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**ELLEN G. WHITE'S UNDERSTANDING OF
INDWELLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT:
A CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY**

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Abstract

Throughout history there have been two major understandings of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The first is the indwelling of the transcendent timeless God within the timeless soul of a body/soul, dualistic anthropology. The second is an all-inclusive view in which either everything is God, pantheism, or everything is within God, panentheism. Adventism has traditionally rejected both of these understandings. Adventism teaches a monistic anthropology, denying the indwelling of the soul and a panentheistic point of view. How then is Adventism able to define the indwelling of the Holy Spirit? In order to begin to answer this question it seems fitting to study the prophetic voice of the Adventist church and come to at least an initial interpretation of Ellen White's understanding of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In this article an initial understanding of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit will be presented through a limited in-depth chronological study of four significant sources of the writings of Ellen White, rather than a surface study of her entire works. These are excerpts from *Steps to Christ*, "Growing Up Into Christ" (chapter 8), a letter written to Sister Wessels, Sr., referenced in *Special Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, Series A No. 9 pg. 75-80, *Desire of Ages*, "Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled" (chapter 73), and *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 8 section 5. The results of this study show White's understanding of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as an abiding in Christ through a devotional interpersonal relationship of faith demonstrated most clearly in transformation of character for the Christian believer.

Keywords: spirituality; Ellen G. White; panentheism; indwelling; Christian life; sanctification.

Introduction

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in theological systems is related to the discussion of the balance between the transcendence and the immanence of God. There are those who emphasize the transcendence of God and those who emphasize the immanence of God and their understandings of indwelling are affected by these

emphases.¹ The transcendent emphasis is based on an ontological dualism derived from the philosophy of Plato. When Ambrose, Augustine, and others brought this philosophy into Christianity it was presupposed that humanity had both the material body and the immortal soul as part of a dual ontology. Indwelling in this understanding is an ontological indwelling within the soul.² According to this transcendent emphasis the soul is part of the world of ideas, or the timeless realm of God while the body is part of the material world. God cannot interact with the temporal material world and therefore can only indwell a human in the timeless part of them, the soul. This view is still prominent today in most of western Christianity as a part of classic theism.

The immanent indwelling emphasis also claims its beginnings in Greek philosophy.³ Plato's ultimate reality, the good, is a part of every living thing,

¹"Conceptions of the divine presence in the world have varied, as much as the very conceptions of God. One religion has differed from the other in this regard. Even within Christianity itself we find considerable disagreement as to the nature of God's omnipresence and as to what degree He is related to the world and to man in particular. While the Christian Greek tradition of the early Church held to the belief in an immanent God, Latin theology eventually put the stress on the transcendence of God. Reformation theology subsequently gave added emphasis to divine transcendence and marked a further step in the West's departure from the spirit of the ancient Church." See Eusebius A. Stephanou, "Divine Indwelling in the World," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 4, no. 2 (1959): 135. John Cooper also describes the differences in classical theology and the immanent pantheistic theology in the introduction to his book. See John W. Cooper, *Panentheism, the Other God of the Philosophers: From Plato to the Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 18, 19.

²Gleason clearly takes this view and supports it with numerous church fathers in the introduction and first chapter of his book. Gleason clearly claims the Holy Spirit as a substantial ontological presence indwelling the soul, which is initiated at baptism. See Robert W. Gleason, *The Indwelling Spirit* (Staten Island, NY: Alba, 1966), 5–9. This classical theological understanding is largely built on the understanding that is derived and debated upon based on the writing of Thomas Aquinas. The indwelling of the Spirit in the just soul is a new type of union with divine presence from general divine presence with all of creation through which the believer possesses the entire trinity through knowledge and love. The primary person of the trinity involved is the Holy Spirit and through this possession the believer may then enjoy the divine presence in the sense of sanctification or transformation of life. See Francis L. B. Cunningham, *The Indwelling of the Trinity; a Historico-Doctrinal Study of the Theory of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Dubuque, IA: Priory, 1955); Barthelmy Froget, *The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Souls of the Just: According to the Teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Sydney A. Raemers, Translated from the 3rd French ed. (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1952).

³"The ancient Greeks were fond of the idea that the divine existed in close proximity to the world. In their mythology gods and men mingle freely. The affinity between the divine and the human was a popular feeling both in mythology and in philosophy." See Stephanou, "Indwelling," 137.

therefore when adapted to Christianity the *imago Dei* is a part of every being. God is in all and all is in God for all has a part of the good. In the same way Aristotle's unmoved mover is perfect actuality and all things have some actuality, therefore God is in all and all is in God.⁴ Indwelling in the immanent emphasis, is an all-pervasive infusion of the presence of God in all things.⁵ Immanence has been a part of the eastern system of Christianity all along, but has now entered the western mindset as well through process theology and panentheism. Panentheism says that all is in God and yet God is beyond all, the dualistic comparison is one of God as the soul of the cosmic body. In other words the cosmos is the material body of God and God is the all pervasive soul which holds the cosmos together both within and beyond the cosmos.⁶

Process theologian, John B. Cobb, redefines reality as energy-events building upon each other. In this new understanding of reality the cosmos as a part of God's being is mutually indwelt in a co-constitution of being through participation in the experience of God.⁷ Each present energy-event is building on the energy-

⁴"There is always the risk of overstating the transcendence of God in the theology of Aristotle. Since all things, according to this philosopher, are drawn to the final cause, which is God, we must remember that He must be in all beings, as their immanent essence (τὰξίς), as well as above the things and apart from the world (κεχωρισμένον τι και αυτό καθ' αυτό)." See Stephanou, "Indwelling," 138. Cooper draws the philosophical origins of an immanent panentheistic emphasis most clearly from Plotinus arguing that Plato keep the original divine creator separate from the World-soul. Plotinus' chain of being as one thing emanates from the next only to be within and return to the divine "one" is what Cooper calls classic Panentheism. See Cooper, *Panentheism*, 38, 41, 43.

⁵Stephanou, "Indwelling," 139.

⁶Both John B. Cobb and Stephanou build their system based on a God as the soul of the world idea, both using the incarnation of the Logos as the basis for this. The tie between current eastern orthodox and process is quite strong. "The character of the world is influenced by God, but it is not determined by him, and the world in its turn contributes novelty and richness to the divine experience. The doctrine that I am developing here is a form of 'panen-theism.' It is, in my understanding, a type of theism. But it differs from much traditional theism insofar as the latter stressed the mutual externality of God and the world, with God conceived as occupying another supernatural, sphere. It differs from pantheism when pantheism is understood to be the identification of God and the world. The doctrine that I am developing here is a form of 'en-theism.' It is, in my understanding, a type of theism. But it differs from much traditional theism insofar as the latter stressed the mutual extemality of God and the world, with God conceived as occupying another, supernatural, sphere. It differs from pantheism when pantheism is understood to be the identification of God and the world. Yet, in reality, panentheism is the synthesis of the central concerns of traditional theism and pantheism." See John B. Cobb, *God and the World* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 79, 80.

⁷"Process philosophy, especially as Alfred North Whitehead developed it, gives primacy to relations. It shows that real entities do 'indwell' or 'participate in' one another.

events of the past and because reality is built out of energy-events all ontology of the cosmos is connected with the ontology of God.⁸ Pantheism is an immanent system of mutual indwelling built upon a new construction of reality.

The historical balancing act of transcendence and immanence concerning the indwelling of the divine presence has entered Adventism as well. Adventism rejected the idea of the immortal soul separate from the body, therefore the Holy Spirit could not dwell in the soul in the same way as for classic theists. This offered confusion at the time of John Harvey Kellogg who chose the immanent option instead. Previously chastised for his mechanistic view of God and nature removing God to a deistic transcendence, Kellogg sought for another option. He discovered that God, instead of being completely removed, could rather be in all of creation and all of creation could be in God.⁹ Kellogg seems to have distanced himself from the pantheistic understanding that all is God, which was his first impulse for trying to adjust his transcendent view. He instead went to the pantheistic view, God is in all and all is in God.¹⁰ Ellen White and other Adventist church leaders reproved these views of Kellogg and called for something different.¹¹

The real entities in question are ‘occasions of experience.’ A present human experience includes past occasions within itself, selectively, but genuinely, as well as events in the environment.” See John B. Cobb and David John Lull, *Romans*, Chalice Commentaries for Today (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2005), 92, 93.

⁸“The electron can only be understood as a succession of events or happenings. These events can be viewed as transmissions of energy from past events to future ones. If we ask what they are in themselves, the only answer possible to the physicist is energy. The building blocks of the universe, the things of which everything else is composed, are energy-events...It would be truer to say that what is physical in the naive sense is the by-product of the interaction of energy-events outside the body with those that constitute the sense organs. That God is not in this way by no means reduces his actuality. When we conceive the physical as composed of certain types or aspects of energy-events rather than in the naive way.” See Cobb, *God/World*, 70.

⁹Brian C. Wilson, *Dr. John Harvey Kellogg and the Religion of Biologic Living* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press), 71.

¹⁰While most at the time considered Kellogg to be a pantheist rather than a panentheist, Kellogg’s view is more in line with the pantheism, which is developed by John Cobb. Cobb uses the same idea that God is in all and all is in God. See Cobb, *God/World*, 78-80; John B. Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975). This is reflected in Wilson’s work as well. See Wilson, *Dr. John Harvey Kellogg*, 72.

¹¹Wilson, *Dr. John Harvey Kellogg*, 77. In other unpublished documents available from the white estate, Pittack made the argument that Kellogg’s pantheism makes God ultimately responsible for sin, which Daniels rejects. See Richard Bruce Pittack, “The Pantheistic Crisis in S.D.A. History” (Class Paper for CH570-2 History of SDA Church, Center for Adventist Research, Andrews University, June 1972), 17. This rejection is also supported by Jacquelyn E. Ruskjer, “Pantheism in Kellogg’s the Living Temple: Fact or

Adventists have rejected the immortality of the soul, which provides for classical theism's transcendent emphasis of indwelling. They have also rejected the pantheistic immanent emphasis embraced by Kellogg. This then raises the question, how then do Adventists define the indwelling of the Holy Spirit? How does Ellen White define indwelling? This research seeks to discern an Adventist definition of 'indwelling' based on contents from Ellen White's discourse.

This study will chronologically process four major passages from the writings of Ellen White. Each passage will be analyzed for the definition it provides of indwelling; the passages will then be compared to see if there is a development of thought. The information from each passage will then be compiled to determine a fuller definition of indwelling.

Analysis of Four Passages on Indwelling

I will process and analyze each selected section of text, identifying the markers, which will build a system of Ellen White's understanding of indwelling. As I come to the conclusion of each passage I will summarize what I have found and give a brief comparison to what has come before it chronologically in the other passages.

"Growing Up Into Christ" in *Steps to Christ* (1892)

Steps to Christ was written at the suggestion of some evangelists as a resource for explaining the basics of salvation and spiritual growth.¹² At the suggestion of having smaller books more available for general consumption, White went to work with her literary assistant Marian Davis to gather both published and unpublished writings on "one of her favorite topics... about the steps sinners must take in finding their way to Christ."¹³ The book was produced in the summer of 1891 and presented to a group of ministers and teachers in Harbor Heights, MI who welcomed it and the name of *Steps to Christ* was chosen.¹⁴ The book was first published by a nondenominational press for hope of wider readership and then later transferred to the Review and Herald for publication.¹⁵

In his dissertation, Woodrow W. Whidden, wrote a theological biography of White concerning her personal journey of Salvation She made a very similar -

Fable?" (Class Paper, HIST/RELH 585, Loma Linda University, 1985), 4, and Stanley August Aufdemberg, "John Harvey Kellogg and Pantheism" (Class Paper, History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Andrews University, 1970).

¹²Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Australian Years, 1891-1900*, vol. 4 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1985) 12.

¹³Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G. White* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1998), 445.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 445.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

journey to John Wesley as she struggled to find salvation. She first longed for the initial forgiveness of justification followed by a great longing for full sanctification, a life without sin.¹⁶ She was not so naïve to think that perfection could be reached before the return of Jesus. She encountered and spoke against many fanatical holiness groups who engaged in such beliefs and the immoral practices that followed believers who claimed their desires were now holy.¹⁷ White's personal salvation journey combined with the General Conference debate over righteousness by faith in 1888, might serve as a strong motivation for the writing of *Steps to Christ* in addition to the evangelistic purpose.

Chapter 8 in *Steps to Christ* (published in 1892) is entitled "Growing up in Christ." In this chapter Ellen White develops what it means to grow in spiritual maturity in Christ. There are several concepts that she brings to light in this chapter, which allow for this growth to happen. I will state the concepts here and then develop them as this section continues. First, spiritual growth is only possible in Christ. Second, in order to grow a believer must consecrate him or herself to Christ. Third, the whole process of growth is accomplished by the means of faith. Fourth, when a believer "dwells on" Christ instead of self they will be transformed in character. Finally, with the transformation of the character the continual abiding of the Holy Spirit is realized in the hearts of the believers. The analysis of this first text will consist of working through these concepts as they build to White's general statement of indwelling at the end of the chapter

Spiritual growth happens in the context of abiding in Christ. White defines abiding in Christ as being "dependent upon Christ, in order to live a holy life."¹⁸ She is very clear that without Christ it is not possible for a person to grow in Christ. Abiding is a union with Christ made through daily, even hourly, communion with Christ. Abiding is only possible through faith. The believer is to

¹⁶Woodrow W. Whidden, "The Soteriology of Ellen G. White: The Persistent Path to Perfection, 1836-1902" (Dissertation, Drew University, 1989), 18-49.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 53-57, 76-82.

¹⁸"Jesus teaches the same thing when He says, 'Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. . . . Without Me ye can do nothing.' John 15:4, 5. You are just as dependent upon Christ, in order to live a holy life, as is the branch upon the parent stock for growth and fruitfulness. Apart from Him you have no life. You have no power to resist temptation or to grow in grace and holiness. Abiding in Him, you may flourish. Drawing your life from Him, you will not wither nor be fruitless. You will be like a tree planted by the rivers of water." See Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (New York et al: Revell, 1892), 68, 69.

consecrate themselves to God in a “Day by day” giving of their lives “into the hands of God.”¹⁹

Faith is further defined as turning one’s focus from the self towards Christ, instead: “Let the mind dwell upon His love, upon the beauty, the perfection of His character. Christ in His self-denial, Christ in His humiliation, Christ in His purity and holiness, Christ in His matchless love –this is the subject for the soul’s contemplation.”²⁰ The believer must realize that he or she is powerless to accomplish anything on his or her own. It is only by “dwelling on” Christ rather than self that the believer can gain the union with Christ, which brings victory.²¹ The recognition of total dependence upon Christ is the life of faith; according to White, the way in which one grows in Christ is the same as at the beginning of a relationship with Christ: “as you received Him at first...’the just shall live by faith.”²²

The goal of this abiding in Christ by faith is the transformation of the character. The transformation of character is brought about by the “regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit” in the renewed heart.²³ The heart is the source of thoughts and desires, which are now renewed, in line with God’s thoughts and desires.

The renewing work of the Spirit culminates in the general statements about the indwelling of the Spirit at the conclusion of the chapter. White says that Jesus’ ascension was necessary so that in some way the presence of Christ through the Spirit is now closer to the disciples than it was while Jesus was on this earth. She ties this dwelling with the idea of Christ through the Spirit abiding “continually in the hearts of His children.”²⁴ White describes a union made between the believer and Christ in the same way that there was a union between the Son and the Father. She wraps up the chapter by suggesting, that in “loving Him and abiding in Him, we shall ‘grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.’”²⁵

In this chapter the indwelling of the Spirit is tied to the concept of an abiding union of the believer with Christ. This union is accomplished by faith through the consecration of the heart and mind to the activity of “dwelling on” Christ rather than the self. It is through this devotional dwelling that a transformation of

¹⁹“Without Me ye can do nothing.’ Our growth in grace, our joy, our usefulness,—all depend upon our union with Christ. It is by communion with Him, daily, hourly,—by abiding in Him.” See White, *Steps to Christ*, 69.

²⁰Ibid., 70.

²¹Ibid., 70, 71.

²²Ibid., 71, 72.

²³Ibid., 70.

²⁴Ibid., 73.

²⁵Ibid., 75.

character takes place in the heart of the believer. White then directly connects this union to the Spirit of Christ who “shall be in you.”²⁶ These concepts set the tone for White’s understanding of indwelling, although this chapter does not differentiate between what indwelling is and is not, especially concerning ontological questions. The ontological context of indwelling is left for later discussions.

Letter to Sister Wessels (1896)

The Wessels family was a wealthy family in South Africa, which Ellen White contacted several times in her efforts to support the development of Adventism in South Africa and Australia, including Avondale College. The Wessels family carried some folklore and scandal, along with the financial support of the Adventist work.²⁷ The history of the patriarch has been told with various degrees of truthfulness.²⁸

From White’s actual letters one is able to guess what might have set up the circumstances for the particular letter being analyzed in this paper. While in Cooranbong, Australia on May 4, 1896, White writes a letter to Sister Wessels, Sr.,

²⁶“And Pentecost brought them the presence of the Comforter, of whom Christ had said, He ‘shall be in you.’ And He had further said, ‘It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you.’ John 14:17; 16:7. Henceforth through the Spirit, Christ was to abide continually in the hearts of His children. Their union with Him was closer than when He was personally with them. The light, and love, and power of the indwelling Christ shone out through them, so that men, beholding, ‘marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.’ Acts 4:13.” See White, *Steps to Christ*, 75.

²⁷The folklore surrounds the story of Peter Wessel’s ignoring letters from White. His finances began to go under and one by one, he lost properties including a diamond mine, and he finally came to financial ruin. He lost his prized ranch and purchased a shack. When he moved in, he found the letters from White, he had left unopened. When he opened them he found the prediction of each of his failed business transactions. These letters however were not found and there were also historical errors, which would not allow for the story to be true. The details regarding this information were referenced in the following articles, which appeared in the *Review*. See Eugene F. Durand, “The Story of a Story,” *Adventist Review*, February 14, 1985, 15; Eugene F. Durand, “The Story of a Story-2,” *Adventist Review*, February 21, 1985, 18, 19; Eugene F. Durand, “The Story of a Story-3,” *Adventist Review*, March 14, 1985, 14, 15. The scandal was the sexual abuse charges which removed ministerial credentials from Peter Wessels. These details are referenced in a letter White wrote to Peter. See Ellen G. White to Peter Wessels, 1 June 1896, Lt 106, 1896, Center for Adventist Research, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

²⁸See Durand, “The Story of a Story,” 15; Durand, “The Story of a Story-2,” 18, 19; Durand, “The Story of a Story-3,” 14, 15.

after coming to understand that she was suffering from “so depressed a spirit.”²⁹ The reasons are undisclosed for this depressed spirit. One suggested reason may be the difficulty of Sister Wessels’ children. White writes letters to more than one of the Wessels’ children encouraging them to get back onto the straight and narrow path.

The most striking letter related to the letter in this paper, is one to Peter Wessels, son of Sister Wessel, Sr. Peter Wessels has had a significant moral fall involving the students he has been teaching. The circumstances are severe enough that his credentials were removed. White rebukes Peter for adultery, tempting his students with the apples of Sodom, and awaking in them lustful desires, which the students will not be able to control.³⁰ This strong reference to child abuse and the loss of Peter’s credentials would be enough to break any mother’s heart.³¹ White counsels Peter not to make a public confession of what has happened for the sake of the reputation of the ministry at large; she even includes his wife in the exclusion of the details.³² It is unclear whether his mother would have known about the details or not, but all the same there are strong suggestions here for why Sister Wessels, Sr., might be depressed in spirit.

The letter to the son of Sister Wessels, Sr., is later published in the *Special Testimonies for Ministers and Workers* and includes some very clear statements for the understanding of indwelling.³³ White clearly stated that “Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith means the contemplation of Christ, beholding Christ, ever cherishing the dear Saviour as our very best and honored Friend, so that we would not in any action grieve and offend Him.”³⁴ This definition clearly continues the same concepts of abiding as seen in *Steps to Christ*. The same suggestion for the contemplation and beholding of Christ is given. Once again the contemplation is done by a means of faith.

White goes further in this letter than she did in the *Steps to Christ* passage. She uses temple language, “The church of Christ is represented as being builded for ‘an habitation of God through the Spirit.’ ... In the human heart cleansed from all moral impurity dwells the precious Saviour, ennobling, sanctifying the whole nature, and making the man a temple for the Holy Spirit.”³⁵ The temple imagery is

²⁹White, *Steps to Christ*, 74.

³⁰White to Wessels, 1 June 1896.

³¹White appeals to Peter to think of his Mother and references the need for the rest of the siblings to shape up as well. She also counsels Peter not to take the loss of credentials too hard as this was sure to happen from his actions, rather to focus on making himself right with God. See White to Wessels, 1 June 1896.

³²White to Wessels, 1 June 1896.

³³Ellen G. White, *Special Testimonies for Ministers and Workers*, No. 9 ([S.l.: s.n.], 1897).

³⁴Ibid., 75.

³⁵Ibid., 75, 76.

used to emphasize the divine presence tied together with the abiding nature of Christ dwelling in the hearts of humanity. She follows the temple imagery up with a comparison of Enoch's abiding relationship as he walked with God.³⁶ When White speaks about "divine companionship" she directly connects the dwelling of God among his people to their interaction with worship.³⁷

The idea of dwelling on Christ is also strongly emphasized in this letter. White compares Christ to the sun and suggests that just as when a person looks at the sun and has the impression of the light of the sun implanted on everything he or she looks at so it is with Christ as the "Sun of Righteousness." When an individual focuses their gaze on Christ they will also see Him imprinted on everything they look at.³⁸ This dwelling on Christ once again, as in *Steps to Christ*, leads to the transformed character of the individual.

White adds an additional piece of clarification in this letter to what was written in *Steps to Christ*. She includes the importance of Jesus' words. When the words and instructions of Christ are received into one's life it is then that Jesus "is to us an abiding presence."³⁹ It is in this context that White makes her first ontological insinuation about the being of man. When the believer has accepted the words of Christ they become part of "the very texture of our entire being." White clearly states in conclusion that it is by his words that Christ dwells in humanity.⁴⁰ White

³⁶Notice the added personal nature of these ideas tied with Enoch and therefore recommended for the personal consolation of sister Wessels. "We have the companionship of the divine presence, and as we realize this presence, our thoughts are brought into captivity to Jesus Christ. Our spiritual exercises are in accordance with the vividness of our sense of this companionship. Enoch walked with God in this way; and Christ is dwelling in our hearts by faith when we will consider what He is to us, and what a work He has wrought out for us in the plan of redemption. We shall be most happy in cultivating a sense of this great gift of God to our world and to us personally." See White, *Special Testimonies for Ministers and Workers*, No. 9, 76.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸"I want to impress upon your mind that you may have a divine companion with you, if you will, always. 'And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.'" See *ibid.*, 76, 77.

³⁹Ibid., 77.

⁴⁰"When His words of instruction have been received, and have taken possession of us, Jesus is to us an abiding presence, controlling our thoughts and ideas and actions. We are imbued with the instruction of the greatest Teacher the world ever knew. A sense of human accountability and of human influence gives character to our views of life and of daily duties. Jesus Christ is everything to us--the first, the last, the best in everything. Jesus Christ, His Spirit, His character, colors everything; it is the warp and the woof, the very texture of our entire being. The words of Christ are spirit and life. We cannot, then, center our thoughts upon self; it is no more we that live, but Christ that liveth in us, and He is the hope of glory. Self is dead, but Christ is a living Saviour. Continuing to look unto

expands the concept of the transformed character clearly calling it the “result of an indwelling savior” in relation to the word of Christ “speaking to the soul.”⁴¹

The letter to Sister Wessels continues to build on the abiding or devotional nature of indwelling for Ellen White. She gave greater clarity by using the direct language of indwelling, the temple as the habitation of God, spiritual companionship, and bringing in the word of Christ as the means by which the living Savior indwells in the mind of the individual. The anthropological question of ontology is raised in this passage. How is it that the word of Christ becomes part of the “very being” of the believer? The context seems to suggest that this is once again done through the dwelling of the heart and mind on Christ that the imprint of Christ is then laid onto everything the believer is aware of.

“Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled” in *Desire of Ages* (1898)

Desire of Ages began in the 52 pages on “the life of Christ.”⁴² Ellen White made entries about her writing on the “life of Christ” in her diary and letters. In his biography of White Arthur L. White mentioned several of these entries. She was in weak health during this time needing to constantly change positions. She set aside much of her other work to focus on the task of writing on the life of Christ, but felt the lack of work she was getting done due to the shortness of the days.⁴³ The major work of expansion from the “life of Christ” to the *Desire of Ages* was done in 1877 and 1878.⁴⁴ The final touches were not finished until 1898.⁴⁵

Jesus, we reflect His image to all around us. We cannot stop to consider our disappointments, or even to talk of them; for a more pleasant picture attracts our sight--the precious love of Jesus. He dwells in us by the word of truth.” See White, *Special Testimonies for Ministers and Workers*, No. 9, 77, 78.

⁴¹She includes in this the Holy Spirit as the living water which is a spiritual power implanted within believers. In some way then even if the ontological being of God is not within humanity his power can still work within them. “Christ's gracious presence in His word is ever speaking to the soul, representing Him as the well of living water to refresh the thirsting soul. It is our privilege to have a living, abiding Saviour. He is the source of spiritual power implanted within us, and His influence will flow forth in words and actions, refreshing all within the sphere of our influence, begetting in them desires and aspirations for strength and purity, for holiness and peace, and for that joy which brings no sorrow with it. This is the result of an indwelling Saviour.” See *ibid.*, 78, 79.

⁴²Arthur L. White, *Ellen White : Woman of Vision* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Association, 2000), 354.

⁴³Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 4:95, 382.

⁴⁴Arthur L. White, *Woman of Vision*, 354.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 357.

One interesting statement- concerning the abiding work of the Holy Spirit is Whites' prayer that "the Holy Spirit may rest and abide upon" her.⁴⁶ She made such a request out of her own feelings of incapability.⁴⁷ Through this work of the Holy Spirit she received visions of certain scenes of the life of Christ.⁴⁸ During the expansion of the "life of Christ" into the *Desire of Ages* the work of the Holy Spirit in White's writing process expanded as well. The writing process then included the help of her assistant, Marian Davis. Means such as "Bible study, visions, prayer, meditation, discussion with her literary assistant, even 'hard thinking,' all under the general superintendence of the Holy Spirit, were involved in the writing."⁴⁹ Arthur White shared the research materials Ellen White was familiar with and the research process she and her assistant retained.⁵⁰ In essence all their efforts were guided by the Holy Spirit. In a statement written in 1904 Ellen White states her confidence in the work of the Holy Spirit in "tracing these truths upon my heart and mind as indelibly as the law was traced by the finger of God, upon the tables of stone, which are now in the ark."⁵¹

In a chapter of the *Desire of Ages*, White develops the understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit sent by Christ for the purpose of uniting believers with Christ in an abiding relationship. She discusses Christ's promise to the disciples in his prayer to the Father that he would send another Comforter who would abide with the believers forever; that he would dwell with them and in them.⁵² White presents the Holy Spirit as Christ's representative, uninhibited by the constraints of the human body, for spatial reasons, therefore accessible to all of humanity, while Christ is limited by his human form.⁵³

White also highlights the words of Christ in this passage and expands the understanding to include the role of the Holy Spirit regarding those words. The Spirit is to guide the believer to the full truth and understanding of the real meaning of Christ's words. The Spirit doesn't bring real meaning from previously unrevealed words but rather through the words of Christ in Scripture, "Through

⁴⁶Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 4:95.

⁴⁷Ibid., 4:382.

⁴⁸Arthur L. White, *Woman of Vision*, 357-358.

⁴⁹Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 4:377.

⁵⁰Marian assisted a great deal in gathering the previous writings of White. Anything, which brought greater clarity or significance to the point that White was trying to convey Marian would find and present to White. In this the various writing on the life of Christ was gathered and compiled into the final published volumes of the *Desire of Ages*. See Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 4:381.

⁵¹Arthur L. White, *Woman of Vision*, 358.

⁵²White, *Special Testimonies for Ministers and Workers*, No. 9, 390.

⁵³Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1898), 668.

the Scripture the Holy Spirit speaks to the minds, and impresses truth upon the heart."⁵⁴

Transformation of character as the goal, comes out in this passage and is expanded to include the partaking of the divine nature. Through the Spirit a believer can become a partaker of the divine nature, which is directly tied to the impression of Christ's own character upon His church. The purpose of the impression of Christ's character on His church is for "the perfection of the character of His people."⁵⁵ Once again White is bringing out transformation of character as the goal of an abiding relationship with Christ.

The idea of the individual's consecration to the ways and words of Christ is reemphasized in *Desire of Ages* by the insistence on the surrender of the soul to be guided by the Holy Spirit. Only through surrender can transformation occur. Those who do not submit seek to "manage themselves."⁵⁶ This is similar to the "dwelling on" self rather than on Christ in chapter eight of *Steps to Christ*.

White builds on the concept of the union between Christ and believers in this chapter as well. She insists that the switch from Christ to the Holy Spirit would not change their union with Christ.⁵⁷ Even the means of faith in Christ as a personal Savior is the same for the union with the Holy Spirit as Christ's

⁵⁴Ibid., 669.

⁵⁵The divine nature seems to be directly tied to the transformation of the character. Once transformed, the character no longer has the hereditary or cultivated tendencies towards evil, which make up the human nature. "It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure. Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress His own character upon His church. Of the Spirit Jesus said, 'He shall glorify Me.' The Saviour came to glorify the Father by the demonstration of His love; so the Spirit was to glorify Christ by revealing His grace to the world. The very image of God is to be reproduced in humanity. The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people." See *ibid.*, 671.

⁵⁶See *ibid.*

⁵⁷The union in this statement begins with the possibility of the ontological union, but then returns to the cognitive union with the mind of Christ. "I am the Vine, ye are the branches,' Christ said to His disciples. Though He was about to be removed from them, their spiritual union with Him was to be unchanged. The connection of the branch with the vine, He said, represents the relation you are to sustain to Me. The scion is engrafted into the living vine, and fiber by fiber, vein by vein, it grows into the vine stock. The life of the vine becomes the life of the branch. So the soul dead in trespasses and sins receives life through connection with Christ. By faith in Him as a personal Saviour the union is formed. The sinner unites his weakness to Christ's strength, his emptiness to Christ's fullness, his frailty to Christ's enduring might. Then he has the mind of Christ. The humanity of Christ has touched our humanity, and our humanity has touched divinity. Thus through the agency of the Holy Spirit man becomes a partaker of the divine nature. He is accepted in the Beloved." See *ibid.*, 675.

representative.⁵⁸ This statement has interesting ontological implications. If the union has not changed, then to claim that through the Holy Spirit Christ is ontologically internal within the believer in a way in which He was not before must be discounted in White's view. White makes this point clear by explaining that the connection of the branch to the living vine is done through continual communion.⁵⁹ To emphasize, White points out that the words of Christ abide in the believer and makes the eating of Christ's flesh and blood simply representative of receiving the words of Christ.⁶⁰

The work or the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in this chapter continued the abiding nature of the union with Christ. White promotes a word-based paradigm for understanding the abiding of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. She removes the possibility of a different type of union with the Holy Spirit than with Christ while he was here on earth. The only difference is in the limitations of Christ in His human form. Christ cannot be present in all places at all times as the Holy Spirit can. But the union with Christ remains the same through the surrender of the believer by faith to the words of Christ which the Holy Spirit communicates to the heart and mind by means of the scriptures.

Testimonies for the Church, Volume 8 (1904)

This text from the *Testimonies*, volume 8, section 5, specifically relating to pantheism and White's development of the "personal God" concept made an interesting shift compared to the previous three texts, which have been looked at so far. While in the previous three, White discussed what abiding in Christ and indwelling of the Holy Spirit means, in this text she spent much more time on what indwelling is not. There is a strong historical reason for this change of emphasis. The Adventist church had now gone through the Kellogg crisis that some have called Pantheism.⁶¹ Kellogg began teaching his pantheistic ideas to the

⁵⁸White, *The Desire of Ages*, 672.

⁵⁹"This union with Christ, once formed, must be maintained. Christ said, 'Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me.' This is no casual touch, no off-and-on connection. The branch becomes a part of the living vine. The communication of life, strength, and fruitfulness from the root to the branches is unobstructed and constant. Separated from the vine, the branch cannot live. No more, said Jesus, can you live apart from Me. The life you have received from Me can be preserved only by continual communion. Without Me you cannot overcome one sin, or resist one temptation." See *ibid.*, 675.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 676. This of course is a significant difference from the transubstantial or even consubstantial nature of the Eucharist. There is no actual presence of Christ within the substance of the bread itself; it is simply a representative symbol of the words of Christ.

⁶¹I will not go into the full details of this crisis because it is beyond the scope of this paper. Here are a few details and references where the reader may follow up. Most of the

church early in his presentations in 1897, but it was with the review of his book *The Living Temple* in 1902 that the crisis became specific in direct relationship to Kellogg's written words.⁶² White wrote to A. G. Daniells of her concerns in 1903.⁶³ Kellogg made clear claims that God was in all and all was in God. He also tied these concepts to indwelling.⁶⁴ White made clear distinctions concerning the separation of God from nature in this text, which provided clarification for this discussion of indwelling within her writings.

White's first argument is the lack of teaching Christ gave to his disciples about God dwelling personally in the things of nature. If this had been true, White argues that Jesus would most certainly have taught his disciples about such things. But instead, "Christ and the apostles taught clearly the truth of the existence of a personal God." White uses the phrase "personal God" to insist on a God who is ontologically separate from his creation.⁶⁵ The terminology of "personal God" is also used to argue against God simply being an organizing principle, although God sustains all things, White argues that God is a personal being, rather than the philosophical logos.⁶⁶

In a statement about Jesus' prayer in John 17:20-23, White makes one of her most striking statements about the nature of the union between the believer and Christ as well as the nature of the union of the Trinity itself: "The unity that exists

work done on Kellogg suggests pantheism as the label for his belief system. I believe his reference to God being in all and all being in God, yet differentiating between God and the world is closer to pantheism. Kellogg even claims that he still believes in a personal God, for without one there would be no worship. See Ruskjer, "Kellogg," 19. Nevertheless White speaks against pantheism in reference to this crisis, as does A. G. Daniells. See Pittack, "The Pantheistic Crisis in S.D.A. History," 6. White does recognize however that Kellogg's beliefs are confused, in Spicer's justification for publishing *The Living Temple*, he cites 23 times that Kellogg mentions a personal savior. As confused as Kellogg may have been, White still calls the theology in *The Living Temple* part of the last deception. See Ruskjer, "Kellogg," 21, 23.

⁶²"But the first time Kellogg publicly introduced pantheism was in 1897 in a series of talks to ministers before the Lincoln, Nebraska General Conference session." See Ruskjer, "Kellogg," 13.

⁶³Ruskjer, "Kellogg," 13.

⁶⁴Ruskjer quotes Kellogg, "The heart needs a sleepless intelligence, a will that never sleeps. So with every heartbeat there is evidence of divine power within the body, that can intelligently direct...you can explain this in no other way than by saying that God dwells in the body." See Ruskjer, "Kellogg," 17.

⁶⁵Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church*, 9 vols. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1948), 8:266.

⁶⁶White does not use the term logos herself in this context. The emanating principle, which she refers to here, is traditionally called the logos in philosophical circles. The logos is the current terminology for the process theology position of the divine incarnation with in all of creation. See White, *Testimony for the Church*, 8:265-266.

between Christ and His disciples does not destroy the personality of either. They are one in purpose, in mind, in character, but not in person. It is thus that God and Christ are one.”⁶⁷ Not only is the unity of Christ with humanity not an ontological union of one person with another, but also the unity of the Trinity does not have this property either. White insists that the union of humanity with God does not in any way eliminate the personality of either.⁶⁸

White’s insistence on the “dwelling on” Christ rather than on the self is more critically defined in her arguments against pantheism in this volume of the *Testimonies*. She claims that believing in God as an essence that pervades all of nature and therefore humanity as well removes the need for a savior. Any person can simply focus on him or herself for salvation because the essence of God is in the person.⁶⁹ White argues instead for the Scripture revealed personal savior and the sinner’s need of such a personal savior.⁷⁰

The contribution of the *Testimonies* volume 8 section 5 to the discussion concerning indwelling is a clear distinction between the ontological union of

⁶⁷White, *Testimony for the Church*, 8:263.

⁶⁸White, *Testimony for the Church*, 8:269. Pantheists make the same claim for their system, the personalities of the beings are not combined they remain distinct from one another while the energy based reality of God and the world are still united. Cobb says it this way, “I believe it offers us our best analogy for thinking of the spatial relation of God and the world. God’s standpoint is all-inclusive, and so, in a sense, we are parts of God. But we are not parts of God in the sense that God is simply the sum total of the parts or that the parts are lacking in independence and self-determination. God and the creatures interact as separate entities, while God includes the standpoints of all of them in his omnispacial standpoint. In this sense God is everywhere, but he is not everything. The world does not exist outside God or apart from God, but the world is not God or simply part of God. The character of the world is influenced by God, but it is not determined by him, and the world in its turn contributes novelty and richness to the divine experience. The doctrine that I am developing here is a form of ‘panen-theism.’” See Cobb, *God/World*, 79-80. White on the other hand insists that God is separate from his creation and only united in “purpose, mind, and character.” See White, *Testimony for the Church*, 8:263.

⁶⁹White, *Testimony for the Church*, 8:269.

⁷⁰“Our condition through sin has become preternatural, and the power that restores us must be supernatural, else it has no value. There is but one power that can break the hold of evil from the hearts of men, and that is the power of God in Jesus Christ. Only through the blood of the Crucified One is there cleansing from sin. His grace alone can enable us to resist and subdue the tendencies of our fallen nature. This power the spiritualistic theories concerning God make of no effect. If God is an essence pervading all nature, then He dwells in all men; and in order to attain holiness, man has only to develop the power that is within him. These theories, followed to their logical conclusion, sweep away the whole Christian economy. They do away with the necessity for the atonement and make man his own savior.” See White, *Testimony for the Church*, 8:291.

beings concerning God and His creation as well as the persons of the Trinity. White also makes a strong case for a personal God and Savior. These contributions only serve to clarify the previous direction of White's understanding of indwelling based on an abiding relationship through faith and surrender to a personal being that is outside of the human person. This requires the individual to "dwell on" something other than themselves for the power of salvation and transformation of the heart, mind, and character of the believer.

Comparison of THE Four Passages

Chronological Development of Thought

The chronological development of thought seen in these four texts is one of expansion and clarification. As has been shown in the analysis, the basis of understanding indwelling for Ellen White is an abiding relationship. This was clear in *Steps to Christ*, the letter to Sister Wessels, and *Desire of Ages*. While it was not stated so clearly in *Testimonies* volume 8, it was clarified in a significant way to show that abiding is one of interpersonal devotion rather than co-constitution of being. I do not see any chronological contradictions in the comparison of these texts but rather a progression, expansion, and clarification of thought regarding the abiding nature of indwelling.

Combined Definition of Indwelling

The combined definition of indwelling from these four passages is what I would like to call interpersonal devotional indwelling. Indwelling is interpersonal as opposed to a co-constitutional participation in being.⁷¹ Just as the Godhead is

⁷¹Co-constitution of being is the language of Cobb. I choose to use interpersonal rather than relational because of the connections with the process relational nature of reality. They do not mean an interpersonal one but that a participation in the being of all that is around us through a redefined energy based reality. Using these ideas to interpret Paul in the book of Romans, Cobb says, "Paul's language was often that of mutual immanence and participation. He often wrote of the mutual indwelling of the faithful and Christ or the Spirit, and of the participation of the faithful in Jesus' death and resurrection. Yet the way reality was conceptualized in the Greco-Roman and Medieval worlds forced thinkers to interpret what Paul wrote about Christ, his death and resurrection, and the Spirit in terms of external relations-that is, as realities or events that do not, indeed cannot, effect any essential change in the faithful. Modern thought, with its understanding of reality as consisting of unrelated, static substances, only intensified this need. Partly as a result, many people are looking outside the old-line churches for a fuller experience of their relations with God and with one another and a more adequate interpretation of that experience than sophisticated thought has allowed them in the Western church. Process or process-relational thought, to which the authors of this commentary subscribe, recovers

made up of three interdependent persons so the union of humanity with God is separate persons who choose to recognize their need for God, becoming fully dependent on Christ for their spiritual growth. Indwelling is devotional in the sense of abiding surrender to Christ, which requires a devoted dwelling on Christ's character so that the believer's character can be transformed. The transformed character is the clearest understanding of indwelling. By devotedly beholding the person of Christ and his character the believer's character has been so transformed that the word and character of Christ are literally being lived out in the believer. He or she has the character of Christ living in him or her.

Summary and Conclusion

Ellen White rejected the transcendent immortal soul dualism as a possibility for the indwelling spirit; she also rejected the panentheistic immanent idea of God as essence in all of creation. What option does this leave for White for an understanding of indwelling? From this initial limited study of White, one can discern a consistent teaching of indwelling as interpersonal abiding. The believer must surrender his or her life to God in faith by consecrating oneself to a continual communion of open communication with God through his revealed word. By accepting the character of Christ revealed in his word and explained through the mediation of the Holy Spirit, the believer is then open to the transforming work of the Spirit on his or her character to be shaped in such a way that the purpose, will, and desire of Christ is living in him or her on a day to day basis. In other words, by beholding one becomes changed and the change is so great that it can only be the result of the Holy Spirit transforming the character of fallen humanity to be like that of the living God as one abides in Christ.

The implications of this study for Adventism are significant. Given the special role of Ellen White in Adventist thought, particularly in pointing to and stimulating a correct understanding of Scripture, this study of her view on indwelling should be followed by a full canonical study of this issue in Scripture.

In addition White also reveals her Protestant values in the discussion of the indwelling of the spirit. First believing as well as spiritual growth are accomplished by the means of faith alone, the understanding comes through scripture alone, and spiritual growth is done through Christ alone. She does depart from the traditional Protestant view of the immortality of the soul. This departure, however, makes the need for a devotional indwelling stronger as it leaves no room for ontological indwelling within the soul.

the understanding of mutual immanence and participation in such a way that Paul's teaching can be taken much more straightforwardly." See Cobb and Lull, *Romans*, 19.