

Dudley Marvin Canright

ABOUT D. M. CANRIGHT, GREAT OPPONENT OF ELLEN WHITE:

Half of this article is Bro. Jason Smith's work "The Unaccounted Factor" [<http://www.asitreads.com/shop/digital-book-unaccounted-factors-jason-smith>] [<http://www.asitreads.com/blog/2018/1/9/dudley-canright-and-the-sda-trinity>] and I owe him gratitude for such elaborate research on this matter of reactionary theology and how trinity was brought into Adventism.

Dudley Marvin Canright (September 22, 1840 – May 12, 1919) was a pastor in the [Seventh-day Adventist Church](#) for 22 years, who later left the church and became one of its severest critics. He joined the church in 1859, at the age of 19, and rose through the ministry to a position of prominence on the [General Conference](#), a committee of Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders.

Early life

Dudley Marvin Canright was born in a farmhouse near [Kinderhook, Michigan](#), on September 22, 1840, to Hiram and Loretta Canright. In 1859, at the age of 19, Dudley journeyed eastwards to attend the Albion Academy, in Albion, New York. To support himself, he worked as a farmhand for Elder Roswell F. Cottrell, a Seventh-day Adventist minister. In the summer of 1859, he attended a [camp meeting](#), held by Elder [James White](#), near Albion. There, he accepted the doctrine of the Advent Message, and was soon baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Dudley briefly served as secretary to Elder White, who encouraged him to enter the ministry. For 5 years, after converting his entire family to Adventism, Dudley served as an evangelist for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, traveling and preaching across the midwestern U.S. In 1865, at the age of 24, Dudley Canright was ordained by James White and [J. N. Loughborough](#), in a service held at [Battle Creek](#).

Dudley continued his evangelistic career, preaching throughout New England. In 1867, he married Lucretia Cranson, a 19-year-old orphan, partially brought up by [Ellen G. White](#). Mr. and Mrs. Canright had 3 children, 2 of whom survived infancy.

The life of a traveling minister's wife was harsh for Mrs. Canright, and in 1879, she succumbed to [tuberculosis](#). Two years later, Dudley was remarried, to a Miss Lucy Hadden. Their union produced 4 children, 3 of whom survived infancy.

DENOMINATIONAL HISTORY TEXTBOOK FOR SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST COLLEGE CLASSES BY R. W. SCHWARZ

During his brief period as an Adventist minister **Hull** had written *The Bible From Heaven*, a book designed to demonstrate the divine origin of the Scriptures and the basis for considering them authoritative in matters of religious faith and practice. Fifteen years later Dudley M. Canright published a revised edition of this book. At that time Canright was also a leading

Adventist minister, but within two decades he would turn into the most widely quoted and controversial critic of Adventism in the entire period of the church's existence.

Canright accepted Seventh-day Adventism in 1859 as a young man of nineteen. Two years later James White presented him with a Bible and a set of prophetic charts and this advice, "Do not content yourself with being a small preacher, but be somebody, or die, trying." Elder White could scarcely have imagined just how much the youthful Canright would take these words to heart. Ordained by James White and J. N. Loughborough at the age of twentyfour, Canright was dispatched to New England to work under J. N. Andrews. It was here that he adopted the practice of debating with ministers of other Protestant churches. Canright demonstrated considerable debating skill and was commended by Andrews for his "zealous, devoted, and faithful labors.- Yet there was a darker side in the development of this young minister as well. He experienced periods of acute depression and doubt. His diary reveals that he recognized ugly characteristics in his life—"pride, self exaltation, and a spirit of harshness toward others"—that led him to fear for his eternal salvation.

Marriage and the strong support of James and Ellen White seemed to strengthen Canright's Christian experience. In 1869 he was transferred to Iowa to work under George I. Butler. This began a close association that would last nearly twenty years. Yet one evening Butler was surprised to find Canright despondent and toying with the idea of giving up all religious faith—and this just after he had completed a successful debate. For hours the older minister prayed and reasoned with the discouraged man and the crisis passed. On several occasions in subsequent years Butler would again labor to keep Canright from going into infidelity.

The next real jar to Canright's religious experience occurred during a family vacation with the Whites in the Colorado mountains during the summer of 1873. Both couples were worn and much in need of rest. At first the vacation went nicely, and the period of relaxed association gave promise of real benefits to all. Then a combination of circumstances soured the relationships. James White became quite ill, and Ellen was burdened with caring for him. Inclement weather confined all the vacationers in too-close common quarters. The Canrights' fifteen-month-old daughter turned cranky. Nerves in need of healing were frayed instead. When the Whites attempted to counsel the younger couple concerning what they deemed some character weaknesses, an explosion developed.

Canright later remembered that he had proceeded to tell "the elder my mind freely. That brought us into an open rupture." The Canrights moved out. Taking his wife and child to California, Canright seemed determined to abandon a ministerial career. For several months he worked on a farm. But the need for preachers in California was great. Soon Canright was back holding evangelistic meetings. A reconciliation, begun through correspondence, was completed when the Whites arrived in California. Soon Elder Canright was effectively meeting the attacks on Ellen White's prophetic gift that were being disseminated through the state by Miles Grant, a Sunday-keeping Adventist. Yet later events seem to indicate that a continuing resentment against Mrs. White smoldered in Canright's breast.

During 1876 Canright spent much of the summer on the camp-meeting circuit throughout the East and Midwest. That year, along with James White and S. N. Haskell, he was elected to the three-member General Conference Executive Committee. The following year he

published a strong defense of the Whites in the *Review* in a series of articles entitled, "A Plain Talk to Murmurers." Of Mrs. White's work in particular Canright wrote: "If I have any judgment, any special discernment, I pronounce the testimonies to be of the same Spirit and of the same tenor as the Scriptures."

Increasing responsibilities came Canright's way. He was elected president of the Sabbath School Association and of the Ohio Conference. He was active in developing the tithing plan. Some suspected that he hoped to succeed James White as General Conference president in 1878. If this was so, he was disappointed; fellow Adventist leaders did not consider him a steady enough man to lead the entire church. Then in 1879 Lucretia Canright died after a heartbreaking struggle against tuberculosis. It was a hard blow, for although Canright had not always appeared as considerate of his wife as he might have been, he loved her dearly. Now he had two small children to care for alone. For years Canright had experienced problems with his voice and throat, problems which he believed were precipitated by incorrect speaking habits. In the summer of 1880 he decided to spend some weeks in Chicago attending the Hamill School of Oratory. He hoped "that through a thorough study in, and mastery of, expression he could accomplish his consuming desire to be a popular public speaker."

An incident that occurred during the course of the summer provides a revealing picture of Canright's thinking. As part of his practical work in Hamill's school, he had just completed speaking to more than 3000 people in one of Chicago's most popular Protestant churches. For more than half an hour members of the congregation had pressed around him, complimenting him on a "masterly discourse." Now he was quietly discussing the evening with a fellow Adventist, Hamill's student, who had attended the service to act as his professional critic. Suddenly Canright sprang to his feet and exclaimed, "I believe I could become a great man were it not for our unpopular message." D. W. Reavis, to whom this statement was made, was shocked. "D. M.," he said solemnly, "the message made you all you are, and the day you leave it, you will retrace your steps back to where it found you."

That fall brought another lapse of Canright's ministerial endeavors. For four months he traveled throughout Michigan and Wisconsin holding classes in elocution. During part of this time, he later told Butler, he ceased observing the Sabbath and seriously considered seeking a preaching assignment from the Methodists. But early in 1881, following extended talks with Butler and the Whites, Canright once more began ministerial labor, only to turn again in the fall of 1882 to farming. This time he announced that his decision to stop preaching for the Adventists was due to the fact that he had become "thoroughly satisfied that the visions are not from God, but are wholly the fruit of her [Mrs. White's] own imagination."

By this time Elder White was dead; George Butler was General Conference president. Canright professed no hard feelings toward Butler or other Adventist leaders, "excepting Mrs. White. I dislike her very much indeed." These feelings persisted throughout the two years Canright farmed near Otsego, Michigan. Then, in response to an appeal from Butler, he attended an Adventist camp meeting at Jackson. Again there were long hours of prayer and counsel, climaxed by a public confession of his struggle with doubt and his bitter feelings toward Ellen White. Upon his knees Canright begged Mrs. White's forgiveness. When this was freely given, the repentant preacher could report that "for the first time in years" he "could

truly say that I believed the testimonies. All my hard feelings toward Sister White vanished in a moment, and I had a tender love toward her."

Back once more in the Adventist ministry, Canright publicly professed his determination to stay there this time, come what may. "I will never do this backing up any more," he told a general Adventist convocation in his home church, "and I believe that if I ever go back from this I am lost." Soon he was traveling widely attending Adventist meetings in the East and in Iowa and Minnesota. Shortly thereafter a new tribulation assailed Elder Canright. In the spring of 1881 he had remarried; James White officiated at the ceremony. Now in February 1885, while Canright was on assignment in New England, he received word that his fourteen-month-old son was seriously ill. Canright tarried for several days, hoping the child would improve. When he finally arrived home, the boy was dead. "It seems as though it could not be so, that we can not have it so," the distraught father wrote Ellen White, "and yet it is so. Poor Lucy, it almost kills her and my own heart feels as though it would break. I can not see why this should come upon us.

Does the Lord really overrule all such things, or do they only happen so? We fasted and prayed earnestly hoping that God would hear us and spare our child. But he died. Was it really the will of God that it should be so?"

In spite of this cruel blow Canright continued active in the Adventist ministry. Almost every issue of the *Review* carried an article from his pen, many devoted to the strong defense of specific Adventist doctrines. His most famous, entitled "To Those in Doubting Castle," contained a strong line of argument in support of the particular role Ellen White occupied in the church. In closing he identified what he considered the root cause of doubt and dissatisfaction in the church. "The real trouble lies close at home,- Canright wrote, "in a proud, unconverted heart, a lack of real humility, an unwillingness to submit to God's way of finding the truth." Throughout 1885 and 1886 Canright's services to his church were many and varied. For eight weeks he taught Uriah Smith's Bible classes at Battle Creek College in order that Smith might devote his time to other tasks. He served as a member of the editorial board of a short-lived missionary journal, *The Gospel Sickle*. He prepared a series of Sabbath School lessons for *The Youth's Instructor*. In an effort to strengthen churches without regular pastors, Canright was asked to visit and hold meetings with eighteen Michigan congregations.

Unfortunately, all of this activity did not indicate a satisfied and stable religious experience. In January 1887 Canright informed Butler that he could no longer be a Seventh-day Adventist. Butler then journeyed to Otsego to preside over a business session of Canright's home church. At this meeting Canright made it clear that "he no longer believed the Ten Commandments were binding upon Christians and had given up the Law, the Sabbath, the [Three Angels'] Messages, the Sanctuary, our position upon [the] U.S. in prophecy, the Testimonies, health reform, the ordinance of humility. He also said that he did not believe the Papacy had changed the Sabbath, and though he did not directly state it, his language intimated that he would probably keep Sunday."

In view of his expressed doctrinal differences, the Otsego Seventh-day Adventist church felt they had little choice other than to withdraw fellowship from Canright and his wife, who agreed

with him. Butler reported that Canright had assured the church "that he thought there was a larger percentage of true Christians among our people than among any other denomination." He professed no hard feelings toward church leaders, nor any dissatisfaction over the way he had been treated. To Ellen White Canright wrote, "For my part I earnestly wish that there might continue to be a friendly feeling between me and our people [S.D.A.'s]. On my part it shall be so."

Just what precipitated Canright's final break with the church he had served for over twenty years has been a matter of debate down to the present. One of the elder's relatives felt it was due to his failure to be elected president of the Michigan Conference in the fall of 1886. Butler, who had worked to dispel Canright's doubts probably as much as any other man, put his finger on what he considered Canright's basic character weaknesses. "When everything went pleasantly," Butler wrote to his fellow Adventists, "he could usually see things with clearness. When he was '*abused*,' as he always thought he was when things did not go to suit him, the evidences of our faith began immediately to grow dim. Dark clouds of unbelief floated over his mental sky, and he felt that everything was going by the board. Here was the Elder's special weakness. He is a strong man in certain directions when all goes smoothly, but very weak in adversity. When things apparently were against him, he seemed to have no staying, recuperative qualities. He never could bear reproof with patience, or feel composed when his way was crossed."

Canright, of course, had a different version as to why he separated from Seventh-day Adventists. In a letter to the local newspaper he reported that he had doubted some points of Adventist doctrine "for years." He had become "fully satisfied that keeping the seventh day is an error productive of evil rather than good." He was certain that Mrs. White's visions were "only the imaginings of her own mind." Adventists, he also maintained, were "too narrow and exclusive in their feelings toward other churches." Sometime later Canright avowed, "Had I desired office, or better position, all I had to do was to go right along without wavering, and positions would [have] come to me faster than I could fill them." Generally Christians opposed to Seventh-day Adventist doctrines have accepted Canright's explanation that he could no longer intellectually accept Adventist beliefs.

The "friendly feeling" Canright had promised to maintain toward his former brethren soon evaporated. He became disturbed over a reference in the *Review* which referred to his "apostasy" and made a thinly veiled comparison between him and Judas Iscariot. Although Canright was not mentioned by name in later articles commenting on the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram and the cupidity of Balaam, he was certain he was being compared to these men. Whatever his earlier intentions, Canright now began a thirty-year campaign to discredit Seventh-day Adventism by voice and pen. Several weeks after being dropped from Adventist membership the Canrights joined the local Otsego Baptist church. The following month he was ordained a Baptist minister.

Except for three or four years, however, Canright held no regular Baptist pastorate during the remaining thirtytwo years of his life. Most of his time was devoted to lecturing against Adventists in widely scattered areas of the country, wherever local Protestant pastors were concerned that members of their flocks were becoming "ensnared" in what they considered Adventist heresies. Canright's long association with Adventists, and his friendship with so

many early Adventist leaders, made him seem an especially valuable ally to Adventist opponents.

In 1889 Canright published a 413-page book, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced*. This quickly became the chief weapon in evangelical Protestantism's anti-Adventist arsenal. By Canright's death in 1919 it had gone through fourteen printings and was widely circulated in many parts of the world outside the United States. During his last years Canright composed a *Life of Mrs. E. G. White*, which was published posthumously. Far from being a biography as the title would imply, it was a bitter and sometimes sarcastic attack designed to discredit Mrs. White's claims to be a special messenger from God. Among other things, Canright charged Mrs. White with

- (1) *Being "a great plagiarist,"*
- (2) *Suppressing some of her earlier "embarrassing" writings,*
- (3) *Using "her gift" to profit financially,*
- (4) *Yielding to human influences,*
- (5) *Making false prophecies, and*
- (6) *Teaching incorrect doctrines, from the "shut-door" to the "reform dress."""*

Considerable evidence indicates that in Canright's post-Adventist years he exhibited an almost Dr.-Jekyll-and-Mr.-Hyde attitude toward Seventh-day Adventists. Publicly, and to his immediate family, he maintained that he was happy to have been delivered from Adventist bondage and never once regretted the course of action begun in 1887. Yet he maintained cordial relations with some old Adventist friends, attended Adventist meetings frequently, especially in the last decade of his life, and reportedly told many Adventist acquaintances that they had "the truth" and should "never let it go." One of the most moving experiences is recorded by D. W. Reavis, to whom Canright years earlier had confided that he believed he could be a great man "were it not for our unpopular message." At the end of a long, frank talk one day in 1903, Reavis appealed to Canright to confess his errors to his Adventist brethren and once more join them in heralding Christ's final message to the world. "I never heard any one weep and moan in such deep contrition as that once leading light in our message did," Reavis remembered. "He said he wished he could come back to the fold as I suggested, but after long, heartbreaking moans and weeping, he said: 'I would be glad to come back, but I **can't! It's** too late! I am forever gone! Gone!' " Canright's parting words to Reavis were "Whatever you do, don't ever fight the message."

Canright's attitude toward Ellen White also appears to have been ambivalent. His *Life of Mrs. E. G. White* was certainly derogatory, yet several years before this was issued he told L. H. Christian that he had "never met a woman so godly and kind and at the same time so unselfish, helpful, and practical as Mrs. White. She was certainly a spiritual woman, a woman of prayer and deep faith in the Lord Jesus." "Anyone who follows her writings," he continued, "in prayer and faith will certainly get to heaven. She always exalted Jesus, and she taught true conversion and genuine sanctification as few others have."

With his Adventist brother, Jasper, Canright attended Ellen White's funeral in the Battle Creek Tabernacle. Twice the brothers joined the line of mourners to pass by the casket. Brokenly he said, "There is a noble Christian woman gone."

UNACCOUNTED FACTOR BY JASON SMITH

In 1889 D. M. Canright published his book *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced*. This book's import is best explained by the historian Gary Land.

"His book *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* became the chief weapon used by Evangelicals against Seventh-day Adventists..."¹

And the extent of this book's influence is captured by a statement in the June 17, 1899 edition of *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times* (an Australian SDA periodical) which had this to say on the matter:

"The fact that Elder D.M. Canright has abandoned the faith of the Seventh-day Adventist has formed and still continue to form, one of the most satisfactory topics with many of the religious papers and teachers of the day... Nearly every religious paper in Christendom has heralded his apostasy, and become, to some extent, the medium through which he has vented his feelings toward a cause that has made him all that he is, and that he has not ceased to oppose with all his might since he forsook it....Elder Canright has written a book, as nearly everybody knows, which is directed against our work and people. We venture to say that no book published in the last decade, unless it be 'Robert Elsmere,' has received such extensive free advertisement as this production."²

So for a decade, 1889 to 1899, this critical work received "extensive free advertisement" and was "the chief weapon" used against the Adventist church. And when we turn to Canright's book we see that one of the charges he made against his former brethren was that "they reject the doctrine of the Trinity,"³ This charge was later expunged from later editions of Canright's book and I believe this was due to the Seventh-day Adventist reaction.

Thus the light of criticism was thrust upon the Seventh-day Adventist church on a larger scale than before. The theology of the church reacted and developed in this environment. As an example of this particular doctrine developing in a critical environment we turn to an 1892 edition of the Australian periodical *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*. The title is "**A Criticism Considered.**"

"An esteemed subscriber has been furnished with a criticism upon an answer to a query upon the nature of the Trinity which appeared in our Dec.15,1891, number. The objectionable paragraph reads as follows: "We understand the Trinity, as applied to the Godhead, to consist of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The two former to be personal, spiritual beings, eternal and infinite in all their ways and attributes. The Son is of the Father, equal in glory and honor, but in some measure subject in authority. The Holy Spirit is the representative of the Deity in all parts of the universe. These supreme Beings we cannot comprehend or measure."

¹ *Adventism in America: a history* - Page 105, Gary Land -1986

² *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times* June 17, 1899 pg 192

³ *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* pg 25

"Our critic animadverts upon the danger of the subscriber being led to embrace per force some fatal heresy while accepting more obvious truths associated together. These words are a revelation to him; now he can see our dark designs in the position here taken relative to the personality of the Holy Spirit, He invites a comparison of the position here expressed with our Saviour's discourse in the latter chapters of John. There may be others situated as this person is, so we refer to the matter in this place.

"Our reply is that we did not consciously reveal any definite position in regard to the Holy Spirit's personality. There is certainly nothing incongruous in the idea of the Spirit being a personal representative, hence saying that the Spirit is the representative of the Father and Son does not deny his personality as our friend would make out. He occupies in our minds an exalted place with Deity; and the paragraph in question speaks of him as a supreme Being. **In reference to the subject of his personality our minds are well expressed by J. H. Waggoner in his little work entitled "The Spirit of God,"** as follows:—

"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. 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. 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."⁴

As to who this critic was the article does not say but it is apparent that someone was responding to the Seventh-day Adventist claims. What is also of interest is that similar to Charles Boyd's redefinition of the Trinity we see here another redefined Trinitarian doctrine. It is one that does not "consciously reveal any definite position in regard to the Holy Spirit's personality" and then proceeds to quote a non-Trinitarian author to defend that premise! Why use the term "Trinity" at all then? This very unusual maneuvering makes sense in the context of a non-Trinitarian church seeking to defend itself against the accusation that they reject the doctrine of the Trinity.

This historical context also helps us to better understand the following complaint from Mrs. White in speaking of her time in Australia. She explained that false reports were circulated about the Seventh-day Adventist people by the denominational ministers, particularly in regard to their belief in the divinity of Christ and His pre-existence.

⁴ "A Criticism Considered" Bible Echo and Signs of the Times April 1st, 1892 pg 112, bold emphasis added

*“In this country, the denominational ministers tell the most unblushing falsehoods to their congregations in reference to our work and our people. 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. 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. 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 school-teacher there opposed the truth, **and declared to the people that Seventh-day Adventists did not believe in the divinity of Christ.** 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.”⁵*

According to sister White the Seventh-day Adventist church, in 1893, was holding to “the truth of Christ’s pre-existence” and no other group held “more firmly” to this. Yet at this time Seventh-day Adventists believed the pre-incarnate Son of God was begotten. Today they do not! Has there been an exchange of the truth of His pre-existence for error in this shift from begotten theology to unbegottenism? Now Mrs. White does not specify the source of the false reports here but we do know from the Bible Echo and Signs of the Times periodical that Canright’s work was very popular in Australia during this time. Whether he was the source or not, it is clear that Canright’s charges made great inroads against the progress of the 3 angel’s message and remained problematic for decades.

This is the historical setting for M.C. Wilcox’s publication of Spear’s article “The Subordination of Christ” in December of 1891. From 1889 onward there was a popular work being circulated that charged Seventh-day Adventists as being rejecters of the Trinity! What made it all the more problematic was that Canright had been a well-known Adventist apologist and that made him seem all the more credible. Consequently Seventh-day Adventists were held to be rejecters of the Divinity and pre-existence of Christ and one who had been a leader among them was spreading that claim far and wide.⁶

Here, I believe, we find a much more plausible explanation for the introduction of the word “Trinity” into Adventism. It was reactionary theology! Due to the impact of this critical work M.C. Wilcox used Spear’s article in order to start building munitions to fight back against Canright and alter the public perception of Seventh-day Adventists.

⁵ Ellen G. White, Review and Herald December 5, 1893, par. 5 [bold emphasis added]

⁶ See Appendix 3 for a series of statements indicating how influential Canright was.

“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.”⁷

“In this number is concluded 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, for not only the subject matter it contains, but for the way in which it is presented”⁸

Here we see Wilcox calling attention to this article and giving it a strong endorsement. And we note his positive usage of the word “Trinity.” And the efforts did not stop here either. As noted above this article was published as a part of a public campaign called the “Bible Student’s Library.” According to the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia the “series of pamphlets” of the Bible Students’ Library were “designed for the public, containing brief and pointed essays on Bible doctrines, the fulfillment of prophecy, and other aspects of SDA teachings.”⁹ M.C. Wilcox “was chair of the editorial committee” of this library “for a number of years”¹⁰ and in this series the title of Spear’s article was changed to read “The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity.” It is interesting to note that other articles in this series had headings that appear to be labeled especially for public consumption (i.e. #111 is entitled “Tormented Forever and Ever” and # 121 is entitled “The Temporal Millennium”). In light of the popular beliefs amongst evangelicals back then, eternal hell fire and post-millennialism, these headings appear designed to catch their attention and then assuage their fears regarding Adventists by revealing the Bible truth on the matter. So in 1892 we see the newly titled article “The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity” being promoted by Seventh-day Adventists. The timing of this occurrence seems more than coincidental and its promotion came forth immediately.

“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. **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 Father, Son and Holy Spirit with a devout adherence to the words of Scripture, in the best brief way we ever saw it presented”¹¹

“The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity. 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**. It is a tract worthy of reading”¹²

The historical context suggest to this author that Wilcox used Spear’s article not because he started to believe in the Trinity as a result of the 1888 meetings but rather so that “the public”

⁷ Signs of the Times, December 7th, 1891

⁸ Signs of the Times, December 14th 1891

⁹ Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia, entry on the "Bible Students' Library

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Signs of the Times Vol 18, No. 22, 1892 [bold emphasis added]

¹² Signs of the Times Vol 20. No. 29, 1894 [bold emphasis added]

would see evidence that Seventh-day Adventists were not heretical contrary to Canright's popularized claim otherwise. Notice the continued reference to the "Trinity" as a Bible doctrine. This was a word that up until this point is very much absent from Adventism in a positive sense.

Now M.C. Wilcox was the editor of Signs of the Times so he was responsible for the endorsements here and his usage of the word "Trinity" via Spear does not mean what some today attempt to make it out to be. Merlin Burt, perceptively notes the following:

"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."¹³

While it is true that much of what Spear wrote in his article would have been acceptable to Seventh-day Adventists of that era it is also true Wilcox himself did not agree in totality with Spear's document. While he wrote that there "may be minor thoughts" that "we might wish to express differently" he never explained what these might be. Yet reading his other articles later on indicates that there were most certainly significant differences that he held. However due to the critical environment it was advantageous for him to minimalize that when advertising this document.

Christy Taylor noted in her paper "The Doctrine of the Personality of the Holy Spirit as Taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church up to 1900" M.C. Wilcox actually "rejected Trinitarianism." She continued on to state:

"Even after many of his associates accepted this doctrine he remained definitely anti-Trinitarian. In 1898 the Signs of the Times, of which Wilcox was editor, published as editorial entitled "The Divine Unity." **It states his belief in "one God, the Father."** He accepted Christ as "under God, our Creator and Redeemer," but his comparison of the Spirit to the light of the sun reveals that he did not combine these three in a divine Trinity. He also said of the Spirit, "It is in the Father, it is in Christ; it is in every member of the church of Christ. 13"

Her footnote # 13 reads:

13. M. V. Wilcox, "The Divine Unity," Signs of the Times, 24:51, December 22, 1898, p. 816"
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¹³ Merlin Burt, 'Demise of Semi-Arianism and Anti-Trinitarianism in Adventist Theology, 1888-1957', pages 5-6, December 1996

¹⁴ Christy Taylor "The Doctrine of the Personality of the Holy Spirit as Taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church up to 1900" pg 14. The typo of "M.V." instead of "M.C." is in the original. [bold emphasis added]

Here we note that Wilcox believed that the “one God” was the Father! Unfortunately the article that Taylor is commenting on is not available online.

Another interesting point here is that at late as 1914 Wilcox was still ambiguous about the eternity of the Son of God. A subscriber by the initials of T.A. Z. asked a two-part question and I will quote part 2:

“2. Can we concluded, from Rev. 3:14 and Col. 1:15, that our Lord Jesus had a beginning, and there was a time when God the Father was alone?”

Wilcox, replied:

“2. Yes, some do conclude, from Rev. 3:14, that there was a time when the Son did not exist, save in the all-comprehending purpose and potency of God. And yet there are others who still hold- and there is nothing to the contrary in the text – that the beginning of the creation of God means the One in whom the creation began, as declared in Col 1:17, “And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.” The finite can not grasp the infinite. Let this suffice, - that our Lord is God with the Father from the “days of eternity”; that “He is before all things, and in Him all things consist,” and He brings to all those who believe in Him the plenitude of the power of the Deity according to our needs.”¹⁵

Here we see ambiguity regarding the full eternity of the Son of God. A possible reason for this might be that Wilcox believed that God created time through His Son. Quoting now from an 1894 article of his we read the following:

“See also 2 Tim. 1:9 “before the world began,” literally, “before the times of the ages.” See Young’s translation, Emphatic Diaglott, and Rotherhama’s Emphatic Translation. So much for the past...The plan of the ages was laid by Jesus Christ. This is stated in Heb. 1:1, 2 “God . . . 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,” literally “ordained the ages.” See Revised Version, margin. Young translates, “Did make the ages;” the Diaglott, “Constituted the ages.” The word translated “made” in Heb. 1:2 is from the Greek word poieo, ...The text therefore declares that God through Jesus Christ “caused,” “brought forth,” “ordained,” or “appointed” the ages....”¹⁶

Whatever the case may be for this ambiguity about the Son of God, even as late at 1914, it does not match with Trinitarianism which definitively asserts this. Finally Wilcox’s view of the Spirit is also contrary to Trinitarian theology. Writing 6 years after he the Spear article he claimed:

“This presence and power of God, present wherever life is, is by his Holy spirit. That spirit is “the eternal Spirit” (Heb. 9:14), it is “the Spirit of life” (Rom. 8:2). It is the life of God flowing out from the great central Fountain to all parts of the universe.... God is

¹⁵ M.C. Wilcox Question Corner “48 -Various Texts on the Deity” Signs of the Times November 17th, 1914

¹⁶ M.C. Wilcox “The Purpose of the Ages” Signs of the Times May 7th, 1894

everywhere present by his outflowing life. Just as every heart-beat sends the blood to all parts of the physical frame of man, so the pulsations of the life of God, his Holy Spirit, go out to all parts of his created universe, giving life to all God's creatures, and keeping all creation in constant touch with the throne of Deity. It is the divine life-current to all his universe. It is the divine telegraphy by which the Ruler of the universe is in sympathetic communication with all his children. In it is all his fullness, and so it is said to be "the seven Spirit of God sent forth into all the earth." Rev. 5:6. It is the divine telephone by which God hears the faintest whisperings of thought. It is the divine X-ray by which he sees not merely through iron walls, but the very motives of men. Wonderful Spirit, wonderful life, of God!"¹⁷

Christy Taylor has also noted that "Milton C. Wilcox called the Spirit the 'life of God, 8' and in another place the 'mighty beneficent energy, or life of God. 9'. He emphasized this belief in another article entitled "The Spirit of Life," by explaining that as finite man is surrounded by an "aura" or sphere of influence, reaching far out beyond himself, capable at times of controlling many, and as this sphere is filled with his own personality, so the infinite God is surrounded by a "limitless sphere, to every part of which flows from the great central Fountain, the life-force of God, carrying with it the power and personality of God. 10"

Unfortunately footnotes 8 and 9 do not exist in her document, presumably an oversight, so the source of these quotes is unknown but footnote 10 states "Milton C. Wilcox, "Spirit of Life," Signs of the Times, 23:22, June 2, 1898, p. 342.¹⁸

Again we read from her document that "In an article in the Signs of the Times in 1898 the importance of the work of the Spirit is emphasized by Milton C. Wilcox. He says, "Without the Spirit, the life and light of Christ would avail us nothing. 16"

Footnote 16 reads:

"16 Milton C. Wilcox, "The Spirit, Personal and Impersonal," The Signs of the Times, 24:33, August 18, 1898, p. 518"¹⁹

Again Taylor documents:

"He speaks of the Spirit as carrying the power of God to every soul who will receive it. He says that the Spirit is impersonal because "it" is spoken of as being poured out upon all flesh, and as being every-where present in the universe of God, and yet personal also because "it" bears the life and power of God in all "its" operations, and the presence of God to the child of faith.

"It comes to the believer as a person, the person of Christ Jesus, speaking of and for Him, witnessing of and for Him. It is the life force of the Deity, by which all His works are wrought,

¹⁷ M.C. Wilcox "Editorial" Signs of the Times, September 23rd, 1897

¹⁸ Christy Taylor "The Doctrine of the Personality of the Holy Spirit as Taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church up to 1900" pg 24

¹⁹ Ibid pg 32

but coming into the heart and life of the believer not only as an agency of power, but as a divine presence of love and knowledge and companionship. 17”²⁰

Footnote 17 is the previous location cited again. When trying to confirm these quotes I discovered that there is only one 1898 edition of Signs of the Times available online. It is the August 18th, 1898 but pages 516 to 525 are missing. Thus the 1898 Wilcox articles quoted by Taylor are missing.

Wilcox also answered the following inquiry in 1898:

“May we not understand that the Holy Ghost is a person, as well as the Father, and the Son, or is its Jesus’ Spirit, as most claim it is?” he replied:

“The Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit, the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, the Spirit of Christ, are all one and the same Spirit: for there is ‘one Spirit, even as ye are called ‘in one hope.’ Eph. 4:4. This Spirit is the outflowing life of God in Christ, and has the power of bringing to the child of God the personality and presence of Christ. In this way it may be said to be a person, while as God’s life it is said to be shed forth, poured out, etc. We cannot comprehend the infinite”²¹

Once more in 1908 Wilcox answered a similar inquiry:

“Question: The Trinity - We speak of the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and Holy Ghost; do we understand that the Holy Ghost, or Spirit, is a personal being as God the Father and Jesus the Son? In Christ’s talk with the disciples, in John 14, He uses the personal pronoun in referring to the Comforter.

“Answer: There are various interpretations and differences of opinion in regard to the matter. To the mind of the writer, the Spirit is the life of God, or better, the life of the Godhead, common both to the Father and the Son. It is that which makes Deity everywhere present. In Acts 2 it is spoken of as that which came into the room and filled all who were there. In the thirty-third verse Peter speaks of it as the power, which Christ had poured forth. It is spoken of as a person, because by the Spirit the Father and the Son come personally to us. In John 16:7 Jesus tells us, “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.” Jesus was a person located in one place; the Spirit was that which was shed abroad among all His children, but it brought to every one of those children, the presence of Christ. So we read again, “He (the Spirit) shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall declare it unto you.”²²

Again, in 1911, Wilcox asserted a view that the Spirit was not revealed as a separate person.

“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

²⁰ Ibid pg 32, 33

²¹ M.C. Wilcox, Signs of the Times August 11, 1898 Vol. 24, No. 31

²² M.C. Wilcox, Signs of the Times, February, 26th, 1908

and all creation... Thus the Spirit is personified in Christ and God, but never revealed as a separate person. Never are we told to pray to the Spirit; but to God for the Spirit."²³

Finally, even as late as the year 1914, Wilcox did not regard the Spirit as an individual person as we look upon them.

"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"²⁴

So it would appear that Wilcox maintained a view that there was "one God, the Father." It is also appears that he maintained flexibility on the eternity of the Son of God. He acknowledged that there were some who believed that He was not fully eternal and offered no condemnation of that position. Finally he did not believe in the personhood of the Spirit in the same sense as with the Father and the Son. With this in mind why would he publish Samuel Spear's article? Why would he promote it under the title of Bible doctrine of the Trinity and say that his differences with it were minimal? Why would he use the word "Trinity" to describe SDA belief? I believe the correct answer is that he was reacting to Canright. Brother Wilcox now had a resource to which he could point when readers asked questions of Adventists on the matter as the following quote from an 1893 Signs of the Times indicates:

"73. FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT. "What is your idea about the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost being three in one? SUBSCRIBER.

"It matters very little what our idea is in the matter. What does the Bible teach? should be the question with us all. Christ says" I and my Father are one," and prays that his disciples may be one as he and his Father are one. John 10: 30; 17:11,21. The unity is one we may apprehend, though not comprehend. "The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity," No. 90 of the Bible Students' Library, price two cents (Pacific Press, Oakland, Cal.), will give you some good thoughts and suggestions on the matter."²⁵

A careful reader will note that Wilcox completely dodged the question about the Father, Son and Holy Ghost being three in one and responded instead with Scripture that taught that Christ and the Father (that is 2 Persons) are one.

I believe what is happening here is best explained as reactionary theology. There was now an article in print, by Seventh-day Adventists, that used the word "Trinity" in a positive sense. It could be used as a response to all inquiries and deflect criticism but it did not commit to the issue. This response, as we will see shortly, did not settle the issue and over 20 years this article would again be referenced to try to guard against Canright's accusations.

The salient point for this paper is that this very early positive Trinity reference in Seventh-day Adventism by M.C. Wilcox was not due to his adopting the doctrine of the Trinity as a

²³ M.C. Wilcox Questions and Answers gathered from 'The Question Corner Department' of the Signs of the Times. Pacific Press p18-182. 1911.

²⁴ M. C. Wilcox, "The Personality of the Spirit" Signs of the Times , 24 November 1914

²⁵ Signs of the Times, Jan 23, 1893

consequence of the 1888 meetings. Since he did not become a Trinitarian himself it must be for some other reason. The only other option available that I can fathom, and one that is supported by the historical evidence, is that it was reactionary to criticism. It was a rephrasing of the doctrine with evangelical wording in order to make it more palatable. This is what introduced the doctrine of the Trinity into Seventh-day Adventism. The major problem in the pro-Trinitarian recounting of the development of this doctrine in Seventh-day Adventism is that the impact of D.M. Canright and his criticisms is overlooked yet they were clearly a major impetus. These criticisms were most damaging and were believed by influential Christians of other denominations. For example James Gray, the president of Moody Bible Institute, had this to say about the matter:

“The Seventh-day Adventists...reject the doctrine of the Trinity, which involves the Deity of Christ, though this is not stated... We would recommend you to read *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* by Elder Canright...”²⁶

As you can see Seventh-day Adventists were not trusted and Canright was viewed as the reliable source for information on the true SDA doctrine. This statement from James Gray was in the year 1913 so despite M.C. Wilcox’s 1891 publication of a pro-Trinitarian reference the church was still maligned and Canright continued on the attack. This was a period of damage control. The following article demonstrates this and the critic being referenced here is none other than Canright.

“Garbled Statements of Facts

“A CORRESPONDENT sends us a copy of the Louisville Christian Observer of February 12, containing an article on the Seventh-day Adventists. It aims to set forth the views of Seventh-day Adventists, not from their own published statements so much, but statements from a disappointed, ambitious man who felt that his ability was not sufficiently recognized, and who apostatized.

“... The simple fact is that in all this time this man never really knew the truth as taught by Seventh-day Adventists and as it is in Jesus. He learned facts and theories, but not truth. He learned doctrines, separate and distinct articles of faith, but never the doctrine, the teaching of the Bible, the center of which is Christ Jesus. He perhaps tells us truly what he believed once, but he does not rightly represent the denomination. For instance, he declares that among the chief doctrinal points of Seventh-day Adventists are “rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity; materiality of all things ; that the Bible must be interpreted to harmonize with the writings of Mrs. White ; that when Christ comes only 144,000 out of all then living will be saved, and all those will be Seventh-day Adventists.” Now in the sense in which these are set forth they are not true. This man may not know it, but our correspondent evidently thinks so, who says that he is a member of the Presbyterian Church, and a reader of the SIGNS OF THE TIMES, and remarks that “I do not think this article quite fair.” And it is not fair, nor is it true. “The best way to understand just what Seventh-day Adventists believe is to read just what they have to say. All of the great fundamental Scriptural views of the denomination

²⁶ James M. Gray, *Bible Problems Explained*, 1913, pg 81

are given each year in the SIGNS OF THE TIMES, and these are taught as the editors understand the Bible to teach them.”²⁷

Now M.C. Wilcox got himself into a bit of trouble here. How so? The problem was that the great fundamental Scriptural views of the denomination that were being published at this time were non-Trinitarian! So even though Wilcox and others had used the word "Trinity" in the periodicals the fundamental principles were problematic. Even just one year prior, in the August 22nd, 1912 edition of the Review and Herald they had been published verbatim.²⁸ They were also still being sold at the various publishing houses:

“The International Tract Society has just put out another number of our “Bible Students’ Library.” It is No. 26, “The Fundamental Principles of Seventh-day Adventists,” and should have a large circulation...”²⁹

Not only that but these principles were still actively being used within the denomination at the time as a basis of fellowship.

“Elder Campbell presented the fundamental principles of our faith and then an expression was taken from all those who were reading and willing to confirm to the same”³⁰

These principles were non-Trinitarian and Canright, who was no novice to Adventism, knew these things and took full advantage of them. He even had evidence on hand of a Conference president had used the principles as a test of fellowship in 1911. Quoting Canright now in “The Christian Workers Magazine” from 1915. Here he is repudiating a claim by a Seventh-day Adventist minister by the name of Wheeler that Seventh-day Adventists believed in the Trinity as held by evangelical churches.

“Seventh-day Adventists and the Doctrine of the Trinity - By Rev. D. M. Canright, Grand Rapids, Mich.”

“EDITOR of The Christian Workers Magazine: In the June number of your magazine, under the above title, you say that in a previous issue, by request, you gave a summary of the Seventh-day Adventists doctrines in which you said, “They reject the doctrine of the trinity.” For this Elder Wheeler, an Adventist minister, “took you to task” and convinced you of error on this point. So you apologized and corrected your statement.

In my book, “Seventh-day Adventism Renounced,” page 25, I give a summary of their doctrines and use exactly these words. So I judge you accepted my statement as reliable. I now re-affirm my statement: “They reject the doctrine of the trinity” as held by evangelical churches, as the previous line in my book states. But Elder Wheeler says: “I regard our position upon the trinity as in harmony with that of other evangelical churches.”

²⁷ M.C. Wilcox Signs of the Times, April 8, 1913

²⁸ “Fundamental Principles of Seventh-Day Adventists” Review and Herald, August 22nd, 1912 pgs 4-6

²⁹ The Eastern Tidings, March 15th, 1914

³⁰ Eastern Canadian Messenger, October 2nd, 1915 pg 2

“His statement is untrue. Either he does not know the doctrine of his church or has not read their standard works, or else he misleads you. I was a minister and writer among them for over twenty years... Since I became a Baptist minister I have kept in close touch with all their teachings. I now take five Advent papers and read their latest books. I know all their doctrines as well as they do themselves, much better than their young ministers like Elder Wheeler...While an Adventist I often preached against the orthodox doctrine of the trinity and other ministers did the same.

“As proof that they believe in the trinity the same as others Elder Wheeler quotes from Mrs. White this sentence touching Christ, “He was the incarnate God.” Well then, did their incarnate God become totally dead and unconscious for three days? Was there no living God for three days? Or was there another Deity up in heaven at the same time? Is that the evangelical doctrine of the trinity? Or does not Elder Wheeler know what Trinitarians believe?

“What shall we say to Elder Wheeler’s assertion that Adventists believe in the trinity as held by the evangelical churches? Again you asked Elder Wheeler “if they had put out any official statement of their faith.” He says, “The denomination has declined to adopt such a creed.” Here is another statement which is untrue. They have carefully prepared, officially endorsed, printed creed, and enforce every article strictly. We Baptists have our “Articles of Faith,” the Methodists there “Articles of Religion” and the Presbyterians their “Confession of Faith.” Adventists say these are our “creeds” and so they are, and we are not ashamed of them. Seventh-day Adventists have a creed as clearly defined as any of these. Webster defines creed thus: “A definite summary of what is believe; especially, a summary of Christian belief.” “Our Baptists Articles begin: “We believe, etc.” That is a creed. **The Adventist creed is entitled “Fundamental Principles of Seventh-day Adventists.” It says, “The following propositions may be taken as a summary of the principal features of their religious faith.” “They believe” – then follow 29 Articles of Faith. This is exactly Webster’s definition of a creed.** If Baptists have a creed so have Adventists. **This is published in their year books, listed in their catalogues, for sale in all their offices.** I just went to their office here and bought five copies, one cent each, 14 pages. **This is just what you asked for, so I send you one. Why did not Elder Wheeler send you one in his letter? Instead, he says they have nothing of that kind! You may sometime learn that the statements of Adventists concerning their objectionable doctrines are not always reliable.** “You see Articles 1 and 2 of that creed give at length their doctrine concerning God and Christ but only mention the Holy Spirit without mentioning His personality in any way. Nor is there any mention of the trinity. These two articles give exactly the information you ask for. **Why did Elder Wheeler withhold them from you? The answer is evident – their statement is not Trinitarian.** A line is added at the close saying that these articles are not a rule of their faith or practice. I positively know to the contrary. I myself expelled a prominent Advent minister from the church for refusing to abide by one of these articles. In recent years both ministers and laymen, many of them, have been expelled for simply disagreeing with one or two of these articles. Whole churches have been disbanded by conference officials for the same reason.....

“I enclose you a tract of ten pages entitled “An Open Letter to the Florida Conference Committee of Seventh-day Adventists” by L.H. Crisler, Orlando, Fla. This gives an account

of how he and many others were cast out for not accepting some of the Articles of Faith as stated in their “Fundamental Principles,” their creed. I quote a few lines to show that these articles are made a test of fellowship. I am personally acquainted with ministers and lay members who were tested and cast out in the same way:

“Orlando, Fla., November 17, 1911.

“Ivring Keck, Bowling Green, Fla.

“Dear Brother:

“Your letter of November 7, is at hand. Replying will say it will afford us pleasure to grant you a letter to unite with the Bartow church if you can answer affirmatively the following questions:

“1. Are you in harmony with the fundamental principles of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination?”

“2. Are you in harmony with the denominational organization and its work?”

“An affirmative to these questions will bring a prompt, favorable response.

“(Signed) For the Conference Committee,

“R.W. Parmele, Pres.”

“I believe this is a sufficient answer to Elder Wheeler. Please read the two tracts and the book I send you, then tell your readers whether or not Elder Wheeler informed you fairly and correctly.”³¹

Now what is very interesting is that Lee Wheeler argued that the Seventh-day Adventist position upon the Trinity was in harmony with the other evangelical churches! This is more evidence that the historical context behind the introduction of the Trinity in Seventh-day Adventism was reactionary theology. And the quote above helps us to understand, at least in part, why the Fundamental Principles stopped being published in 1915. Canright knew Adventism very well. He knew about the Fundamental Principles that were published every year and they were clearly non-Trinitarian. In fact he sent a copy to the individual he was corresponding with in the article above. You can imagine how foolish the Seventh-day Adventist apologists must have felt as they read his words that these beliefs “only mention the Holy Spirit, without mentioning His personality in any way” and “nor is there any mention of the trinity.” In what is perhaps more than a coincidence that very year the Seventh-day Adventist church stopped publishing the non-Trinitarian statement. This enabled the church to shelter itself more effectively from Canright’s blistering criticisms. It is also important here that we look at Wheeler’s reply to Canright.

³¹ D.M. Canright “Seventh-day Adventists and the Doctrine of the Trinity” *The Christian Workers Magazine* Volume 16, pg 84, 85 October 1915. [bold emphasis added]

“EDITORS of The Christian Workers Magazine:

“In your October number under the heading "Seventh-day Adventists and the Doctrine of the Trinity," appeared an article from Rev. D. M. Canright in which he attempts to show that this religious body rejects the doctrine of the trinity, involving the Deity of Christ: and in which he strongly attacks my statements published in the June issue, in which I said: **"I regard our position upon the trinity as in harmony with that of other evangelical churches."** Mr. Canright declares, "This statement is untrue." And he adds: "Either he (Elder Wheeler), does not know the doctrine of his church, or has not read its standard works, or else he misleads you."

“In support of his contention Mr. Canright quotes certain passages from an old book written by Elder J. H. Waggoner, printed in 1884, and projected in such a way as to really place the Seventh-day Adventist denomination in a false light before your readers. The conclusion naturally follows, unless something is said to answer these charges, that Mr. Canright is correct in his assertions. He may not intend to misrepresent us, but his way of putting things appears bad. However, not wishing to be personal, I will, in correcting his mistakes, confine myself to facts.

"The work of Elder Waggoner was written, as will appear, before our denominational views upon the doctrine of the trinity had been defined. It has been out of print many years, and I may add that **no controvertible or inharmonious sentiments survive in the later literature of our organization.** For some reason Mr. Canright has made use of quotations only from this obsolete publication; apparently overlooking the rich and numerous sources of information upon this subject to be found in our recent and standard works like "Desire of the Ages;" "The Story of the Ages;" "The Coming King;" "Bible Readings for the Home Circle;" "Patriarchs and Prophets" "The Ministry of Healing;" "Steps-to Christ;" "Christ Object Lessons;" and "Testimonies for the Church."

"The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity"

In the year 1892 Seventh-day Adventists placed themselves plainly before the world as believers in the evangelical doctrine of the trinity and the Deity of Christ in the most unequivocal sense of those terms, by adopting and publishing for the general use of its church and missionary societies a treatise entitled "The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity." It was written by Samuel T. Spear, D. D., a prominent Presbyterian clergyman, pastor of the South Presbyterian Church, Brooklyn, N. Y., from 1849, to 1871, and afterward associated editorially with "The Independent," till the close of his life. The article was published by that 'religious journal in its issue of November 14, 1889, soon after Dr. Spears' death. This exceptionally clear, scriptural, and in every way excellent exposition of the Christian doctrine of the trinity, in tract form and bearing the name of its esteemed author, **has been in general use among Seventh-day Adventists during the past twenty-three years.** I quote the opening paragraph.

"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. John 17:3;

1 Corinthians 8:6. The same Bible as clearly teaches that the adorable person known to us 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; Romans 1:3, 4; 9:5; Titus 2:13."

Mr. Canright appears not to know these facts.

The Testimony of Elder Daniells

Finally, that I may put to rest this calumny against our faith, and at the same time refute Mr. Canright's contention that Seventh-day Adventists "have a carefully prepared, officially endorsed, printed creed," I wish to present a letter from Elder A. G. Daniells, President of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Takoma Park, Washington, D. C. In answer to my inquiries about the points disputed by Mr. Canright, he wrote me on December 16, 1915, as follows:

"Dear Brother Wheeler:

"The Seventh-day Adventist denomination does not deny nor even question the Deity of the Son of God. Nothing can be found in the record of our pronouncements as a body during the seventy-one years of our existence to show that we disbelieve in the Deity of our blessed and only Saviour. **Individuals among us may have been somewhat confused in the early days regarding the trinity. Some of them made statements in their writings that have never been accepted by the body.** For many years every utterance of all our writers have expressed the unbounded confidence in the Deity of Christ. All anyone will need to do to verify this fact is to go through the files of our denominational papers and the many books we have put out.

"Now as to creed, Seventh-day Adventists have never drawn up, nor adopted a church creed. From our earliest days we have made it plain that the Bible must be our only creed. We have all been united all the way along in the view that the word of God must be the one infallible authority in matters of salvation. "No, Brother Wheeler, we have never drafted a church creed, nor even approached one. Very, sincerely, A. G. Daniells."

"In conclusion we wish to confess with the beloved Paul and the multitude of early Christian witnesses, that "To us there is but one God the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things and we by him; and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling." (See 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 4:4). "And in the benedictive prayer we join in fellowship with all the children of God saying: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all, Amen." (2 Cor. 13:14).

Lee S. Wheeler."³²

Now what is very interesting is the brother Wheeler asserts that Waggoner's 1884 work "was written...before our denomination views upon the doctrine of the trinity had been defined." This claim is very dubious. Waggoner wrote his book twelve years **after** the Seventh-day

³² The Christian Workers Magazine 1915 Vol 16 pg 680, 681 [bold emphasis added]

Adventist Fundamental Principles were first published. Here we see a very clear dodge of the original denominational view and the Fundamental Principles.

Brother Wheeler also resorts to the 1892 statement in order to defend against Canright. He asserts that Seventh-day Adventists, by that statement, placed themselves “plainly before the world as believers in the evangelical doctrine of the trinity” but this again is problematic because the Fundamental Principles lacked this doctrine. Also Wheeler has glossed over the fact that the article he is referencing actually omitted the sentence “or triune God, which has so long been the faith of the Christian Church.” It also rejected “the eternal generation of the Son” and “the eternal procession of the holy Ghost” which are common features of creedal Trinitarianism. Consequently the Seventh-day Adventist view, as taken from the Spear article, arguably does not mesh with orthodox Trinitarianism. Even more so the issue of tangibility for God and His Son, which is hinted at in Canright’s reply about another Deity up in heaven while the Son was dead, was also ignored.

Finally we note A.G. Daniells attempted to make it seem like the non-Trinitarian view was not the majority view of the body of Seventh-day Adventists. This is similar to what LeRoy Froom argued many years later in his book *Movement of Destiny* that was originally commissioned by Daniells. It would appear that what we are seeing here is a clear case of damage control and reactionary theology. The denominational view is being publically presented in a way so as to shield the church from criticism on this particular subject.

Moving on, the historical context of Canright's criticisms is also necessary in order to understand what Francis Wilcox did. This is Milton Wilcox’s brother. In the year 1913 F.M. Wilcox wrote a statement using the word "Trinity" and said that this is what the church believed even though the Fundamental Principles did not say this. Why would he do such a thing? It looks like the answer, at least in part, is that it was reactionary theology to Canright. He was trying to defend the church. Let's read what he 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."³³

So at the same time while the non-Trinitarian Fundamental Principles were being published, F.M. Wilcox wrote a statement in the *Review and Herald* saying a “cardinal feature” of the Seventh-day Adventist faith was belief in the divine Trinity! That is problematic. One claim was being made in the Fundamental Principles while a different claim was being made in the *Review*. Yet there is another problem here too. Pro-Trinitarian scholars and ministers in the church today often miss a key fact. While Wilcox did step forward and assert the Personhood of the Holy Spirit, he did not repudiate the literal Sonship of God's begotten Son and neither did he assert that God is a triune Being. In fact he actually implied that the Father and Son

³³ F.M. Wilcox, *Review and Herald*, Oct 9, 1913, caps emphasis added

are separate beings for he wrote that the Father is "a personal, spiritual being" and that the 2nd Person as "the Son of the eternal Father." In other words he was not teaching Trinitarianism as it was understood back then by Christendom or even how Seventh-day Adventists understand it today. Let's look back at the 1913 statement in the SDA Yearbook.

"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; unchangable, and everywhere present by his representative, the Holy Spirit. Ps. 139:. "2. That there is one Lord Jesus Christ, THE SON OF THE ETERNAL FATHER, the one by whom he created all things..."³⁴

Now let's compare that to F.M. Wilcox's statement:

"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."³⁵

A careful reader will see that Wilcox's statement dropped the phrase "one God" out. Thus what is conspicuously absent is the three in one concept. F.M. Wilcox actually pulled the wording out from the Fundamental Principles and superimposed the word "Trinity" onto it. Thus he completely sidestepped the issue of the begotten nature of the Son of God. Gilbert Valentine perceptively observes:

"Although Review editor F.M. Wilcox was able to say in a doctrinal summary in the Review in 1913 that Adventists believed "in the divine Trinity," his language sidestepped the issue of the eternal self-existent deity of Christ and was still sufficiently vague as to be able to include both the traditional semi-Arians and the Trinitarians. Jesus was simply "the son of the Eternal Father."³⁶

It is also important to note here that Moon, Whidden and Reeve obscure this point also in how they quote Wilcox's 1913 statement.

"Wilcox, editor of the denomination's most influential periodical, wrote that "Seventh-day Adventists believe, - 1. In the divine Trinity. This Trinity consists of the eternal Father,...the Lord Jesus Christ,...[and] the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead" (Wilcox)"³⁷

By sharing this statement with these ellipses the reader is potentially left with an erroneous impression that this Trinity, mentioned by F.M. Wilcox in 1913, is the same as the 1980

³⁴ Fundamental Principles, SDA Yearbook 1913, caps emphasis added

³⁵ F.M. Wilcox, Review and Herald, Oct 9, 1913, caps emphasis added

³⁶ Gilbert Valentine, footnote 28 "How clear views of Jesus developed in the Adventist Church" <http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/trinity/valentine.htm>

³⁷ The Trinity pg 199

Trinity. This is not the case though. Wilcox actually wrote so as to be harmonious with begotten theology. Even his 1931 statement, which was published in the yearbook, was written ambiguously with that purpose in mind.

"After carefully reading Wilcox's [1931] "Fundamental Beliefs" statement, Nichol expressed appreciation and approval of its scope and balance. He noted that it was conservatively stated—doubtless framed that way in the hope that it might be acceptable to those who had held divergent views, especially over the Godhead. Yes, that was true, Wilcox assented."³⁸

So then why did F.M. Wilcox write his 1913 statement? Some argue that he was convinced via EGW's writings that the Trinity was true³⁹ due to Mrs. White's clear articulation of the Personhood of the Spirit. I believe that is a likely factor but I believe an equally convincing factor is that Wilcox was attempting to refute Canright's claims. And interestingly enough Canright eventually dropped the charge that Seventh-day Adventists did not believe in the Trinity from out of his book *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced*. Why would he do that? I would suggest that he was paying close attention to the Seventh-day Adventist apologists as they were paying close attention to him, particularly the Wilcox brothers.

Certain Seventh-day Adventists, during this era, were very much concerned with changing the public perception of Seventh-day Adventism. There was a keen awareness that the church was being attacked before of the original pioneer view. In 1914 W. A. Spicer noted:

"We lately have been attacked in publications as believing this teaching, the attack being based on "Thoughts on Revelation" which in this matter certainly does teach Arianism straight."⁴⁰

This statement is more evidence of the hostile environment in which Seventh-day Adventist Trinitarianism was birthed. There was a clear effort on the part of leaders to remove the cult stigma. G.W. Reaser wrote in 1921:

"With deep concern relative to the dangers which exist in certain modern cults, some of the constituents of the International Federation of Christian Workers requested their president, John Edward Brown, to review such isms as he considered a menace to the Christian Church. The following extracts are copied from his pamphlet, entitled "The Cult Kingdom," published in response to this request: -

"In a certain city, a very Godly man came to me with the request that I include 'Seventh-Day Adventism' in this series announced for review, and seemed incredulous when I told him the Church of Jesus Christ had no fight to make on 'Seventh-Day Adventism.' There are no fundamental grounds of disagreement between the organized church of Christ and the 'Seventh-day Adventist.'

³⁸ Froom, MOD, p. 414 brackets added for clarity

³⁹ The Trinity pg 198

⁴⁰ W. A. Spicer to L. R. Conradi, October 30, 1914

“On all the cardinal doctrines of the Bible--the Miraculous Conception, and the Virgin Birth, the Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension, **the Deity of Christ**, the Atonement of Christ, and the Second Coming, **the Personality of the Holy Spirit**, and the Infallible Bible, **the Seventh-Day Adventist rings as true as steel**.

“...“When you walk up in the presence of Mormonism, Eddyism and Russelism, you walk up into the presence of that which has strange theories to present--strange doctrines to promulgate,--all but literally, a 'new' God to worship.⁴¹

This claim, in 1918, from John Brown is a bit unusual inasmuch as Seventh-day Adventists themselves were by no means united on Trinitarianism as the minutes from the 1919 meetings reveal. So then why did he assert that Seventh-day Adventism “rings as true as steel” on the issues of “the Deity of Christ” and “the Personality of the Holy Spirit.” Could it be that reactionary theology was also at work here and one or more Seventh-day Adventists persuaded Mr. Brown that they believed in the Trinity just as the other churches did similar to how Lee Wheeler attempted to convince James Gray? While this is a speculation on my part, it is interesting to note how this Mr. Brown’s assessment was used later on. Again W.A. Spicer, writing in 1936, commented on this categorization by John Brown as a proof that the original pioneers had the manifestation of spiritual gifts among them.

“...**The story of the advent movement bears witness to the presence of these gifts building solidly on the gospel foundation.** True men of God, called from all walks of life in those days of 1844 and onward, had evidently these gifts represented among them. **In no other way can we account for the wisehearted, sure way in which they built in the pioneering days.** Those years were times of stress and confusion in the religious world, and all manner of curious and eccentric and often fanatical cults were springing up. By the gifts bestowed,—of apostleship and teaching of the Spirit of prophecy,—**the early workers laid down a system of truth, drawn from the word of Holy Writ, that we stand for today in all the world. It is our defense and stay.**

“**Let an outside observer tell it.** Some years ago the president of the International Association of Christian Workers wrote a book on erroneous cults and isms of the day. Some one asked him why he had not included Seventh-day Adventists in the survey. He replied:

“There are no fundamental grounds of disagreement between the organized church of Jesus Christ and the Seventh-day Adventist.... On all the cardinal doctrines of the Bible—the miraculous conception, the virgin birth, the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, **the deity of Christ**, the atonement of Christ, the second coming, **the personality of the Holy Spirit**, and the infallible Bible— the Seventh-day Adventist rings true as steel.”—“*In the Cult Kingdom,*” Dr. J. E. Brown, pp. 5, 6.

⁴¹ “An Honest Measurement of Seventh-day Adventists” Australian Record August 22nd, 1921 [bold emphasis added]

“Our pioneers, from earliest times, built on the foundation of Christ and Holy Scripture a structure of truth that meets the universal spiritual needs of all mankind, and stands foursquare against all the winds of error that can ever blow.⁴²

Here we see an implication that the current belief system of Seventh-day Adventists in 1936 was the system of truth laid down by the early workers. This claim from W.A. Spicer, who informed Spalding that his father quit preaching because of the anti-Trinitarian atmosphere at Battle Creek, suggests that there was revising the history regarding the original Seventh-day Adventist view on the Trinity.

The impact of reactionary theology really should not be missed here in the development of the Trinity in Adventism. Returning back to D.M. Canright now we note that more than a decade after his death in 1919 there was still a continuing apologetic response to him! Even as late as 1933 C.P. Bollman attempted to make it out that D.M. Canright had taught the doctrine of the Trinity as a part of the Seventh-day Adventist faith back in 1877!

“That the full force of these and of other texts making mention of the Holy Spirit as a personal being has always been recognized among us as a people, does not admit of serious question. In an article in the REVIEW AND HERALD of April 12, 1877, **a worker who was at that time one of our leading preachers and writers said this:** “Do we not all agree that in the providence of God, special light is now being given upon the subjects of the second advent near, the kingdom, the new earth, the sleep of the dead, the destruction of the wicked, the doctrine of the Trinity, the law of God, God's holy Sabbath, etc. ? All Seventh-day Adventists will agree in these things.” ...They do us wrong who deny that Seventh-day Adventists are Trinitarians”⁴³

William Branson made a similar argument:

“In chapter 1, page 25, paragraph 2 of his work, he professes to enumerate the doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church that differ from those held by other evangelical churches. His very first statement of these differences is, “They reject the doctrine of the Trinity.” Had Mr. Canright said that when he was among them there were **some** Seventh day Adventists who did not believe the doctrine of the Trinity, it might have been difficult to challenge his statement. But his sweeping indictment, involving, as it does, the whole denomination, is not true today, **nor was it true when made.** And **this Mr. Canright well knew**, for in an article which he published in the Review and Herald, the Seventh-day Adventist Church paper, under date of April 12, 1877, **he himself had said:**

“Do we not all agree that in the providence of God, special light is now being given upon the subjects of the second advent near, the kingdom, the new earth, the sleep of the dead, the destruction of the wicked, the doctrine of the Trinity, the law of God, God's holy Sabbath, etc.? All Seventh day Adventists will agree in these things.”⁴⁴

⁴² W.A. Spicer “The Spirit of Prophecy in the Advent Movement 1936, pgs 8, 9 [bold emphasis added]

⁴³ C.P. Bollman, Review and Herald Aug 3rd, 1933 [bold emphasis added]

⁴⁴ William Branson, In Defense of the Faith 154, 155 [bold emphasis added]

Here we see another clear example of revisionist history. Bollman and Branson have attempted to make Canright's 1877 statement about "special light" on "the doctrine of the trinity" into an endorsement of the doctrine. Nothing could be further from the truth. Let's actually quote Canright himself one year later in 1878 to properly understand what "special light" was being given upon the trinity doctrine. He was still a Seventh-day Adventist at this time. First we will quote from his unmistakably entitled article "The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit Not A Person, But An Influence Proceeding From God."

"All Trinitarian creeds make the Holy Ghost a person, equal in substance, power, eternity and glory with the Father and 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."⁴⁵

Secondly we quote from his article later on that year entitled "The Personality of God."

"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."⁴⁶

Thus it is completely impossible to honestly interpret Canright's 1877 statement as an endorsement of the doctrine. The "special light" that Canright mentions back then was light against the doctrine of the Trinity not for it!

Also Bollman's claim that the Holy Spirit had "always been recognized" as a "personal being" by the Seventh-day Adventist people is disproven by the historical data. As we saw above Canright's 1878 article rejected this. We have already noted numerous quotes from M.C. Wilcox that oppose this idea. Uriah Smith argued against this in *Review and Herald* October 28th, 1890. G.I. Butler also opposed the idea when writing to Kellogg.⁴⁷ R. A. Underwood admitted that he changed his view stating "It seems strange to me, now, that I ever believed that the Holy Spirit was only an influence, in view of the work he does."⁴⁸ A.T. Jones, writing in the Feb 14th, 1899 edition of the *Review and Herald* claimed that "The mistake we are making is to teach and preach that the reception of the Holy Ghost is a blessing, an influence, an edurement, a power, a something. It is not any or all of these things; it is no thing. He is a person, and as such must be received, and not as a blessing of any name nor kind. Receive ye him, not a blessing. No, no! not anything so low, but the third person in the Godhead, - divinity received by humanity. He is not an act nor an experience, but an abiding, "another Comforter," a new personage that come into your life, and comes to stay and control. Don't

⁴⁵ D.M. Canright, *Signs of the Times* July 25th, 1878

⁴⁶ D.M. Canright, *Review and Herald*, August 29th 1878, 'The Personality of God'

⁴⁷ Butler wrote of the Spirit that "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)

⁴⁸ R. A. Underwood, "The Holy Spirit a Person," *Review and Herald*, May 17, 1898, 310

make such a mistake; thousands have made it, and have lost all. Blessings go; the Blesser stays. Receive him, and no one else, nor anything less. – Selected.”⁴⁹ These claims would be completely impossible if the Spirit had always been recognized as a personal being as Bollman claimed.

Also Branson’s claim that Canright’s claim was not true when it was made is also highly questionable, especially considering what the Fundamental Principles declared to be the unanimous position back then. It would appear that as others did Branson also attempted to downplay the non-Trinitarian stance of the pioneers by making it seem like a minority position.

Unfortunately, during this period of Adventism there was quite a bit of white washing the historical position of the pioneers to make Adventist doctrine seem more palatable to evangelicals. We noted, much earlier on, that Arthur Spalding did this as well. Again this suggest an ongoing trend of reactionary theology. This is an often neglected and very important aspect of the historical framework for this doctrine’s emergence. Yet this aspect helps us to understand why Seventh-day Adventist writers, like M.C. Wilcox, who was clearly non-Trinitarian, began using the word “Trinity” in a positive sense. Another example of a non-Trinitarian who did the same thing is Uriah Smith. He is, perhaps, the most well known non-Trinitarian Seventh-day Adventist pioneer. Many readers, who are well aware of his doctrine, are astonished to learn that brother Smith also used the word “trinity.”

“Do the Scriptures warrant the praise or worship of the Holy Spirit? If not, does not the last line of the doxology contain an unscriptural sentiment? D. H.

“Answer.--- We know of no place in the Bible where we are commanded to worship the Holy Spirit, as was commanded in the case of Christ (Heb. 1 : 6), or where we find an example of the worship of the Holy Spirit, as in the case of Christ. Luke 21: 52. Yet in the formula for baptism, the name " Holy Ghost," or "Holy Spirit," is associated with that of the Father and the Son. And if the name can be thus used, why could it not properly stand as a part of the same trinity in the hymn of praise, " Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost " ⁵⁰

Please notice the year here. This is during that window of time when the church was still under tremendous pressure from the critics as being an anti-Trinitarian denomination. Brother Smith fielded this question from D.H. and used the word “trinity” to justify singing praise to the Holy Ghost! Yet was he a Trinitarian? No, he was not. Let’s quote him one year later in his book Daniel and Revelation.

"Could not the Father ordain that to such a being worship should be rendered equally with himself, without it's being idolatry on the part of the worshiper? He has raised him to positions which make it proper that he should be worshiped, 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." ⁵¹

⁴⁹ A.T. Jones, Review and Herald Feb 14th, 1899

⁵⁰ Uriah Smith, RH Oct 27, 1896

⁵¹ Daniel and the Revelation, 1897 edition p. 430

Here brother Smith clearly repudiates the idea that the Son of God had an equality of existence with the Father in eternity! In other words he still clearly adhered to begotten theology! Again quoting him from 1898:

“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 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. 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 (Psalm 139:7), was in existence also.”⁵²

Any honest reader can see that this is actually not the doctrine of Trinity at all for brother Smith did not believe that the Son of God existed throughout all eternity past but appeared so long ago that it was to finite minds “essentially eternity.” It was “by some divine impulse or process” that the Son appeared and when this occurred it was “then” that the Holy Spirit was representative of Them (Father and Son) Both. If you keep reading he calls this “the evolution of deity” (Ibid pg 13). Eight years earlier in Review and Herald, Oct 28, 1890 he wrote:

“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.” And again “In one of Christ’s discourses (John 14-16) 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.”⁵³

Nothing about his view had changed except he is using a new word to describe it. The 1898 quote irrefutably proves this but he clearly used the word “trinity” in answering an inquiry. Like others he is using the word “Trinity” in an unique way. I believe the evidence suggests that the church was doing damage control against its critics and this interesting dichotomy of certain Seventh-day Adventist pioneers using the word “Trinity” yet not being Trinitarian is best understood in this historical context of Canright’s criticisms. The development of the Trinity in Adventism did not occur in a vacuum and a failure to acknowledge the role that reactionary theology played in its entry ends up making some modern pro-Trinitarian defenders present a false narrative.

⁵² Uriah Smith, Looking Unto Jesus pg 10, 1898

⁵³ Uriah Smith, RH, Oct 28, 1890

The impact of D.M. Canright was even felt as late as the 1950s. Roy Allan Anderson informs us that the question that Walter Martin and George Cannon asked him back in 1955 was about the Trinity:

“What do you folk believe about the Trinity?” Was a question put to me some years ago by two gracious Christian gentlemen who came unannounced to the General Conference headquarters in Washington, D.C....**Both men were Christian college professors who had read much about Adventists, but all from detractors**, and one of them was commissioned to write a new book about Adventist beliefs. However, they felt they should contact the headquarters to discover what we actually believe on points of vital interest rather than just quoting from others. The answers to their earnest questions lengthened into days of prayerful discussions. **Our answer concerning the Godhead and the Trinity was crucial, for in some of the books they had read that Adventists were classed as Arians;...“We reassured the visitors when we turned first to the Scriptures, then to the 'Fundamental Beliefs' of Adventism. They discovered that we were in harmony with sound Biblical scholarship, not only on the Trinity but on every other cardinal doctrine of Christianity.”**⁵⁴

Walter Martin mentions the history behind this interaction as well. Please notice the person he says was the source of the controversy and what classification was under consideration.

“MARTIN: No. In fact, the General Conference was not really too warm to the entire project initially. Anderson, Froom, Read and Unruh paid some of the expenses from their own pockets. And we, out of our own pockets, did the same thing, because I came to the realization that there was a real area of conflict that had to be resolved. After all, **if Seventh-day Adventists were in essence Christians, then to classify them as a cult would be a great sin.** If they were really cultists, and didn't even know that they were, then we could do them a great service by pointing it out to them. **And if we could deal with all of the issues that had been raised from the Adventists' controversies of Canright, all the way through to that particular day**, then perhaps we could set the record straight once and for all. Just exactly what did they believe?

“You have to understand that 30 years ago there was great confusion. As a matter of fact, today there is still in many areas of Adventism. **They had strains of Arian Christology; there were men in positions of authority who denied the deity of Christ and the Trinity. For all I know, some of them may still be there today.** There were people who were absolute legalists, who believed that any person who kept Sunday - even in good conscience before God - right at that moment had the mark of the beast. And they were printing and distributing it under official Adventist logos.⁵⁵

Walter Martin, in a taped interview in 1989 also had this to say on the matter:

⁵⁴ [Adventists And The Trinity, by Roy Allan Anderson, Adventist Review, Sep. 8, 1983](#) [bold emphasis added]

⁵⁵ <http://web.archive.org/web/20050224182337/http://web2.airmail.net/billtod/martin.htm>

“The climate at that time [1955, 1956], Adventism was considered like Jehovah's Witnesses, like Mormonism, like most of the major cultic structures of the day. ...

“When I first met with L. E. Froom, he took me to task for about fifteen minutes on how I could ever possibly think that Adventism was a cult. "Adventism rings as true as steel" I said **"do you think Arius was a Christian?" And he was an excellent church historian and he said, "Of course he wasn't a Christian, he denied the deity of Jesus Christ." I said, "So did Ellen White."** Dr. Froom replied, "What!" I said, "yes" and opened up a suitcase and produced at least twelve feet of Adventist publications stacked up and marked for Dr. Froom's perusal. And for the perusal of the committee to check the sources in there. And they were in mortal shock I might add, to think that it was as pervasive as it was. Mrs. White reversed herself later on very quickly, and affirmed the doctrine of the Trinity very strongly and taught it. **But she was influenced by Uriah Smith. She did deny the eternal deity of Christ at one time and relegated Him to the place of a second deity. That's why you were classified with the Jehovah's Witnesses early on, because of the Arian emphasis in Adventism.** And because of the fact that you affirmed Michael the Archangel to be Christ.

“Dr. Froom and the committee decided that they would peruse this material immediately. So we adjourned the meeting and they took all the materials with them and I guess others, and went through the materials. *They came back and said, "well, a great deal of these things you're calling attention to are there, we agree, and we don't agree with these statements. They do not reflect orthodox Adventist theology, and we reject it."* I said, "good, happy to hear that, now can you fault us , because we read this material, and it's not peripheral issues we are talking about." ...

“We went through all kinds of materials and then the idea came for a book where we would question and the Adventist denomination would respond. ... Out of that came the book *Questions on Doctrine*. Contrary to some of the fantasies and myths which I hear today from Adventists who ought to know better, the book had the approval of the General Conference.⁵⁶

If this testimony from Walter Martin is accepted then we begin to see why Froom and others took the route they did. We also see a possible reason why Froom argued that Ellen White was always a Trinitarian! It might have been a counterpoint to Martin's claim. Donald Barnhouse wrote of the interaction with the Adventists:

“Immediately it was perceived that the Adventists were **strenuously denying** certain doctrinal positions which had been previously attributed to them.

“The Adventists specifically repudiate any teachings by ministers or members of their faith who have believed, proclaimed, and written any matter which would classify them among Arians.⁵⁷

Here we see the last embers of Canright's influence squelched by the response of Seventh-day Adventist leaders in the 1950s. This is the culmination of reactionary theology.

⁵⁶ Walter Martin - taped conference at Campus Hill Church in Loma Linda, CA, January 1989

⁵⁷ Donald Barnhouse, *Eternity*, September, 1956

Beyond a doubt, Seventh-day Adventist beliefs have truly changed over time, particularly the understanding of the Trinity. Perhaps what is “most startling” about this is not even the change itself but the process behind it. Unfortunately, as this paper attests, our historians have not always been truthful about this process. While there have been several factors responsible for this change one clear factor was reaction to criticism. D.M. Canright was an influential man while he was among Seventh-day Adventists but it appears that he became even more influential in shaping Adventism when he left it. Reaction to his criticisms of the Seventh-day Adventist people as rejecters of the doctrine of the Trinity helped to bring that doctrine into Seventh-day Adventism. This was such a troublesome issue for the church that over 60 years later, his criticism was still one of the issues raised. This factor has been neglected in accounting for the change and hopefully this paper will help to remedy that lack.

End of Jason Smith Excerpt

EYEWITNESS TO AN ELLEN WHITE PROPHECY BY DR. ARCHIBALD WILLIAM TRUMAN

Dr. Truman was born in 1884. He started his medical career at Battle Creek Hospital and Medical Center, but got his medical degree in Colorado in 1908. He practiced medicine in Glendale California during the 1940's. After retirement, he moved to Loma Linda, California. He died April 20, 1977 at 93 years of age. This account was transcribed from a taped sermon he gave in Loma Linda at the Azure Hills Church in the late 1970's. Dr. Truman was in His 90's when he gave this account in a church.

Now permit me to relate a personal experience in connection with the story of Elder D.M. Canright of Battle Creek days. For years Elder Canright was an intimate friend of and a co-laborer with Elder James and Ellen White. Later he became her bitterest opponent, and did the most of any man to discredit her work and to malign her good name.

Elder Canright for years was a strong Seventh-day Adventist preacher, and a Conference President. Before his defection from the church, he wrote on January 6, 1885, which account you will find in Elder Rebock's book Believe His Prophets. *"While I have carefully read the first, second and third volumes of the Spirit of Prophecy, heaven seemed very near to me. If the Spirit of God does not speak to us in these writings, then I should despair of ever discerning it. I have read many books, but never one which has interested me so intensely as volume four of the Great Controversy by Sister White. The ideas concerning the nature and attributes of God, the character of Christ, and the rebellion of Lucifer in heaven, carry with them their own proof of inspiration."*

Why did Elder Canright leave the Seventh-day Adventist Church? I believe it was because he wanted to become a great man. Here are my reasons for saying this. He was an eloquent and forceful speaker. After an address which he gave in a popular church in Chicago before an audience of more than 2000 non-Seventh-day Adventist, the people literally swarmed him. They rushed to the platform and held him for another half hour. After he and his fellow ministers, and my friends Elder D.W. Rebbish left the Temple, he said to Pastor Rebbish, *"If it were not for this despised Sabbath question, I could become a great man."* He did leave the Sabbath truth and did become a great man.

In 1888, Sister White wrote a kindly friendly yearning letter to Pastor Canright, entreating him for his wife and children's sake to consider the choice he had made, and for his own souls sake, to ponder the path that his feet were treading. Said she, "*I called to mine your temptation through false and ambitious hopes to become greater away from our people than with them.*" You will find that in Volume five, of the Testimonies, page 621.

Decades passed by, and Mrs. White's life ended in 1915, at the age of 88. The White family invited me to attend her funeral in Battle Creek, Michigan. I crossed much of the continent to be present, and was standing a few feet from her open casket in the great Dime Tabernacle, when an old broken man, D.M. Canright came along in the line. He paused, placed his hands, both hands on the bier on the casket, and looked and looked at that peaceful face now at rest. He raised his broken adhesive patched spectacles and peered some more. And with warm tears trickling from his face, said on mournful tones, "There lies a noble Christian women gone." He left, went to the other street entrance to the church, and passed the casket a second time. He was shabbily dressed. He was poverty stricken and living alone. His wife was being cared for by relatives, because he was unable to support her.

My dear friend and associate in the Washington Sanitarium, Dr. D.H. Kress, made a friendly visit to D.M. Canright in his home. Said Dr. Crest, "There was not even a scatter rug on his floor. His dream of worldly greatness had turned to bitter ashes upon his lips." Why did he not come back to the Seventh-day Adventist Church? He said he couldn't come back. He died a discouraged, disheartened, disillusioned, dejected and destitute old man, without hope, without money, and apparently forsaken by his new found non-SDA church friends.

The poet wrote, "There is a line by us unseen, it crosses every path. The hidden boundary, between God's mercy and His wrath." Terrible thought Mr. Forest? But it is Biblical. From Amos I quote, "*Behold the days come saith the Lord, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land. Not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord, and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east. They shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it.*"

I have one more brief reference I want to read from Book 1, of Selected Messages, page 48. "*Satan is constantly pressing in the spurious, the false to lead away from the church. The very last deception of Satan will be [will be what, not the last deception, but the very last, what will be the very last deception of Satan be, deception to our people, we ought to know, the very last deception of Satan will be,] to make of none effect the testimony of the Spirit of God. Where no vision is the people perish. Satan will work ingeniously, in different way and through different agencies to unsettle the confidence of God's Remnant people in the true testimony. There will be a hatred kindled against the testimonies, which is Satanic. Have you ever heard anything about that? Have you ever seen any evidence of it? There will be a hatred kindled against the testimonies which is Satanic. The workings of Satan will be to unsettle the faith of the churches in them.*

Blessings