of other denominations who joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church were being taught

non-trinitarianism. Notice that Gane refers to this non-trinitarianism as “the Arian belief”. This (Arian or Arianism), as we have noted before, is a rather ambiguous term that can mean almost anything that is not trinitarian. This is often how it is used. As we know from our studies so far, the belief of Seventh-day Adventists, all through the time of Ellen White’s ministry, is what many refer to today as semi-Arianism.

The “Whitney article” was published in two parts in the *Review and Herald* of February 25th and March 4th 1862. These showed that this new convert to Seventh-day Adventism, namely S. B. Whitney, was being taught non-trinitarianism. It even included a letter from his former denomination (the Congregational Church of Christ at Malone, New York) saying that by giving up the doctrines that he once embraced and also for accepting other teachings in the place of them, that they (the Congregational Church) had preferred charges against Whitney. It should not be necessary to say that one of the teachings that by going over to Seventh-day Adventism they said that Whitney had given up was the doctrine of the trinity. In this letter, the Congregational Church said to Whitney

“A few words now in regard to the doctrines which you have recently embraced as substitutes for those you once adopted, but have now put away.

The doctrine of the Trinity you set aside as not a scriptural doctrine. Our creed on this subject is, that there are three persons in one God, not three persons in one person, and that Christians are required to baptize in the name of these three as constituting the only true God revealed in the Scriptures.

The doctrine of the trinity is a doctrine of faith, not of comprehension, nor could we solve the mysteries of this wonderful infinite Being. We must admit that God knows infinitely more of the manner of his own existence than we, who are but finite, can know; and when he condescends kindly to instruct us in this great matter, does it not become us modestly to believe what he says? This we do; but this you refuse to do, launching out as you have done with Unitarians and Socinians to become wise above, and against, what God has written. Against this reckless and dangerous course we must solemnly warn you.” (*Review and Herald* article ‘Both Sides’ March 4th 1862 A letter from a Congregationalist Church in Malone New York to S. B. Whitney)

Here we can see that the other denominations certainly recognised that the Seventh-day Adventist Church was not a trinitarian denomination. Notice here though that because Seventh-day Adventists opposed the trinity doctrine, they were classed with the “Unitarians and Socinians”. These were another two groups that opposed the trinity doctrine but their beliefs were far different than that of early Seventh-day Adventists. Generally speaking, not only do these two

groups reject the trinity doctrine but they also reject the divinity of Christ. This is something that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has never done (see section twenty-one and section twenty-two).

Interesting also to note is that the Congregationalists said to Whitney that because he had rejected the trinity doctrine, he had “[become wise above, and against, what God has written](#)”. This was exactly the opposite of what Samuel Spear had said in his article. This was that those who believe in certain concepts of the trinity doctrine (that which he terms a “mystical speculation”) are trying “to be wise, not only above what is written, but also beyond the possibilities of human knowledge” (*Samuel T. Spear, D. D., published in the New York Independent on November 14th 1889 as The Subordination of Christ and by the Pacific Press in 1892 as The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity. The latter was in pamphlet form as a tract and included as No. 90 in the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Students Library. It was also published in the Signs of the Times of December 7th and 14th 1891. This was under its original title of ‘The Subordination of Christ’*)

Such is the difference between those who have their faith in the Scriptures and those who resort to speculating about that which God has not revealed. See the previous section for more discussion on Samuel Spear’s article. Go here to read it in its entirety.

[http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Articles\(others\)/Speararticle.pdf](http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Articles(others)/Speararticle.pdf)

Returning our thoughts to Gane’s thesis he then says

“Evidently by 1890, when Bourdeau deprecated the prevailing diversity of opinion on the subject, the situation had changed in that other views were being seriously considered. The reprinting of the Spear article would indicate that they were.” (*Ibid*)

Gane, in his Masters Thesis, says that Bourdeau “deprecated” (meaning deplored or condemned) “[the prevailing diversity of opinion on the subject](#)” of the “[Arian belief](#)” (non-trinitarianism or anti-trinitarianism) and says also it shows that “[other views were being seriously considered](#)” but how anyone from reading Bourdeau’s article can draw this type of conclusion is totally beyond me. To read the Bourdeau article for yourself, please go to the following link. It is less than 1600 words long

<http://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/SBDH.htm>

As has been emphasised previously, Bourdeau did not mention anything about any debate on the subject of the trinity or discuss the relationship of the members of the Godhead, As I have also stated already is taking Bourdeau’s statement completely out of context and making it say something that he (Bourdeau) never meant to even imply let alone say. Certainly the article does

not reveal, as Gane says, that certain views other than the non-trinitarianism that the church then taught “were being seriously re-considered”. That much really is for sure. Note Gane’s remark about the publishing of Samuel Spear’s article. We noted in the previous section that Spear’s article was written against the speculations of the trinity doctrine not in favour of them.

Erwin Gane regarding James White and the trinity doctrine

In his master’s thesis under the heading *James White an enigma*, Erwin Gane says

“Since White came out of the Christian Connection, one would expect to discover that he was, at least early in his career, opposed to Trinitarianism. But the evidence is not readily forthcoming, and what is available is inconclusive.” (*Erwin Gane, Masters Thesis*)

I do not know what materials were available to Erwin Gane when he did his Masters Thesis but in the light of what we know today his conclusions are extremely misleading. Today, when compiling a history of the trinity doctrine within Seventh-day Adventism, one of the easiest things to do is to prove that from the beginning of his experience with our denomination until his death, James White was a devout non-trinitarian. This can easily be seen by what he wrote about this doctrine. In 1852 (very early in his career) he said

“To assert that the sayings of the Son and his apostles are the commandments of the Father, is as wide from the truth as the old trinitarian absurdity that Jesus Christ is the very and Eternal God.” (*James White, Review & Herald August 5th 1852 Vol. 3 No. 7 page 52 article ‘The Faith of Jesus’*)

This was at the beginning of James White’s career within Seventh-day Adventism. As we have seen, this was in complete harmony with the views of his wife Ellen White, God’s messenger to the remnant. We know that this was in harmony with her views because she often said such as

“The One appointed in the counsels of heaven came to the earth as an instructor. He was no less a being than the Creator of the world, the Son of the Infinite God.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies on Education page 173 1897*)

Here Ellen White is referring to the Son in terms of personality, not to identity of person. She says that Christ is “the Son of the Infinite God” not that He is the infinite God. This was exactly the same as was said by James White (see above). As to identity of person she said with reference to John 1:1

“Christ was God essentially, and in the highest sense. He was with God from all eternity, God over all, blessed forevermore.” (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald 5th April 1906 ‘The Word made Flesh’*)

Notice here, just like it says in John 1:1, Ellen White says that Christ (as a separate personality from God) was with God and was God (identity of person). Just like Ellen White, James White believed also that Christ was equal with God. In one article in 1877 he said (note the title of the article)

“Paul affirms of the Son of God that he was in the form of God, and that he was equal with God. “Who being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God.” Phil. 2:6. The reason why it is not robbery for the Son to be equal with the Father is the fact that he is equal. If the Son is not equal with the Father, then it is robbery for him to rank himself with the Father.

The inexplicable Trinity that makes the Godhead three in one and one in three, is bad enough; but that ultra Unitarianism that makes Christ inferior to the Father is worse. Did God say to an inferior, “Let us make man in our image?” (*James White, Review and Herald 29th November 1877, ‘Christ Equal with God’*)d

This was 25 years on from when James White made the first statement that we read above. He was still decidedly anti-trinitarian although He certainly believed that Christ was God. James White also said of the Son of God (this was the year of James White’s death)

“In his exaltation, before he humbled himself to the work of redeeming lost sinners, Christ thought it not robbery to be equal with God, because in the work of creation and the institution of law to govern created intelligences, he was equal with the Father. The Father was greater than the Son in that he was first. The Son was equal with the Father in that he had received all things from the Father.” (*James White, Review and Herald January 4th article ‘The Mind of Christ’ 1881*)

James White definitely regarded the Son as being equal with God but note how his non-trinitarianism (really anti-trinitarianism) is revealed. It is the belief that at some point in eternity, the Son was begotten of God (“The Father was first”). As we have seen in section fifteen, this too (Christ begotten) was the belief of Ellen White.

This last statement of James White was made in the year of his death (1881). He had been a non-trinitarian from beginning to end, just as was his wife Ellen White. No wonder that God chose him to begin the publication work for Seventh-day Adventists. Erwin Gane though, with respect to a decidedly non-trinitarian article written by a man by the name of A. J. Dennis (printed in the *Review and Herald* when James White was editor) said

“It would be easy to conclude that White concurred with the position taken in the article, since he was editor and there is no indication that he, as editor, might have held another view. But James White was a Christian

gentleman, and possibly he published a view with which he could not agree simply as a gesture of Christian courtesy.” (*Erwin Gane, Masters Thesis for the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University June 1963*)

It was certainly not simply out of “Christian courtesy” that White published this article written by A. J. Dennis. James White (as we have seen) was just as much against the trinity doctrine as was Dennis. Gane concluded though

“At all events, White did not allow his view, whatever it was, to come to the fore, at a time when a major Trinitarian controversy might have split the infant Adventist Church.” (*Ibid*)

Today, there can be no mistaking James White’s view of Christ so it is extremely misleading to continue saying “whatever it was”.

As we have just seen (also in previous sections), James White was very vocal in his views regarding the doctrine of the trinity so why Gane should say that he did not bring them “to the fore” is left to the imagination. What is also left to the imagination is why Gane should say that these same views could have caused “a major trinitarian controversy”. How could this be, seeing that the entire Seventh-day Adventist Church was then non-trinitarian? As Gane had previously said

“There may have been many converts who retained their Trinitarianism, but the present writer has not been able to discover evidence for this.” (*Ibid*)

Why therefore did Gane think that James White’s views would have caused a “major trinity controversy”? This does not make sense. As Russell Holt said in his term paper regarding the years leading up to the death of James White

“A survey of other Adventist writers during these years reveals, that to a man, they rejected the trinity, yet, with equal unanimity they upheld the divinity of Christ. To reject the trinity is not necessarily to strip the Saviour of His divinity. Indeed, certain Adventist writers felt that it was the trinitarians who filled the role of degrading Christ’s divine nature.” (*Russell Holt, “The doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination: Its rejection and acceptance”, A term paper for Dr. Mervyn Maxwell, 1969*)

James White’s views on the trinity could never have caused a controversy within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As can be seen by a study of what he believed, he was as non-trinitarian as was the entire church. Why then Erwin Gane should say that in this respect that James White was “an enigma” is once again something about which we can only wonder. I can only think that as to regards what it was that James White believed, perhaps he did not have available to him all the information that we have today. This would be a reasonable conclusion to draw.

Conclusion of parts one and two (no evidence of trinitarianism within pioneer Seventh-day Adventism)

During my seven years of studies on this subject, I have found no evidence whatsoever that there was any element of trinitarianism within the early Seventh-day Adventist Church. I believe also that the confirmation of this is that no one else can find it either. This is why no trinitarian pioneers can be quoted. It is also why certain statements are taken to be evidence of trinitarianism within Seventh-day Adventism when in reality they are not really evidence at all.

What we have seen though, so it seems, is the very best evidence that can be produced by the trinitarians to supposedly show that it was in existence. If better evidence could be found, then the people who promote this idea would have already produced it. It can only be concluded therefore that the very best evidence has already been produced but investigation of it shows that is not really evidence at all. In fact much of what we have seen says exactly the opposite, meaning that there was no breakdown at all, during Ellen White's time, in the solid wall of non-trinitarianism within Seventh-day Adventism.

As also has been said before, if there were articles or statements made by our pioneers in support of the trinity doctrine then our records would reveal this fact, thus they would be there for all to see. As it is, none can be found (at least I have not found them). All that I can find in Seventh-day Adventist literature, all during the lifetime of Ellen White, is non-trinitarianism.

Perhaps the other best evidence to show that the predominant belief of Seventh-day Adventism was non-trinitarianism is the books that we published. As we have seen in previous sections, during the time period of the ministry of Ellen White, these were all non-trinitarian. This must be very significant. See section thirty-seven, section thirty-eight and section thirty-nine.

We shall now go to section 55. This is where we shall see where all of our trinitarianism has led us.

A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism

Section fifty-five

Where we are today (in 2008)

Throughout this study we have spent a great deal of time looking at the history of the trinity doctrine. This is particularly as it relates to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We now need to turn our thoughts to where we are today – as Seventh-day Adventists. This will show us, in 2008, where our trinitarianism has eventually led us.

Where we are today - the necessity of a trinity confession

At two Seventh-day Adventist baptisms that I recently attended, all of the baptismal candidates were required to publicly confess their allegiance to the current faith of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In so doing they were first asked if they believed that there is only one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a unity God of three co-eternal Persons. All the baptismal candidates answered in the affirmative, saying that this is exactly what they did believe. This is where we are today in 2008. It is with the Seventh-day Adventist Church insisting that its potential members, at their baptism, should publicly confess the doctrine of the trinity (God is three-in-one). In our current church manual it says

“Prospective members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, before baptism or acceptance on profession of faith, should be carefully instructed from the Scriptures in the fundamental beliefs of the church as presented in chapter 3 (see p. 9) of this Church Manual.” (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, chapter 6 page 32, ‘Church membership’*)

Chapter 3 of the church manual is where our fundamental beliefs are listed. They contain the trinity doctrine. Interestingly it says next

“In order to assist evangelists, pastors, and others in giving such instruction and making it Scripture-based and practical, a specially prepared summary appears as an appendix on pages 219-223 of this *Church Manual* and in the *Minister’s Handbook*.” (*Ibid*)

Why I say this is interesting is because in that summary of our beliefs in the appendix (page 219), the trinity doctrine is not mentioned. It just details beliefs concerning Father, Son and Holy Spirit but does not mention anything about God being a trinity. It even says that Jesus is the Son of God. This profession could be confessed by a trinitarian or a non-trinitarian. This was much the same as my

baptismal vow (1975). It simply said "I believe in God the Father, in His Son Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit". There was no mention of God being a trinity. Even in the summary of doctrinal beliefs there was no mention of a trinity.

Following on from the above remarks it says (this is under the heading of *Baptismal Vow and Baptism*)

"Candidates for baptism or those being received into fellowship by profession of faith shall affirm their acceptance of the doctrinal beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the presence of the church or other properly appointed body. (See p. 31.) The minister or elder should address the following questions to the candidate(s), whose reply may be by verbal assent or by raising the hand." (*Ibid*)

There then follows the 1st of the vows which says

"Do you believe there is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three coeternal Persons?" (*Ibid*)

In 2003, because I objected to a present Seventh-day Adventist publication that taught this belief, I was barred from taking preaching appointments and Sabbath School classes etc. This was after almost 30 years of service to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This is where we are today! It is with those who protest about the belief that God is three-in-one (the trinity doctrine) being no longer useful to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Thus it seems that they are sidelined to where they can supposedly do no harm.

All over the world today, others can relate the same or a very similar experience. Some can even tell of how, because of their non-trinitarian faith, their names have been removed from the membership list of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, although as yet this has not happened to me. This is where we are today. It is with some, because they will not make confession of God as a trinity, being told that they can no longer even profess to be a Seventh-day Adventist.

These same people are in very good company. As George Knight (Professor of Church History at Andrews University) wrote in the *Ministry* magazine of Oct 1993

"Most of the founders of Seventh-day Adventism would not be able to join the church today if they had to subscribe to the denomination's Fundamental Beliefs. More specifically, most would not be able to agree to belief Number 2, which deals with the doctrine of the Trinity." (*George Knight, 'Ministry' magazine, October 1993 page 10, 'Adventists and Change'*)

This then is where we are today. It is with our church freely admitting that with the passing of years, the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists have changed so

much that even if our pioneers wanted to join our church today, which because of the contrast between their beliefs and the current beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists they probably would not wish to do, they would not be permitted to do so. This is quite a startling realisation, especially as this would include Ellen White. Ellen White never made any confession of trinitarianism and as we have seen throughout this study, a comprehensive study of her writings clearly reveals that she often said things about Christ that no trinitarian would believe. She was definitely not a trinitarian, at least not in the accepted sense of the belief.

It seems therefore that to become a Seventh-day Adventist today or perhaps in some places to even remain a Seventh-day Adventist today, a person must be willing to confess that God is a trinity (three personal distinctions in one indivisible substance). This is exactly the opposite as to how things were when Ellen White was alive. This was when a profession of such a belief (God being three-in-one) would have been at variance with what was then taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, perhaps even prohibiting a person (then) from becoming a member of our denomination. Hence we can see the legitimacy of George Knight's remarks regarding our pioneers not being able today to join our church (see above).

Where we are today - the measure of the present day teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (part 1 - our publications)

The measure of what the Seventh-day Adventist Church professes to believe today (2008) is often said to be that which is found in our denominational book "What Seventh-day Adventists Believe", also in their Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology (Volume 12 of the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia) but it must be said that our denominational beliefs can also be seen in those things that are being taught in our Sabbath School lesson quarterlies as well as in our denominational books.

Amongst our books and with regards to the trinity issue itself, the two publications *The Trinity* (co-authored by Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon and John Reeve) and *Understanding the Trinity* (written by Max Hatton) readily spring to mind. As a matter of interest, it was my objection to what was written in the latter book that brought about an end to my services to the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Concerning *Understanding the Trinity*, I would now like to share with you some comments that I received from a certain authority within our church,. This will show us with regards to our publications, exactly where we are today. It will also show us that only those publications that are in harmony with the official faith of Seventh-day Adventists, as revealed in our *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, will pass the scrutiny of those who evaluate these publications.

In reply to an email that I sent to the editor of the press here in England that published *Understanding the Trinity* (this was when I objected to certain of what was written in the book) I was told

“Before they are published, our manuscripts go through a number of stages. One of these is line-by-line evaluation by the BUC Reading Committee of which Pastor Perry is the chairman and I am the secretary. The touchstone of orthodoxy is taken to be the authoritative 'Seventh-day Adventists Believe' (published by the General Conference in 1988 and which, along with many others, I helped to write).” (*Email, David Marshall, editor of the Stanborough Press on England, to Terry Hill, 29th January 2003*)

Here we can see it said that before the Stanborough Press in England publishes books, the manuscripts are given a “line-by-line evaluation by the BUC Reading Committee”. Note here that David Marshall is the editor of this press as well as being chairman of this reading committee whilst Pastor Perry was then, in 2003, the president of the British Union Conference. We can see therefore that prior to publication all of our books, each receive a very critical examination. Notice also that the editor said that the “touchstone of orthodoxy” is said to be “the authoritative 'Seventh-day Adventists Believe’”. This is the book he pointed out that he had helped to write of which an updated version has recently been published. The email continued by saying

“Our Reading Committee that evaluated the Hatton manuscript included a number of theologians and church leaders, including the then principal of Newbold and an (Adventist) university professor from Scotland.” (*Ibid*)

Here we are told that quite an array of high-ranking Seventh-day Adventist personnel evaluated Hatton’s book and gave it their approval. This book was thought of as being very important. Note now, because of its theological content, how very carefully this manuscript was scrutinised. David Marshall added

“In addition, because of its theological nature, the manuscript was also sent to Newbold's two most senior Bible teachers.” (*Ibid*)

This book was eventually published, promoted and distributed amongst Seventh-day Adventists. It must have been regarded therefore by those who evaluated it (the reading committee and the Newbold Bible teachers and principal etc) as being in complete harmony with the current beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. At the very least it can be said that the reading committee thought that Seventh-day Adventists would benefit from reading and believing its content. This much, by reason of its critical analysis and eventual publication, is only too apparent. It was said to be in total keeping with what we believed.

Two years later, as I was trying to persuade someone (anyone really) in authority, within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, to read the theology that I had written on the Godhead, I was surprised by what I was told by Gerhard Pfandl, the Associate Director of the Biblical Research Institute. He wrote to me saying (this was in reply to me requesting his department to read what I had written, which I did happen to mention was in disagreement to certain of the theology in *Understanding the Trinity*)

“Please do not identify the book by my friend and classmate Max Hatton with the official Adventist position on the Trinity. Max has done a good job of presenting his view on the topic, but this does not mean that in every detail this is also the view of the church at large.” (Email, Gerhard Pfandl to Terry Hill, 22nd February 2005)

This reply really was quite a surprise. I also considered it rather strange. Two years earlier, as we have just noted above, the editor of the Press that had published the book had assured me that prior to its publication, the manuscript of it had undergone a meticulous scrutiny by a reading committee. This committee, so I was told, had found it to be in complete harmony with the denominational beliefs of the Seventh-day Church. Now though, Gerhard Pfandl, the Associate Director of our Biblical Research Institute, was telling me that I should not identify this book “with the official Adventist position on the Trinity”.

This latter statement is seemingly somewhat contrary to what I had been led to believe by David Marshall, and I must say that it left me up in the air somewhat over whether or not that which is written in Hatton’s book is being said, by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, to be in harmony (representative) of what Seventh-day Adventists believe.

This brings me to my second reason as to why I believe Pfandl’s remarks to be somewhat strange’. Hatton’s book (*Understanding the Trinity*) has been promoted by our church, through our publications, as being the best defence of the trinity doctrine in the last 50 years (see rear cover of the book). It also says in the ABC catalogue of the *Review and Herald*

“Called “the best defence of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity in the last fifty years,” this book discusses the Deity and pre-existence of Christ, the Holy Spirit in both the Old and New Testaments, and the personality and Deity of the Holy Spirit.” (ABC catalogue, *Review and Herald, Pacific Press, 2002*)

What I find strange is, why openly promote a book amongst our membership giving it this type of accolade and yet say, when questioned, that it may not in every detail be the view of the church at large? Is error not always dangerous? Why let errors, if they are there, be published amongst our members and where did this book differ from official Adventist theology, that is if it did differ? Why also, if the theology of the book is not in keeping with what Seventh-day Adventists believe, was it published? By saying that a book is “the best defence of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity in the last fifty years”, isn’t our church saying that our denomination is in total agreement with what it says?

This accolade concerning Hatton’s book, I find very misleading. Nowhere does it say in the write ups for it that it may contain error or that it may not be the official view of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It would seem to me therefore that to give a book such a promotion as was done is saying to all those who read it that

it has met the approval of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (which I believe is what I was told by David Marshall) and is therefore safe to be believed by Seventh-day Adventists. If this book had differed from our official position then someone should certainly say so.

Needless to say, the church wants its members and others to accept as true what Hatton has written in his book else they would not have published it or promoted it as such, particularly as it was published amidst all the present controversy over the Godhead within our denomination. The other side of the coin is that they (our church) must consider its theology important because by reason of my objections to it, I was stopped from taking active service in the church. This must be saying something very important.

That the two books (*Understanding the Trinity* and *The Trinity*) were meant to quell the present furore of the present trinity debate within Seventh-day Adventism is beyond question. We know this because in 2006 Gerhard Pfandl (Associate Director of the Biblical Research Institute) said

“Because of a resurgence of anti-Trinitarian views within the church, two books on the Trinity have been published in recent years: Max Hatton’s book *Understanding the Trinity* (Grantham: Autumn House, 2001) does not address the Adventist situation, but focuses on the biblical material and responds to attacks on the doctrine of the Trinity. W. W. Whidden, J. Moon, and J. W. Reeve’s book *The Trinity* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2002) has two chapters by Jerry Moon dealing with anti-Trinitarianism in Adventism.” (Gerhard Pfandl, Footnote, *The Doctrine of the Trinity Among Seventh-day Adventists*, 2006, page 160)

I find this to be another strange statement. This is because the year previous Pfandl had said to me

“Please do not identify the book by my friend and classmate Max Hatton with the official Adventist position on the Trinity. Max has done a good job of presenting his view on the topic, but this does not mean that in every detail this is also the view of the church at large.” (Email, Gerhard Pfandl to Terry Hill, 22nd February 2005)

As I said above, I was left wondering where Max Hatton’s views did differ (if anywhere) from official Seventh-day Adventist theology.

Where we are today - the measure of the present day (2006) teaching of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (part 2 - our Sabbath School quarterlies)

The things that are presently being taught in our Sabbath School quarterly is also that which the Seventh-day Adventist Church teaches today, therefore we shall take particular note as to what has been recently (2006) said in it concerning God being a trinity.

With regards to what our leadership is encouraging Seventh-day Adventists to believe today about the trinity, this will certainly show us where we are today. As the second quarter of 2006 shows this the best, we shall now spend some time in looking at what it had to say on this subject. Under the heading “The Triune God” (the theme of the quarter is the personality of the Holy Spirit), the Sabbath School study notes say

“The second of the 27 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church reads, in part: “There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons.”—*Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, p. 16. In other words, Adventists—along with millions of other Christians—believe in the triune nature of God; that is, there is one God (*Deut. 6:4*) who exists as three Persons.” (*The Seventh-day Adventist Lesson quarterly, 2nd quarter 2006 Sunday March 26th page 7*)

Note the comment here that Seventh-day Adventists believe the same about God being a trinity as “millions of other Christians” and that this “one God” “exists as three persons”. The phrase “millions of other Christians” appears to be some sort of justification for us as God’s remnant people believing it. The quarterly notes then say about God being three-in-one (the one unity God who exists as three persons)

“While that concept itself might not be simple, *the biblical evidence for this truth* is powerful and compelling.” That we can’t fully understand something, particularly something about the very nature of God Himself, is hardly reason to reject it. (*Job 11:7, 1 Cor. 13:12*)” (*Ibid*)

Here in the opening of this lesson study on the personality of the Holy Spirit, we are told that the Seventh-day Adventist denominational position regarding God, even though it may not be easy to understand, is that He is a combination of Divine Beings, meaning “a unity” of Father, Son and Holy Spirit (the three-in-one concept of three persons in the one being of God). We are also told that although it is difficult to accept this concept, this is “is hardly reason to reject it”.

I must admit here that even though I have just done so, I do find difficulty in using the pronoun ‘He’ with respect to this three-in-one unity God. I say this because what would ‘He’ look like? The alternative, meaning using the word ‘it’ to describe God, would I am sure be offensive to the trinitarians, therefore I will continue with my use of the pronoun. We will come back to this thought later.

This three-in-one teaching is more fully expressed in the denominational book that details the fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. This is where on page 16 regarding belief No. 2 it says

“There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons (*Seventh-day Adventists believe ... A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines, page 16,*).

This book then describes this unity “one God” by explaining

“God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. He is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation” (*Ibid*)

Note here that this unity “one God” (the trinity) is said to be “immortal”. This really is important because it is saying that this “one God” can never cease to be. This is something else to which we shall return our thoughts later.

It also says here that this “one [trinity] God” is “all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present”, and that “He is infinite and beyond human comprehension”, thus displaying the belief that this composite entity termed the “one God” (whatever form of being this would be) has a centre of consciousness.

Strangely, fundamental beliefs No. 3 (page 28), No. 4 (page 36) and No. 5 (page 58) depicts the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (of which this “one God” comprises) as also having centres of consciousness, therefore it must be asked, how many centres of consciousness are there in the Seventh-day Adventist trinity God, one, two, three or four?

Now note that this “unity” God is said to be “immortal” meaning that whatever the circumstances, He (this unity three-in-one God), cannot cease to be.

There are Seventh-day Adventists who regard the implications of this as being derogatory to the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is because they see this as saying that the Son of God, because He is said to be part of this immortal divine three-in-one entity, cannot go out of existence. This, say the non-trinitarians, makes the gospel a farce because if by becoming incarnate the Son could not be lost, meaning if the risk was not there to be lost, then how does this show the love of God for a world lost in sin? It would also mean that in the plan of redemption, neither God nor His Son would have risked anything.

It is also like saying that by becoming human, Christ was not placed in the same situation as we are in, meaning that the result of his lifestyle would not determine His eternal destiny. This is seen as being out of harmony with where the Scriptures say

“For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.” Hebrews 2:17-18

It is also seen to be against where the Bible says

“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”
Hebrews 4:15

It is those two phrases “in all things” and “in all points” that concern the non-trinitarians. They say that these texts are saying that like us, Christ was tempted to sin with the possibility of yielding to temptation and in consequence would have gone out of existence. This of course is denied in trinitarian theology.

The non-trinitarians also regard this latter theology as being out of harmony with what Seventh-day Adventists have been told through the spirit of prophecy. Whilst we cannot quote all the statements here (see section thirteen for an expanded list), perhaps the one that says the most is that which can be found in a General Conference Bulletin on 1895. This shows us undoubtedly that this is what Seventh-day Adventists then believed. She said

“Who can estimate the value of a soul? Go to Gethsemane, and there watch with Jesus through those long hours of anguish when he sweat as it were great drops of blood; look upon the Saviour uplifted on the cross; hear that despairing cry, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Look upon that wounded head, the pierced side, the marred feet. Remember that Christ risked all; "tempted like as we are," he staked even his own eternal existence upon the issue of the conflict. Heaven itself was imperiled for our redemption. At the foot of the cross, remembering that for one sinner Jesus would have yielded up his life, we may estimate the value of a soul.” (*Ellen G. White, General Conference Bulletin 1st December 1895 ‘Seeking the Lost’*)

This then is where we are today. It is with the Seventh-day Adventist Church not being in harmony with the spirit of prophecy. This is done by their trinitarian theology saying that the divine Son of God, even though He became human, could not have been lost (for a more detailed discussion on this issue see section thirteen).

Interesting to note is that when this statement was transposed into the book *Christ's Object Lessons*, the words "tempted like as we are," he staked even his own eternal existence upon the issue of the conflict" were omitted. Why this was done this author has not yet discovered.

A decided trinitarian push

There can be seen, in the Sabbath School lesson studies for the second quarter of 2006, a decided push, by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, to say that God, instead of being a person in His own right (a personal being separate from Christ), is some sort **of** composite being – a trinity (a unity or tri-unity three-in-one entity). This same lesson study, after giving a number of texts showing that there is a plurality of the Godhead (note that these statements do not show a plurality in God), quotes Ellen White as saying

“The Father is all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and is invisible to mortal sight. The Son is all the fullness of the Godhead manifested. The Word of God declares Him to be ‘the express image of His person.’ . . . The Comforter that Christ promised to send after He ascended to heaven, is the Spirit in all the fullness of the Godhead, making manifest the power of divine grace to all who receive and believe in Christ as a personal Saviour. There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will co-operate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, pp. 614, 615.” (*The Seventh-day Adventist Lesson quarterly*, 2nd quarter 2006 Sunday March 26th page 7)

On the face of it, this would appear to aid in substantiating the theology of the trinity doctrine but in reality, Ellen White was denying the trinity doctrine. We shall discover why this is very soon. Note also that Ellen White was saying that there are three persons of the Godhead not in God. We discussed this in section twenty-seven so we will not do so again here, suffice to say that the words trinity and Godhead are not synonymous. The word trinity means a unity three whilst the word Godhead is translated from three Greek words meaning pertaining to divinity. That is what Ellen White is saying here, that there are three personalities pertaining to divinity (of the Godhead)

I would ask you to note here two other very important observations. The first is that this is not a complete quote. By this I mean that there are certain sentences that have been deliberately omitted. This is very important to note and remember. As quoted in the lesson quarterly, this statement is an extraction that has been taken from three paragraphs that when read as a whole (as they should be read) tell us so much more. Note though, although it does contain an ellipsis, that the quote looks as though it is just one paragraph.

Whilst we shall be taking a look at the complete quote later, note for the moment that the first sentence (as in the quote above in the Sabbath School quarterly) is actually the final one in a paragraph that has six other sentences preceding it. The second and third sentences in the statement are taken from the next (second) paragraph which has two sentences following it. These are also omitted. The two remaining sentences do constitute the whole of the third paragraph.

It must be said here that if only fundamental beliefs No 3 (about the Father), No 4 (about the Son) and No 5 (about the Holy Spirit) were listed in our *Seventh-day Adventist Believe...* then this would be more or less in harmony with the above Ellen White quote but as it is, belief No 2 saying that the “one God” is “a unity” of these divine personalities, cannot be supported by these words. This is because, as has already been pointed out, this statement of Ellen White is regarding a plurality of the Godhead (of divinity), not a plurality in God Himself.

It must also be said here that nowhere in the writings of Ellen White, just like

there is nowhere in the Bible, is there anywhere where she says that God is “a unity” of persons (a plurality in God). In boldness of type, as it is quoted here, the lesson quarterly then asks of its readers

“What analogies—such as a triangle or a three-pronged fork — can help someone understand the idea of how one God can be composed of three equal Persons? What other examples might help us better understand this deep truth?” (*The Seventh-day Adventist Lesson quarterly, 2nd quarter 2006 Sunday March 26th page 7*)

Here we can see that all over the world through this Sabbath School lesson, Seventh-day Adventists are deliberately encouraged to liken God, or at least use as an analogy to describe him, to a “triangle or a three-pronged fork”. The same author(s) also asks “what other examples” can be given to show the “deep truth” that this one unity God is a trinity of “three equal persons”. Hence we can see that the readers of the Sabbath School lessons, by the author(s) of this lesson study, are encouraged to spend time in thinking up three-in-one analogies, like three-pronged forks and triangles, to describe God’s being.

This then is where we are today. It is with the Seventh-day Adventist Church teaching its members, through its Sabbath School study quarterly, that God can be likened to a three-pronged fork or by some other three-in-one analogy.

We shall now take a look at, as it was originally written, the Spirit of Prophecy statement quoted above in the Sabbath School lesson. We shall also take particular note as to why Ellen White wrote it in the first place. As we shall see, it was actually written to condemn all three-in-one analogies (illustrations) about God. This part of the testimony was omitted in the quote in the lesson quarterly.

Where we are today - tampering with the testimonies

Let us first of all take note as to why Ellen White made the above ‘three personality’ statement.

We noted in section twenty-five that in an attempt to justify what he had written in his book *The Living Temple*, John Harvey Kellogg professed to have come to a belief in the trinity doctrine. During my eight years of studies, he is the only Seventh-day Adventist that I have found who ever openly made such a confession, at least whilst Ellen White was alive (as we have noted in previous sections, up to the time of Ellen White’s death and beyond, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was strictly a non-trinitarian denomination).

Ellen White wrote an abundance of testimonies against Kellogg’s beliefs, many of which she compiled in a book called *Special Testimonies to the Church, Series ‘B’ No. 2 and No. 7*. This is where the three personality quotation, as seen above quoted in the lesson quarterly, can be found originally written. This statement was then used in the book *Evangelism*, a 1946 compilation of Ellen White’s writings, from which the quote in the lesson quarterly was extracted.

As we now look at this quote as a whole, meaning with the missing sentences included, we shall see that it is actually a testimony against using three-in-one illustrations to describe God. This counsel though, because of the omissions in this quote, was hidden from those who read the Sabbath School quarterly and knew no different.

This testimony, as written the booklet *Special Testimonies*, is called *Come Out and be Separate*. In this testimony Ellen White says (and this comes immediately before her three personality quotation, therefore is the immediate and literal context of it)

“I am instructed to say, The sentiments of those who are searching for advanced scientific ideas are not to be trusted.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies, Series B, No. 7, page 62*)

Ellen White then goes on to explain what she means by “advanced scientific ideas”. She says

“Such representations as the following are made: "The Father is as the light invisible; the Son is as the light embodied; the Spirit is the light shed abroad." "The Father is like the dew, invisible vapor; the Son is like the dew gathered in beauteous form; the Spirit is like the dew fallen to the seat of life." Another representation: "The Father is like the invisible vapor; the Son is like the leaden cloud; the Spirit is rain fallen and working in refreshing power." (*Ibid*)

As most Christians will realise, Ellen White is quoting here a few of the illustrations that are often used by trinitarians to explain their three-in-one concept of their trinity God. These they need to use because there is no actual text of Scripture in the Bible that depicts this concept. At the very best, all that trinitarians can do is bring together a number of Scriptures concerning the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (the plurality of the Godhead) and then conclude that these texts suggest this three-in-one trinity concept. They then use these three-in-one illustrations to give credence (meaning credibility and authority) to their suggestions and assertions.

To trinitarians therefore, because of the lack of scriptural support for their three-in-one belief (concept) concerning God, these three-in-one illustrations are invaluable. This is probably why the author of the Sabbath School lesson studies (as we noted above) could only ask Seventh-day Adventists to consider analogies and think up more that describe God as three-in-one but could not quote Scripture as proof of his assertions. At the very best, all that he could give as Scripture references was for to show a plurality of the Godhead but not in God. The messenger of the Lord then says (these are the six sentences at the beginning of the first paragraph that were deliberately omitted from the quote in that Sundays' Sabbath School lesson that only cited the seventh sentence)

“All these spiritualistic representations are simply nothingness. They are imperfect, untrue. They weaken and diminish the Majesty which no earthly likeness can be compared to. God can not be compared with the things His hands have made. These are mere earthly things, suffering under the curse of God because of the sins of man. The Father can not be described by the things of earth” (*Ibid*)

Ellen White says here that all three-in-one illustrations that supposedly describe God’s being are both “imperfect” and “untrue”. Could this be said any more plainly? She even says that they “weaken and diminish the majesty” of God.

Note here though, through the testimonies of God’s Spirit, that all such practises as using “the things of earth” to describe the being of God as triune is totally condemned. Interestingly, this particular part of the quote, meaning the context in which Ellen White wrote the three personalities of the Godhead statement, was omitted in the Sabbath School quarterly.

It appears abundantly clear therefore that if the lesson study author(s) had included these missing sentences condemning the use of three-in-one illustrations, then they could not have used as a means of describing God, the analogies of a “three pronged fork” or a “triangle”. It is only reasonable to conclude therefore that this is why these sentences were omitted. This, if it is true, must surely constitute a tampering with the testimonies.

To describe His being, God condemns the practise of using three-in-one illustrations. This is whether it is by the things of nature or triangles or even three-pronged forks. It is important therefore that as a church and as individuals, we should immediately desist from doing so. As Ellen White said, not only does this practice “diminish the majesty” of God but they (the three-in-one illustrations) are “imperfect and untrue” (see above) thus they totally misrepresent Him.

We can see then that through Ellen White, in the very same testimony in which it is said that there are three personalities of the Godhead (not in God), God says that His being is not to be described by using three-in-one illustrations. It can only be concluded therefore that by describing our God as some sort of unity three-in-one entity, by whatever means it is done, is exactly the same as creating within the imaginations of God’s people a false idea of God. For this reason, Seventh-day Adventists, particularly those of its leadership, should not even attempt to do it, no matter how innocent this practise may seem.

By omitting these sentences that condemned describing God by three-in-one illustrations, the lesson study author(s) deliberately led Seventh-day Adventist to do what God, through the testimonies, said they should not do. This is where we are today. It is with the Seventh-day Adventist Church, through its Sabbath School lesson studies, leading its own people to ignore and go against the testimonies that God Himself, through the Holy Spirit has placed in His church.

Ellen White wrote this three personality statement, as quoted above, with direct reference to Kellogg's beliefs. As we noted in section twenty-five, Kellogg claimed to have come to believe in the trinity. To say that Ellen White was not making reference here to the trinity doctrine is to disbelieve everything that can be called common sense. To what else could she have been making reference?

We also noted in section twenty-five that Ellen White copied these three-in-one illustrations from a high profile book written by the Rev. William Boardman called *The Higher Christian Life*. As we detailed this in section twenty-seven we shall not do so again here. What we noted though was that he used these illustrations to show the relationship of the personalities that existed in what he termed "the triune God" and how the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in all three. As can be seen from what Ellen White said, she condemned these illustrations by saying that not only were they "imperfect" but also "untrue", even diminishing the "Majesty" of God (see above).

In other words, Ellen White used Boardman's words but she changed them from how he used them (to promote God being a trinity) to showing that all three-in-one illustrations were error. Ellen White also used other statements from Boardman to show that the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in all three personalities of the Godhead whilst not using phrases (as Boardman used) such as "triune God". This must be telling us a great deal.

The misuse of Ellen White's writings (the testimonies) as seen here in this lesson study, actually reminds me of another testimony. This is where she wrote

"It is Satan's plan to weaken the faith of God's people in the Testimonies. Next follows skepticism in regard to the vital points of our faith, the pillars of our position, then doubt as to the Holy Scriptures, and then the downward march to perdition. When the Testimonies, which were once believed, are doubted and given up, Satan knows the deceived ones will not stop at this; and he redoubles his efforts till he launches them into open rebellion, which becomes incurable and ends in destruction." (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies Volume 4, page 211, 'Faithful reproofs necessary'*)

The latter is well worth noting. Can any of us afford to be included in that condemnation?

Where we are today – a progressive unity with other denominations

There is one more aspect to this trinity issue that must be mentioned. This is with respect to the growing unity (alliance/affiliation) that we have, as a denomination, with other denominations.

As we noted in section forty-nine, prior to being accepted by the evangelicals in the 1950's as Christians, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was always regarded by them as a non-Christian cult or sect. If we had continued in our faith as it was during the time of Ellen White (this was when we were non-trinitarian),

then our cult/sect image would have continued through to today. It was only when we could be seen to be truly trinitarians that we could even begin to hope that these other denominations would accept us as Christians. Whilst we were still non-trinitarian, there would have been no hope whatsoever of being accepted as one of them. That much really is for sure.

From our very beginnings, our pioneers believed and taught that the other protestant denominations, the majority of whom were trinitarian, were those that constituted the falling Babylon of Bible prophecy. Our pioneers also rigorously taught that all of God's people who were in these denominations should come out of them and accept the message that God had given to us. This was once a prominent feature of our message and was in fact what we once believed was the fulfilling of the "loud cry" of Revelation 18:1-5. This is when the second angel's message (see Revelation 14:8) is repeated.

As Ellen White once put it with reference to the fourth angel's message of Revelation 18 (this was under the sub heading of "The Loud Cry")

"The message of the fall of Babylon, as given by the second angel, is repeated, with the additional mention of the corruptions which have been entering the churches since 1844. The work of this angel comes in at the right time to join in the last great work of the third angel's message as it swells to a loud cry. And the people of God are thus prepared to stand in the hour of temptation, which they are soon to meet. I saw a great light resting upon them, and they united to fearlessly proclaim the third angel's message." (*Ellen G. White, Early Writings, page 277*)

Since the acceptance of the trinity doctrine, along with our acceptance as being Christian by the other denominations, this "come out of her my people" part of our message does seem to have been very much de-emphasised. Today it appears that we are instead trying to make some sort of an allegiance with them, saying, when all is said and done, that we are all very much the same. This is brought out very clearly in the evangelistic booklet called *An inside look at Seventh-day Adventists*. Here it says at the very beginning of the chapter *What makes Seventh-day Adventists different*

"If you asked, 'What, if anything makes Adventists different?' the answer would have to be, 'In percentage terms, very little'." (*An inside look at Seventh-day Adventists', page 8, 'What makes Seventh-day Adventists different'*)

The booklet then goes on to say that 52% of our fundamental teachings are the same as those held by all conservative Christians. It then says

"There is no divergence on these matters" (*Ibid*)

From this I assume that it is being said that what the other denominations teach

regarding this 52% is no different than what Seventh-day Adventists teach (see further remarks below). The booklet then lists some of this 52%. It says

“Within this category falls doctrine about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, the Scriptures, sin, salvation, etc. Seventh-day Adventist teachings are orthodox on these subjects.” (*Ibid*)

I find it amazing that anyone can come to the conclusion that even regarding these teachings that Seventh-day Adventists are in harmony (“no divergence on these matters”) with other denominations. Certainly we are not in harmony with the Roman Catholic Church or the Anglicans on the doctrine of the trinity. They, as well others, hold to the original version that came out of the councils of Nicaea (AD 325) and Constantinople (AD 381) whilst in keeping with certain evangelical denominations, Seventh-day Adventists have their own version of it. I could not say either that the Seventh-day Adventist view of sin is orthodox or that we hold the same belief as most denominations regarding salvation and righteousness by faith but this may just be my personal perspective of these teachings. Then, with respect to the teachings where we do blatantly differ from other denominations (these are such as the Sabbath, the immortality of the soul, and the 10 commandments etc) the booklet says

“Adventists would prefer that these differences should not drive a wedge between themselves and other Christians. They would rather live in peace as brothers and sisters in God’s family, agreeing to disagree without considering themselves to be superior or inferior.” (*Ibid page 9*)

Amazingly, nothing is said in this booklet about the necessity, prior to the return of Christ, of other Christians accepting the Sabbath. Nothing is even said of the importance of keeping it today. Neither is there any warning in the booklet of the dangers of believing in the immortality of the soul. There cannot be found either anywhere where it says that the thrust of our message is that Christians of other denominations should come out from their system of beliefs and join with us in the proclamation of the third angel’s message (see Revelation 14:6-12), the latter of which of course would entail the promotion of not only the seventh-day Sabbath but also the judgement hour message and the impending return of Christ. This would also include pointing out the dangers of believing in the immortality of the soul and other unscriptural beliefs held by these other denominations. Yet in *The Great Controversy* Ellen White wrote

“Through the two great errors, the immortality of the soul and Sunday sacredness, Satan will bring the people under his deceptions. While the former lays the foundation of spiritualism, the latter creates a bond of sympathy with Rome.” (*Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, page 588, ‘The impending Conflict*)

In the booklet *An inside look at Seventh-day Adventists*, there is nothing mentioned of that which Ellen White says here, therefore it is sadly lacking in

telling other Christians of the danger that they are in by continuing with their beliefs. Regarding this same issue, there is another statement, in this same booklet, which I find rather startling. This is where concerning what we as a denomination believe it says

“They [Seventh-day Adventists] do *not* believe that only Seventh-day Adventists will be saved when Jesus returns, or that they are the only church teaching the truth.” (*An inside look at Seventh-day Adventists*, page 8, *‘What makes Seventh-day Adventists different’*)

This I find is an extremely disturbing statement and also one that is very misleading, at least in the way that I understand our end-time message. I say this because if when reading this booklet I belonged to a denomination other than the Seventh-day Adventist Church, this would only make me feel very comfortable in the denomination to which I belonged (whatever its persuasion) and not uncomfortable, which our message is designed to do. It would also make me comfortable in any beliefs that I held.

Historically, the message of the Seventh-day Adventist Church always was that when Christ returns, all would have taken their stand regarding the seventh-day Sabbath and that those who then still opposed it would constitute apostate Christianity. The latter would also constitute the living lost when Jesus returns.

To put all this in another way, Seventh-day Adventists historically taught that when Christ returns, all those who at that time still rejected the seventh-day Sabbath, meaning those who opted for Sunday as God’s day of rest instead of Saturday, would fail to gain eternal life. This though seems to be downplayed (even very misleading) by saying that when Jesus returns, not only Seventh-day Adventists will be saved. Whether it is by virtue of being a Sabbath keeper and a Seventh-day Adventist by name (as a member of our denomination) or because a person is a seventh-day Sabbath keeper (not necessarily a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church), we have always taught that only seventh-day Sabbath keepers, will, on the day that Jesus returns, constitute the living saved. By saying that Seventh-day Adventists “do not believe that only Seventh-day Adventists will be saved when Jesus returns, or that they are the only church teaching the truth”, that part of our message is almost lost.

Ecumenical organisations

This getting together with the other denominations can be seen in the fact that we are now associate members of the organization called *Churches together in Britain and Ireland* (CTBI) as well as official observers at the *World Council of Churches* (WCC). It can also be seen because of recent discussions (2006) that we have had with these other denominations. Through the *Adventist News Network* it was reported

“At the first meetings between representatives of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church and the World Evangelical Alliance, they shared a

common concern for united Christian witness in an age of increasing secularism and religious pluralism. Although informal contacts have occurred between Adventists and Evangelicals during the past 50 years, the August 8 to 11 dialogue held on the campus of the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague, Czech Republic was the first official meeting of the two groups.” (*Adventist News Network, August 16th 2006, ‘World Church: Adventists, Evangelicals Commence Dialogue in Prague’*)

These previous “informal contacts” I would suggest was those such as the meetings that our denomination had in the mid 1950’s with the evangelicals Martin and Barnhouse. This was what brought about our eventual acceptance, by these other denominations, as being Christian (see section fifty).

This same Adventist News Network article then reported Dr. Angel Manuel Rodriguez (director of the Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Research Institute) as saying that these meetings were spiritually significant and intellectually enriching, also that although all the churches represented had come from different traditions, there was much we shared together in common. The article then continued

“The meetings were designed to gain a clearer understanding of the theological positions of each body; clarify matters of misunderstanding; discuss frankly areas of agreement and disagreement on a Biblical basis; and explore possible areas of cooperation.” (*Ibid*)

One is left to imagine what this “cooperation” with these other churches will eventually entail. The article then told how the dialogue continued by reason of various papers and presentations that described the respective profiles of Adventists and the Alliance. It then said

“Representatives discussed the platform of beliefs held in common by Evangelicals: the Holy Scriptures, the Trinity, the Lord Jesus Christ, justification by faith, the new birth, the unity of the Spirit, and the Resurrection. They also considered Adventist presentations on the interpretation of Scripture; Gospel, Law, the Sabbath; and relations with other churches.” (*Ibid*)

After saying that the representatives participated together in daily worship and fellowship, the article related

“The dialogue revealed a large measure of common ground as agreement was found between the beliefs of the Evangelical Alliance Statement of Faith and the Adventist church's statement of Fundamental Beliefs; further, the two groups shared a spirit of devotion and piety, a strong belief in the inspiration and authority of Scripture.” (*Ibid*)

This “large measure of common ground” (apart from what was said above) was

not detailed further, but the article did say that the meeting concluded with plans being made for a second round of talks with the Alliance in 2007 (August 6th-10th). It also said that the subjects to be discussed would be the role and authority of Ellen White, the Seventh-day Adventist approach to last day events which would include the pre-advent judgement and the remnant (one would assume of Bible prophecy) also present day worldwide trends amongst evangelicals. The article then admitted

“Seventh-day Adventists have previously held bilateral discussions with the Lutheran World Federation (1994-1998), the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul (1996), the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (2001), and The Salvation Army (2004-2005).” (*ibid*)

The article concluded by saying that the Alliance consisted of an estimated 420 million evangelical Christians from numerous denominations in 127 different countries, and that the Seventh-day Adventist Church regarded itself as being a part of this mainstream Christianity (that which Seventh-day Adventists once taught was the Babylon of Bible Prophecy).

This getting together with other Christian denominations certainly has had an adverse affect on our message. No longer it seems do we urge the importance of them (Christians of other denominations) to accept what we believe and come out of their denomination into ours. Important to note is that this alliance (this getting together) would not have been possible if we did not hold or teach the doctrine of the trinity. This is because we would not have believed what is regarded as the major tenet of mainstream Christianity and therefore by them would still be termed a cult.

Current Reflections

In the Biblical Research Institute newsletter *Reflections* for July 2008, there was an article that informed its readers of a congress that met recently, in the South Pacific, for the study of the trinity doctrine. The article began

“From May 1-4 more than 65 theologians and biblical scholars, administrators, teachers, and pastors from all over the South Pacific Division, met in Wahroonga/Sydney to study and discuss the doctrine of the Trinity.” (*Biblical Research Institute, Reflections newsletter, July 2008, Page 4 ‘Trinity Congress in the South Pacific Division’*)

It went on to say

“The congress was for invitees only and limited to a certain academic level. Yet, the intention of the South Pacific Division is to reach out to the church members as well. Sabbath afternoon was set aside for a public meeting with a presentation and subsequent panel discussion where Ekkehardt Mueller from the Biblical Institute and lecturers from Avondale provided answers to tough questions.” (*ibid*)

This first sentence reminded me somewhat of the elite gathering at the 1919 Bible Conference (see section thirty-five and section thirty-six). The conclusion of the meeting was

“On the basis of our study of Scripture we affirm our belief in “one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal persons” (Fundamental belief # 2) (*Ibid*, page 5)

On page 9 of the Biblical Research Institute newsletter, there was given a Bible study on the trinity doctrine. This was by Ekkehardt Mueller and was under the heading “One God and Three Persons” (until recently, Ekkehardt Mueller, Associate Director of the Biblical Institute, was editor of the newsletter). He wrote

“There is only *one* God (Deut. 6:4), however, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all called God (Matthew 27:46, John 20:28: Acts 5:3-4). Consequently, we do not worship three Gods, but one God who reveals Himself in and consists of three “persons”. The three persons share one indivisible nature.”(*Ekkehardt Mueller, Biblical Research Institute, Reflections newsletter, July 2008, Page 9, ‘Scripture Applied, - A Bible Study’*)

This is typical trinity reasoning. It goes beyond what God has revealed in the Scriptures but without it (this reasoning) there would be no such thing as the trinity doctrine, at least not as it is generally known today. Ekkehardt Mueller also said

“Each person of the Godhead is by nature and essence God, and the fullness of the deity dwells in each of them. On the other hand, each person of the Godhead is inseparably connected to the other two.” (*Ibid*)

Again this is typical trinity reasoning. Again there is no evidence of this in Scripture. It is only an assumption based on the also assumed *one substance* reasoning (see section four *The trinity – an assumed doctrine*).

As we have seen, this reasoning that none of the three can be separated from each other makes null and void the belief that in the plan of redemption, there was a risk taken by the Father and the Son. It also lends itself to the belief that at Calvary, the divine Son of God (whom Seventh-day Adventists today like to term ‘the second person of the Godhead’ because they do not believe that He is a true son) did not die but only human nature died. We referred to these problem areas in section twelve and section thirteen. Mueller concluded regarding his own reasoning

“This concept of God surpasses our experiences and our intellect.” (*Ibid*)

I believe a lot of people might agree with his statement. This is because this type of three-in -one God is difficult to imagine. After giving a number of Bible texts - which he seems to think gives support to his trinity reasoning- also

after saying that illustrations of this triune God being like ‘the family’ or being like the ‘roles that people play such as spouse, parent and child’ or being like ‘a triangle’ were problematic he says,

“We do not believe in three Gods but one God in three persons. These three personalities participate in one substance. In the divine unity there are three coeternal and coequal persons, who, though distinct, are the one undivided God.

This doctrine of God is a biblical doctrine. However, it surpasses our understanding. We accept it because it is taught by God’s Word and because we have to expect that God is not just a superman. He is and remains God, and surpasses our feelings, our will and our intellectual capacities.

The doctrine of the trinity allows us to understand the plan of salvation and other biblical doctrines.” (*Ibid*)

This is quite a slur against our pioneers. This is because they all rejected the trinity doctrine. In fact up to and beyond the death of Ellen White, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was strictly a non-trinitarian denomination. This means that it is also a slur against the majority of Seventh-day Adventists existing at that time. It is saying that because they rejected the trinity doctrine as unscriptural, they did not understand “the plan of salvation and other biblical doctrines” (whatever these doctrines maybe which Mueller does not say).

This is as about current as it gets. This was July 2008.

Where we are today regarding who is right and who is wrong?

Who is right and who is wrong in this trinity issue is a question that all Seventh-day Adventists must face. There are no fences upon which we can sit. We are either in favour of this teaching (and the results of accepting it) or we are not. Eventually, all must decide one way or another.

The next section (No. 56) is the final one in this series. It is called “Where will we be tomorrow”? That is a very important question that every Seventh-day Adventist should be asking, particularly as we have seen where the introduction of the trinity doctrine into our beliefs has already brought us.

**A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within
the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day
Adventism**

Section fifty-six

Where will we be tomorrow?

The jury is still out on this one. Only time will tell.

This section will be completed at a later date.