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## **The Editor's Page**

Edwin Reynolds  
Southern Adventist University

This is the first issue under my watch, and I hope that it will further the goals of the Society in the same way that past issues have under the effective editorship of those notables who have gone before. I don't plan to write an editorial note in each issue, but I did want to take a little space in this first issue to talk about plans for the direction the journal will take in the near future.

First, the Adventist Theological Society has returned to the practice of having two annual meetings instead of one. This will naturally result in more papers from the meetings being submitted for publication in the journal. The themes from these meetings will result in a predominant theme for each issue, with most of the articles in the issue likely originating out of the meeting associated with that issue.

The present issue features primarily articles on the theme of the Trinity. They originated in connection with the first of the revived Spring meetings, the Trinity Symposium held March 30–April 1, 2006, at Southern Adventist University in Collegedale, Tennessee. Because of this, the reader will note that some of the articles are more scholarly while others are more oriented toward a general audience. This has in part to do with the nature of the Society and the interest of lay persons in the presentations of the Society at its meetings and in part to the fact that some papers were presented as academic research while others were presented as part of a worship service with less academic interests. The initial article was only intended as an introduction to the Symposium, not as a formal paper, and it is presented here with a similar function.

For those receiving this journal who are not members of the Society, it may be well to rehearse briefly the nature of the society. The Society was founded with a broad base. It was started by a group of Seventh-day

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Adventist scholars, but it was not their intention that it should be limited to scholars, but that it should be open to interested Adventist lay persons and clergy with the purpose of helping to enrich their theological awareness and providing an opportunity to dialogue about the issues facing Adventist theology without the constraints of critical scholarship and the limited view of scriptural authority which often accompanies such scholarship as a presupposition.

For this reason, the Society has attempted to avoid being overly academic, either in its general meetings or in its publications. Our goal is to be heard and read by lay persons as well as by academics. That does not mean that we tolerate poor scholarship. This journal maintains a strict double-blind peer review process in order to maintain the quality of the scholarship published, yet we attempt to be able to speak to both academia and the laity. The content and the style of presentation, therefore, should provide something for each. If you as a reader find an article too heavy for you, you can skip it and move on to something easier to read. If you find an article too lightweight and oriented more for a general audience, you can move on and find something else that is more academic and rigorous. It is a challenge to maintain this balance, but that is our goal.

In addition to the articles relating to the theme of one of the annual meetings, it is our intention always to include a few articles that do not relate to the major theme. This is done in order to provide diversity not only for the reader but also for those scholars who have good research that deserves publication but which is not related to one of the themes of the annual meetings. If you as a reader, therefore, have something you would like to submit that would be suitable for our readership and in harmony with the goals and purposes of the Society, we do solicit your contribution. Obviously, with an increase in the number of papers from the annual meetings that will be published in the journal, there will be increased competition for space for additional submissions, but this should only increase the quality of the final product. We look forward to being able to select from the best of scholarship rather than having to request people to submit articles for publication. The reader will benefit most from this process.

I do not know that we will be able to sustain publication of the papers from the Spring meeting in the Spring issue and the papers from the Fall meeting in the Fall issue. Time is tighter in the Fall, since the meetings don't take place until the end of November, leaving little time to prepare the papers for publication by the end of the year or the first of

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January. Fortunately, there is an extra meeting this summer, the Bible Conference in Izmir, Turkey, being sponsored by the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, which should provide a flurry of papers for the Fall issue this year. The papers from the Fall meetings, then, will probably end up in the Spring issue, the papers from the Spring meetings, in the Fall issue, and so forth. This will take a little pressure off the matter of deadlines that we have struggled with for this issue. It will require patience, however, from our readers waiting for the publication of the papers.

For those few who take note of such things, the masthead is in the process of change. At the next meeting of the ATS Executive Committee, changes should be voted that will be implemented in the Fall issue. If you have noted little change over time and are wondering why some names are still there, please await the next issue, when we should have a new masthead.

Happy reading, and we hope you will contact us if you have any suggestions for improvement. Encourage your friends and colleagues to subscribe to our journal. We are committed to the exposition of Scripture and to enriching the theological understanding of our readers as it brings people into a closer relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and to a desire to hasten His return by sharing these understandings with others.

**Edwin Reynolds** is Professor of New Testament and Greek at Southern Adventist University in Collegedale, Tennessee. He also serves as the executive editor of *JATS*.

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## **God, the Trinity, and Adventism: An Introduction to the Issues**

Denis Fortin  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary  
Andrews University

Why a symposium on the Trinity? There are several good reasons.

In the last decade or two, there has been a resurgence of Arianism<sup>1</sup> and anti-Trinitarianism, not only in Seventh-day Adventism but also in the wider Christian and Evangelical world.

But Seventh-day Adventist objections to the doctrine of the Trinity are not new. Many of our early pioneers had issues with the doctrine of the Trinity, and it is now commonly known and accepted that many of them were anti-Trinitarian. Representative of such sentiments is Joseph Bates' statement in his autobiography: "Respecting the Trinity, I concluded that it was impossible for me to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, was also the Almighty God, the Father, one and the same being."<sup>2</sup> Although Bates' view of the Trinity does not correspond with the traditional orthodox understanding of the triune God, it nonetheless highlights that in early Adventism the doctrine was not accurately understood to start with.

In a recent book on the Trinity, Woodrow Whidden comments that

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<sup>1</sup> Arianism holds that the Son was created by nature and did not exist before the Father brought him into existence. As such the Son is subordinate to the Father's authority (subordinationism). Arians have also consistently denied the personhood of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Jerry Moon, "Trinity and Anti-Trinitarianism in Seventh-day Adventist History," in Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, and John W. Reeve, *The Trinity: Understanding God's Love, His Plan of Salvation, and Christian Relationships* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2002), 190.

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Not only are there increasing reports of pockets of anti-Trinitarian revival in various regions across North America, but via Internet its influence has spread around the world. As this grassroots Arian or anti-Trinitarian movement gains ground, local churches increasingly find themselves drawn into debate over the issues.<sup>3</sup>

While Adventists have been careful and deliberate in their study of many biblical doctrines—for example the doctrines of last day events, justification by faith, the sanctuary, and the atonement—other doctrines have been neglected. One of them, I believe, is the biblical doctrine of the Godhead. And perhaps we are now seeing the results of this neglect. In any case, this conference seeks to address some of the issues that are being raised in regard to our understanding of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

While preparing this introduction, I consulted a theological dictionary to see what it would say about the doctrine of the Trinity. The author of the article stated that although the expression “the Trinity” is not a biblical term, with which I readily agree, “it has been found a convenient designation for the one God self-revealed in Scripture as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”<sup>4</sup>

Likely it is here that the difficulties with the doctrine of the Trinity begin for some people, and some Adventists in particular. First, we have a term that is not found in Scripture, and Adventists are determined to base their doctrines on Scripture only. Second, to our modern, analytical, and mathematical minds, the Trinity is a hard concept to understand. How can three equal one or one equal three?

Yet we do find in Scripture many references to three persons in God, and this adds to the confusion in many people’s minds. Although the Old Testament emphasizes the exclusive unity of God (Deut 6:4; 5:7–11), it also alludes to the plurality of God (Gen 1:2, 26; 11:7; 18:1–33; Exod 23:23). Of all allusions to this plurality of God in the Old Testament, Isa 42:1 and 48:16 come very close to a Trinitarian formulation.

The New Testament does not have any explicit statement on the Trinity—apart from 1 John 5:7, which has been rejected as a medieval addition to the text—but the Trinitarian evidence is overwhelming. Jesus

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 8–9.

<sup>4</sup> G. W. Bromiley, “Trinity,” in Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 1112.

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is clearly described as divine in the gospel of John (John 1:1–3; 20:28), and he himself proclaims his own divinity (John 8:58). In the New Testament we find also clear references to the three persons of the Godhead. All three are mentioned at the baptism of Jesus (Matt 3:16–17); during the Lord’s Supper Jesus comforts his disciples with the thought that he and the Father would send the Holy Spirit to guide them after his departure (John 14:16–17); all three persons are part of the baptismal formula found in Jesus’ great commission to his disciples (Matt 28:19); Paul readily refers to all three persons in many of his epistles (Rom 8:9–11; 2 Cor 13:14; 2 Tim 1:3–14; Eph 1:13–14; 3:14–19); Peter acknowledges the work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the salvation of people (1 Pet 1:2), and John is a witness of the Spirit’s testimony regarding Jesus, the Son of God (1 John 5:5–9). The book of Revelation also presents three persons involved in the final events of this world (Rev 1:4–5; 22:16–18).

But all these biblical evidences to the triune God become somewhat ambivalent for some people because the Holy Spirit is often referred to with metaphors of objects: a dove (Matt 3:16), the wind (John 3:8), fire (Isa 6:6, 7), water (John 7:37–39), and oil (Matt 25:1–4). Moreover, adding to this ambivalence are some New Testament statements that appear to refer to Jesus as having had a beginning when he is referred to as “begotten” (*monogenes*) or “firstborn of all creation” (*prototokos*) (John 3:16; Col 1:15).

But the history of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity also brings up some issues. Historically, it can be argued that the development of the doctrine of the Trinity is closely connected with the Christological disputes the early church struggled with. When the early church through a series of councils confirmed the eternal divinity of Jesus, it opened the way for a clarification of the relationship between God the Father and Jesus. “The more emphatic the church became that Christ was God, the more it came under pressure to clarify how Christ related to God.”<sup>5</sup> And along with this, it needed to clarify the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

For the early Church, the fact that Christian faith involved acceptance of Jesus as Savior and Lord meant that the Trinity quickly found its way into the creeds of the church. The Niceo-Constantinopolitan creed confesses in part that

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<sup>5</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Malden: Blackwell, 1998), 61.

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We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, . . . We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. . . . We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father.<sup>6</sup> With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified.”<sup>7</sup>

Roger Olson comments that “The implications of this confession, especially in the context of monotheism, naturally became one of the first concerns of patristic theology, the main aim being to secure the doctrine against tritheism on the one side and monarchianism on the other.”<sup>8</sup>

The early church fathers gave us the vocabulary we use and discuss today. Irenaeus spoke of the “economy of salvation,” in which each member of the Godhead has a distinct yet related role. In his theology of the Trinity, Tertullian argued that “substance” is what unites while “person” is what distinguishes the members of the Godhead. “The three persons of the Trinity are distinct, yet not divided, different yet not separate or independent of each other.”<sup>9</sup> The eastern Cappadocian fathers expanded on Tertullian’s thought and tended to emphasize the distinct individuality of the three persons while safeguarding their unity by stressing the fact that both the Son and the Spirit derived from the Father.<sup>10</sup> They spoke of one “substance” (*ousia*) in three “persons” (*hypostases*).<sup>11</sup> However, another issue for us today is that much of that vocabulary and thought assumed ancient Greek dualism and metaphysics, which are very distant and confusing to us now.

Augustine grounded his theology of the Trinity on the concept of relationship and on the bond of love between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He “developed the idea of relation within the Godhead, arguing that the

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<sup>6</sup> Later western versions of the Nicene Creed added the *filioque* clause here: “who proceeds from the Father *and the Son*.” The addition of this clause was one of the issues that led to the great schism between east and west in 1054.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted from Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 195–196.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 196. Monarchianism is a form of modalism that denied the plurality of God. It holds that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are a succession of modes or operations; they are not separate persons.

<sup>9</sup> McGrath, 62.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 63. Following the Cappadocian fathers, Orthodox theology teaches that the Son is the “only begotten” of the Father and the Holy Spirit “proceeds” from the Father.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

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persons of the Trinity are defined by their relationships to one another.”<sup>12</sup> Augustine rejected any form of subordinationism that treated the Son and the Holy Spirit as inferior to the Father within the Godhead. Although the Son and the Spirit may appear to be posterior to the Father, this judgment only applies to their role within the process of salvation; they may appear to be subordinate to the Father in history, but in eternity all are equal.<sup>13</sup>

By the end of the fifth century, the early church had reached a consensus regarding the doctrine of the Trinity that has remained Christianity’s official position for centuries.

But there has always been strong divergent opinions threatening this consensus. Although the early church councils clearly defined Jesus’ divine-human nature and the relationship between the persons of the Godhead, Arianism and modalism<sup>14</sup> have remained influential beliefs within Christianity. Jaroslav Pelikan believes that during the Reformation, the doctrine of the Trinity was relegated to a secondary position in relation to the immediate moral-religious interest of the Reformers.<sup>15</sup> And this is basically the position it kept in Protestant theology for the following five centuries.

Most devastating to the doctrine of the Trinity was the impact of Enlightenment rationalism and Deism, an impact that is still felt today. For a variety of reasons, during the Enlightenment the doctrine of the Trinity became “a pestilence for rationalistic theologians,” as one thinker said, and the assumption that it was a “revealed doctrine” could no longer be taken for granted in the Christian theology of the nineteenth century. Ever since the Reformation, Socinianism had been criticizing the doctrine of the Trinity on both biblical and rational grounds, but during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the criticisms appeared with growing frequency and insistence also within churches that were professedly Trinitarian in their confessions of faith.<sup>16</sup> Along with Unitarianism, which was gradually beginning to take its place alongside the Trinitarian

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>14</sup> Modalism took many forms. One of them, Sabellianism, teaches that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three different modes or manifestations of the same God at different times. Another form is monarchianism, mentioned earlier in this paper.

<sup>15</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 5: *Christian Doctrine and Modern Culture (since 1700)* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989), 198.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 192–193.



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churches, some American denominations, such as the Christian Connection and some Freewill Baptist churches, became anti-Trinitarian.

To some extent, the modern anti-Trinitarian sentiments and the recrudescence of modalism confirmed “the warnings long voiced by orthodox polemics that loss of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity would eventually lead to loss of the reality of God.”<sup>17</sup> These warnings were fulfilled when Christian theology adopted pantheistic and panentheistic views of God in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Traditional Christian theology affirmed a doctrine of God according to which the created world was distinct from its Creator. This doctrine distinguished clearly between a God omnipotent in nature and a God identical with nature. Upon that distinctness depended such fundamentals of the Christian worldview as the very doctrine of creation itself.<sup>18</sup>

A hundred years ago, our own Adventist denomination was shaken by a pantheistic controversy. Could it be that such a development was the result of some long held Arian views? That the Holy Spirit was not to be understood as a person within the Godhead but only as a divine force?

Such views were espoused by J. N. Andrews, Joseph H. Waggoner, Daniel T. Bourdeau, R. F. Cottrell, J. N. Loughborough, Uriah Smith, and many others of our pioneers who came from a Christian Connection and Freewill Baptist heritage. But second generation Adventists also held these views, among them E. J. Waggoner, good friend of J. H. Kellogg.

But slowly our denomination reshaped its understanding of the Godhead and moved toward a traditional Trinitarian view in order to take into account the clear New Testament teaching on a triune God and to uphold the validity and full sufficiency of Christ’s substitutionary sacrifice of atonement on the cross. Furthermore, Ellen White certainly had a strong influence in that direction, particularly after the publication of her book *Desire of Ages*.<sup>19</sup>

Yet today questions persist, and there is a resurgence of anti-Trinitarian views among Adventists. Some wish to reclaim the teachings of our Adventist pioneers on the Godhead and deny the full and eternally preexistent deity of Jesus and the personal deity of the Holy Spirit.

Our own Adventist theological experience and history can make valuable contributions to this discussion. In many ways the philosophical

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 200–201.

<sup>19</sup> References in the *Desire of Ages* to the eternal deity of Christ are found on pp. 19, 530, 785, and to the divine personhood of the Holy Spirit on p. 671.

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assumptions and presuppositions of our worldview are different from traditional Christianity and bring different perspectives on some of these old issues. We do not accept the traditional Platonic dualistic worldview and metaphysics that were foundational to the church fathers' theology of the Trinity, one of these being the concept of the immortality of the soul.

It is our hope that the papers presented at this symposium will offer some scholarly answers to many questions and will provide a solid foundation on which to build a biblically and theologically sound doctrine of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**Denis Fortin** is a Professor of Theology and Chair of the Theology and Christian Philosophy Department at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. [fortind@andrews.edu](mailto:fortind@andrews.edu)

## The Personhood of the Holy Spirit and Why It Matters

Ron E. M. Clouzet  
Southern Adventist University

Borrowing imagery from a children’s story, Finnish theologian Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen points out that today, the Holy Spirit is no longer “the Cinderella of the Trinity,” being left alone at home while her two sisters go to the ball. “Nowadays, it will not do to speak about the Holy Spirit as the *theos agraptos*—the God about whom no one writes—as did Gregory of Nazianzus in the fourth century.”<sup>1</sup> There is a revolution going on regarding the Holy Spirit. This revolution is experiential, ecumenical, as well as academic.<sup>2</sup> Scholars today search for greater clarity on a topic that has always remained elusive: Just who is the Holy Spirit?

The search is timely, and especially so for Christians whose understanding of last-day events place today’s world on the brink of a great deception by Christ’s archenemy.<sup>3</sup> What we understand regarding the nature of the Holy Spirit will influence our response to His work in our lives. This article will review basic biblical and theological arguments

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<sup>1</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 16.

<sup>2</sup> See Elizabeth A. Dreyer, “Resources for a Renewed Life in the Spirit and Pneumatology: Medial Mystics and Saints,” in *Advent of the Spirit: Orientations in Pneumatology, Conference Papers from a Symposium at Marquette University, 17–19 April 1998* (unpublished), 1.

<sup>3</sup> I speak here of a biblical worldview based on Bible prophecies found in the books of Daniel and Revelation that point to climactic end-time events before the return of Christ which include an increased activity of the Holy Spirit in the world as well as correspondingly increased deceptions by Satan regarding such activity. As an example of such a worldview, see Norman R. Gulley, *Christ Is Coming! A Christ-centered Approach to Last-day Events* (Hagerstown: Review & Herald, 1998), 127–158, 476–506.

for the personhood of the Holy Spirit and the implications for Christian experience today.

### The Study of the Person of the Spirit

Seventy years ago Samuel Chadwick contended that “the last great book on the Spirit was written in 1674.”<sup>4</sup> John Owen’s work was a tour de force on the subject, but much more has surfaced on the subject in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> From small beginnings in Kansas City and Los Angeles—giving life to Classical Pentecostalism—to the Charismatic Renewal among Catholic and mainline Protestant churches, to today’s Third Wave that includes large numbers of Evangelicals, the “silent” theology of the Spirit of yesteryear has turned into a veritable post-modern Tower of Babel. But not everything written or said about the Spirit these days contains truth. Contemporary approaches to pneumatology vary a great deal.<sup>6</sup> And much serious work on the Spirit bypasses His nature, focusing instead on His function and work.<sup>7</sup> It is not surprising then, that our very

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<sup>4</sup> *The Way to Pentecost* (Berne: Light and Hope, 1937), 5. Chadwick was referring to Puritan John Owen’s works on the Holy Spirit, particularly his first one: *Pneumatologia: Or, A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit: Wherein an Account of His Name, Nature, Personality, Dispensation, Operations, & Effects . . .* (London: J. Darby, 1674). Abraham Kuyper considered Owen’s works on the Holy Spirit “still unsurpassed”; *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Henri De Vries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), ix–xi.

<sup>5</sup> Watson E. Mills had listed and analyzed 3998 works published by 1993. See his *A Bibliography of the Nature and Role of the Holy Spirit in Twentieth-Century Writings* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1993). Esther Dech Schandorff has included and systematized scores of works on the Holy Spirit for several centuries in *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit: A Bibliography Showing Its Chronological Development*, 2 vols. (Lanham: Scarecrow, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> According to Kärkkäinen, 20–22, while Jürgen Moltmann [*Spirit of Life* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001)] follows fairly traditional patterns, providing extensive interaction with the way the Spirit has been conceived in the history of theology, Miroslav Volf [*Work in the Spirit* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2001)] relates the discussion to political realities and work. While Elizabeth Johnson [*She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminine Theological Discourse* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2002)] seeks a distinctively feminine perspective in the doctrine of the Spirit, Joseph Comblin [*The Holy Spirit and Liberation* (New York: Orbis, 1989)] sees the work of the Spirit as part of liberation theology. And while Michael Welker [*God the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994)] treats the study of the Spirit as truly biblical theology, Clark Pinnock [*Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996)] tries to construct a full-scale systematic theology from a pneumatological point of view.

<sup>7</sup> Typical of theological treatments is Arthur W. Pink’s work, purporting a brief, yet comprehensive view of the doctrine: he devotes only six pages to the person and deity of

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own 2005 edition of *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* covers the person of the Spirit, the question of His divinity, and His relationship with the Godhead in only two pages, while more than twice that many are spent on His mission alone.<sup>8</sup>

If understanding the person of the Spirit is so critical for our times, why is it so difficult to accomplish?<sup>9</sup> Obviously, one reason is that comparatively little is explained in the Scriptures. Much is assumed, but little is explained. And even though the New Testament mentions the Spirit tenfold more often than the Old Testament, it remains concerned with ethics and not with nature.<sup>10</sup> True, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is “one of the most elusive themes in the Bible or in theology,”<sup>11</sup> but should we not seek to understand what *is* revealed for the sake of our instruction, as Paul suggests to the Romans (Rom 15:4)? Surely, we must do so with great reverence and humility, yet with determination, for “the dispensation in which we are now living is to be . . . the dispensation of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>12</sup>

For many Christians, the Father is seen as fairly impersonal and transcendent and the Son as far removed in history, while the Spirit “is the

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the Spirit, but he writes 159 pages on the various functions and ministries of the Spirit. *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970).

<sup>8</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Silver Spring: Ministerial Association of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), 70–76.

<sup>9</sup> Millard J. Erickson proposes five reasons for this: 1) There is less “explicit revelation in the Bible” regarding the Holy Spirit than about the Father or the Son. 2) There is no systematic discussion about Him, the only extensive treatment being John 14–16, which, of course, deals more with His work and the timing of His coming than with His nature or His personality. 3) There is a lack of concrete imagery about the Spirit, making it harder to conceptualize. A further misfortune is the fact that generations who only had access to the King James Version’s terminology of the Holy Spirit as the Holy Ghost grew up conceiving of the Spirit “as something inside a white sheet.” 4) There is a subconscious Arianism that sees the Father and the Son in one plane but the Holy Spirit in a lower, subservient plane because of His function. 5) The avoidance by some because of the excessive emphasis on the Holy Spirit by charismatic Christians. *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 863, 864.

<sup>10</sup> Henry Barclay Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 286.

<sup>11</sup> Seán P. Kealy, “Holy Spirit,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 601.

<sup>12</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Washington: Review & Herald, 1923), 511.

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point at which the Trinity becomes personal to the believer.”<sup>13</sup> Since that is so critical, study we must, while not forgetting an important warning penned by Ellen White at a time when popular interest in the Spirit was growing rapidly, 1911:

It is not essential for us to be able to define just what the Holy Spirit is . . . The nature of the Holy Spirit is a mystery. Men cannot explain it, because the Lord has not revealed it to them . . . Regarding such mysteries, which are too deep for human understanding, silence is golden.<sup>14</sup>

In order to deal biblically and theologically with the person of the Spirit, we should briefly consider its historical development.

**Brief Historical Background**

Theologians and church leaders have wrestled for centuries over the nature and work of the Holy Spirit. The Trinity was the first doctrine dealt with in Christian history after the apostles passed on from the scene of their labors. However, there is evidence to suggest that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit was not *fully* treated until the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>15</sup> By the late second century there developed a growing emphasis on the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Tertullian of Carthage called the Spirit *God*, stressing that there is one substance that the Spirit and the Son hold jointly with the Father.<sup>16</sup> However, much confusion remained, with many struggling to even include the Holy Spirit as a member of the Godhead. Paul of Samosata, for instance, believed that the Holy Spirit was basically the grace of God poured upon the apostles. Irenaeus thought that the Spirit was an attribute of God, such as divine Wisdom. Origen, on the other hand, went far afield from an ontological Trinity, affirming that the Holy Spirit was “brought into existence through the Word, the chief in rank of

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<sup>13</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 862.

<sup>14</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1911), 51–52.

<sup>15</sup> See James Orr, *The Progress of Dogma* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, repr. 1952), 22–30. Orr suggests that even though the chronological order of major doctrines followed a traditional systematic order— so that the first one was the doctrine of God and the last one the doctrine of the last things; that was not so with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Cited in Erickson, 864.

<sup>16</sup> Tertullian, *Adversus Praxeam* 2, 3, 8. His propensity to construct formulas of faith led him to coin the word “trinity.”

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all the beings originated by the Father through Christ.”<sup>17</sup> Not much has changed, as these early views are still held by a number of faith groups today.

It was the Cappadocian Fathers in the fifth century who fortified the notion of the Holy Spirit as a person.<sup>18</sup> Basil the Great became known as the “theologian of the Holy Spirit,” thanks mostly to a desire to establish the tri-unity of God against attempts at tritheism—three Gods—or at “binity,” the idea that the Father and the Son were God but the Holy Spirit was a step below them. He wrote the first serious treatise on the person of the Holy Spirit, appropriately entitled *On the Holy Spirit*, and this greatly influenced the revision of the Nicene Creed.<sup>19</sup> The First Council of Nicea, convened by Emperor Constantine in AD 325, proclaimed in that creed, “We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, . . . begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father.” But even though a small paragraph and a much more substantial paragraph are dedicated to the Father and the Son, the creed ended with the cryptic: “And [we believe] in the Holy Ghost.” Nothing more was said about the Spirit. Why? Because Arianism remained a major threat to the church. Arius had managed to convince a great many people that Jesus was a special creation of God, but not God Himself. This concept had experienced a revival not only among many church leaders, but also among secular leaders with power. Decades after the original creed, Arian theology survived, thanks, in part, to Emperor Constantine, whom some consider to have “lived as a pagan and died as an Arian.”<sup>20</sup> The strongest voice for what became the orthodox view belonged to Athanasius and the Cappadocians, who steadfastly wrote and taught and preached on the full divinity of the Son as well as the Spirit until the Nicene creed was revised in AD 381 at the First Council of Constantinople. The Council not only expanded on the Father and the Son, but added a full and significant paragraph on the Spirit, who now

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<sup>17</sup> See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 118; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.30.9; Origen, *Commentary on John* 2.10.75. Cited in Erickson, 865.

<sup>18</sup> See Gary D. Badcock, “Doctrine of the Holy Spirit,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 304.

<sup>19</sup> Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 177.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

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“proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.”<sup>21</sup>

Even though during the Middle Ages the Spirit was fully accepted as equal with God, confusion continued. The trouble reflected past controversies over Christology regarding the exact *origin* of the Spirit: Was He from God the Father or from the Son or from both? All was quiet in the West until the Eastern Church discovered the now famous *filioque* clause in 1014.<sup>22</sup> To the Nicene Creed had been added the word *filioque*—Latin for “and the Son”—now stating that the Holy Spirit proceeded “from the Father *and the Son*.” The Eastern Church, already miffed at the preeminence of Rome in the Church Catholic, and fully holding to the concept that the Father alone was the sole fountain, root, and cause of deity, would not stand for such “treason.” The *filioque* controversy became the greatest theological disagreement in the history of the Christian church, leading to the permanent rift between the Eastern and the Western Church: the Great Schism of 1054.

The Protestant Reformation produced no major changes in the orthodox, chiefly Augustinian<sup>23</sup> doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Calvin’s contribution was in the area of revelation, positing that the inward witness of the Spirit is the ultimate basis for our confidence in the divine nature of the Bible. In other words, the *applied* work of the Spirit follows the Spirit’s *written* work, the Bible.

Over time, the Holy Spirit as a person became more accepted in the churches, leading some to wonder just how it is that the Spirit works in the lives of sinners. Wesley, for instance, introduced the idea of a person’s instantaneous sanctification by the Holy Spirit.<sup>24</sup>

Despite Wesley, the church’s interest in the Holy Spirit went through a period of decline in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Protestant scholasticism,

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<sup>21</sup> See a word comparison of both creeds in Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 57.

<sup>22</sup> According to Badcock (305), although the addition was finally discovered and made something about in 1014, the action had taken place nearly 500 years before, at the Third Council of Toledo, Spain, in AD 589, at a gathering of only Latin ecclesiastics. Williston Walker asserts that Charlemagne had also approved of the *filioque* addition. Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1970), 189, 164.

<sup>23</sup> See Badcock, 304. Luther’s formulations were quite similar to those of Augustine.

<sup>24</sup> Though it was followers like John Fletcher who expanded the concept of instantaneous sanctification by using the term “baptism of the Spirit,” later to become an expression of major contention that continues to this day between Christians of the Reformed tradition and those stemming from the Pietistic and Holiness Movement traditions.



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with its “rechte Lehre” (correct doctrine), produced “a more mechanical view of the role of Scriptures,” and “as a result the witness of the Spirit tended to be bypassed.” The Word alone, without the Spirit, was regarded as the basis of authority. In addition, rationalism, naturalism, and even deism became major accepted philosophical standards, which meant that since the Holy Spirit cannot be proven from an examination of nature, the doctrine was rather neglected. Eventually, Schleiermacher’s brand of Romanticism insisted that religion was not really a matter of beliefs (doctrines) or behavior (ethics), but of feelings. So, the Holy Spirit was redefined as “the vital unity of the Christian fellowship as a moral personality.”<sup>25</sup>

Other religious movements, however, did pay close attention to the Spirit, but largely to the *work* of the Holy Spirit.<sup>26</sup> American revivalism, for instance, stressed conversion and an immediacy of experience. This, coupled with the Holiness Movement rooted in Methodism, and the Keswick Conventions born from Calvinist traditions,<sup>27</sup> along with a rapidly changing America, gave way to the official rise of Pentecostalism in 1901/1906, Neo-Pentecostalism in the 1960s, and the Third Wave in the 1980s accepting sign gifts as normative for evangelical Christians. Now the doctrine of the Spirit became the concern of individual and corporate *praxis*, or experience, rather than *dogma*, or theology.

#### **Fundamental Questions Regarding the Person of the Holy Spirit**

In 1906 Ellen White wrote that “The Holy Spirit has a personality, else He could not bear witness to our spirits and with our spirits that we are the children of God. He must also be a divine person, else He could not search out the secrets which lie hidden in the mind of God.”<sup>28</sup> The statement alludes to three fundamental questions that must be answered to begin to understand the Holy Spirit and the implications of His personhood: 1) Is the Holy Spirit God? 2) Is the Holy Spirit a person in the Godhead? 3) What is the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Godhead? Though much of the biblical evidence may be familiar to the reader, it nevertheless bears repeating for the sake of our proposal.

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<sup>25</sup> Erickson, 868–871.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 871–872.

<sup>27</sup> See Melvin E. Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Lanham: Scarecrow, 1986).

<sup>28</sup> Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington: Review & Herald, 1946), 617.

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**Is the Holy Spirit God?** We must admit that the direct Scriptural evidence on this question is scant. This, no doubt, is one key reason why so many sincere believers throughout the history of the Christian church have not been convinced of the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Even though Paul's doctrine of the Holy Spirit may be more central in the New Testament than his doctrine of justification by faith,<sup>29</sup> "the deity of the Father is simply assumed . . . that of the Son is affirmed and argued, while that of the Holy Spirit must be inferred from various indirect statements found in Scripture."<sup>30</sup>

However, God has left enough evidence for us to understand basic truths. The clearest of these may be the statement by Peter in Acts 5 where he asks deceiving Ananias why he had lied "to the Holy Spirit" regarding the sale of his land, and then declares, "You have not lied to men, but to God" (Acts 5:3, 4).<sup>31</sup> For Peter, "lying to the Holy Spirit" and "lying to God" were interchangeable expressions, his point being that Ananias was not *merely* lying to the apostles of the nascent New Testament church, but to God Himself. This is all the more significant in view of the fact that Luke wrote his account from the point of view of the mighty acts of the Spirit,<sup>32</sup> as "the promise" of the Father (Luke 24:49) had finally been realized. This critical event in the life of New Israel mirrored that of the old. The day of Pentecost was known among the Jews as "the day of the giving of the Law," in reference to when the Law of God, written with the finger of God—or Spirit of God, according to Jesus (compare Matt 12:28 with Luke 11:20)—was given at Mount Sinai. It was only days later that some in Israel, in spite of experiencing mighty signs and wonders by the covenant God who had shown His superiority over the gods of Egypt, brazenly chose to follow gods of their own making in the form of two golden calves. In AD 31, on the Day of Pentecost, the "finger" or Spirit of God descended with mighty signs and wonders

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<sup>29</sup> S. Neill and N. T. Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861–1986* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988), 203.

<sup>30</sup> Erickson, 873.

<sup>31</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural references are from the New American Standard Bible.

<sup>32</sup> See George Sweeting and Donald W. Sweeting, *The Acts of God: Reflections from the Book of Acts* (Chicago: Moody, 1986). For an application of this concept, see my "A Biblical Paradigm for Ministerial Training" (DMin Dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1997), 164–167. For a helpful theology on the book of Acts, see I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson, eds., *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

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upon the waiting believers to begin writing God's law upon their hearts (Acts 2). But just like their predecessors, some, like Ananias and Saphira, chose to make a pretense of following God while their allegiance remained with Mammon. Their fate was the same as that of the 3,000 that fell in the wilderness that day (Acts 5:3–11; Exod 32:21–28). Why such harsh punishment? Because just as the affront 1,500 years before was shamelessly made before Almighty God, the same happened with the rebellious couple before the same mighty God as before: God the Holy Spirit.

Another example of interchangeable expressions is given by Paul in 1 Cor 3 and 6. In chapter 3:16, 17, he writes, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" Three chapters later, he uses almost identical language: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you?" (1 Cor 6:19). The temple of God or the temple of the Holy Spirit—God and Holy Spirit are used interchangeably by Paul. "The Holy Spirit is not a mere spirit," said Martin Luther, "a creature, for example, or something apart from God and yet given to men by Him, or merely the work of God which He performs in our hearts—but that He is a Spirit who Himself is God in essence."<sup>33</sup>

Jesus also used the word God and Holy Spirit interchangeably. During the night encounter with Nicodemus, Christ made reference to how possible it was to be born *again*—a common reference to salvation—by the Spirit, even if the secret disciple considered it impossible, saying: "How can these things be?" (John 3:5–9). Later in His ministry, when another group of disciples gathered to inquire how it could be that people not expected to be saved could be saved, Jesus responded: "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt 19:23–26). Clearly, for Jesus it was God who made salvation possible, even as it was the Spirit who made men born again. This is because the Holy Spirit is the one with the ability to bring about conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8–11).

In the Book of Hebrews we find the only biblical reference to "the eternal Spirit" (Heb 9:14), whereas in the Book of Deuteronomy we find the only biblical reference to "the eternal God" (Deut 33:27). We know that only God is eternal. We also know that only God can raise the dead

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<sup>33</sup> Martin Luther, "Sermon On John 15:26, 27" in *Luther's Works*, 24:297, cited in Arnold Valentin Wallenkampf, *New by the Spirit* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1978), 14.

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to life. “Truly, truly I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear shall live . . . all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice” (John 5:25, 28). On what basis can Christ call the dead to life? He explains in the following verse: “Just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself” (v. 26). A few years later, Paul echoed Jesus’ words when he wrote, in Romans 8:11: “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, *He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit* who indwells you” (emphasis supplied). The same Spirit who raised Jesus will raise you and me from the dead because, like God, He too has life in Himself.

In the discourse given on the night of His betrayal, Christ announced the coming of the *parakletos*, often translated in English as *Comforter* or *Helper* (John 14:16, 17). Linguistically, this alludes to the “parallel” status the person introduced has with the One introducing Him.<sup>34</sup> This is why Christ referred to the Holy Spirit as “another” Comforter, Him being the first the disciples knew. The point to be made here is that Christ would “ask [*pray* in the King James Version] the Father” for the Spirit. Just a few minutes earlier Christ had referred to Himself and His Father as equals (vv. 9, 10). If the Comforter is equal—or parallel—to the Son, and the Son is equal—or one—with the Father, the Comforter, or Holy Spirit, is equal with the Father.

The Holy Spirit possesses attributes only belonging to God. He is omnipresent, making the Psalmist exclaim: “Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy presence?” (Ps 139:7). The Holy Spirit is omniscient, for Paul says, “the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God,” for “the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God” (1 Cor 2:10, 11). And the Holy Spirit is omnipotent, since He distributes gifts “to each one individually *just as He wills*” (1 Cor 12:11, emphasis supplied).

Finally, a number of statements in Scripture mention all three members of the Godhead, making them equal in nature and rank, though not in function. The well known baptismal formula that was part of the Great Commission states that Christ’s followers must baptize new disciples “in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19). The

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<sup>34</sup> The promise that another (Greek *allos*, one of the same kind) Comforter would come means one like Christ would come. Like Christ, the Spirit will be a “Comforter” (KJV), “Helper” (NKJV, NASB), “Advocate” (NEB), and “Counselor” (NIV, RSV).

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formula highlights a *single* name, not three different ones, making one and all of them of the same substance (*hupostasis*) as the others. The apostolic blessing of 2 Corinthians 13:14 reveals the same triune God: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.” And the spiritual gifts discourse makes the same point by speaking of “varieties of gifts but the same *Spirit*,” “varieties of ministries, and the same *Lord*,” and “varieties of effects, but the same *God*” (1 Cor 12:4–6, emphasis supplied). In Peter’s greeting, we find the triune Godhead linked together as before, yet giving hints of their various functions: “Peter, . . . to those who reside as aliens, scattered . . . , who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood” (1 Pet 1:1, 2).

#### Is the Holy Spirit a Person?

The personhood of the Holy Spirit was something with which early Adventist pioneers struggled.<sup>35</sup> Along with anti-Trinitarian views, some thought of the Holy Spirit as less than a person. Long time church editor and General Conference Secretary Uriah Smith, for example, as late as 1891, described the Holy Spirit as “that divine, mysterious emanation through which they [the Father and the Son] carry forward their great and infinite work.” A year earlier, he had pictured the Spirit to be a “divine influence” and not a “person like the Father and the Son.”<sup>36</sup> The lack of clarity in the Adventist Church regarding the person of the Holy Spirit was the result of a lack of a truly Trinitarian understanding of God. Even Ellen White, quoting the King James Version, kept referring to the Holy

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<sup>35</sup> This is attested by fairly recent scholarship revealing early Adventism’s anti-trinitarian views. See Erwin R. Gane, “The Arian or Anti-Trinitarian Views Presented in Seventh-day Adventist Literature and the Ellen G. White Answer” (M.A. thesis, Andrews University, 1963); Russell Holt, “The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination: Its Rejection and Acceptance” (Term Paper, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 1969); Merlin Burt, “Demise of Semi-Arianism and Anti-Trinitarianism in Adventist Theology, 1888–1957” (term paper, Andrews University, 1996); and Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, and John W. Reeve, *The Trinity: Understanding God’s Love, His Plan of Salvation, and Christian Relationships* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2002), 190–220.

<sup>36</sup> General Conference Bulletin, 146, 1891; *Review & Herald*, October 24, 1890, 664, cited in George R. Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (Hagerstown: Review & Herald, 2000), 18. Uriah Smith also called the Spirit “the divine afflatus [impulse] and medium” of the Father and the Son. *Looking Unto Jesus* (Battle Creek: Review and Herald, 1897), 10.

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Spirit as an “it” in her writings. However, all that changed by 1898. A new understanding of the nature of Christ and the person of the Spirit made her clearly state that “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underrived,” and the personal pronoun “He” was used in reference to the Holy Spirit, who was said to be “the Third Person of the Godhead.”<sup>37</sup> The publication of *The Desire of Ages* propelled a paradigm shift that surprised many and shocked some. Well known is the story of young M. L. Andreasen, who was so skeptical of the changes that he sought to ascertain whether or not this was her own writing. In 1902, after visiting with Ellen White in her Elmshaven home and seeing the manuscript, he was convinced that it was so.<sup>38</sup>

Today, the Seventh-day Adventists’ official statement of beliefs clearly states that “the Bible reveals that the Holy Spirit is a person, not an impersonal force.”<sup>39</sup> This is standard Christian doctrine. But Christian theological tradition has never been a good enough reason for Seventh-day Adventists to settle on biblical teachings. What, then, is the Bible evidence for the personhood of the Spirit?

At times, people have viewed the Holy Spirit as an “it,” in part, because the neuter gender for Spirit, both in the original Greek—*pneuma*—and in English, have contributed to this concept. An example is Romans 8:16, where the KJV translates the text: “The Spirit *itself* . . .” (emphasis added).<sup>40</sup> Since pronouns are to agree with their antecedents in person, number, and gender, you would expect the neuter pronoun to be used to represent the Holy Spirit. However, when John the Beloved recorded the words of Jesus, he used the masculine pronoun *ekeinos*—he—when referring to the Holy Spirit. “When the Helper comes . . . that is the Spirit of truth . . . He will bear witness of Me” (John 15:26). “When He, the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). “And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever” (John 14:16). Either John made a consistent grammatical error or he purposely called the Holy Spirit a “he.” Since no similar error is made in the rest of John’s gospel, we conclude he did it to

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<sup>37</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1898, 1940), 530, 669–671.

<sup>38</sup> The story was relayed by Andreasen at a 1948 chapel address given at Loma Linda, California, and quoted by Russell Holt, 20. Also cited in Whidden, 197.

<sup>39</sup> “God the Holy Spirit,” in *Beliefs*, 70.

<sup>40</sup> For the sake of clarity, modern translations have replaced the neuter pronoun with the masculine personal pronoun.

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make a point: Jesus referred to a Person and not a thing.<sup>41</sup> Not much should be made of John's use of the *masculine* personal pronoun; his point was not a specific gender but personality.<sup>42</sup>

The Bible also identifies in the Holy Spirit a number of attributes characteristic only of persons. For instance, the Holy Spirit *wills*. In Acts 16 we find Paul and his companions "forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; and when they had come to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them" (Acts 16:7, 8). In 1 Corinthians 12 we are told, after several gifts of the Spirit are mentioned, that "the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills" (1 Cor 12:7–11). Also, the Holy Spirit is said to have a *mind*. Paul reminds us that "he who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is." Such mind is used by the Spirit to intercede on our behalf: "for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes . . . with groanings too deep for words" (Rom 8:27, 26). As only persons can, the Spirit *gives instruction* as well. Paul writes to Timothy: "The Spirit explicitly says that in the latter days some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim 4:1). Nehemiah reminisced how God had given Israel His "good Spirit to instruct them" (Neh 9:20). And Jesus promised His disciples that when facing danger or stress because of Him: "the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say" (Luke 12:12). A further characteristic is the fact that the Holy Spirit is capable of *feelings*. Paul counsels the Ephesians to make sure not to "grieve the Holy Spirit of God" (Eph 4:30); and Isaiah recalls how Israel had so stubbornly "rebelled and grieved [God's] Holy Spirit" that the Spirit then "turned Himself to become their enemy" (Isa 63:10). And the Spirit has *influence*. Paul assures us that "no one can say 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 12:3).<sup>43</sup> Jesus promised that "when [the Spirit] comes, [He] will convict the world concerning

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<sup>41</sup> A similar reference is found in Eph 1:14, where Paul uses the word *hos*—who—in a clause modifying the Holy Spirit.

<sup>42</sup> According to Jerome, the fact that the Hebrew *ruah* (spirit) is mainly feminine, the Greek *pneuma* (spirit) is neuter, and the Latin *spiritus* is masculine shows that God has no gender at all. See Kealy, 601.

<sup>43</sup> Gordon Fee makes an important point when he highlights that what Paul says about the Spirit as an agency of God's activity parallels "what he says in scores of places about Christ, whose agency can only be personal. By implication, the Spirit's agency can hardly be less personal than that of Christ." *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 26.

sin, and righteousness, and judgment” (John 16:8). Finally, only persons can *love*, and all three members of the Godhead do (see John 3:16 and 13:1). Paul appeals to the Romans: “Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit [to pray for me]” (Rom 15:30). And he had already told them, in Romans 5, that “hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts *through the Holy Spirit*” (Rom 5:5, emphasis supplied).

### **What is the Relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Godhead?**

Seventh-day Adventists assert that “from eternity, God the Holy Spirit lived within the Godhead as the third member. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are equally self-existent. Though each is equal, *an economy of function* operates within the Trinity (emphasis supplied).”<sup>44</sup> Now we turn to this *economy of function* and the role of the Spirit as the *third* member of the Godhead. However, we must keep in mind that there is less explicit revelation in the Bible regarding the Holy Spirit than regarding the Father and the Son. This is never easy to understand. Though it is true that in the New Testament the Spirit is regarded chiefly in relation to the Church and the Christian life, the question of the Spirit’s relation to God can find answers in Scripture.<sup>45</sup>

Whereas the Christological controversies in the early centuries of the Christian era were the result of the dual nature of Christ, the resistance to accepting the Spirit as a person and as fully God stems from His *role* in the Trinity, this “economy of function.” Is this in Scripture? Though the Bible does not provide a systematic discussion about the Holy Spirit, the closest treatment can be found in Christ’s Passover night dialogue in the Upper Room. There we find striking statements that reveal what appears to be a voluntarily subservient role of the Spirit to the rest of the Trinity.

When Jesus announces the coming of the promised Comforter, He says, “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper . . . the Spirit of truth” (John 14:16, 17). Though we clearly see evidence that the Spirit has and exercises His will, we find in this text that it all depends on the two other members of the Trinity: the Son’s request and the Father’s provision. Through the Spirit, Christ indwells His disciples (v. 20): “In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.” Then Christ adds that He will disclose Himself to them then (v. 21). In fact, the promise is that both Father and Son will come to make

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<sup>44</sup> “God the Holy Spirit” in *Beliefs*, 71.

<sup>45</sup> See Sweete, 288, regarding a veiled skepticism on this point.



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Their abode with them (v. 23), and even though no explicit mention is made about the Spirit being the Third *Guest* in their hearts, it is the Spirit who will aid the disciples in comprehending what He has just said. We find here a clearly subordinate role in the person of the Holy Spirit, even though He is *another parakletos*, another like the Son. This in no way should be understood to mean the Spirit is somehow a *lesser* God than Christ or the Father. This appears to be the Spirit's *role and function* in the Godhead, not His *status or rank*. In chapter 15, again we find the Spirit's subordinate role: "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me" (John 15:26).<sup>46</sup> Finally, in chapter 16 we may find the most clear statements regarding this triune relationship:

But when He, the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said, that He takes of Mine, and will disclose it to you. (John 16:13–15)

Just as the Son reveals the Father's love and character, and just as the Son chooses not to take His own initiative but yields such prerogative to the Father (see John 5:30; 6:38), so does the Spirit in relationship to the Son. The danger here is to harbor a subconscious Arianism that sees the Father and the Son in one plane but the Holy Spirit in a lower, subservient plane because of His function in the plan of salvation, just as Arius' followers read statements in the Bible pointing to Christ's subserviency to the Father and concluded He could not be fully divine. In fact, in this functional economy, it appears as if the Father is the source, the Son the mediator, and the Spirit the one who applies what God designs to do.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> This text gives credibility to the *filioque* clause inserted in the Nicene Creed, since the Spirit is sent by the Son, and yet also proceeds from the Father.

<sup>47</sup> See "The Godhead" in *Beliefs*, 30. On the other hand, another aberration would be to consider the Spirit the Lord Himself, as some read 2 Cor 3:17–18: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (emphasis supplied). Fee is helpful here. "Paul is using a well-known form of Jewish interpretation, in which the interpreter picks out one word from a biblical citation and gives 'its true meaning' for a new context. Thus 'the Lord is the Spirit' interprets 'the Lord' just mentioned in v.16, which is an allusion to Exodus 34:34. The 'Lord' to whom we turn, Paul says, has to do with the Spirit. That is,

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The concept of a plural union within the Godhead that is interactive and mutually submissive is seen even in the passage Jews for generations have used to voice their monotheism: the Shema. Deuteronomy 6:4: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!” The word translated “one” is the Hebrew *ʾehād*. Though it means “one,” it means “one among others, the emphasis being on a particular one.” According to Otto Christensen, “the possibility of there being others in this ‘oneness’ is inherent in the word *ʾehād*.” Moses could have used the word *yahîd* to indicate “one” as in “one alone.” But *ʾehād* “oneness” results “from the unity of numerous persons.”<sup>48</sup> The same word is used to describe the *submissive union* between the first pair: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become *one* flesh” (Gen 2:24). A match made in heaven is the union of two distinct persons who, loving one another supremely, choose to become *ʾehād*—one.

This concept, as simple as it is, is nevertheless revolutionary, in part because sin has managed to make “*yahîds*” out of all of us—lonely units. However, God had other ideas from the beginning. In every family with more than one child in the home, it becomes obvious to the adults that each young sibling has significantly different philosophical, stylistic, and general ways of approaching life and issues. Even if much of their shared experience is the same, parents soon notice that these two, or three, or four young persons are definitely *not* alike, though living under the same roof, eating the same food, and originating from the same parents. If one considers the injunction God gives to mankind through Adam and Eve to “be fruitful and multiply, and *fill* the earth” (Gen 1:28, emphasis supplied), simple mathematics leads to the conclusion that it would take at least *three* children per couple to do so, one in addition to the two it would take to replace themselves. How appropriate, considering the Trinity. The command in verse 28 comes right after we are told that God said “Let *us* make man in *our* image, according to *our* likeness,”<sup>49</sup> and then corroborated it with: “And God created man in *His* own image, in the image of God *He* created him; male and female *He* created

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‘the Lord’ is now to be understood in terms of the Spirit’s activity among us . . . ,” 32. Louis Berkhof pointed out that the identification of the Christ (the Lord) with the Spirit in this text is “not with respect to personality, but as to manner of working.” *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939, 1941), 97.

<sup>48</sup> See Otto H. Christensen, *Getting Acquainted with God* (Washington: Review & Herald, 1970), 69.

<sup>49</sup> Known as the plural cohortative.

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them” (Gen 1:26, 27, emphasis supplied). From plurality to singularity and back to plurality again: male and female. This idea is also true in marriage. What do two people find attractive about one another so as to get married? One key attraction is how *unlike* each other they may be: opposites attract.

Why is this in society? Because it mirrors, in a small and pale way, what it means to live and to love and to be. God as a solitary one, a *yahîd*, would not reflect these values as clearly as God can being a union of three persons. And so He wishes for us to experience the same. Since “God is love” (1 John 4:8), and love cannot become a practical reality unless it can be shared with others, God then is Three as One. Bruce Metzger is helpful here. I quote him with minor editing:

The Unitarian professes to agree with the statement that “God is love.” But these words, “God is love,” have no real meaning unless God is at least two Persons. Love is something that one *person* has for another *person*. If God were a single person, then before the universe was made, he was *not* love. For, if love be of the essence of God, he must always love, and, being eternal, he must have possessed an eternal object of love. Furthermore, perfect love is possible only between equals. Just as a man cannot satisfy or realize his powers of love by loving the lower animals, so God cannot satisfy or realize his love by [merely] loving man or any creature. Being infinite, he must have eternally possessed an infinite object of his love, some *alter ego*, or, to use the language of traditional Christian theology, a consubstantial, co-eternal, and co-equal [Other].<sup>50</sup>

The Godhead, then, is a society. Not a group of Gods but a union of three Persons who practice and express perfect love in perfect humility. And why three? Perhaps because with three “there is a dimension of openness and extension not necessarily found in a relationship between two persons,” which could be more closed in nature.<sup>51</sup>

There is a divine humility in all this that becomes the more astonishing the more one ponders it. Since God then is a God who is in relationship within Himself first, it follows that He would seek to create in order for others to experience the same. However, the intrinsic presupposition

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<sup>50</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *The Jehovah's Witnesses and Jesus Christ* (Princeton: Theological Book Agency [reprint from the April 1953 *Theology Today*]), 83.

<sup>51</sup> Christensen, 59. Cited in Whidden, 115. I am indebted to Whidden, Moon, and Reeve for the gist of these thoughts.

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to self-sacrificing love is freedom of exercise, including the freedom to withhold it. Every new creation in the universe becomes a risk, for creatures can choose to keep their capacity to love to themselves instead of sharing their love with God and others, thus turning love into sin. The fact that God has known this all along and still risked it, that He would rather set out to have a love relationship with His creation than withhold creation for fear creatures would make a wrong use of their freedom, is a demonstration of His deep love. John the Beloved understood this when he said, “There is no fear in love,” and “We love, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:18, 19). Oh, what remarkable condescension! To love and risk it all instead of keeping it within the perfect safety of the Trinity.<sup>52</sup>

**Why A Biblical View of the Person of the Spirit Matters**

Why does it matter to understand the Holy Spirit as a person in the Godhead? Our earlier treatment of the story of Ananias and Saphira in Acts 5 gives us a clue: If we don’t understand or refuse to understand that the Holy Spirit is a person in the Godhead, we will tend to treat Him as an “it” and incur our own destruction.

This is why the unpardonable sin is the one committed against the Holy Spirit (Matt 12:31, 32). For us, the point of contact with God is through the Holy Spirit—“where can I go from your Spirit?” says David, “where can I flee from your presence?” (Ps 139:7). The point of most immediate contact is not through the Father, and not even through Jesus. Whereas Christ is the sinner’s intercessor as our High Priest in heaven (Heb 7:17–8:2), the Spirit is our intercessor as *parakletos*—one like Him—on earth (Rom 8:26–27), in our midst. It is only through the ministry of the Holy Spirit that we can access the efficacy of *Christ’s* intercessory ministry. Without Him it would be impossible to even understand or accept Christ as our Savior and Lord. If we treat the Holy Spirit as an “it,” a mere emanation or influence devoid of personality and will, we find it especially easy to ignore Him, to lend deaf ears to His voice and invitation to leave self behind and abandon it to the hands of a God with whom all things are possible. Like the Pharisees of old, we are likely to reject the very One our hearts longed for and the Spirit reveals, the greatest object of our gratitude: Jesus Christ our Savior. We can understand the Son’s despair on the banks of the Mount of Olives that Sunday at

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<sup>52</sup> I am indebted to Norman Gulley for this insight from a soon-to-be-published manuscript chapter in his systematic theology, “The Trinity in Scripture and the Early Patristic Period,” 10.

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dusk when, looking to the temple, He knew that the time of probation for the leaders in Jerusalem that night would come to a close.<sup>53</sup> They had rejected Christ the Messiah by rejecting the wooing of the Spirit to their hearts. With a double vocative, expressive of deepest emotion, Christ cries: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is left to you desolate!” (Matt 23:37, 38).

A second reason it is important for us to understand that God the Spirit is a person is because if we treat Him like a “feeling” or a mere “power” meant to warm our hearts when we sense the need for it, we will become unbelievers. In Revelation 16 we are introduced to the false trinity, an allegiance made up of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet (Rev 16:13–14), with this last entity being the equivalent of the Third Person of the Trinity.<sup>54</sup> Just as a prophet *speaks* for God, specifically for the Holy Spirit—for “men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet 1:21)—the false prophet pretends to do the same. But whereas the Holy Spirit speaks through the Word of God, the false prophet does so by signs and the use of the supernatural. The Spirit of God is not a “cosmic vending machine, responding mechanically with power or blessing if only we insert enough coins of faith.”<sup>55</sup> Those who will trust God only when able to see signs and wonders do not trust a Person but a “power” or a “sensation.” They do not walk by faith, for faith only “comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ” (Rom 10:17). Faith does not come by miracles. Therefore, those who treat the Holy Spirit as a “power” to be called upon at will—instead of a Person to respond to by yielding our wills—will be deceived, perceiving a god of their own making rather than the God of the Bible. And a god of our making will in the end lead us to disappointment and unbelief for having been deceived. This is the apocalyptic picture of “the kings of the earth” (Rev 18:9) and “the nations” turning against the former object of their affections.

A third reason why it matters that we think of the Spirit as a Person in the Godhead is because a consideration of His utter humility, a trademark of his Person, will lead us to surrender and service. The Bible says,

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<sup>53</sup> See Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1898, 1940), 578.

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares: The Message of Revelation*, vol. 2 (Boise: Pacific Press, 1985), 444.

<sup>55</sup> Donald T. Williams, *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1994), 10.

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“No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Luke 10:21, 22). Much more is said in the Bible about God the Father and God the Son than about God the Holy Spirit. Though the Holy Spirit is mentioned 88 times in the Old Testament,<sup>56</sup> and 325 times in the New Testament,<sup>57</sup> this amount is dwarfed by the thousands of references to the other members of the Trinity. But it was the Spirit that inspired these biblical writers (2 Pet 1:21), and yet He did so in typical divine humility. The Holy Spirit says very little about *Himself*.

That’s the way love is as revealed in the Person of the Spirit: He focuses on the Father and His relationship with the Son more than on His own relationship with the Son or the Father. The Son was in the Father and the Father in Him, and the same can be said of His relationship with the Holy Spirit, and that of the Holy Spirit with the Father.<sup>58</sup> That the Spirit communicates so freely about the Father and the Son is an insight into the selfless love that exists in the Trinity, and in particular, the way the Spirit glorifies the Father and the Son. The Spirit voluntarily adopts a lower position of service because of His love for the Son and His desire to see Him glorified, in spite of the fact that He is the Person in the Godhead whose time of activity and preeminence is now.<sup>59</sup> Donald Williams has pointed out that the reason for this is because “there is no conflict between submission and equality.”<sup>60</sup>

The Christian God—three in one—is completely different from the gods in the Olympic pantheon or the Nordic tales. The gods with “the small g” engaged in constant warfare one with another. They each had an individual will and plan and clearly were *not* of one purpose. They each had their pride and their “turf” to protect.<sup>61</sup> Such gods remind us of the

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<sup>56</sup> See W. H. Griffith Thomas, *The Holy Spirit of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 9. The mentions are found in about half of the Old Testament books.

<sup>57</sup> See William Edward Bleedenwolf, *A Help to the Study of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1936), 17. All but three of the New Testament books mention the Holy Spirit, with over 50 references in the Book of Acts alone.

<sup>58</sup> Gulley, 12.

<sup>59</sup> This same type of subordination is seen in the Son (1 Cor 11:3; 15:28; John 14:28). Moule makes the point that this voluntary submission is not to be interpreted as “God’s aide de camp.” This is why the orthodox Trinitarian formula settled on the specific term *homoousios*—of the same essence—instead of *homoiousios*—of similar essence—to indicate that no member of the Trinity was in any way a demigod. C. F. D. Moule, *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 45.

<sup>60</sup> Williams, 13.

<sup>61</sup> Wallenkampf, 13.

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conflict and pride that existed among the disciples of Jesus before Calvary and Pentecost. However, when the Spirit is allowed to work among those who wrangle (Luke 22:24) and push for the preeminence (Mark 10:35–41) and are suspicious of one another (John 21:20–22), a holy submissiveness takes over their hearts which allows them to become of “one accord” (Acts 1:14; 2:1). The group then mirrors the Trinity in this respect. In fact, absolute humility may be the most distinct characteristic of the Triune God. How else could God handle His omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, and other attributes only the God of the Universe can have? Jesus voiced this truth when He said: “Learn of Me, for I am *meek* and *humble* in heart” (Matt 11:29, emphasis supplied).<sup>62</sup> Humble *in heart*, that is, a matter of choice and will. God can do anything, but He chooses to restrain Himself because He is *love*. The Bible also identifies Moses as “very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth” (Num 12:3). No wonder the people of Israel looked to Moses, basically, as if he were God! Contemplation of the deep humility demonstrated for eternity by the Third Person of the Godhead puts our pride and pettiness in the dust.

A fourth reason why it matters that God the Spirit be a person is because only persons can choose to cooperate with one another, and we are invited to cooperate with the Spirit as He leads Christ’s Church. When the Early Church, led by the Spirit, faced their first major theological controversy (Acts 15:1–29), the Church—“leading men among the brethren” (v.22)—convened at Jerusalem to deal with the matter. After the matter was decided, it is interesting to see how they described the decision: “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit *and to us* . . .” (v. 28, emphasis supplied). Such close association and cooperation can be achieved solely through trusting personal interaction. When Paul and his missionary associates wished to preach in Asia and twice were prevented from doing so by the Spirit, they ended up in Macedonia instead, “concluding that God [notice, the Spirit here is called *God*] had called [them] to preach [there]” (Acts 16:6–10). Such open interaction can be achieved only between persons who love and respect one another. The Spirit is much more than an impression in Paul’s mind. He is his constant Guide. When the glorified Jesus in Revelation addresses the churches in Asia through the Holy Spirit, he admonishes seven times to pay attention to “what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). The warnings and counsels by the Spirit to the churches presuppose an established

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<sup>62</sup> This is the only time Christ identifies Himself with adjectives.

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relationship. One can only have such relationships with persons. To recognize the voice of the Spirit means believers have spent enough time listening to such a voice. He is not a heavenly ghost—the Spirit speaks so we can listen.

**Conclusion**

At a time when the greatest growth explosion in Christianity is among charismatics,<sup>63</sup> a greater clarity regarding the person of the Spirit is warranted. It matters that we understand God the Spirit as a personal Being who knows and loves and has a clear idea of how God's children ought to understand reality. It is through the Spirit that we can know God as He truly is.

This intimate relationship between God the Spirit and His people is seen in the last appeal in Revelation: "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost" (Rev 22:17). We note first what it does *not* say. It doesn't say "the Spirit and the church" or "the Spirit and the remnant of her seed." It says, "the Spirit and the bride." The picture is of a wedding. The attention is to be on the Heavenly Groom. His bride, you and me, thanks to the work of the Spirit in our hearts, and the Heavenly Best Man—the Spirit—those who love the Groom most, cry out in unison: "Come to feast on the riches of Christ!" "Come, come, come!" And so it will echo for eternity future as it has for thousands of years now, the clarion call of the Spirit on behalf of the Son, for the sake of His own.

**Ron E. M. Clouzet** is an award-winning educator who has been Professor of Ministry and Theology at Southern Adventist University since 1993. Before he became a teacher, he pastored for twelve years in California. He holds a D.Min. degree from Fuller Theological Seminary, where his doctoral work was on theological education, and is completing a Th.D. in Systematic Theology from the University of South Africa. He has written and spoken on a number of areas related to ministry, the Christian life, and the Holy Spirit in the United States and abroad. [clouzet@southern.edu](mailto:clouzet@southern.edu)

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<sup>63</sup> Some experts estimate 500 million adherents today, including between 80 and 90% of all Christians in the Third World. See Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Development World Wide* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997).



## **Proverbs 8 and the Place of Christ in the Trinity**

Richard M. Davidson  
Andrews University

### **Introduction: Issues**

The history of the interpretation of Proverbs 8 embraces an astonishing array of ancient and modern perspectives on this passage, ranging from the Christological debates of the early Christian centuries to the almost universal rejection of Christological interpretations in recent decades. In this study I survey the gamut of interpretations, revisit the possibility of a Christocentric interpretation in light of recent exegetical insights into the passage, and explore potential implications for understanding the place of Christ in the Trinity. This is not intended to constitute a comprehensive exegesis of Prov 8; rather, I build upon previous exegetical studies and suggest a theological synthesis that favors a Christological reading of the text.

A number of interrelated issues have surfaced from this preliminary research. I will deal with six: (1) the interpretation of “Wisdom” in Prov 8, in light of the history of research; (2) the identity of “Wisdom” in Prov 8, in light of the meaning and referent of the word *’āmôn* (traditionally translated “mastercraftsman”) in v. 30; (3) the significance of the “birth/begetting” and “installment” language in Prov 8; (4) the significance of the “mediator” language of vv. 30–31; (5) the significance of the language of “play” in vv. 30–31; and (6) the relative status between “Wisdom” and Yahweh in Prov 8.

Each of these issues leads naturally to the next in the discussion that follows. First, what is the interpretation of “Wisdom” in Prov 8?

**I. The Interpretation of “Wisdom” in Proverbs 8**

**A. Brief History of Interpretation Until Modern Times.**

1. *Early Jewish Interpretations.* Allusions to Prov 8 are found in the Wisdom of Ben Sira (ca. 185 B.C.E.). Sirach 24 imitates 35 lines of Prov 8 and relates how Wisdom left her heavenly abode to dwell with the people of Israel in Zion and now is found in the Torah. The poem on Wisdom in Baruch 3:9–4:4 (date uncertain) likewise identifies Wisdom with Torah. Further allusions to Prov 8 appear in the Wisdom of Solomon (1<sup>st</sup> cent. B.C.E. or C.E.). Wisdom 8:3 affirms the role of Wisdom in governing the world and alludes to Prov 8:22: “She glorifies her noble birth by living with God, / and the Lord of all loves her.” Wisdom 9:9 contains another allusion to this passage: “With you is wisdom, she who knows your works / and was present when you made the world.” In these early Jewish sources the interpretation of “wisdom” appears to move beyond poetic personification to include some kind of hypostatization.<sup>1</sup>

2. *New Testament Allusions to Proverbs 8.* Various NT descriptions of Jesus Christ as Wisdom allude to Prov 8:22–31. These include especially John 1:1–3 (which combines Gen 1:1 with Prov 8:22–23); 1 Cor 1:24, 30; and Heb 1:1–4. The NT writers evidently regarded the “wisdom” of Prov 8 as more than personification; it is hypostatization that finds fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup> We will return to these NT passages again briefly in our discussion below.

3. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers.* In patristic Christology, Prov 8:22–31 constituted one of the most popular OT passages used with reference to Christ.<sup>3</sup> Justin Martyr (d. 166), in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, gave

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion, see, e.g., Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 139–145; and P. W. Skehan, “Structures in Poems on Wisdom: Proverbs 8 and Sirach 24,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 41 (1979): 365–379.

<sup>2</sup> This paper is not the place for exegesis of the relevant NT passages. For brief discussions of the basis of Logos-Wisdom Christology in Prov 8 and other OT passages, see, e.g., Raymond Brown, “Wisdom Motifs,” in *The Gospel According to John, I–XII*, AB 29 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), cxxii–cxxv; George R. Beasley-Murray, “The Origin of the Logos Concept,” *John*, WBC 36 (Waco: Word, 1987), 6–10; George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 237–242; A. van Roon, “The Relation between Christ and the Wisdom of God According to Paul,” *Novum Testamentum* 16 (1974): 207–219; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 4–5; and Williston Walker et al., *A History of the Christian Church*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons: 1985), 37–39.

<sup>3</sup> See Maurice Dowling, “Proverbs 8:22–31 in the Christology of the Early Fathers,” *Irish Biblical Studies* 24 (June, 2002): 99–117. Dowling, 99, summarizes: “Most Fathers

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Prov 8:22 an (allegorical/typological) christological interpretation, showing that Christ (or the Holy Spirit) was always with the Father and emphasizing the distinction between the Logos and the Father and the priority of the Logos over Creation.<sup>4</sup>

Athenagoras, in his *Supplication for the Christians* (ca. 177),<sup>5</sup> and Tertullian (ca. 160–220), in his *Against Praxeas*,<sup>6</sup> follow Justin in identifying Logos (=Wisdom) with the eternal Son of God, but use Prov 8 as part of their two-stage history of the Logos to depict the Logos passing from an “immanent” state in the mind of God to an “expressed” state sent forth for the purpose of creation.

Origen of Alexandria (185–254), in his *De principiis (First Principles)*, clearly understands Wisdom to refer not simply to an impersonal attribute, but to the first-born Son of God. Wisdom is the beginning of God’s ways in the sense that “she contained within herself either the beginnings or forms or species of all creation.”<sup>7</sup>

4. *The Fourth Century Christological Debates and Subsequent Orthodox Christianity.* In the Christological controversies of the fourth century, this passage took on enormous significance. The opposing participants in the debate generally proceeded under the same assumption that wisdom in Prov 8:22–31 was an hypostasis (*hypostatikē*, distinct substance or essence of the Person) of the Son of God. But the Arians used the translation of the LXX (Old Greek) of v. 22 (“The Lord created [*ektise*] me . . .”) as evidence that although the Son of God was divine and existed before the creation of the world, He was not eternal, but rather originated in time and was subordinate to God.

The orthodox view (articulated especially by Eusebius of Caesarea [ca. 260–339]<sup>8</sup> and Athanasius [300–373]<sup>9</sup>) followed a Greek variant (*ektēsato*, “acquired,” found in some LXX MSS and in Aquila, Symmachus,

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assume without question that the OT Wisdom passages speak of the Son (or Word) of God.”

<sup>4</sup> Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho (Dialogus cum Tryphone)* 61.3–5, in *The Ante-Nicean Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Repr. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 1:227–228). The abbreviation ANF is used hereafter.

<sup>5</sup> Athenagoras, *Legatio pro Christianis* 10.3 (ANF 2:133).

<sup>6</sup> Tertullian, *Against Praxeas (Adversus Praxean)* 6–7 (ANF 3:9.601–602).

<sup>7</sup> Origen, *First Principles (De principiis [Peri archōn])* 1.2.2 (ANF 4:246).

<sup>8</sup> See especially Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel (Praeparatio evangelica)* 7.12.5; 11.14.2–10; and *Demonstration of the Gospel (Demonstratio evangelica)* 5.1.

<sup>9</sup> See in particular Athanasius, *Orations against the Arians (Orationes contra Arianos)* 2.46, 57–61, 73–77.

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Theodotion, Philo; cf. Vulgate) in v. 22. This verse was translated thus: “The Lord constituted/acquired/possessed [*ektēsato*] me as head of creation . . .” Such a translation was seen to imply both the Son’s co-eternal existence and unique relationship with the Father. Even if the reading of the LXX translation of *ektise* “created” is retained, as by the Arians, orthodox theologians argued that the word “create” in Scripture does not always imply “to bring into being out of nothing,” but may be used metaphorically. They explained *ektise* “created” in Prov 8:22 as referring not to the actual existence, but to the position, or place, of the Son as “head of creation” or at the time of His incarnation.<sup>10</sup>

The Council of Nicea in 325 rejected Arius’ subordinationist view of Christ, and Christian orthodoxy never again used the LXX (OG) translation of Prov 8:22 to speak of Trinitarian relations, but rather only the incarnation of the Son. The Christological interpretation was assumed throughout the sweep of Christian history until modern times

5. *The Eighteenth-Nineteenth Centuries.* The Christological interpretation of Prov 8 was still popular among 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century conservative commentators. So, e.g., Matthew Henry’s 1710 Commentary states regarding wisdom in Prov 8:22–31:

That it is an intelligent and divine person that here speaks seems very plain, and that it is not meant of a mere essential property of the divine nature, for Wisdom here has personal properties and actions; and that intelligent divine person can be no other than the Son of God himself, to whom the principal things here spoken of wisdom are attributed in other scriptures, and we must explain scripture by itself.<sup>11</sup>

Charles Bridges’ 1846 *Exposition of Proverbs* comments upon Prov 8:22–31 as follows:

It must be a perverted imagination that can suppose an attribute here. So glorious are the rays of eternal supreme Deity, distinct personality, and essential unity, that the mysterious,

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<sup>10</sup> For further discussion, see Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18A (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 411; and Dowling, 105–117. Dowling not only surveys the views of Eusebius and Athanasius on Prov 8, but treats extensively the allegorical anti-Arian interpretation of this passage by Marcellus of Ancyra, many of whose allegorical interpretations of specific verses were rejected by Eusebius.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Old Tappan: Revell, [original, 1710]), 3:835.

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ever-blessed Being—“the Word, who was in the beginning with God, and was God” (John, i.1,2)—now undoubtedly stands before us. Curiously to pry into the mode of his subsistence would be “intruding into those things which we have not seen.” (Col. ii. 18. 1 Tim. vi. 16.) To receive his own revelation of himself is our reverential privilege.<sup>12</sup>

David Thomas, in his 1885 commentary on Proverbs, insists regarding 8:23–31: “Here we must speak of Wisdom as a person, and that person is none other than He who is called the ‘Wisdom of God.’ These verses may be well regarded as His autobiographic sketch. He alone can write His own history, for His existence and experience date back to periods anterior to the creation.”<sup>13</sup>

At the same time, an analysis of Prov 8 is strangely absent from the four-volume *Christology of the Old Testament* by Ernst Hengstenberg, the great 19<sup>th</sup> century defender of Christian orthodoxy, and a cursory survey of other more recent treatments of Messianic Prophecies of the OT also failed to turn up any reference to Prov 8. The Christological interpretation of this chapter in Proverbs seems to have largely evaporated during the nineteenth century, perhaps in the face of ever-increasing application of historical-critical methodology.

**B. Recent Interpretations**

In the twentieth century and beyond, the Christological interpretation has been largely abandoned, at least in the major commentaries and scholarly studies. In the biblical scholarship of the last century there have been three main lines of interpretation of Wisdom in Prov 1–9, and more specifically, Prov 8:22–31.

*1. Wisdom as a Goddess.* A number of interpreters in the last century have argued that the evidence from Prov 8 (in its ANE context) points toward the interpretation of Wisdom in this chapter as the survival of the ancient Near Eastern wisdom goddesses.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Charles Bridges, *An Exposition of Proverbs* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959 [original, 1846]), 79.

<sup>13</sup> David Thomas, *Book of Proverbs: Expository and Homiletical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1982), 95. [Reprint of *The Practical Philosopher*, The Homilistic Library 5 (London: R. D. Dickinson, 1885).]

<sup>14</sup> For surveys of the theories that Lady Wisdom in Prov 1–9 is dependent upon ancient Near Eastern goddess mythology, see especially, Claudia V. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Sheffield: Almond, 1985), 23–34; Michael D. Coogan, “The Goddess Wisdom—‘Where Can She Be Found?’” in Ki Baruch Hu: *Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Judaic Studies in Honor of Baruch A. Levine*, ed. Rob-

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Hermann Gunkel, father of OT Form Criticism, was one of the first to point out that Lady Wisdom in Prov 1–9 had the qualities of a goddess, and he suggested a Mesopotamian mythological background.<sup>15</sup> A seminal article by William F. Albright in 1920 reconstructed the existence of a goddess of life and wisdom, also imaged as the goddess of the vine, which was manifested as Siduri-Sabitu of the Gilgamesh Epic and identified with Ishtar by the Phoenicians. Following Gunkel, Albright argued that Lady Wisdom in Prov 1–9 was too mythological to have originated in Israel and posited a Mesopotamian origin.<sup>16</sup> After the discovery of Canaanite mythological texts at Ugarit, in the 1950's Albright revised his theory and proposed a Canaanite goddess of Wisdom brought forth by the god El as the source of the relationship between Wisdom and Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>17</sup>

Other scholars have seen not a Mesopotamian, but an Egyptian background for Lady Wisdom, particularly in the goddesses Isis and Maat. For example, in the late 1960's Christa Bauer-Kayatz set forth the hypothesis that the Egyptian goddess Maat was the ancestor of Lady Wisdom of Prov 1–9, providing numerous parallels between the two.<sup>18</sup> She especially noted the structural/thematic parallels between the self-predication of gods and goddesses in Egyptian literature and the self-predication of Woman Wisdom in Prov 8. Specific parallels with the Egyptian goddess Isis have also been traced by W. L. Knox and others.<sup>19</sup>

Other scholars find the province of the Wisdom Goddess of Prov 8 in the land of Israel itself. In his 1986 monograph, *Wisdom and the Book of*

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ert Chazan, William W. Hallo, and Lawrence H. Schiffman (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 203–209; and William A. Young, “Wisdom, Nature, and the Feminine: Proverbs 8 in Cross-Cultural Perspective,” *Proceedings of the Central States Society of Biblical Literature and American Schools of Oriental Research* 4 (2001): 221–223.

<sup>15</sup> Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis: Übers. und erklärt. Mit einem Geleitwort von Walter Baumgartner* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht, 1969), 1:95.

<sup>16</sup> William F. Albright, “The Goddess of Life and Wisdom,” *American Journal of Semitic Languages* 36 (1919/1920): 258–294 (esp. 285–286).

<sup>17</sup> William F. Albright, “Some Canaanite-Phoenician Sources of Hebrew Wisdom,” in Martin Noth and D. Winton Thomas, *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (VTSup 3; Leiden: Brill, 1955), 1–45.

<sup>18</sup> Christa Bauer-Kayatz, *Studien zu Proverbien 1–9* (WMANT 22; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1966); and idem, *Einführung in die alttestamentliche Weisheit* (BibS(N) 55; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1969). See also, Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (trans. James D. Martin; Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), 152–153.

<sup>19</sup> W. L. Knox, “The Divine Wisdom,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 38 (1937): 230–237; cf. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 336–338.

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*Proverbs: A Hebrew Goddess Redefined*,<sup>20</sup> Bernhard Lang postulates that ancient Israelite society was largely polytheistic, worshiping at least one goddess, Astarte (Queen of Heaven), along with Yahweh, and against this background Lady “Wisdom must be understood as another goddess.”<sup>21</sup> Lang suggests that she was “the divine patroness of the Israelite school system,”<sup>22</sup> and in Prov 8 the goddess Wisdom, “watching the Creator fashion the world, is an exalted image of the teacher observing nature and demonstrating to his students the wonders of creation.”<sup>23</sup> Lang insists concerning Wisdom in Prov 8: “While remaining on one level a teacher, she is also a goddess who judges the rulers and dwells in the presence of the creator god.”<sup>24</sup>

In light of textual and archaeological references to the goddess Asherah in an Israelite setting, still other interpreters would associate the Goddess Wisdom, alluded to in Prov 8, with the Canaanite goddess Asherah, Yahweh’s consort, whose worship was eventually wiped out in ancient Israel and Judah.<sup>25</sup>

Since the 1980’s, feminist theology, especially in North America, has specifically focused upon the figure of the goddess Wisdom (*hokmā*) in Israel, including references in Prov 8, exploring the possibilities of this figure becoming the foundation for a new Christian spirituality.<sup>26</sup>

2. *Wisdom as Poetic Personification.* While modern scholars generally acknowledge that Prov 1–9 (and especially Prov 8) probably reflect

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<sup>20</sup> Bernhard Lang, *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: A Hebrew Goddess Redefined* (New York: Pilgrim, 1986).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>25</sup> See Silvia Schroer, “Weise Frauen und Ratgeberinnen in Israel,” *Biblische Notizen* 51 (1990): 45; Judith M. Hadley, “Yahweh and ‘His Asherah’: Archaeological and Textual Evidence for the Cult of the Goddess,” in Walter Dietrich and Martin A. Klopfenstein, ed., *Ein Gott allein? JHWH-Verehrung und biblischer Monotheismus im Kontext der israelitischen und altorientalischen Religionsgeschichte* (Freiburg: U of Freiburg P; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 235–268; Coogan, 204.

<sup>26</sup> See, e.g., Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983); Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* (Boston: Beacon, 1983), 54–61; Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (1985); Susan Cady, Marian Ronan, and Hal Tausig, *Sophia: The Future of Feminist Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986); and Silvia Schroer, *Wisdom Has Built Her House: Studies on the Figure of Sophia in the Bible*, trans. Linda M. Maloney and William McDonough (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2000).

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some ANE mythological understanding of Wisdom as a goddess, many conclude that in its present literary setting within the book of Proverbs, “the personification wisdom in chapter viii is indeed poetic only and not ontological.”<sup>27</sup> The goddess mythology has been demythologized, and this passage is to be taken as poetic personification (abstraction made personal for the sake of poetic vividness) of Wisdom, not the identification of another personal deity besides Yahweh or of an hypostasis of an attribute of Yahweh (an actual heavenly being).<sup>28</sup>

For Gerhard von Rad, Lady Wisdom must be seen within Israel’s historical process of “theologizing” human wisdom; she is the personified “voice of world order” who summons and instructs humans.<sup>29</sup> For Lang, after Wisdom loses her status in Israel as a goddess (as Israel moves from polytheism to monotheism), she becomes a “personification of school wisdom or God’s own wisdom.”<sup>30</sup> For Claudia Camp, Woman Wisdom is an overarching metaphor of feminine poetic personification, the connecting symbol unifying the whole book of Proverbs, which (in post-exilic times) takes over the role of the king to mediate between divine and human realms.<sup>31</sup>

Some evangelical commentators, while recognizing the immediate context as thoroughly metaphorical (poetic personification), have also suggested that in light of the wider canonical setting, “the personifying of wisdom, far from overshooting the literal truth, was a preparation for its full statement, since the agent of creation was no mere activity of God, but the Son, His eternal Word, Wisdom and Power (see also John 1:1–14; 1 Cor 1:24, 30; Heb 1:1–4).”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, AB 18 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965), 71. For a survey of the theories that personified Wisdom is dependent upon ancient Near Eastern sources, see especially Camp, 23–34.

<sup>28</sup> Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon*, trans. M. G. Easton, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 1:183. So Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman, 1993), 108: “The ‘birth’ of Wisdom is metaphorical and part of a poetic personification.” Cf. Roland Murphy, “Wisdom and Creation,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104 (1985): 3–11.

<sup>29</sup> Von Rad, 153–166.

<sup>30</sup> Lang, 129. See his fuller discussion in pp. 126–146.

<sup>31</sup> Camp, 283–291.

<sup>32</sup> Derek Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1964), 79.



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3. *Hypostatization of Wisdom*. Helmer Ringgren's 1947 monograph, *Word and Wisdom*,<sup>33</sup> represents a major modern attempt to argue for the theory of hypostatization with regard to Wisdom. Ringgren refers to hypostasis in a "wider definition of the term" than the theological sense of "person of the Trinity" (used in the fourth century debates); it is for him "a quasi-personification of certain attributes proper to God, occupying an intermediate position between personalities and abstract beings."<sup>34</sup> According to Ringgren's theory, while in other ANE cultures the process of hypostatization led to the addition of another deity to the pantheon, in Israel, with the onset of monotheism, this process was aborted, bringing about a reality less than another deity but more than mere poetic personification. In the Hebrew Bible, the process of hypostatization reached its fullest realization in Prov 8:22–31. In this passage, according to Ringgren, Wisdom is not an "abstraction or a purely poetic personification but a concrete being, self-existent beside God."<sup>35</sup> Others who have taken over Ringgren's hypostatization hypothesis include Roger Whybray, who concludes that in Prov 8:22–31, "wisdom is clearly represented as a person in conformity with the context."<sup>36</sup>

Other interpreters who do not follow Ringgren's hypothesis of the general ANE process of hypostatization nonetheless argue that the depiction of wisdom in Prov 8:22–31 clearly transcends poetic personification. So, e.g., Bauer-Kayatz: "[Wisdom,] which is merely a 'poetic personification' in ch. 3, becomes in 8:22–31 a hypostasis of divine wisdom, an entity with a virtually independent existence. . . ."<sup>37</sup>

**C. A Suggested Interpretation of "Wisdom": A Divine Person**

With regard to Wisdom in the book of Proverbs (especially Prov 8:12–36), I have become convinced by those modern studies that identify

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<sup>33</sup> See, e.g., Helmer Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom: Studies in the Hypostatization of Divine Qualities and Functions in the Ancient Near East* (Lund: Haken Ohlssons Boktryckeri, 1947).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 (quoting William O. E. Oesterley and G. H. Box, *The Religion and Worship of the Synagogue*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. [London: Pitman and Sons, 1911], 169, who themselves do not use the term "hypostasis").

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>36</sup> Roger N. Whybray, *Wisdom in Proverbs: The Concept of Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9*, SBT 45 (Naperville: Allenson, 1965), 98–104 (citation is p. 99); *idem*, *The Book of Proverbs* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1972), 50–52; and *idem*, "Proverbs VIII 22–31 and Its Supposed Prototypes," in James Crenshaw, ed., *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom* (New York: KTAV, 1976), 390–400.

<sup>37</sup> Camp, 30, summarizing the view of Christa Bauer-Kayatz, *Studien zu Proverbien 1–9*; cf. Christa Bauer-Kayatz, *Einführung in die alttestamentliche Weisheit*, 70.

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*ḥokmâ* (“Wisdom”) as an hypostatization for divinity (in the sense of an actual divine person). Especially impressive is the evidence that Wisdom in Proverbs assumes the very prerogatives elsewhere reserved for Yahweh alone in the Hebrew Bible: giver of life and death (Prov 8:35–36)<sup>38</sup>; source of legitimate government (8:15–16)<sup>39</sup>; the One who is to be sought after, found, and called (1:28; 8:17)<sup>40</sup>; the one who loves and is to be loved (8:17)<sup>41</sup>; the giver of wealth (8:18–21)<sup>42</sup> and security (1:33)<sup>43</sup>; and perhaps most significantly, a source of revelation (Prov 8:6–10, 19, 32, 34; 30:3–5).<sup>44</sup> In Prov 9:1 (cf. 7:6), Wisdom builds herself a temple “as befits a deity of her status . . .”<sup>45</sup> It is also “quite plausible that the plural construction *ḥkmwt* in Prov 1:20; 9:1 . . . [and elsewhere in Wisdom literature—Prov 14:1; 24:7; Ps 49:4; Sir 4:11; 32(35):16] as a *pluralis intensitatis* may be a conscious parallel construction to *ʾlhym*, as has been proposed.”<sup>46</sup>

In Prov 8, specifically v. 12, Wisdom uses the common rhetorical self-asseverating form of “divine self-praise” (“I am Wisdom”) regularly reserved elsewhere in Scripture and in the ancient Near East for deity: “I am Yahweh your God”; “I am Ishtar of Arbela”; “I am Isis the divine.”<sup>47</sup> Biblical parallels to this “divine self-praise” with the same grammatical

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. Prov 10:27; 14:27, and throughout the biblical canon. Elizabeth Achtemeier rightly points out that “No one but God can say ‘He who finds me finds life,’ for God is the source of all life” (*Preaching from the Old Testament* [Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989], 173).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Num 11:16–17; 1 Sam 2:10; 10:1; 1 Kgs 3:4–15; 10:9; Ps 2:7.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. 2 Chr 15:2; Hos 5:6; Amos 5:4–6; 8:12; Ezek 8:18; Deut 1:45; 4:29; Judg 10:11–12; Job 35:12; Pss 22:3; 28:1; Isa 1:15; Jer 11:11, 14; 14:12; Mic 3:4; Zech 7:13.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. 1 Kgs 3:3; 1 Sam 2:30; 2 Sam 12:23; Neh 13:26; Isa 48:14.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. 1 Kgs 3:13; 1 Chr 29:12; 2 Chr 1:12; 17:5.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Lev 25:18, 19; Jer 32:37, etc.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Prov 29:18; Pss 19:10; 119:1–2. Achtemeier notes that “Wisdom here has become a source of revelation. . . . Such a view contradicts everything we have heretofore learned about the Old Testament, because the created world has here become a source of revelation” (173–174). Achtemeier points out most of these divine prerogatives assumed by Wisdom, but fails to recognize the implication of the hypostatization of Wisdom.

<sup>45</sup> Coogan, 203. Does the “seven pillars” of this house allude to the seven days of creation? This is possible, although not certain.

<sup>46</sup> Schroer, *Wisdom Has Built Her House*, 27.

<sup>47</sup> This kind of self-predication is also used by kings, who in some sense claim divinity or an intimate connection with the divine: “I am Azitawadda, blessed by Baal”; “I am Kilamuwa son of Hayya.” For analysis of parallels with the Egyptian statements of self-predication on the part of gods and (divine) kings, see the pioneering work of Bauer-Kayatz, *Studien zu Proverbien 1–9*, 76–93.

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structure can be found in Ezek 12:25; 35:12; Zech 10:6; Mal 3:6.<sup>48</sup> Based upon these precise grammatical parallels, I agree with scholars who argue that the better translation of Prov 8:12 is “I am Wisdom . . .” not “I, wisdom . . .” and that this is a form of “divine self-praise.” From the perspective of genre analysis, I concur with Silvia Schroer that Wisdom “in the book of Proverbs is a divine figure. . . . [who] speaks like a deity, or like the God of Israel.”<sup>49</sup>

Evidence presented by an array of modern exegetes is difficult to ignore, i.e., evidence of “Wisdom’s self-presentation as a divine figure in chapter 8 . . .”<sup>50</sup> As Schroer puts it, “This important text about *ḥokmâ* [Prov 8:22–31] at the very beginning of creation leaves no doubt that she is a divine figure. She is not a created work, but rather was present before all created things and is an authoritative participant in the creation of the world.”<sup>51</sup>

The later intertextual allusions to Prov 8, both by writers of later Judaism and of the NT, seem clearly to have understood this poem as an hypostasis (i.e., an actual divine person) and not just personification.<sup>52</sup> R. B. Y. Scott restates this point: “These later interpretations of the figure of Wisdom seem to assume that the writer of this poem thought of Wisdom as an hypostasis of Yahweh, that is, as having some kind of independent existence.”<sup>53</sup> But what divine person is spoken of in Prov 8? This draws us to the next issue.

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. Samuel L. Terrien, *Till the Heart Sings: A Biblical Theology of Manhood and Womanhood* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 94–95.

<sup>49</sup> Schroer, *Wisdom Has Built Her House*, 27. Samuel Terrien hesitates to accept the theological consequences of this usage of the rhetorical form of aretology (“divine self-praise”)—that Wisdom here is the hypostatization of God, although in further discussion he acknowledges that “Wisdom portrays herself as the daughter of Yahweh” and that “Godhead was viewed as a collective personality” and that perhaps here, “without falling into a crass polytheism” is a suggestion of “the transpersonality of God” (97).

<sup>50</sup> Carol A. Newsom, “Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs 1–9,” in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 157.

<sup>51</sup> Schroer, *Wisdom Has Built Her House*, 28.

<sup>52</sup> We have already noted in our history of interpretation references to early Jewish interpretations and the NT references: Wis 7:22; 8:3, 4, 6; 9:9; John 1:3; Col 1:15–16; and Heb 1:3. See also Philo, *de Sacerdot* 5. Cf. the intertextual linkage also with Job 28, where Wisdom should also be “best understood as personal rather than abstract, and as divine” (Coogan, 207).

<sup>53</sup> Scott, 70. However, Scott sees this as part of the mythological language borrowed and adapted by the author of Proverbs in his poetic personification (not hypostatization) of wisdom.

## II. The Identity of Wisdom in Proverbs 8, in Light of the Word *ʾāmôn* in Proverbs 8:30

As we have noted above in our review of literature, even before the rise of feminist interpretation, many modern commentators recognized that in this passage Wisdom “addresses men in the tones of a goddess who has been associated with Yahweh in the creation of the world and its inhabitants. . . . Wisdom is presented here *as if* she were a self-conscious divine being, distinct from though subordinate to Yahweh. . . .”<sup>54</sup>

Michael D. Coogan summarizes the current thinking: “There is a scholarly consensus, despite considerable disagreement about the origins and interpretation of the language used, that Wisdom is depicted as a goddess in such texts as Proverbs 1–9. . . .”<sup>55</sup>

I would acknowledge that the language in Prov 8 describes a divine being, and based upon the weight of evidence, would agree with the many scholars who argue that this language goes beyond poetic personification to that of hypostasis (description of an actual divine being). But is this divine being a goddess, a female deity? Obviously, since the gender of the Hebrew word for “wisdom,” *hokmâ*, is feminine, the hypostatization of this attribute of God would naturally take on feminine gender in descriptions of Wisdom’s actions. But is there a hint, perhaps, that this hypostasis of “Wisdom” is not to be ultimately conceived of as feminine? I believe this hint is found in the word *ʾāmôn* found in Prov 8:30.

The precise meaning of this Hebrew word *ʾāmôn* is debated; the traditional and most widely-accepted meaning is “workman/craftsman,” but some (ancient and modern) interpreters suggest the meaning “child, nursling.” Translating as “nursling” or “small child” requires revocalization of the MT from *ʾāmôn* to *ʾāmûn*. Cleon Rogers sets forth strong evidence for retaining the MT and translating as “master workman.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>55</sup> Coogan, 203.

<sup>56</sup> See Cleon L. Rogers, III, “The Meaning and Significance of the Hebrew Word *ʾāmôn* in Proverbs 8,30,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 109 (1997): 208–221; cf. Patrick W. Skehan, “Structures in Poems on Wisdom: Proverbs 8 and Sirach 24,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 41 [1979]: 365–379; and Delitzsch, 190–193. A third meaning, “trustworthy [friend]” is a further alternative, suggested in the ancient Greek translations of Symmachus and Theodotion. However, this translation seems to be an “etymological deduction” based on the etymology of the root *ʾmn* (which has the root meaning of “firm”) rather than an actual attested meaning of the term. See Richard J. Clifford, *Proverbs: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 100–101, for the (related) suggestion that like its probable Akkadian cognate *ummānu*,

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First, Rogers summarizes the lexical evidence for this meaning in the OT and in cognate languages. The Hebrew root occurs elsewhere in the OT as a personal name “Ammon” (Neh 7:59; 1 Kgs 22:26; 1 Chr 3:14; 2 Chr 33:20–25; Jer 1:2; 25:3; cf. another form of the Hebrew name, “Amnon,” 2 Sam 3:2; 13:1; 1 Chr 3:1; 4:20). It is used in Jer 52:15 (though disputed because of the parallel in 2 Kgs 25:11). It is probably a variation of another word *ʾomān*, which in Song 7:2 clearly means “artist.” This same word probably is found in Phoenician (YMMANAI) as a stamp on a brick, and it clearly appears in Aramaic and NW Semitic with the meaning of “architect.” It is also clearly attested in Akkadian, probably related to *ummānu* “workman”—designating a particular class of skilled experts (musicians, skilled craftsmen, sages or scholars).

Rogers also gives evidence that the word *ʾāmôn* is found in later Hebrew with the meaning “craftsman” and shows from the Targum that the Rabbis understood the meaning in Prov 8:30 to be “architect.” Versional support for this meaning is found in the LXX, Vulgate, and Syriac. The MT pointing indicates that the Masoretes understood the word to mean “craftsman,” as does the allusion to this text in the Wisdom of Solomon (7:21).

Rogers points out that such meaning is also supported by the immediate context of Prov 8, in which the emphasis is upon the orderly building and craftsmanship in creation. Compare the words “make” (v. 26), “establish” (v. 27), and “foundation” (v. 29).

Rogers also summarizes evidence for translating *ʾāmôn* as “child” or “nursling” and concludes that this is much weaker. He points out that this translation arises largely because of uneasiness with having wisdom being a “mastercraftsman” and hence, a co-creator with Yahweh. According to this suggestion it would be easy to have a scribal confusion between a *holem* and a *shureq*. Aquila’s translation supports this variant, as does that of some rabbinic exegetes. It parallels the idea of the Egyptian goddess Maat playing as a child before Ra. And this reading is congruent

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the term can mean “scribe, sage,” and should be translated thus in Prov 8:22. Clifford suggests that the MT wrongly vocalized the word. Against this view, I find that Clifford makes the Akkadian cognate the final determiner of meaning and ignores the inner-biblical evidence (especially from Cant 7:2) for the meaning of “craftsman.” Even in Akkadian, as Rogers notes, the term *ummānu* can mean “artisan” or “craftsman” as well as “sage, scribe.” I concur with Rogers that the meaning of “craftsman” better comports with the immediate context of Prov 8:30. Clifford seems to make another less-than-natural reading of the text to avoid having Wisdom be a co-creator with Yahweh in a post-exilic monotheistic context.

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with the semantic field of *ʾmn* in the Qal. Finally, it is argued by those supporting the translation of “nursling” that the child imagery fits the context of the “birthing” imagery of vv. 22–24.

In response to the suggestion that one translate *ʾāmôn* as “child” or “nursling,” Rogers points out that Egyptian parallels are far from convincing and should not be the final determiner of meaning. The immediate context of Prov 8: 30–31 is not birth, as in vv. 22–24 (where it is emphasized that wisdom pre-existed the created world), but the ordering of the world, in which context the child imagery would not be appropriate.<sup>57</sup> The versional evidence of Aquila and some rabbis is apparently another attempt to solve a theological problem, i.e., of having wisdom be a co-creator, rather than the representation of a more original reading. It is easy to see why a scribe would wish to read “infant” instead of “mastercraftsman” out of a concern for monotheism. Thus “the versional evidence would suggest an intentional change as an attempt to solve this perceived theological dilemma. This argument becomes even stronger considering that the word *ʾāmôn* occurs only here. It would be unlikely for the change to occur in the opposite direction.”<sup>58</sup>

While Rogers presents what is to me persuasive evidence that *ʾāmôn* in Prov 8:22 should be translated “master craftsman,” he nonetheless resists applying this term to Wisdom because he contends that (1) this would imply that Wisdom was a (co-) creator and the motif of (co-) creator does not seem applicable to Wisdom; and (2) the term *ʾāmôn* is masculine, and since the antecedent of a word in Hebrew is generally the same gender, one would expect a feminine form of *ʾāmôn* here.

These obstacles need not cause the interpreter to look for a rare (and in my view improbable) grammatical construction (“accusative of state”) in this context to explain the difficulties, as Rogers does, and ascribe the term Mastercraftsman to Yahweh rather than Wisdom.<sup>59</sup> Instead, the very

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<sup>57</sup> See also the contextual argumentation of Clifford (100) against the meaning of “nursling”: “If Wisdom were a child, the analogy that is drawn between her relationship to God and her relationship to human beings (vv. 30b–31) would not make sense. She has an adult relationship to God and an adult relationship to human beings.”

<sup>58</sup> Rogers, 218.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 220, translates: “I was close to Him [the Lord in His role as] a master craftsman.” In this case, “the antecedent of the word is not Wisdom, but is the Lord” (221). However, as Rogers points out (220), in the construction that he suggests (an accusative of state, or alternatively, a noun in apposition to the preceding pronominal suffix), the noun is usually either definite or a personal name. Rogers’ reply that we are dealing here with poetry where articles occur inconsistently is not really a sufficient response.

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dissonances that Rogers points out are in my view internal textual indicators that Wisdom is here hypostatized and ultimately refers to another Person within the Godhead. Seen as hypostatization for the Son of God, the grammatical and contextual difficulties disappear: the Son (masculine in gender, as indicated by the masculine “Master Workman”) is indeed Co-Creator with Yahweh.

This inner-textual hint is perhaps reinforced in Prov 30:4 (with possible allusion to Father and Son Co-Creators): “Who has ascended into heaven, or descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has bound the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is His Son's name, If you know?”<sup>60</sup>

And such interpretation is further supported by the allusion to Prov 8 in the NT (especially 1 Cor 1:24, 30; Col 1:15–16), as we noted above in our review of literature. Further exploration of these and other possible NT allusions to this passage lies beyond the scope of this paper.

Ultimately, however, I suggest one cannot say that Wisdom in Prov 1–9 is either male or female in gender. A recent penetrating article in *Revue Biblique* by Françoise Mies<sup>61</sup> presents a fascinating thesis. I quote the printed English abstract of the French article:

Personified Wisdom in Pr 9 is [widely] considered as a feminine figure. This interpretation is nevertheless corroborated neither by the study of this chapter nor by the analysis of the other passages of the book presenting Personified Wisdom (1, 20–33; 8), or of the first seven chapters in which the sexual and gendering atmosphere is nevertheless emphasized. However, Wisdom is not masculine. As God, it exceeds all sexual activity.<sup>62</sup>

Mies’ article has forced me to go back and look at Prov 1–9. Indeed I find the author is correct in pointing out that aside from the feminine gender of the word *ḥokmâ* “wisdom” (and here there is no choice in the Hebrew language, for the word *ḥokmâ* is invariably feminine in gender, and pronouns that refer to *ḥokmâ* must necessarily be feminine), there is simply no indication in the context that “Wisdom” is to be taken as a

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<sup>60</sup> See the NJKV and NASB, which take the pronoun “He” to be God, and (in the NKJV) the word “Son” is capitalized.

<sup>61</sup> Françoise Mies, “‘Dame Sagesse’ en Proverbes 9 une personnification féminine?” *Revue Biblique* 108/2 (2001): 161–183.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

feminine figure! Rather, as Mies forcefully argues, “Wisdom” as a divine being is presented in a neutral way, beyond the polarity of sexuality.<sup>63</sup>

This description, I maintain, precisely fits the Second Person of the Godhead. Although female imagery is utilized of Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible, and Yahweh is denoted by the masculine “He,” ultimately He is presented as beyond the polarity of sexuality.

But if Prov 8 does refer to Christ, what about the apparent imagery of “birth” in vv. 22–25? Was Arius (and now Jehovah’s Witnesses) right after all? Was there a time before which the Son was not? This takes us to our next issue.

### III. Meaning of the “Birth” and “Installment” Language in Prov 8:22–24

The meaning of *qānā* in v. 22 has been debated over the centuries. Does it mean “created” or “possessed”? Derek Kidner points out that “Elsewhere this verb [*qānā*] predominantly means ‘get,’ and hence ‘possess’ (see, e.g., Pr. 4:5, 7, where wisdom is the object, as here.) Of its 84 Old Testament occurrences, only six or seven allow the sense ‘create’ (Gn. 14:19, 22; Ex. 15:16; Dt. 32:6; Pss. 74:2; 139:13; Pr. 8:22), and even these do not require it. The derived nouns still more strongly emphasize possession.”<sup>64</sup> More recently, parallels with Ugaritic literature have nonetheless swung scholarly opinion in favor of “create” because of the phrase *qnyt ʿelm*, usually translated as “creatress of the gods.” But as C. H. Gordon indicates, the idea of “create” both in Ugaritic literature and the OT parallels is in the specific sense of *parenthood*: “Gn. 4:1 and Pr. 8:22 refer primarily to bearing or begetting children.”<sup>65</sup> This seems to be the consensus position in recent scholarship.

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<sup>63</sup> Mies points out, among other things, that unlike references to Lady Folly, which repeatedly use the Hebrew word for “woman” (Prov 9:13; 11:16; 12:4), there is no reference to “the woman Wisdom.” There is thus an asymmetry between Folly and Wisdom. Folly is a clearly depicted as a woman, but there are no uniquely feminine activities described for Wisdom (166–171). In Prov 8, Wisdom speaks in the first person so that one cannot discern any difference between masculine and feminine grammatically (172). Regarding the contention by many scholars that Wisdom erotically “seduces” her hearers in a sexual context with her use of the word “love,” Mies points out that the term “love” throughout the Bible, and in Proverbs in particular, is an expression of polysemy and often does not refer to erotic love (173–174).

<sup>64</sup> Kidner, *Proverbs*, 79.

<sup>65</sup> Cited in Kidner, *Proverbs*, 80. Cf. W. A. Irwin, “Where Shall Wisdom Be Found,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 80 (1961): 133–142; and R. N. Whybray, “Proverbs 8:22–31 and Its Supposed Prototypes,” *Vetus Testamentum* 15 (1965): 504–514.



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For some time I maintained that this phrase must mean “possessed” instead of “begotten.” But the following words in vv. 24–25 leave little doubt that “birth” language is being employed in this passage: “When there were no depths I was brought forth [*hōlālî*]. . . Before the hills, I was brought forth [*hōlālî*].” This term *hōlālî*, from the root *hûl*, in the Polel/Polal can mean “whirl, dance, writhe,” but in this context there is no doubt that it means “be brought forth” (cf. Ps 51:7 and Job 15:7) in the sense of childbirth. Thus, one cannot avoid the language of “birth” in reference to Christ long before His incarnation.

How does the description of “birth” apply to the One we now call the Second Member of the Godhead at the time before the beginning of creation? I suggest that the key is found in the accompanying expression of v. 23: “I have been established/installed [*nsk* III]<sup>66</sup> from everlasting, from the beginning, before there was ever an earth.”

The language in Prov 8:22–25 for Wisdom’s having been “established/installed” and “brought forth” before the creation of this world, is illuminated by parallel language in Ps 2:6–7, including, significantly, the only other biblical occurrence of the Hebrew word *nsk* III “install.”<sup>67</sup> Here Yahweh installs the Messianic king using the language of birth (=adoption). Yahweh declares:

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<sup>66</sup> See F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford, 1907), 651.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. The existence of a *nsk* III in the Hebrew Bible is rejected by Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm, eds., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. M. E. J. Richardson (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 703; the usage of *nsk* in Psa 2:6 is conjectured to be in need of an emendation, to be revocalized as derived from *skk*, meaning “fashion artfully;” the usage in Prov 8:23 is considered to be a *hapax legomenon* of *nsk* II meaning “be woven, shaped.” However, as noted by C. Dohmen, “*נָסַךְ*,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 9:460, with regard to Psa 2:6, “the implicit need for this revocalization . . . is questionable; this text possibly provides evidence for a broader semantic range of *nsk*.” Regarding Prov 8:23, Dohmen sides with O. Plöger (*Sprüche Salomos*, BK 17 [1984], 87), who “keeps the niphāl of *nsk*, translating it ‘be appointed.’” There is no need to follow a conjectured emendation when the Hebrew of the MT makes good sense. Whether one follows BDB in postulating *nsk* III for Psa 2:6 and Prov 8:23, which I find most likely, or suggests that *nsk* I, “to pour out,” has a broader semantic range including, in these two passages of the Hebrew Bible, the meaning “to anoint/install/appoint,” the resulting translation and intertextual linkage of Psa 2:6 and Prov 8:23 is the same. I concur with the majority of modern versions which translate these two passages as indicating the idea of “install,” “appoint,” “anoint [to an office],” “set up,” “establish,” or the like.

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Yet I have installed [*nsk* III] My King  
On My holy hill of Zion. (Ps 2:6)

And the Messianic king responds:

I will declare the decree:  
The Lord has said to Me,  
You are My Son,  
Today I have begotten you. (Ps 2:7)

Psalm 2, while probably having a local, historical application to the installation of the Davidic king in OT times, refers ultimately to the Messiah in His incarnation, and vss. 6–7 particularly to His being anointed as King after His resurrection and ascension.<sup>68</sup>

From this intertextual parallel with the usage in Ps 2, it seems clear that Prov 8, like Ps 2, is using reference to “birth” as technical language to describe the formal installation of royalty into a new office. Prov 8 is not speaking of a time before which Wisdom (the pre-incarnate Christ) did not exist; the text is not speaking of His literally being “begotten.” Rather, the passage seems to refer to the time of His installment into His office of Sonship “in the beginning” (which in light of the allusion to the “in the beginning” [using the same Hebrew word] of Gen 1:1, refers to the commencement of creation in the universe).<sup>69</sup>

I conclude that this whole section of Prov 8, suffused with language of begetting, linked to the technical word of installation (*nsk* III), in light of the intertextual parallel to both installation and begetting in Ps 2:6–7, is to be taken as technical terminology for installment into office in Prov 8, as in Ps 2. But what precisely was the office to which the Second Member of the Godhead was installed “in the beginning,” before sin and even before creation of the universe, as described in Prov 8? This leads us to the next section.

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<sup>68</sup> For internal evidence that Psalm 2, including especially vss. 6–7, refers ultimately to the Messiah, see my article, “New Testament Use of the Old Testament,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 5/1 (Spring 1994): 24, 37. Cf. Acts 13:33; Heb 1:5; 5:5.

<sup>69</sup> See my article, “The Biblical Account of Origins,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 14/1 (Spring 2003): 32–34, for evidence that the “beginning” in Gen 1:1 is referring to the beginning of creation in the entire universe, and not just the beginning of creation of this world and its surrounding heavenly spheres.

**IV. The Mediatorial Language of Prov 8:30–31**

According to Prov 8:30–31, Wisdom was beside Yahweh at creation, a “Master craftsman [*ʾāmon*]” (masculine) who was “rejoicing [*mēšaḥequet*] always before Him” (Prov 8:30) and at the same time “rejoicing [*mēšaḥequet*] in His inhabited world”—or, more specifically—“with the sons of men” (v. 31). What is described in these verses is nothing less than a role of Wisdom mediating between divinity and humanity (vv. 30b–31).

Numerous recent studies have recognized the mediatorial role of Wisdom in these verses. So, Shirley Wurst: “the text subtly demonstrates that Woman Wisdom is a mediator between creator and creation.”<sup>70</sup> Again, Samuel Terrien, in his *The Elusive Presence*: “The function of Wisdom is [=as, *sic*] the instrument of rapprochement between God and man is delineated more sharply in . . . Prov. 8:22–31.”<sup>71</sup> As another example, Tikva Frymer-Kensky writes: “Wisdom, beloved lover of men, is also the beloved of God. . . . As the lover of both men and God, she also joins them in her love. . . . In this way, she mediates, in her own way, the gulf between humanity and God.”<sup>72</sup>

Gale Yee analyzes how the macrostructure of Prov 8 leads to this same conclusion: “This climactic poem of Prov 8 is a highly intricate poetic piece. It is divided into three strophes framed by means of distant antithetical parallelism, while a third is fashioned in a chiasmus. Each stich within the strophes is interlinked by synonymous and antithetical parallelism and repetitions. The whole poem builds structurally to portray Wisdom as the ultimate mediator between God and humanity.”<sup>73</sup> Claudia Camp shows this to be the case within the chiastic microstructure of vv. 30–31. “Not only the context of the poem [Prov 8:30–31] but the structure itself [of these two verses] makes the theological point that Wisdom, who was begotten before creation and was present with God during creation, is also the primary link between God and humankind. . . . [O]ne can see the point clearly in the chiastic structure of

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<sup>70</sup> Shirley Wurst, “Woman Wisdom’s Ways: Ecolkinship,” in *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions*, ed. Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst, The Earth Bible 3 (Sheffield: Academic P; Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2001), 59.

<sup>71</sup> Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: The Heart of Biblical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978), 355.

<sup>72</sup> Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 181.

<sup>73</sup> Gale Yee, “An Analysis of Prov 8:22–31 According to Style and Structure,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 94 (1982): 64–65.

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8.30b–31. . . . In this poem, Wisdom is the only link between God and humans.”<sup>74</sup>

Putting together the aspects of the text that we have seen thus far, I suggest that Prov 8 is not indicating a time before which Wisdom (the pre-incarnate Christ) did not exist, but rather refers to the time of Christ’s installment into a new office at the commencement of creation and the particular role to which He is installed as the “Mediator” between an infinite God and His finite creatures.

Is there other biblical evidence for this mediatorial role of the pre-incarnate Son of God? I believe there is.

1. The Word (John 1:1)—“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” A “word” is a go-between between one’s mouth and another’s ear so that communication can take place. The Son of God was such a Word—mediating, facilitating communication between the Godhead and created beings.

2. The depiction of the pre-incarnate Son of God as an Angel (“messenger”) from Yahweh to His creatures. I refer to the many “Angel of the Lord” (*Malʾak Yahweh*) passages in the OT where the context makes clear that the Angel is sent from Yahweh, representing Yahweh, and at the same time *is* Yahweh. See especially: Gen 16:13; 18–19; 22:24; 48:16; Exod 23:20–21; 32–33; Josh 5–6.<sup>75</sup>

3. Related is the mention in Daniel of Michael, “one of the chief princes” (Dan 10:13, 21; 12:1), who is again referred to in Jude 9 and Rev 12:7. In the context of other passages referring to the voice of the “archangel” at the Second Advent (1 Thess 4:15–17, parallel with the “voice” of the Son of God, John 5:28–29), a good case can be made that “Michael,” whose name means “who is like God?” is actually a reference to Christ.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Camp, 272. Camp diagrams the chiasmic structure of these two verses thus:

“I was his delight [*šāʿa šuʿim*] day after day  
playing [*měšaḥequet*] before him continually  
playing [*měšaḥequet*] in his inhabited world  
and my delight [*šāʿa šuʿim*] was with humankind.”

<sup>75</sup> See the discussion of these passages in, e.g., Ernst Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament and a Commentary on the Messianic Predictions*, trans. Theodor Meyere and James Martin, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1956), 1:115–130; Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1967), 33–34; Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959 [1948]), 86–87.

<sup>76</sup> See, e.g., Francis D. Nichol et al., *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7 vols. (Washington: Review and Herald, 1978–80), 4:860.

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Is it possible that, perhaps in a council between the members of the Godhead before creation, it was decided that the One we now call the Second Person of the Godhead would at the commencement of creation condescend to partially empty himself (cf. the *kenosis* of Phil 2), to step down (perhaps taking the form of an angel?) to become the Mediator between the infinite God and finite creatures? And that Prov 8 is referring to this installation—this “begetting” of the Son of God—into the office of Mediator between the transcendent God and finite created beings? And that Prov 8 describes the mediatorial role of Wisdom—the pre-incarnate Christ?

Proverbs 8, I suggest, not only describes this role, but gives us an inside look into the attitude of Christ as He engages in the act of creation beside the Father. What is the spirit, the attitude, of the Mediator in Creation? This leads to a fifth issue in this passage.

**V. The Theology of “Play” in Prov 8:30–31**

According to Prov 8:30, Wisdom was beside Yahweh at creation, a “Master craftsman [*ʿāmon*]” who was “rejoicing [*měśaḥeqet*, lit. playing, sporting, laughing]<sup>77</sup> always before Him (Prov 8:30).

This term *měśaḥeqet* is a participial form of the root *śḥq*, “to sport, play, laugh.” Here is represented the mood of joyful celebration, pure delight, of the Son with Yahweh, and pure delight, joyful celebration with humanity. This verb *śḥq* is used elsewhere of children “playing” in the streets (Zech 8:5). The Father and the Son are having “the time of their life,” as it were, rejoicing, laughing, playing, as they work together, Co-creators, fashioning this world and its inhabitants. Likewise, the Son is having “the time of His life,” as it were, rejoicing, laughing, sporting with the humans He has created. This description introduces a dynamic into the theology of creation that has long been overlooked—a theology of divine play! Unfortunately, within space constraints, this theology must await further development in a future study. I move now to the last issue, by way of synthesis and implication.

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<sup>77</sup> See also the words “rejoicing” (2x), which are synonyms for “play.” Delitzsch, 192: “Play is in contrast to work, an occupation which has enjoyment in view. But the work, i.e., the occupation, which aims to do something useful, can also become play if it costs no strenuous effort, or if the effort which it costs passes wholly into the background in presence of the pleasure which it yields.”

**VI. The Relative Status between Persons of the  
Godhead in Proverbs 8**

Based upon the insights derived from Prov 8, I conclude that it is not possible to posit either an eternal or an economic subordination within the Godhead before Christ's incarnation. As Schroer observes: "it would be false, keeping in mind the whole context of ch. 8, to impute to these texts (vv. 22–31) the notion that Wisdom here is *subordinate* to YHWH. The text avoids any statement that could be read as a clear expression of subordination. *Hokmâ* is a counterpart for YHWH, a divine counterpart."<sup>78</sup>

I suggest that according to Prov 8, at the beginning of creation, we find a situation of equal members of the Godhead as Co-creators. There is no reference to a time before which One of the Members of the Godhead did not exist, nor a reference to the eternal subordination of One Member of the Godhead to Another Member. Rather, there is described a time, before the creation of the universe, when, presumably by mutual consent, one Person of the Godhead is "installed" (*nsk* III) in a role of Mediator. While the Person we call the Father continued to represent the transcendent nature of the Godhead, the Person we know as the Son condescended in divine *kenosis* to represent the immanent aspect of divinity, coming close to His creation, mediating between infinity and finitude, even before sin. This is not a subordination of the Son to the Father, but a voluntary condescension to be installed into a mediatorial role, representing the divine love in an immanent way to His inhabited universe.

Far in the future from this time at the commencement of creation, the incarnation, coming after the entrance of sin into the world, will continue this pattern of *kenosis* by the Son, as He actually takes the nature of humanity and voluntarily becomes subordinate to the Father, obedient even unto death, even the death of a cross (Phil 2:5–11). The incarnation clearly involves the economic (not eternal) subordination of the Son. But that is the subject of another study.

**Richard M. Davidson** is J. N. Andrews Professor of Old Testament Interpretation and Chair of the Old Testament Department at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University. In addition to his books *Typology in Scripture*, *Lovesong for the Sabbath*, and *In the Footsteps of Joshua*, he has published many articles. He is a past-president of the Adventist Theological Society. davidson@andrews.edu

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<sup>78</sup> Schroer, *Wisdom Has Built Her House*, 28–29.

## The Trinity in the Book of Revelation

Edwin Reynolds  
Southern Adventist University

In the year 2000 Woody Whidden published a study of Trinitarian evidences in the book of Revelation.<sup>1</sup> In it he challenged Rob Wall's assertion that if there is a doctrine of the Trinity evident in the book of Revelation, it must be "primitive."<sup>2</sup> Whidden's own conclusion was that "one of the great permeating themes of the Apocalypse is the Triune nature of the Godhead."<sup>3</sup> Although, as he notes in a subsequent republication of the study as a chapter in another work, the issue is not directly addressed per se in the book of Revelation,<sup>4</sup> I conclude from my own research that the observant reader finds there perhaps the fullest delineation of the Trinity and the respective roles of its members in all of Scripture, with the exception of the Gospel of John.

This paper reports the results of my own comprehensive research in the book of Revelation regarding all references to Deity and the respective roles of the members of the Trinity as revealed by these references.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Woodrow W. Whidden, "Trinitarian Evidences in the Apocalypse," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 11 (2000): 248–60.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>4</sup> Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, and John W. Reeve, *The Trinity: Understanding God's Love, His Plan of Salvation, and Christian Relationships* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2002), 79.

<sup>5</sup> I read Revelation through carefully more than once, recording every reference to Deity, noting which member of the Deity is suggested by the evidence of the context, and classifying and recording all of the data in a report which was originally appended to this paper but has been omitted for publication. Whidden's study, although very good, was not fully comprehensive, in that it studied primarily four major settings, namely, chaps. 1–3, 4–5, 12–14, and 21–22, and it did not summarize the data across the book. Another study of God in Revelation deserves mention, namely, Richard Bauckham, *The Theology*

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Following a short summary of the data, I move to a study of the similarities and distinctions between the three Persons, followed by the respective roles of the three members of the Trinity in the book of Revelation.

**A Summary of the Data**

It is difficult to render precise numbers for the data, since there are many ways in which it can be broken down or interpreted.<sup>6</sup> Although I do summarize some numbers for the data, the emphasis is on patterns rather than on precision. I have not attempted to distinguish between names and titles, but I have treated most identifiers formed from substantial participles as descriptive statements rather than as names or titles, except where they appear with sufficient frequency and/or in such close connection with other names as to indicate that they begin to function more as an identifier than as a descriptor. The main examples of this would be characterizations of God as “the One who sits on the throne,” “the One who lives forever and ever,” and “the One who was and who is and who is coming.” One other construction of this type that seems, in context, to be used as an identifier is found in 14:7, where those who dwell on the earth are instructed to worship “the One who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and the fountains of waters.”

My study found about 124 separate names, titles, or identifying designations for God the Father in the book of Revelation. Of these, the most common by far is the simple designation *θεός*, translated “God,” used by itself about seventy-four times, including when accompanied by a possessive pronoun such as “my God,” “our God,” “his God,” or “their God.” In addition, the same designation appears in combination with a variety of other names or descriptors, including “Lord God,” “Lord God Almighty,” “our Lord and God,” “God Almighty,” “the living God,” “our God who sits on the throne,” “the God of heaven,” “God who lives

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*of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 40–65, 109–25, but this excellent study did not accomplish my purpose. Therefore, I conducted my own primary, comprehensive research.

<sup>6</sup> For example, would *κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ* (“Lord God Almighty”) in Rev 4:8 be considered one name or title for God or three? Is *ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος* (“the One who was and who is and who is coming”), which immediately follows in the same verse, a part of the same name, a separate name, three separate names, or merely a compound descriptive phrase? How can one clearly distinguish between a name, a title, and a descriptive phrase? These questions are in addition to any consideration of textual variants, which introduce more names and titles into the text. For the purposes of this study, the common Greek texts of Nestle-Aland, 27th ed., and the United Bible Societies, 4th ed., were used.



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forever and ever,” “the Lord God of the holy prophets,” and “the Lord God, who is and who was and who is coming.” These various designations account for another eighteen instances of identifying God the Father. That He is the Father of Jesus Christ is also mentioned four times, where He is three times called “My Father” by Jesus in His letters to the seven churches, and once He is called “His Father” with reference to “the Lamb” in 14:1. In addition, God is referred to simply as “the Lord,” “our Lord,” or “the Lord of the earth” at least four times.<sup>7</sup> Eight additional times God is referred to as “the One who sits [or sat] on the throne,” besides those connected with His name. Another five times God is called “the One who lives forever and ever,” “the One who is and who was,” or “the One who was and who is and who is coming.” Additionally, God takes the titles “the Alpha and the Omega,”<sup>8</sup> “the Holy One,” “King of the saints,” and “the Beginning and the End.”

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<sup>7</sup> There would be five times if counting 1:10, which is debatable. Many would see it as referring to Jesus Christ, but this is not necessarily the case. The closest context—and the only previous reference—in which anyone is called Lord is 1:8, in which the Lord God is the Almighty, who is and who was and who is coming, who is always God the Father in Revelation. While the Father is several times referred to as “the Lord,” Jesus is never called simply “the Lord” in Revelation. He is called “their Lord,” referring to the Two Witnesses in 11:8; He is called “the Lord Jesus” twice by John in the closing two verses of the book; and He is twice called Lord of lords with reference to His victory over the evil powers at the end of time (17:14; 19:16). If John has in mind “the holy day of the LORD,” which Yahweh calls “My holy day” in Isa 58:13, he would be thinking of the Creator who set apart the day as holy (Gen 2:2–3; Exod 20:11), and John does point to God the Father as the Creator in Rev 4:11; 10:6; and 14:7. This is the most consistent biblical position, though it is possible to argue that John may have had in mind the claim of Jesus in Mark 2:28. To see here a reference to something that appears only in later non-canonical literature, from the second century and beyond, namely, Sunday as “the Lord’s day” is not a justifiable biblical interpretation. This case is well presented by Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 2002), 90. But then neither should the expression be interpreted as pointing to the eschatological judgment day, the OT “day of the LORD,” as Stefanovic prefers to see it (*ibid.*, 90), since there is nothing in the context of the vision that suggests such a setting.

<sup>8</sup> This is so whether or not 1:8 is held to refer to the Father. Many commentators do see it as a reference to God the Father, since the other ascriptions in the verse clearly point to Him as the Lord God, who is and who was and who is coming, the Almighty, a reference that does not elsewhere point to Christ but to the One who sits on the throne (cf. 4:8; 11:17–18; 21:5–6). See, e.g., Bauckham, 54–55; Alan F. Johnson, “Revelation,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 13, *Hebrews–Revelation*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 601; Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, 2d ed., Tyndale New Testament Commem-

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There are about eighty references to Jesus Christ by various designations in Revelation. The most common of these is “the Lamb,” used twenty-eight times. Second is “Jesus” or “Jesus Christ,” used twelve times. In addition, “the Lord Jesus” appears twice, “Christ” alone appears twice, and “His Christ” appears twice, the latter two referring, respectively, to the Messiah anointed by “our Lord” (11:15) and “our God” (12:10). In addition, Jesus claims or receives a host of other titles or designations in the book, including “the Faithful Witness,” “the Firstborn of the dead,” the Ruler of the kings of the earth,” “One like a son of man,” “the First and the Last,” “the Living One,” “the Holy One,” “the True One,” “the Amen,” “the Faithful and True Witness,” “the Beginning of God’s creation,” “the Lion of the tribe of Judah,” “the Root of David,” “Michael,” “the Son of God,” “the Male Child [of the Woman],” “Lord of lords,” “King of kings,” “the Word of God,” “the Alpha and the Omega,”<sup>9</sup> “the Beginning and the End,” and “the Bright Morning Star.”

The situation with regard to the names for the Holy Spirit is a bit more tenuous, with only seventeen references made, four of which are expressed symbolically. It seems clear from John’s salutation (1:4–5), in which he greets his readers with grace and peace from three separate entities, all of which he treats as members of the Deity, that John understands the Holy Spirit to be a separate person of the Godhead,<sup>10</sup> but the Spirit receives significantly less attention in Revelation than the other two divine Persons, and He is four times mentioned in symbolic terms. His introduction in 1:4 is as “the seven Spirits who are before His [God’s] throne,” and He is similarly depicted symbolically in 3:1; 4:5; and 5:6 as “the seven Spirits of God.”<sup>11</sup> The other thirteen<sup>12</sup> times He is mentioned, He is referred to only as “the Spirit.” The emphasis seems to be more on His function than on His person, something also found widely elsewhere in Scripture.

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taries (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1987; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 51; Whidden, “Trinitarian Evidences,” 249–250.

<sup>9</sup> This is so from 22:12, even if, as noted above, 1:8 is considered to refer to the Father, and even if, as in this study, the variant reading found in 1:11 (KJV, NKJV) is not counted.

<sup>10</sup> Whidden, “Trinitarian Evidences,” 248.

<sup>11</sup> Bauckham, 109, sees symbolic significance in the numerology of four times seven, which corresponds to the number (twenty-eight) of references to the Lamb.

<sup>12</sup> Bauckham, *ibid.*, counts fourteen, seeing the reference to the spirit of prophecy in 19:10 as a reference to the Holy Spirit.

### Three Separate and Distinct Persons

There is very little overlap between the names, titles, or designations of the three divine Persons mentioned in the book of Revelation. Certainly, there is no overlap between the names or designations of the Spirit and that of God the Father or of Jesus Christ the Son. There is very limited overlap between the titles of the Father and those of the Son. The four titles<sup>13</sup> that do overlap, namely, “the Alpha and the Omega,” “the Beginning and the End,” “the Holy One,” and “Lord,” designate essential attributes of Deity which are shared by them, no doubt with intent to characterize the Son as of the same essential attributes of Deity as the Father<sup>14</sup> while trying to avoid confusing Their persons or Their roles. This virtual lack of overlap in names, titles, or designations makes clear that John has three separate Persons in view, and He introduces these Persons very early in his letter.

Although John introduces both God (the Father) and Jesus Christ as separate persons already in the very first verse of the book, he introduces the divine Trinity in 1:4, expressing his wish to his readers for grace and peace from (ὁ πῶς) the One who is and who was and who is to come, and from (καὶ ὁ πῶς) the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from (καὶ ὁ πῶς) Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the Firstborn from the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth. The three-fold repetition of ὁ πῶς connected by καὶ is clear indication that the three are separate entities or persons but are placed on an equal ground ontologically. Each one of these three is equally and fully able to communicate grace and peace to the readers and hearers of the book.

Throughout the book the Father and the Son are juxtaposed in such a way as to make clear that they are separate persons while equally sharing the essential attributes of Deity. It would be tedious to render an exhaustive accounting of all of the evidence for this, but let us consider a variety of examples. The revelation to John comes from both God and Jesus Christ, each of whom plays a leading role in the origin and transmission of the revelation to John (1:1). Beginning in 1:2 and repeated frequently throughout the book, the two-fold witness of the word of God and the

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<sup>13</sup> Whidden, “Trinitarian Evidences,” 249–50, includes “the First and the Last” as another title used of both the Father and the Son, but it is never used of the Father in Revelation.

<sup>14</sup> Whidden, “Trinitarian Evidences,” 250.

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testimony of Jesus Christ plays a significant role.<sup>15</sup> The name of God and the name of Jesus Christ are both written on the foreheads of the one who overcomes in Philadelphia (3:12). To the overcomer in Laodicea, Jesus promises that He will grant the right to sit with Him on His throne just as He overcame and sat down with His Father on His throne (3:21). Every creature in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and in the sea sings, “To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, *be* blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever”<sup>16</sup> (5:13). Under the sixth seal the wicked flee from the face of the One who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb (6:16). The numberless multitude of the redeemed stands in white robes before the throne and before the Lamb, and they cry out, “Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb” (7:10). When the seventh trumpet sounds, loud voices in heaven announce, “The kingdom of the world has become *the kingdom* of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever” (11:15).

In 19:11–16 the Rider on the white horse, whose name is Faithful and True (v. 11; cf. 3:14), the Word of God (v. 13), and King of kings and Lord of lords (v. 16), out of whose mouth goes a sharp sword with which to strike the nations (v. 15; cf. 1:16; 2:12), will rule the nations with a rod of iron (19:15; cf. 2:27; 12:5) and will Himself tread the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God (19:15; cf. 14:19–20). Thus Christ is depicted as having the attributes of and doing the work of judgment that belongs to Almighty God.

In 20:6, those who are raised in the first resurrection will function as priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Christ for a thousand years (cf. v. 4). In 21:22, John sees no temple in the holy city, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. Further, the city has no need of the sun or moon to provide light, for the glory of God illuminates it, and its lamp is the Lamb (21:23; cf. 22:5). Most significant, perhaps, is 22:1, 3, where God and the Lamb share the same throne. Not only does the river of the water of life flow from the throne of God and of the Lamb (v. 1), but “the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name *will be* on their foreheads” (vv. 3–4). The use of the third person singular

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<sup>15</sup> Hans K. LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible* (Sarasota: First Impressions, 1997), 223–25; Kenneth A. Strand, “The Two Witnesses of Rev 11:3–12,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 19 (1981): 131–34.

<sup>16</sup> Extended quotations from Scripture are from the NASB (1995) unless otherwise noted.

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personal pronoun throughout this text to refer to God and the Lamb seems to lend extra force to the sense of unity that is demonstrated by their sharing the throne.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the claim of Jesus to the titles of God in 22:13, in the midst of a series of first person statements about Himself in verses 12–16, substantiates still further His ontological equality with God the Father while at the same time being a separate person.<sup>18</sup>

**Individual Roles of the Members of the Godhead**

Although there is a fundamental ontological equality among the three members of the Deity, there are clearly separate individual roles that They play in the book. As soon as one begins to gather and sort the data from this study, it becomes immediately apparent that the different persons of the Godhead have different functions, and these functions seldom overlap. Although there are a few names that overlap between the Father and the Son, particularly “the Alpha and the Omega,” “the Beginning and the End,” “Lord,” and “the Holy One,” these names have more to do with the essential attributes of God than with roles or functions. Some of the other names or designations, however, do signify separate functions. Even more, the description of various activities and the association with different elements or functions creates distinctions in roles.

**The Role of the Father.** God the Father is portrayed throughout the book of Revelation as the figurehead, the One who sits on the throne (4:2–3, 9–10; 5:1, 7, 13; 6:16; 7:10, 15; 19:4; 20:11–12; 21:5), the Almighty or Sovereign Ruler (παντοκράτωρ: 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22), the Creator who rightfully receives the worship of all created things (3:14; 4:9–11; 7:11–12; 10:6; 11:16–17; 14:7; 15:3–4; 19:4, 10; 22:9), the One who lives forever and ever, who is and was and is coming<sup>19</sup> (1:4, 8; 4:8–10; 10:6; 11:17; 15:7; 16:5). He is the Father of Jesus Christ, the Lamb (2:27; 3:5, 21; 14:1), who is the Son of God

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<sup>17</sup> Bauckham, 60–61, points out that John, motivated by a concern for monotheistic worship of God, “is evidently reluctant to speak of God and Christ together as a plurality. He never makes them the subjects of a plural verb or uses a plural pronoun to refer to them both.”

<sup>18</sup> Cf. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, New Century Bible Commentary, softback ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1981), 339. See also Ranko Stefanovic, *The Background and Meaning of the Sealed Book of Revelation 5*, Andrews University Seminary Dissertation Series, no. 22 (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1996), 296–300, on the issue of the subordination of the Son.

<sup>19</sup> Or variations of the latter expression: 4:8 reverses the order of the first two elements (“who was and who is”), while 11:17 and 16:5 omit the third element (“and is coming”).

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(2:18). Although God shares His throne with the Son (3:21; 22:1, 3), it is usually depicted as His throne (1:4; 4:2–3; 7:15; 12:5), which He shares at His will (3:21), and the Son is never portrayed as sitting on it by Himself.<sup>20</sup> The Father is the God of heaven (11:13; 15:11) and Lord of the earth (11:4). He is also the Lord God of the holy prophets (22:6). If there is any seniority in rank among the three divine Persons, in terms of roles, it would be the Father who is depicted as holding that position. This is shown in a variety of ways.

In 1:1 He is the One who gives to Jesus Christ the revelation to pass along to His servants. He is the One who speaks in the first person in 1:8 at the end of the Prologue as the divine Author of the content of the revelation. Jesus states in 2:27 that He received from His Father authority to rule all nations with a rod of iron. In 3:5 Jesus says that He will confess the name of the overcomer before His Father and before His Father's angels. In 2:7 Paradise belongs to God, while in 3:12 Jesus calls the New Jerusalem "the city of My God" "which comes down out of heaven from My God." God the Father is seated on the throne at the center of the heavenly throne room, surrounded by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders, with their thrones, receiving constant praise, adulation, and worship (4:2–11). He is the One who has the covenant document,<sup>21</sup> the seven-sealed scroll, which needs to be opened and read so that its provisions can be put into effect (5:1–4). It is to God that people are redeemed and made kings and priests (5:9–10). In 7:2–3, the seal of God is placed on the foreheads of the servants of God (cf. 9:4; 14:2; 22:4). The heavenly temple belongs to God (7:15; 11:19; 13:6; 15:5, 8), and the smoke of the incense ascends from the hand of the ministering

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<sup>20</sup> This is not to imply that Christ has no right to sit on it by Himself, but it is a matter of function. Bauckham, 46, sees the throne as representing God's transcendence: "God as the One who sits on the throne is at present in heaven and acts on earth only through angelic intermediaries. Only in God's eschatological coming to his creation at the end, only in the New Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven and abolishes the distinction between heaven and earth, will God's dwelling be with his people on earth." Christ is represented as immanent and accessible.

<sup>21</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999; Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 1999), 340–41; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 201–3. Stefanovic argues that the scroll is not in the right hand of the Father, as most texts read, but is lying on the throne at His right side (201). This is a possible way of reading the text, but is not required, especially in 5:7, where ἄπὸ would seem to have been a better reading than ἐπὶ for such intention. In any case, 5:7 reveals that the scroll is passed from the possession of the Father to that of the Lamb.

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Angel with the prayers of the saints before God and His throne (8:3–4). The kingdom is God’s (12:10), the commandments are God’s (12:17; 14:12), the word is God’s (1:2, 9; 6:9; 17:17; 19:13; 20:4). God directs the affairs of men and nations to accomplish His purposes (17:17), but in the end, as Sovereign, He will judge them in righteousness (6:10; 11:18; 14:7; 16:1, 5–7, 19; 18:8; 19:2, 17–18; 20:12; 22:18–19). Although there is some participation by others in some aspects of judgment (19:11, 15; 20:4), in the final analysis, God is depicted on the “great white throne” as presiding over the executive judgment of the wicked (20:11–12). His presence is so awesome that heaven and earth attempt to flee and hide from Him, but there is no place to hide (20:11). In the new creation, the holy city, the New Jerusalem, comes down from God out of heaven (21:2, 10), having the glory of God (v. 11), and the everlasting covenant is pronounced fulfilled<sup>22</sup> when “the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them” (v. 3). It is the One who sits on the throne who declares that He will make all things new (21:5), and to the one who conquers He says, “I will be their God and they will be my children” (21:7 NRSV).

**The Role of the Son.** In many respects, the role of the Son is different in Revelation, although He shares the attributes of Deity and certain basic functions of Deity. Some of the functions of Deity that He shares include sitting with God on His throne (3:21; 22:1, 3), exercising wrath and judgment against sin and sinners (2:5, 16, 22–23; 6:16–17; 19:11, 15), rewarding the overcomers (1:7, 10, 17, 26–28; 3:5, 12, 21), and providing the light for the city of God (21:23).

At the same time, the Son of God has a variety of different functions in Revelation that are not shared by the Father. These are significant. Besides being the Son of God (2:18, 27; 3:5, 21; 14:1), in 1:13 and 14:14 He is “one like a son of man,” that is, like a human being. At the same time, He is clearly depicted as the Son of man from Dan 7:13, coming on the clouds of heaven (14:14; 1:7), just as He prophesied to Caiaphas at His trial (Matt 26:64). He is also the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root and the Offspring of David (5:5; 22:16). He is Jesus the Messiah (1:1–2, 5; 11:15; 12:10; 20:4, 6), the Offspring of the Woman, the Male Child, who is to rule all nations with a rod of iron (12:4–5, 13; 2:27). He is the

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Lev 26:11–12; Ezek 37:26–28; Hans K. LaRondelle, *Light for the Last Days: Jesus’ End-time Prophecies Made Plain in the Book of Revelation* (Nampa: Pacific Press, 1999), 144–47; Morris, 238; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 577.

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Lamb that was slain (5:6, 9, 12; 13:8)—crucified (11:8)—according to a plan established before the foundation of the world (13:8). He redeemed people to God from every nation by His blood (5:9; 12:11), and He has washed us from our sins in His own blood (1:5; 7:14). He died and came back to life (1:18; 2:8), the Firstborn from the dead (1:5), and He is alive forevermore and holds the keys of death and of Hades (1:18; 2:8; 11:8). He also holds the key of David, with the authority to open and to close (3:7–8; cf. Isa 22:22).

In addition to all of this, He is the Faithful and True Witness (1:5; 3:14) and the living Word of God (19:13). As such He is the role model for the Two Witnesses who follow in His footsteps by giving their faithful and true witness until they are martyred for their prophesying, lie dead for three and a half days while their enemies rejoice, then are raised to life again and ascend to heaven in a cloud in the sight of their enemies (11:3–12).<sup>23</sup> He is the author of the letters to the seven churches (2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14), and He appears to John walking in the midst of the seven churches and holding the angels, or leaders, of the churches in His right hand (1:12–13, 20; 2:1; 3:1). He knows each of the churches intimately (2:2–4, 6, 9–10, 13–15, 19–20, 24–25; 3:1–2, 4, 8, 15, 17–18), their strengths, their weaknesses, their needs, and their problems. He is depicted as having seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth (5:6). His eyes are also described as like a flame of fire (1:14; 2:18), with which He says He searches minds and hearts (2:23). The relation between Jesus and the Spirit is so close that the things Jesus says to the churches are described as being spoken by the Spirit (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

Jesus is the One who gives personal counsel and appeal to the churches (2:5, 10, 16, 25; 3:2–3, 11, 18), who rebukes them and even disciplines them (3:19). He describes Himself as being the One who will personally hand out the rewards to the overcomer (2:7, 10, 17, 26–28; 3:5, 12, 21; 22:12) and judgment to those who refuse to repent or heed His counsel (2:5, 16, 21–23; 3:3, 16). He is the One who will either confess their name before His Father or blot their name out of His Book of Life (3:5; 13:8; 21:27).

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<sup>23</sup> Robert W. Wall, *Revelation*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 146–47, notes the parallels with Jesus' experience and observes, "John's main point is therefore this: faithfulness unto death is always the ultimate measure of the disciple's faithfulness to God."



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Jesus, the Son of God, is the Lamb that takes the scroll of the covenant from the One who sits on the throne and breaks its seven seals so that He can open it and read it, that is, put it into effect (5:5, 7; 6:1). He is declared worthy to do this because He was slain and has redeemed people to God by His blood from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation, and has made them kings and priests to His God, and they will reign on the earth (5:9–10, 12). The Lamb has followers who follow Him wherever He goes (14:4; 19:14), like a flock following their divine Shepherd (7:17). Nonetheless, the salvation of the race is declared to be a joint venture between God, who sits on the throne, and the Lamb, who has come down and sacrificed Himself for humankind (7:10; 12:10–11).

It appears from the biblical evidence that the Son of God is also Michael (12:7), the heavenly combatant with Satan, the Dragon, and who casts the latter out of heaven along with his angels.<sup>24</sup> Michael is a figure in the book of Daniel who stands as the ruler and defender of God's people against their foes, who assists another heavenly being<sup>25</sup> in combating the opposition of the kings of Persia and Greece (Dan 10:13, 20–21), and who will at last deliver God's people from all their enemies and raise the dead to face their final rewards (12:1–2). In Jude 9 He is called Michael the archangel, and He contends with Satan over the body of Moses, whom He intends to resurrect from death. In 1 Thess 4:16 it is Christ Himself who descends from heaven with the voice of the archangel to raise those who have died in Christ so they can receive their reward. If Michael is Christ Himself, then it is not surprising that the Dragon is seen standing before the pregnant Woman ready to devour her Male Child as soon as He is born (Rev 12:4). But the Child is caught up to God and to His throne (12:5), and the Dragon turns his wrath on the Woman and on the rest of her offspring (12:6, 13–17).

Although the Son of God, the Male Child of the Woman, was caught up to God and to His throne, He is not inactive in regard to His people.

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<sup>24</sup> Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 85–86.

<sup>25</sup> The heavenly being Michael assists is not named; he is referred to only as “one who resembled a human being” (Dan 10:16) and “one with human appearance” (v. 18). Without a further description, it is not possible to identify him certainly, but it seems probable that he was Gabriel, who appeared to Daniel first in 8:15 as “one who looked like a man,” then again in 9:21 as “the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision previously.” Beale, 651, however, identifies him with the divine Son of man of Dan 7:13, so that Michael, although “closely associated with the Son of man,” with both “set forth as heavenly representatives of Israel,” cannot himself be the Son of man, since he is distinguished from Him in 10:21. I do not find this argument convincing.

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He is depicted not only as Michael the Archangel but as a mighty Angel with the glory of God coming down from heaven with a little scroll in His hand and planting His right foot on the sea and His left foot on the land (10:1–2), showing His authority over all of creation.<sup>26</sup> He announces the time of the end and the urgent need to prophesy again to the peoples of the earth (10:6–7, 11). Though it cannot be stated conclusively from the text, it seems reasonable also to see Him as the Angel of Rev 8:3–5,<sup>27</sup> who is ministering before the golden altar before the throne of God, mingling incense with the prayers of the saints until the time comes when He throws the censer to the ground and concludes His intercessory ministry before God, a time apparently indicated by the opening of the temple in heaven in conjunction with the close of probation and the pouring out of the seven last plagues upon the earth (11:18–19; 15:5–8).

Associated with the final events of this earth's history is a final struggle between the powers of evil and the powers of righteousness. This final struggle has often been referred to as the battle of Armageddon, though the text refers to it as the battle of the great day of God Almighty (16:14). However, the actual combatants in the battle are named as the Dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet, along with the kings of the earth, and the Lamb, referred to as the King of kings and Lord of lords, along with His followers (16:13–14; 17:12–14; 19:11–16, 19–21). There is no description of an actual battle, only of the victory of the Lamb and the defeat of the evil powers (17:14; 19:20–21; cf. 16:18–19; 18:8–21). This is followed by great rejoicing in heaven, with praise to God for judging the oppressor and avenging the blood of His servants on her (19:1–4), followed in turn by the announcement in heaven of the marriage of the Lamb to His bride and an invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb (19:7–9). The coming of Christ in glory in the clouds of

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<sup>26</sup> LaRondelle, 197, citing His physical description in v. 1, says that He “is portrayed with Messianic characteristics.” One could even conclude from parallel descriptions, like those in Ezek 1:27–28; Dan 10:6; Rev 1:16; 2:18; and Matt 17:2, that they are *divine* characteristics.

<sup>27</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 125, while not necessarily concurring, states, “Many commentators feel that this angel must be Christ Himself, for the Bible does not teach the mediatorial role of angels in the prayers of God’s people.” It is true that a member of the Deity is often depicted in the OT as the Angel of God or the Angel of Yahweh (e.g., Gen 22:11–18; 31:11–13; Exod 3:2–7; Judg 2:1–5; 6:11–24; 13:3–22; Zech 3:1–5; 12:8), and this is frequently considered to be the pre-incarnate Christ. So it is not unreasonable to see a member of the Deity, especially Christ, represented as an angel. See Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, one-vol. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983–85), 443.

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heaven is represented as occurring within the same general time frame, apparently at the end of the seventh bowl plague (16:15, 20; 6:14–17; 14:14–16; 19:11–16; cf. 1:7; 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20). The resurrection of the righteous also takes place at this time (20:4–6), before the thousand years during which they reign with Christ as kings and priests, participating in another judgment, apparently a review judgment of the wicked (v. 4), who have all been killed with the sword<sup>28</sup> that comes out of the mouth of Christ, the Rider on the white horse (19:15, 21).

In the eternal kingdom that is established at the time of Christ's return in glory to retrieve His followers, Jesus Christ and His Father co-rule the universe (11:15; 21:22–23; 22:1, 3–4), separate but equal. Despite their equality as the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, they have separate functions in the divine economy. Christ accepted the role of the Mediator between God and His creatures, the One who agreed from before the foundation of the world to come down and become incarnate in human flesh, to live and die for the salvation of humankind, and to be the active agent in interceding for those who would choose to follow Him. He communicates by the Spirit with His people and appeals to them to be faithful to the end, when He will reward the overcomers with all the privileges and blessings He can offer to them, including sitting with Him on His throne and, as kings and priests to God, assisting in judging those who have rejected His atoning work on their behalf. Finally, He will return in power and glory to establish the eternal kingdom in which He co-rules with His Father and receives the honor and worship of His loyal servants.

**The Role of the Spirit.** The role of the Spirit of God is much less fully described in the book of Revelation. One must be able first to understand the symbolic language in which some of the descriptions of the role of the Spirit are expressed.

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<sup>28</sup> This sword must be the word of God (Heb 4:12), which will judge all at the last day (John 12:48). The Rider on the white horse is Himself called the Word of God in this very context, as well as Faithful and True, identifying Him with the Faithful and True Witness of 3:14. The word that comes out of the mouth of Christ is none other than the word of God. Cf. Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation: The Apocalypse through Hebrew Eyes* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2002), 177; Morris, 225; Wall, 232. It is the word of God and the testimony of Jesus that comprise the Two Witnesses out of whose mouths fire will proceed to devour their enemies, a probable allusion to Jer 5:14: "Behold, I am making My words in your mouth fire and this people wood, and it will consume them."

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Given the apparent symbolic value of the number seven in Revelation, signifying completion or perfection,<sup>29</sup> one can understand the attempt to portray the perfection of the Spirit by its seven-fold representation. The setting is clearly symbolic in 3:1, where the seven Spirits of God are paralleled with the seven stars in Jesus' right hand, as well as in 4:5, where the seven Spirits of God are represented as seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, and in 5:6, where the seven-fold Spirit of God is represented as seven eyes on the Lamb which are sent out into all the earth. The latter is a probable allusion to 2 Chron 16:9 and, especially, to Zech 4:10, which states, "These seven [lamps] are the eyes of the LORD, which range through the whole earth," thus equating the seven lamps of fire in Rev 4:5 with the seven eyes on the Lamb in 5:6. What we see then is that the function of the Spirit of God in His relation to the other divine Persons is being described rather than statements being made about His person, as if He were seven-fold.<sup>30</sup>

In 3:18, 23 we have seen already how the eyes of the Son of God are significant for their ability to search the mind and the heart. This is the work of the Spirit, as indicated in 5:6 and its allusions to 2 Chron 16:9 and Zech 4:10. This work is closely associated in Zechariah with the seven lamps of fire which are burning before the throne in Rev 4:5 and with the function of the Two Witnesses in 11:3–4, which are also represented as the two olive trees and the two lampstands which stand before

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<sup>29</sup> John J. Davis, *Biblical Numerology: A Basic Study of the Use of Numbers in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 116, after a thorough study of the significance of numbers in the Bible, states, "It is the view of this writer that the only number used symbolically in the Scripture to any degree with discernible significance, is the number 7." After listing the evidence for this conclusion, including not only biblical but broad contemporary extrabiblical use, he summarizes, "It is generally agreed that the fundamental idea conveyed by the symbolic use of seven is that of 'completeness' or 'perfection.' This conclusion is not based on the sum of any of its factors or any other arithmetical feature of the number, but its *usus loquendi*" (ibid., 119).

<sup>30</sup> Bauckham, 115, concludes, "The seven Spirits represent the fullness of the divine Spirit in relation to God, to Christ and to the church's mission to the whole world." At the same time, other commentators see the seven-fold representation of the Spirit as integrally related to the giving of seven messages to the seven churches, even His "involvement in the providences of God working through the numerous series of seven in the book" (Whidden, "Trinitarian Evidences," 249). See also Johnson, 599, and Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 63. However, F. F. Bruce, "The Spirit in the Apocalypse," in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament*, ed. Barnabas Lindars and Stephen S. Smalley (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1973), 599, disagrees that the seven Spirits are tied to the seven churches, pointing out that the seven churches disappear after chap. 3, while the seven Spirits are still prominent in chaps. 4 and 5.

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the Lord of the earth (cf. Zech 4:2–14). When Zechariah asks what the lamps and olive trees represent, he is told first, “This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel saying, ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts” (4:6). Subsequently, the interpreter adds, “These are the two anointed ones who are standing by the Lord of the whole earth” (v. 14). Revelation brings all of this together to depict the function of the seven-fold Spirit of God in the presence of the Lord of all the earth.<sup>31</sup>

According to the function of the Spirit in Revelation, it is His work to represent God and Christ to the people of earth, to make God’s work effective on earth, to bring the light of truth to the world, to engender prophecy and faithful witness, to search the hearts and minds of people, and to bring conviction of truth forcefully to the mind. Thus, the appeal is given at the end of each of the letters to the seven churches, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).<sup>32</sup> The Spirit becomes the voice of conscience, the voice of Christ spoken internally to the heart and mind. He is depicted as searching the heart and mind in the sense that He is able to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart and to respond with the voice of conscience to direct the human agent in making wise choices, which will lead to life.

In the message of Christ to the church of Sardis, He introduces Himself as the One who has the seven Spirits of God (3:1) because the church of Sardis is nearly dead, and it is the Spirit who gives life to the dead. This is a clear teaching of Scripture (Ezek 37:14; John 6:63; Rom 8:2; 2 Cor 3:6), even implied by the word *πνεῦμα* itself, which signifies not only spirit but also breath, air, or wind (cf. John 3:8). So it is not surprising that Jesus would use this concept in His message to Sardis to stress the life-giving power of the Spirit, which they badly need.

In Rev 22:17, the Spirit and the Bride invite everyone who is thirsty to come and take of the water of life freely. The water of life flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb (22:1) and brings life wherever it goes (v. 2; cf. Ezek 47:1, 9, 12). In this invitation we see the work of the Holy Spirit in appealing to the hearts of people to come to life, which God offers freely from His throne of grace and mercy. We also see a reminder of the call of Jesus in John 7:37–38: “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said,

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<sup>31</sup> Bauckham, 111–13; cf. Bruce, 334–36.

<sup>32</sup> Bauckham, 114.

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‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’” John interpreted that call to refer to the promise of the Holy Spirit (v. 39), which was sometimes represented in the Old Testament as water or rain for the thirsty ground (Isa 44:3; Joel 2:23, 28–29). Again, the Spirit is depicted in its function of bringing the life of God to those who need it, a very personal ministry.<sup>33</sup>

The Spirit is represented several times in Revelation in its function of communicating a prophetic message through visions and auditions to the mind of the prophet. John records several events reminiscent of the experience of Old Testament prophets in which he was transported “in the Spirit” to view a scene which was a vision of realities that could not be seen with the literal eye (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10; cf. Num 24:2; Ezek 2:2; 3:12, 14, 24; 8:3–4; 11:1, 24; 37:1; 43:5).<sup>34</sup> The Spirit also speaks in Rev 14:13 to confirm the voice that comes from heaven regarding those who die in the Lord, adding, “. . . so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.” This testimony about the role of the Spirit is in harmony with the rest of Scripture about His role in communicating God’s messages to the hearts and minds of people on earth (Joel 2:28–29; 2 Pet 1:20–21). In Rev 19:10 the interpreting angel tells John that the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. Even if this is not a direct reference to the Holy Spirit,<sup>35</sup> it may be seen as an indirect reference, since the parallel text in 22:9 reveals that John’s brethren who have the testimony of Jesus are in fact the prophets, whose minds are inspired by the Holy Spirit with messages from God (cf. 2 Pet 1:21).

The Holy Spirit is never portrayed in Revelation as sitting on a throne, ruling, judging, receiving worship and adoration, or even sacrificing Himself to save fallen humanity.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit has a

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<sup>33</sup> Whidden, “Trinitarian Evidences,” 258–59, argues for identifying the river of the water of life in 22:1 with the Holy Spirit, indicating the life-giving power of the Spirit that proceeds from the throne of God and the Lamb.

<sup>34</sup> Bauckham, 116, observes that John models his accounts of his prophetic experience and claims primarily on those of Ezekiel, and the effect of strategically placing his claims where he does in the book is “to attribute the whole of it to the agency of the divine Spirit.” Cf. Bruce, 340.

<sup>35</sup> Bauckham, 115, 119, and Bruce, 337, see it as a direct reference to the Spirit of God.

<sup>36</sup> This does not imply that the Holy Spirit does not have the prerogatives of God. It is important to remember that Revelation focuses primarily on the *function* of the Spirit rather than on His person or prerogatives. And since the Spirit’s primary function is to reveal the truth about God and the Lamb to human beings, it is natural that He will not

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very important role to play in the plan of salvation.<sup>37</sup> This role is equivalent in Revelation to the role which Jesus described for Him in John 14–16, a work of comforting and counseling, of reminding and convicting, of guiding and teaching, of doing the work of Christ in His absence<sup>38</sup> to help to prepare His followers for the judgment and for Christ's return to reward those who have been faithful to Him. The Spirit is an integral part of the triune Deity from whom grace and peace are communicated to the readers and hearers of the book of Revelation (Rev 1:4–5). The fact that He is never portrayed as sitting on a throne, ruling, or receiving worship and adoration should not be construed to imply that He is not ontologically equal with God. It reflects rather the unique *function* that the Spirit maintains in Revelation, a function that emphasizes a ministry on earth rather than an exalted state in heaven. As the Communicator of God's will and His grace to humanity, He does not exalt Himself, but He exalts the Father and the Son. Yet, implicitly, the Spirit is portrayed as a full member of the heavenly Trinity.

**Conclusion**

I have shown from a close study of the book of Revelation that there are three divine Persons who are introduced in the opening verses of the book as a Trinity composed of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. Various names, titles, and designations are used throughout the book to describe these three divine Persons, and the text describes various activities in which They are engaged. These names, titles, and designations, presented in close relationship to each other, along with their complementary functions, demonstrate the fundamental ontological equality that exists between the three Persons of the Godhead. At the same time, the various designations and activities of each of the Three point very clearly to different roles or functions which They assume in the divine economy, especially with respect to the carrying out of the plan for humanity's salvation and the eradication of sin from the universe.

In this divine economy, the separation of functions makes for a more effective administration of the government of the universe, and each of

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focus attention on Himself and His own prerogatives. Cf. John 14:26; 15:26; 16:8–15; 1 John 4:2; Bruce, 337–39.

<sup>37</sup> Bauckham, 109, observes that “the Spirit plays an essential role in the divine activity of establishing God's kingdom in the world.”

<sup>38</sup> Jesus told His disciples that it was to their advantage that He should go away so that the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, would be able to come to them (John 16:7).

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the members of the Godhead makes His own unique contribution. The Father is the figurehead Administrator, the Sovereign, Almighty God, who remains on the throne directing the affairs of the universe while the other Two are engaged in other activities, especially activities connected with the salvation of humanity.

The Son, on the other hand, agreed to come down to earth and be incarnated in human flesh, to live and die in order to redeem humanity from death by meeting the enemy on his own ground and overcoming him on earth as He had overcome him in heaven. The Son was victorious and was caught back up to God and to His throne, but He continues to intercede there for humanity before the bar of justice, rebuking the accusations of Satan against the faithful followers of Christ until the time comes for Him to destroy the evil powers, claim the kingdom He has already won, and reward His saints who have been faithful even to death.

The Spirit is less prominent in the book, yet is pervasively active nonetheless. His role is to communicate God's will to His people, both in the form of prophetic oracles and in the form of individual working upon the hearts and minds. He is Christ's personal representative on earth to carry on the work that Christ began when He was on earth. He is the One who brings spiritual life to the soul in a very personal way.

There should be no doubt from a close study of the book of Revelation that God is comprised of a trinity of Persons working as a team for the administration of the universe and the salvation of this fallen race. Although we do not have all the detailed answers we would like to have, the evidence is abundant for three divine Persons working together in a distribution of functions to accomplish their collective will for the eradication of sin from the universe and for the salvation of as many fallen human beings as absolutely possible in the process.

**Edwin Reynolds** is Professor of New Testament and Greek at Southern Adventist University in Collegedale, Tennessee. He also serves as the executive editor of *JATS*.  
reynolds@southern.edu



## ***The Da Vinci Code, the Nature of Christ, and Historical Accuracy***

Dennis Pettibone  
Southern Adventist University

Dan Brown's book *The Da Vinci Code* has given forty million people<sup>1</sup> a distorted version of Christian history. Millions more have been influenced by Ron Howard's motion picture adaptation of this book, released in May, 2006.<sup>2</sup> Even before the film came out, my students were asking questions about the concepts found in the book.

Some people have dismissed concerns about its theological and historical errors by saying, "It's just a work of fiction." However, popular perceptions of the past are heavily influenced by the images the public has seen in "historical" motion pictures and dramatic television productions, as well as the mental images generated by reading popular historical novels.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, Dan Brown claims that *The Da Vinci Code* is more than just a work of fiction. Not only do the dialogues in the book imply that Brown has superimposed a made-up story on a framework of essential truth,<sup>4</sup> but the author baldly asserts, "All descriptions of . . . documents in this novel are accurate." Some of the historical misinformation is contained in these "descriptions of . . . documents."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cathleen McGuigan, "Heck of a Prob, Brownie," *Newsweek*, 13 March 2006, 21.

<sup>2</sup> In its first five weeks after release, ticket receipts totaled \$680 million. AFP, "'Da Vinci Code' Tops World Box Office for 5<sup>th</sup> Straight Week," *DNA World*, 20 June 2006 <<http://www.dnaindia.com/report.asp?NewsID=1036644>>

<sup>3</sup> A similar point is made in Bart Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction in the Da Vinci Code: A Historian Reveals What We Really Know about Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and Constantine* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), xvi.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>5</sup> Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code: A Novel* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), [1].

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On the other hand, a few of the book's historical claims have the ring of truth for Seventh-day Adventists embracing the ideas of Ellen G. White's *Great Controversy*. Like Ellen White,<sup>6</sup> Brown, through the novel's fictitious fountain of historical information, former British Royal Historian Sir Leigh Teabing, questions the genuineness of Constantine's conversion. He describes the pagan-hearted Constantine as creating a "kind of hybrid religion" by "fusing pagan symbols, dates, and rituals into the growing Christian religion."<sup>7</sup> Adventists would be even more gratified to hear another of the novel's fictional scholars, Robert Langdon, professor of religious symbology at Harvard University,<sup>8</sup> declare that Christianity originally "honored the Jewish Sabbath of Saturday." Constantine, he says, "shifted it to coincide with the pagan's veneration day of the sun."<sup>9</sup>

However pleased they might be to see a recognition of the seventh day as the original Christian Sabbath in a book read by scores of millions, they would hardly relish its positive slant on goddess worship<sup>10</sup> and its totally unfounded<sup>11</sup> claim that ancient documents speak of Jesus' marriage to Mary Magdalene.<sup>12</sup> They would be even less sympathetic with the book's head-on attack on the inspiration and reliability of the Bible<sup>13</sup> and the divinity of Jesus Christ. Brown has Teabing assert that prior to the Council of Nicea, "Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet"—His "establishment as the 'Son of God' was officially proposed and voted on" in "a relatively close vote" at this council of Nicea.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan: The Conflict of the Ages in the Christian Dispensation* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1911, 1950), 49–50. Some historians have made a similar assessment. For example, see Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (New York: Dorset, 1967, 1986), 125; Jacob Burkhardt, *The Age of Constantine the Great*, trans. Moses Hadas (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1949), 292.

<sup>7</sup> Brown, 216, 231–232; cf. White, 50.

<sup>8</sup> Brown, 7.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 232–233.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, *ibid.*, 46, 124, 255, 256, 390–391, 434, 444, 446, 448, 454.

<sup>11</sup> Ehrman, 143–144. Two of the *Nag Hammadi* gospels imply that Jesus had a special relationship with Mary but say nothing about marriage. James M. Robinson, gen. ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, third, completely rev. ed., 145, 148, 525, 526.

<sup>12</sup> Brown, 244–247, 255.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 231, 341.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

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Is that true? Was the divinity of Christ a novelty—a new idea introduced at the Council of Nicea? Do we owe our belief in Jesus as the Son of God to Constantine<sup>15</sup> and a “close” vote at Nicea? Are there—as Brown asserts—gospels older and more reliable than Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John that present a Jesus who was altogether human?<sup>16</sup> What is the historical evidence?

First, we should note that even scholars—such as Bart Ehrman—who use critical methods to attack the historical truth of much of the information in the New Testament gospels<sup>17</sup> admit that these books are the oldest and most reliable accounts of Christ’s life. This, Ehrman declares, is not just his own opinion: “It is the conclusion that has been reached by every one of the hundreds (thousands, even) of scholars who work on the problem of establishing what really happened in the life of the historical Jesus.”<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, even if the noncanonical gospels were reliable, they would not provide evidence that Jesus Christ was a mere mortal. Indeed, some of them point in the opposite direction, challenging the idea that he was really a human being. As Roland Bainton points out, “The greatest fight in the early church was to establish not the divinity, but the humanity of Christ.”<sup>19</sup>

Gnosticism, perhaps the greatest heretical challenge facing the early church, had a negative view of all things material, including the body, going so far as to present salvation as liberation from the body-prison. Various schools of Gnosticism presented Christ as either only appearing to have a body or as assuming the body of the man Jesus at His baptism and then abandoning it when Jesus—or Simon of Cyrene—was nailed to the cross.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Brown also makes the unfounded claim that Constantine created the canon; *ibid.*, 231. The canon’s “basic outline was fixed during the second half of the second century.” This includes the general acceptance of the “fourfold witness to the gospel” championed by Irenaeus and the exclusion as heretical of other gospels; Gonzalez 1:149.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, *ibid.*, 231, 234, 235, 245.

<sup>17</sup> Ehrman, 116–117, 124.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 102–103. See also Robert Sheaffer, “The Da Vinci Code Cult,” *Skeptical* 11/4 (2005): 22–23. However, some scholars suggest that at least part of the Gospel of Thomas may be as old as, or older than, the canonized gospels. See Robinson, 125; Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage, 1978), xvii.

<sup>19</sup> Roland Bainton, *Christianity*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1964, 2000), 67.

<sup>20</sup> Kurt Randolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, trans. and ed. Robert McLachlan Wilson (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1977, 1987), 157–158, 167; Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, rev. ed., vol. 1: *From the Begin-*

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The specific ancient documents that Brown mentions are the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Gnostic Gospels in the Nag Hammadi Library. “These documents,” he declares, “speak of Christ’s ministry in very human terms.” He quotes specifically from the gospels of Philip and Mary.<sup>21</sup>

The Dead Sea Scrolls are Jewish documents. They “do not contain any gospels” or any mention whatever of Jesus Christ or the emerging Christian movement.<sup>22</sup>

The Nag Hammadi books are indeed Gnostic “Christian” literature, including a number of gospels. The Jesus they present is “the revealer and proclaimer of gnostic wisdom,” and Christ is “made into a strictly mythological being.”<sup>23</sup> Says Ehrman, who translated some of these gospels for his book *Lost Scriptures*,<sup>24</sup> “If anything, Jesus is portrayed as more divine in the Nag Hammadi sources than he is in the Gospels of the New Testament.”<sup>25</sup>

The Gospel of Mary, which scholars date to the second century—perhaps late in that century,<sup>26</sup> says nothing to indicate that Jesus was a mere mortal. In fact, it seems to me that He is describing Himself in this book as “the Good” who has “come into your midst.”<sup>27</sup> Its main focus seems to be on the ascent of the “enlightened soul”—evidently liberated from its body-prison—taking various forms in order to deceive the powers that would keep it down.<sup>28</sup>

The Gospel of Philip is a third-century document that may have made use of older sources.<sup>29</sup> This “gospel” includes a statement of the Gnostic idea that the creation of this world was a mistake<sup>30</sup> and speaks of

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*nings to the Council of Chalcedon* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970, 1987), 74, 130 (text and n. 24), 132, 134; Ehrman, 42, 43.

<sup>21</sup> Brown, 234, 245–247.

<sup>22</sup> Ehrman, 26; Gonzalez, 35; Bainton, 213; Sheaffer, 22.

<sup>23</sup> Randolph, 151.

<sup>24</sup> Bart D. Ehrman [ed.], *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It Into the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003).

<sup>25</sup> Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction*, 26.

<sup>26</sup> Robinson, 524; Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*, 35.

<sup>27</sup> “Gospel of Mary,” in Robinson, 525.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 523, 526.

<sup>29</sup> Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*, 38; Robinson, 141.

<sup>30</sup> “Gospel of Philip,” 99, in Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*, 43.

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Christ as a pre-existing being<sup>31</sup> who “showed himself not to be as he really was, but appeared in a way that they could see him.”<sup>32</sup>

This is not the only Gnostic gospel that seems to deny the essential humanity of Jesus Christ. Another is the Apocalypse of Peter, in which Jesus speaks of “my incorporeal body.”<sup>33</sup>

Although Brown is clearly mistaken in citing the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Gnostic gospels as evidence that early Christians believed that Jesus was a mere mortal, he could presumably have looked elsewhere. Historians speak of other pre-Constantine Christians who denied Christ’s divinity, including some people classified as Judaizers<sup>34</sup> (especially Ebionites), adoptionists,<sup>35</sup> and dynamic monarchians.<sup>36</sup> Such groups were clearly a small minority on the fringes of Christianity.<sup>37</sup> The divinity of Jesus Christ was something most early Christians seem to have taken for granted. Declaring Jesus to be divine was not some novelty Constantine invented.

As Jaroslav Pelikan points out, “The oldest surviving pagan report about the church described Christians as gathering before sunrise and ‘singing a hymn to Christ as to [a] god.’”<sup>38</sup> This report was written by Pliny in A.D. 112.<sup>39</sup> Pelikan also notes that the “oldest surviving sermon of the Christian Church after the New Testament opened with these words: ‘Brethren, we ought so to think of Jesus Christ as of God, as of the judge of the living and the dead.’”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 9, in Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*, 39; cf. Robinson, 142.

<sup>32</sup> “Gospel of Philip,” 26, in Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*, 41; cf. Robinson, 144–145.

<sup>33</sup> “The Coptic Apocalypse of Peter,” in Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*, 81.

<sup>34</sup> Gonzalez, 74, 122–124. Gonzalez (122) notes, “It is difficult to determine the exact nature of the doctrine held by the diverse Judaizing movements” for two reasons: the “scarcity of sources” and the fact that the “ancient Christian writers” discussing them “seem confused.”

<sup>35</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity, I: Beginnings to 1500*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1953, 1975), 143–144; Linwood Urban, *A Short History of Christian Thought*, rev. and exp. ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 1995), 76.

<sup>36</sup> Gonzalez, 144.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2003), 114; Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction*, 20; Gonzalez, 144.

<sup>38</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1971), 173.

<sup>39</sup> Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction*, 104–105.

<sup>40</sup> Pelikan, 173, cf. “An Ancient Homily” in J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers: Revised Greek Texts with Introductions and English Translations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, repr. 1984, 1987 from the 1891 ed. pub. by Macmillan, London), 87. This was “probably written before A.D. 150”; Gonzalez, 65.

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The Apostolic Fathers are considered the “earliest surviving Christian writings apart from those” included in the New Testament. They all agreed “in affirming” both Christ’s “divinity and his humanity,” as well as His pre-existence, according to Justo Gonzalez, who says all but one of them agreed “in making use of diverse Trinitarian formulas, no matter how primitive.”<sup>41</sup> This was long before the time of Constantine.

Ignatius, who was executed very early in the second century,<sup>42</sup> was one of these “Apostolic Fathers.” He says that “our God, Jesus the Christ was conceived in the womb by Mary.”<sup>43</sup> He uses the expression “our God Jesus” more than once and refers to the passion of Christ as “the passion of my God.”<sup>44</sup>

Among the other second-century Christian writers who affirmed the divinity of Jesus are Justin Martyr, Tatian, Tertullian, and Irenaeus. Justin said,

The Jews, being . . . of the opinion that it was the Father of the universe who spake to Moses, though He who spake to him was indeed the son of God . . . are justly charged . . . by Christ Himself with knowing neither the Father nor the Son. For they . . . are proved neither to have become acquainted with the Father, nor to know that the Father of the universe has a Son, who also, being the first-begotten Word of God, is even God. And of old He appeared in the shape of fire and in the likeness of an angel to Moses and to the other prophets; but now . . . become Man by a virgin.

Justin then reminds his readers that the words coming from the burning bush, spoken by the individual Justin has identified as Jesus, were, “I am that I am, the God of Abraham, The God of Isaac, and the God of your fathers. . . .” There is absolutely no question about this: Justin Martyr taught the divinity of Jesus Christ.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Gonzalez, 61, 95. An example of this is found in Clement, “To the Corinthians,” 46: “Have we not one God and one Christ and one Spirit of grace . . .” Lightfoot and Harmer, 77.

<sup>42</sup> Philip Shaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. I: *Ante-Nicene Christianity, A.D. 100–325* (Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910, rpr. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1987), 49.

<sup>43</sup> Ignatius, “To the Ephesians” 18 (cf. 15) in Lightfoot and Harmer, 141.

<sup>44</sup> Ignatius, “To the Romans” 3, 6, in Lightfoot and Harmer, 150–151.

<sup>45</sup> “The First Apology of Justin,” 43, in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994, rpr. American Ed. of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. I, Christian Literature Publishing, 1885), 1:184.

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Tatian was another second-century writer who said, “God was born in the form of a man.”<sup>46</sup> Irenaeus, borrowing a phrase from Isaiah, called Jesus “the mighty God,”<sup>47</sup> and he indicated that God consisted of Father, Son, and Spirit.<sup>48</sup>

Tertullian and his disciple Hippolytus, like most early Christians,<sup>49</sup> believed that humanity and divinity were united in Jesus Christ.<sup>50</sup> Regarding Christ’s divinity, Tertullian said, “For God alone is without sin; and the only man without sin is Christ, since Christ is also God.”<sup>51</sup>

These examples from the second century should suffice to show that the divinity of Jesus Christ was not a fourth-century invention. By the time the Council of Nicea was called in 325 A.D., Christians had been declaring that Jesus was divine for more than two hundred years.

Thus we see that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are generally considered even by historical-critical Biblical scholars to be the oldest and most reliable gospels and that more than a century before the Council of Nicea, most Christians considered Jesus Christ to be the divine Son of God. Whatever Constantine and the Council of Nicea accomplished, those accomplishments did not include inventing the idea of Jesus’ divinity.

**Dennis Pettibone** is Professor of History at Southern Adventist University.  
dlpettib@southern.edu

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<sup>46</sup> “Address of Tatian to the Greeks” 21 in *ibid.*, vol. 2:74.

<sup>47</sup> “Irenaeus Against Heresies” 3. 19. 2 in *ibid.*, vol. 3:449.

<sup>48</sup> Gonzalez, 161.

<sup>49</sup> Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction*, 18. This includes Clement of Rome. Gonzalez, 67.

<sup>50</sup> Gonzalez, 182, 234.

<sup>51</sup> “A Treatise on the Soul” 41, in Roberts and Donaldson, vol. 3:221. Roland Bainton credits Tertullian with coining “the word *Trinity*.” Bainton, 79.

## Trinity in the Old Testament

Norman R. Gulley  
Southern Adventist University

History has many examples of persons distinguishing between the God of the OT and NT and questioning the Trinity in the OT. The following are a few examples. In his *Antithesis*, the Gnostic Marcion (d. ca. 160), the “most formidable heretic” to oppose the revealed truth of Scripture since the writing of the NT,<sup>1</sup> claimed that “the finite, imperfect, angry Jehovah of the Jews” and the “good or gracious God” revealed by Christ were two different Gods.<sup>2</sup> In fact, according to Marcion, the OT God is evil (or at least the author of evil), while the NT God is good.<sup>3</sup> Tertullian (ca. 155–220) wrote five books against Marcion’s heretical ideas<sup>4</sup> and is the most important early thinker to demonstrate the importance of rejecting any dualism in the Trinity.

During the whole 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D., Modalistic Monarchianism (or Sabellianism, or Patripassianism) stated that one God took on different modes. He was the Father in the OT, the Son in the Gospels, and the Spirit since Pentecost—the same God appearing in three different modes of revelation.<sup>5</sup> The stress here was on the oneness of God against pagan

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Schaff, Introduction, *ANF* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 3:7.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1910), 2:482–487.

<sup>3</sup> Bradley Nassif, “Marcion (d. c. 154)” in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, ed. Trevor A. Hart (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 350–352.

<sup>4</sup> Tertullian, *The Five Books Against Marcion*, in *ANF*, 3:270–474.

<sup>5</sup> Schaff, *History*, 2:572; Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity: Beginnings to 1500* (Peabody: Prince, 1997), 1:143–145. As William Shedd put it, “The Sabellian Trinity is economic, that is, one of offices, as one and the same human person may be a citizen, a magistrate, and a parent. It is not an intrinsic and immanent Trinity, but



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polytheism,<sup>6</sup> which denied a Trinity in either the OT or the NT. Much later, Michael Servetus (1511–1553) believed the Trinity had little biblical support, and if theology could rid itself of the Trinitarian idea, this would contribute to the conversion of Jews and Muslims.<sup>7</sup> Socinians (16<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> century) emphatically denied the divinity of Christ, and so rejected the Trinity.<sup>8</sup> Their Racovian Catechism (1605) was one of the earliest antitrinitarian statements since Arianism (4<sup>th</sup> century) and became the forerunner of Deism and Unitarianism (both promoting God as one).<sup>9</sup> The 17<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a vigorous defense of the Trinity against Socinian and Arminian views and modern forms of Sabellianism and Arianism.<sup>10</sup>

It is well known that many biblical scholars, past and present, reject a continuity between law and grace and hence distinguish the God of law (OT) from the God of grace (NT). Even more radical, the Dispensationalists assume that God deals differently with those living in one historical period than with others living in another historical period. For example, Lewis Chafer claims that these different dispensations are “the very foundation of a science such as Systematic Theology.” He then continues:

Though too often confused, the divine government is different in each of these ages, being adapted perfectly to the relation which the people in their respective dispensations sustain to God. Each of these systems of human government is wholly

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one of manifestation only” *Dogmatic Theology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 1888–1894, ed. Alan W. Gomes (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2003), 239.

<sup>6</sup> “Monarchianism,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988), 440, 441.

<sup>7</sup> “Unitarianism,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, 700.

<sup>8</sup> This influential movement was headed by two Italian lay theologians: Sozzini (or Sozzini) was their surname; They were Lelio (1525–1562) and his nephew Faustus (1539–1604). See John Marshall, “Socinianism,” in *Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2000), 845. They taught that Christ didn’t become God until after His resurrection; see P. Kubricht, “Socinus, Faustus (1539–1604),” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 1122. Albert Henry Newman, *A Manual of Church History*, 1902, 21<sup>st</sup> ed. (Chicago: American Baptist, 1948), 2:329.

<sup>9</sup> P. Kubricht, “Racovian Catechism (1605),” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 979.

<sup>10</sup> Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520–1725: The Trinity of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 4:147.

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complete in itself. The Mosaic law contained the commandments, the statutes, and the ordinances, and was an expression of God's will to Israel to whom alone it was addressed. In the teaching of grace addressed only to the Church, God has disclosed in full the manner of life which becomes those who are already perfected in Christ.<sup>11</sup>

Dispensationalists distinguish between Israel and the church, designating the old covenant as law and the new covenant as grace. Charles Hodge believed Scripture contrasts the old and the new covenants in several ways. One way is that the new reveals the same covenant, but "it is spoken of as a state of tutelage and bondage, far different from the freedom and filial spirit of the dispensation under which we now live . . . in the New Testament the gospel greatly predominates over the law. Whereas, under the Old Testament, the law predominated over the gospel."<sup>12</sup> Predestinarians promote a difference in humans due to sovereign rather than human choice.<sup>13</sup> What these human ideas have in common is questioning the God of Scripture.

However, there is a problem. If God is a solitary Person in the OT ("Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, is one," Deut 6:4),<sup>14</sup> and a Trinity in the NT (at Christ's baptism, Matt 3:16, 17; and in Christ's great commission, Matt 28:19), how can He be a God of love (1 John 4:8b) throughout human history? In other words, how can a solitary God (OT) love as the Trinity does (NT)? Such assumed differences are not merely between law and grace, bondage and freedom, sovereign and free choice, but have to do with God Himself. If God relates to humans differently at any time and in any way, what does this do to His words "I the Lord do not change" (Mal 3:6)? Our presentation is confined to whether God is only solitary in the OT, compared to a Trinity in the NT.

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<sup>11</sup> Lewis Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, xi, and xxi. The entire preface gives insight into the uniqueness of Dispensational theology, v–xxxviii.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.p., n.d.), 2:376.

<sup>13</sup> Predestinarians distinguish between the elect, whom God chooses in eternity, and the reprobate, whom God rejects in eternity, disallowing the possibility that free human choice in history in either the OT or the NT might have anything to do with human destiny. This calls into question the statements that God doesn't show partiality (2 Chron 19:7; Job 34:19).

<sup>14</sup> The *Shema* is found in three passages (Deut 6:4–9; 11:13–21; Num 15:37–41); Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary: Mark 8:27–16:20*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 34b:263.

**Old Testament Shema**

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deut 6:4, NIV, NASB, NKJV), or “one Lord” (NEB, KJV, RSV), or “The Lord alone” (Goodspeed), or “the Lord our God is one Lord, the only Lord” (Amplified). Commentators recognize that the Hebrew can be translated in different ways.<sup>15</sup> The next chapter in Deuteronomy, about the Decalogue, begins the same way: “Hear, O Israel . . . the Lord our God” (Deut 5:1, 2a), and the word “one” can be considered as a title or name for God.<sup>16</sup> Two chapters before the *Shema*, the Red Sea miracle (exodus redemption) calls forth the exclamation, “the Lord is God . . . there is no other” (Deut 4:39), which echoes “who among the gods is like you, O Lord” (Exod 15:11a), which anticipates the first commandment and its prologue “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, You shall have no other gods before me.” These texts focus on the uniqueness of God.

The *Shema*

expresses not only the *uniqueness* but also the *unity* of God. As one God (or the “Unique”), when he spoke there was no other to contradict; when he promised, there was no other to revoke that promise; when he warned, there was no other to provide refuge from the warning. He was not merely first among the gods, as Baal in the Canaanite pantheon, Amon-Re in Egypt, or Marduk in Babylon, he was the one and only God.<sup>17</sup>

What is this oneness that is attributed to God? Is it more than a *name*, *uniqueness*, and the *one and only*? There are two words for “one” in Hebrew (1) *yāhîd* means unique, such as an only son (Gen 22:2) and an only child (Prov 4:3; Zech 12:10), whereas (2) *’ehād* means united, such as “a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (Gen 2:24). The word *’ehād* (united) is used in the *Shema*. Millard Erickson observes that the unity of husband and

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<sup>15</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 168. Duane L. Christensen, *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 6A, 142, notes the following: C. H. Gordon suggests “Yahweh is our God, is ‘One’” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 29 (1970) 198; and S. D. Mc Bride translates it as “Our God is Yahweh, Yahweh alone” *Interpretation* 27 (1973): 274.

<sup>16</sup> Craigie, 168.

<sup>17</sup> Craigie, 169.

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wife is “not uniqueness, but the unity of diversity. It speaks of union, rather than aloneness”<sup>18</sup> That’s why Duane L. Christensen says, “The word אֱלֹהִים in the text of the *Shema*<sup>c</sup> speaks not only of the *uniqueness*, but also of the *unity* of God. The doctrine of monotheism is implicit in this brief creedal statement.”<sup>19</sup> The Hebrew word for “one” (*yāhîd*), meaning solitary, or without others, is not used in the *Shema*. So it seems that the *Shema* not only speaks of the uniqueness of God as the only God, but “refers to the oneness that results from a unity of numerous persons.”<sup>20</sup>

*Elohim* is a plural term for God (for *El* is God, and most names for God add to the word *El*). This didn’t bother monotheists, which indicates that the plurality of the name wasn’t confused with polytheism. Rather, as Herman Bavinck concludes, the plural form of this name for God “refers to the deity in the fullness and richness of its life. The God of revelation is not an abstract ‘monad’ but the true and living God, who in the infinite fullness of his life contains the highest diversity.”<sup>21</sup>

*Further Old Testament Evidence for Plurality.*<sup>22</sup> The plurality of God is also present in the following: (1) After sin entered the world “the Lord said [singular], ‘The man has now become like one of us [plural], knowing good and evil’” (Gen 3:22a); (2) “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying [singular], ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us [plural]?’” (Isa 6:8).

In Hebrew, more than one Person in the one God is conveyed by God’s use of the plural cohortative “let us”: (1) “Then God said [singular], ‘Let us [plural] make man in our image’” (Gen 1:26a); (2) in response to the Babel tower builders God said [singular], “Come, let us [plural] go down and confuse their language so they will not be able to understand each other” (Gen 11:7). When God said “let us,” “one of us,” or “for us,” He indicated that more than one Person is in the Godhead, even though He told Israel that their God was one. *While focusing on one God to keep them from many gods, He allowed them to glimpse that one God as more than one Person.*

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<sup>18</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 174.

<sup>19</sup> Christensen, 145.

<sup>20</sup> Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, John W. Reeve, *The Trinity: Understanding God’s Love, His Plan of Salvation, and Christian Relationships* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2002), 33, 34

<sup>21</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 2:261.

<sup>22</sup> In this segment the singular and plural are pointed out in supplied brackets.

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It should be kept in mind that the above plurals are not plurals of majesty, when a royal person (singular) says “we grant you this privilege,” for there are no other royal persons in Scripture who speak in this way.<sup>23</sup> We must not read into Scripture ideas understood in our culture. George A. F. Knight is right to say that believing that Scripture contains plurals of majesty “is to read into Hebrew speech a modern way of thinking. The kings of Israel and Judah are all addressed in the singular in our biblical records.”<sup>24</sup>

Here are other examples of plurality in God: (1) “Now the Sovereign Lord has sent me with his Spirit” (Isa 48:16b); (2) “I will show love to the house of Judah; and I will save them—not by bow, sword or battle, or by horses and horsemen, but by the Lord their God” (Hos 1:7); and (3) “See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the Lord Almighty” (Mal 3:1).

#### Angel of the Lord<sup>25</sup>

An internal indicator for plurality in God is the phrase “the angel of the Lord.” The following examples document that the “angel of the Lord” is sometimes God, for the “angel of the Lord” (*Yahweh*) in the OT is the pre-incarnate Christ. This angel’s relationship with persons in the OT compares well with the Christ we know in the NT, thus showing the

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<sup>23</sup> Wayne Grudem: *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity and Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 227.

<sup>24</sup> G. A. F. Knight, *A Biblical Approach to the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Edinburgh: Oliver & James, 1953), 20.

<sup>25</sup> In commenting on 2 Cor 5:15, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself,” Ellen White says, “Since the sin of our first parents there has been no direct communication between God and man. The Father has given the world into the hands of Christ, that through His mediatorial work He may redeem man and vindicate the holiness of the law of God. All the communion between heaven and the fallen race has been through Christ. It was the Son of God that gave to our first parents the promise of redemption. It was He who revealed Himself to the patriarchs Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses understood the gospel. They looked for salvation through man’s Substitute and Surety. These holy men of old held communion with the Saviour who was to come to our world in human flesh; and some of them talked with Christ and heavenly angels face to face. Christ was not only the leader of the Hebrews in the wilderness—the Angel in whom was the name of Jehovah, and who, veiled in the cloudy pillar went before the host—but it was He who gave the law to Israel.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 366.

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Christ of the OT is the same as the Christ of the NT, and the distinction placed between the OT God and the NT God is not warranted.

(1) When Hagar fled from Sarah, “The angel of the Lord” found her near a spring in the desert. The angel of the Lord named her baby and told Hagar to return to Sarah and submit to her. “The angel added, ‘I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count . . . for the Lord heard your misery.’” Only God can do that, so Hagar said, “You are the God who sees me.” This God said the Lord had heard of her misery, so God referred to the Lord, and in so doing gave insight into there being more than one Person in the Godhead (Gen 16:7–13).

(2) When Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac, “The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, ‘I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand of the seashore’” (Gen 22:11–17). The angel of the Lord is called the Lord (Heb. *Yahweh*), and He speaks twice in the passage (vs. 11, 12; 15–18), and God (Heb. *’Elōhîm*) is mentioned four times (vs. 1, 3, 8, 9). It is *Yahweh* who saves Abraham from sacrificing His son, blesses Him, and Abraham calls the place “*Yahweh* will provide” (v. 14), an insight into the future day when on the same mount, Christ would provide the sacrifice for all humans.

(3) When Israel blessed Joseph he said, “May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my Shepherd all my life to this day, the Angel who had delivered me from all harm—may he bless these boys” (Gen 48:15, 16a; cf. Gen 24:7, 40; Exod 32:34).

(4) Once “the angel of the Lord” spoke to Jacob in a dream explaining how to increase his flocks, out of pity for what his father-in-law Laban was doing to him. He said to Jacob, “I am the God of Bethel” (Gen 31:10–13). At Bethel the pre-incarnate Christ gave Jacob a dream of a ladder between earth and heaven, with angels ascending and descending, to let him know he was not alone. He promised, “I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you” (Gen 28:12b–15). He told Jacob to leave the land, and thus to leave Laban, and return home (Gen 31:13b). Laban pursued Jacob, but the pre-incarnate Christ appeared to Laban in a dream at night, saying “Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad” (Gen 31:24).

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The report that Esau, with four hundred men, was coming to meet him caused Jacob “great fear and distress” (Gen 32:7a). He prayed to God to save him, claiming the covenant promises given to him. Then came the night of wrestling. With whom did Jacob wrestle? Genesis says it was with a man (Gen 32:22–30), but Hosea is more specific: Jacob wrestled “with the angel” who was “God” (Hos 12:3, 4).<sup>26</sup> The pre-incarnate God stayed with Jacob that night and blessed Him, changing His name to Israel before departing (Gen 32:26–29). In Hebrew culture names stood for character. The name “Jacob” means deceiver, and the name “Israel” means “you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome” (v. 28b). His “new name is a guarantee of a successful meeting with his brother Esau.” The name “Esau” reminded him of deceiving Esau in the past, whereas the name “Israel” would remind him of victory over Esau in the future. This was an encouragement to him. And Israel became the name of God’s chosen people, and so to be named the same was an honor. That night the pre-incarnate Christ gave him forgiveness for the past and a promise for the future.<sup>27</sup> No wonder Israel exclaimed, “I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared” (v. 30).

(5) When Moses stood before the burning bush, “the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush . . . When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses, Moses! . . . Then he said, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.’ At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God” (Exod 3:2–6). But the pre-incarnate Christ promised to give Moses success in his mission in leading God’s people (Exod 3:16–4:17).

(6) Israel was terrified as the army of Pharaoh closed in behind them as they faced the Red Sea. Then “the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel’s army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them,” and during the Red Sea crossing, “the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and

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<sup>26</sup> Compare Joshua, who was confronted by a man near Jericho who said He was “commander of the army of the Lord” and asked Joshua to take off his shoes because it was holy ground, just as God asked Moses at the burning bush. Here is the pre-incarnate Christ as the commander of God’s army, as He had been at the Exodus, and He appeared as a man to Joshua (Joshua 5:13–15). However, in Joshua 12:8 “the Angel of the Lord” leads His people into battle to destroy all nations that attack Jerusalem. So the man and “the Angel of the Lord” are the same pre-incarnate Christ.

<sup>27</sup> See Gordon Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 16–50*, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker (Dallas: Word, 1994), 2:296, 297.

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cloud at the Egyptians and threw it into confusion. He made the wheels of their chariots come off so that they had difficulty driving” (Exod 14:1–25a). In praising the angel of the Lord (Exod 14:19), Israel sang the song of Moses after the Red Sea deliverance: “Who is like you, O Lord? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?” (Exod 15:11). New Testament corroboration says the angel of the Lord through Moses “led them out of Egypt and did wonders and miraculous signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the desert” (Acts 7:35, 36), For forty years in the desert they were fed by manna (Exod 16:15, 31, 33; Psa 78:24), drank water (Neh 9:20), and their clothes didn’t wear out (Deut 8:4).

(7) Later, during the time of the Judges, “The angel of the Lord” said, “I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land that I swore to give to your forefathers. I said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you . . . Yet you have disobeyed me” (Judg 2:1, 2). When the angel of the Lord spoke to Gideon, he addressed Him as “Lord,” and to Gideon’s concerns Scripture says, “The Lord answered” (Judges 6:12–16). The angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah’s wife (Sampson’s mother), promising she would give birth to a son who would deliver Israel from the Philistines (Judg 13:27). Manoah prayed to God that the angel of the Lord would come back, and He did and talked to Manoah, after which the angel ascended in the flames from the alter of burnt offering, and Manoah exclaimed, “We have seen God!” (Judg 13:19–22).

(8) Clearly the angel of the Lord is the covenant-making God, the same God who spoke to Abraham (Gen 12:1–3). This is the Lord who gave the Ten Commandments to His people (Exod 20; Acts 7:38), the law identified with the covenant (Deut 4:13). This is why Christ said, “If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me” (John 5:46). God said, to Israel, “I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your rebellion, since my Name is in him” (Exod 23:20, 21). Here God spoke about the pre-incarnate Christ and said He had His name. That is to say, He also is called God. Here is a clear statement that there is more than one Person in the Godhead, and a clear statement that they share the same name “God,” and in this respect there is only one God, the God who is represented by these two in the passage.

(9) Paul identifies the angel of the Lord. “For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized



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into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ” (1 Cor 10:1–4).

The OT God is unique compared to idols: He is Creator of everything, foretells the future, acts as none other can, and is the Savior of the world.<sup>28</sup> The texts on the “angel of the Lord” indicate that this unique God is a relational God. He is the same God we know from the NT. For the OT says, “I the Lord do not change” (Mal 3:6), and the NT says “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8).

**Sola Scriptura Evidence for an Old Testament Trinity**

The *sola scriptura* hermeneutic is Scripture interpreting Scripture, and in our case, allowing the NT to interpret the OT texts on God. This hermeneutic is vital to biblical understanding and is crucial in evaluating Dispensational claims regarding the continuing relevance of OT prophecies for contemporary Israel.<sup>29</sup>

**Creation.** In the creation of male and female in the image of God (Gen 1:26, 27), the Persons of the Godhead are imaged in the oneness of man and woman in marriage. The *sola scriptura* hermeneutic specifies the reality of that image as the Spirit (Gen 1:2; Psa 104:30; cf. Job 33:4; 26:13) and the Father creating everything through the Son (Col 1:15, 16; Heb 1:2b), and hence the reality of the image is a oneness in three, or the Trinity.

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<sup>28</sup> The OT is unequivocal that there is only one God: “the Lord is God; besides him there is no other . . . the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other” (Deut 4:35b, 39b). This theme is repeated in a number of texts (e.g., Deut 32:39; 1 Kings 8:60). Often God is mentioned as Creator compared to the gods who were creations (e.g., Isa 44:6–24; 45:5–18; 46:1–4). “It is I who made the earth and created mankind upon it. My own hands stretched out the heavens; I marshaled their starry hosts” (Isa 45:12). God foretells the future (Isa 48:14). God says He will raise up Cyrus to free His people from Babylonian captivity, and the vanquished “will bow down before you and plead with you, saying ‘Surely God is with you, and there is no other; there is no other god.’ Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Savior of Israel!” (Isa 45:14b, 15). He is the God of universal salvation: “Turn to me and be saved all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other” (Isa 45:22). He is the God who will be victor over the cosmic controversy in the final judgment: “Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. They will say of me, ‘In the Lord alone are righteousness and strength. All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame’” (Isa 45:23b, 24).

<sup>29</sup> For evidence of this, see Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena* (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 2003), 1:717–749.

**Christ's Mission and Inauguration.** In Luke 4:18, 19, Christ read from Isaiah 61:1, 2, recognizing the verses as a statement of His mission, and in so doing indicated that Isa 61:1, 2 speaks of the Trinity as follows: "The Spirit [Holy Spirit] of the Sovereign Lord [the Father] is on me [Christ]" (Isa 61:1a). This is Christ's commentary on this OT passage. The inauguration of Christ in heaven is another example of more than one Person in the one God. "Your throne, O God [Heb. *ʾElōhîm*], will last for ever and ever . . . You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God [literally "God, God of you"] has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy" (Psa 45:6, 7). Here God is addressing God; two Persons share the name of God (Heb. *ʾElōhîm*). Who are they? This passage is quoted in Hebrews 1:8, 9. "But about the Son he says, 'Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever . . . You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions.'" Here God speaks to Christ after His victorious life on earth when He "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven" (Heb 1:3b).

Compare Psalm 110:1: "The Lord [Heb. *Yahweh*] says to my Lord [Heb. *ʾadōnî*]: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" That future must have encouraged Christ. In fact, on one occasion Christ asked the Pharisees, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" They replied, "the son of David," to which Jesus responded. "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, 'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet."' If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" (Matt 22:41–45).

### **The Trinity in Isaiah**

It is well known that the Trinity is explicit in the NT and only implicit in the OT. However, internal evidence provided below indicates that the Trinity can rise to the level of being explicit in the OT. There are several examples in the Book of Isaiah.

(1) The Trinity is explicit in Isa 42:1: "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations." God the Father is speaking about His Son, to whom He will give the Holy Spirit. The NT comments that this passage from Isaiah was fulfilled in the healing ministry of Jesus (Matt 12:15–21), who was sent by the Father (John 3:16, 17) and empowered by the Holy Spirit (Matt 3:16, 17; Luke 4:18). The heart relationship of the Father for the Son is seen in this passage, for the Father

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says Christ is “the one I love, in whom I delight” (Matt 12:18a). Here is specific insight into the loving relationship among the three in the Godhead. They love each other, and as such are by nature “love” (1 John 4:8). Here is a glimpse into the relational Trinity.

(2) The Trinity is explicit in Isa 48:16: “Come near me and listen to this [cf. “Listen to me, O Jacob . . . I am the first and the last” v. 12] . . . And now the Sovereign Lord [Father] has sent me [Christ], with his Spirit” [Holy Spirit].

(3) The Trinity is explicit in Isa 63:7–14. We will focus on verses 7–10a:

I will tell of the kindnesses of the Lord, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the Lord has done for us—yes, the many good things he has done for the house of Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses. He said, “Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me”; and so he became their Savior. In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. Yet they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit.

(1) **Kindnesses** of the Lord, v. 7: The verse begins and ends with the word “kindnesses,” which is the Hebrew word *hesed*, meaning covenant love, faithful love, undeserved love. This is in utter contrast to Israel, the covenant partners, who rebelled (Heb. *mārâh*) and grieved (Heb. *âtsab*) the Spirit of God (v. 10a). The contrast is between the Father (and the Trinity) as faithful in love to Israel who are unfaithful as rebels to God. Gomer, the prostitute wife of Hosea (older contemporary of Isaiah), typifies this unfaithful relationship (Hos 1:2). Isaiah said, “They have forsaken the Lord; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him” (Isa 1:4b).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Most in Israel rebelled and caused God to be angry. They never entered into His rest (Heb 3:7–11; cf. Psalms 95: 7–11). For “those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in because of their disobedience” (Heb 4:6; cf. 2, 3). For those who heard the gospel failed to understand its value, because they “did not combine it with faith” (Heb 4:2). In the NT Christ, moved with sorrow, exclaimed, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’” (Matt 23:37–39).

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(2) *Kindnesses of the Lord*, v. 7: The word “Lord” (Heb. *Yahweh*, mentioned three times in the verse) is a distinct being from “the angel of the Lord” (Heb. *Yahweh* in verse 9), and both are distinct from the Holy Spirit (vs. 10a, 11b), who is said to be the “Spirit of the Lord” (Heb. *Yahweh* in verse 14a). Here we have: (1) *Yahweh*, (2) angel of *Yahweh*, and (3) Spirit of *Yahweh*, an explicit reference to the Trinity, and a specified relationship between them: the Son and Spirit are related to the Father, for they both share the name *Yahweh* with the Father. The Trinity is *hesed* love (cf. “God is love,” Gr. *agapē*, 1 John 4:8b, 16).

(3) *He too was distressed*, v. 9: God was not aloof, impassible or unmoved by human suffering (as in Platonism and in the classical theism of Christian Theology). He suffered with His people. “God’s saviorhood involves much more than merely delivering people from their afflictions; it involves participation in the afflictions with the afflicted”<sup>31</sup> (cf. Heb 4:16, 17). He also suffers in place of His people, as seen in the suffering Servant (Isa 52:13–53:12), which is the most profound OT revelation of the substitutionary atonement of Christ. The text continues with the Father and Son redeeming these rebels, lifting them up, and carrying them, reminiscent of a lost lamb being carried on the shoulders of the Shepherd Christ (Luke 15:5). I agree with Geoffrey Grogan that “Verse 9 is one of the most moving expressions of the compassionate love of God in the OT, reminding the reader of some of the great passages in Hosea, Isaiah’s older contemporary.”<sup>32</sup>

(4) *The angel of His face*, v. 9: God the Father (name given to Him in v. 16) calls Himself the Savior of Israel (at the Red Sea, vs. 11–14), and “in all their distress he too was distressed” (vs. 8b, 9a). Then His angel is introduced as the “angel of his face” (Heb. *pāneh* = face or presence). This is the only time this expression appears in the OT.<sup>33</sup> What does “face” imply? “The genitive פָּנֵי . . . is not to be taken objectively in the sense of ‘the angel who sees His face,’ but as explanatory, ‘the angel who is His face, or in whom His face is manifested.’”<sup>34</sup> “the face of

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<sup>31</sup> John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah: The New International Commentary on the OT: Isaiah 40–66*, ed. R. K. Harrison, Robert L. Hubbard (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 606.

<sup>32</sup> Geoffrey W. Grogan, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 6:342.

<sup>33</sup> John D. W. Watts, *Word Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 34–66*, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker (Waco: Word, 1987), 332. The expression does occur in rabbinic writings; cf. Oswalt, 607.

<sup>34</sup> F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the OT in Ten Volumes*, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 7/2, 455.

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God' is His self-revealing presence."<sup>35</sup> Here Christ, to some degree, is in the same role of manifesting the Father as later in the NT He said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9b). The angel of the Lord "speaks as the Lord and is yet distinct from him, in whom the holy God 'accommodates' himself to live among sinners, an Old Testament anticipation of Jesus."<sup>36</sup> The pre-incarnate Christ saved them in the Red Sea (vs. 11–14).

(5) *In his love* (Heb. *ʾahābâh*), v. 9: The noun love occurs only here in Isaiah. "It is the love which delights in the companionship of the loved one."<sup>37</sup> Here is insight into the way God loves in the OT. As Hosea faithfully loved his unfaithful wife, so God faithfully loved (Heb. *hesed*) His unfaithful Judah. This is the stunning contrast presented in this passage. It is while they rebelled that God loved them to this depth, even though He had to punish them to save them (v. 10b onwards).

John Oswalt suggests reading Isaiah 63:7 as:

the way God had demonstrated the fundamental beneficence of his character in all his treatment of Israel. In many ways this is the dominant feature of the entire OT. When Gentile readers (from Marcion onward) look at the OT and see a God of wrath, the OT writers say to us in astonishment, 'Oh no, it's not surprising that God should have gotten angry with us. What is surprising is that he ever cared about us at all, and that he then continued to love us and care for us when we senselessly rejected him.'"<sup>38</sup>

Isaiah, the gospel prophet, reveals more about the Suffering Servant (Jesus Christ) than any other OT prophet. Likewise, arguably, He presents the Trinity more explicitly than any other OT writer.

**The Spirit in the Old Testament.** The Holy Spirit is mentioned 88 times in the OT, in about half of its 39 books,<sup>39</sup> and 325 times in 24 NT books.<sup>40</sup> Yet you will find that He says very little about Himself. He communicates much about the Father and the Son. This is an insight into

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<sup>35</sup> F. Delitzsch, 454.

<sup>36</sup> J. Alec Motyer, *The Tyndale OT Commentaries: Isaiah* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 387.

<sup>37</sup> Motyer, *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Oswalt, 604.

<sup>39</sup> W. H. Griffith Thomas, *The Holy Spirit of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 9.

<sup>40</sup> Wm. Edward Bleedenwolf, *A Help to the Study of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1936), 17.

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the selfless love in the Trinity, for the Son glorifies the Father (John 17:4), and the Spirit glorifies the Son (John 16:14). I can imagine that in heaven before the inhabited planets of unfallen intelligent beings, the Father glorified the Son and the Spirit. For in perfect eternal and reciprocal love, each loves the others more than loving Himself—the very opposite of Satan and those who follow Him. This communion means they do not do things on their own (John 5:22, 27, 30; 10:30, 37, 38; 14:31; 15:10b), so the Son speaks what the Father told Him (John 7:16; 12:49; 15:15), and the Spirit “will speak only what he hears” from Christ (John 16:12–14).

**The Old Testament Relational Trinity  
Is the Same as the New Testament Trinity**

If God is love by nature (1 John 4:8),<sup>41</sup> which is documented in the sampling of OT texts examined above, then the God of the OT is the same as the God of the NT. What God is in His revelation in history is what God is like in His own inner-Trinitarian being. God’s acts of love issue from His nature as love. God could not be solitary and be love, for an eternal existence of God by Himself before the first creation would not be the same as a Trinity. The fact that the Trinity lived for eternity with each other before creating indicates that their mutual love for one another needed none other. It means that there is a reciprocal love relationship within the Trinity so that each loves the other two with a love that is eternal and divine.

The NT speaks of the relational Trinity as follows: (1) Mutual indwelling. Christ says the Spirit will come to the disciples and adds, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:18). So Christ says He will come to them through the Holy Spirit. At the same time Christ prayed for Christian unity “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you” (John 17:21a). (2) The Trinity is a relationship of equals who have different functions in the plan of salvation. The Father prepared a body for Christ, and Christ came to do the will of His Father (Heb 10:4–7), to reveal Him (John 14:9), and to

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<sup>41</sup> John also says “God is light” (1 John 1:5) and “God is spirit” (John 4:24). These are three Johannine declarations on the nature of God. Because the fruit of the Spirit is love (Gal 5:22, 23), that fruit is manifested in all God does, so that He is light and reveals light in a way compatible with His love. Light and love speak of His character. “God is spirit” describes His metaphysical nature. For further discussion, see I. Howard Marshall, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: Epistles of John*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse, F. F. Bruce, Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 212, 213.

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speak His words (John 17:8a). But in carrying out this mission Christ said, “it is the Father living in me, who is doing his works” (John 14:10b), and speaks of His Father as “you are in me and I am in you” (John 17:21a); (3) With respect to sending the Spirit, Christ said, “When the Counselor comes, *whom I will send to you* from the Father, the Spirit of truth *who goes out from the Father*” (John 15:26).

In the NT the Spirit is given titles never ascribed to Him in the OT. He is “Spirit of His Son” (Gal 4:6), “Spirit of Christ” (Rom 8:9, 1 Pet 1:11), and “the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:19). W. H. Griffith Thomas could therefore say, “It is not in His Absolute Being, but as the Spirit of Christ that He is revealed in the New Testament.”<sup>42</sup> H. B. Swete concludes that the Spirit is Christ’s “second Self.”<sup>43</sup>

Why is the Spirit’s new name associated with Christ? He is the “Spirit of Jesus” because He brings Jesus to Christians. Jesus promised, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you (John 14:18); and “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20, NKJV). Furthermore, the Spirit is called the “Spirit of Jesus” because His mission is Christ-centered. Jesus said, “the Father will send [the Holy Spirit] in my name” (John 14:26). The “Spirit of truth” (John 16:13) comes to reveal the one who is “the truth” (John 14:6). Jesus said the Holy Spirit would “testify about me” (John 15:26) and “will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you” (John 14:26). He “will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26).

Human beings were created to be temples for the indwelling of God (1 Cor 3:16). Christ’s work, both in heaven’s sanctuary and in human temples, applies the results of Christ’s atonement sacrifice for and in humans. So the application of Calvary is made in the heavenly sanctuary by Christ and in human temples by the “Spirit of Christ.”

From the examination of the OT texts above, it is clear that divine love is shared by the Father, Son, and Spirit in the OT in a reciprocal relationship beyond human comprehension. It will take another paper to explore the covenant relationship of God in the OT as the same as His covenant love in the NT. Suffice it to say, the OT God of love—who is the same as the NT God of love (Mal 4:6; Heb 13:8)—acted in the history of Israel/Judah with profound grace and suffered grief. God’s *hesed*

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<sup>42</sup> Griffith Thomas, 141.

<sup>43</sup> Henry Barclay Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* (London: MacMillan, 1909), 300.

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covenant faithfulness continued even though rejected by Israel/Judah. Creation of humans in the image of God (Gen 1:26, 27) meant that Adam and Eve's relationship with one another was to reflect the relationship among the Trinity. After the fall of humans, God's covenant with humans was to restore the relationship with Him and with one another so human love to some degree could reflect the reciprocal love among the Trinity. The suffering Servant of Isaiah 52, forecasting the pain of Christ becoming a substitute for human sins, crushing out His life, opens up the depths of God's love for humans as much as any NT passage:

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows . . . he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment, he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken . . . he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. (Isa 53:2b–4a, 5–8, 12b)

**Conclusion**

Even the *Shema* (God is one, Deut 6:4), stressing the uniqueness of God (compared to polytheism), didn't use the word *one as unique* (Heb. *yāhîd*) but *one as united* (Heb. *'ehād*), thereby indicating unity of persons. We noted that there are several OT texts indicating a plurality in God, as one God addresses another God. The pre-incarnate Christ often acts in OT history as the "angel of the Lord" and reveals His same *hesed* love (OT) as His *agapē* love (NT). The continuity of a relational God in both Testaments counters the idea that the OT God is different from the NT God (which if true would aid the cosmic controversy against God). The data supports the biblical claims: "I the Lord do not change" (Mal 4:6) and "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb 13:8). Although the Trinity is more implicit in the OT and explicit in the NT, we have noted that: (1) the *sola scriptura* hermeneutic indicates that



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Christ understood the Trinity to be present in the OT; and (2) Isaiah, the gospel prophet who reveals the suffering Servant Christ as no other OT prophet, also presents the Trinity with greater specificity than any other OT writer.

**Norman R. Gulley** earned his Ph.D. degree in Systematic Theology from the University of Edinburgh and is Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Southern Adventist University, where he has taught since 1978. He has been a pastor and missionary. He has served as Chair of the Religion Department at Madison College and of the Theology Department at Japan Missionary College. He was also founding Dean of the Graduate Seminary in the Philippines. He has written extensively for leading SDA journals, authored four Sabbath School quarterlies, and written several books—including *Christ Our Refuge* (Pacific Press, 1996), *Christ is Coming!* (Review and Herald, 1998), the *Prolegomena* to a three volume systematic theology (Andrews UP, 2003), and *Satan's Trojan Horse and God's End-Time Way to Victory* (Review & Herald, 2004). He is a past-president of the Adventist Theological Society. [ngulley@southern.edu](mailto:ngulley@southern.edu)

## **God Is Love—Trinitarian Love!**

Woodrow W. Whidden II

Adventist International Institute for Advanced Studies

What follows is not primarily a doctrinal/biblical study (the “what” of the Trinity doctrine), but a theological reflection on the profound implications of the doctrine as it illuminates the meaning of creation, sin, atonement, and personal reconciliation with God. But before we proceed to considerations of the theological significance of this foundational doctrine, a review of its fundamental doctrinal elements is in order.

The Trinity doctrine teaches that the Godhead consists of three divine Persons—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There are not three gods, but three divine Persons who are One in nature (same essence or substance), character, and purpose. They have eternally pre-existed; that is, there has never been a time in eternity past when they did not co-exist, and there will never be a time when they will cease to exist.

While these three divine Persons are One, they have taken different roles or positions in the Godhead’s work of creation, redemption, and the loving administration of the universe. The Father has assumed overall leadership, the Son has subordinated Himself to the leadership of the Father, and the Spirit is voluntarily subordinate to both the Father and the Son.

The Son is the fully divine second Person of the Godhead who, while retaining His full deity, laid aside the trappings or prerogatives of His divine power and became fully man in the Incarnation. The Spirit proceeds forth from the Father and the Son as the personal, divine representative of the Trinity on earth. The Holy Spirit is just as much divine as the Father and the Son and is fully personal.

These are the main convictions that Christians have confessed as the biblical truth about the Holy Trinity. We would humbly submit that the Trinity is an absolutely foundational and essential doctrine that clarifies

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gross misconceptions about God's nature and character. And such clarifications will make it easier for us to be reconciled to Him and be more effective servants in our witness to and for Him.

**SDA Trinitarian Developments**

One of the great surprises of Seventh-day Adventist history is that the "movement" did not formally embrace the biblical truth of the Trinity earlier than the mid-20th Century. When, however, the historical background of the movement is better understood, it does help to explain the tardiness of Trinitarian considerations in the SDA theological pilgrimage. With its radical, rationalist, and highly individualistic approach to Bible study and a strong aversion to anything that smacked of papistical "tradition" (all such ideas arising from Adventism's Christianite/Restorationist heritage), it is little wonder that the subtleties of classical Trinitarian thought did not initially fare too well.

The Sabbatarian Adventists, however, did possess at least two significant resources that paved the way to a theology that became undergirded with Trinitarian principles. Foremost among these resources was (1) a strong advocacy that any doctrine be biblical. Their rationalist and "restorationist" prejudices were significant blinders to Trinitarian truth, but there was another factor which would help to clear off the mists of anti-Trinitarian thinking: (2) the steadily advancing Christological and Pneumatological testimony of Ellen G. White. Over time the testimony of the "lesser light" raised consciousness regarding the essentially Trinitarian testimony of the "greater light" (the Bible). And the heart of this biblical exposition was the full, eternal deity of Christ and the deity and personhood of the Holy Spirit, who have existed co-eternally with the Father. With the unfolding of her expositions of Bible truth, especially in the setting of the "Great Controversy between Christ and Satan" meta-narrative, the issue of divine love comes to the fore as the centrally contested theme.

I would suggest that the most succinct presentation of the "Great Controversy" motif is appropriately located at the heart of Ellen White's profoundly moving expositions of the significance of the passion of our Lord (especially His atoning death). This inspired commentary is found in *The Desire of Ages*, in the chapter entitled "It Is Finished."<sup>1</sup> I would further suggest that these comments undoubtedly form the theological

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<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1898), 761-64.

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and spiritual “Most Holy Place” of the writings of the “Messenger to the Remnant.”

The arresting theme of her commentary on Calvary as the climactic moment of the “Great Controversy between Christ and Satan” revolves around the concept of God’s love as a delicate balance of divine justice and mercy. The social love of the Trinity has been contested by Satan, and his argument has always been that radical, selfish individualism is the source of a love that is superior to God’s love. God’s response to Satan’s proposal of radical, selfish individualism centers in the plan of redemption flowing out of God’s nature of love. And what, one may ask, is at the heart of God’s love response to the Satanic “love proposal”? The “crux” of the issue came to a profound manifestation in the incarnate ministry of Christ and climaxes at Calvary:

God’s love unfolds from His Trinitarian Oneness as radical, self-sacrificing, mutually submissive, yet always creative and redemptive out-flowing Social Love. God’s love, revealed as balanced justice and mercy, has been consistently manifested in the three eternally divine Persons of the biblical Godhead. Furthermore, the Holy Trinity has (from all eternity past) been only able to fully reveal and define themselves through their relationship to one another—Yes, in profoundly unitive social love!

What follows is a theological reflection on the powerful implications of Triune love as it illuminates the meaning of the doctrines of creation, sin, atonement, and personal salvation.<sup>2</sup>

### **Creation and Sin**

These fundamental doctrines begin to unfold in the biblical narratives of the creation and fall of human beings. Humanity was made in love to live out our lives in loving relationships. God’s social circle of Trinitarian love has always been expansively seeking to multiply the venues of loving arenas. From the profoundly self-sacrificing love of God has emerged new orders of beings (in an expanding physical universe) who can experience God’s love and share it with others—especially those beings made in God’s image. I believe that it can be persuasively argued that God’s out-flowing love (which is highly expansive) is the only metaphysical explanation for what physicists have perceived

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<sup>2</sup> What follows is largely adapted and extracted from the final three chapters of the book co-authored by Woodrow W. Whidden, Jerry Moon, and John W. Reeve: *The Trinity: Understanding God’s Love, His Plan of Salvation, and Christian Relationships* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2002).

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as an ever-expanding universe. And what the physicists have perceived is just what Trinitarian Christians would expect.

God's ever expanding "love fest," however, has been seriously disrupted by the emergence of sin. Sin involves everything that is antithetical to God's love. It is self-absorbed (not expansive) and implacably opposed to anything like self-sacrifice. Furthermore, the only love force which could overcome the horrible effects of this horrific "unlove" is the Divine love that created in the first place. In fact, if God does not act to redeem the creation and its creatures, who have been designed to live in love, His love can be seriously called into question.

Once more, I raise the question: What is God's love? The central theme of Ellen White in *The Desire of Ages* (especially 761–64) claims that God's love is a profoundly balanced revelation of justice and mercy played out in venues of social love. And thus, the next logical question is this: can such a love overcome and heal the effects of the "unlove" which has spoiled God's original creation plan?

The first basic theological thesis goes like this: only the love that created a universe to revolve around social, self-sacrificial, and outward flowing relationships can heal the effects of Satanic "unlove." Neither creaturely being nor any "thing" can fill this demanding order. Please indulge me in a bit of expansion on this most basic of all biblical themes.

If "God is love" (1 John 4:8)<sup>3</sup> in the very essence of His nature and we have been made in His "image" and "according to" His "likeness" (Gen 1:26, 27), then this ought to tell us that the very core of what it means to be human is found through our experience of social/spiritual relationships which are loving, trusting, and submissive to God and our fellow human beings.

Maybe we could put the issue like this: if the gist of God's nature is eternal, infinite, and relational love and we are made in His image, *then the very heart of what it means to live is to live in loving relationships!* In other words, to really and truly exist is to live in outward oriented love, not in inward-directed, self-focused gratification.

The first practical implication is this: if the very nature of the God-created social universe is the life of out-flowing love, then any attitudes or actions which prove destructive for genuine, God-like (lawful) love relationships become suspect. And those attitudes and actions that build satisfying, productive relationships are what should be pursued.

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<sup>3</sup> All biblical references are from the *New King James Version*, unless otherwise noted.

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This, however, raises a very serious issue: Can sinful humans truly know what constitutes legitimate, other-oriented love relationships? Is this the way things are? Is this truly the way things ought to be? The great “Adversary,” Satan, has claimed that the only way to find love and true happiness is to make self and self-gratification the major goal of life.

Who is right? We would suggest that God, in His Trinitarian Self-revelation, has claimed that we have been created to reflect the love that super-naturally resides in His very being as an eternally loving God. And Who is this God? The God Who is One in Three. Furthermore, the Triune love found in God is not self-oriented and thus strongly implies that we will find our greatest joy and satisfaction in living for and serving others.

Now we do believe that all Christians would acknowledge that God’s way of love is the best. In fact, it is the only way to go. The next consideration, however, is this: we humans simply do not naturally want to live like that. Our very nature, in conflict with the heart of God’s nature of self-sacrificing relationships, constantly pushes us to live like the Devil—all out for self! What does the Trinity say to this terrible predicament that we find ourselves caught in?

**Who Alone Can Redeem?**

The biblical story tells us that in God’s original creation He invested humanity with the natural ability to love and live like the Trinity. But humans have rebelled and now naturally live more demonically than lovingly. How then has God reacted to this tragic turn of events?

The great good news from our Maker is this: not only has He created us in an amazing act of overflowing love (He wanted to widen the exercise circle of Trinitarian love), but He has now determined to redeem us in an amazing move of self-sacrificing love. It is at the very essence of this sacrificial love that the truth of the Trinity receives its greatest acid test and most startling, yet touching revelation.

God has been challenged to confront the issue of angelic and human rebellion, a type of sin that has gone totally against the grain of His heart of eternal love. What is He to do?

The compelling story line of the Bible is this: The Triune God has chosen to love us in a way that creates the only possible path for reconciliation and redemption. This path has manifested a redemptive scenario that can restore other-directed relationships with Himself, and such a relational orientation will once again enable human beings to live in love with one another.

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While God does not love our sin and sinfulness, His very nature of love has instinctively impelled Him to reach out in redemptive mercy, not to lash out in a hot flash of righteous justice. And He has done all of this in ways intended to restore our status as His infinitely valued sons and daughters. His goal is to change us redemptively into His image through the healing of our sinful histories and natures which have so “be-deviled” our existence (and His).

Once more we ask: how is God to accomplish all of this? Is He to act with righteous force and purge the universe of its rebellion? Yes, He could have done this; but He has not chosen such a “quick fix.” The biblical narrative strongly suggests that His way has been the path of patient, long-suffering appeals and demonstrations of His eternal love. The heart of His plan has been to sacrificially give His own divine Son to come and be one with us as a man to show us what Godly love is really all about. The climax of the Son’s mission was to live and die in such a way that sinful humanity could be forgiven, reconciled, and ultimately healed of the disease of sin.

**Christ Alone Is Able to Redeem.** But did the sacrificial “gift” have to be the Person of His very Own Son? Could the agent of reconciliation have been an angel or some other unfallen being from some other world who has always loved God and remained loyal?

It was questions such as these that incited the ancient debates of the Fourth Century A.D. over the divine nature of Christ. Athanasius, the major advocate for the full deity of Christ at Nicea, took a very firm stand against Arius by affirming that the only One who could effectively redeem and heal the world was none other than God Himself. No created or derived being (angelic or otherwise) was deemed capable of pulling off this great mission.

But why is it that only the unique Son of God would be capable of such a mission? Why is Jesus the only being who could fully reveal what God is like? What follows are the answers, answers flowing from the very core of the Trinitarian nature of the Godhead!

**Only God Can Reveal God.** Only One who is God, in the fullest sense of the word, can effectively reveal what God is like (John 14:8–11; 1 Cor 1:21–24). And since Jesus was fully one in nature and character with the Father, He was fully capable of revealing the truth about God. Not only does it “take one to know one,” but it takes One who really knows about deity by nature to give a truly credible revelation of what God is like. No created god, semi-god, or god of some derived divine

nature could be sufficiently equipped to do the job. Only a divine “insider” can really reveal to humanity the inside, in depth truth about God.

**Only God Can Make the Sacrifice.** The deeper question, however, swirls around the issue of why it is that only a member of the Godhead (Jesus was chosen) could offer a fully effectual, saving sacrifice for sin. Here we need to move with the utmost care and clarity. We need to remind ourselves that we are on the borders of heavy truth shrouded in the most profound of all mysteries.

First of all, we need to admit that in a literal sense, true deity is naturally immortal and cannot experience death. This simple biblical truth (1 Tim 6:14–16) explains one of the reasons for the necessity of the incarnation (Heb 2:9, 14–18). Only dependent, mortal human nature could be subject to death. And in the experience of the incarnation, Jesus took on human nature and died.

But, once more we pose the question? Why was it that only one Who is fully divine would be capable of offering the sacrifice of an atoning death? Why would this be true if Christ in His deity was incapable of death?

**Jesus the Only Atonement Maker.** It appears that the answer comes in a number of fascinating facets:

(1) The very union of divinity with humanity in Christ’s incarnate nature suggests that though divinity did not literally die, it as good as died in the following sense:

Christ’s deity, along with His humanity, self-sacrificially consented to death at every step of the way to the Cross. And in so doing the very nature of Christ’s human death was invested with the infinite value of eternal love.

An illustration from the death of Abraham Lincoln might prove helpful. Lincoln’s death, from a purely personal human point of view, was no more tragic than that of any other murder victim. From the perspective of his value to the nation, however, his death was a much greater tragedy. The value invested in the life and character of Lincoln, by virtue of his Office as President and his acts as the “healer” of the nation’s wounds in the Civil War, invested his death with much greater significance and value than the death of any other ordinary citizen. And Christ, the One Who was by divine nature invested with the “offices” of Creator and Redeemer, is the only Being of sufficient value and virtue to offer an effectually atoning sacrifice for sin.

Ellen White, following the same theme as Athanasius and the early Trinitarian writers, put it this way:



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The divine Son of God was the only sacrifice of sufficient value to fully satisfy the claims of God's perfect law. The angels were sinless, but of less value than the law of God . . . His [Christ's] life was of sufficient value to rescue man from his fallen condition.<sup>4</sup>

Christ is equal with God, infinite and omnipotent. He could pay the ransom for man's freedom . . . He could say that which the highest angel could not say,—I have power over my own life, "power to lay it down, and . . . power to take it again."<sup>5</sup>

(2) Only a love residing in a member of the Godhead was capable of effectually judging sin. The issue of sin's judgment could be phrased this way:

The fully divine love of Christ possessed not only innate value, but also the power to conquer sin. And why is this so? A possible clue lies in the very nature of what sin is.

When we really boil it all down, we can safely say that sin involves the nature and actions of creaturely "un-love." You might ask, "What in the world are you speaking about with the use of the term 'un-love'?"

Think of it in the following terms: The very nature of Godly righteousness is the manifestation of love. The law of God is a concrete expression of His nature of love (Matt 22:36–40; Rom 13:8–10; 1 John 5:2, 3). The law of God practically defines, in vivid commands, the very way that beings filled with the love of God will think and act. And that which goes contrary to the express law of God goes contrary to the love of God. Thus sin is thinking and acting in not only an unlawful, but in an unloving manner.

To put the issue another way, sin could only come into existence because of the very nature of God's love. The fact that God's love requires free choice makes it possible for sin to come into play. The very God-given freedom essential to the exercise of love allows for sinful disobedience. Yet when sin takes advantage of God's love-borne freedom and goes against His very nature, it can only manifest itself as the selfishly chosen attitudes and actions of un-love. Sin becomes a human creation

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<sup>4</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, 4 vols. (facsimile reproduction) (Washington: Review and Herald, 1969), 2:9, 10.

<sup>5</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Youth's Instructor* (June 21, 1900), in *Youth's Instructor Articles* (facsimile reproductions) (Washington: Review and Herald, 1986).

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that feeds off of God's love and becomes an intensely perverse twisting of divine love. Sin simply cannot exist without God's nature of love, but it is a parasitic development that feeds off of God's nature as a perverse parody of the real thing.

Most certainly, God is not in any sense the Author of sin. Sin is the mysterious, twisted brainchild of Satan and can never be fully explained. But without God's granting the right to choose those things that are contrary to His nature of love, there could be no such thing as sin. God could have played it safe and pre-programmed us not to sin. But then we would have been a bunch of robots doing God's will only by instinct. Yes, God chose a very chancy route when he created beings in the image of His own loving nature. But could He have done it any other way if He truly wanted a race of beings that could freely and responsively relate to Him in love?

Therefore, since sin can only be understood as that which is totally at logger-heads with God's love (freely choosing the un-loving attitude and action), then it must be true that only One Who is eternal, divine love in nature would be equipped to expose, define, and destroy sin and its satanic author. Only the knowledgeable power of selfless, divine love residing in Christ, in "Whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col 2:9), is equipped to expose and judge sin and its egomaniacal creator. The upshot of these facts is that the death of Christ on the Cross was, in principle, the judgment and defeat of sin.

This judging and defeat of sin through the divine power of Christ has two important consequences:

(a) In Christ's life and death divine love was revealed in a way never before seen in the history of the universe. God's loving and merciful justice reaches out in waves of spiritual and moral influence, leading sinners to repent of their sin. This repentance is inspired not only by Christ revealing the enormity of sin, but also results from a deeper appreciation of God's offer of a mercy that we really don't deserve. So Jesus' revelation of love in His perfect life and atoning death changes our attitudes towards sin and God so that we are enabled to respond to his offer of mercy and new life. But the Son's judgment of sin by His life and death demonstration of love enables God to do one more important act:

(b) The perfect obedience of Christ to the law and His bearing the penalty of the broken law for us enables God to forgive repentant sinners. The forgiveness given to the repentant sinner is granted for Christ's sake. That is, because of what God's love has secured in the life and death of Christ, God is able to secure our forgiveness by declaring that

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all that belongs to Christ is now accounted as ours. We are given new histories (Christ's life is now ours), new legal standing, and powerful motives of God's love to live like and for Him from henceforth. And all of this has been secured on the basis of what the love of God has wrought out, not what some mere human creature has accomplished. The justifying merits of Christ are the manifestations of God's righteousness, not those of just any old loving creature!

This understanding of God's way of forgiveness and justifying grace is inextricably bound up with His divine love. Only the love residing in the fully divine Christ could secure such a righteousness. What has proven to be quite interesting is that over the centuries, anti-Trinitarian and unitarian religious traditions have always fallen into legalistic views of salvation. In other words, only when the sinner has been good and obedient is the sinner deemed forgiven. But when Trinitarian clarity comes, these Trinitarian movements have a strong tendency to give a renewed emphasis to forgiveness or justification by grace through faith alone, not earned by works of the law, lest any man should boast.<sup>6</sup>

Judaism, Islam, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and early non-Trinitarian Adventism all have tended to lack a clear doctrine of justifying grace based solely on the merits of Christ's divine righteousness. It was only when Seventh-day Adventism began to emerge out of its non-Trinitarian understandings of Christ's divinity that it began to find clarity on justification by grace through faith alone. In fact, there seems to be a law of sacred history: until greater clarity is gained regarding the full deity of Christ, salvation by grace through faith alone does not fare too well.

The benefits of Christ's full deity do not end, however, with the manifestation of justifying grace. His deity also guarantees a powerful experience of new life for the believer in transforming grace.

(3) The necessity of a divine sacrifice also arises from the fact that only a being Who naturally possesses immortality can offer everlasting life to those who take advantage of the saving power of His atoning death.

The new life from Christ includes conversion to a life of love in time and a never-ending life at the second coming. Thus, His death not only

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<sup>6</sup> A possible exception to this tendency is Roman Catholicism. I would suggest that the reason for this exception is two-fold: 1) the Trinity doctrine is almost a philosophical dead-letter in the Roman tradition (on the books, but not really utilized theologically); 2) the intercessory work of Jesus has been just about totally obliterated by the practical emphasis on the intercession of Mary and the saints. In other words, human intercessors have virtually displaced the divine/human person of Jesus.

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cancels sin and destroys the power of death, but Christ's divine love enables us to be restored in our characters.

(4) This great work of character restoration we call sanctifying, transforming, or life changing grace. Not only is the full deity of Christ absolutely essential to His offer of forgiving or justifying grace, but it also provides the power of transforming grace. The power of sin has so profoundly deranged God's creation that the only Being Who can put it right is none other than the original active Agent of Creation—the divine Son of God!

Jesus the great Creator becomes the Great Physician of the human soul ravaged by the raging infection of sin! Flowing out of His righteous life and atoning death, His healing powers are so great that not one desperate soul need despair of a healing power failure!

Possibly another metaphor, other than healing, could explain the issue of transforming love. This is the metaphor of the comforting presence of a strong parent with a weak and fearful child. When I was a little boy, I was desperately afraid of the dark. When I would have to go on an errand in the dark, I imagined all sorts of evil ogres lurking in the shadows. But somehow, when my strong father was along, all seemed safe and secure. When the mighty God, the powerful Jesus, is by our side in the struggle with the demonic forces of darkness, we need not fear.

(5) Furthermore, not only was the full deity of Christ necessary to the effective provisions of His life and death to forgive sin and transform our characters, but His divine nature assures us that He is always there for us as our Redeemer. That is, the divine Christ is a constantly available and effective Advocate, "Intercessor" or "Mediator between God and men." Yet the One Who is divine is also Himself "the Man" (1 Tim 2:5, 6).

This concept is beautifully expressed in the metaphor of the "surety." This assuring (even spiritually alluring) term projects the idea of a person who unceasingly stands for another. This is particularly evident in cases of debt. The guarantor steadily and surely stands to guarantee that the debt will be satisfied if the one who has incurred the debt fails. Bible-believing writers have often used the wonderful description of Christ as the sinner's "substitute and surety" to picture Christ as our Mediating Advocate before the Father. Yes, there is One Who stands for us, One in Whom the plenitude of infinite love is cast in our favor! What a fully sufficient Savior we have in Christ!

Once more, Ellen White has expressed this theme in a way that closely resembles the classic Fourth Century A.D. Trinitarian reflections and confessions of faith:

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The reconciliation of man to God could be accomplished only through a mediator who was equal with God, possessed of attributes that would dignify, and declare Him worthy to treat with the Infinite God in man's behalf, and to represent God to a fallen world. Man's substitute and surety must have man's nature, a connection with the human family whom He was to represent, and, as God's ambassador, He must partake of the divine nature, have a connection with the Infinite, in order to manifest God to the world, and be a mediator between God and man.<sup>7</sup>

But Christ is no longer physically present with us to do this work. How then can He effect such changes and bring such comfort from so far away? The answer is found in the work and person of the mighty Agency of the Third Person of the Godhead, the precious and powerful Holy Spirit.

#### **The Holy Spirit and the Triune Oneness of the Godhead**

Most certainly the Holy Spirit has received less notice in theology and practical Christianity than has the Father or the Son. Yet, this is most likely just the way the Holy Spirit would have it. His business has never been to call attention to His own being or person. His greatest delight comes when He lovingly places the focus of His ministry on highlighting the Father through His (the Spirit's) representation and exaltation of the Son. It is in this ministry that the Spirit can truly be spoken of as "another" heavenly "Comforter" (KJV) or "Helper" (NKJV).

Could the Holy Spirit, however, truly and effectively carry out His helpful ministry if He were only some sort of created, celestial Internet, not the mighty Third Person of the eternal Godhead?

And finally, what theological implications could the Triune Oneness or profound unity of the Godhead have for our understanding of salvation and the security of God's governance of the universe? We will address the implications of Triune oneness, but we turn first to the "so what" of the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

#### **The Holy Spirit as the Divine and Personal Agent of Salvation**

Closely related to these issues of Christ's divine person and nature are those which relate to the Holy Spirit's deity, person, and work. The

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<sup>7</sup> Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald* (Dec. 22, 1891), in *Review and Herald Articles*, 6 vols. (facsimile reprint) (Washington: Review and Herald, 1962).

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classic Trinitarian convictions have consistently held that only a being who is fully God could rightly represent the Father and the Son to the human race. Furthermore, only the fully divine Spirit could effectively make the work of Christ a saving fact in the human heart.

**The Full Deity of the Spirit.** The Bible text which witnesses most persuasively to the practical necessity of the full deity of the Holy Spirit is 1 Cor 2:7–12:

(7) We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery . . . (8) which none of the rulers of this age knew . . . (10) But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. (11) For what man knows the things of man except the spirit of man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. (12) Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

This passage plainly claims that God can only be made known through the Spirit of God, who is now His authoritative representative on earth, the revelation of God's love and saving power.

Thus it only makes sense that if the Holy Spirit is to rightly represent both the divine Father and Son, then He must also be fully divine Himself. Once more, it not only "takes One to know One," but it takes a Being of the same essential divine "Kind" or nature to reveal that Kind to some other creaturely "kind." In other words, only a Being Who is fully divine, Who wholly shares the eternal nature of divine love, can adequately communicate such love to a created world woefully destitute of divine knowledge and doomed to death.

Carefully ponder a number of other "only" implications of the full deity of the Holy Spirit:

(1) Only the Holy Spirit of God could bring the converting and convicting power of the great love of God to fallen humanity. Only One Who has been eternally bound up with the heart of self-sacrificing love in the Father and the Son can fully communicate such love to lost human beings.

(2) Only the Holy Spirit, Who fully shares the adopting heart of God, inflamed with love for His lost children, can impart to these estranged human children "the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom 8:15, 16).

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(3) Only One Who has worked with the Son in creation would be equipped to effect re-creation in souls ravaged by the destructive forces of Satan and sin (Rom 8:10, 11). This re-creative function of the Spirit is closely connected with the work of bearing spiritual fruit. Thus, only the Divine Spirit, Who works with Christ the vine (John 15:1–11), is competent to produce in God’s people the “first-fruits of the Spirit” (Rom 8:23).

Furthermore, the issue of the “fruit of the Spirit” takes on clearer meaning when it becomes apparent that all of these discrete fruits (joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, etc.) are but manifestations of the one, all-encompassing “fruit” of love (see Gal 5:22–24).

(4) Only the Holy Spirit Who sustained Christ through the horror of Gethsemane and Calvary can effectually comfort us through our dark valleys and frightful nights of the soul.

(5) Only the Spirit, Who fully knows the heart of our great High Priestly Intercessor, can fully represent the comforts and effectually impart the blessings of Christ’s constant intercessions on our behalf before the Father of Love.

(6) Only the Spirit who inspired the prayers of Jesus can effectually help in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God (Rom 8:26, 27).

(7) Only One Who can be fully in tune with the heart of Jesus’ incarnate ministry, and yet at the same time be able to be everywhere at once (the omnipresence of God), could ably represent the redeeming presence of Christ to the entire world. The only being Who could do such a thing is the ever- and all-Present Holy Spirit.

**The Personhood of the Spirit.** Why is this issue so critical? Do we really sense the power in the statement that the Spirit of Christ is the manifestation of the personal presence of Christ to us?

Is not a lover’s personal presence the heart of the power of love? Can there really be an effectually redeeming love that is not ultimately manifest in personal presence? Does the thought of the Holy Spirit as being some sort of celestial Internet bring any thrill of personal anticipation to your soul? Thank God that the Holy Spirit is the divine Person communicating, rather than some sort of impersonal, electronic network!

I recall the joy of communicating, via electronic means, with my fiancée when we were temporarily separated by seemingly interminable

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miles and days. But blessed as these electronic means were, they ultimately proved not to be a very satisfying substitute for actually being with her personally! If the only hopes of love I could have aspired to in those days were an e-mail or phone relationship, I would have been “of all men most miserable” (1 Cor 15:19 KJV)! Thank God, the Holy Spirit is an effective, personal presence of the Bridegroom to the Bride.

How many have experienced the technically competent, but impersonal ministrations of medical personnel who lack what we call a good “bedside manner.” Yet, when Christ comes to comfort us in all of our sin-related stresses and illnesses, His bedside manner is powerfully and personally ministered to us through the person of His Holy Spirit representative on earth.

Furthermore, when we are called upon to serve, witness, and do mighty acts for God, it is the power and guidance of the personal Spirit that is present to guide, strengthen, and provide courage, vision, and the precious ointment of wisdom. Thus only the Holy Spirit, the heavenly Comforter, can truly heal the sick human soul and direct our witness and service in the world.

**The Oneness of the Godhead and Its Theological Significance**

**God’s Oneness and the Unity of the Universe.** Right now, the situation of the world is one of terrible divisions and deep fractures. The moral and social fabric is deeply conflicted in wrenching alienation between individuals, people groups, religions, and nations.

Furthermore, based on the concepts undergirding the “Great Controversy” theme, there is also a sense of intuitive distrust pervading the larger universe when it comes to the issue of how God meets the crisis called sin. Does the Oneness of the Godhead have anything to say to these troubling dilemmas?

**Triune Unity Promises a Unified Universe.** If the divisions disturbing the tranquility of our world and the cosmic concerns of the intelligent universe have any chance of being healed, it will have to come from the reconciling efforts of the Godhead. We say this because the doctrine of the Trinity holds that the profound unity of nature, character, and purpose of the Godhead provides the only sure basis for hope that the alienations of the created order can be healed.

Wayne Grudem expresses the issue this way: “If there is not perfect plurality and perfect unity in God himself, then we have no basis for



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thinking there can be any ultimate unity among the diverse elements of the universe either.”<sup>8</sup>

The alienations which have produced deep divisions in God’s universe have their source in the horrific phenomenon of sin. The core of the issue is this: does the Godhead have within Its nature of infinite love the resources to reconcile the disruptions that sin has caused?

**Christ’s Death Brings Reconciliation.** We would suggest that the heart of the Christian response to the above question revolves around the atoning death of Christ. Can the death of Christ truly bring full reconciliation? We are convicted that it can, and the “crux” of the issue has to do with God’s judgment of sin, manifested through our divine Lord’s substitutionary sacrifice.

Many Christians, however, have expressed deep misgivings about the whole concept of Christ offering a sacrifice of substitution to satisfy God’s nature of justice. They argue that such a view is not only morally questionable, but that it makes God look like some angry ogre who is intent on taking out His wrath on an unwilling third party. What is the truth of this issue?

If there is to be a fair assessment of the concept of Christ’s death, understood in terms of an act of sacrificial substitution which satisfies God’s justice, it will be necessary to provide some background on the various explanatory models which have been used to explain the meaning of Christ’s death. Thus, we invite the reader’s careful attention to the following lines of thought.

**The Models of the Atonement.** Thinkers who have deeply reflected on the meaning of the death of Christ have come up with a number of classic theories or models with which to illustrate the meaning or make sense of Christ’s death. In other words, these models seek to answer the question as to why Christ had to die?

While all of these models have proven helpful to our understanding of the atonement, not any one of them (or even all of them put together) can exhaust the mysterious depths of God’s redeeming act of sacrificial love. Yet they do help us to gather our thoughts in a more focused way as we think about the meaning of Christ’s death.

The most influential models fall into two basic categories: “Subjective” and “Objective.”

*Subjective Models.* Those preferring “subjective” models advocate that the death of Christ was mainly to *demonstrate* differing aspects of

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<sup>8</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 247–248.

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God's redeeming love so that a subjective change would be made in the minds and hearts of rebellious sinners.

The best known of the "subjective" models is the "Moral Influence" Theory. The gist of this model contends that Christ died to demonstrate the lengths to which God would go in manifesting love for the sinner. God loved us so much that He would give His Son to die so that His love could be expressed in solidarity with sinners in their terrible plight. We know of no one who would disagree with this point.

What, however, makes this theory controversial is what it denies, not what it affirms. It denies that there was any need for the death of Christ to satisfy God's nature of justice as the prerequisite to His offer of forgiveness. The "Moral Influence" advocates claim that God's love freely or gratuitously forgives sin, and there was no prior need for divine justice to be satisfied in the execution of a just penalty for sin.

These thinkers claim that the necessity for Christ's death is found in God's desire to demonstrate love, not the loving satisfaction of justice through paying the penalty for sin. Thus, the death of Christ is deemed to be only a demonstration of love, not the loving execution of divine justice.

Another well-known "subjective" model is the "Governmental" Theory. This model also affirms that Christ's death demonstrates God's love and that it was not necessary for Christ to die as a substitute to satisfy God's personal wrath or justice. Let's be very clear about this model: it does not deny the need for Christ to die; it simply claims that the death of Christ was not needed by God to satisfy the just wrath which resides within His own nature of love.

This model goes on to claim that the demonstration of God's love is given through a manifestation of God's public justice. What the death of Christ establishes is that God is willing to suffer as much as He has to in order to maintain governmental order in the universe.

Furthermore, it claims that the death of Christ clearly demonstrates that if sinners persist in sin, they will have to pay the consequences of an executionary death. Thus, in love, God warns sinners of the just consequences of persisting in sin and reminds us that He will maintain justice in this universe where He presides as moral governor.

What both of these "subjective" models hold in common is that the death of Christ was (1) a saving necessity and (2) a clear demonstration of God's love; but they also proceed to an important qualification: (3) the death of Jesus was not needed to satisfy God's personal nature of justice or revulsion against sin. Thus, the death of Christ demonstrates the

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greatness of divine love and warns against the deadliness of sin. The advocates of these “subjective” models, however, have expressed deep reservations about the need for the death of a substitute whose sacrifice satisfies God’s nature of loving justice.

*“Objective” Models.* These models of the atonement present explanations of the death of Christ which hold that God in His love needed to take certain actions in order to insure that the provisions for human salvation were fully consistent with the justness and mercy of divine love. Thus, these models demand more than a demonstration of love. They strongly claim that love must act in such a way that justice be fully satisfied before God can offer mercy to sinners.

Therefore, the expression “Objective” refers to what God’s nature of love did for us, not to a demonstration by God that needed to change how we would respond to God within ourselves. Objectively, God had to demonstrate His love in the death of Christ through first judging sin. It is then, on the basis of His just judgment of sin, that God can offer us the fruit of His love. Thus, there was provided a merciful forgiveness for our sins which is consistent with His nature of justice. In other words, the death of Christ objectively changed the human status before God, not just our mental state or attitude towards God.

The most well known of the “Objective” Models is the so-called “Satisfaction” Theory.

The gist of this model goes like this: God’s love offered Christ as the sinners’ substitute in order to pay their just penalty for sin (eternal death). In the course of this substitutionary sacrifice, Christ’s death satisfied divine justice.

The “Satisfaction” model does not deny any of the positive claims of the “Subjective” models, but only disagrees with what they deny. It clearly teaches that God’s love cannot be manifest in mercy unless the justice of His love is fully satisfied in the substitutionary payment of the penalty for sin.

The “Satisfaction” Model has had numerous well-known proponents. Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, and Ellen G. White are among the notables most familiar to Protestant and Seventh-day Adventist Christians.

**An Appraisal of the Models.** Now the reader might ask, what do all of these Atonement Models have to do with the Divine Unity of the Godhead? What might our understanding of the death of Christ have to do with the full deity of Christ and His equality with the Father and the Holy Spirit?

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As already pointed out, all of the advocates of these various models affirm the positive truth of the “Subjective” Models. All agree that divine love needs an extraordinary demonstration by none other than God Himself. And as we have argued previously in this essay, only a fully divine Christ could effectively “demonstrate” God’s love to an alienated world. Furthermore, only the fully divine personal Spirit could “communicate” such a love “demonstration” to the sin afflicted world and the whole universe.

The crucial question, however, is this: Did Christ need to die in order for God’s loving justice to be satisfied? Was the satisfaction of divine justice a necessary demand of God’s love before He could offer His merciful forgiveness to sinners?

We would earnestly urge that God’s loving justice did need to be “satisfied” by Christ’s death as a penalty for sin.

The whole basis for this contention arises out of what we mean by God’s love. We contend that the Bible’s and Ellen White’s understanding of divine love includes a perfect balance of two complementary components—justice and mercy. God’s love has been manifested in the justice of His law and His wrath against sin, not just in a gratuitous (free) offer of forgiving mercy. All agree that God’s love was demonstrated and has been offered through His willingness to forgive sinners. But the question that seems to most urgently cry out for an answer is, what do we mean when we speak of God’s wrath? Can there be any such thing as a “just wrath” in God’s nature of love?

Many are confused by this term “wrath.” It provokes visions of God having some sort of bad temper or fit of revenge against sinners. But such a view terribly misses the point of God’s justice. We would propose that God’s wrath refers to that aspect of His love that can do no other than have an allergic reaction to sin. That is, when God’s love confronts that which is contrary to His just nature, His nature cannot ultimately abide that which is contrary to His core nature of just love!

Yet God’s revulsion is against sin, not sinners. Thus, when God’s just love confronts sin, it is then that the merciful side of His love comes into play. God’s loving mercy simply will not allow Him to give up on those held in sin’s grip without a vigorous offer of redemption. And this arresting offer has been provided through Christ’s merciful offering of Himself to die for our sins.

Thus, His death has provided mercy in a manner that is fully consistent with divine justice. Christ our substitute satisfied God’s just wrath. This satisfaction enables God to be “both just and the justifier of the one

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who has faith in Jesus” (Rom 3:26). Therefore, in the death of Christ we have not only a demonstration of God’s justice, but a fully just satisfaction of it so that there can be a fully just offering of divine mercy.

**Who is the Substitute?** The key question that confronts the “Satisfaction” model is who would be an acceptable candidate for the office of atoning substitute? Here is where the issue of the Oneness of the Trinity’s divine nature comes into play.

We have already established that whoever this substitute would be, it could not be a mere human being or some other creature. Only One who is fully God could both demonstrate divine love and capably judge sin in all of its horror. If we claim that it could be some created being (the Arian version of the Son of God) or some being who is only possessed of some sort of derived deity (the semi-Arian view of the Son of God), then we have the odd situation of God being dependent on some creature to demonstrate His love and satisfy His justice. Such a picture very much conjures up visions of a creature begging God for mercy or God demanding justice from some creaturely victim. And finally, God would be taking out His wrath on an innocent third party, and this would certainly raise the question of the justice of such an act.

If, however, the sacrificial victim is both fully God and truly Man, such as we find in Jesus Christ, then we have a new set of possibilities. Think of it this way:

The death of the God/Man, Jesus, is not merely the death of a human or an extra-terrestrial creature, but it is also the death of God! As we pointed out earlier, the death of Christ did require Christ’s deity. This is not to say that His deity literally died, but that it was there in full unity with His human nature. His deity fully consented to His death as a sacrifice for sin. The deity of Christ died a proverbial “thousand deaths” in the death of His humanity!

The offering of Isaac by Abraham provides a touching illustration of the truth we are seeking to clarify (see Gen 22). God brought to bear on Abraham the greatest test imaginable: “Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering” (Gen 22:2).

No one but God will ever be able to fully know the pain that wrenched the heart of the great patriarch! While Abraham was fully obedient to God in this awful test, the grace of God spared him the actual execution of his “only son.” But for all practical purposes, Abraham did sacrifice his son and died a “thousand deaths” himself in the process.

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And thus it was with the deity of Christ: His deity, so bound up with and blended with His humanity, fully shared in the mental anguish of Christ's death so that we can truthfully say that God died for us.

**The Godhead Suffers the Penalty.** And yet, when we say that God died, does this only have reference to the deity of the Son? Most certainly not! Because of their profound unity of triune Oneness in nature, we can say that the Father and the Holy Spirit were also profoundly present and in solidarity with Christ's atoning death. It is this deep and penetrating truth that the Apostle Paul expresses: "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ . . . that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor 5:18, 19).

So, who is the substitute? Was it simply the Man Christ Jesus? Absolutely not! Did it include the Man Christ Jesus? Most certainly! Is this all that was included in the substitutionary death? Certainly not! Christ's humanity was so bound up with His full deity that we can truly say that when He died, the entire Godhead "was in Christ" and suffered this atoning death.

The deity of Christ is the full deity of the entire triune Godhead. And this amazingly unified self-sacrifice judged sin in such a way that full provision was made for the salvation of the whole human race.

Therefore we can truthfully say that God, in satisfying His nature of loving justice, did not take His wrath out on an innocent third party or some unwilling victim. Rather, in Christ He has satisfied justice through His own willingly given, divine self-sacrifice. Is there any injustice revealed in such a substitutionary satisfaction of God's justice? And is not such a sacrifice the very essence of Triune love for all eternity? It is a love that is mutually self-submissive, self-sacrificing, and overflowing with creative and redemptive consequences to the created beings of the universe.

Furthermore, what has been substituted is not moral character, but the satisfaction of legal requirements that are consistent with the demands of God's nature of love. And once more we hold that God's love involves an outflowing demand for both justice and mercy. And if one is denied, the other becomes meaningless and God's love dissolves into some sort of mushy mercy or untempered wrath.

This great truth has been powerfully expressed by both Ellen White and John R.W. Stott:

Through Jesus, God's mercy was manifested to men; but mercy does not set aside justice. The law reveals the attributes

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of God's character, and not a jot or tittle of it could be changed to meet man in his fallen condition. God did not change His law, *but He sacrificed Himself, in Christ, for man's redemption.*<sup>9</sup>

In order to save us in such a way as to satisfy himself, God through Christ substituted himself for us. Divine love triumphed over divine wrath by divine self-sacrifice.<sup>10</sup>

The great truth of the Holy Trinity and the atoning death of Christ speaks eloquently that God has, in His Son, borne the penalty of sin as our substitute and made an infinitely valuable and powerful provision for the full reconciliation of the entire human race. And if God can make such effective provision for the sin-alienated human race, does this give hope that He can also heal the larger divisions of the universe?

**The Judgment and the Vindication of God.** The problem of evil is one of the most pressing philosophical problems with which religions wrestle. Many individuals have also struggled with this challenging issue. The basic question is this: how is it that a good God who claims to be the loving creator can allow so much evil, suffering, and injustice to spoil the happiness and joy of the inhabitants of the earth?

Once more we would suggest that the doctrine of the Trinity makes a very important contribution to this discussion.

The heart of the Christian answer to the issue of evil and the injustice of so much suffering is this: the ultimate source of the evil and suffering which afflicts the world is sin. Yet according to the Christian understanding of sin and evil, the present scene of suffering is not the whole story. Christians do believe that there will come a day when evil will be eradicated and wrongs righted. But who will get the job done?

Here is where the Trinity reveals profound truth. The solution to the problem of evil has and will continue to come from none other than God Himself in the Person and Work of His dear Son. God did not wimp out over this issue, but has thrust Himself into the battle with suffering and evil. And how has He involved Himself? Through sending His very own divine Son as a solution to the horrid blot which evil has injected into the creation. No creature could fully supply the answer; only God in Christ could.

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<sup>9</sup> White, *Desire of Ages*, 762; emphasis added.

<sup>10</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1986), 159.

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Put another way, God has not sent the angel Gabriel, neither a mere man, nor some un-fallen extra-terrestrial from another world. But He has sent His Son to be the point “Man” in the battle with evil. Thus God has not passed the problem along to any finite being (natural or supernatural) to solve, but in His divine Son He has taken full responsibility.

**The Trinity and the “Great Controversy” Theme.** We would strongly submit that the work of the divine Jesus, in the setting of the “Great Controversy,” provides the only satisfying explanation of the existence of evil and its ultimate eradication from the universe.

The story line goes like this: Sin erupted into God’s heaven in the mysterious and inexplicable rebellion of Lucifer. God bore long with Lucifer, but He was finally forced to banish him from the heavenly courts.

Many have asked why God did not immediately destroy Lucifer and the angels who joined Him in his uprising. The “Great Controversy” answer is that God settled in for the “long-haul” solution rather than a “quick fix” of pure justice. He knew that the un-fallen beings of heaven and the rest of the universe did not then fully understand all the issues involved with Satan’s disaffection. If Satan was to be immediately destroyed, then these beings would serve Him more out of fear rather than out of rationally informed love.

But this sin emergency did not catch the Holy Trinity off guard. A plan had been conceived in which God would send His very own Son to this world to meet Satan in hand to hand combat. Through Christ’s life, teachings, and especially His death, Christ has defeated Satan, atoned for Sin, and exposed Satan for the liar and murderer that he really is.

While Satan was fully defeated in his temptations of Christ and alienated from the affections of the un-fallen beings, there were yet issues still to be clarified. These issues involved the disposition (in the sense of “disposal”) of sin and the salvation of the penitent sinners. These further questions could only be answered in a process of judgment.

And who is the key figure in this vindicating judgment? None other than the Lord Jesus Himself. The Son of God Himself, as both Savior and Judge, will demonstrate in each phase of judgment that He has acted in ways that are completely consistent with His love in the final settlement of each and every case. The cases of both the redeemed and those who are finally lost will all testify that God, in Christ, has acted in ways that will fully justify His final eradication of evil and his salvation of the redeemed.



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Most likely the major reason why there were still issues to be settled after the atoning death of Christ was this:<sup>11</sup>

Satan had originally accused God of being unjust in requiring obedience to His law of love. The basic argument of Satan was that God's justice must be swallowed up by mercy. When Satan was able to seduce human beings to sin, he then argued that God must not extend mercy to them. Since Satan did not receive mercy and was banished from heaven, he claimed that God should not show mercy to Adam and Eve. Thus he turned around his original argument and went on to claim that justice must swallow up mercy.

Satan has continued to use both lines of argument whenever it suits his purposes. But when we come to the great crisis of the Cross, God confronted Satan with a powerful argument: The death of Christ was a perfect manifestation of both justice and mercy. In the death of Christ, as our substitute, God has provided a perfect manifestation of mercy that was profoundly informed by a flinty justice. Yet this justice, conditioned by mercy, has allowed God to forgive sins for Christ's sake. At the same time, Christ's death manifested a perfect justice that is profoundly permeated with mercy. Both of Satan's objections to God's love have been met, and Christ has triumphed. Therefore, why was the controversy continued?

The answer seems to revolve around the question of how God's treatment of sin and sinners would play out after the cross. This is especially crucial when Satan, after the Cross, now goes back full force to his original argument: justice must be completely swallowed up by mercy, and the death of Christ does away with the law altogether.

Yes, it would seem, superficially, that the death of Christ was such a telling and profound manifestation of merciful love that quite possibly God would get out of balance on the mercy side of things in applying the effects of the atonement to each needy human case. But would God's mercy cause Him to go soft on sin and evil?

What the judgment will demonstrate (in all of its phases—pre-Advent, millennial, and at the end of the millennium) is that God has not gotten out of balance. The investigation of all cases, both the redeemed and the lost, will fully demonstrate that Christ's divine love will be consistently and fairly applied.

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<sup>11</sup> What follows is a condensation of Ellen White's explanation of the essential issues at stake in the "Great Controversy between Christ and Satan," found in *The Desire of Ages*, 761-764.

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Thus, when the whole controversy is ended, God will be able to banish evil and all of its proponents from the universe. Perfect love will finally vanquish evil, vindicate the faithful, and fully vindicate God as the rightful moral governor of the universe. Then and only then will full and harmonious unity be restored.

The final question is this: Who is it that will have achieved the great victory over evil? It will be clearly seen that God, in Christ, pulled it off through the power of infinite, divine love. And this love is the very heart of the Triune God's nature. At last the intelligent beings of the entire universe will be unified under the governance of the Holy Trinity. One pulse of harmony will beat throughout the vast creation, and all will declare that the Godhead is love!!

**Conclusion**

The God revealed in the Scriptures is composed of Three divine persons who have existed for all eternity in a profound unity, or oneness of nature, purpose, and character. The most arresting implications of this divine unity have arisen out of the affirmation that Christ is just as fully God as is the Father and that the Holy Spirit shares the same and is a Person.

Furthermore, we have discovered that the essential nature of this divine unity is dynamic, creative, out-flowing and self-sacrificing love. This love has been most movingly and ardently revealed in the incarnation of Christ Jesus, the eternal Son of God. In this amazing demonstration of self-sacrificing love, the Good News of God's mercy and justice has been revealed in a victory over temptation, a death which provided forgiveness through the satisfaction of divine justice, in a resurrection that made eternal life possible, and in a heavenly intercession that makes the whole accomplishment of incarnate love always and directly available to the whole world.

The incarnation of the Son, however, did not end God's communications of love to the world. At the ascension of Christ, the Father and the Son dispatched the Third Person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit, to be their unique, divine, yet earthly agent of conviction, conversion, comfort, and empowerment for those who respond to God's saving initiative in Christ.

I am convinced that the doctrine of the Trinity is not just a minor quibble over some peripheral doctrine or dubious moral issues. The truths contained in this profound doctrine form the essential basis for the very heart of what is unique to Christianity. Out of our understanding of

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the Trinity emerges our very understanding of the greatest of all biblical notions—“God is love.”

But love is defined not just by feeling or human experience. It is defined by none other than the Creator and Redeemer God of the universe. And the definitions of love that really count are those that reside in the very core or substance of God’s eternal triune nature.

Such love, however, has not simply lain dormant in the inner being of God! To the contrary, it has been revealed in the ways that His nature has created the world, redeemed it from sin, and has continually sought to re-establish His moral governance over the universe. If this projected universal moral governance is not based on the justness of His love, then the universe is in deep trouble.

Without the creative and redemptive initiatives which have their source in the freely manifested and bestowed Love of God, the universe will ultimately sink into moral, social, and physical anarchy. Therefore, only the love that abounds in God’s Triune nature can establish the moral principles that make life orderly and meaningful. Not only do we owe our existence and salvation to God, but we are utterly dependent upon Him for any semblance of moral order (either now or in the world to come).

But this love is not just about tender, merciful sentiment and moral order. There is a flinty side to the Triune manifestation of love. This justice aspect of Triune love has been forced to confront the unspeakable horror of the invasion of evil into the universe created by expansive, divine love. And the question persists: Is there any solution to this indescribably demonic terror?

I would answer in the affirmative: God’s love is not only tender, relational, and personal, but it is also just and sovereign. The latter concepts comfort us with the consolation that God has not allowed and will not allow sin, and its horrible fruit of evil and suffering, to interminably afflict the universe.

While the wheels of His justice have ground slowly, they will ultimately grind to a satisfying finality: He will vanquish these unspeakably blighting terrors by finally taking care of the emergency Himself. In the Person of His beloved Son, God has come and met sin and its attendant terrors head-on and provided the only sensible and adequately powerful response appropriate to the very nature of evil and its causes. God has not ultimately delegated the solution of the sin problem and all its resulting suffering to some creaturely surrogate.

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The Trinity is simply too foundational, too essential, too biblical, and finally, too precious to the very nature of our understanding of God to relegate it to an irrelevant side track. I urge a renewed commitment to the truth of the Triune Godhead and the “Heavenly Trio’s” awesome vision of a loving and benevolent human existence.

In a word, the Trinitarian understanding of God points us to the exalted experience of making Him central to all of our worship, moral formation, service, and witness to the world. Our prayer is that one day soon, we may all be able to stand before the eternal throne and shout “‘Give Glory to Him,’ for the ‘hour of His judgment has’ passed and all is well with the universe.” Even so, Maranatha!

**Woodrow W. Whidden, II** (Ph.D., Drew University) has been Professor of Religion in the Department of Religion and Biblical Languages of the College of Arts and Sciences at Andrews University for sixteen years, but is taking up new responsibilities as Professor of Religion at the Adventist International Institute for Advanced Studies in the Philippines. Whidden’s major areas of teaching responsibility include modern church history, systematic theology, and ethics. He has published extensively on both Adventist and Wesleyan soteriological issues and has co-authored a book on the Trinity. His most notable publications are his treatments of Ellen White’s soteriology and Christology, *Ellen White on Salvation* (Hagerstown: Review & Herald, 1995) and *Ellen White on the Humanity of Christ* (Hagerstown: Review & Herald, 1997).  
whiddenw@andrews.edu

## **History of Seventh-day Adventist Views on the Trinity**

Merlin D. Burt

The last decade has seen an increased anti-Trinitarian agitation within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Though this agitation is significant, it has remained on the margins of the movement. There are perhaps many reasons for the increased interest in the Trinity. I will mention three. (1) The availability of information through the Internet has provided a platform to disseminate anti-Trinitarian perspectives more effectively. (2) Several other Adventist groups that emerged from the Millerite movement have continued to hold to an anti-Trinitarian perspective. Examples include the Church of God, Seventh Day (Marion Party); the now defunct World-wide Church of God; and the Church of God, Atlanta, Georgia (formerly Oregon, Illinois, or the “Age to Come” Adventists). It should be noted that the Advent Christians, like Seventh-day Adventists, have embraced the Trinitarian view. (3) Perhaps most significant, over the last few decades some Seventh-day Adventists have thought to return to a historical Adventist faith or what might be called neo-restorationism. They argue that historic Adventism was a purer faith and that current Adventism has been drifting towards Roman Catholicism or at least away from Scripture. Part of the problem is that they do not recognize the dynamic nature of Seventh-day Adventist theology. Adventists have always sought a clearer understanding of Bible truth. Throughout their history, their doctrines have grown from their original distinctive core of the Three Angel’s Message and kindred concepts. A small though significant and growing segment of “historic” Adventists are advocating a return to an anti-Trinitarian stance.

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This brief study provides a survey of the Adventist historical progression from anti-Trinitarianism to a Biblical Trinitarian view.<sup>1</sup> History shows that Ellen White played a critical role in the development of the doctrine of the Godhead or Trinity within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It also shows that the change was difficult for Adventists and was only settled during the middle years of the twentieth Century. We will trace our topic chronologically: (1) Up to 1890—anti-Trinitarian period; (2) 1890 to 1900—emergence of Trinitarian sentiment; (3) 1900 to 1931 and the *SDA Yearbook* statement of faith—transition and conflict; and (4) from 1931 to the publication of *Questions on Doctrine* in 1957—acceptance of the Trinitarian view.

#### **Up to 1890: Anti-Trinitarian Period**

Until near the turn of the twentieth century, Seventh-day Adventist literature was almost unanimous in opposing the eternal deity of Jesus and the personhood of the Holy Spirit. During the earlier years some even held the view that Christ was a created being. Theological tension within Adventism began during the Millerite movement and is illustrated by the two principal leaders, William Miller and Joshua V. Himes.

Miller, being a Baptist, was a Trinitarian. He wrote, “I believe in one living and true God, and that there are three persons in the Godhead. . . . The three persons of the Triune God are connected.”<sup>2</sup> Himes, a close associate of William Miller, was of the Christian Connection persuasion. The northeastern branch of the Christian church almost unanimously rejected the Trinitarian doctrine as unscriptural. Himes wrote, “There is one living and true God, the Father almighty, who is unoriginated, independent and eternal . . . and that this God is one spiritual intelligence, one

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is largely based on a longer document by the author. Merlin D. Burt, “Demise of Semi-Arianism and Anti-Trinitarianism in Adventist Theology, 1888–1957” (Research Paper: Andrews University, December 1996); see also Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, and John Reeve, *The Trinity: Understanding God’s Love, His Plan of Salvation and Christian Relationships* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2002); Erwin Roy Gane, “The Arian or Anti-trinitarian Views Presented in Seventh-day Adventist Literature and the Ellen G. White Answer” (M.A. thesis, Andrews University, 1963); Russell Holt, “The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination: Its Rejection and Acceptance,” term paper, Andrews University, June 2, 1969; Christy Mathewson Taylor, “The Doctrine of the Personality of the Holy Spirit as Taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church up to 1900” (B.D. thesis, Andrews University, 1953).

<sup>2</sup> Sylvester Bliss, *Memoirs of William Miller, Generally Known as a Lecturer on the Prophecies, and the Second Coming of Christ* (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1853), 77–78.

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infinite mind, ever the same, never varying.”<sup>3</sup> Millerite Adventists were focused on the soon coming of Jesus, however, and did not consider it important to argue on subjects such as the trinity.

Two of the principal founders of the Seventh-day Adventist church, Joseph Bates and James White, like Himes, had been members of the Christian Connection and rejected the doctrine of the Trinity. Joseph Bates wrote of his views, “Respecting the trinity, I concluded that it was an impossibility for me to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, was also the Almighty God.”<sup>4</sup>

James White wrote: “Here we might mention the Trinity, which does away the personality of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ.”<sup>5</sup> Arthur White, grandson of James White, correctly argued that while James White rejected the doctrine of the Trinity, he did believe in the three great powers in heaven.<sup>6</sup> The first Hymn book compiled by James White—in 1849—contains the Doxology, “Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.”<sup>7</sup> While James White was opposed to the Trinity, he did not believe that Christ was inferior to the Father. In 1877 he wrote, “The inexplicable trinity that makes the godhead three in one and one in three, is bad enough; but the ultra Unitarianism that makes Christ inferior to the Father is worse.”<sup>8</sup>

Uriah Smith, long time editor of the *Review and Herald*, believed during the 1860s that Jesus was a created being. He was “the first created being, dating his existence far back before any other created being or thing, next to the self-existent and eternal God.”<sup>9</sup> By 1881 Smith had changed his view and concluded that Jesus was “begotten” and not created.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Joshua V. Himes, “Christian Connection,” in *Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. J. Newton Brown (Brattleboro: Brattleboro Typographic Company, 1838), 363.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Bates, *The Autobiography of Elder Joseph Bates* (Battle Creek: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing, 1868), 205.

<sup>5</sup> James White, “Preach the Word,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 11, 1855, 85.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur L. White to Hedy Jemison, July 2, 1969.

<sup>7</sup> James White, comp., *Hymns for God’s Peculiar People, That Keep the Commandments of God, and the Faith of Jesus* (Oswego: Richard Oliphant, 1849), 47.

<sup>8</sup> James White, “Christ Equal with God,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 29, 1877, 72.

<sup>9</sup> Uriah Smith, *Thoughts, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Revelation* (Battle Creek: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing, 1865), 59.

<sup>10</sup> Uriah Smith, *Thoughts, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Revelation* (Battle Creek: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing, 1881), 74.

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A selective list of Adventists who either spoke against the Trinity and/or rejected the eternal deity of Christ include J. B. Frisbie,<sup>11</sup> J. N. Loughborough,<sup>12</sup> R. F. Cottrell,<sup>13</sup> J. N. Andrews,<sup>14</sup> D. M. Canright,<sup>15</sup> and J. H. Waggoner.<sup>16</sup> W. A. Spicer at one point told A. W. Spalding that his father, after becoming a Seventh-day Adventist (he was formerly a Seventh Day Baptist minister), “grew so offended at the anti-Trinitarian atmosphere in Battle Creek that he ceased preaching.”<sup>17</sup>

In surveying the writings of the various pioneers, certain concerns frequently appear. In rejecting the trinity, some saw the “orthodox” Christian view as pagan tri-theism. Others argued that the trinity degraded the person-hood of Christ and the Father by blurring the distinction between them. It should be noted that while the early positions on the trinity and deity of Christ were flawed, there was a sincere attempt to oppose certain legitimate errors. Early Adventists strove to be true to Scripture. When they read “first-born of every creature,” they took it at face value. Other Bible phrases, such as “only begotten Son of God,” also were understood on a literal English level.

By 1890 Adventists had come to a harmonious position that rejected the idea of Jesus as a created being and viewed Him the “begotten” or originated divine Son of God. He was seen as the Creator with the Father. The nature of the Holy Spirit was lightly discussed, though He was generally considered to be the omnipresent influence from the Father or the Son rather than a person.

#### **From 1890 to 1900: Emergence of Trinitarian Sentiment**

The period after the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference saw a new emphasis on Jesus and the plan of salvation. This emphasis naturally

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<sup>11</sup> J. B. Frisbie, “The Seventh Day Sabbath Not Abolished,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 7, 1854, 50.

<sup>12</sup> J. N. Loughborough, “Questions for Brother Loughborough,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 5, 1861, 184.

<sup>13</sup> R. F. Cottrell, “The Trinity,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 6, 1869, 10–11.

<sup>14</sup> [J. N. Andrews], “Melchisedec,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 7, 1869, 84. This is an unsigned article, J. N. Andrews was the editor of the paper.

<sup>15</sup> D. M. Canright, “The Personality of God,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, August 29, 1878, 73–74; September 5, 1878, 81–82; September 12, 1878, 89–90; September 19, 1878, 97.

<sup>16</sup> J. H. Waggoner, *The Atonement: An Examination of the Remedial System in the Light of Nature and Revelation* (Oakland: Pacific Press, 1884), 164–179.

<sup>17</sup> A. W. Spalding to H. C. Lacey, June 2, 1947.



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led to a consideration of His deity and what it meant for the redemption of humanity. A. T. Jones was among the first to use vocabulary that suggested that Christ was eternally pre-existent. Jones emphasized the idea that in Christ was the “fullness of the Godhead bodily.” At the 1895 General Conference he repeatedly emphasized Colossians 2:9.

Possibly for the first time in Adventist literature (with the exception of Ellen White), Jones described Christ as “eternal.” “The eternal Word consented to be made flesh. God became man.”<sup>18</sup> Two days later, speaking of Christ, Jones said: “In view of eternity before and eternity after, thirty-three years is not such an infinite sacrifice after all. But when we consider that he sank his nature in our human nature to all eternity,—that is a sacrifice.”<sup>19</sup>

A. T. Jones avoided referring to the Godhead as the “Trinity.” Yet in 1899 he wrote a nearly Trinitarian statement, “God is one. Jesus Christ is one. The Holy Spirit is one. And these three are one: there is no dissent nor division among them.”<sup>20</sup>

Ellen White played a prophetic role in confirming the eternal deity of Jesus and the idea of a three-person Godhead. In *Desire of Ages* Ellen White wrote with clarity on the eternal deity of Christ. “[Christ] announced Himself to be the self-existent One” and “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived.”<sup>21</sup> She also said of the Holy Spirit: “Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power.”<sup>22</sup>

Tim Poirier, in a paper presented on April 3, 2006, at a Symposium on Ellen White and Current Issues” at Andrews University, compared Ellen White’s published statements on the Godhead, the eternal deity of Jesus, and the personhood of the Holy Spirit with interlineated original

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<sup>18</sup> A. T. Jones, “The Third Angel’s Message Number 17,” *General Conference Bulletin*, February 25, 1895, 332.

<sup>19</sup> A. T. Jones, “The Third Angel’s Message Number 20,” *General Conference Bulletin*, February 27, 1895, 382.

<sup>20</sup> A. T. Jones, editorial, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 10, 1899, 24.

<sup>21</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1898), 530. Ellen White drew the wording of this statement from John Cumming, *Sabbath Evening Readings on the New Testament: St. John* (London: Arthur Hall, Virtue & Co., 1857), 6.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 671.

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copies and her handwritten originals.<sup>23</sup> He has presented compelling evidence that Ellen White's published views were truly hers and not changed by editors, publishers, or literary assistants.

Curiously, for years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*, the church generally avoided these and other statements. Even previous to 1898, Ellen White made clear statements affirming the underived divine nature and eternal pre-existence of Christ. While she never used the term "Trinity" in her published writings, she repeatedly conveyed the concept. A selected chronological collection of her clearer statements are provided.

[1878] "The unworthiness, weakness, and inefficiency of their own efforts in contrast with those of the eternal Son of God, will render them humble, distrustful of self, and will lead them to rely upon Christ for strength and efficiency in their work."<sup>24</sup>

[1887] "This injunction is from the eternal Son of God."<sup>25</sup>

[1893] "Jesus said, 'I and my Father are one.' The words of Christ were full of deep meaning as he put forth the claim that he and the Father were of one substance, possessing the same attributes."<sup>26</sup>

[1897] "He was equal with God, infinite and omnipotent. . . . He is the eternal, self-existent Son."<sup>27</sup>

[1900] "Christ is the pre-existent self-existent son of God. . . . In speaking of his pre-existence, Christ carries the mind back through dateless ages. He assures us that there never was a time when He was not in close fellowship with the eternal God."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Tim Poirier, "Ellen White's Trinitarian Statements: What Did She Actually Write?" paper read at "Ellen White and Current Issues" Symposium, April 3, 2006, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

<sup>24</sup> Ellen G. White, "An Appeal to Ministers," *Review and Herald*, August 8, 1878, 49, 50.

<sup>25</sup> Ellen G. White, "Search the Scriptures, John 5:39," *Youth's Instructor*, August 31, 1887, 165.

<sup>26</sup> Ellen G. White, "The True Sheep Respond to the Voice of the Shepherd," *Signs of the Times*, November 27, 1893, 54.

<sup>27</sup> Ellen G. White, "The True High Priest," Manuscript 101, 1897, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Ellen G. White, "Resistance to Light, No. 3," *Signs of the Times*, August 29, 1900, 2-3.

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[1906] “Christ was God essentially, and in the highest sense. He was with God from all eternity, God over all, blessed forevermore.”<sup>29</sup>

[1907/1908] “The Father is all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and is invisible to mortal sight. The Son is all the fullness of the Godhead manifested. The Word of God declares Him to be ‘the express image of His person.’ . . . There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized.”<sup>30</sup>

**From 1900 to 1931: Transition and Conflict**

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the church was divided in its position on the deity of Christ. The idea of Christ as the “eternal” Son appeared in print occasionally. The first person after 1900 to prominently promote the eternal pre-existence of Christ was W. W. Prescott.

Prescott became editor of the *Review and Herald* in February, 1902.<sup>31</sup> Almost immediately he began an editorial series entitled, “Studies in the Gospel Message.” Throughout this series, and in other articles, Prescott sought to lift up Jesus. In three articles toward the end of 1902 he emphasized the equality and eternal nature of God the Father and God the Son.<sup>32</sup> In many other published statements he promoted the equality, personhood, and eternal nature of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>33</sup> During the 1890s he had been slower than Jones to embrace the full eternal

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<sup>29</sup> Ellen G. White, “The Word Made Flesh,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 5, 1906, 8.

<sup>30</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church Containing Messages of Warning and Instruction to Seventh-day Adventists Regarding the Dangers Connected with the Medical Work*, Series B. No. 7 (Published for the Author, n.p., n.d.), 62–63.

<sup>31</sup> General Conference Committee Minutes for February 15, 1902. Cited in Gilbert Murrey Valentine, *William Warren Prescott: Seventh-day Adventist Educator* (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1982), 351.

<sup>32</sup> W. W. Prescott, “Studies in the Gospel Message,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 2, 1902, 4; idem, “Our Place as Sons,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 23, 1902, 6; idem, “The Eternal Purpose,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 23, 1902, 4.

<sup>33</sup> [W. W. Prescott], “Our Personal Saviour Jesus Christ,” *Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly*, first quarter, 1921, 2, 9, 20; idem, *The Doctrine of Christ: A Series of Bible Studies for Use in Colleges and Seminaries* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1920), 3, 20, 21.

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deity of Jesus.<sup>34</sup> At the 1919 Bible Conference he and others more carefully defined what they believed on the deity of Jesus.

**1919 Bible Conference.** The July 1–19, 1919 Bible Conference held at Takoma Park, Washington, D.C., was an open exchange of ideas between a select group of church leaders, editors, Bible teachers, and history teachers. The purpose of the conference was to discuss questions and points of difference, particularly on the “eastern question.” The frank discussions and controversial nature of some of the papers led A. G. Daniells, then president of the General Conference, to not release the transcripts. It was not until 1974 that they were found in the General Conference Archives.<sup>35</sup>

W. W. Prescott presented a series of eight devotionals for the conference titled “The Person of Christ.” While affirming the eternity of the Son, he also said that He derived his existence from the Father. He said:

There is a proper sense, as I view it, according to which the Son is subordinate to the Father, but that subordination is not in the question of attributes or of His existence. It is simply in the fact of the derived existence, as we read in John 5:26: “For as the Father hath life in himself, even so gave he to the Son also to have life in himself.” Using terms as we use them, the Son is co-eternal with the father. That does not prevent His being the only-begotten Son of God.<sup>36</sup>

During the afternoon discussion on July 6, 1919, Prescott found himself in an awkward position. Those arguing against the eternity of Christ wondered how Christ could be “begotten,” and also “co-eternal” with the Father.<sup>37</sup> Others who agreed with Prescott on Christ’s eternity wondered about his use of the word “derived.”<sup>38</sup> Finally, at the end of the discussion, Prescott borrowed an idea shared at the conference by H. C. Lacey with the following summary statement regarding Christ: “One with the Father, one in authority, in power, in love, in mercy, and all the attributes—equal with him and yet second in nature. I like the word ‘second’

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<sup>34</sup> W. W. Prescott, “The Christ for Today,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 4, 1896, 232.

<sup>35</sup> Donald E. Mansell, “How the 1919 Bible Conference Transcript Was Found,” Unpublished Paper, Ellen G. White Estate Document File, July 6, 1975.

<sup>36</sup> 1919 Bible Conference transcript, July 2, 1919, afternoon discussions, 20.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

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better than ‘inferior,’—second in rank.”<sup>39</sup> Prescott’s view was held by several at the conference.

L. L. Caviness, who came late to the discussion, expressed a fear that the church might be heading towards the Trinitarian doctrine. He said plainly,

I cannot believe that the two persons of the Godhead are equal, the Father and the Son,—that one is the Father and the other the Son, and that they might be just as well the other way around. . . . In praying he [Christ] said it was his wish that the disciples might see the glory which he had with the Father, and which the Father had given him. It was not something he had all through eternity, but the Father had some time given to him the glory of God. He is divine, but he is the divine Son. I cannot explain further than that, but I cannot believe the so called Trinitarian doctrine of the three persons always existing.<sup>40</sup>

Soon the meeting became so tense that A. G. Daniells, the General Conference president, suggested the “delegates not become uneasy” and requested that some of the comments not be transcribed.<sup>41</sup> A little later Daniells reminded everyone that they were not voting a position on “trinitarianism” or “arianism” at the meeting.<sup>42</sup> As the meeting came to a close, John Isaac blurted out in frustration,

What are we Bible teachers going to do? We have heard ministers talk one way. Our students have had Bible teachers in one school spend days and days upon this question, then they come to another school, and the other teacher does not agree with that. We ought to have something definite so that we might give the answer. I think it can be done. We ought to have it clearly stated. Was Christ ever begotten, or not.<sup>43</sup>

Daniells concluded by saying: “Don’t let the conservatives think that something is going to happen, and the progressives get alarmed for fear it won’t happen. Let’s keep up this good spirit. Bring out what you have.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., July 6, 1919, 57.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 69.

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A total of 36 delegates were seated at the 1919 Bible Conference. Others joined the conference as it continued and some left early. The following chart outlines the positions of some of the participants according to their views on the eternal deity of Christ.

**1919 Bible Conference on Deity of Christ**

<b>Supported Eternal Deity</b>	<b>Resisted Eternal Deity</b>	<b>Uncertain</b>
W. W. Prescott J. N. Anderson H. C. Lacey G. B. Thompson	C. P. Bollman T. E. Bowen L. L. Caviness W. T. Knox C. M. Sorenson	A. G. Daniells W. E. Howell John Isaac E. R. Palmer A. O. Tait Charles Thompson W. H. Wakeham M. C. Wilcox

Prescott clearly articulated his eternal but subordinate position on the Son of God in his book *Doctrine of Christ*.<sup>45</sup> During the first decades of the twentieth century others besides Prescott published statements affirming the eternal pre-existence of the Son of God.<sup>46</sup> It remains unclear how many also shared Prescott's subordination view. There were of course many who continued to hold to the pre-1890s view.<sup>47</sup>

From 1900 to the 1930s, opinion on the eternal self-existent deity of Christ remained split in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The use of the word "Trinity" in describing God continued to be avoided in print except for rare exceptions. As editors of the *Review and Herald*, Prescott and then F. M. Wilcox promoted the new view of Christ as eternal. The opposing positions continued as a source of theological conflict in the church.

<sup>45</sup> W. W. Prescott, *The Doctrine of Christ: A Series of Bible Studies for Use in Colleges and Seminaries* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1920), 20, 21.

<sup>46</sup> M. C. Wilcox, "Sermon," *General Conference Bulletin*, April 22, 1901, 400; "Topical Bible Studies," *Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly*, first quarter, 1918, 3; G. B. Starr, *Bible Studies: A Series of Illustrated Readings* (Melbourne: Signs Publishing, n.d.), 7.

<sup>47</sup> O. A. Johnson, *Bible Text-Book* (Battle Creek: Review and Herald, 1900), 23, 41, 71; idem, *Bible Doctrines: Containing 150 Lessons on Creation, Government of God, Rebellion in Heaven, Fall of Man, Redemption, Prophecies, Millennium, End of Sinners and Satan, Paradise Restored, etc., etc.*, 4<sup>th</sup> rev. ed., (College Place: n.p., 1917), 34. The 1921, 5<sup>th</sup> rev. ed. has the same statements; S. N. Haskell, *Bible Handbook* (South Lancaster: Bible Training School, 1919), 3; idem, *The Cross and Its Shadow* (South Lancaster: Bible Training School, 1914), 75.

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During the first decades of the twentieth century, Adventists found themselves battling higher criticism and the “new modernism” growing in Christianity. Protestant Fundamentalists were resisting this trend, and Adventists often found themselves battling side by side with them against teaching evolution in public schools and against liberal efforts to undermine the authority of the Bible. Modern liberalism rejected the deity of Jesus and his virgin birth. As a result, Adventist articles defending the deity of Christ began to appear in church papers on a more frequent basis. Irrespective of individual differences on details, Adventist ministers pulled into line against dangerous liberal views.

The natural result was an increased appreciation of the full deity of the Son of God as the teaching came under attack. Quite understandably, even those who rejected the eternal pre-existence of Christ did not want to speak of His beginning and thus weaken their argument against higher criticism. Even articles on the Trinity were tolerated. The resistance against the use of the term seemed to weaken as the battle against liberalism continued.<sup>48</sup>

**1931 Statement of Faith.** Throughout their history, Adventists have refused to adopt any creed but the Bible. They have realized that an understanding of truth is never complete. At various times, though, summary statements of faith have been published. But until the 1946 General Conference session, these were never intended to be the official position of the church.<sup>49</sup>

Curiously, doctrinal summaries were consistently avoided during the first decades of the twentieth century, at a time when they were most needed by a rapidly growing world church. L. E. Froom wrote, “Certain of these historic variances of view [on Christ’s eternal pre-existence] still persisted. And chiefly because of these differences, no Statement of Faith or Fundamental Belief had appeared in the annual *Yearbook*.”<sup>50</sup> This changed in 1931, when an “unofficial” statement of “Fundamental Beliefs” was included in the Adventist *Year Book*. F. M. Wilcox was the

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<sup>48</sup> Stemple White, “What is Meant by the Trinity,” *Canadian Watchman*, September 1923, 18; C. P. Bollman, “The Deity of Christ,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 15, 1923, 4; Lyle C. Shepard, “Christ: A Divine or a Human Saviour?” *Canadian Watchman*, September 1927, 12.

<sup>49</sup> Robert Olson and Bert Haloviak, “Who Decides What Adventists Believe: A Chronological Survey of Sources, 1844–1977,” Ellen G. White Estate Shelf Document, February 24, 1977. The 1946 General Conference session required any changes in the “Fundamental Beliefs” statement to be approved by a General Conference session.

<sup>50</sup> L. E. Froom, *Movement of Destiny* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1971), 413.

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person principally responsible for the statement. He was “respected by all parties for his soundness, integrity, and loyalty to the Advent Faith—and to the Spirit of Prophecy—he, as editor of the *Review*, did what probably no other man could have done to achieve unity in acceptance.”<sup>51</sup>

The second and third statements of Fundamental Beliefs in 1931 made significant progress toward the Church’s present view but were carefully crafted to leave ambiguities. They read thus:

That the Godhead, or Trinity, consists of the Eternal Father, a personal, spiritual Being, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, infinite in wisdom and love; the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Eternal Father, through whom all things were created and through whom the salvation of the redeemed hosts will be accomplished; the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, the great regenerating power in the work of redemption. Matt. 28:19.

That Jesus Christ is very God, being of the same nature and essence as the Eternal Father. While retaining His divine nature He took upon Himself the nature of the human family, lived on the earth as a man, exemplified in His life as our Example the principles of righteousness, attested His relationship to God by many mighty miracles, died for our sins on the cross, was raised from the dead, and ascended to the Father where He ever lives to make intercession for us. John 1:1, 14; Heb. 2:9–18; 8:1, 2; 4:14–16; 7:25.<sup>52</sup>

These statements left certain details undefined. While the Father was “eternal,” Jesus was the “Son of the Eternal Father.” A specific statement of belief about the Holy Spirit was omitted, though He was referred to as the “third person of the Godhead.” The theologically loaded couplet “very God” made Christ and the Father equally self-existent and eternal, but the vocabulary was couched in theological terms not generally understood by Adventists and functionally left room for interpretation.<sup>53</sup> The portion of the 1931 statement of “Fundamental Beliefs” referring to the Godhead and person of Christ was reprinted unchanged in the *Year Book*

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 415.

<sup>52</sup> *1931 Year Book of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination*, Prepared by H. E. Rogers (Washington: Review and Herald, 1931), 377.

<sup>53</sup> T. M. French’s use of the term “very God” in the 1936 Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly.



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until the 1980 General Conference Session revision and expansion of Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs.<sup>54</sup>

**From 1931 to 1957: Acceptance of the Trinitarian View**

During the 1940s, an ever-increasing majority of the church believed in the eternal underived deity of Christ and the personhood of the Holy Spirit, yet there were some who held back and even actively resisted the change. This group was mainly comprised of a few older ministers and Bible teachers. Among the more vocal were J. S. Washburn, C. S. Longacre, and W. R. French.

In 1944 Wilcox wrote in an editorial, “When we come to the study of the Scriptures we find that Christ is the great dominating figure. The infinite Son of the infinite Father is very God in His own right. He is the great ‘I Am’ existing from everlasting to everlasting.”<sup>55</sup> In this simple but clear statement, Wilcox presented to his readers that Christ was both eternal and intrinsically divine like the Father. Wilcox did not depend upon his own opinions in promoting his view. He made it a point to use the Bible as authority for his position and quoted from statements by Ellen White. His January 3, 1945, editorial entitled “The Eternity of Christ” is largely a collection of Bible and Ellen White quotes.<sup>56</sup> Wilcox’s articles encouraged Adventists to embrace the “orthodox” Christian view of the Trinity and Christ’s deity.

The residual tension regarding the Trinity and eternal deity of Christ is revealed in the differences between the official church hymnal of 1941 and the 1985 Hymnal. There were omissions and changes in the original hymns in the 1941 *Church Hymnal* that were corrected in 1985. At the same time, certain language that included controversial thought was included. In the 1941 hymnal the familiar hymn, “Holy, Holy, Holy” (number 73) only had three verses. The fourth and last verse, which ends with, “God in three persons, blessed trinity,” was omitted.<sup>57</sup> The verse was restored in the current *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, published in 1985.<sup>58</sup> Other hymns as well were modified in the 1941 hymn to omit Trinitarian ideas but were restored to their original form or adjusted to

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<sup>54</sup> “Session Actions,” *Adventist Review*, May 1, 1980, 23–27.

<sup>55</sup> F. M. Wilcox, “Christ as Creator and Redeemer,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 23, 1944, 2.

<sup>56</sup> F. M. Wilcox, “The Eternity of Christ,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 3, 1945, 5–6.

<sup>57</sup> *The Church Hymnal* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1941), 59.

<sup>58</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1985), 73.

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include Trinitarian language in 1985.<sup>59</sup> Examples from the 1941 hymnal that preserved controversial language include “Praise Ye the Father” (number 9), which ends with the words “Praise ye the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Praise the Eternal Three!” Also the first verse of hymn number 366, “Soldiers of Christ, Arise,” includes the phrase, “Through His eternal Son.”<sup>60</sup>

For many, Uriah Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation* held a nearly inspired status. His book had been read and studied by nearly every Adventist for over sixty years. In Smith’s discussion of the seventh church in Revelation 3, he made the following comment: “The Son came into existence in a different manner, as he is called ‘the only begotten’ of the Father. It would seem utterly inappropriate to apply this expression to any being created in the ordinary sense of that term.”<sup>61</sup> This statement was removed in the 1944 edition.<sup>62</sup> Naturally, some were unhappy that *Daniel and the Revelation* had been tampered with.

Consideration of the final resolution of the Trinity doctrine cannot be completed without mentioning the role of the book *Questions on Doctrine*. It anchored the doctrine of the Trinity or Godhead.<sup>63</sup> *Questions on Doctrine* affected Adventist theology in several ways. A further study of this is beyond the scope of this paper. But it must be noted that while the book produced conflict in other areas, there was virtually no dissent on the book’s clear teaching of the Trinity.

The book affirmed:

As to Christ’s place in the Godhead, we believe Him to be the second person of the heavenly Trinity—comprised of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who are united not only in the Godhead but in the provisions of redemption. . . . Christ is one with the Eternal Father—one in nature, equal in power and authority, God in the highest sense, eternal and self-existent, with life original, unborrowed, underived; and that Christ existed from all eternity, distinct from, but united with, the Father, possessing the same glory, and all the divine attributes.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *The Church Hymnal*, 1941, 10, 63, 487,

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 16, 286.

<sup>61</sup> Uriah Smith, *Daniel and the Revelation: The Response of History to the Voice of Prophecy* (Nashville: Southern Publishing, 1941), 400.

<sup>62</sup> Uriah Smith, *The Prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation* (Nashville: Southern Publishing, 1944), 391.

<sup>63</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1957), 30, 31, 36.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

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The lack of negative response to the book's clear defense of the Trinity demonstrates that the church at large had accepted what had previously been known as the "new view."

From 1900 to the 1950s the church gradually shifted to the Biblical Christian view on the trinity and deity of Christ. This change seems to be due to a collection of influences: (1) Repeated published biblical studies on the topic; (2) Ellen White's clear statements; (3) Adventist response to the attacks of "modern liberalism" on the deity of Christ and his virgin birth; and (4) F. M. Wilcox's statement of "Fundamental Beliefs" and his *Review and Herald* editorials.

### **Conclusion**

So what can we learn from the history of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist church?

First, we must acknowledge that the development of Adventist biblical theology has usually been progressive and corrective. This is clearly illustrated in the doctrine of the Trinity. The leading of the Holy Spirit is dynamic and not static. Other doctrinal concepts, such as the time to begin the Sabbath (1855), the Great Controversy theme (1858), and tithing (1878) developed in a similar manner.

Second, the development of the Trinity doctrine demonstrates that sometimes doctrinal changes require the passing of a previous generation. For Seventh-day Adventists, it took over 50 years for the doctrine of the Trinity to become normative.

Finally, Adventist theology is always supremely dependant upon Scripture. It is always necessary to engage in careful Bible study. Adventist doctrinal beliefs were built on a biblical foundation during the Millerite movement, during the formative period of Sabbatarian Adventism after 1844, and continuing down to the present.

**Merlin D. Burt** teaches Church History at the S.D.A. Theological Seminary and is Director of the Center for Adventist Research and the Ellen G. White Estate Branch Office, Andrews University. He holds a Ph.D. in Adventist Studies from Andrews University.  
burt@andrews.edu

## **The Quest for a Biblical Trinity: Ellen White’s “Heavenly Trio” Compared to the Traditional Doctrine<sup>1</sup>**

Jerry Moon  
Andrews University Theological Seminary

In 1846, James White dismissed the traditional doctrine of the Trinity as “the old unscriptural trinitarian creed.”<sup>2</sup> A century later, at the 1946 world session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, the denomination that James White co-founded voted official endorsement of a Fundamental Beliefs statement that explicitly professed belief in the “Trinity.”<sup>3</sup> During the sixty years that have passed since that action, a trinitarian view of God has remained dominant among Seventh-day Adventists—despite the general awareness since E. R. Gane’s M.A. thesis in 1963 that most of the earliest Adventist leaders were non-trinitarian.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Paper presented to the Trinity Symposium, Southern Adventist University, April 1, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> James White, *Day-Star*, January 24, 1846, 25.

<sup>3</sup> “Fifteenth Meeting,” General Conference Report No. 8, *Review and Herald*, June 14, 1946, 197. The 1946 GC session met in Washington, D.C. For a discussion of the historical context, see Jerry Moon, “The Adventist Trinity Debate, Part 1: Historical Overview,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 41 (Spring 2003): 122–123.

<sup>4</sup> Erwin R. Gane, “The Arian or Anti-Trinitarian Views Presented in Seventh-day Adventist Literature and the Ellen G. White Answer” (M.A. thesis, Andrews University, 1963); Russell Holt, “The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination: Its Rejection and Acceptance” (term paper, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 1969); Le Roy Edwin Froom, *Movement of Destiny* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1971), 148–180—although Froom’s pleading on the basis of Millerite statistics that a “majority” of the Adventist founders were trinitarian (*ibid.*, 147) has not been supported by the evidence; Merlin Burt, “Demise of Semi-Arianism and Anti-Trinitarianism in Adventist Theology, 1888–1957” (term paper, Andrews University, 1996); Woodrow

### MOON: THE QUEST FOR A BIBLICAL TRINITY

What is now debated by some is Gane's second conclusion that Ellen G. White, Adventist co-founder and prophetic voice, was "a trinitarian monotheist."<sup>5</sup> The view that Ellen White was a trinitarian has recently come under attack from a few writers who advocate a return to the semi-Arian position of some early Adventist leaders. While not agreed on all details, these new antitrinitarians generally seem to believe: (1) that Ellen White agreed with *every aspect* of the pioneers' antitrinitarian view of God; (2) that Ellen White's view never changed (she was antitrinitarian at the beginning and always remained so)<sup>6</sup>; therefore, (3) her later writings that seem to express a trinitarian view are not to be taken at face value: they are either "unclear" statements to be read through the lens of her earlier writings, *or* they are inauthentic statements produced not by her, but by others who tampered with her writings.<sup>7</sup> The new antitrinitarians further reason (4) that if the current Adventist doctrine of the Trinity is the same doctrine that early Adventists, *including Ellen White*, rejected, then the current Adventist doctrine of the Trinity is a heresy based on extrabiblical tradition, hence an apostasy from the church's biblical foundations.<sup>8</sup> These are serious charges indeed—if they could be

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W. Whidden, "Salvation Pilgrimage: The Adventist Journey into Justification by Faith and Trinitarianism," *Ministry*, April 1998, 5–7; Fernando L. Canale, "Doctrine of God," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen, Commentary Reference Series, vol. 12 (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2000): 117–150; and Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, and John W. Reeve, *The Trinity: Understanding God's Love, His Plan of Salvation, and Christian Relationships* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2002), 190–220.

<sup>5</sup> Gane, 67–79.

<sup>6</sup> For example, John Kiesz, an antitrinitarian of the Church of God (Seventh Day), speculates that Ellen White was a "closet trinitarian" who kept that view to herself for half a century until in the 1890s she suddenly broke her silence to challenge the then majority view of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination ("History of the Trinity Doctrine," Study No. 132, <<http://www.giveshare.org/BibleStudy/132.trinityhistory.html>>, accessed January 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Tim Poirier has provided the most direct and substantial refutation of the charge that Ellen White's trinitarian statements were forged. He takes several of the most important examples and shows that they still exist in Ellen White's handwriting or in typed documents bearing her signature and other handwritten annotations (T. Poirier, "Ellen White's Trinitarian Statements: What Did She Actually Write?" presentation to the Symposium on Ellen White and Current Issues, Andrews University, April 3, 2006, publication forthcoming from the Center for Adventist Research, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan).

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., [Fred Allaback], "The Doctrine of the Trinity in Adventist History," *Liberty Review* [5250 Johnstown Road, Mt. Vernon, Ohio], October 1989, 4–5, 7–8;

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substantiated. But I argue that every premise of this syllogism is false, though some of them may appear plausible at first glance.

In previous research I have traced the development of the Adventist doctrine of God from opposition to the Trinity doctrine as traditionally formulated to acceptance of the biblical concept of one God in three persons.<sup>9</sup> I have also traced the clear progression in Ellen White's visions from 1850 onward, showing that her visions gradually formed her concept of God until by 1898, when she published *Desire of Ages*, she held a trinitarian concept.<sup>10</sup>

This research has shown that: (1) Ellen White agreed with *some aspects, but not with every aspect* of the antitrinitarian views of other early Adventists. (2) Ellen White's view *did* change—she was raised trinitarian, came to doubt some aspects of the trinitarianism she was raised on, and eventually came to a *different* trinitarian view from the traditional one. (3) There is a basic harmony between Ellen White's earliest statements and her latest ones. Even on internal evidence, there is no reason to question the validity of her later, more trinitarian writings. They are completely consistent with the trajectory of her developing understanding of the Godhead, and there is every evidence that they represent her own thought. In her earliest writings she differed from *some aspects* of traditional trinitarianism and in her latest writings she still strongly opposed *some aspects* of the traditional doctrine of the Trinity. (4) It appears, therefore, that the trinitarian teaching of Ellen White's later writings is *not* the same doctrine that the early Adventists rejected.<sup>11</sup> Rather,

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Lynnford Beachy, "Adventist Review Perpetuates the Omega," *Old Paths* [Smyrna Gospel Ministries, HC64, Box 128-B, Welch, WV; website [www.smyrna.org](http://www.smyrna.org)], 8/7 (July 1999), 1–14; David Clayton, "The Omega of Deadly Heresies," n.p., n.d. [ca. 2000], in my files; idem, "Some Facts Concerning the Omega Heresy," [www.restorationministry.com/Open\\_Face/html/2000/open\\_face\\_oct\\_2000.htm](http://www.restorationministry.com/Open_Face/html/2000/open_face_oct_2000.htm); accessed Mar. 10, 2003; and Bob Diener, *The Alpha and the Omega* (Creal Springs: Bible Truth Productions, [ca. 1998]), videocassette.

<sup>9</sup> Jerry Moon, "The Adventist Trinity Debate, Part 1," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 41 (Spring 2003): 113–129.

<sup>10</sup> Jerry Moon, "The Adventist Trinity Debate, Part 2: The Role of Ellen G. White," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 41/2 (Autumn 2003): 275–292. See also chapters 11–14 (161–238) in *The Trinity* by Whidden, Moon, and Reeve.

<sup>11</sup> Ellen White's later trinitarianism contains *some elements* that some of the early leaders had rejected, such as the eternal pre-existence of Christ and the full Deity and Personality of the Holy Spirit; but these are clearly taught in Scripture, are fully in harmony with the early Adventists' methods of biblical interpretation, and are completely consistent with the progressive unfolding of Scripture among the early Adventists and in

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her writings describe two contrasting forms of trinitarian belief, one of which she always opposed, and another that she eventually endorsed.

The purpose of the present article is to clarify more fully the similarities and differences between Ellen White's view of the "heavenly trio" and the traditional doctrine of the Trinity in order to discover her position in relation to the current debate among Adventists. The scope of this article will not permit consideration of recent Adventist writings on the Trinity, such as those by Raoul Dederen, Fernando Canale, Rick Rice, Fritz Guy, Woodrow Whidden, and others.<sup>12</sup> However, the unique position of Ellen White in the Adventist church justifies taking her as an authentic representative of Adventist theology. Furthermore, those who advocate a return to antitrinitarianism have interacted more directly with her position than they have with more recent Adventist thought on the nature of God.

#### Two Different Concepts of the Trinity

The conceptual key that unlocks the puzzle of Ellen White's developmental process regarding the Godhead is the discovery that *her writings describe at least two distinct varieties of trinitarian belief*, one based on Scripture alone, and one based on Scripture as interpreted through the lens of Greek philosophy—the same hermeneutic that brought the immortality of the soul into Christian theology. The concept of God that is explicit in her later writings portrays the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three eternal Persons of intellect, will, and emotions who are united in character, purpose, and love. There is no conflict among them, no working at cross-purposes, no competition, not even disagreement. Thus, they are *not* three gods (as in polytheism or tritheism), but One. Furthermore,

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the writings of Ellen White. Therefore, I am convinced that *to the extent that the current Adventist belief in the Trinity can be completely based on Scripture alone*, independent of traditional creeds or ancient church Councils, that doctrine represents the biblical truth about God, however imperfectly it may be understood or expressed.

<sup>12</sup> Raoul Dederen, "Reflections on the Doctrine of the Trinity," *AUSS* 8 (1970): 1–22; Fernando Luis Canale, *A Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 10 (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1983), 359; 402, n. 1; F. L. Canale, "Doctrine of God," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen, Commentary Reference Series, vol. 12 (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2000): esp. 117–150; Richard Rice, *The Reign of God*, 2d ed. (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1985), 60–61; Fritz Guy, *Thinking Theologically: Adventist Christianity and the Interpretation of Faith* (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1999), 130, also 70, 88, 151, and their notes; Whidden, Moon, and Reeve, *The Trinity*.

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their unity is not a mathematical paradox, but a relational unity, analogous to the unity seen in a good marriage, where husband and wife are united in an ever-growing oneness, but without negating their individuality.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, her concept is in harmony with the biblical witness of both the OT and NT.<sup>14</sup> After God said, “Let us make man in our image” (Gen 1:26–27), God proceeded to create humans in a plurality of forms that were capable of becoming one. In Genesis 2:24 God explained His purpose in this—so that these diverse creatures bearing His “image” could “become one.” The Hebrew word translated “one” in Gen 2:24 is *ʿeḥād*—not a monolithic singleness [for which Moses could have used *yāḥîd*, “one” or “only”], but a unity formed from multiple components. The same word occurs in Deut 6:4, “Hear O Israel: Yahweh is our God; Yahweh is one [*ʿeḥād*].”<sup>15</sup>

The concept of plurality of persons in unity of relationship becomes more explicit in the NT. For example, Christ prayed that believers in Him may “all” be “one” as He and the Father “are one” (John 17:20–22). Ellen White quotes this passage as proof of the “personality of the Father and the Son,” and an explanation of “the unity that exists between Them.” She wrote: “The unity that exists between Christ and His disciples does not destroy the personality of either. They are one in purpose, in mind, in character, but not in person. It is thus that God and Christ are one.”<sup>16</sup>

In the same year (1905) she wrote elsewhere, “There are three living persons of the heavenly trio . . . the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>17</sup> Her concept of the “heavenly trio” differs from the traditional Trinity in that it is based on simple biblical reasoning and biblical presuppositions. It could be called a “biblical” view of the Trinity, and it

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<sup>13</sup> The dictum of Gen 2:24, “the two shall become one flesh,” is not a mathematical paradox, but a statement of relational unity. The fact that Scripture has much more to say about the relational unity of God (see, e.g., John 14–17) does not preclude God’s ontological unity, but the ontological unity is certainly less explicit in Scripture.

<sup>14</sup> See Whidden, “The Biblical Evidence for the Full Deity of Christ, the Personality of the Holy Spirit, and the Unity and Oneness of the Godhead,” in *The Trinity*, Whidden, Moon, and Reeve, 7–117.

<sup>15</sup> Whidden, *The Trinity*, 33–34.

<sup>16</sup> E. G. White, *Ministry of Healing* (Mt. View: Pacific Press, 1905), 421–422.

<sup>17</sup> E. G. White, *Special Testimonies*, Series B, no. 7 (Sanitarium: n.p., 1905), 62–63, emphasis supplied.



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became clearer and clearer in her mind and writings as the years passed and the revelations to her accumulated.

**The Historical Context of the Early Development of  
Ellen White's Understanding of the Godhead**

In the aftermath of the Great Disappointment of 1844, many former Millerites “spiritualized” the second coming by interpreting the biblical prophecies of Christ's return as having a spiritual, not literal fulfillment.<sup>18</sup> Thus they professed to believe that Jesus had come in 1844, not literally, but “spiritually.”<sup>19</sup> This view led to a wide range of aberrant behavior. Among the most extreme were the “no work” fanatics who believed that the millennium had already begun as a Sabbath of perpetual rest, and that the way to demonstrate saving faith was to refrain from all work.<sup>20</sup> Others of the “spiritualizers” dabbled in “mesmerism,”<sup>21</sup> joined the Shakers,<sup>22</sup> or even became followers of occult spiritualism.<sup>23</sup>

Both James and Ellen White opposed this “spiritualizing” as deadly heresy,<sup>24</sup> because from their perspective, if the second advent were not a literal, bodily return of the same divine-human Jesus who ascended, but was rather some subjective spiritual “revelation” to the individual heart

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<sup>18</sup> Richard W. Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1979), 53–54. For the most extensive investigation to date of post-disappointment Millerism, its division and disintegration, see Merlin D. Burt, “The Historical Background, Interconnected Development, and Integration of the Doctrines of the Sanctuary, the Sabbath, and Ellen G. White's Role in Sabbatarian Adventism from 1844 to 1849” (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 2002), 60–272, especially 145, 231–242.

<sup>19</sup> See Burt, dissertation, 145, 231–242; and George R. Knight, *Millennial Fever and the End of the World* (Boise: Pacific Press, 1993), 260..

<sup>20</sup> “They said they were in the Jubilee, the land should rest, and the poor must be supported without labor” (E. G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2 [Battle Creek: James White, 1860], 75).

<sup>21</sup> E. G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 62–63; Burt (141–145) cites several unpublished sources.

<sup>22</sup> Enoch Jacobs, editor of the *Day-Star*, led in this move (Burt, 231–242).

<sup>23</sup> Burt, dissertation, 242; George R. Knight, 260.

<sup>24</sup> Re: James White's view; Burt (dissertation, 146–147) lists four such items, each titled “Letter from Bro. White,” in *Day-Star* Sept. 6, 1845, 17–18; Oct. 11, 1845, 47; Nov. 29, 1845, 35; and Jan. 24, 1846, 25. For Ellen White's opposition to spiritualizing theology, see *Great Controversy*, 582, 674; and *Selected Messages*, 1:170. For examples of her opposition to the behavior that sprang from this theology, see *Spiritual Gifts*, 2:73–75; James White and Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of James White and Ellen G. White* (Battle Creek: SDA Pub Assn., 1880), 230, 251–252; cf. E. G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1915), 85–94.

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or mind, then the teaching of His literal return had been not merely modified, but destroyed—hence the phrase “spiritualize away.” In one passage James charged that the “spiritualizers” “spiritualize away the existence of the Father and the Son, as two distinct, literal [*sic*], tangible persons, also a literal Holy city and throne of David.”<sup>25</sup>

In maintaining that the Father and the Son are “two distinct, literal, tangible” persons, James White certainly did not doubt that “God is spirit” (John 4:24),<sup>26</sup> but he insisted that though “spiritual” beings, Christ and the Father are nevertheless Divine Persons who have a “literal, tangible” existence; They are neither unreal nor imaginary. The trinitarian creeds he knew of made God so abstract, theoretical, and impersonal that God was no longer perceived as a real, caring, loving Being.

For example, one trinitarian creed that early Adventists quoted fairly often was that of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Ellen White’s church of origin. That creed says in part, “There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body or parts.”<sup>27</sup> This the early Adventists vigorously refuted, citing several biblical passages that portrayed God as having both “body” and “parts.”<sup>28</sup>

Ellen White was also much interested in this question.<sup>29</sup> Twice in early visions of Jesus, she asked Him questions related to the “form” and “person” of God. In one early vision, she reported seeing “a throne, and on it sat the Father and the Son. I gazed on Jesus’ countenance,” she said, “and admired His lovely person. The Father’s person I could not behold,

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<sup>25</sup> James White, *Day-Star*, Jan. 24, 1846, 25; Ellen White used parallel terms: “I have often seen that the spiritual view took away the glory of heaven, and that in many minds the throne of David, and the lovely person of Jesus had been burned up in the fire of spiritualism” (*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2 [1860], 74).

<sup>26</sup> In 1877 Ellen White quoted John 4:24 KJV: “God is a Spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (E. G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy* 2:143). In 1904 she wrote, “God is a spirit; yet He is a personal being, for man was made in His image” (E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9 vols. [1855–1909; reprint Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948], 8:263). James White held that God is “a Spirit being” (idem, *Personality of God* [Battle Creek: SDA Pub. Assn., ca. 1868], 3).

<sup>27</sup> *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1856), 15.

<sup>28</sup> For instance, Exod 24:9–11; 33:20–23; John 1:18; Heb 1:1–3; Uriah Smith, *The State of the Dead and the Destiny of the Wicked* (Battle Creek: SDA Publishing Assn., 1873), 27–30. Note Smith’s polemic against any “mystical interpretation of our current theology” (ibid., 27).

<sup>29</sup> The creed in question was a Methodist creed, and she had been raised Methodist. Furthermore, she was closely associated with early Adventists who cited this creedal detail as one of the unbiblical aspects of trinitarianism.

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for a cloud of glorious light covered Him. I asked Jesus if His Father had a form like Himself. He said He had, but I could not behold it, for said He, ‘If you should once behold the glory of His person, you would cease to exist.’”<sup>30</sup>

In 1850 she reported, “I have often seen the lovely Jesus, that He is a person. I asked Him if His Father was a person and had a form like Himself. Said Jesus, ‘I am in the express image of My Father’s person.’”<sup>31</sup> Thus her visions confirmed what her husband had written in 1846, that the Father and the Son are “two distinct, literal, tangible persons.”<sup>32</sup> The visions also disproved, to her mind, the claim of the Methodist creed that God is “without body or parts.” Thus, these early visions steered her developing view of God away from *creedal* trinitarianism, though they offered nothing directly contradictory to her later statements of what I have called biblical trinitarianism. In her first volume, titled *Spiritual Gifts*,<sup>33</sup> her belief in the Holy Spirit is not in question, for she refers to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in Christ’s baptismal narrative. But she does not mention the Holy Spirit in connection with the divine councils about creation and salvation.<sup>34</sup> These statements are basically nontrinitarian in emphasis, but because of their ambiguity, could be read without

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<sup>30</sup> Ellen G. White, *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White* (Saratoga Springs: James White, 1851), 43; reprinted, idem, *Early Writings of Ellen G. White* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1882, 1945), 54.

<sup>31</sup> E. G. White, *Early Writings*, 77, emphasis hers.

<sup>32</sup> While there is no record of her denouncing the “trinitarian creed” as did her husband, note the similarity of expression between her view (above) and what he wrote in 1868: “The *Father and the Son were one* in man’s creation, and in his redemption. Said the Father to the Son, ‘Let us make man in our image.’ And the triumphant song of jubilee in which the redeemed take part, is unto ‘Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, forever and ever.’”

“Jesus prayed that his *disciples might be one as he was one* with his Father. This prayer did *not* contemplate *one disciple with twelve heads, but twelve disciples, made one in object and effort* in the cause of their master. Neither are the Father and the Son *parts of the ‘three-one God.’ They are two distinct beings, yet one in the design and accomplishment of redemption.* The redeemed . . . ascribe the honor, and glory, and praise, of their salvation, to both God and the Lamb” (James White, *Life Incidents* [Battle Creek: SDA Publishing Assn., 1868; reprint, Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 2003], 343, emphasis added).

<sup>33</sup> The title was an explicit assertion of her claim to have received the gift of prophecy.

<sup>34</sup> Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vols. 1, 3 (Battle Creek: Steam Press of the Review and Herald Office, 1858; Steam Press of the SDA Publishing Association, 1864), 1:17–18, 22–28; 3:33–34.

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conflict by Adventists regardless of both trinitarian and antitrinitarian leanings.

Perhaps her first statement that clearly disagrees with her antitrinitarian colleagues came in 1869 in the chapter, “The Sufferings of Christ” (now in *Testimonies*, vol. 2, 200), where in the opening paragraph she declares (on the basis of three NT texts) that Christ in His pre-existence was “equal with God.”<sup>35</sup>

Eventually it became evident that the most prominent early Adventist antitrinitarian—James White—was beginning to change his views, apparently following the lead of his wife’s visions. In an 1876 editorial, comparing the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists with Seventh Day Baptists, he included the Trinity among the doctrines which “neither [Adventists nor Seventh Day Baptists] regard as tests of Christian character,” that is, not tests of membership. “Adventists hold the divinity of Christ so nearly with the trinitarian,” James White observed, “that we apprehend no trial [conflict] here.”<sup>36</sup> A year later he proclaimed in the *Review* that “Christ is equal with God.” Another remark in the same article shows that he was in sympathy with certain aspects of trinitarianism. “The inexplicable trinity that makes the godhead three in one and one in three is bad enough,” he wrote, “but ultra Unitarianism that makes Christ inferior to the Father is worse.”<sup>37</sup> While he still opposed the “inexplicable” trinitarian terminology that made God seem unreal, he even more vehemently rejected the antitrinitarian position that made “Christ inferior to the Father.” Present-day antitrinitarians who hold that Christ is “inferior to the Father” are not being true to the theology of James White. For yet another evidence of how her visions influenced her colleagues, her

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<sup>35</sup> The texts were Heb 1:3; Col 1:19; and Phil 2:6 (Ellen G. White, “Testimony 17 [1869],” in *Testimonies for the Church*, 2:200); cf. “The Son of God was in the form of God, and he thought it not robbery to be equal with God” (E. G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 2 [Battle Creek: SDA Pub. Assn., 1877], 10).

<sup>36</sup> James White, “The Two Bodies,” *Review and Herald*, Oct. 12, 1876, 116; cf. Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, 178.

<sup>37</sup> James White, “Christ Equal with God,” *Review and Herald*, Nov. 29, 1877, 72.

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affirmation that Christ was uncreated<sup>38</sup> came more than 20 years before Uriah Smith published his acceptance of that concept.<sup>39</sup>

In another clear break with the antitrinitarians, she declared in 1878 that Christ was the “*eternal* Son.”<sup>40</sup> Ellen White did not understand “eternal” Sonship to imply that Christ was *derived* from the Father, but that “Christ was united with the Father” “from all eternity.”<sup>41</sup>

In the years after 1888, she made an even more fundamental departure from the antitrinitarian view when she recognized that a true concept of Christ’s atonement demands His full and eternal Deity.<sup>42</sup> “The reconciliation of man to God could be accomplished only through a mediator

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<sup>38</sup> Ellen G. White, “The First Advent of Christ,” *Review and Herald*, Dec. 17, 1872, par. 4; later published in *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 2 (Battle Creek: SDA Publishing Association, 1877), 9–10; cf. E. G. White, “Bible Study,” *Review and Herald*, Jan. 11, 1881, par. 3.

<sup>39</sup> Uriah Smith, *Thoughts on the Revelation* (Battle Creek: SDA Publishing Association, 1865), 59, calls Christ the first created being; a view he repudiated in *Looking Unto Jesus* (Battle Creek: Review and Herald, 1898), 17, 12.

<sup>40</sup> Ellen G. White, “An Appeal to the Ministers,” *Review and Herald*, August 8, 1878, par. 4; Ellen G. White to E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones, Feb. 18, 1887 (Letter 37, 1887, in *idem*, *Manuscript Releases*, 21 vols. [Silver Spring: Ellen G. White Estate, 1981–1993], 15:25; also in *Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 4 vols. [Washington: Ellen G. White Estate, 1987], 28); *idem*, “‘Search the Scriptures.’ John 5:39,” in *Youth’s Instructor*, August 31, 1887, par. 1; *idem*, “The Truth Revealed in Jesus,” *Review and Herald*, Feb. 8, 1898, par. 2.

<sup>41</sup> E. G. White, “Christ Our Only Hope,” *Signs of the Times*, Aug. 2, 1905, reprinted in E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, Book 1 (Washington: Review and Herald, 1958), 226–228. Sonship in His preexistence denoted that He was of the same nature as the Father, in unity and close relationship with the Father, but it did not imply that Christ had a beginning. For in taking human flesh Christ became the Son of God “in a new sense.” From the perspective of His humanity, He for the first time had a “beginning,” and also, as a human, He began a new relationship of dependence on the Father.

“In His incarnation He gained *in a new sense* the title of the Son of God. Said the angel to Mary, ‘The power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.’ While the Son of a human being, He became the Son of God *in a new sense*. Thus He stood in our world—the Son of God, yet allied by birth to the human race. . . . From all eternity Christ was united with the Father” (E. G. White, “Christ Our Only Hope,” *Signs of the Times*, Aug. 2, 1905, reprinted in E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, 1:226–228).

<sup>42</sup> Ellen G. White, *Great Controversy* (1888 ed.), 524. Cf. E. J. Waggoner: “Our object in this investigation is to set forth Christ’s rightful position of equality with the Father, in order that His power to redeem may be the better appreciated” (*Christ and His Righteousness* [Oakland: Pacific Press, 1890; facsimile reprint, Riverside: The Upward Way, 1988], 19).

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who was equal with God, possessed of attributes that would dignify, and declare him worthy to treat with the Infinite God in man's behalf."<sup>43</sup>

Finally, in 1897, Ellen White wrote that the Holy Spirit is "the third person of the Godhead."<sup>44</sup> This affirmation received wider circulation and more permanent form in *The Desire of Ages* (1898).<sup>45</sup> At the same time her belief in the absolute and eternal equality of Christ with the Father was made unequivocally emphatic. "In Christ is life," she wrote, "original, unborrowed, underived."<sup>46</sup> With this clear articulation of the unity of God in a plurality of eternal divine persons, her trinitarianism is essentially complete.<sup>47</sup> All that remains for her capstone statements is to affirm explicitly that the three "eternal heavenly dignitaries," the "three living persons of the heavenly trio," are one in nature, character, and purpose, but not in person.<sup>48</sup>

Thus there is a clear progression from the simple to the complex, showing that Ellen White's understanding did grow and change as she received additional light.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> E. G. White, "No Caste in Christ," *Review and Herald*, December 22, 1891, par. 1.

<sup>44</sup> *Special Testimonies for Ministers and Workers*, series A, No. 10 (1897).

<sup>45</sup> Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, (Oakland, Pacific Press, 1898; Mt. View, Pacific Press, 1940), 671.

<sup>46</sup> Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, 530, 671.

<sup>47</sup> In 1899 she reaffirmed the other side of the formula, that in "person," Christ was "distinct" from the Father. "The world was made by him, 'and without him was not anything made that was made.' If Christ made all things, he existed before all things. The words spoken in regard to this are so decisive that no one need be left in doubt. *Christ was God essentially, and in the highest sense. He was with God from all eternity, God over all, blessed forevermore. The Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, existed from eternity, a distinct person, yet one with the Father*" (Ellen G. White, "The Word Made Flesh," *Review and Herald*, April 5, 1906, par. 6–7, italics supplied [reprinted from *Signs of the Times*, April 26, 1899]).

<sup>48</sup> E. G. White, Manuscript 130, 1901, in *Manuscript Releases*, 16:205, quoted in idem, *Evangelism* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1946), 616 (but there erroneously attributed to Ms. 145, 1901); idem, *Special Testimonies*, Series B, no. 7 (1905), 51, 62–63, quoted in *Evangelism*, 615, cf. 617; idem, *Ministry of Healing*, 421–422.

<sup>49</sup> Fernando Canale has pointed out that this progression is similar to the one presented in the NT. In the gospels, the first challenge was to convince the disciples that Christ was one with the Father. Once their concept of monotheism had been expanded to accept "one God" in "two divine persons," it was comparatively easy to lead them to the next conceptual step, recognizing the Holy Spirit as a third divine person (Canale, "Doctrine of God," 128–130).

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**The Definition of True and False Trinities**

Ellen White's clearest differentiation between two contrasting views of the Trinity was written during the Kellogg crisis of 1902–1907.<sup>50</sup> J. H. Kellogg, M.D., medical superintendent of the Battle Creek Sanitarium, was the leading person of scientific credentials among Adventists in the early twentieth century. Seeking to define biological “life” in theistic rather than naturalistic terms, he eventually theorized that the life of every living thing—whether tree, flower, animal, or human—has the very presence of God within it. This was eventually recognized as a form of pantheism,<sup>51</sup> or more precisely, panentheism, of which traces can be found in his public presentations in the 1890s.<sup>52</sup> The “crisis,” however, did not break until 1902, with the writing of the manuscript for a new book, *The Living Temple*.<sup>53</sup>

*The Living Temple* was primarily a handbook on basic physiology, nutrition, preventive medicine, and home treatments for common ailments. The title referred to the human body as a living “temple of the Holy Ghost,” and the opening chapter set forth Kellogg's personal theology that “God is the explanation of nature—not a God *outside* of nature, but *in* nature, manifesting himself through and in all the objects, movements, and varied phenomena of the universe.”<sup>54</sup>

Because other leading Adventists had pointed out the weaknesses of this theory,<sup>55</sup> Ellen White hoped at first that she would not have to get involved. But when Kellogg claimed publicly that the teachings of *The Living Temple* “regarding the personality of God” were in accord with

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<sup>50</sup> On the Kellogg Crisis, see R[ichard] W. Schwarz, *John Harvey Kellogg, M.D.* (Nashville: Southern Publishing, 1970; reprint, Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1981), 174–192; idem, *Light Bearers*, 282–298; Jerry Moon, *W. C. White and Ellen G. White: The Relationship between the Prophet and Her Son* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1993), 274–320.

<sup>51</sup> W. A. Spicer, “Pantheism Here and in Its Ancient Setting,” in *How the Spirit of Prophecy Met a Crisis: Memories and Notes of the “Living Temple” Controversy*, [1938], chapter 13. <http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/white/spicer/index.htm>, accessed September 18, 2003.

<sup>52</sup> See J. H. Kellogg, “God in Man, No. 1,” “God in Nature, No. 2,” and “God in Man, No. 3,” in *General Conference Daily Bulletin*, 1897, 72–84.

<sup>53</sup> J. H. Kellogg, *The Living Temple* (Battle Creek: Good Health Pub., 1903).

<sup>54</sup> J. H. Kellogg, *Living Temple*, 28, emphasis added.

<sup>55</sup> W. A. Spicer, (n. 55 above); W. W. Prescott, “Suggestions on Matter Found on Galleys 1–129, Inclusive, of Matter for Dr. Kellogg's New Book, *The Living Temple*,” Record Group 11, A. G. Daniells, 1901–1950, J. H. Kellogg Case File, General Conference Archives, Silver Springs, MD.

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the writings of Ellen White, she could no longer remain silent. “God forbid that this opinion should prevail,” she declared.<sup>56</sup>

We need not the mysticism that is in this book. . . . [T]he writer of this book is on a false track. He has lost sight of the distinguishing truths for this time. He knows not whither his steps are tending. The track of truth lies close beside the track of error, and both may seem to be one to minds which are not worked by the Holy Spirit, and which, therefore, are not quick to discern the difference between truth and error.<sup>57</sup>

In a follow-up letter, she zeroed in on the core issue: “The Lord Jesus . . . did not represent God as an *essence pervading nature*, but as a *personal being*. Christians should bear in mind that God has a personality as verily as has Christ.”<sup>58</sup>

Kellogg countered by arguing that if the Holy Spirit could be everywhere at once (as even the antitrinitarians believed), and if the Holy Spirit were also a Person (as Ellen White had asserted in *Desire of Ages*), then God could be all-pervasive without being impersonal. He tried to convince church leaders<sup>59</sup> that the “pantheism” of *Living Temple* was simply a scientific version of the same doctrine of God that Ellen White had expressed in *Desire of Ages*.

Ellen White, however, insisted that Kellogg’s concept of the Trinity was not the same as her concept, and as the conflict dragged on into 1905, she exposed the matter to the church in such stark lines that she could not be misunderstood. The most scathing indictment she ever wrote against a false view of the Trinity, this manuscript labels Kellogg’s view as “spiritualistic,” “nothingness,” “imperfect, untrue,”<sup>60</sup> “the trail of the serpent,” and “the depths of Satan.”<sup>61</sup> She said those who received Kellogg’s view were “giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of

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<sup>56</sup> E. G. White to the Teachers in Emmanuel Missionary College, Sept. 22, 1903 (“Teach the Word”), in *Spalding and Magan’s Unpublished Manuscript Testimonies of Ellen G. White, 1915–1916* [*Spalding-Magan Collection*] (Payson: Leaves-Of-Autumn Books, 1985), 320.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 320–321.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 324, emphasis added. Kellogg had hinted in *Living Temple* (29–32) that the concept of a personal God was an [ultimately unfactual] construct for the benefit of immature minds, implying that intellectuals such as himself could perceive the reality beyond the anthropomorphism.

<sup>59</sup> See Moon, “Adventist Trinity Debate, Part 2,” 286–287.

<sup>60</sup> E. G. White, *Special Testimonies*, Series B, no. 7 (Sanitarium: n.p., 1905), 63.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 62, alluding to Rev 2:24.



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devils, departing from the faith which they have held sacred for the past fifty years.”<sup>62</sup>

In contrast to Kellogg’s view, she defined another view that she regarded as “the right platform,” in harmony with “the simplicity of true godliness,” and “the old, old times . . . when, under the Holy Spirit’s guidance, thousands were converted in a day.”<sup>63</sup> The antagonism between two opposing theologies could scarcely be drawn in more stringent terms than a disagreement between doctrines of “seducing spirits” and the doctrine of the original Pentecost. She is talking about two contrasting doctrines of the Trinity.

She first described the false doctrine of the Trinity that she rejected. “I am instructed to say,” Ellen White wrote,

The sentiments of those who are searching for advanced scientific ideas are not to be trusted. Such representations as the following are made: “The Father is as the light invisible; the Son is as the light embodied; the Spirit is the light shed abroad.” “The Father is like the dew, invisible vapor; the Son is like the dew gathered in beauteous form; the Spirit is like the dew fallen to the seat of life.” Another representation: “The Father is like the invisible vapor; the Son is like the leaden cloud; the Spirit is rain fallen and working in refreshing power.”

All these spiritualistic representations are simply nothingness. They are imperfect, untrue. They weaken and diminish the Majesty which no earthly likeness can be compared to.<sup>64</sup>

Then she defines what she understands to be the truth about the Godhead.

“The Father is all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and is invisible to mortal sight.

“The Son is all the fulness of the Godhead manifested. The Word of God declares Him to be “the express image of His person.” “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Here [in Christ] is shown the personality of the Father.

“The Comforter that Christ promised to send after He ascended to heaven, is the Spirit in all the fulness of the God-

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 63–64.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 62.

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head, making manifest the power of divine grace to all who receive and believe in Christ as a personal Saviour. There are three living persons of the *heavenly trio*; in the name of these three great powers—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will co-operate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ. [Emphasis supplied]<sup>65</sup>

In charging that Kellogg, with his “spiritualistic” Trinity doctrine, was “departing from the faith” Adventists had “held sacred for the past fifty years,” and then setting forth another view of the Trinity as the “truth,” she clearly distinguished between two varieties of trinitarianism.

Further, Ellen White claimed that in Kellogg’s heresy she “recognized the very sentiments” she had opposed among spiritualizing ex-Millerites in 1845 and 1846.<sup>66</sup> The implication is that the spiritualizing of the post-disappointment fanatics, the creedal teaching that God is formless and intangible (“without body or parts”), and Kellogg’s impersonal concepts of God were all associated in her mind under the general heading of “spiritualistic theories.”<sup>67</sup>

This is directly relevant to the current debate because some have claimed that Kellogg’s view that Ellen White condemned is the same view of the Trinity now accepted by the church.<sup>68</sup> This claim is not supported by the evidence.

She clearly rejected any view of the Trinity that makes God impersonal and unreal, but embraced a literal, biblical<sup>69</sup> view of *one God in three eternal Persons*, who are *relationally united* in character, purpose, and love.

These affirmations of belief in one God in three persons were sufficiently influential that by 1913, during her lifetime, was published the first explicitly trinitarian belief statement among Seventh-day Adventists. Written by F. M. Wilcox, editor of the *Review and Herald*, a man she designated in her will as one of the original five trustees of her estate, the

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 62–63.

<sup>66</sup> E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, 1:203.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>68</sup> Bob Diener, *The Alpha and the Omega*, videocassette.

<sup>69</sup> Bible texts that Ellen White cited as supporting various aspects of a trinitarian view include Rom 8:16 (*Evangelism* [Washington: Review and Herald, 1946], 617); 1 Cor 2:10–14 (ibid.); John 16:7–14 (ibid., 616); John 14:16–18, 26; 16:8, 12–14 (*Desire of Ages*, 669–671); and Col. 2:9 (*Evangelism*, 614).

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article was published on the same page after one of her articles, virtually guaranteeing that she would see it.<sup>70</sup> “Seventh-day Adventists believe,” Wilcox explained, “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.”<sup>71</sup>

#### Summary and Conclusions

The change from Adventist rejection of the traditional doctrine of the Trinity to acceptance of a biblical trinitarian doctrine was not a simple reversal. When James White denounced creedal trinitarianism in 1846, Ellen White agreed with *both his positive point*—that “the Father and the Son” are “two distinct, literal [sic], tangible persons”—and *his negative point*—that the philosophical trinitarianism held by many did “spiritualize away” the personal reality of the Father and the Son.<sup>72</sup>

Soon after this she added the conviction, based on visions, that both Christ and the Father have bodily form—rejecting the teaching of one trinitarian creed that God is “without body or parts.” Then, step by step, she affirmed the eternal equality of Christ with the Father, that Christ was not created, and that a true concept of His atonement demands a recognition of His full and eternal Deity. All of these points differed from the antitrinitarians and brought her closer to trinitarian thinking.

In the 1890s, when she became convinced of the individuality and personhood of the Holy Spirit, she referred to the Holy Spirit in literal and tangible terms much like those she had used in 1850 to describe the Father and the Son. For instance, addressing the church at Avondale College in 1899, she declared, “the Holy Spirit, who is as much a person as God is a person, is walking through these grounds, unseen by human eyes . . . . He hears every word we utter and knows every thought of the mind.”<sup>73</sup>

Her capstone statement came in 1905. She wrote, “There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; . . . three great powers—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>74</sup> In the same year she defined Their unity

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<sup>70</sup> F. M. Wilcox was editor of the *Review and Herald* from 1911–1944 and one of the original five trustees appointed by Ellen White to superintend her estate.

<sup>71</sup> [F. M. Wilcox], “The Message for Today,” *Review and Herald*, October 9, 1913, 21.

<sup>72</sup> James White, *Day-Star*, January 24, 1846, 26.

<sup>73</sup> E. G. White, *Sermons and Talks*, vol. 2 [Silver Spring: E. G. White Estate, 1994], 136–137; also in *Evangelism*, 616; and *Manuscript Releases*, 7:299.

<sup>74</sup> E. G. White, *Special Testimonies*, Series B, no. 7, 63.

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in relational rather than philosophical terms: “The unity that exists between Christ and His disciples does not destroy the personality of either. They are one in purpose, in mind, in character, but not in person. It is thus that God and Christ are one.”<sup>75</sup>

Since Ellen White clearly held the basic formula of one God in three persons, it can hardly be denied that her view is essentially trinitarian. However, her view differs from traditional trinitarianism in the following important respects.

1. She rejected at least three of the philosophical presuppositions undergirding traditional trinitarianism: (a) the radical dualism of spirit and matter, which concluded that God could not have a visible form; (b) the notion of impassibility, which held that God had no passions, feelings, or emotions, hence could have no interest in, or sympathy with, humans<sup>76</sup>; and (c) the dualism of time and timelessness, which led to the notions of “eternal generation” and “eternal procession.”<sup>77</sup> Her rejection of all these

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<sup>75</sup> E. G. White, *Ministry of Healing*, 421–422.

<sup>76</sup> Aristotle styled God the “Unmoved Mover” because he reasoned that if God so much as thought about flawed, mortal, material beings, His absolute perfection would be spoiled. Aristotle’s God was “impassible,” that is, free of all passions (feelings and emotions)—the exact opposite of the God portrayed in Isaiah 53:4–6 and Hebrews 4:15. Roger Olson, a historian of theology, summarizes the situation: “Augustine’s God, though trinitarian, is made captive to the Greek philosophical theology of divine simplicity, immutability, and impassibility, and turns out to be more like a great cosmic emperor than a loving, compassionate heavenly Father. Anselm denied that God experiences feelings of compassion at all. . . . Those who rightly criticize Deism for subverting biblical teachings by overwhelming them with Enlightenment philosophical and natural religion, ought to consider the extent to which classical Christian doctrines of God have been unduly influenced by Greek philosophical categories of metaphysical perfection (Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999], 530). See also Fernando L. Canale, “Doctrine of God,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen, 117–118, 126, 128–129, 132, 138–140, 145, 148–150.

<sup>77</sup> See Moon, chap. 11, in *The Trinity*, by Whidden, Moon, and Reeve, esp. 167–174. Malachi 3:6, “I am the Lord, I do not change,” means that His character is unchanging, hence trustworthy. Heb 13:8 makes the same claim for God the Son, that He is “the same, yesterday, today, and forever.” But the philosophical notion of timelessness says God has no “yesterday,” no past or future, but is static, immobilized in an “eternal present.” When Jesus said, “I proceeded and came forth from God (John 8:42), the plain meaning of His speech to his initial hearers was a claim: ‘My witness of the Father is trustworthy, because I know Him intimately, it is He who sent me into the world, and I speak as His appointed representative’ (loose paraphrase of John 8:14–17, 28–29, 38, 42). But Greek philosophy reasons that if Jesus came from outside the world, He also came from outside time, hence He must have pre-existed in timelessness. Since timelessness was theorized

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concepts constitutes a radical departure from the medieval dogma of the Trinity.

2. She described the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in relational rather than ontological terms. While the traditional doctrine defined the divine unity in terms of “being” or “substance,” she focused on the volitional and relational dimensions of Their unity, a unity of “purpose, mind, and character.”<sup>78</sup> In this sense her concept of the “heavenly trio” is a more humble concept than the traditional Trinity doctrine. As Fernando Canale observes, “In no way could human minds achieve what the classic doctrine about the Trinity claims to perceive, namely, the description of the inner structure of God’s being. Together with the entire creation, we must accept God’s oneness by faith (James 2:19).”<sup>79</sup>

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to be an eternal present, if Christ “proceeded” from the Father in timelessness, then His “procession” from the Father is eternal. It had no beginning (no past), no ending (future), but is eternally “proceeding.” Thus dualism interprets a simple statement of Jesus about His coming into the world as a word about His ultimate origins. Two implications are drawn from this: first, that “the Father was the only one of the three persons who did not come from another” (Bonaventure, quoted in Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, 5 vols. [Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1971–1989], 3:278). The Eastern Orthodox concept differs in details, but also holds that only the Father “is ungenerated, the Son is generated by the Father, and the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father through the Son” (or as some say, “from the Father only”) (*Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church [ODCC]*, art. “Trinity”). A second implication is that if eternity is a timeless, “eternal present,” then whatever happens to God, is still happening and will continue to happen forever. From this comes the theory of the “eternal generation of the Son.” Some include the Holy Spirit in this “eternal generation,” since He too is said to “proceed” from the Father [John 15:26] (*ODCC*). To this John Calvin reported, “it is foolish to imagine a continuous act of generating when it is evident that three persons have existed in one God from eternity” (*Institutes*, I.xiii.29). Yet, despite brilliant, famous, and learned opponents (see Justo L. Gonzalez, *History of Christian Thought, From the Protestant Reformation to the Twentieth Century*, vol. 3 [Nashville: Abingdon, 1975], 91–92), the theory of the “eternal generation of the Son” remains a part of the Roman Catholic Trinity doctrine to this day (see Richard M. Hogan and John M. LeVoir, *Faith for Today: Pope John Paul II’s Catechetical Teachings* [New York: Doubleday, 1988], 12–14). But the doctrine is warranted only on the basis of the Aristotelian concept of timelessness.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* This gives a deep practical meaning to the doctrine of the Trinity. If the Trio’s unity is relational, then the biblical statement, “God is love,” is seen to be not just descriptive, but definitive. Without love, the Three would not be One. And without plurality, God could *have* love for others, but not *be* love in Himself.

<sup>79</sup> Canale, “Doctrine of God,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 150. “[H]aving departed from the philosophical conception of God as timeless and having embraced the historical conception of God as presented in the Bible, Adventists envisage the relation between the immanent and economic Trinity as one of identity rather than

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3. Ellen White's emphasis, however, on the relational unity of God does not preclude an ontological unity (of "being" and "substance") as well, but recognizes that the evidence for ontological unity "transcends the limits of our human reason."<sup>80</sup> Both Canale and Fritz Guy have warned against the danger of tritheism if the relational unity is overemphasized to the exclusion of the ontological unity.<sup>81</sup>

4. Since Ellen White described the divine unity in relational rather than philosophical terms, she had no need for Kellogg's scientific-philosophical metaphors—different states of light or water—by which he attempted to explain the relations among the Trinity. She saw such metaphors as not merely inadequate, but intrinsically misleading and false.

5. For all these reasons, Ellen White's writings never use the term "Trinity." An uncritical use of the term "Trinity" could have led others to accept concepts to which she was diametrically opposed. The traditional doctrine of the Trinity did contain a core of biblical truth, but that truth was distorted by philosophical presuppositions alien to Scripture. The only method by which the scriptural elements in the doctrine could be separated from the nonscriptural elements was to simply set aside the traditional doctrine and seek to understand God on the basis of Scripture alone. In so doing, Adventists eventually became convinced that the basic concept of *one God in three eternal persons* was indeed found in Scripture. In their progress toward that conclusion, they temporarily held some of the heterodox views that the larger church had wrestled with

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correspondence. The works of salvation are produced in time and history by the immanent Trinity [Fritz Guy, "What the Trinity Means to Me," *Adventist Review*, Sept. 11, 1986, 13] by way of its different Persons, conceived as centers of consciousness and action. Consequently, the indivisibility of God's works in history is not conceived by Adventists as being determined by the oneness of essence—as taught in the Augustinian classical tradition—but rather by the oneness of the historical task of redemption [Raoul Dederen, "Reflections on the Doctrine of the Trinity," *AUSS* 8 (Spring 1970): 20]. The danger of Tritheism involved in this position becomes real when the oneness of God is reduced to a mere unity conceived in analogy to a human society or a fellowship of action. Beyond such a unity of action, however, it is necessary to envision God as the one single reality which, in the very acts by which He reveals Himself directly in history, transcends the limits of our human reason [W. W. Prescott, *The Saviour of the World* (Takoma Park: Review and Herald, 1929), 17]. In no way could human minds achieve what the classic doctrine about the Trinity claims to perceive, namely, the description of the inner structure of God's being. Together with the entire creation, we must accept God's oneness by faith (James 2:19)."

<sup>80</sup> Canale, "Doctrine of God," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 150.

<sup>81</sup> Canale, "Doctrine of God," 150 (in n. 73 above); Fritz Guy, *Thinking Theologically*, 70.

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during the early centuries of the Christian era. By discarding tradition, however, and building a doctrine of God on Scripture alone, Adventists came eventually to a view of the Trinity that they believe is truly biblical.<sup>82</sup>

Regarding the conflict in the denomination today, both Ellen White and other early Adventists testify that faithfulness to the spirit of the pioneers does *not* mean never varying from the precise understandings they held. As J. N. Andrews declared in 1854: “If the Advent body itself were to furnish the *fathers* and the *saints* for the future church, Heaven pity the people that should live hereafter. Reader, we entreat you to prize your Bible.”<sup>83</sup>

Ellen White agreed. “Greater light shines upon us than shone upon our fathers,” she urged. Therefore, “we cannot be accepted or honored of God in rendering the same service, or doing the same works, that our fathers did. In order to be accepted and blessed of God as they were, we must imitate their faithfulness and zeal,—improve *our* light as they improved *theirs*,—and do as they would have done had they lived in our day. We must walk in the light which shines upon *us*, otherwise that light will become darkness.”<sup>84</sup>

**Jerry Moon** is an Associate Professor of Church History at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. He also edits *Andrews University Seminary Studies*. [jmoon@andrews.edu](mailto:jmoon@andrews.edu)

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<sup>82</sup> Canale, “Doctrine of God,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 150.

<sup>83</sup> J. N. Andrews, *Review and Herald*, January 31, 1854.

<sup>84</sup> E. G. White, *Testimonies*, 1:262.

## The Doctrine of the Trinity Among Seventh-day Adventists

Gerhard Pfandl  
Biblical Research Institute

While the Seventh-day Adventist Church today espouses the doctrine of the Trinity, this has not always been so. The evidence from a study of Adventist history indicates that from the earliest years of our church to the 1890s a whole stream of writers took an Arian or semi-Arian position.<sup>1</sup> The view of Christ presented in those years by Adventist authors was that there was a time when Christ did not exist, that His divinity is an inherited divinity, and that therefore He is inferior to the Father. In regard to the Holy Spirit, their position was that He was not the third member of the Godhead, but the power of God.

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<sup>1</sup> The first comprehensive study of Arianism in the Seventh-day Adventist Church was Erwin R. Gane's unpublished M.A. thesis, "The Arian or Anti-Trinitarian Views Presented in Seventh-day Adventist Literature and the Ellen G. White Answer," which was completed in 1963 at Andrews University. Others who have written on the topic since then include Russell Holt, "The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination: Its Rejection and Acceptance," term paper, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 1969; Merlin Burt, "Demise of Semi-Arianism and Anti-Trinitarianism in Adventist Theology, 1888–1957," research paper, Andrews University, 1996; John M. Fowler, "In the Presence of Mystery," *Adventist Review*, April 13, 1997, 16–19; Woodrow W. Whidden, "Salvation Pilgrimage," *Ministry* (April 1998): 5–7; Jerry Moon, "Heresy or Hopeful Sign," *Adventist Review*, April 22, 1999, 8–13. George R. Knight, *A Search for Identity* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2000), 110–117. Because of a resurgence of anti-Trinitarian views within the church, two books on the Trinity have been published in recent years: Max Hatton's book *Understanding the Trinity* (Grantham: Autumn House, 2001) does not address the Adventist situation, but focuses on the biblical material and responds to attacks on the doctrine of the Trinity. W. W. Whidden, J. Moon, and J. W. Reeve's book *The Trinity* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2002) has two chapters by Jerry Moon dealing with anti-Trinitarianism in Adventism.



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A number of Adventist authors today who are opposed to the doctrine of the Trinity are trying to resurrect the views of our early pioneers on these issues.<sup>2</sup> They are urging the church to forsake the “Roman doctrine” of the Trinity and to accept again the semi-Arian position of our pioneers.

**The Early Pioneers**

Two of the principal founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Joseph Bates and James White, were originally members of the Christian Connection Church, which rejected the doctrine of the Trinity. James White was an ordained minister of that church. When he and Bates joined the Advent Movement, they continued to hold the anti-Trinitarian view that they had held in the Christian Connection Church.

In 1855 James White published an article in the *Review and Herald* entitled “Preach the Word.” In dealing with Paul’s statement in 2 Timothy 4:4, “they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables,” he wrote, “Here we might mention the Trinity, which does away the personality of God and His Son Jesus Christ, . . . .”<sup>3</sup>

Joseph Bates wrote in 1868, “Respecting the trinity, I concluded that it was impossible for me to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, was also the Almighty God, the Father, one and the same being.”<sup>4</sup>

Other prominent Adventists who spoke out against the Trinity were J. N. Loughborough, R. F. Cottrell, J. N. Andrews, and Uriah Smith. For example, J. N. Loughborough, in response to the question “What serious objection is there to the doctrine of the Trinity?” wrote, “There are many objections which we might urge, but on account of our limited space we shall reduce them to the three following: 1. It is contrary to common sense. 2. It is contrary to scripture. 3. Its origin is Pagan and fabulous.”<sup>5</sup> And R. F. Cottrell, in an article on the Trinity, stated:

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<sup>2</sup> For example, Fred Allaback, *No New Leaders . . . No New Gods!* (Creal Springs: Fred Allaback, 1995); Lynnford Beachy, *Did They Believe in the Trinity* (1996); Rachel Cory-Kuehl, *The Persons of God* (Albuquerque: Aggelia, 1996); Allen Stump, *The Foundation of Our Faith* (Welch: Smyrna Gospel Ministries, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> *Review and Herald*, December 11, 1855, 85.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Bates, *The Autobiography of Elder Joseph Bates* (Battle Creek: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1868), 205.

<sup>5</sup> *Review and Herald*, November 5, 1861, 184.

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To hold the doctrine of the trinity is not so much an evidence of evil intention as of intoxication from that wine of which all the nations have drunk. The fact that this was one of the leading doctrines, if not the very chief, upon which the bishop of Rome was exalted to the popedom, does not say much in its favor.<sup>6</sup>

In an article concerning the identity of Melchizedek in Hebrews 7:3, J. N. Andrews argued that the words “having neither beginning of days” cannot be taken literally since every being in the universe except God the Father has a beginning. It is in this context that he wrote, “And as to the Son of God, he would be excluded also, for he had God for his Father, and did, at some point in the eternity of the past, have a beginning of days.”<sup>7</sup>

Finally, in the 1865 edition of the book *Thoughts, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Revelation*, Uriah Smith called Christ “the first created being.”<sup>8</sup> However, by the time the 1882 edition was published, he had modified his view. Concerning the phrase “the Beginning of the creation of God” in Revelation 3:14 he wrote, “Some understand by this language that Christ was the first created being . . . But the language does not necessarily imply that he was created . . . he himself came into existence in a different manner, as he is called ‘the only begotten’ of the Father.”<sup>9</sup>

Our pioneers clearly held Arian or Semi-Arian views in regard to the person of Christ. They understood “firstborn over all creation” (Col 1:15) and “only begotten Son” (John 3:16) in a literal sense. The Father, therefore, was first and superior, and the Son, who had a beginning sometime in eternity, was subordinate to the Father. A corollary of this view was the belief that the Holy Spirit is an influence or the power of God, but not a person.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., July 6, 1869, 11.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., September 7, 1869, 84.

<sup>8</sup> *Thoughts, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Revelation* (Battle Creek: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1865), 59.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. (Battle Creek, 1882), 74. Smith, however, never abandoned his semi-Arian views. In 1898, five years before his death, he published the book *Looking Unto Jesus* (Review and Herald, 1898). In the chapter on “Christ as Creator,” he wrote, “With the Son, the evolution of deity, as deity, ceased. All else, of things animate or inanimate, has come in by the creation of the Father and the Son” (13).

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**The Position of Ellen G. White**

During the early decades of our church, Ellen White made statements that could be interpreted as anti-Trinitarian. She at times referred to the Holy Spirit as “it,”<sup>10</sup> and in the context of her description of the fall of Satan, she wrote,

A special light beamed in his [Satan’s] countenance, and shone around him brighter and more beautiful than around the other angels; yet Jesus, God’s dear Son, had the pre-eminence over all the angelic host. *He was one with the Father before the angels were created.* Satan was envious of Christ, and gradually assumed command which devolved on Christ alone.

The great Creator assembled the heavenly host, that he might in the presence of all the angels confer special honor upon his Son. . . . The Father then made known that it was ordained by himself that Christ, his Son, should be equal with himself; so that wherever was the presence of his Son, it was his own presence. . . . His Son would carry out His will and His purposes, but would do nothing of himself alone.<sup>11</sup>

This seems to imply that after the angels were created, they did not know or recognize that Christ was equal with the Father and it took a special “heavenly council” to inform them of this.

On the other hand, if Christ’s equality was a “special honor” which was conferred upon him, the implication is that he was not equal to the Father before that time.<sup>12</sup> In the book *Patriarchs and Prophets* (1890) she wrote, “He [Satan] was beloved and revered by the heavenly host, angels delighted to execute his commands, and he was clothed with wisdom and glory above them. *Yet the Son of God was exalted above him,* as

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<sup>10</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9 vols. (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948), 1:124; *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials* (Washington: The Ellen G. White Estate, 1987), 1249; Ellen G. White, “Special Testimony to the Battle Creek Church,” *Pamphlet* 154 (Battle Creek, 1896), 4.

<sup>11</sup> Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, 4 vols. (Washington: Review and Herald, 1969), 1:17–18 (emphasis supplied).

<sup>12</sup> A similar statement is found as late as 1904. At that time Ellen White wrote, “God is the Father of Christ; Christ is the Son of God. To Christ had been given an exalted position. He has been made equal with the Father. All the counsels of God are opened to His Son” (White, *Testimonies*, 8:268). This statement appears immediately following a quote from Hebrews 1:1–5, where reference is made to the fact that Christ after his ascension is “appointed heir of all things” and is “being made so much better than the angels.” Her statement in this context can be seen as an elaboration of the text in Hebrews that refers to Christ after his ascension.

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one in power and authority with the Father.”<sup>13</sup> Two paragraphs further on she explains,

There had been no change in the position or authority of Christ. Lucifer’s envy and misrepresentation and his claims to equality with Christ had made necessary a statement of the true position of the Son of God; but this had been the same from the beginning. Many of the angels were, however, blinded by Lucifer’s deceptions.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, these kinds of statements are used today to support the semi-Arian position that some Adventists have recently begun to advocate. Could it be that these passages express Ellen White’s understanding of Christ’s position in heaven at that time and that as time progressed, she received more light, which eventually led to her very clear Trinitarian statements in the late 1890s?<sup>15</sup>

**Carsten Johnson’s Explanation**

Carsten Johnson, one time professor of theology at Andrews University, taught that God’s glory consisted not of his supreme might and majesty, but rather of his humility and self-effacement. His glory was his “going down” to the level of his creation. And this glory did not become visible only in Christ’s incarnation, but God has been like that all the time.

The attribute of “going down” is not an attribute of God developed only at the critical moment when such “going down” became a desperate necessity, an emergency measure for the sake of our salvation. It is not limited to the accident of our father Adam’s fall into sin in the Garden of Eden. It is an effulgence of God’s very being, all the time. God’s descent

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<sup>13</sup> Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1958), 37.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 38.

<sup>15</sup> Another case of increasing light leading to a clearer understanding are her statements on the eating of pork. In 1858 she wrote, “If God requires His people to abstain from Swine’s flesh, He will convict them on the matter” (White, *Testimonies*, 1:207). At that time most Adventists ate pork. After receiving more light on the subject, she wrote in 1868, “You know that the use of Swine’s flesh is contrary to His express command, given not because He wished to especially show His authority, but because it would be injurious to those who should eat it.” (Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods* [Washington: Review and Herald, 1946], 392).

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into the depths of creation and redemption is an expression of  
His constant nature<sup>16</sup>

Thus, Johnson believed that when the angels were created Christ was already concealing his glory in humility. From the fact that “the angel of the Lord” (Judges 6:22) is a divine being, and Michael is called an angel (1 Thess 4:16), he concluded that Christ at the creation of the angels identified himself with them. Therefore, when Satan became jealous of Christ, God was forced to lay bare all the facts. It was in this context that the events portrayed in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 36–38, took place.

**A Principle of Interpretation**

Whatever the case, we should not forget that in contrast to the two or three statements in the books *The Spirit of Prophecy* (1858) and *Patriarchs and Prophets* (1890), there are a number of passages where Ellen G. White emphasizes that Christ was equal with the Father from the beginning<sup>17</sup> and that he was God essentially and in the highest sense.<sup>18</sup>

As is the case with ambiguous texts in Scripture, we need to clarify ambiguous passages in Ellen White with clear statements on the topic. As we shall see below, during the 1890s several statements came from the pen of Ellen White that clearly support the Trinitarian concept of God.

There were also changes in the understanding of the Godhead in the writings of other Adventist authors as the nineteenth century progressed. By about 1880 the idea of Christ as a created being began to fade away, and the concept of Christ as the “begotten” Son of God became more prominent.<sup>19</sup> The word “begotten” was taken literally, which meant that

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<sup>16</sup> Carsten Johnson, “How Could Lucifer Conceive the Idea of a Rivalry with Jesus Christ” (Unpublished paper, 1976), 9.

<sup>17</sup> In 1909 she wrote, “In [the Word] we may learn what our redemption has cost Him who from the beginning was equal with the Father” (Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* [Nashville: Southern Publishing, 1923], 536); the same thought in the same year appears in Letter 64, 1909 (Idem, *Mind, Character and Personality*, 2 vols. [Nashville: Southern Publishing, 1977], 1:352); and on p. 13 in her book *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1943), first published in 1913.

<sup>18</sup> In 1906 she wrote, “Christ was God essentially, and in the highest sense. He was God from all eternity, God overall, blessed forevermore.” (Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, 3 vols. [Washington: Review and Herald, 1958], 1:247).

<sup>19</sup> In the 1882 edition of his book *Thoughts, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Revelation* (Battle Creek: Review and Herald, 1882) Uriah Smith wrote on p. 74, “Some

Christ at some point in eternity proceeded from the Father, and was therefore subordinate to Him.

### A Time of Transition

The rise of the Trinity doctrine in our church was the outworking of a slow process that occurred over many years. It was not imposed on the church arbitrarily; it evolved slowly from within. The first positive reference to the Trinity in Adventist literature appeared in the *Bible Students' Library* series in 1892. The *Bible Students' Library* was "a series of pamphlets, designed for the public, containing brief and pointed essays on Bible doctrines, the fulfillment of prophecy, and other aspects of SDA teachings."<sup>20</sup> Pamphlet number 90 was entitled "The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity." What is significant is the fact that the author, Samuel Spear, was not an Adventist. The pamphlet was a reprint of an article from the *New York Independent* of November 14, 1889.<sup>21</sup>

While teaching the doctrine of "one God subsisting and acting in three persons,"<sup>22</sup> Spear insisted on the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father. "The subordination of Christ, as revealed in the Bible," he said, "is not adequately explained by referring it simply to His human nature . . . His subordination extends to His *divine* as well as His human nature."<sup>23</sup> Although this pamphlet was certainly an improvement on previous positions, it still fell short of the true picture of the Trinity. Nevertheless, the fact that it was printed by Pacific Press indicates that the concept of the Trinity was beginning to be accepted by the church.

Although Ellen White had asserted Christ's equality with the Father in 1869<sup>24</sup> and James White had basically said the same in 1877,<sup>25</sup> the breakthrough came with the publication of Ellen White's article "Christ

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understand by this language that Christ was the first created being . . . But the language does not necessarily imply that he was created . . . he himself came into existence in a different manner, as he is called 'the only begotten' of the Father." In a similar vein, E. J. Waggoner wrote in 1890, "The point is that Christ is a begotten Son, and not a created subject" (*Christ and His Righteousness* [Oakland: Pacific Press, 1890], 22).

<sup>20</sup> Don F. Neufeld, *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, rev. ed. (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 1976), s.v. "Bible Students Library."

<sup>21</sup> This pamphlet is reproduced in M. L. Andreasen, *The Book of Hebrews* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1948), 115–124.

<sup>22</sup> Samuel Spear, "The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity," *New York Independent* (November 14, 1889), 9.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>24</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 2:200.

<sup>25</sup> *Review and Herald*, November 29, 1877, 172.

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the Life-giver” in *Signs of the Times* in 1897<sup>26</sup> and *The Desire of Ages* in 1898. In “Christ the Life-giver,” after quoting John 10:18, “No one takes it [life] from Me, but I lay it down of Myself,” she says, “In Him was life, original, unborrowed, underived.”<sup>27</sup> In *Desire of Ages*, in the chapter “The Light of Life,” she quotes Jesus’ answer to the Jews in John 8:58, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.” Then she comments:

Silence fell upon the vast assembly. The name of God, given to Moses to express the idea of the eternal presence, had been claimed as His own by this Galilean Rabbi. He announced Himself to be the self-existent One, He who had been promised to Israel, ‘whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity.’ Micah 5:2 margin.<sup>28</sup>

A few pages further in the book, in the chapter “Lazarus, Come Forth,” she repeats her statement from 1897, “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived.”<sup>29</sup> These statements clearly describe Christ as God in the highest sense. He is not derived from the Father as most Adventists up to that time believed, nor has divinity been bestowed upon him. He is the self-existent One, equal to the Father in every respect. In fact, Ellen White had said that much already in 1897: “He was equal with God, infinite and omnipotent . . . He is the eternal self-existing Son.”<sup>30</sup>

In spite of these clear statements from the pen of Ellen White, it took many years before this truth was accepted by the church at large. Not only did Uriah Smith, editor of the *Review and Herald*, believe until his death in 1903 that Christ had a beginning, but during the first decades of this century there were many who held on to the view that in some way Christ came forth from the Father, i.e., he had a beginning and was therefore inferior to Him.

During the 1919 Bible Conference, for example, Elder W. W. Prescott made a presentation on “The Person of Christ.” In the ensuing discussion, the question of the Trinity was raised. L. L. Caviness voiced his concern and said,

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<sup>26</sup> *Signs of the Times*, April 8, 1897, 6–7.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>28</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1940), 469–470.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 530.

<sup>30</sup> Manuscript 101, 1897, in *Manuscript Releases*, 21 vols. (Silver Spring: E. G. White Estate, 1981–1993), 12:395.

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I cannot believe that the two persons of the Godhead are equal, the Father and the Son,—that one is the Father and the other the Son, and that they might be just as well the other way round. . . . In praying he [Christ] said it was his wish that the disciples might see the glory which he had with the Father, and which the Father had given him. It was not something he had all through eternity, but the Father had some time given to him the glory of God. He is divine, but he is the divine Son. I cannot explain further than that, but I cannot believe the so called Trinitarian doctrine of the three persons always existing.<sup>31</sup>

Elder Prescott then raised the question, “Can we believe in the Deity of Christ without believing in the eternity of Christ?”<sup>32</sup> Some of those present said, “Yes.” W. T. Knox suggested that Christ was the eternal Son in the same sense that Levi was in the loins of Abraham. He said, “There came a time—in a way we cannot comprehend nor the time that we cannot comprehend, when by God’s mysterious operation the Son sprung from the bosom of his Father and had a separate existence.”<sup>33</sup>

This discussion indicates that twenty years after Ellen White’s clear statement on the eternal divinity of Christ and his absolute equality with the Father, many in the church still held on to the idea that Christ, although divine, had a beginning.

**The 1931 “Statement of Fundamental Beliefs”**

In 1930 church administrators in Africa requested that the General Conference include a statement in the Yearbook of what Seventh-day Adventists believe. “Such a statement,” they said, “would help government officials and others to a better understanding of our work.”<sup>34</sup>

A committee of four (M. E. Kern, E. R. Palmer, C. H. Watson, and F. M. Wilcox) was appointed to draft such a statement. They produced a 22-point statement that in 1931 was printed in the *Adventist Yearbook*. Fundamental Beliefs three and four stated:

That the Godhead, or Trinity, consists of the Eternal Father, a personal, spiritual Being, omnipotent, omnipresent,

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<sup>31</sup> Report of 1919 Bible Conference (July 6, 1919), 57. The report can be accessed under <http://www.adventistarchives.org/documents.asp?CatID=19>

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>34</sup> *General Conference Committee Minutes* (December 29, 1930), 195.



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omniscient, infinite in wisdom and love; the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Eternal Father, through whom all things were created and through whom the salvation of the redeemed hosts will be accomplished; the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, the great regenerating power in the work of redemption. Matt. 28:19.

That Jesus Christ is very God, being of the same nature and essence as the Eternal Father. While retaining His divine nature He took upon Himself the nature of the human family, lived on the earth as a man, exemplified in His life as our Example the principles of righteousness, attested His relationship to God by many mighty miracles, died for our sins on the cross, was raised from the dead, and ascended to the Father where He ever lives to make intercession for us. John 1:1, 14; Heb. 2:9–18; 8:1, 2; 4:14–16; 7:25.<sup>35</sup>

These statements fully expressed the biblical doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>36</sup> Christ is described as “very God,” self-existent and eternal, and the Holy Spirit is identified as the third person of the Godhead.

**The 1980 Dallas Statement of Fundamental Beliefs**

Prior to the 1980 General Conference in Dallas, a proposed statement of 27 Fundamental Beliefs was sent to the world divisions.<sup>37</sup> At the conference itself a revised version, incorporating the many suggestions from the world field, was discussed and eventually voted as an expression of the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Fundamental Belief number two on the Godhead states,

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<sup>35</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1931), 377.

<sup>36</sup> For an Adventist defense of the biblical doctrine of the Trinity, see Raoul Dederen, “Reflections on the Doctrine of the Trinity,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 8 (January 1970): 1–22; Fernando L. Canale, “The Doctrine of God,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. R. Dederen (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2000), 120–138; Hatton, 11–137; W. W. Whidden, “The Biblical Evidence for the Full Deity of Christ, the Personality of the Spirit, and the Unity and Oneness of the Godhead,” in W. W. Whidden, J. Moon, and J. W. Reeve, 16–119; Gerhard Pfandl, “The Trinity in Scripture,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 14.2 (Autumn 2003): 80–94.

<sup>37</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .* (Silver Spring: Ministerial Association, 1988), v. The members of the committee of 194 persons from the ten world divisions mentioned on this page consulted with the theologians in their fields and passed on their recommendations to the smaller working committee. I was one of the Bible teachers at Bogenhofen Seminary, in Austria, at that time, and I remember when the Union president, who belonged to the 194-person committee, came to the Seminary to go through the proposed 27 fundamental beliefs with us.

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There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons. God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. He is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation.<sup>38</sup>

Fundamental Belief number two, as voted at the 1980 General Conference in Dallas, expresses the present position of the church on the doctrine of the Trinity. It is supported by Scripture and the writings of Ellen G. White.

**Seventh-day Adventist Anti-Trinitarians**

In recent years a number of anti-Trinitarian publications have appeared in our church.<sup>39</sup> The tenor of all these publications is that “the church as a whole rejected the doctrine of *the Trinity*, and it was not until many years after the death of Ellen G. White that the Adventist church changed their [sic] position in regards to *the Trinity*.”<sup>40</sup> The doctrine of the Trinity is seen as “the ‘omega’ of doctrinal apostasy within the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.”<sup>41</sup> Therefore, to remain true to God, they claim, we need to return to the faith of our pioneers and reject the Trinity.

Apart from a few biblical arguments, most of the arguments advanced to promote this idea are historical, with the focus on our pioneers and Ellen White:

**1. All Our Pioneers, Including Ellen White, Were Anti-Trinitarians.** Fred Allaback, in his booklet *No New Leaders . . . No New Gods!* writes, “It is no mystery to the studios, that the early Adventist pioneers were categorically anti-Trinitarian and the modern Seventh-day Adventists Church today is an ‘avowedly Trinitarian church.’”<sup>42</sup> Concerning Ellen White’s position on the topic, he says, “If Ellen White always believed and taught the Trinitarian doctrine, these teachings [sic] would be reflected in her writings, which they are not. . . . There is no

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<sup>38</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, 16.

<sup>39</sup> For example, Fred Allaback, *No New Leaders . . . No New Gods!* (Creal Springs: Fred Allaback, 1995); Lynnford Beachy, *Did They Believe in the Trinity?* (1996); Rachel Cory-Kuehl, *The Persons of God* (Albuquerque: Aggelia Publications, 1996); Allen Stump, *The Foundation of Our Faith* (Welch: Smyrna Gospel Ministries, 2000).

<sup>40</sup> Beachy, 1.

<sup>41</sup> Allaback, 38.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 11; See also Stump, 63.

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evidence to conclude that Ellen White was not in harmony with the non-Trinitarian teachings of all her friends and co-workers.”<sup>43</sup>

**Answer:** It is true that in the beginning most of our pioneers expressed their understanding of the Godhead in anti-Trinitarian terms. Anti-Trinitarianism at that time was based on three leading ideas: (1) There once was a time when Christ did not exist.<sup>44</sup> (2) Christ inherited divinity from the Father and was therefore inferior to him.<sup>45</sup> (3) The Holy Spirit is not the third person of the Godhead but only the power or influence of God and Christ.<sup>46</sup>

All of these ideas were originally held by our pioneers. However, it is also a historical fact that the understanding of our pioneers changed over time. For example:

a. In 1846 James White referred to “the old unscriptural trinitarian creed, viz., that Jesus is the eternal God.”<sup>47</sup> But in 1876 he wrote that “S. D. Adventists hold the divinity of Christ so nearly with the Trinitarians, that we apprehend no trial here.”<sup>48</sup> And a year later he declared his belief in the equality of the Son with the Father and condemned any view as erroneous that “makes Christ inferior to the Father.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 32

<sup>44</sup> J. M. Stevenson, in 1854, pointed out that “If the inspired writers had wishes to convey the idea of the co-etaneous existence, and eternity of the Father and the Son, they could not possibly have used more incompatible terms.” (“The Atonement,” *Review and Herald*, November 14, 1854, 105). And J. N. Andrews, in 1869, wrote that “the Son of God . . . had God for His Father, and did, at some point in the eternity of the past, have a beginning” (*Review and Herald*, September 7, 1869, 84)

<sup>45</sup> J. N. Andrews, *Review and Herald*, Jan 27, 1874, 52. D. M. Canright, after quoting Heb 1:4, “having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they,” says, “Christ, being the Son of God, has inherited the name, the nature, and the glory of God his Father” (*Review and Herald*, June 18, 1867, 2).

<sup>46</sup> D. M. Canright, in 1878, wrote, “The Holy Spirit is not a person . . . [He is] a divine influence proceeding from the Father and also from the Son, as their power, energy, etc.” (“The Holy Spirit Not a Person, but an Influence Proceeding from God,” *The Signs of the Times*, July 25, 1878, 218). Similarly, Uriah Smith in 1890 wrote concerning the Holy Spirit, “The Bible uses expressions which cannot be harmonized with the idea that it is a person like the Father and the Son. Rather it is shown to be a divine influence from them both, the medium which represents their presence and by which they have knowledge and power through all the universe, when not personally present” (*Review and Herald*, October 28, 1890, 664)

<sup>47</sup> *The Day-Star*, January 24, 1846, 25.

<sup>48</sup> *Review and Herald*, October 12, 1876, 116.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., November 29, 1877, 172.

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b. Originally Uriah Smith and others taught that Christ was the first created being. Later he adopted the position that Christ was begotten not created (see page 3).

c. In 1896, W. W. Prescott wrote,

As Christ was twice born, once in eternity, the only begotten of the Father, and again in the flesh, thus uniting the divine with the human in that second birth, so we, who have been born once already in the flesh, are to have the second birth, being born again in the Spirit . . .<sup>50</sup>

Twenty-three years later, at the 1919 Bible Conference, during a discussion on the divinity of Christ, he admitted,

I was in the same place that Brother Daniells was, and was taught the same things [that Christ was the beginning of God's creative work, that to speak of the third person of the Godhead or of the trinity was heretical] by authority, and without doing my own thinking or studying I supposed it was right. But I found out something different.<sup>51</sup>

When he raised the question, "Can we believe in the deity of Christ without believing in the eternity of Christ?" One of the participants answered, "I have done so for years." To this Prescott replied,

That is my very point—that we have used terms in that accommodating sense that are not really in harmony with Scriptural teaching. We believed a long time that Christ was a created being, inspite of what the Scripture says. I say this, that passing over the experience I have passed over myself in this matter—this accommodating use of terms which makes the Deity without eternity, is not my conception now of the gospel of Christ. I think it falls short of the whole idea expressed in the Scriptures, and leaves us not with the kind of Savior I believe in now, but a sort of human view—a semi-human being. As I view it, the deity involves eternity. The very expression involves it. You cannot read the Scripture and have the idea of deity without eternity.<sup>52</sup>

As we can see, our pioneers were not locked into one particular interpretation. When new understanding came, they changed their views,

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid. (April 14, 1896): 232.

<sup>51</sup> Report of the 1919 Bible Conference (July 6, 1919), 58.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 62.

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even though at times it took a long time. Furthermore, we must note that some of their views as to what was involved in the Trinity were erroneous, e.g., they thought the Trinity was three persons in one person,<sup>53</sup> or that Jesus and the Father were one and the same.<sup>54</sup> Another misconception was the idea that the Trinity teaches the existence of three Gods.<sup>55</sup> Many also held the view that belief in the Trinity would diminish the value of the atonement, i.e., if Christ was the self-existing God, he could not have died on Calvary. If only his humanity died, then his sacrifice was only a human sacrifice.<sup>56</sup> These misunderstandings contributed to the rejection of the Trinity.

**2. Only After Ellen G. White's Death Was the Trinity Doctrine Introduced Into the Church.** Under the title "How Do We Know Our Adventist Pioneers Were Not Trinitarians?" Allaback writes, "It can be demonstrated that the Seventh-day Adventist Church did not believe in the doctrine of the Trinity until long after the death of Ellen G. White. How can this be proven?"<sup>57</sup> He provides three reasons:

"1) Many Seventh-day Adventist scholars, theologians and church historians candidly admit that early Adventists did not believe nor teach the doctrine of the Trinity. (see appendix p. 42).

2) Every statement of Adventist belief was distinctly non-Trinitarian prior to the 1931 statement of beliefs and the 27 fundamental beliefs voted in 1980. (see appendix p. 45).

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<sup>53</sup> "If Father, Son, and Holy ghost are each God, it would be three Gods; for three times one is not one, but three. There is a sense in which they are one. But not one person, as claimed by Trinitarians" (J. N. Loughborough, "Questions for Bro. Loughborough," *Review and Herald*, November 5, 1861, 184).

<sup>54</sup> "Respecting the trinity, I concluded that it was impossible for me to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, was also the Almighty God, the Father, one and the same being" (Joseph Bates, *The Autobiography of Elder Joseph Bates* [Battle Creek: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1868], 205).

<sup>55</sup> "How the doctrine of the trinity of three Gods, can be reconciled with these positive statements [1 Tim 2:15; Deut 6:4] I do not know" (D. M. Canright, "The Personality of God," *Review and Herald*, August 29, 1878, 218).

<sup>56</sup> "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" We not only find that our Saviour calls his Father his God but that God had forsaken him. It is here asserted by Trinitarians that the God-head had left him. If this is the case then Christ was alive after the God-head left him. Then it was only the humanity that died and we have only a human sacrifice" (D. W. Hull, "Bible Doctrine of the Divinity of Christ," *Review and Herald*, November 17, 1859, 201).

<sup>57</sup> Allaback, 11.

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3) The personal letters, periodical articles, pamphlets and books written by Seventh-day Adventists prior to the death of Ellen G. White (1915) are distinctly non-Trinitarian. (see appendix p. 48).<sup>58</sup>

**Answer:** The historic facts plainly contradict this statement. As indicated above, Ellen White in 1897 and 1898 taught that in Christ “was life, original, unborrowed, underived.”<sup>59</sup> This can only be true if he was God in the highest sense and did not derive his existence from the Father. In regard to the Holy Spirit she told the students at Avondale College in 1899, “We need to realize that the Holy Spirit, who is as much a person as God is a person, is walking through these grounds.”<sup>60</sup>

In the context of the Kellogg crisis, Ellen White in 1905 wrote a warning to our workers connected with the medical work in which she unambiguously endorsed the Trinity doctrine.

*The Father is all the fullness of the Godhead* bodily, and is invisible to mortal sight. *The Son is all the fullness of the Godhead* manifest. . . . The Comforter that Christ promised to send after He ascended to heaven, is *the Spirit in all the fullness of the Godhead*, making manifest the power of divine grace to all who receive and believe in Christ as a personal Savior. *There are three living persons of the heavenly trio*; in the name of these three great powers—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will co-operate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ.<sup>61</sup>

Only someone who believed the Trinity doctrine would speak of “three living persons in the heavenly trio.” Anti-Trinitarians would not use such language.

Furthermore, her bold statements on the Trinity took many by surprise. M. L. Andreasen recounts, “I remember how astonished we were when *Desire of Ages* was first published, for it contained some things

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> White, *Selected Messages*, 1:296.

<sup>60</sup> Idem, *Evangelism*, (Washington: Review and Herald, 1970), 616.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 614–615, emphasis supplied.

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that we believed were unbelievable; among other things the doctrine of the trinity which was not generally accepted by Adventists then.”<sup>62</sup>

During 1909, Andreasen spent three months at Elmshaven, where he was able to look at her handwritten manuscripts. He wrote,

In her own handwriting I saw the statements which I was sure she had not written—could not have written. Especially was I struck with the now familiar quotation in *Desire of Ages*, page 530: “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived.” This statement at that time was revolutionary and compelled a complete revision of my former view—and that of the denomination—on the deity of Christ.<sup>63</sup>

This clearly took place long before Ellen White’s death. Thus, the charge that only after Ellen G. White’s death was the Trinity doctrine introduced into the church cannot be sustained.<sup>64</sup>

**3. The Book *Evangelism* Has Been Manipulated to Support the Trinity.** After quoting the statement “We need to realize that the Holy Spirit, who is as much a person as God is a person, is walking through these grounds,”<sup>65</sup> from the book *Evangelism*, Allaback says, “This ‘un-contextual’ quotation is a classic example of bold ‘alteration’ and ‘manipulation’ in order to spread Trinitarian misinformation. In other words, an attempt to ‘force’ Ellen White to endorse and approve of the modern Adventist position on the Trinity.”<sup>66</sup>

**Answer:** The editorial changes which are found in *Evangelism* do not alter the meaning of the statements. Two examples should be sufficient to prove the point:

a. “We need to realize that the Holy Spirit, who is as much a person as God is a person, is walking through these grounds.”<sup>67</sup> Allaback gives the larger context, which is as follows:

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<sup>62</sup> M. L. Andreasen, “The Spirit of Prophecy,” an unpublished chapel address given at Loma Linda, California, November 30, 1948; quoted in Holt, 20.

<sup>63</sup> Testimony of M. L. Andreasen, Oct. 15, 1953, White Estate Document File 961.

<sup>64</sup> Another strong evidence for this fact is F. M. Wilcox’s statement in 1913, “Seventh-day Adventists believe,—1. In the divine Trinity. This Trinity consists of the eternal Father . . . of the Lord Jesus Christ, the son of the eternal Father . . . the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead . . .” (“The Message for Today,” *Review and Herald*, October 9, 1913, 21).

<sup>65</sup> White, *Evangelism*, 616.

<sup>66</sup> Allaback, 69.

<sup>67</sup> White, *Evangelism*, 616.

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The Lord instructed us that this was the place in which we should locate, and we have had every reason to think that we are in the right place. We have been brought together as a school, and we need to realize that the Holy Spirit, who is as much a person as God is a person, is walking through these grounds, that the Lord God is our keeper, and helper. He hears every word we utter and knows every thought of the mind.<sup>68</sup>

Allaback claims that the fact that the sentence in *Evangelism* starts in the middle of the original sentence, and the comma after “grounds” is replaced by a period, changes the meaning of the statement. He says,

The original and intended meaning of the quotation is NOT to prove the Holy Spirit to be “another God” along with the Father and His Son. But rather, that the “Lord” who “instructed us,” “the Holy Spirit” who “is walking through these grounds,” the “Lord God” who “is our keeper” and “helper” and who “hears every word” and “knows every thought,” is one and the same person—The glorified Jesus Christ. . . . Ellen White is saying the same thing as the Bible. Jesus, “is as much a person” as God the Father “is a person.” Jesus “is walking through these grounds.” Jesus “is our keeper, and helper.” Jesus “hears every word we utter and knows every thought of the mind.”<sup>69</sup>

Allaback identifies the Holy Spirit with the Lord God and refuses to acknowledge that there are two persons referred to in this quote. In fact, in his pamphlet he gives the Holy Spirit three separate and distinct identities in a vain attempt to prove that He has no personal existence. In the above quotation he identifies the Holy Spirit with Christ. On p. 62 he identifies the Holy Spirit with the Father, and on p. 65 with the angels. He writes, “the term ‘Holy Spirit’ or ‘ghost’ in these ‘three’ quotations [referring to Ellen White’s statements on the three heavenly powers], are including (not excluding) the ministering angels as the ‘third’ power in heaven.”<sup>70</sup>

b. Ellen White writes,

The *Father is all the fullness of the Godhead* bodily, and is invisible to mortal sight. The *Son is all the fullness of the Godhead* manifest. . . . The Comforter that Christ promised to

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<sup>68</sup> Idem, *Manuscript Releases*, 7:299.

<sup>69</sup> Allaback, 69.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 65.



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send after He ascended to heaven is *the Spirit in all the fullness of the Godhead*, making manifest the power of divine grace to all who receive and believe in Christ as a personal Savior. *There are three living persons of the heavenly trio*; in the name of these three great powers—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will co-operate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ.<sup>71</sup>

Allaback says, “The above quotation is misinterpreted to mean: ‘There is a “trio” of three living Gods in the “God family,” who all have the same qualities and divine powers.’” He cannot accept three persons in the Godhead, so he paraphrases the whole passage to give “the correct interpretation.” The sentence, “There are three living persons of the heavenly trio,” is paraphrased in this way:

Here we see the three great powers of heaven who manifest, represent and personify God the Father. 1) God the Father Himself, 2) The Son of God as a representative of His Father, 3) The Holy Spirit of God and Christ working in and through holy angels, personifying their character to lost humanity.<sup>72</sup>

It is sad to see how a perfectly simple English sentence is reinterpreted to mean something completely different from what it actually says.

**4. The Trinity Doctrine Is Pagan.** “The pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church clearly recognized the Pagan origin of the Trinity doctrine,” writes Allaback.<sup>73</sup> He then quotes J. B. Friesbie, who said that the Sunday-god (the Trinity) came from the same source as Sunday-keeping,<sup>74</sup> and J. N. Loughborough, who stated that the origin of the Trinity is “pagan and fabulous.”<sup>75</sup>

**Answer:** The doctrine of the Trinity is based on Scripture,<sup>76</sup> not on pagan religions or human philosophy. Similar triadic constellations in other religions, such as Brahma, Siva, and Vishnu in Hinduism; Osiris,

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<sup>71</sup> White, *Evangelism*, 614–615 (emphasis supplied).

<sup>72</sup> Allaback, 71.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>74</sup> “The Sunday God,” *Review and Herald*, March 7, 1854, 50.

<sup>75</sup> “Questions for Bro. Loughborough,” *Review and Herald*, November 5, 1861, 184.

<sup>76</sup> See James R. White, *The Forgotten Trinity* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1998). For Adventist material on this topic see footnote 36.

Isis, and Horus in the Egyptian religion; or Nimrod, Ishtar, and Tammuz in Babylon are based on the family concept—father, mother, and son—which is not the case in the Christian religion. If there is any parallelism at all, it would be evidence for a satanic counterfeit such as we find in the book of Revelation (the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet).

**5. The Doctrine of the Trinity Is Catholic [Papal] in Origin.** In response to the question, “Why were the Adventist pioneers not Trinitarians?” Allaback gives four reasons, one of which is that “the Trinity doctrine is of Catholic origin.”<sup>77</sup> The other three reasons are that the doctrine is unscriptural, of pagan origin, and that it degrades our understanding of the atonement.<sup>78</sup>

**Answer:** The historical record gives us a different picture. Although the concept of the Trinity is scriptural, the doctrine was formulated at the ecumenical Council of Nicaea in AD 325. The Council, summoned by Emperor Constantine, assembled in Nicaea (Asia Minor) to deal with the Arian controversy. Of the 318 bishops,<sup>79</sup> only seven came from the West.<sup>80</sup> The rest were from the Eastern churches, where the bishop of Rome had very little influence. The bishop of Rome himself was not even present—he sent two priests to represent him.<sup>81</sup> This clearly contradicts the claim that the Trinity is of Roman Catholic origin. This does not deny that theologians of the Roman Catholic Church heavily influenced later developments of the Trinity doctrine.<sup>82</sup>

### Summary and Conclusion

Most early Adventist pioneers were anti-Trinitarians. In the late 1890s, Ellen White published articles and books in which she made strong statements supporting the Trinity concept, although she never used the word “Trinity.” Because many in the church remained opposed to it, more than three decades would pass before the church at large accepted the doctrine. In 1931 the *Adventist Yearbook* contained a statement of twenty-two fundamental beliefs, one of which was the Trinity.

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<sup>77</sup> Allaback, 11.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. by C. F. Cruse (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998), 390.

<sup>80</sup> Hans Lietzmann, *A History of the Early Church*, trans. B. L. Woolf, 4 vols. (Cleveland: World, 1961), 3:116.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> See Whidden, Moon, and Reeve, 151–159.

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The 1980 Dallas statement of Fundamental Beliefs again reiterates that “there is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons.”<sup>83</sup>

Modern Seventh-day Adventist anti-Trinitarians seek to recover the heritage of our pioneers in regard to the Trinity. They believe that only after Ellen White’s death did the doctrine of the Trinity enter the church and that her books have been manipulated and changed. As we have seen, the evidence does not support these charges.

While the Trinity is a divine mystery, and no mortal man will ever be able to understand it fully, the Scriptural evidence clearly indicates the equality and eternal co-existence of the three persons in the Godhead. While human reason may not understand it, by faith we can believe it.

**Gerhard Pfandl** is an Associate Director of the Biblical Research Institute. He holds M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in Old Testament from Andrews University. A native of Austria, he has worked as a pastor in Austria and in the Southern California Conference. From 1977–1989 he was Professor of Religion at Bogenhofen Seminary in Austria. Prior to joining the Biblical Research Institute in 1999, he served for seven years as Field Secretary of the South Pacific Division in Sydney. He has published many articles for scholarly and popular journals in German and English and is the author of vol. 1 of the Adventist Theological Society Dissertation Series, *The Time of the End in the Book of Daniel*, and of *Daniel: The Seer of Babylon* (Review & Herald, 2004). PfandlG@gc.adventist.org

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<sup>83</sup> Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . , 16.

## **The End of Historicism? Reflections on the Adventist Approach to Biblical Apocalyptic—Part Two**

Jon Paulien  
Andrews University

### **Introduction**

In Part One of this article I addressed significant issues related to historicism and its application to biblical apocalyptic.<sup>1</sup> Historicism, as a method for interpreting biblical apocalyptic, sees in books like Daniel and Revelation sequences of history moving from the prophet's time to the end of history.<sup>2</sup> This way of reading biblical apocalyptic, widely practiced up until the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, has not only been marginalized in current scholarship,<sup>3</sup> but is being increasingly challenged in one of its remaining bastions, the Seventh-day Adventist Church.<sup>4</sup>

Recent scholarship, however, has exhibited a renewed interest in ancient apocalyptic, both inside and outside the Bible. Significant work has been done to define apocalyptic as a literary genre produced in the context of ancient apocalyptic eschatology.<sup>5</sup> Scholars have recognized that apocalyptic literature does not come in a single, crisply-defined form.

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<sup>1</sup> Jon Paulien, "The End of Historicism? Reflections on the Adventist Approach to Biblical Apocalyptic—Part One," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 14/2 (Autumn, 2003), 15–43. For a definition of historicism as applied to apocalyptic, see Reimar Vetne, "A Definition and Short History of Historicism as a Method for Interpreting Daniel and Revelation," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 14/2 (Autumn, 2003), 1–14.

<sup>2</sup> Paulien, 15.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 16–17.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 17–21.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 21–24.

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Instead there are at least two major types of apocalyptic: the historical and the mystical.<sup>6</sup>

The historical type of apocalyptic, characteristic of Daniel, gives an overview of a large sweep of history, often divided into periods, and leading up to the end of history and the final judgment. It tends to be highly symbolic, with the symbols referring to heavenly and earthly beings and events.<sup>7</sup>

The mystical type of apocalyptic, on the other hand, describes the ascent of the prophet through the heavens. While symbolism may be used, there is a greater degree of reality in this type; the visionary ascends to a real place where actions occur that affect the lives of the readers on earth. Both types of apocalyptic can occur in a single work.<sup>8</sup>

In reflecting on these definitions, a couple of things stand out to me. First of all, while the distinction between historical and mystical apocalyptic seems a helpful one, the definitions are very minimal, and interpreters will have a difficult time distinguishing between them in many apocalyptic texts. For example, to what degree are these categories appropriate to the study of Revelation? Current scholarship does not seem to offer clear answers to this question.

Second, the presence of both types of apocalyptic in a single work raises the question whether applying these distinctions to whole works like Daniel and Revelation is truly helpful. Assignments of genre may be more accurate and helpful if made on a passage-by-passage basis.

Recent Adventist scholarship on apocalyptic has tended to operate in a vacuum in relation to the developments in the wider arena. But the Adventist distinction between general and apocalyptic prophecy has awakened Adventist interpreters to the importance of genre.<sup>9</sup> Here, too, careful attention to genre on a text-by-text basis seems advisable.

I conclude in Part One, therefore, that neither Daniel nor Revelation is a consistent example of apocalyptic genre. In addition to apocalyptic visions, Daniel contains court narratives, prayers, and poetry.<sup>10</sup> And while most scholars see apocalyptic elements in Revelation, it also has elements of classical prophecy, poetry and song, epistle, and perhaps even straightforward narrative.<sup>11</sup> So neither work can be comfortably

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 24–26.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 27–29.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 34–36.

labeled “apocalyptic” as a whole, especially Revelation. If that is so, merely assuming, as many Adventists have done, that the whole book is to be read as “historical apocalyptic” is not an adequate approach for scholars.

In light of the above, I echoed Ramsey Michaels’ call to give greater attention to the genre of the various parts of Daniel and Revelation.<sup>12</sup> Adventist interpreters who wish to revive historicist interpretation of Revelation will need to pursue a thorough-going examination of the genre of Revelation’s visions on a passage-by-passage basis. The presence of historical apocalyptic in Daniel and other Jewish apocalyptic books can form the basis for discovering the kinds of markers in the text that are characteristic of historical apocalyptic. If portions of Revelation exhibit the characteristics of historical apocalyptic, a historicist approach may be indicated by the text itself.<sup>13</sup>

In this article I examine two of Daniel’s apocalyptic visions, in chapters 2 and 7, to expose the textual characteristics most typical of historical apocalyptic. I combine this information with literary observations from Revelation to determine whether a selected text passage, Revelation 12, meets the criteria of historical apocalyptic observed in Daniel. I conclude, with some qualification, that it does.<sup>14</sup>

### **Historical Apocalyptic in Daniel**

**Daniel 2: Overview of the Visionary Portion.** The visionary portion of Daniel 2 has many characteristics of historical apocalyptic.<sup>15</sup> It

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 38–39; cf. J. Ramsey Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, vol. 7, *Guides to New Testament Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 29–33.

<sup>13</sup> Paulien, 39, 41–42.

<sup>14</sup> My purpose here is not a “mindless” defense of the kind of historicism seen in Elliott (Edward B. Elliott, *Horae Apocalypticae*, fifth edition, 4 volumes [London: Seeley, Jackson and Halliday, 1862]) and others, or in the extremes of some Seventh-day Adventist and evangelical apologetics (such as Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970]). I am interested in a serious reading of the text in light of its original intention to the degree that can be determined.

<sup>15</sup> I recognize, of course, that the chapter as a whole is a court conflict tale. A Judean exile succeeds where the Babylonian sages fail and is, therefore, rewarded with riches and power. The ultimate purpose of the narrative is not a sequence of history, but the message that God is in control of events and that history has a goal and a purpose, which He will achieve. See the discussion in Ernest C. Lucas, *Daniel*, *Apollos Old Testament Commentary*, 20 (Leicester: Apollos, 2002), 77–79. It is the visionary part of the court tale that is told in the form of historical apocalyptic. See Douglas Bennett, “The Stone Kingdom of Daniel 2,” in *Symposium on Daniel: Introductory and Exegetical Studies*,

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contains a revelation delivered in a narrative framework, and that revelation is given directly by God (an otherworldly being) to Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar, the human recipients. The vision and its interpretation disclose a transcendent temporal reality regarding eschatological salvation and reveal the spatial reality of God's will and purposes in the supernatural world. However one understands the metals of the statue and Daniel's interpretation of them, the vision portrays a chain of kingdoms, beginning with the time of Nebuchadnezzar, and continuing to an everlasting kingdom at the eschatological climax.<sup>16</sup>

The story of Daniel 2 begins with a sleepless night for King Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:1). He is worried about the future, and God gives him dreams that unpack that future (Dan 2:29). After futile attempts to get help from his closest advisors, Nebuchadnezzar hears out Daniel, the Hebrew prophet. Daniel testifies that the future is unknown to human beings, no matter how intelligent they may be nor how connected to the occult (Dan 2:27). There is a God in heaven, however, who is fully able to reveal what will happen in days to come, including the final events of history (אֶת־יְמֵי־הָאֵלֶּיךָ—“at the end of days,” Dan 2:28 [my translation]).<sup>17</sup>

The dream is about a large statue made from a succession of metals, declining in value (from gold to iron), but increasing in strength from the head to the foot of the image (2:31–33).<sup>18</sup> The feet of the statue are made of a mixture of iron and clay (2:33). At the end of the dream a supernatural rock smashes into the feet of the image, breaking the whole image to pieces (2:34). The pieces are then swept away by the wind, while the rock grows into a mountain that fills the whole earth (2:35).

While the vision of the statue carries Nebuchadnezzar to the end of earth's history, the explanation of the vision by Daniel is firmly grounded in the time and place of Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>19</sup> The interpretation

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Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 2, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Washington: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), 346.

<sup>16</sup> John J. Collins, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 166–171.

<sup>17</sup> Bennett, 347–351.

<sup>18</sup> Collins, 170; Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, The New American Commentary, vol. 18 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 94; William H. Shea, *Daniel 1–7: Prophecy as History*, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier (Boise: Pacific Press, 1996), 139.

<sup>19</sup> Dieter Bauer, *Das Buch Daniel*, Neuer Stuttgarter Kommentar—Altes Testament, vol. 22 (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1996), 87; Robert J. M. Gurney, “The Four Kingdoms of Daniel 2 and 7,” *Themelios* 2 (Summer 1977): 41; Tremper Longman III, *Daniel*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 80;

begins with a straightforward, unambiguous assertion, “You are that head of gold.”<sup>20</sup> That the head of gold is not limited to Nebuchadnezzar personally, but represents his whole kingdom, becomes clear in that all the succeeding metals represent whole kingdoms, not just a series of kings.<sup>21</sup> Nebuchadnezzar is addressed as the representative of his kingdom. The comment that the fourth kingdom will be “strong as iron” suggests that the various metals were designed to portray specific characteristics of each of the kingdoms.<sup>22</sup>

The next stage in the prophecy is also clear. “After you *בְּהֵרֵךְ*), another (*אֲחֵרִי*) kingdom will arise, inferior to yours” (2:39, NIV).<sup>23</sup> This second kingdom clearly comes on the stage after the time of Nebuchadnezzar. While the text does not explicitly state that this kingdom is represented by the silver of the statue, the inferior nature of the kingdom is appropriate to the move from gold to silver.<sup>24</sup> The transition between Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom and the following one is marked by the story in Daniel 5. Babylon is followed by Medo-Persia.<sup>25</sup>

“Next (*אֲחֵרִי*—“another”), a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth” (2:39, NIV). Daniel’s explanation again uses an Aramaic term of sequencing, this time making it clear that the third kingdom corresponds to the third metal on the statue, bronze. In Daniel 8, the kingdom that replaces Medo-Persia is Greece.<sup>26</sup>

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Miller, 93; W. Sibley Towner, *Daniel*, Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Preaching and Teaching (Atlanta: John Knox, 1984), 35..

<sup>20</sup> 2:38—*אֲחֵרִי הוּא רִי הַקָּבֵא*.

<sup>21</sup> Collins, 169; Miller, 93; Paul L. Redditt, *Daniel*, New Century Bible Commentary (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 59; Shea, 139–140.

<sup>22</sup> Jacques B. Doukhan, *Daniel: The Vision of the End* (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1987), 14.

<sup>23</sup> Collins notes that there is no direct reference to the dream in the explanation of the second, third and fourth kingdoms. The text doesn’t say, “The breast and arms of silver are another kingdom.” See Collins, 165. See also Bauer, 87.

<sup>24</sup> Bauer, 87; George Wesley Buchanan, *The Book of Daniel*, Mellen Biblical Commentary, Old Testament Series, vol. 25 (Lewiston: Mellen Biblical, 1999), 66; Longman, 81.

<sup>25</sup> Donald E. Gowan, *Daniel*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 119; Miller, 93; Towner, 118–119.

<sup>26</sup> Bauer, 176; Buchanan, 251–252; Gowan, 119; Longman, 206; Miller, 95; Towner, 118–120. I am well aware that among Daniel scholars who respect biblical authority there has been a recent trend toward accepting the view that the second and third kingdoms are Media and Persia. These identifications are not critical to my point in this article, but at this stage of the discussion I find the traditional evangelical position (Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome) more convincing. See Robert J. M. Gurney,



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“Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron—for iron breaks and smashes everything—and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others” (2:40, NIV). The “finally” here is supplied by the translators of the NIV. The Aramaic term is the simple conjunctive (ו). But “finally” is not an inappropriate translation, as the movement to the fourth and final kingdom in the series is explicit in the passage. The association of this fourth kingdom with iron also makes the correlation between the metals on the statue and the sequence of historical kingdoms clear.<sup>27</sup>

The move to the fifth stage of iron and clay again lacks a sequencing term, but by this stage in the vision the progression is clear enough without continual repetition. “Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay” (2:41, NIV). Interestingly, the transition to the fifth stage differs from the others in that the fourth kingdom is not replaced by a more powerful one, but seems to disintegrate into a divided and weakened condition.<sup>28</sup>

The climax of the vision and its interpretation comes in Dan 2:44, “In the time of those kings (NIV—literally “in the days of those kings” [וּבְיָמֵי מַלְכֵי אֲשֶׁר]), the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed.” The coming of the stone kingdom is the final event of the vision, the one that brings the whole course of history to an end.

The vision of Daniel 2, then, is an apocalyptic prophecy with a clear historical sequence running from the time of the prophet down to the end of earth’s history, the establishment of the kingdom of God. The explanation, grounded in the language, time, and place of Nebuchadnezzar, clearly marks out the sequence of events that moves the reader from the time when the prophecy was given to the time when history comes to its end. In Daniel 2, therefore, the basic characteristics of historical apocalyptic are visible.

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John E. Goldingay, and Gordon J. Wenham, “Approaching Daniel: Three Studies,” *Themelios* 2 (Summer 1977): 39–51; John H. Walton, “The Four Kingdoms of Daniel,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29/1 (March 1986): 25–36; John Goldingay, *Daniel*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 30 (Dallas: Word, 1989).

<sup>27</sup> Miller, 95.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Redditt, 58; Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *The Book of Daniel: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections*, The New Interpreter’s Bible, vol. 7 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 55.

**Summary and Conclusion.** It doesn't take an exegete to see that Daniel 2 portrays a series of kingdoms running from the time of Nebuchadnezzar to the time of the stone kingdom, which presumably comes at the end of history. A careful look at the passage, however, helps us to discern some general principles that can be the starting point of a taxonomy of historical apocalyptic. The following observations can then be confirmed or disconfirmed by comparison with Daniel 7.

1) *Textual sequence markers.* There are a number of words in the Aramaic text that indicate the kingdoms represented by the various metals of the statue appear in sequence, one after the other. These words are found in the explanation of the vision given by Daniel. The words are translated in the NIV "after you . . . another" (Dan 2:39—אֲחֵרֵי . . . אַחֵרֵי), "next" (Dan 2:39—אֲחֵרֵי . . . וְ), and "in the time of those kings" (Dan 2:44—וּבְיָמֵיהֶן דִּי מְלָכֵי אֲנִין).

2) *A consistent sequence of symbols and explanation.* In parts of the vision interpretation (Dan 2:36–45), the verbal markers of sequence are absent or unclear (Dan 2:41–43). In this part of the explanation, however, the sense of sequence remains because the explanation follows the sequence in which the metals of the vision are described (Dan 2:32–34). So the consistent sequence of materials in the image grounds the explanation in a similar sequence, sometimes marked by words of sequence and sometimes not.

3) *A comprehensive sweep of events.* The vision and explanation of Daniel 2 is clearly grounded in the time and place of Nebuchadnezzar and moves forward to the apparent close of history. So historical apocalyptic portrays a sequence of events running from the time (or implied time) of the visionary to the end of the world. It is also clear that the vision concerns a series of world-dominating kingdoms (Dan 2:39–45); it is not simply concerned with local and immediate events, as is the case with general prophecy. The events of the vision are global in significance and cover long ages.

We turn now to Daniel 7 in order to see if these observations can be confirmed and if further marks of historical apocalyptic can be discerned.

**Daniel 7: Exegetical Overview.** Daniel 7 marks some important transitions within the book. It is tied to the preceding narratives by the use of the Aramaic language (Hebrew is used in chapters 8–12). It is equally tied to chapter 2 by the vision formula (Dan 7:1, cf. 2:28)<sup>29</sup> and

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<sup>29</sup> Collins, *Daniel*, 294. The Aramaic portions of Daniel (chapters 2–7) seem to fall easily into an inverse parallelism. Chapters 2 and 7 contain visions of four earthly king-

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other connections we will note below. At the same time, Dan 7 is tied to the visions in the following chapters by its subject matter and by close parallels with chapter 8.<sup>30</sup> The focus of the book shifts from stories *about* Daniel to accounts *by* Daniel of his visionary experiences.<sup>31</sup> So Dan 7 is in many ways the center point of the book of Daniel.<sup>32</sup> Unlike Daniel 2, this vision is a unit in itself and is not part of a larger narrative.<sup>33</sup>

As was the case with the vision of Dan 2, the apocalyptic prophecy of Dan 7 is divided into two parts; a description of the vision, in which the prophet can be transported through time and space (Dan 7:2–14), and an explanation of the vision, given in the language, time, and place of the prophet (Dan 7:15–27).<sup>34</sup> In Daniel 2 the prophet is Nebuchadnezzar, and the explanation is given by Daniel himself.<sup>35</sup> In Daniel 7, Daniel is the prophet, and the explanation is given by an angelic attendant in the vision.<sup>36</sup>

It may seem unfortunate, at first, that the vision and interpretation of Daniel 7 fail to name any of the kingdoms symbolized in the chapter. This is in contrast to what happens in the visions of Daniel 2 (“You are the head of gold”—2:38, NIV) and Daniel 8 (The “ram represents the

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doms, chapters 3 and 6 contain stories about Jews being faithful in the face of death, and chapters 4 and 5 are stories of royal arrogance. See Lucas, 68, 195.

<sup>30</sup> John J. Collins, *Daniel with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*, Forms of the Old Testament Literature, 20 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 80; idem, *Daniel*, 277. Lucas (194–195) notes that the date formula in 7:1 breaks with the chronological sequence that has run throughout chapters 1–6. The narrative time of chapter 7 moves back to somewhere between chapters 4 and 5. A new sequence starts in chapter 7 and moves on through the rest of the book.

<sup>31</sup> Lucas (195) points out that the court tales have a positive perspective on the experience of Jews in Babylon, while the visions take a much more negative perspective.

<sup>32</sup> Doukhan, 2–7.

<sup>33</sup> Collins, *Daniel* (Hermeneia), 277.

<sup>34</sup> More accurately, perhaps, the “explanation” part of Daniel 7 can be divided into an initial explanation (17–18), a supplementary vision (19–22), and a detailed interpretation (23–27). See Lucas, 165–166.

<sup>35</sup> The vision formula of Dan 7:1 is identical to that of 2:28 in Aramaic. Whatever it was that Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel experienced, the dreams/visions of the two chapters are described in the same way. The formula is essentially repeated in 4:13, where Nebuchadnezzar experiences the dream/vision of the great tree.

<sup>36</sup> Collins, *Daniel* (Hermeneia), 277. The concept of “dream” in this and other passages has to do with something “seen” during the sleeping hours of the night. The concept of “vision” is broader. A vision can happen any time, including the waking hours of the day; see Susan Niditch, *The Symbolic Vision in Biblical Tradition* (Chico: Scholars, 1983), 186. Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar had similar night-time visionary experiences.

kings of Media and Persia, the . . . goat is the king of Greece”—8:20–21, NIV). The most natural explanation is that the vision of Daniel 7 is simply restating and expanding on the earlier vision,<sup>37</sup> but this time couched in the language of the Torah, rather than Babylonian symbolism.<sup>38</sup> The vision of Daniel 8, on the other hand, introduces new material and requires specific re-identification. This explanation is confirmed by the many parallels between Daniel’s vision in chapter 7 and the earlier one given to Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2.

Susan Niditch points out the strong formal parallels between Daniel 7 and Daniel 2.<sup>39</sup> In both chapters there is a symbolic dream/vision, introduced by a common formula, both Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar show a great desire to understand the dream, both visionaries are “disturbed” by the vision (2:1–3; 7:15, my translation), and both dreams/visions occur at night. In both dreams/visions the symbols are interrelated into a narrative drama.<sup>40</sup> In Daniel 2, however, the story of how the dream comes to be interpreted is central to the chapter, while in Daniel 7, the narrative context is virtually non-existent.

Both passages deal with four kingdoms (Dan 2:37–40; 7:17).<sup>41</sup> The four animals in Dan 7 parallel the four metals of the great statue that Nebuchadnezzar saw (Dan 7:3–7, cf. 2:31–33).<sup>42</sup> Both visions concern four items, many of which are numbered, “first,” “fourth,” etc. (Dan 2:39–40; 7:4, 5, 7).<sup>43</sup> In both visions, special authority is given to the

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<sup>37</sup> Buchanan, 68; Gowan, 103; Jürgen-Christian Lebram, *Das Buch Daniel*, Zürcher Bibelkommentare: Altes Testament, 23 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich), 83–84; Norman Porteous, *Daniel*, 2nd rev. ed. (London: SCM, 1979), 103; Towner, 93–94; Walton, 25.

<sup>38</sup> Doukhan, 17; Angel Manuel Rodriguez, *Future Glory: The 8 Greatest End-time Prophecies in the Bible* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2002), 22.

<sup>39</sup> Niditch, 188; see also Towner, 93–94.

<sup>40</sup> This is strikingly different from the vision/interpretation of Zech 4, for example, where the symbols are related thematically, but each symbol is static and self-contained. Niditch, 200.

<sup>41</sup> The motif of beasts coming out of the sea could be understood in terms of the biblical tradition of dragons or monsters in the sea (Isa 27:1; 51:9–11); Collins, *Daniel* (Hermeneia), 295. Collins notes further (299) that Israel’s enemies were portrayed as wild animals in Ezekiel 34 and the Animal Apocalypse of 1 Enoch 85–90.

<sup>42</sup> Niditch, 203.

<sup>43</sup> This sequencing language is further heightened in Daniel 7 by the use of “And behold” (וַיֵּרְא) at every point in the vision where there is chronological progression (Dan 7:5, 6, 7, 8 [twice], and 13). See Doukhan, 21.

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third kingdom.<sup>44</sup> In both visions, the fourth element is numbered (2:40; 7:7), involves iron, and uses the language of crushing.<sup>45</sup> According to Dan 7:23 (NRSV), “There shall be a fourth kingdom on earth (בְּאַרְצָא) (מִלְכוּתוֹ יִבְיֵאֵל הַדְּרוֹא).” In both visions, the figure of the fourth kingdom is followed by symbols of division (2:43; 7:24).

In both visions there is progressive degeneration; from gold to iron, and from the kings of beast and bird (lion/eagle) to a nameless monster.<sup>46</sup> Both visions climax with a kingdom that lasts forever (Dan 2:44; 7:26–27).<sup>47</sup> Both visions cover a period that leads to the final establishment of God’s kingdom. I conclude that the vision of Daniel 7, therefore, concerns the same four kingdoms symbolized by metals in Daniel 2.<sup>48</sup> The purpose of Daniel 7 is to expand further on the issues raised by Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Daniel 2.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Dan 2:39 (NRSV): “Which shall rule over the whole earth,” 7:6 (NRSV): “And dominion was given to it.” Cf. Collins, *Daniel* (Hermeneia), 298.

<sup>45</sup> Lucas, 180.

<sup>46</sup> James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (New York: Scribner, 1927), 283.

<sup>47</sup> Niditch, 210–211.

<sup>48</sup> While scholars disagree on the identification of the four kingdoms in Daniel 2 and 7, Niditch states that they generally agree that the interpretation of four kingdoms should be the same for both visions; Niditch, 203. Cf. H. H. Rowley, *Darius the Mede and the Four World Empires in the Book of Daniel* (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 1935), 60–66; Montgomery, 283.

From an SDA perspective, Shea points out that the fourth kingdom is never identified by name anywhere in the book of Daniel. He then offers significant evidence for the Adventist identification of the fourth kingdom with Rome (William H. Shea, *Daniel 7–12: Prophecies of the End Time*, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier [Boise: Pacific Press, 1996], 132–137). This identification was also made by the early Church Fathers Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and possibly Barnabas (see Le Roy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers: The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretation*, vol. 1 [Washington: Review and Herald, 1950], 210, 244–246, 272–273).

<sup>49</sup> John J. Collins argues to the contrary (*Daniel* [Hermeneia], 323). He does this by highlighting the differences between the two accounts (34–35). The vision of Daniel 2 is embedded in a court narrative, but in Daniel 7 the vision stands alone. The vision of Daniel 2 concerns metals in a statue, while the vision of Daniel 7 concerns a succession of beasts. There is no judgment scene in Daniel 2 to parallel the one in Dan 7:9–14. And, finally, the son of man (Dan 7:13–14) is to be interpreted differently from the stone (pages 304–310).

While Collins does not state his own understanding of the “stone” in Dan 2:45 (he lists several opinions of others, 171), he may assume that the obvious reference is the everlasting kingdom of 2:44 which crushes all the other kingdoms. On the other hand, he appears to hold the position that the Son of Man of Dan 7:13–14 is a “mythic-realistic”

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On the other hand, a new element in this vision is the little horn power that plucks up three horns and speaks boastful things (Dan 7:8). Unlike the first three beasts, which have humanizing characteristics,<sup>50</sup> the fourth beast seems totally out of control and, therefore, different from the others.<sup>51</sup> An additional new element is the heavenly judgment scene (7:9–14) with its books, its Ancient of Days, and its son of man. The vision of Daniel 2 is essentially repeated, but with two additional elements. Note the following chart:<sup>52</sup>

Daniel 2	Daniel 7
Gold	Lion
Silver	Bear
Bronze	Leopard
Iron	Beast (Iron Teeth)
Feet and Toes	Horns
-	Little Horn
-	Judgment
God's Kingdom	God's Kingdom

In comparing the two visions we are moving from the simple to the complex and from the clear to the somewhat less clear. So in interpreting

being in the heavenly realm (305). He later identifies this individual with Michael the “great prince” of Dan 10:13 and 12:1 (310).

This contrary position appears weak to me in comparison with the evidence cited in the main text above. The presence of a court narrative in Daniel 2 does not preclude a strong visionary parallel with Daniel 7. The contrast between metals and beasts is easily explained by the different recipients of the two visions. Nebuchadnezzar, the heathen king, sees a picture of future world empires in the form of an idol (“statue” in NIV of Dan 2:31–32—Aramaic: ܩܒܠܐ). Daniel, the Hebrew prophet, sees (I believe) echoes of creation. The symbolism of each vision differs, but the content is similar. A judgment scene could be added in the second vision to expand on the basic themes of the earlier one. And, finally, I agree with Collins’ definitions of both the stone and the Son of Man. But the Son of Man’s kingdom in 7:13–14 is expanded to include the “saints” in 7:27. The kingdom of the saints is an everlasting kingdom that supplants all the other kingdoms, a situation parallel with Dan 2:44. The single reference to a kingdom in chapter 2 is doubled in chapter 7.

<sup>50</sup> The lion stands “like a man” (Dan 7:4, NIV) and has a human heart, the bear can respond to human speech, and the leopard’s authority is derived, presumably from God.

<sup>51</sup> Lucas, 198.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Towner, 93–95.

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Daniel 7 we must not forget the things we have learned from Daniel 2. The pattern of apocalyptic, historical sequences continues to be followed.

There are two sets of linguistic cues in the vision of Daniel 7 that mark off its different parts: The vision formula, “In my vision at night I looked” (NIV—*לִי־לַיְלָה בְּחִזְוֵי הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה*), which occurs at crucial transition points in verses 2, 7, and 13; and a formula, found in verses 5, 6, 7, 8 (twice), and 13, that is always associated with chronological progression in the chapter (*וַיֵּאָמֶר* or *וַיִּבְרָא*).<sup>53</sup> Combining these two linguistic cues leads to the following structure for the vision:

**Scene 1:** (7:2–6) Beasts from the Sea

Lion (4)

Bear (5)

Leopard (6)

**Scene 2:** (7:7–12) Fourth Beast and Judgment

Nondescript Beast (7)

Ten horns (8)

Little horn (8)

Judgment scene (9–10)

Judgment verdict (11–12)

**Scene 3:** (7:13–14) Son of Man

Son of man approaches throne (13)

Receives dominion (14)

Surprisingly, this arrangement ties the fourth kingdom more closely to the heavenly court scene than to the three kingdoms that precede it in verses 4–6. The immediate context of the seating of the heavenly judgment in 7:9–14 is the little horn’s boastful speaking in verse 8. The absence in verse 9 of the typical sequencing term (*וַיֵּאָמֶר* or *וַיִּבְרָא*—“behold” in KJV) found seven times in the vision (Dan 7:5, 6, 7, 8 [twice], 13)<sup>54</sup> is further evidence that the judgment begins at precisely that point in history where the little horn is doing its human thing and speaking boastfully (elaborated in 7:21, 25).

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<sup>53</sup> Careful attention to Aramaic sequence markers in Daniel 7 can be found in the dissertation by Kenneth Orville Freer, “A Study of Vision Reports in Biblical Literature” (PhD Dissertation, Yale University, 1975), 32–34; see also Doukhan, 21; Lucas, 164–165, 180.

<sup>54</sup> It is true that *וַיֵּאָמֶר*, a sequencing phrase in Aramaic, appears early in verse 9. It occurs also in verses 11 and 22. But its primary function in verse 9 is not to separate the action from verse 8, but to provide a specific link (along with verse 11) to the explanation of the vision in verse 22.

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A portion of the vision formula of 2, 7, and 13 is also found at the conclusion of verse 11, further tying the descriptions of verses 7 and 8 to the opening of the judgment in 9 and 10.<sup>55</sup> The allusion to the destruction of the beast that carried the little horn in verse 11 implies that the judgment comes into session to deal with the actions of that beast and of the ten horns and the little horn that follow it in the course of history.<sup>56</sup> This implication is confirmed in Dan 7:21–22. The time, times, and half a time in which the saints are oppressed continue “until (עַד דַּי) the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High” (7:22, NIV). So the judgment comes at the end of the little horn’s time of oppressing the saints.

The end result of that judgment is that “His power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever. Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His [the son of man of 7:13–14] kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him” (Dan 7:26–27, NIV).

The little horn power of Daniel 7, therefore, is not separate from the fourth beast.<sup>57</sup> It arises directly from among the ten horns that are part of the fourth beast (Dan 7:7, NIV: “It had ten horns”—(וְקַרְנֵינָיו עֲשָׂרָה לָהּ)).<sup>58</sup> This point is underlined again in Dan 7:19–20, NIV, where Daniel himself is described as saying, “Then I wanted to know the true meaning of the fourth beast, . . . I also wanted to know about the ten horns on its head and about the other horn that came up . . .”<sup>59</sup> But while rooted in the fourth beast, the little horn comes up after the ten horns,<sup>60</sup> which themselves come up after the fourth kingdom is established (Dan 7:24).<sup>61</sup>

There is sequencing, therefore, in relation to the imagery of the fourth beast. Since the little horn arises after the fourth kingdom and in

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<sup>55</sup> John J. Collins, *Daniel with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*, 76. Dan 7:7: literally: “I kept looking”—הָיִיתָ הַיְהוָה; Dan 7:11: “I kept looking”—הָיִיתָ הַיְהוָה.

<sup>56</sup> Buchanan, 181; Porteous, 107–109.

<sup>57</sup> Buchanan, 228.

<sup>58</sup> Dan 7:8 states, “While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them (סִלְקַת בִּינְיָהוּן). . .”

<sup>59</sup> Note the Aramaic of verse 20: וְעַל-קַרְנֵינָיו עֲשָׂרָה דִּי בְרָאשֵׁת וְאַחֲרֵי דִּי סִלְקַת—literally: “And concerning the ten horns which (were) on its head and another which came up.”

<sup>60</sup> Dan 7:24 NRSV (explaining the shift of attention in Dan 7:7–8 from the ten horns to the little horn): “And another shall arise after them. This one shall be different from the former ones. . .” (וְאַחֲרָיו יָקוּם אַחֲרֵיהֶן וְהוּא יִשְׁנָא מִן-קַרְנֵיהֶן). See Shea, vol. 2, 138.

<sup>61</sup> Dan 7:24 NRSV: “As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise. . .” (וְקַרְנֵינָיו עֲשָׂרָה מִמֶּנָּה מְלָכֹתָהּ עֲשָׂרָה מִלְכֵינָיו).



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the context of the ten horns, it would seem to be operating in the time of the divided kingdom of Daniel 2. Just as the mixed kingdom of iron and clay was connected to the fourth by the image of iron (Dan 2:41–42), so the little horn is connected to the fourth kingdom, having grown from its symbolic head (Dan 7:8).

*Summary and Conclusion.* The vision of Daniel 7, therefore, is not so much adding new elements to the earlier vision as it is elaborating on the later stages of it, the times after the fourth kingdom and before the setting up of God's eternal kingdom. In Daniel 2 and 7, therefore, we find a pair of apocalyptic prophecies that review the same basic historical sequence, running from the time of the respective prophets until the establishment of God's kingdom at the end of history.

The vision and explanation of Daniel 7 has several features we noticed already in Daniel 2. 1) There are a number of sequence markers in the text. 2) The series of beasts in the first part of the vision is reminiscent of the series of metals in Nebuchadnezzar's statue.<sup>62</sup> 3) While it is less clear here that the starting point of the vision is Babylon, the parallels with Daniel 2 clearly leave that impression.<sup>63</sup> So this vision begins and ends more or less where the vision of Daniel 2 did. And there is the comprehensive sweep of world-dominating kingdoms that was seen in the previous vision (Dan 7:17–18; 2:39–45).

There is one additional feature, however, that may prove useful to a taxonomy of historical apocalyptic. 4) *Parallels with earlier historical apocalyptic.* The evident parallels between Daniel 7 and the preceding vision of Daniel 2 suggest that one way to detect historical apocalyptic is intentional allusion to previous examples of historical apocalyptic. In Revelation, for example, when allusions to Daniel 7 occur in a passage that has marks of historical sequence, there is an increased likelihood that the genre of the passage is in fact historical apocalyptic.

#### **Historical Apocalyptic in Revelation**

No passage in Revelation is more critical to Adventist self-understanding than Rev 12–13. I will, therefore, examine one of these chapters for evidence of whether it reflects the sequencing of historical apocalyptic or some other genre. It is not appropriate to force a text into

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<sup>62</sup> Buchanan (168) notes that this is not a casual parallel; the mixture of beasts and the mixture of metals are each characteristic of the respective visions.

<sup>63</sup> Bauer, 147; John E. Goldingay, "The Book of Daniel: Three Issues," *Themelios* 2 (Summer 1977): 46; Gurney, 42; Longman, 184–185; Miller, 196–197; Towner, 93.

the historicist mode if that was not the intention of the text. We must allow the characteristics and purposes of each text to emerge out of the text. Only then can we accurately determine whether the chapter has the marks of historical apocalyptic or not.

**Indicators of Historical Apocalyptic:**

- 1) Textual Sequence Markers
- 2) A Consistent Sequence of Symbols and Explanation
- 3) A Comprehensive Sweep of Events
- 4) Parallels with Earlier Historical Apocalyptic

**Preliminary Considerations.** Before we take up the analysis of chapter 12, I would like to note once more the four characteristics of historical apocalyptic that were detected in Daniel 2 and 7. They are 1) *textual sequence markers*, 2) *a consistent sequence of symbols and explanation*, 3) *a comprehensive sweep of events*, and 4) *parallels with earlier historical apocalyptic*. Before we turn to an examination of Revelation 12, I would like to point out a couple of literary strategies that the author of Revelation uses to indicate sequence in visions.

*Character Introduction.* I call the first literary strategy “character introduction.” Consistently throughout the book, the author of Revelation introduces characters in general terms before describing their actions at the time of the vision. In other words, when a character appears in the book for the first time, there is a general description of the character’s appearance and prior actions (on one occasion even a future action—Rev 12:5), followed by a description of the actions the character takes in the context of the vision’s own time and place setting. These character introduction passages, therefore, normally offer clear markers of sequence.

When Jesus is introduced to John in chapter 1, for example, the historical setting is John’s location on the island of Patmos (Rev 1:9). John goes into vision and sees one like a son of man. This is the first visible appearance of Jesus in the book, although He and His works are mentioned earlier (1:1, 4–7). John’s experience of Jesus in chapter one (Rev 1:12–20)<sup>64</sup> clearly precedes the messages to the seven churches in chapters two and three.<sup>65</sup> The “character introduction” of 1:12–16 sets the

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<sup>64</sup> He first hears the one like a son of man speaking with a voice like a trumpet (Rev 1:9–11), then he sees and describes Jesus (1:12–16), then he experiences His comforting and explanatory words (1:17–20).

<sup>65</sup> One possible further indicator of time sequencing in the passage is the fact that the opening character identification scene (1:12–20) is in the aorist tense (Rev 1:12—

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stage for the “letters” (2:1–3:22). There is, therefore, a clear sequence between chapter one and the two chapters that follow.

A word of caution is in order at this point. While there is sequencing going on in this passage (Rev 1:9–3:22), it meets few of the other criteria of historical apocalyptic. Sequencing alone is no indicator of historical apocalyptic; *it is the accumulated evidence of multiple criteria that demonstrates the genre*. What I wish to demonstrate at the moment is simply that Revelation has some unique ways of exhibiting sequence.

The concept of character introduction occurs also in chapter 11. The two witnesses are introduced with a description of their appearance and an overall description of their characteristics and their actions in the present (11:4–6)<sup>66</sup> and in the future tense (11:3). The entire character introduction passage (11:3–6) occurs prior to the visionary description that follows (11:7–13).<sup>67</sup> When characters are introduced for the first time in Revelation, the introduction is normally made up of characteristics and actions that precede the time of the vision.

*Old Testament Roots.* Another special feature of the Book of Revelation is its extensive use of the Old Testament. No book of the New Testament is as saturated with the Old as this one is.<sup>68</sup> But while it is not difficult to recognize the central place of the Old Testament in the Book of Revelation, it is difficult to determine exactly how it is being used there. One acquainted with the Old Testament quickly notices that Revelation

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ἐπέστρεψα . . . ἐπιστρέψας εἶδον; Rev 1:17—Καὶ ὅτε εἶδον αὐτόν, ἔπεσα . . . καὶ ἔθηκον), while the messages of the seven churches are in the present indicative.

<sup>66</sup> Note the present indicative tenses in Rev 11:4–6: οὗτοί εἰσιν αἱ δύο ἐλαῖαι καὶ αἱ δύο λυχνίαι αἱ ἐνώπιον τοῦ κυρίου τῆς γῆς ἐστῶτες. καὶ εἴ τις αὐτοὺς θέλει ἀδικῆσαι πῦρ ἐκπορεύεται ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτῶν καὶ κατεσθίει τοὺς ἐχθροὺς αὐτῶν καὶ εἴ τις θελήσῃ αὐτοὺς ἀδικῆσαι, οὕτως δεῖ αὐτὸν ἀποκτανθῆναι. οὗτοι ἔχουσιν τὴν ἐξουσίαν κλεῖσαι τὸν οὐρανόν, ἵνα μὴ ὑετὸς βρέχῃ τὰς ἡμέρας τῆς προφητείας αὐτῶν, καὶ ἐξουσίαν ἔχουσιν ἐπὶ τῶν ὑδάτων στρέφειν αὐτὰ εἰς αἶμα καὶ πατάξαι τὴν γῆν ἐν πάσῃ πληγῇ ὅσακις ἐὰν θελήσωσιν.

<sup>67</sup> This is clear from Rev 11:7: Καὶ ὅταν τελέσωσιν τὴν μαρτυρίαν αὐτῶν. The testimony of the two witnesses (cf. verse 3—also referred to as prophesying or prophecy in verses 3 and 6) is to occur for a period of 1260 days in John’s future. That is all part of the introduction to the actions in verses 7–12. When the two witnesses have finished their testimony (the 1260 days are closed), the actions of verses 7ff. begin; cf. David Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 616.

<sup>68</sup> Pierre Lestrangant (*Essai sur l’unité de la révélation biblique* [Paris: Editions “Je Sers,” 1942], 148) suggests that one-seventh of the substance of the Apocalypse is drawn from the words of the OT.

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never directly quotes the Old Testament; rather, it alludes to it with a word here, a phrase there, or a concept in another place.<sup>69</sup> Careful and consistent application of method is essential to recognizing the Old Testament subtext to the apocalyptic prophecies of Revelation.<sup>70</sup>

The importance of the Old Testament in Revelation can be seen by a second look at Revelation 1. The vision in which Jesus is physically introduced to the reader (Rev 1:12–16) is based on a variety of Old Testament texts. The golden lampstands are a reminder of the lampstand in the Old Testament sanctuary (Exod 25:31–40) and the vision of Zechariah (Zech 4:2,10). Jesus' dress recalls the dress of the High Priest in the same sanctuary (Exod 28:4, 31). The voice like rushing waters reminds the reader of the appearance of Almighty God in the book of Ezekiel (Ezek 1:24; 43:2). The two-edged sword coming from Jesus' mouth is reminiscent of Yahweh's judgments through His messianic Servant in Isaiah (Isa 11:4; 49:2). The reader's appreciation and understanding of Revelation's apocalyptic-style symbolism is greatly enhanced by following up a veritable mosaic of Old Testament allusions.<sup>71</sup>

But what ties all these Old Testament allusions together is a reference to two characters in the book of Daniel, the Son of Man (Dan 7:13–14) and Daniel's mysterious visitor in 10:5–6.<sup>72</sup> Virtually every detail of the description in 1:12–16 is found in those two passages. The same Jesus who walked and talked with ordinary people here on earth is described in terms of the mighty acts of Yahweh and of His heavenly and earthly messengers in the Old Testament. The parallels to the Old Testament lend much meaning to what otherwise would be a bewildering and incomprehensible description. So Jesus is depicted in this introduction as a heavenly priest, cosmic ruler, and divine judge.<sup>73</sup> In Rev 1:17–18 he

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<sup>69</sup> While a handful of scholars argue for anywhere from one to eleven "quotations" of the OT in the book of Revelation (see, for example, Robert G. Bratcher, ed., *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament* [London: United Bible Societies, 1967], 74–76), the overwhelming majority of scholars conclude that there are none.

<sup>70</sup> See Jon Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 11 (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1988), 155–194; see also Paulien, "Criteria and the Assessment of Allusions to the Old Testament in Revelation," in *Studies in the Book of Revelation*, ed. Steve Moyise (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001), 113–129; and (in a more popular form) idem, *The Deep Things of God* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2004).

<sup>71</sup> William Milligan, *Lectures on the Apocalypse* (London: MacMillan, 1892), 72.

<sup>72</sup> G. K. Beale, *Revelation*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 208.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

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exercises his priesthood in his merciful gentleness to John, while 1:19–20 makes clear that his royal rule will be exercised in judgment, both positive and negative, toward the churches.<sup>74</sup> This passage right at the beginning of the book of Revelation emphasizes its strong ties to the apocalyptic book of Daniel.<sup>75</sup>

In Daniel 7, the parallels to Daniel 2 enhanced its apocalyptic character. Similar connections with those chapters would increase the likelihood of historical apocalyptic in Revelation. But it is clear, from the allusions to Daniel 7 in Revelation 1, that such parallels, by themselves, are no guarantee of historical apocalyptic. In Revelation 1, the use of Daniel 7 seems more along the lines of realized eschatology than historical apocalyptic. The allusions to Daniel 7 emphasize the parts of that chapter that indicate God's mighty action at the End, rather than an ongoing sequence. In the New Testament, such mighty acts of God are often interpreted as present realities in light of the kingdom introduced by Jesus.

### **Exegetical Overview of Revelation 12**

Not only is Revelation 12 important to Adventist self-understanding, but it is widely seen as a center and key to the entire book.<sup>76</sup> So I have chosen it as a test passage for this project. The goal is to determine whether it reflects the historical sequences of apocalyptic prophecy or whether it should be interpreted along the lines of classical prophecy or some other genre.

First of all, chapter 12 does have textual markers that indicate passage of time. In Rev 12:6 the woman is taken care of by God in the desert for 1260 days. In Rev 12:14 she is taken care of for a time, times,

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<sup>74</sup> In this He is a model for the churches, who are a “kingdom and priests” (Rev 1:5–6, NIV).

<sup>75</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John*, (Lanham: UP of America, 1984), 154–177. Beale goes so far as to suggest that Rev 1 offers an intentional “midrash” on Daniel 7 (173–176). See the contrary viewpoint in David Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52A, (Dallas: Word, 1997), 93–94.

<sup>76</sup> Pierre Prigent, *Apocalypse 12: histoire de l'exegèse* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Karl Siebeck], 1959), 1; William H. Shea, “The Parallel Literary Structure of Revelation 12 and 20,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 23 (Spring, 1985): 37–38.

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and half a time, presumably the same period as 12:6.<sup>77</sup> So Revelation 12 is not describing a single event, but a considerable period of time.<sup>78</sup>

A second observation about the chapter is that the cryptic phrase “a time, times, and half a time” (Rev 12:14, NIV) is drawn from a couple of the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel (Dan 7:25; 12:7).<sup>79</sup> Further observation indicates that Revelation 12 builds on Daniel throughout. The dragon of Rev 12:3–4 has a number of the characteristics of the beasts of Daniel 7 and of the little horn (Dan 7:7, 24; 8:10).<sup>80</sup> The war in heaven of 12:7–9 makes several allusions to Daniel (Dan 2:35; 10:13, 20–21; 12:1).<sup>81</sup> This broad utilization of Daniel’s apocalyptic prophecies enhances the impression that Rev 12 should be interpreted along similar lines.

Finally, Revelation 12 contains a number of character identifications with their typical time sequences. First, a woman appears in heaven, clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head (12:1). 12:1–2 is based on the Old Testament image of a virtuous woman as a symbol of faithful Israel (Isa 26:16–27; 54:5; 66:7–14; Hos 2:14–20), anticipating the arrival of the messianic age.<sup>82</sup> So the woman of Rev 12 has a “pedigree” that carries back well into Old Testament prophecy. According to Isa 66:7, she is the faithful Israel that

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<sup>77</sup> Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 706; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 668–669.

<sup>78</sup> Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation*, Sacra Pagina, vol. 16 (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1993), 131; Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 2002), 379, 384, 391.

<sup>79</sup> Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 706; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 669; Jan Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and their Development*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 93 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 179; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 482; Stefanovic, 384, 391.

<sup>80</sup> Fekkes, 179.

<sup>81</sup> See the listings of allusions in the back of Nestle (Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, and Kurt Aland et al, editors, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27<sup>th</sup> rev. ed. [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993]), in the margins of the UBS text (Kurt Aland et al, editors, *The Greek New Testament*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. [New York: United Bible Societies, 1975]), and at the back of Westcott and Hort (Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort, ed., *The New Testament in the Original Greek* [London: MacMillan, 1898]).

<sup>82</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, Proclamation Commentaries (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 80–81; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 237; Osborne, 456; Stefanovic, 381–382. Contra Harrington, who believes that “for John this woman is the heavenly Israel” (130).

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longed to give birth to the Lord's salvation.<sup>83</sup> But in verse 5 she acts in the context of the vision, giving birth to a male child who is generally recognized to represent Jesus.<sup>84</sup>

The woman's character and actions, as described in 12:1–2, are clearly prior to her actions in verse 5, and the actions of verse 5 are prior to the actions of verse 6. After she gives birth to the child (12:5), she is seen fleeing into the desert for a lengthy period (12:6). So the experience of the woman in Rev 12:1–6 is actually depicted in three stages: 1) the time of her appearance and pregnancy, 2) the time of giving birth, and 3) the time of fleeing into the desert.

The second character introduced in this chapter is the dragon (Rev 12:3–4), also called the ancient serpent, the devil, and Satan (Rev 12:9). The dragon's initial action in the context of the vision is described in 12:4, where he waits before the woman, seeking to devour her child as soon as it is born. Scholars widely recognize that the dragon's attack on the male child in Rev 12:5 represents Herod's attempt to destroy the Christ child by killing all the babies in Bethlehem (Matt 2:1–18).<sup>85</sup> But the description of the dragon, as it was with the woman, carries back to a time before the events of the vision.

The dragon's pedigree is seen in the heads and the horns of Daniel 7 (Rev 12:3); it is the embodiment of the kingdoms of the world in service

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<sup>83</sup> Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 682, 687; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 640–641.

<sup>84</sup> Fiorenza (81) considers this identification “without question.” See also Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 687–689; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 639; Harrington, 130; Mounce, 238–239; Frederick J. Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon: The Revelation to John*, *The New Testament in Context* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1998), 284; Osborne, 457, 462; Robert W. Wall, *Revelation*, *New International Biblical Commentary* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 161; Charles H. Talbert, *The Apocalypse: A Reading of the Revelation of John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 49; Leonard L. Thompson, *Revelation*, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 134.

<sup>85</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 639; Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation*, *Concordia Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1999), 331; Kendell H. Easley, *Revelation*, *Holman New Testament Commentaries*, ed. Max Anders (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1998), 209; J. Ramsey Michaels, *Revelation*, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, ed. Grant R. Osborne (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), 147; James Moffat, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 5:425; Mounce, 238; Osborne, 462; J. P. M. Sweet, *Revelation*, *Westminster Pelican Commentaries* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 196–197.

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of Satan.<sup>86</sup> His pedigree, in fact, goes all the way back to Eden (“that ancient serpent”—Rev 12:9, 15, NIV). And prior to his attack on the woman, his tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to earth (Rev 12:4).<sup>87</sup>

But the dragon isn’t finished when the male child gets away in verse 5. The dragon pursues the woman into the desert (12:13–16) and eventually makes war with the remnant of her seed (Rev 12:17). So the dragon in chapter 12 is actually described in terms of four successive stages,<sup>88</sup> 1) his attack on a third of the stars (12:4), 2) his attack on the male child (12:4–5), 3) his attack against the woman herself (12:13–16), and finally 4) his war against the remnant. The character and actions of both the woman and the dragon suggest the successive periods of a historical apocalypse.

I would conclude this initial reading of Revelation 12 by noting that the chapter clearly meets two of the four criteria for a historical apocalypse. These are 1) indicators that the chapter contains sequences of events and 2) strong parallels to the historical sequences in Daniel 7. I would now like to turn to the third criterion, whether or not the material in Revelation 12 exhibits the comprehensive sweep of history that we have found in the visions of Daniel.

### **The Vision’s Big Picture**

**The Time of Jesus and John.** The third character to be introduced in this chapter is the male child, the woman’s son. The scene is reminiscent of Gen 3:15, where the seed of the woman is the one who will crush the serpent’s head.<sup>89</sup> This character introduction is unique in the sense that instead of describing a pedigree or prior action on the part of this male child, the introduction focuses instead on action beyond the time of the vision. Using the future tense, He is described as the one who “will rule (μέλλει ποιμαίνειν) all the nations with an iron scepter” (Rev 12:5, NIV). This allusion to Psalm 2:9 describes Jesus’ judgment role at the end of time.<sup>90</sup> The very next phrase reverts to the visionary past, “her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.” In 12:5 reference is

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<sup>86</sup> William G. Johnsson, “The Saints’ End-time Victory Over the Forces of Evil,” in *Symposium on Revelation—Book 2*, DARCOM Series vol. 7 (Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 17; Rodriguez, 93.

<sup>87</sup> An allusion to Dan 8:10, according to Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 635–636.

<sup>88</sup> Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 663–664.

<sup>89</sup> Rodriguez, 94.

<sup>90</sup> See Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 688.



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made, then, to the birth, the ascension, and the ultimate victory of Jesus Christ.<sup>91</sup> The death of Christ on the cross is only brought into play in verses 10–12.

The result of the dragon's attack in 12:4–5 is to split up the woman and the child. The child is snatched up to heaven and the woman flees into the desert, under God's protection but still on earth (Rev 12:6). At this point we encounter the most challenging part of the chapter with regard to chronological sequence. Does Rev 12:7–9 describe an event in relation to the birth and ascension of the male child (verse 5) and in connection with the events surrounding the cross and enthronement of Christ (verses 10–12)?<sup>92</sup> Or is it distinct from its immediate context in detailing the primeval cosmic conflict mentioned in passing in verse 4?<sup>93</sup> Is there

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<sup>91</sup> See footnote 85 for a listing of selected scholars who have supported this conclusion.

<sup>92</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Revelation*, The NIV Application Commentary, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 320–321; Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 360–361; Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 387–388. In favor of this interpretation are two things. 1) Seeing the war in heaven as contemporary with the ascension of the male child makes for a natural sequence between verses 5 and 7 (Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 650–653; Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* [Downer's Grove: InterVarsity, 2005], 322). 2) The most natural antecedent of ἐβλήθη in verse 10 (“Now ἄρτι] have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ, for the accuser of our brothers has been hurled down [ἐβλήθη]”) is the ἐβλήθη of verse 9 (the intimate connection of verses 9 and 10 is supported by Aune, *Revelation* 6–16, 699–700; cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 657–658; Smalley, 326). This suggests that the two castings down are the same. If this interpretation holds, the casting down of the serpent in Rev 12:7–10 took place at the enthronement of the Lamb as a result of His overcoming at the cross (Rev 5:5–6, cf. 3:21). For more on the enthronement concept in Revelation, see the detailed argument in Ranko Stefanovic, *The Background and Meaning of the Sealed Book of Revelation 5*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 22 (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1996).

<sup>93</sup> This viewpoint was popular among the earliest commentators on Revelation (see survey in Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland, *Revelation*, Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 138–139. In favor of this interpretation are the following: 1) The possibility of a clean break at the opening of verse 10 (καὶ ἤκουσα φωνὴν μεγάλην ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ λέγουσαν—see translations of NIV, NASB, NKJV, NRSV). 2) Strong allusions to the cosmic conflict language of Isa 14:12ff. and the serpent scene of Genesis 3. 3) The location of the war in heaven, not after verse 5, but after verse 6 (breaking up the connection between the mention of the male child's ascension and the heavenly war). In conjunction with this, verses 7–9 are widely seen as a new section of the chapter (Cf. Alan Johnson, in the revised edition of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David Garland [Grand Rapids: Zondervan,

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one casting down of the dragon described in verses 7–9, 10, and 12? Or are there two separate and distinct castings down (verses 7–9 and 10–12)? While, in my opinion, the more natural reading of the Greek of Rev 12:7–10 reflects a primary focus on casting down in relation to the cross and the ascension of Christ<sup>94</sup> (which is reflected in the four-stage chart at the end of this article<sup>95</sup>), the decision one makes with regard to the heavenly war does not materially impact the goal of this article.<sup>96</sup>

Either way, it is clear that there is a conflict in heaven at the time when the kingdom of God and the authority of Christ are clearly established (12:10, 12). Throughout the New Testament the Kingdom of God is seen as a present reality in the person of Jesus (Matt 12:28; Luke 17:20–21, etc.) and is established in force at His ascension, when He joined His Father on the heavenly throne (cf. Heb 8:1–2, etc.).

This evidence indicates that the vision of Revelation 12 begins with events associated with the birth, death, resurrection, and enthronement of

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2006], 12: 697). 4) Literary sequence and chronological sequence are often different in Revelation.

For the most persuasive cosmic conflict approach to Rev 12:7–9, see Sigve Tonstad, “Saving God’s Reputation: The Theological Function of *Pistis Iesou* in the Cosmic Narratives of Revelation” (PhD. Dissertation, University of St. Andrews, 2004), 100–118. Aune also supports the idea that verses 7–9 stand somewhat apart from the larger story of Revelation 12 (Aune, *Revelation* 6–16, 691). Maxwell assumes that verses 7–9 describe the original battle in heaven, but offers no textual arguments in support: Mervyn C. Maxwell, *God Cares: The Message of Revelation for You and Your Family*, vol. 2 (Boise: Pacific Press, 1985), 321–322, 331–336.

<sup>94</sup> Aune, *Revelation* 6–16, 699–700; Rodriguez, 95. Such a position in no way denies the reality of an earlier stage to the cosmic conflict as attested in Rev 12:4, Isa 14, Ezek 28, and Gen 3. I do not feel that it has to be an either/or proposition. Even if one believes that the heavenly war of Rev 12:7–9 is primarily focused on the events of the cross and the ascension, it clearly contains powerful echoes of that earlier conflict. Notice how Aune actually plays it both ways, affirming the uniqueness of verses 7–9 within the larger story of the chapter, but then the intimate connection in the Greek between the casting down of verse 9 and the casting down of verse 10 (Aune, 691, 700). Barr also plays it both ways: David L. Barr, *Tales of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge, 1998), 124. Among Adventist interpreters, Uriah Smith does the same as Barr and Aune: Uriah Smith, *The Prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation* (Nashville, Southern Publishing, 1944), 554–557.

<sup>95</sup> The four stages laid out in the chart at the end of this article are chronological stages, not literary ones. From a purely literary standpoint, Revelation 12 divides neatly into three parts: 1–6, 7–12, and 13–17.

<sup>96</sup> One other alternative is to see verse 9 as connected to verse 10, describing the casting down of Satan at the cross, with the primeval language of verses 7 and 8 better focused on the primeval conflict at the beginning (cf. Isa 14 and Rev 13:8).

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Jesus, events in the immediate context of John and the churches of Asia Minor. Like Daniel 2 and 7, therefore, the vision of Revelation 12 has its beginning point within the experience of the seer.

**The Final Attack on the Remnant.** Rev 12:17, on the other hand, serves as a summary introduction to Revelation's portrayal of a great final crisis at the conclusion of earth's history. It indicates that there are two sides in the final conflict, represented by the dragon, on the one hand, and the remnant, on the other. But the dragon does not immediately act on his anger. Instead he "went away" to make war.<sup>97</sup> Why? Because he is frustrated by repeated failures in the course of apocalyptic history. He is not strong enough to last in heaven (Rev 12:4, 8), he has failed to destroy the man-child of the woman (Rev 12:3–5), and he has failed to destroy the woman herself (Rev 12:16). Because of his repeated failures, he realizes he doesn't have the strength to defeat God's purposes by himself, so he decides to enter the final conflict with allies, a beast from the sea and a beast from the earth (Rev 13:1–18). The rest of the book of Revelation elaborates on the summary introduction in Rev 12:17.<sup>98</sup> Revelation 13, for example, outlines in more detail the dragon's war against the remnant of the woman's seed (Rev 12:17).<sup>99</sup> Revelation 14 focuses on the remnant's side of the conflict. Then in Rev 16:13–16, the counterfeit trinity (dragon, beast, and false prophet) uses demonic spirits that look like frogs to gather the kings of earth for the final battle.

Revelation 12, therefore, not only begins with the time of Jesus and John, but ends with a summary introduction of the eschatological climax in 12:17. Revelation 12:17 functions as a nutshell summary of the eschatological war detailed in chapters 13–18. The chapter meets the third criterion for historical apocalyptic, beginning in the time of the prophet and continuing until the consummation at the end of history. The period spanning from the beginning of the vision to the end is covered in Rev 12:6, 12–16.

**The Central Period.** Revelation 12:12 marks the transition between the experience of Jesus, in his various symbolic representations, and the vision's renewed focus on the woman back on earth. Her exile into the desert has been introduced in 12:6 and now becomes the focus of the devil/dragon, who is angered by his casting out and by the knowledge

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<sup>97</sup> Rev 12:17: ἀπῆλθεν ποιῆσαι πόλεμον.

<sup>98</sup> This next section is elaborated in more detail in Jon Paulien, *What the Bible Says About the End-Time* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 1994), 109–138.

<sup>99</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 680.

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that “his time is short.”<sup>100</sup> He therefore pursues the woman into the desert (12:13). The language of 12:13–16 is reminiscent of several accounts in the Old Testament: the vision of Daniel 7, the Exodus from Egypt, and the temptation and fall in the Garden of Eden.

The language of “a time, times and half a time” recalls Dan 7:25,<sup>101</sup> as do the seven heads and the ten horns of the dragon who pursues the woman. The mouth of the serpent (Rev 12:15) reminds the reader of the deceptive words of the serpent in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3). The flooding waters that attack the woman in the desert, therefore, imply deceptive and persuasive words as much as persecuting force. The woman fleeing into the desert on the two wings of a great eagle (Rev 12:14) reminds the reader of the Exodus experience, where God carried the tribes of Israel “on eagle’s wings” out of Egypt (Exod 19:4).<sup>102</sup>

The evidence of the previous paragraph is significant. While nowhere in Revelation 12 are any of the characters explicitly identified with world-dominating kingdoms like Rome,<sup>103</sup> the references to Satan, the Garden of Eden, and the Exodus certainly leave the impression that the events of this chapter are comprehensive in their scope. We are not simply dealing with a local and immediate perspective. This chapter is the prelude to the cosmic end of history.

In Rev 12:16 the “earth” helps the woman. This is a further allusion to the Exodus and Israel’s experience in the desert.<sup>104</sup> The desert protected Israel from the “flooding waters” of both the Red Sea and the Egyptian army. Once again the dragon is frustrated in his designs against

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<sup>100</sup> Note the evidence in Shea (“The Parallel Literary Structure of Revelation 12 and 20,” 40–41) for a close correspondence between 12:6 and 12:14; both appear to be referring to the same event.

<sup>101</sup> Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 706; Osborne, 482; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 384, 391.

<sup>102</sup> Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 705; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 673–675; Fekkes, 179; Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 124; Osborne, 482; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 393; Thompson, 136.

<sup>103</sup> Although many commentators see a strong allusion to the actions of Herod in Rev 12:4–5.

<sup>104</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 675–6; Jan Dockhorn, “Und die Erde tat ihren Mund auf: Ein Exodusmotiv in Apc 12,16,” in *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 88 (1997), 140–142; Harrington, 131; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 394. Dockhorn notes that Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Exod 15:12 speaks of a debate between earth and sea as to which will “swallow up” the Egyptians. The earth eventually does so.

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the woman and her offspring. During that period of calm, however, he prepares for his final attack (Rev 12:17).

So the experience of the woman, who represents the people of God, is built on the language of Old Testament Israel, both before and after the time of Jesus. The experiences of Old Testament Israel and those of the Church are closely entwined in the book of Revelation. The material concerning the woman in the desert provides the centerpiece of a three-part apocalyptic drama.

**Conclusion**

Revelation 12, therefore, clearly demonstrates the successive stages of prophetic history that are characteristic of the historical type of apocalyptic found in Daniel 2 and 7. Observing carefully the markers in the text, the author's use of character introductions, and the way the Old Testament is utilized, we have detected three stages of Christian history running from the time of Jesus and John to the end of all things. When we note that at least two of the main characters in the chapter were active in the time before the birth of Jesus (which we will call below Stage Zero), there are a total of four successive stages of apocalyptic history.<sup>105</sup> This conclusion is not out of harmony with traditional Adventist exegesis of the chapter. The four stages can be summarized as follows:<sup>106</sup>

- 1) Stage Zero: Before the Time of the Vision (12:1–4)
  - The original war in heaven (4)
  - The dragon embodies the kingdoms of the earth (3)
  - The woman represents OT Israel (1–2)
- 2) Stage One: The Time of Jesus and John (12:5, 7–12)
  - The woman gives birth to the male child (5)
  - He is snatched up to heaven (5)
  - War in heaven (7–9)

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<sup>105</sup> Aune has also identified four sequential moves in this chapter, with the first being an "introduction of the dramatis personae" (Rev 12:1–4a). For Aune, the introductory actions are followed by the birth and escape of the child (4–6), the expulsion of the dragon from heaven (7–12), and the pursuit of the woman and her offspring (13–17). See Aune, *Revelation* 6–16, 663–664. Shea ("The Parallel Literary Structure of Revelation 12 and 20," 39–42) has drawn attention to the three successive conflicts between the dragon and the woman, 12:1–5, 6, 13–16, and 17. Although he approaches matters differently than I do here, there are significant similarities in the conclusions, as is the case with Aune. Shea gives more attention to textual markers of sequence than do most commentators on the chapter.

<sup>106</sup> It must be emphasized once more that the four stages laid out here are chronological stages, not literary ones. From a purely literary standpoint, Revelation 12 divides neatly into three parts: 1–6, 7–12 and 13–17.

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- Enthronement and victory (10–11)
- Transition (12)
- 3) Stage Two: The Serpent Attacks the Woman (12:6, 13–16)
  - The dragon pursues the woman (13)
  - She flees into the desert and is protected 1260 days (6, 14)
  - The serpent spews water to sweep her away (15)
  - The earth helps the woman (16)
- 4) Stage Three: The Dragon and the Remnant, (Rev 12:17, etc.)
  - The dragon is angry and goes away to make war (12:17)
  - He calls up allies for the conflict (13:1–18)
  - The remnant responds (14:1–13)
  - The Battle of Armageddon (16:13–16)

**Overall Summary and Conclusion**

In the previous article I noted that current scholarship divides the genre of apocalyptic into two sub-categories—historical and mystical apocalyptic—although the characteristics of these sub-categories are not clearly defined. I also noted a trend toward analyzing the genre of smaller passages rather than simply books or documents as a whole. Further work is needed to understand the characteristics of historical apocalyptic so that ambiguous texts like the Book of Revelation can be more helpfully classified.

In the first half of this article I examined Daniel 2 and 7 to discover characteristics that give those visions the flavor of historical apocalyptic. There appear to be four. These are: 1) textual markers that indicate historical sequence, 2) a consistent sequence of symbols and explanation, 3) a comprehensive sweep of events, and 4) parallels with clear examples of historical apocalyptic.

Revelation 12 clearly meets the first, third, and fourth criteria. There are abundant textual markers of historical sequence and clear parallels with apocalyptic portions of Daniel 7. The vision also has a cosmic scope, running roughly from John's day to the consummation<sup>107</sup> and saturated with references to Satan, heaven, Eden, and the Exodus.

The second criterion, a consistent sequence of symbols and explanation, is the one least exhibited in Revelation 12. In Daniel 2 the materials of the image are the common ground in the sequence of empires, while in

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<sup>107</sup> I use the term “roughly” because the beginning period includes events in John's past, such as the birth and ascension of Jesus, and the ending point itself (Rev 12:17) does not contain the consummation, but summarizes the eschatological war that leads to the consummation.

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Daniel 7 various beasts provide the common ground. In both visions, however, the images of earthly empire are in contrast to the images of God's kingdom: the stone and the mountain of Daniel 2 and the son of man and saints in Daniel 7. In Revelation 12 the key images are dragon, woman, male-child, and remnant, which together don't exhibit the consistency of Nebuchadnezzar's image or the sequence of beasts in Daniel 7.

Having said this, the images of woman, male-child, and remnant are not out of line with the positive side of the imagery in Daniel 7 (son of man, saints). And the dragon and its activity is the constant of all three chronological stages of the chapter.<sup>108</sup> So while the flavor of Revelation 12 is somewhat different than that of the two examples from Daniel, there is more consistency than might appear upon a surface reading.<sup>109</sup>

There are enough differences between Revelation 12 and the historical apocalyptic of Daniel to make the conclusion that they are different genres understandable. The chapter, does, however, track very closely with the criteria for historical apocalyptic developed from Daniel. I would suggest, therefore, that the genre of Revelation 12 needs to be, at the least, an open question in the scholarly community.

Historicism as a method for interpreting Revelation has been marginalized and, at times, even ridiculed in the scholarly process. Nevertheless, a careful examination of Revelation 12 in light of Daniel 2 and 7 suggests that a historicist reading of Revelation 12 is defensible from an exegetical perspective. As the work of Steve Moyise has demonstrated,<sup>110</sup> the Apocalypse is a multivalent work that transcends the either/or options that are so easily read into it. There is much about Revelation's meaning that has never been fully explored. The research set out in this article and its predecessor indicates that a Seventh-day Adventist approach to Revelation can contribute important insights to the evangelical study of this fascinating book.

**Jon Paulien** is Professor of New Testament Interpretation and Chair of the New Testament Department at the SDA Theological Seminary, Andrews University. He was awarded a Ph.D. in Religion with an emphasis in New Testament in 1987. The focus of

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<sup>108</sup> All four stages if you include the Stage Zero of events before the time of the vision.

<sup>109</sup> In any case, comparison with non-biblical examples of Jewish Apocalyptic may weaken the importance of this criterion.

<sup>110</sup> Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series, vol. 115, Stanley E. Porter, exec. ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995).

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his dissertation was the use of the Old Testament in the Book of Revelation, with particular focus on the seven trumpets. Before coming to the seminary in 1981, he was a pastor in the Greater New York Conference for nine years. He has written more than ten books and has produced more than 150 other publications over the past fifteen years.  
jonp@andrews.edu



## **The Well Women of Scripture Revisited**

Jo Ann Davidson

Andrews University Theological Seminary

This paper will underscore the importance of careful interpretation of biblical narratives through a brief discussion of the narratives of biblical “well women.”

For over a century biblical narratives were pounded with a major frontal attack from the formidable arsenal of the historical critical method. In the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, a new attitude regarding these narratives emerged as a result of more sophisticated attention paid to Hebrew narrative writing. Various voices urging this posture have included James Muhlenberg, Brevard Childs, Phylis Tribble, J. P. Fokkelman, Meir Steinberg, and Robert Alter. Their accumulated contribution forced recognition of the distinctive literary features found consistently within biblical narratives.

They suggested that the oft-noted narrative characteristics, such as word and phrase repetition, conversation inclusion and length, among other details, are significant for correct interpretation rather than merely evidence of numerous redactors.<sup>1</sup> As a result, long-standing interpretations of biblical narratives may need to be adjusted. For example: the understanding of biblical patriarchy.

Many modern feminist writers exhibit a powerful revulsion against OT patriarchy. This patriarchal system, they argue extensively, is the

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<sup>1</sup> As Robert Alter writes: “What role does literary art play in the shaping of biblical narrative? A crucial one, I shall argue, finely modulated from moment to moment, determining in most cases the minute choice of words, and reported details, the pace of narration, the small movements of dialogue, and a whole network of ramified interconnections in the text. . . . It is a little astonishing that at this late date literary analysis of the Bible of the sort I have tried to illustrate here in this preliminary fashion is only in its infancy.” Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1981), 312.

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major influence behind all subsequent repression of women.<sup>2</sup> Rightly drawing attention to the pain and inequities women are still forced to bear, they are correct in noting that these grievous matters need to be addressed and resolved. However, in their view, nothing will change as long as patriarchal religions such as Judaism and Christianity exist, for it is just such systems that force women into subservience. The language in feminist literature against patriarchy is often bitter and uncompromising. To bolster their position, they regularly link their discussion with descriptions of their own personal experiences of inequity and indignity.<sup>3</sup> Mary Kassian is blunt:

I am a woman. I have experienced the scorn and prideful superiority with which men have, at times, treated me. I have listened to insults against my capabilities, my intelligence, and my body. I have burned with anger as I have wiped the blood from a battered woman's face. I have wept with women who have been forcefully, brutally raped—violated to the very core of their being. I have been sickened at the perverted sexual abuse of little girls. I have boycotted stores which sell pornographic pictures of women. I have challenged men who sarcastically demean women with their "humor." And I have walked out of church services where pastors carelessly malign those whom God has called holy. I am often hurt and angered by sexist, yes, *sexist* demeaning attitudes and actions. And I grieve deeply at the distortion of the relationship that God created as harmonious and good. As a woman I feel the battle. I feel the sin. *Feminism identifies real problems which demand real answers.*<sup>4</sup>

Such offenses against women are horrifying. Feminist complaints are compelling. I am not seeking to make light of the abominable record of the mistreatment of women that continues to this day. However, in this

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<sup>2</sup> Such as Naomi Goldenburg, Cynthia Eller, Mary Daly, and Rosemary Radford Ruether, to name a few.

<sup>3</sup> For example, feminist Carol Christ: "During my years there, Yale's president was to make the infamous statement that Yale would never admit women as undergraduates because its mission was to educate 1000 male leaders each year. But I had not expected this experience. I had come to study truth, and truth was no respecter of gender, I thought." Carol Christ, *Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest* (Boston: Beacon, 1980), xi.

<sup>4</sup> Mary A. Kassian, *The Feminist Gospel: The Movement to Unite Feminism With the Church* (Wheaton: Good News, 1992), 242, emphasis added. She forcefully argues this point though she is not a Feminist herself.

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paper I question feminist insistence that OT patriarchy is the prime cause of this.

In the following study, I wish to draw attention first to textual indicators within Genesis that seem to depict matriarchy far more positively than Feminism yet acknowledges. Following this, I submit a consideration of a NT “well woman.”

**Hagar**

Hagar is not a matriarch in the Covenant line. However, she is one of the “well women” of Genesis. Poignant details are recorded in Gen 21 when she and her son are excluded from Abraham’s family. After surveying the Genesis narratives, Trevor Dennis decides that this Egyptian slave woman is “more highly honored in some respects than almost any other figure in the Bible.”<sup>5</sup> For example, the “Angel of the Lord” appears, for the first time in biblical history, to this rejected woman (Gen 21:17). Indeed, He even calls her by name! Sarah and Abraham have not granted her this dignity but typically call her “slave woman.”<sup>6</sup>

God does not abandon Hagar or her son Ishmael in their devastating situation. When they are on the point of death in the wilderness of Beersheba, God directs them to a “well of water” (Gen 21:19). He also promises to make Ishmael a great nation. Indeed, it is arresting how similar His promise to Hagar and her son is to the one they have been hearing in Abraham’s household regarding the son of promise: “Then the Angel of the LORD said to her, ‘I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude’” (Gen 16:10).<sup>7</sup>

This occasion is also the solitary time that a covenantal-type promise is announced to a woman. Dennis appraises this poignantly:

. . . how very surprising is the honor which is bestowed upon Hagar (and upon Ishmael too) in Genesis 16. For a start, annunciations are a rare commodity in the Bible . . . In only three cases, those of Hagar, Manoah’s wife, and Mary in Luke, is the promise of a son made to the one who will be the mother

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<sup>5</sup> Trevor Dennis, *Sarah Laughed* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 176.

<sup>6</sup> Sarah speaking to Abraham, “Go, please, to my slave-girl” (Gen 16:2b). Sarah does not use Hagar’s name but refers only to her position. Up to this point only the narrator has given Hagar’s name.

<sup>7</sup> God also reiterates this promise a second time to Abraham: “And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation” (Gen 17:20).

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of the child (although Sarah overhears in Genesis 18, the words are addressed to her husband). In only four cases does God make the announcement himself. . . . only two women in the entire Bible receive annunciations from God himself, Hagar and the unnamed wife of Manoah.<sup>8</sup>

It is also noteworthy that Hagar is the only woman in the OT, indeed the only person in all of Scripture, to give deity a name.<sup>9</sup> The name El-Roi is found only here in the OT, and only Hagar expressed it. As Dennis insists:

Let no one underestimate how extraordinary this naming is. . . . After wrestling with God all night at the river Jabbok, Jacob names the spot, Peniel, or “The face of God” (Gen 32:30). After coming so close to sacrificing Isaac . . . Abraham names the place, “The Lord Sees” (22:14). Abraham’s name is very close to the one Hagar gives God. Yet, like Jacob, Abraham names the *place* of encounter. . . . Elsewhere Abraham calls *upon* the name of God (12:8; 13:4; 21:33), but that is a very different exercise. Moreover, Hagar does not name her God as an aside, or declare his identity to herself after he has left the stage. She names him to his face: “*You* are the God who Sees Me.”<sup>10</sup>

This occasion is also one of the three times in Genesis when a woman dialogues with God in Genesis.

### **Rebekah**

Rebekah, a prominent matriarch<sup>11</sup> in Genesis, is notable. Jeansonne compels us to consider that

rather than minimizing Rebekah’s contribution to the Israelite people, the [Genesis] narratives that introduce and develop the portrait of the second of the matriarchs are striking in the way she is depicted. Although she is described as being a beautiful wife for Isaac, she is not appreciated solely for her appearance. Like Abraham, her independence and trust are demon-

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<sup>8</sup> Dennis, 68.

<sup>9</sup> “So she named the Lord who spoke to her, You are El-Roi” (16:13a).

<sup>10</sup> Dennis, 71.

<sup>11</sup> Keturah, Abraham’s wife after Sarah’s death, is mentioned only slightly, without any of the impressive detail that Sarah’s narratives exhibit.

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strated by her willingness to leave her family and travel to a strange land.<sup>12</sup>

Narrative details such as dialogue, narrative pace, genealogical notation, and other literary features suggest the prominence of Rebekah in Israel's history. She appears in the text as a young woman who takes great risk leaving her home and venturing into uncertainty. The Genesis narratives follow her journey as she then marries and becomes a mother. Both Rebekah's character and her journey are extensively recorded compared with her husband Isaac, the patriarch, of whom little is written. Rebekah's many positive qualities and strength of character are displayed in her life as a matriarch. Mishael Caspi and Rachel Havrelock suggest that "Rebekah's actions attest to a certain degree of female autonomy in the biblical world."<sup>13</sup>

Rebekah's genealogical designation alone is striking. In Gen 22:20–24, the genealogy lists the children born to Abraham's brother Nahor and his sister-in-law Milcah. Their eight sons are named, but the offspring of these eight sons (the next generation) are included in two cases. Only the children of Kemuel and Bethuel are given, and we are informed that "Bethuel begat Rebekah" (22:23). This is arresting, for she is the only named offspring of her father, yet later the narrative includes her brother Laban.<sup>14</sup>

If the narratives following the death and burial of Sarah are "patriarchal" in the feminist sense, they should deal with the life of the patriarch Isaac. Instead, the reader's attention is focused on Rebekah. Apart from the incident where Abraham is commanded to sacrifice his son, we know nothing of the boyhood or youth of Isaac. By contrast, Rebekah is depicted more fully. Teubal's cogent analysis is correct: "The power of her personality is already evident when as a young girl she takes command of her destiny and leaves for Canaan."<sup>15</sup>

When Abraham directs his servant to find a wife for Isaac, one remark in his instructions is also indicative of a woman's status during the

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<sup>12</sup> Sharon Pace Jeansonne, *The Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar's Wife* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 53.

<sup>13</sup> Mishael Maswari Caspi and Rachel S. Havrelock, *Women on the Biblical Road: Ruth, Naomi, and the Female Journey* (Lanham: UP of America, 1996), 38.

<sup>14</sup> Jeansonne argues that even the placement of this genealogy after the account of the testing of Abraham with his son Isaac (22:1–19) emphasizes the importance of Rebekah (54–55).

<sup>15</sup> Savina Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess* (Chicago: Swallow, 1984), xv.

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patriarchal era. Abraham declares that “if the woman is not willing to come with you, then you will be free from this oath of mine” (24:8). The patriarch is assuming that the woman will have the final say. And indeed, ultimately it is Rebekah herself who chooses to go. In fact, in the lengthy narrative of Genesis 24, her determination to travel with Abraham’s servant is spoken directly by her (24:58).<sup>16</sup> In contrast to what might be “expected” in an oppressive patriarchy, her father determines nothing.

Upon the servant’s arrival at the local well, he meets Rebekah and asks for a place in her “father’s house” (v. 23). Rebekah arranges for his hospitality herself with her “mother’s house” (v. 28).<sup>17</sup> Her father says hardly a word throughout this entire narrative.

Most impressive is the noticeable correspondence of key terms between Rebekah’s narratives and Abraham’s. Sternberg notes:

the references to haste that punctuate the narrative: “She made haste and lowered her pitcher . . . she made haste and lowered her pitcher into the trough . . . she ran again to the well” . . . bears more than the obvious complimentary implications for character and judgment. It echoes nothing less than Abraham’s model hospitality, “He ran to meet them . . . Abraham made haste into the tent . . . Abraham ran to the tent . . . he made haste to prepare it” (Gen 18:2–7) . . . the elevating analogy stamps her as worthy of the patriarch himself.<sup>18</sup>

According to the text, both Abraham and Rebekah leave behind “their country,” “their kindred,” and their “father’s house.” Both will be “blessed” and “become great.” James Williams highlights this verbal

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<sup>16</sup> “But her brother and her mother said, ‘Let the young woman stay with us a few days, at least ten, after that she may go.’ And he said to them, ‘Do not hinder me, since the LORD has prospered my way; send me away so that I may go to my master.’ So they said, ‘We will call the young woman and ask her personally.’ Then they called Rebekah and said to her, ‘Will you go with this man?’ And she said, ‘I will go’” (Gen 24:55–58). In narrative analysis, direct speech implies the prominence of the person.

<sup>17</sup> [Eleazar speaking] “Whose daughter are you? Tell me, please, is there room in your *father’s house* for us to lodge?” . . . So the young woman ran and told those of her *mother’s house* these things” (Gen 24:23, 28, emphasis added). Her father Bethuel is still alive, for he speaks later (in v. 50).

<sup>18</sup> Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987), 138.

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correspondence by suggesting that “With this blessing the narrator quietly moves Rebecca into the cycle of God’s promises to the patriarchs.”<sup>19</sup>

After Rebecca marries Isaac and becomes pregnant, she apparently experiences great difficulty. In agony she inquires (*darash*) of the LORD. She does this herself (Gen 25:22). The phrase “to inquire” is significant in the OT. Prominent prophets like Moses and Elisha and leading kings of Israel inquire of the Lord. So does Rebekah, and she receives a personal oracle from Yahweh that her older son is destined to serve the younger.<sup>20</sup> Fokkelman finds a concentric “chiastic” structure in this scene which serves to underscore the importance of Rebekah’s divine oracle:

- A Isaac was forty years old when married Rebekah (20)
- B Rebekah was barren; prayer for children answered (20–21)
- C his wife Rebekah conceived (21)  
the children struggled together within her (22)
- D Rebekah asks for—an ORACLE (22)
- D’ Yahweh grants her—an ORACLE (23)
- C’ her days to be delivered were fulfilled (24)  
and behold, there were twins in her womb (24)
- B’ birth and appearance of Jacob and Esau (25, 26a)
- A’ Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them (26b)<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> James G. Williams, *Women Recounted: Narrative Thinking and the God of Israel*, Bible and Literature Series, vol. 6 (Sheffield: Almond, 1982), 44. Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn concur: “It is she [Rebecca], not Isaac, who follows in Abraham’s footsteps, leaving the familiar for the unknown. It is she, not Isaac, who receives the blessing given to Abraham (22:17). ‘May your offspring possess the gates of their enemies!’ (24:60).” *Gender, Power, & Promise: the Subject of the Bible’s First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 73.

Mary Donovan Turner also: “It is Rebekah who, like Abraham before and Jacob after, leaves her home. She travels to the foreign land guided by the blessing for descendants who will “possess the gate of those who hate them.” The reader of Genesis first encounters this promise for possession (*yah-rash*) in 15:3 where Yahweh seals a covenant with Abraham promising him descendants as numerous as the stars and possession of a land in which they would dwell. . . . It is important to note that although Abraham is guaranteed a son to carry God’s promise to his descendants, it is *not* Isaac who next receives the blessing for *possession* of the enemy. It is Rebekah who receives the blessing similar to Abraham as she leaves her family for the foreign land (24:60). The blessing for possession is given one other time, and that is to Jacob as he leaves for Paddan-aram (28:4). Abraham, Rebekah, and Jacob are the ancestors of this promise.” “Rebekah: Ancestor of Faith,” *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 20/2 (April, 1985): 43–44.

<sup>20</sup> Noted by Turner, 44–45.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 94. Fokkelman continues: “. . . the oracle is central. . . . ABC . . . C’B’A’, corroborate once more that we are at the beginning of a story about the new generation

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Highly significant also is the formula used to announce Rebekah's delivery: "And her days were fulfilled that she should give birth" (Gen 25:24). Mary Donovan Turner notes that this formula is used of only three biblical women: Elizabeth and Mary in the NT and Rebekah in the OT.<sup>22</sup>

Later, when Esau her son marries two Hittite women, the text informs us that this is a "grief of mind to Isaac *and Rebekah*." (Gen. 26:35, emphasis added). This inclusion of Rebekah's distress regarding Esau's marriage to pagan women reveals that Rebekah is just as concerned about the covenant line as is Isaac.<sup>23</sup>

It bears repeating that the Genesis narrator exhibits far more interest in Rebekah than in her husband Isaac, the patriarch. Jeansonne rightly argues:

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and not of a Story of Isaac. They show that it is not Isaac's trial of waiting and the answering of his prayer which constitute the plot, but that the ins and outs of the children's birth are the main point. But the really explosive material, which can lend dramatic force to a story of approximately ten chapters, lies in the kernel which ABC and C'B'A' hold in their grip: God's word of v. 23. What food for conflicts is gathered there. . . . the oracle has the power to extend the conflict of the opening passage to the conflict of all of Gen 25–35. Need we wonder that this word of God is poetry?"

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 48. J. P. Fokkelman also observes additional implications of Rebekah's giving birth as he catches subtle nuances in the Hebrew: "even the constructive infinitive in 26b does not tell us that 'Isaac has begot', but only that Rebekah has given birth. this repetition of 24a (*laledet* . . . *beledet*) makes it clear to us eventually that this pair of children is not so much begot by Isaac as primarily an affair between Rebekah and Yahweh, an affair of the barren woman who receives children with God's help only. The father has been driven to the edge and, after having performed in 21a one action (which expresses his helplessness!), he does not appear again until v. 26b, again without action. The rounding-off of this story—truly a story of birth!" *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1975), 92–93.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 47. John Murray comments similarly: "Although Rebekah had probably another motive which she had concealed from Isaac when she said to him, 'I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these, of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?' (Genesis 26:35). There is scarcely room for question that, when Rebekah spoke so disparagingly to Isaac of the daughters of Heth, she had particularly in mind Esau's wives and, though the urgency of her protestation to Isaac was prompted by the need of having Jacob away from the rage of Esau, there was also the deepest concern that Jacob, as the one in whom the covenant promise was to be fulfilled, should not be drawn into the entanglements of Hittite marital alignment." *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 41.



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characterization of Rebekah yields a deeper understanding of her significance. . . . All of these actions are given without a polemical context, and the narrator does nothing to indicate that these were unusual activities for a woman to take. . . . The presentation of Rebekah shows that women in Israel were viewed as persons who could make crucial decisions about their futures, whose prayers were acknowledged . . .”<sup>24</sup>

**Rachel**

During the next generation of patriarchy, Jacob tells his wives Leah and Rachel (whom he met at a well) of God’s command to “return to the land of your fathers” (Gen 31). In the process, he recounts the poor treatment he has received at the hands of their father to persuade them of the reasonableness of leaving.

Then Rachel and Leah answered him, saying, “Have we still a share in the inheritance of our father’s house? Surely, he regards us as outsiders, now that he has sold us and has used up our purchase price. Truly, all the wealth that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children. Now then, do just as God has told you.” (31:3–6, 14–16)

They add to Jacob’s description the hurts they themselves suffered from their father and urge Jacob to hearken to the Lord’s word. They are not afraid to oppose their father. Nor is Jacob a male figure who issues commands to his wives, as might be expected from feminist depictions of patriarchy.

We again find a repeated Genesis “formula” regarding the Covenant: the sundering of human family ties for a divine purpose. Abraham is called to abandon his home for the place God will show him. Rebecca too abandons family and land, traveling from Haran to far-off Canaan. The same breaking of family ties is assented to by Rachel and Leah. Catherine Chaliel reminds us that

The capacity to leave is a measure of the clear awareness of the exigencies of their chosen status. . . . In the story of Genesis, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah know, with neither melancholy nor capriciousness, how to give up their moorings in order to enter further into the covenant, how to keep themselves available to the summonings of a God who chose them . . . This certainly argues for their extreme consciousness of the demands pertaining to the Promise, but also, and jointly,

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<sup>24</sup> Jeansonne, 69.

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for the necessity of a common receptiveness on the part of man and woman to the urgent solicitations of the holy Word.<sup>25</sup>

**Old Testament Summary**

The Genesis “well women” are not “wall flowers”! It would be unfair to the narrative portraits of these women to argue that women bow in submission to all men. Rather, though respectful of their husbands, these women are intelligent and willful. Nunnally-Cox rightly concludes: “Far from conforming to a traditional servitude, these women grace the pages of Genesis with their laughter, their sorrows, *their strength, and their power.*”<sup>26</sup>

Feminists have been right to force attention on the abuse of women inside and outside the Church. But they have been wrong in their assumption that OT patriarchy is a prime cause of this long-standing oppression of women. The patriarchal system is a pivotal issue in their understanding of female repression. However, OT matriarchy exhibited in Genesis suggests a different perspective than that implied by feminist literature.

Feminists are right in demanding redress of the long-accumulating record of the subjugation of women. But they need to rethink the cause of this repression. The Genesis matriarchs are not suppressed or oppressed women. Biblical patriarchy must be defined by the biblical narratives.

Carol Meyers<sup>27</sup> proposes that many of the details recorded in the OT seem to indicate a rather equitable situation between male and female up to the time of the Israelite monarchy. The result of establishing the

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<sup>25</sup> Catherine Chalié, *Les Matriarches* (Paris: Cerf, 1986), 202–3.

<sup>26</sup> Janice Nunnally-Cox, *Fore-Mothers: Women of the Bible* (New York: Seabury, 1981), 20 (emphasis added).

<sup>27</sup> Carol Meyers argues further: “[T]he Hebrew Bible . . . contains some statements that appear to value men more highly than women or to give men certain legal privileges that are not extended to women. From our contemporary perspective, these texts give incomplete evidence of biblical patriarchy. They do not tell us how Israelite women felt about differential treatment. In the context of the specific social and economic structures that characterized ancient Israel, the existence of gender asymmetry, with men accorded a set of advantages apparently unavailable to most women, must not automatically be perceived as oppressive. . . . and the lack of evidence that the Eves of ancient Israel felt oppressed, degraded, or unfairly treated in the face of cultural asymmetry. Gender differences that appear hierarchical may not have functioned or been perceived as hierarchical within Israelite society.” *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford UP, 1988), 34.

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throne in Israel, she argues, brought great changes to the Israelite patriarchal society, with the former position of the female diminishing from that time on:

Feminists who condemn or bemoan the apparent patriarchy of ancient or other societies may be deflecting their energies from what should be the real focus of their concern: the transformation of functional gender balance to situations of real imbalance.<sup>28</sup>

Meyer's suggestion that the suppression of women in Scripture begins with the emergence of the Israelite Monarchy is borne out textually in the narratives. God warns Samuel of the results to Israel should they insist on having a king (1 Sam 8). When the monarchy is instated, one notices a sudden shift in textual emphasis from women and men in basic

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<sup>28</sup> Meyers, 45. Others argue similarly:

"The formation of the monarchy was perhaps the most significant change in the millennium-long history of ancient Israel's national existence. Even before socioeconomic analysis became a prominent concern of the study of ancient Israel, scholars recognized the dramatic changes brought about by state formation: 'The monarchy, owing to its nature and its effects, was the most radical revolution in ancient Israel. It aimed to give Israel an international status, . . . to industrialize the country, and to develop the city at the expense of the village.' [[fn: E. Neufeld, "Emergence of a Royal-Urban Society in Ancient Israel." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 31 (1960): 37.]] More recently the establishment of the monarchy as a powerful force effecting widespread changes and as being a watershed event in the creation of hierarchies in ancient Israel has been similarly evaluated: 'hierarchical structure, such as the monarchic states requires, means a complete break with the social, political, and economic principles on which tribal society is based.' [fn: A. D. H. Mayes, "Judges." Sheffield, England: *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Press* (1985), p. 90; cf. N. K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985, pp. 323–325.]"

"The rise of the state meant the gradual end of a society in which the household was the dominant social unit. The locus of power moved from the family household, with its gender parity, to a public world of male control. The establishment of a nation-state meant the growing prominence of the military and of state and religious bureaucracies controlling economic development. These institutions are typically public and male controlled; whenever they become an important part of a society's organization, female prestige and power recede.

"State formation meant a radical disruption of the social fabric of the clan and tribal levels of social organization. It is no accident that Solomon established a viable tax base and a public support for the imperial power of Jerusalem that involved a territorial redistricting of the kingdom. . . . The rise of male-controlled military, civil, and religious bureaucracies, and the concomitant breakup of kinship-based social organizations must have taken a toll on gender relations." *Ibid.*, 189–190.

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equivalence to kings, court intrigue, war, with women almost disappearing. This then becomes characteristic of the subsequent OT historical documents. The narrator thus subtly substantiates the fulfillment of God's prediction with this dramatic textual transition. The monarchy signals the end of vigorous matriarchy.

**New Testament Well Woman, John 4**

Though this particular narrative is found in the NT and was written in Greek, the writer was a Jew. Thus it would not seem unreasonable to suggest that the John 4 narrative might exhibit the same OT narrative properties.<sup>29</sup>

On-going discussion of John 4 in the literature points to a need for re-evaluating the numerous narrative details of this passage as they cast light on the status of women.<sup>30</sup> All the verbal and literary subtleties that are part of this narrative need to be accorded their proper attention to accurately inform our interpretation.

As Alter suggests regarding the sequencing of Hebrew narratives, the theology of John's Gospel is expressed not only by choice of vocabulary, but also by the author's careful linking and balancing of one narrative scene with another. This becomes obvious with the conversation of Jesus and Nicodemus, a learned Israelite rabbi (John 3), immediately preceding Christ's conversation with a Samaritan divorcee (John 4). The differences between Nicodemus and the well woman in grasping the words of Christ are thus highlighted.

The number of verses in the well scene of John 4 alert the reader to its importance. Even more striking is the length of the first conversation between the Samaritan woman and Jesus. Dialogue is widely acknowledged as one of the notable features of the Fourth Gospel, as it is in all biblical narratives where it appears. The initial conversation in John 4 is one of the longest found in all four Gospels,<sup>31</sup> taking up more than half of

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<sup>29</sup> Indeed, this is what Joseph Cahill attests: ". . . the Samaritan interlude is not only a masterpiece of narrative design but likewise a story reflecting literary characteristics manifested in OT narratives of great antiquity. . . . literary analysis of NT narrative may enlarge the theological significance and secondly indicate dimensions of literary continuity between Old and New Testament narrative." P. Joseph Cahill, "Narrative Art in John IV," *Religious Studies Bulletin*, 2/2 (April 1982): 41.

<sup>30</sup> Though there is still discussion regarding the authorship of the Fourth Gospel, for the purposes of this paper, we will build on the received text. Our intention is not to explore text-critical issues.

<sup>31</sup> The conversation with Nicodemus ends ambiguously in the narrator's comments.

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this particular narrative. On this basis alone John 4 is a very significant passage.<sup>32</sup> Graf rightly concludes that in chapter four [of the Fourth Gospel] “we have . . . one of the most momentous utterances of our Lord.”<sup>33</sup>

Within the first dialogue, the logic of Jesus’ seemingly abrupt turn from the subject of water to His request, “Go, call your husband, and come here” (v. 16), attracts much attention. Some commentators imply that this disrupts the flow of the conversation. However, a favorite Johannine literary transition device in a dialogue regularly alerts the reader of Jesus’ supernatural knowledge (1:42, 48; 2:4–3:2). Jesus’ request for her to bring her husband functions as preparation for His revealing to the woman that He knows all things. Her reaction in v. 19 shows that it has that effect: “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.”

But in reality there is no real digression in the conversation. Jesus has heard the woman’s desire to thirst no more. Thus, He is gently leading her to recognize her need of a Savior.

The ensuing remarks of Christ (verses 21–24), His longest speech in the first dialogue, are widely recognized as foundational statements for mission theology, doctrine of the church, and the theology of worship. Cahill even suggests a chiasmic structure of this narrative with the apex highlighting true worship:

- A Meeting of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at the well: 5–9
- B Dialogue on living water: 10–15
- C Dialogue on true worship: 16–26
- B’ Dialogue on true food: 27–38
- A’ Meeting of Samaritans and Jesus: 39–42.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> “From all I have said about the primacy of dialogue, several general rules suggest themselves for the alert reading of biblical narrative. In any given narrative event, and especially, at the beginning of any new story, the point at which dialogue first emerges will be worthy of special attention, and in most instances, the initial words spoken by a personage will be revelatory, perhaps more in manner than in matter, constituting an important moment in the exposition of character. . . . A quick review of the main functions served by narration in the bible will give us a better sense of the special rhythm with which the Hebrew writers tell their tales: beginning with narration, they move into dialogue, drawing back momentarily or at length to narrate again, but always centering on the sharply salient verbal intercourse of the characters, who act upon one another, discover themselves, affirm or expose their relation to God, through the force of language.” Robert Alter, 74–75.

<sup>33</sup> Dom Ernest Graf, O.S.B., “Theology at Jacob’s Well: Chapters from the Gospel of St. John,” in *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, 59 (Sept 1959), 1100.

<sup>34</sup> Cahill, 42.

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Christ's opening comment of this dialogue, "Woman, I assure you," further underscores this declaration of Jesus. Jesus has already shown that He is free from Jewish prejudice against the Samaritans. Now He seeks to instruct this Samaritan woman regarding the Jews. He declares that the great truths of redemption have been committed to them, and that from them the Messiah is to come. The historical problem of Jewish versus Samaritan worship is thus transformed into a declaration of the true encounter with God, ultimately climaxing in Christ's dramatic "I AM." (v. 26). The well woman is granted a direct, definitive revelation of the Messiah rarely given to anyone.

Another matter needs to be addressed: the characterization of the Samaritan woman. Because the first dialogue in John 4 contains a single reference to her unlawful marital status (vv. 16–18), most exegetes have restricted their understanding of this woman to this one single clue. As a result, she has been evaluated in a less than positive light. Some examples:

1. The time reference of the "sixth hour" when Jesus is said to have arrived at the well (John 4:6) is interpreted to mean that the woman comes to the well in the middle of the day to avoid meeting anyone in her great embarrassment. As William Barclay writes, "May it be that she was so much of a moral outcast that the women even drove her away from the village well and she had to come here to draw water?"<sup>35</sup>

Also Kenneth Gangel: "About noon the woman came to the well, obviously a social outcast since that hot hour would have been an unlikely time to lug a heavy water jar back into the city."<sup>36</sup>

However, well use was not restricted to the evening hours, except by shepherds. Other noontime encounters at local wells are not unheard of in Scripture. Jacob meets with Rachel at the well near Haran during midday (Gen 29:7). It is also important to remember that no one at that time had running water in the home! Furthermore, the comment of time in the narrative is grammatically connected with Christ's journey and His weariness.

2. Major commentators, including Brown, in the usual negative characterization of this woman, wonder, when she at first misinterprets Christ's reference to "living water," if "a Samaritan woman would have

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<sup>35</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 148.

<sup>36</sup> Kenneth O. Gangel, *Holman New Testament Commentary: John*, ed. Max Anders (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 74.

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been expected to understand even the most basic ideas of the discourse.”<sup>37</sup>

Barclay exhibits the same attitude: “the woman chose to understand this with an almost crude literalism. She was blind because she would not see.”<sup>38</sup>

Nicodemus, in just the previous chapter, also initially misinterprets Christ’s comments literally. However, this is characterized as merely a misunderstanding.

3. Other damaging indications regarding the well woman include her being referred to as a “five-time loser” and a “tramp.”<sup>39</sup> D. A. Carson describes her as “unschooled, without influence, despised, capable only of folk religion.”<sup>40</sup>

Gangel is also disparaging:

Here was a woman who lived outside the boundaries of any religious or cultural standards of her day. A string of five husbands followed by a lover is certainly not unknown in the twentieth-first century, but it is hardly common even in our permissive society with its twisted tolerance for evil. In first-century Samaria, such a domestic arrangement was unthinkable.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly Bryant and Krause:

In order to receive Jesus’ living water she must deal with the flagrant misuse of her sexuality. Jesus asked her to fetch her husband.<sup>42</sup>

Also G. H. C. MacGregor:

. . . Jesus finding her not only spiritually obtuse but even inclined to be flippant, tries to sober her by confronting her with the shady side of her own life and thereby to reach a part of her nature wherein he can awaken some response. He there-

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<sup>37</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John i-xii: Introduction, Translation and Notes* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 176.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>39</sup> Paul D. Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: John Knox, 1985), 161.

<sup>40</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: IVP, 1991), 216.

<sup>41</sup> Gangel, 76.

<sup>42</sup> Beauford H. Bryant and Mark S. Krause, *The College Press NIV Commentary: John*, ed. Jack Cottrell and Tony Ash (Joplin: College Press, 1998), 120.

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fore bids her “Go and call your husband, then come back here.”<sup>43</sup>

Likewise Roger Fredrikson:

And then He opens up her whole confused situation. She has lived with a passing parade of men, five of them technically husbands, and the latest a live-in affair. None of them are lasting, meaningful relationships.<sup>44</sup>

Whatever adjectives are attached to this woman regarding her reputation and her marriages, the consistent implication is that she is a low-class person, and any fault in the marriage failures are hers. Even the Samaritan woman’s witness concerning the Messiah to the “men” of Samaria is interpreted negatively. For example:

“Come here, look at a man who has told me everything I ever did,”—merely the exaggeration characteristic of a gossip, though some commentators have read into the words a hint that her many marriages were due not to the husbands’ deaths, but to her own contrivance.<sup>45</sup>

In the literature this well woman is consistently portrayed as being a disreputable character incapable of grasping intelligent theological discourse. However, the details within the narrative do not yield that picture. Even her questions of Christ suggest differently. Her profound grasp of the theological thinking of her day is reflected in her intelligent questions about worship. Her comments, if truly listened to, suggest that she is *not* living “outside the boundaries of any religious or cultural standards of her day.”<sup>46</sup>

The negative castigations of the Samaritan woman have also not been informed by this woman’s political savvy revealed in the narrative. She is not culturally naive. For example, the conversation between the woman and Christ opens with evidence that she is well aware of the political situation between the Samaritans and the Jews (v. 9) and seems to

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<sup>43</sup> G. H. C. Macgregor, *The Moffatt New Testament Commentary: The Gospel of John* [based on the NT translation by James Moffatt] (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1953), 101.

<sup>44</sup> Roger L. Fredrikson, *The Communicator’s Commentary: John*, ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie, (Waco: Word, 1985), 99.

<sup>45</sup> Macgregor, 108.

<sup>46</sup> As Gangel indicates; 76.



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teasingly wonder about the “ignorance” of these matters on the part of the Jewish gentleman at the well when she responds to Jesus’ request for a drink of water: “Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, ‘how is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman? For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans’” (v. 9).<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, as the conversation progresses, contrary to the evaluation of her in the commentaries, the Samaritan woman’s understanding of the Stranger deepens. She begins to call Him “sir” and then wonders if He might be a prophet. Her questions and comments consistently reveal her grasp of both Samaritan and Jewish theology. The conversation in the narrative clearly reveals that she is not “unschooled” in contemporary political or theological matters.

Contra Carson, as far as her having “no influence” after conviction of Christ as Messiah penetrates her heart, she overlooks the reason she came to the well, which strikingly fulfills Christ’s earlier promise regarding “thirst”! She leaves her waterpot and hurries to the town. She goes to where she knows the people, including men, are gathered, resting in the heat of noontide. And at her invitation they come to see for themselves the one of whom she testifies.<sup>48</sup>

Textual evidence does not support the idea of her having “no influence.” Nor does it allow her to be the town harlot, for it is hardly possible that if she is truly a low-class prostitute, the men of Samaria would openly follow her to meet an individual described as being able to reveal everything a person has ever done, which is the well woman’s testimony to them about Christ. Janet Day is correct:

She has no trouble getting the people to hear her, to consider her question seriously, and to respond by accompanying her back to the well to investigate and assess Jesus for themselves (4:29–30, 39). Had she been a loose woman with a reputation of sinfulness, I question whether she would have gotten the same response. . . . The people respond readily and with no resistance.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ezra 4:3–6, 11f; Matt 10:5; John 8:48; Acts 10:28.

<sup>48</sup> “Physical water is secondary at this moment. All that matters is the possibility, the very real possibility, that God has performed one of his surprising and amazing acts in history. He has sent the long-awaited prophet like Moses who will revive and renew the people.” Janeth Norfleete Day, *The Woman at the Well: Interpretaton of John 4:1–42 in Retrospect and Prospect* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 173.

<sup>49</sup> Day, 174.

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What the narrative details seem to portray is an intelligent city woman with a keen mind who has pondered the theological and political realities of her day and culture. The progression in the dialogue reveals Jesus' desire to bring this woman to faith, knowing that her mind and heart can grasp theological verities. With this one solitary divorcee, Jesus discusses the fundamental issues of Christian theology and worship, making His most profound theological statement on true worship to this supposedly "ignorant" woman, even though He Himself has warned about "casting pearls before swine" (Matt 7:6).

Like modern commentators, His own disciples seem not to see any potential in this well woman, for when they return, they wonder why Jesus is speaking to her (v. 27). Nor have they seen Samaria as a potential area for mission, but solely as a place to purchase food. The woman, however, is of a different mind and goes immediately to invite the people of her town to come meet Jesus. And Jesus waxes eloquent to the disciples about the "ready harvest" of Samaria: "Say not 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest.' Behold, I say to you, 'Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest'" (v. 35).

The woman's witness to the men of Samaria is an occasion for Jesus to become excited about the harvest of His ministry. And in a place as unlikely as Samaria, this harvest is ready. The well woman

proved herself a more effective missionary than Christ's own disciples. The disciples saw nothing in Samaria to indicate that it was an encouraging field. Their thoughts were focused upon a great work to be done for the Jewish people. They did not see that right around them was a harvest ready to be gathered. But through the Samaritan woman whom they despised, a whole city of men and women were brought to hear the Savior.<sup>50</sup>

Some scholars suggest that the well woman is only half-hearted in her acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah. The clues in the narrative suggest instead that she is rather immediate in accepting His divine claim when she grasps who He is. The learned Nicodemus, by contrast, has been unable to make such connections from similar concepts spoken by Jesus in the previous chapter. Unlike Nicodemus, who quietly disappears from the scene as Jesus' partner in conversation, the Samaritan woman invites

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<sup>50</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 194–195.

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the men and women of Samaria to meet Jesus. In contrast to Christ's disciples, who go into the city only to buy bread, she hurries there to share the "Bread of Life."

The Pharisees of Israel have despised Jesus, demanding a sign that He is the Son of God. But the Samaritans demand nothing, and Jesus performs no miracles among them, except to reveal to the well woman that He knows her marital status. And many in Samaria receive Him. In their new joy they say to the woman, "Now we believe, not because of your saying; for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world," giving demonstrable confirmation of the influence of this woman's testimony.<sup>51</sup>

**Conclusion**

Feminists deserve to be chided for their castigation that biblical patriarchy subjugates women. OT narratives paint a different picture than they allow. The matriarchs are not suppressed women. Rather, they are seen as willful and directive within a basic position of gender equality with the patriarchs. The consistent picture in Genesis finds both men and women cooking and doing other household chores. Both genders also take care of sheep. It isn't until the later institution of the monarchy that this is drastically affected. Feminists are free to deplore patriarchy, but they cannot use the Genesis matriarchs as evidence to support that position.

In the NT, the gentle chiding is for the commentators on the Gospel of John who seem to miss numerous important narrative details in John 4 and as a result underestimate this well woman. Rather than a low-class prostitute, she is pictured as a well-informed city woman to whom people listen when she talks. A whole town full of people believe her testimony regarding the Jewish gentleman at the well and go with her to find Him.

Yes, she has been divorced five times, but the text never informs the reader who has been at fault in those divorces, or if, perhaps, some of the marriages might have ended with the death of a husband. Furthermore, it is generally acknowledged that divorce in that era seems to be the sole prerogative of the male.<sup>52</sup> Within the John 4 narrative, it is important to

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<sup>51</sup> *Desire of Ages*, 192. Moreover, the Samaritan acknowledgment of the Messiah is proclaimed in the distinctive designation, "Savior of the *world*."

<sup>52</sup> "In OT law, the initiative in instituting divorce proceedings lay entirely with the husband (Dt. 24:1-4). There is no hint of a divorce being initiated by a wife. This is in keeping with the double standard which characterized Israel as well as most of its contemporaries in the Mediterranean region." C. R. Taber, "Divorce," in *The Interpreter's*

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notice that Jesus is not criticizing the well woman's previous marriages, but rather noting her present situation of living with a man without being married. In fact, He twice commends her honesty in describing her present marital status.

It needs to be repeated that Christ unfolds to her the most profound and sublime theology. Christ, throughout all four Gospels, is portrayed as One who knows all things and all people. In the John 4 narrative, He surely knows not only that the well woman's mind is capable of understanding theological discourse, but even more importantly, that her heart is receptive. In fact, careful narrative work throughout the Fourth Gospel reveals that it is women who are the privileged recipients of Jesus' most important self-revelations (Mary, Martha, and the Samaritan woman).

The well woman of John 4 deserves our respect and a fresh evaluation of her character. Sensitive narrative analysis can help point us in the right direction. Interpretation of biblical narratives used to shape theology behooves careful attention to every detail.

**Jo Ann Davidson** teaches Systematic Theology at the S.D.A. Theological Seminary, Andrews University, and is a Past-President of the Adventist Theological Society. She holds a Ph.D. in Theological Studies from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

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*Dictionary of the Bible Supplementary Volume*, ed. Keith Crim (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 244.

## **Ellen G. White and Creationism: How to Deal with Her Statements on Creation and Evolution: Implications and Prospects**

Frank M. Hasel  
Seminar Schloss Bogenhofen

### **1. Introduction**

The topic of how to interpret Ellen G. White's statements on creation and evolution is important for two reasons. First, any reading of Ellen White quickly confirms the fact that she affirms the biblical teaching of creation as it is established in the Old and New Testament on a literal, historical reading of the text. Second, Jesus Christ himself affirmed the historicity and normativity of the biblical creation account. Therefore, the biblical teaching of creation is a crucial belief that has far reaching consequences for the Seventh-day Adventist (hereinafter SDA) church because we are grounded on the written word of God and follow Jesus, the incarnate word of God. It seems that the issue of creation and evolution has more far reaching implications for the SDA church than the Desmond Ford crisis had in the 1980s. Indeed, what is at stake is much more than simply a conflict that can easily be tucked away as a clash between faith and science that otherwise has relatively little impact on the rest of what we believe. The doctrine of creation is so prominent in the Bible and in the writings of Ellen White and is so intimately connected with other fundamental beliefs that a change in this point inevitably will affect other foundational teachings of the Bible that we as SDAs uphold.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere I have pointed out twelve interconnections between the biblical doctrine of creation and other biblical teachings that illustrate the importance of this topic: Creation and the Nature of Man; Creation and Sin; Creation and the Origin and Nature of

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creation recently has been termed “the Sine Qua Non of Adventism.”<sup>2</sup> It is “an article of faith on which the Seventh-day Adventist Church stands or falls.”<sup>3</sup> Second, Ellen G. White and her statements on creation and related issues inevitably raise some important questions. From its inception, the SDA church has maintained that Ellen White was inspired in the same manner and to the same degree as biblical prophets, even though SDAs believe that her writings are not “another Bible.” A recent book on the fundamental beliefs of the SDA church, published by the Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, unambiguously states: “The writings of Ellen White are not a substitute for Scripture. They cannot be placed on the same level. The Holy Scriptures stand alone—the unique standard by which her and all other writings must be judged and to which they must be subject.”<sup>4</sup> This is also expressed in the official Fundamental Belief 18, entitled “The Gift of Prophecy,” which tells us that “they [the writings of Ellen G. White] also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.”<sup>5</sup> At the same time, Fundamental Belief 18 affirms that “her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, her statements on creation and the origin of life raise

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Death; Creation and Theodicy; Creation and Salvation; Creation and the Person and Work of Christ; Creation and Love; Creation and the Nature of God; Creation and the Meaning of History; Creation and Biblical Ethics; Creation and the Sabbath; Creation and Eschatology. (Cf. Frank M. Hasel, “Living with Confidence Despite Some Open Questions: Upholding the Biblical Truth of Creation Amidst Theological Pluralism,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 14/1 (Spring 2003): 231. Jiri Moskala has stated that “each of our 27 fundamental beliefs is somehow tied to creation” (Jiri Moskala, “The President’s Page: Creation—The Sine Qua Non of Adventism,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 15/2 (2004): 1. It has been pointed out in a noteworthy recent dissertation on this topic that too little attention is being given to the theological consequences of creation and alternative models of (evolutionary) origins of this world and of life on earth (cf. Reinhard Junker, *Leben durch Sterben? Schöpfung, Heilsgeschichte und Evolution*. Studium Integrale (Neuhausen/Stuttgart: Hänssler, 1994), 90–91.

<sup>2</sup> Moskala, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines* (Silver Spring: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Ministerial Association, 2005), 258.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>6</sup> Idem., quoting from Fundamental Belief 18, “The Gift of Prophecy.” Herbert Douglas has recently stated that the difference between the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White is one of function and scope, not of authority (cf. Herbert E. Douglass, *Mes-*

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crucial questions on important topics such as the nature and scope of inspiration, the relationship between the writings of Ellen G. White and the Bible, proper hermeneutics, and the authority of inspired writings over against science.

While I do not claim to have the answer to all questions, which sometimes are perplexing, I humbly submit some thoughts for further reflection. These issues and their implications, I believe, are crucial not only for our understanding of Ellen G. White and her statements on creation and evolution, but also for our understanding of the biblical position on creation and related issues.

### **2. Ellen G. White Affirms Creation**

There is no need to spend much time in recounting that Ellen G. White does believe in creation and has affirmed it time and again. Yet it is helpful to briefly remind ourselves of a few aspects that are affirmed by Ellen G. White with regards to creation.

**2.1. Ellen G. White Affirms a Supernatural Creation.** According to Ellen G. White, creation is not the result of natural causes (PP 113; 3SG 94–95).<sup>7</sup> Rather, in creation the agency of a personal God is manifest (8T 264). “The earth came forth from the hand of its Maker” (PP 44). For Ellen White all things are created by God (COL 362; cf. Col. 1:16; John 1:3; Heb. 1:2). To her the power to create is “the prerogative of God alone” (PP 264). Creation belongs to God (FW 22), and human beings belong to God by creation (CS 72). Hence, the creation of man did not take place through impersonal factors in nature, but through “the agency of a personal God” (MH 415). Thus, humanity was the crowning act in God’s creation (LHU 48).

**2.2. Ellen G. White Affirms a Creation in Six Literal, Historically Consecutive 24 Hour Days.** Ellen G. White not only affirms a supernatural creation through a personal God, but she also describes creation as having taken place in six literal, historical, consecutive, contiguous, 24-hour days. The days of creation are not “vast, indefinite periods, covering thousands or even millions of years” (Ed 128; cf. PP 112). To her, “each successive day of creation . . . consisted of the evening and morning, like all other days that have followed” (PP 112). In other

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*senger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G. White* [Nampa: Pacific Press, 1998], 416).

<sup>7</sup> The abbreviations for the writings of Ellen G. White are those used in the Ellen G. White CD-ROM.

words, the days of creation are real 24-hour days, as we know them today (cf. Exod 20:8–11). She was shown “that the first week, in which God performed the work of creation in six days and rested on the seventh day, was just like every other week” (3SG 90). Thus, the seventh 24-hour day of creation week forms the basis of the institution of the Sabbath day at the beginning of the world (PP 47). The Sabbath was instituted at creation (7BC 979) at the close of creation week (EW 217; PP 111). Therefore the Sabbath is as old as the world itself (GC 455; PP 336) and is a memorial of creation (3SM 318) and a commemoration of creation for all mankind (OHC 343).<sup>8</sup> Ellen G. White acknowledges: “Just how God accomplished the work of creation in six literal days he has never revealed to mortals. His creative works are just as incomprehensible as his existence” (3SG 93).

**2.3. Ellen G. White Affirms a Recent Creation.** In contrast to very long periods of time for the development of life on this earth, Ellen G. White clearly rejects “millions of years,” as would be “required for the evolution of the earth from chaos” (Ed 128). Neither did Ellen G. White propose indefinite periods of time since the beginning of creation. Instead, for her the age of the earth is to be measured within a short chronology of a few thousand years.<sup>9</sup> She clearly connects a short chronology

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<sup>8</sup> On the importance of the creation account as foundation for the biblical Sabbath, see Norman R. Gulley, “Basic Issues Between Science and Scripture: Theological Implications of Alternative Models and the Necessary Basis for the Sabbath in Genesis 1–2,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 14/1 (2003): 212–216, 221–228.

<sup>9</sup> According to Warren H. Johns, Ellen G. White makes about forty-two “6000-Year” and forty-one “4000-year” statements in her writings (cf. Warren H. Johns, “Ellen G. White and Biblical Chronology,” *Ministry* [April 1984]: 20; cf. Gerhard Pfandl, “Ellen G. White and Earth Science,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 14/1 [Spring 2003]: 188). The current Ellen G. White CD-ROM lists 62 references about “six thousand years” in her writings and 51 references to “four thousand years.” The former refers to the time since creation, the latter to the time from creation to the birth of Christ.

It is interesting, however, to note that in contrast to some theologians who dared to pinpoint the exact date of the creation of this world (for instance James Ussher, who calculated the exact date for the creation in 4004 B.C.), Ellen G. White makes more general and unspecific time references and often speaks of the “six thousand years” in connection with the work of Satan who is engaged to do his work “for six thousand years” (DA 413; GC ix, 656; PP 342; FLB 72; AG 370). Since Satan was active in his deceiving work even before the existence of this world, she writes: “More than six thousand years of continual practice has greatly increased his [Satan’s] skill to deceive and allure” (HS 133, emphasis added). Speaking about the creation of humankind, Ellen White uses various phrases, such as “for six thousand years” man has “withstood the ever-increasing weight of disease and crime” (CTBH 7). She speaks about “the continual transgression of man



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with the reliability of the biblical record and warns that those who try to “account for GOD’s creative works upon natural principles . . . are upon

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for *over* six thousand years” (CTBH 154, emphasis added) and also writes that “the continual transgression of man for *nearly* six thousand years has brought sickness, pain and death as its fruit” (CT 467, emphasis added, cf. GC 518, 552–3). According to her, the earth has borne witness to the creator’s love “for *more* than six thousand years” (SJ 183). It seems that her time references are not given with the intention of giving an exact date for the creation of this world. She rather tried to convey the idea that the time that elapsed since the six-days creation is to be understood in terms of a short chronology of “*about* six thousand years” (1SP 87, emphasis added).

In one place, when Ellen White specifically addressed the age of the world and wrote about “infidel geologists” who “claim that the world is very much older than the Bible record makes it” and “reject the Bible record, because of those things which are to them evidences from the earth itself, that the world has existed tens of thousands of years,” she referred to the literal seven day creation week as foundational for the fourth commandment of God’s holy law and “that the world is now only *about* six thousand years old” (3SG 91–92, emphasis added). To those who “conclude that the world is older than we have any scriptural record of” (3SG 92), she writes: “*I have been shown that without Bible history, geology can prove nothing. . . . It may be innocent to conjecture beyond Bible history, if our suppositions do not contradict the facts found in the sacred Scriptures. But when men leave the word of GOD in regard to the history of creation, and seek to account for GOD’s creative works upon natural principles, they are upon a boundless ocean of uncertainty*” (3SG 93, emphasis supplied). Here Ellen G. White clearly favoured the facts of the biblical account of history as reliable and normative for the believer over against historical reconstructions, as in geology.

Even though Ellen G. White did not give an exact date for the creation of the world, she definitely affirmed a short chronology of a few thousand years, based on the scriptural record. To blame this position of Ellen G. White just on Anglican archbishop James Ussher’s (1581-1656) dates in the margin of the King James Bible seems to be short sighted. In distinction to Ussher, who was “one of the most learned men of his day,” an outstanding Hebrew scholar who affirmed “the general reliability of the Hebrew text” (Saul Leeman, “Was Bishop Ussher’s Chronology Influenced by a Midrash?” *Semeia* 6 [1977]: 128), Ellen G. White did not propose specific chronological details for the creation week, but carefully spoke of the age of the earth in terms of “*about* six thousand years” (3SG 92, emphasis supplied). We should be aware that it was not just Ussher who displayed an interest in the reliability of the biblical chronologies for placing such events as the creation, flood, and the patriarchal period. As renowned theologian James Barr has aptly stated: “The idea that there was, more or less, 4000 years from creation to Christ was nothing new. Anyone who worked with the figures of the Hebrew Bible would have come somewhere near this total” (James Barr, “Luther and Biblical Chronology,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library* 72 [1990]: 53). For a helpful discussion on the unique nature and structure of the Chronogenealogies in Genesis 5 and 11 and their relevance for tracing a history of beginnings, see Gerhard F. Hasel, “Genesis 5 and 11: Chronogenealogies in the History of Beginnings,” *Origins* 7 (1980): 23–37, and idem., “The Meaning of the Chronogenealogies in Genesis 5 and 11,” *Origins* 7 (1980): 53–70.

a boundless ocean of uncertainty” (3SG 93).<sup>10</sup> She states: “I have been shown that without Bible history, geology can prove nothing” (3SG 93). Ellen G. White acknowledged that “the bones of human beings and of animals found in the earth, are much larger than those of men and animals now living” and added that “the time of their existence, and how long a period these things have been in the earth, are only to be understood by Bible history” (3SG 93).

Thus, in contrast to very long ages, as proposed by evolutionary theory, and in contrast the so called active “Gap or Ruin & Restoration Theory,” where matter and life were created very long eons ago and multiple cataclysms and creations took place over a very long time period, Ellen G. White supports a recent creation of life and humans and probably even matter.<sup>11</sup>

**2.4. Creation *Ex Nihilo*.** Ellen G. White connects with God’s creation by supernatural means the idea that pre-existing matter is not needed

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<sup>10</sup> Contra Gary A. Nowlan, who believes that particular convictions about earth history are not essential to our Seventh-day Adventist faith (cf. Gary A. Nowlan, “Jeeps, Geology, and Slippery Slopes,” *Spectrum* 31/4 [Fall 2003]: 47). On the issue of the compatibility of deep time and Adventist theology, see the helpful article of Fernando Canale, “Adventist Theology and Deep Time / Evolutionary Theory: Are They Compatible?” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 15/2 (2004): 93–103.

<sup>11</sup> A succinct overview of the discussion in early Adventism is given in Gerhard Pfandl, 185–187. It seems that Ellen G. White’s statement in 1904 that “in the formation of our world, God was not indebted to pre-existing matter” (8T 258) was given as a response to some Adventist authors who earlier had suggested that the six day creation took place while the material body of our world was already in existence. Pfandl concludes: “Considering all her [Ellen White’s] writings on the topic, it is unlikely, though not impossible, that she made a distinction between Precambrian or pre-fossil material of the earth and the fossil bearing strata of the earth” (187). A straightforward reading of Fundamental Belief 6, which is largely a quote from Exodus 20:11, gives the impression that the globe itself was created during the six days of creation. It reads: “God is Creator of all things, and has revealed in Scripture the authentic account of His creative activity. In six days the Lord made ‘the heaven and the earth’ and all living things upon the earth, and rested on the seventh day of that first week” (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe* (2005), 78. Cf. also Ronald L. Numbers, *The Creationists: The Evolution of Scientific Creationism* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1993), xii–xiii, and passim. As for the possibility of a passive gap theory, cf. William H. Shea, “Creation,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2000), 419, and more recently, Richard M. Davidson, “The Biblical Account of Origins,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 14/1 (Spring 2003): 4–43; cf. also Marco T. Terreros, “What is an Adventist? Someone Who Upholds Creation,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 7/2 (Autumn 1996): 147–149, on some theological arguments against a passive gap theory.

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for creation. “In the creation of the earth, God was not indebted to pre-existing matter. ‘He spoke, and it was; . . . He commanded, and it stood fast.’ Psalm 33:9. All things, material or spiritual, stood up before the Lord Jehovah at His voice and were created for His own purpose. The heavens and all the host of them, the earth and all things therein, came into existence by the breath of His mouth” (MH 414–15; cf. 8T 258–259). She thus affirms what the writer of the epistle of Hebrews stated under inspiration: “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear” (Hebrews 11:3). To Ellen G. White, “the theory that God did not create matter when He brought the world into existence is without foundation. In the formation of our world, God was not indebted to pre-existing matter” (FLB 24).

Ellen G. White affirmed the historical reliability of Scripture and understands the events described in the Bible as actual historical happenings, including God’s creation in seven literal days, a global flood, and God’s miracles. Given the clear affirmation of a creation *ex nihilo* in these statements, Ellen G. White does not support the existence of life forms on earth before the six-day creation. She upheld a high view of Scripture, where all of Scripture is believed to be inspired by God and therefore to provide a trustworthy and reliable account of God’s involvement in this world.<sup>12</sup> This raises the question of her relationship to (natural) science.

### 3. Ellen G. White and Science

While Ellen G. White clearly affirms a literal understanding of the biblical creation account, she is not antagonistic toward (natural) science. We will briefly investigate how Ellen G. White understood science and how she suggests that we deal with science and faith.

**3.1. Ellen G. White and her Understanding of Science.**<sup>13</sup> The words “science” and “sciences” occur frequently in the writings of Ellen G. White.<sup>14</sup> She uses the word “science” in a variety of different ways. Often she uses the word “science” in its root meaning of “knowledge”

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<sup>12</sup> On Ellen G. White’s understanding of revelation and inspiration, see Frank M. Hasel, “Revelation and Inspiration Including Both Ellen G. White’s Thought About Scripture and Her Own Writings,” in Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon, eds., *Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, forthcoming).

<sup>13</sup> In this section I am indebted to Gerhard Pfandl, 178–181, whom I follow closely.

<sup>14</sup> According to the Ellen G. White CD-ROM, the word “science” occurs 1489 times; the word “sciences” occurs 359 times.

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(from the Latin *scientia*). Thus she writes of “the science of salvation” (AA 474), the “science of the Bible” (MS 24, 1891 in 3MR 434), the “science of Christianity” (CG 296), or the “science of cooking” (CG 372). When the apostle Paul visited Athens, he met “logic with logic, science [knowledge] with science, philosophy with philosophy” (AA 244).<sup>15</sup>

She also used the word “Science” to describe physiology, which she calls “the science of life” (ChS 152), or the “science of human life” (CME 33), or the “science of health” (ChS 138). It was especially in the area of health and medicine that Ellen G. White appreciated the findings of medical science and encouraged Seventh-day Adventists to enter these fields (DG 95). She referred to the work of medical missionaries as “scientific work” (CH 370).<sup>16</sup>

It is the study of nature, however, that is called “natural science” by her.<sup>17</sup> She believed that “natural science is a treasure house of knowledge from which every student in the school of Christ may draw” (COL 125). Statements like this make it clear that Ellen G. White was not antagonistic toward (natural) science. She did not keep faith and science separate from each other or relegate faith and science to different areas that have nothing to do with each other. This would have meant that faith is no longer relevant to all areas of life.<sup>18</sup> Instead she was convinced that God is the ultimate author of Scripture,<sup>19</sup> and she also believed that “God is the author of science,” and therefore, “rightly understood, science and the written word agree, and each sheds light on the other” (CT 426). This raises the important question of the relationship between Scripture and science, especially as it touches upon questions in the area of creation and evolution.

**3.2. The Relationship Between Scripture and Science.** Perhaps one of the most important and encouraging aspects of Ellen G. White’s

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<sup>15</sup> For more examples, see Pfandl, 178.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Pfandl, 178–179.

<sup>17</sup> The term “natural science” occurs some 17 times in her writings, cf. Ellen G. White CD-ROM.

<sup>18</sup> Faith then would be relegated to an existential level at the loss of having to do with history and the real world (cf. Frank M. Hasel, “Living with Confidence,” 234).

<sup>19</sup> To her, “the Bible is God’s voice speaking to us, just as surely as though we could hear it with our ears” (8T 393); it is “the inspired word of God” (ST, March 21, 1906), “the written word of God” (YI, July 24, 1902). On Ellen G. White’s understanding of revelation and inspiration, see Frank M. Hasel, “Revelation and Inspiration,” in Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon, eds., *Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, forthcoming.

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understanding of the relationship between Scripture and science<sup>20</sup> is the confidence that both can be in harmony.

3.2.1. *Harmony between Scripture and Science.* For Ellen G. White, nature and the Bible have the same author, and therefore one can expect harmony between them. “Rightly understood, science and the written word agree, and each sheds light on the other” (CT 426). The revealed Word of God and the natural world will be in agreement, “for all truth, whether in nature or in revelation, is consistent with itself in all its manifestations” (PP 114). Thus, for Ellen G. White, there is indeed a “Friendship between Faith and Science,” but not in the sense that God brought into being a creation that evolved according to evolutionary processes for billions of years.<sup>21</sup> To her, atheistic, evolutionary theories are incompatible with biblical faith. To connect these ideas with biblical creation would be a wrong attempt to bring natural science and Scripture into harmony. To uphold the biblical account of creation only because science’s picture of physical process has relaxed in the twentieth century in such a way that it is congenial to religious belief<sup>22</sup> would make faith dependent upon science and science the final authority of faith.

3.2.2. *Conflict between Science and Scripture.* Ellen G. White was keenly aware that such harmony is not possible when modern science is conducted independent of any explanation of God and even in opposition to God’s Word. She writes: “I have been warned that henceforth we shall have a constant contest. *Science, so-called*, and religion will be placed in opposition to each other, because finite men do not comprehend the power and the greatness of God” (Ev 593, emphasis added). This science, falsely so-called, is based on conceptions and theories of men to the exclusion of the wisdom of God as revealed in His written Word. She warned that “when professedly scientific men treat upon these subjects from a merely human point of view, they will assuredly come to wrong conclusions. . . . The greatest minds, if not guided by the word of God in

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<sup>20</sup> Pfandl (180) has pinpointed five chapters and articles where Ellen G. White wrote under inspiration concerning the relationship between Scripture and the natural sciences: 1864 “Disguised Infidelity” (3SG 90-96); 1884 “Science and Revelation” (ST March 13, 1884); 1884 “Science and the Bible in Education” (ST March 27, 1884); 1884 “Erroneous Doctrines Dangerous” (ST March 27, 1884); 1903 “Science and the Bible” (Ed 128-134). We could also add her statements in the chapters “A True Knowledge of God” and “Danger in Speculative Knowledge” in *The Ministry of Healing* (1905), 409–438.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. John Polkinghorne, “The Friendship of Science and Religion,” *Spectrum* 31/4 (Fall 2003): 34.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Polkinghorne, 34.

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their research, become bewildered in their attempts to trace the relationship of science and revelation” (PP 113). For her, “one of the greatest evils that attends the quest for knowledge, the investigations of science, is the disposition to exalt human reasoning above its true value and its proper sphere. Many attempt to judge the Creator and His works by their own imperfect knowledge of science” (MH 427).<sup>23</sup> When natural causes are the sole explanation for what did take place in creation and the subsequent history of this earth, “science, falsely so-called, has been exalted above God” (CE 84, emphasis added). She specifically warned “against the sophistry in regard to geology and other branches of science falsely so-called, which have not one semblance of truth” (RH March 1, 1898). In other words, Ellen G. White opposes a naturalistic worldview of science that excludes God from scientific enterprise.

3.2.3. *The Integration of Science into Faith.* A harmonious relationship between Scripture and science can occur, however, if science is integrated into faith in such a way that Scripture is retained as the superior and ultimate authority.<sup>24</sup> Ellen G. White wrote in 1894: “Science, so-called, human reasoning, and poetry, cannot be passed on as of equal authority with revelation” (RH Nov. 20, 1894). In her book *The Ministry of Healing*, she wrote: “Only that which He sees fit to reveal can we comprehend of Him. Reason must acknowledge an authority superior to itself. Heart and intellect must bow to the great I AM” (MH 438; cf. SC 109). Elsewhere she wrote: “Many professed ministers of the gospel do not accept the whole Bible as the inspired word. One wise man rejects one portion; another questions another part. They set up their judgment as superior to the word; and the Scripture which they do teach rests upon their own authority. Its divine authority is destroyed” (COL 39).

In contrast to “so-called” science, Ellen G. White believed that “true science” is in harmony with Scripture (CE 66). From this perspective it is possible that science and faith can work together in friendship and in harmony. It has been correctly pointed out that “the platform from which Ellen White considered the natural sciences was the Bible. She had absolute confidence in Scripture and believed that everything, including scientific theories, had to be measured by the Word of God.”<sup>25</sup> For Ellen G.

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<sup>23</sup> On the role of reason in theology see Frank M. Hasel, “Theology and the Role of Reason,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 4/2 (1993): 172–198; and idem., “Living with Confidence,” 235–237.

<sup>24</sup> Frank M. Hasel, “Living with Confidence,” 239–241. On the integration of faith and science, see also Brand, 121–137.

<sup>25</sup> Pfandl, 180.

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White, “the Bible is not to be tested by men’s ideas of science, but science is to be brought to the test of the unerring standard” (CT 425). This means that she integrated (natural) science into faith. The integration of science into faith implies that faith—or Scripture—has priority over science.

It seems that Ellen G. White was well aware of the theory of evolution that was firmly entrenched in the scientific community at the beginning of the twentieth century, particular in regard to geology, which had developed the most detailed account of evolutionary thought and the need of long ages. Therefore she seems to mention especially the science of geology in connection with the issues in creation and evolution.<sup>26</sup> “Geology has been thought to contradict the literal interpretation of the Mosaic record of the creation. Millions of years, it is claimed, were required for the evolution of the earth from chaos; and in order to accommodate the Bible to this supposed revelation of science, the days of creation are assumed to have been vast, indefinite periods, covering thousands or even millions of years. Such a conclusion is wholly uncalled for. The Bible record is in harmony with itself and with the teaching of nature” (Ed 128-129).

At this point we should remember that while nature and science have God as their author, neither Scripture nor Ellen G. White attribute the quality of inspiration to nature or science. The Bible is God’s inspired book. Nature and science are not. Nature is God’s creation and came into existence through God’s special design. As such, it reveals something about God, its creator. But nature and science are not inspired. Furthermore, nature as it presently exists is affected by sin and therefore might render an ambiguous perspective that needs the clear and trustworthy revelation of God’s inspired word on the origins of life on this earth. While Ellen G. White frequently uses the phrase “the book of nature” to speak of God’s creation as revealing something about God’s love and power, she clearly differentiates and distinguishes “the book of nature”

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Pfandl, 177–178, who gives some helpful information on the historical background to this discussion. Pfandl points out that during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Ellen G. White and the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist church frequently wrote on the subject of geology, creation, and evolution and kept themselves informed on the creation-evolution debate. On the average two articles on these topics appeared every year in the *Review and Herald* between 1860 and 1890.

from the “pages of inspiration” (AA 571), thus indicating that to her the Bible is the final authority.<sup>27</sup>

#### 4. Implications and Prospects for the SDA Church

On the basis of the priority and superiority of Scripture, some remarkable possibilities open up to the believing scientist and theologian. As Leonard Brand has said: “One who accepts the Bible as a reliable record of events is not hampered by that worldview, as many would claim, but actually has an advantage. Most scientists are only familiar with one basic understanding of earth history and do not actively ask critical questions of their paradigm.”<sup>28</sup> In other words, faith does not prevent the believer from thinking. It rather enables the believer to think properly—according to God’s revealed will—and thus to search for creative, new solutions that are in harmony with God’s Word.

Thus, rather than adapting biblical ideas to the latest outlook in science, Scripture can have a unique influence on science by asking questions that could function as a source of inspiration in developing new

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<sup>27</sup> There are several areas and issues where statements by Ellen G. White do not agree with the current opinion of natural(istic) science. Perhaps one of the greatest challenges is the length of time that is suggested in evolutionary theory and by Ellen G. White. There are other questions in related areas where some have perceived a conflict between Ellen G. White and widespread scientific opinion, for instance when she speaks about volcanic activity. On this and related questions, see the discussion in Herbert E. Douglas, 490–497; Pfandl, 181–183; Warren H. Johns, “Ellen G. White and Subterranean Fires” Part 1, *Ministry* (August 1977): 9–12; idem., “Ellen G. White and Subterranean Fires,” Part 2, *Ministry* (October 1977): 20–22; and more recently, Elaine Kennedy, “When the Earth Crust Explodes,” *Dialogue* 10/3 (1988): 13–16 cf. [http://dialogue.adventist.org/articles/10\\_3\\_kennedy\\_e.htm](http://dialogue.adventist.org/articles/10_3_kennedy_e.htm)

How do we deal with unresolved questions that are raised by the natural sciences? Elsewhere I have delineated some important characteristics that are necessary if faith and science clash. I suggest a) to allow for a creative tension between faith and science; b) resist the temptation of superficial answers; c) honesty; d) patience; e) humility; f) recognition of the limited nature of scientific knowledge; g) an openness to the reality that God intervenes; h) learning from love. See Frank M. Hasel, “Living with Confidence,” 248–252, for a more detailed exposition of these ideas. See also the helpful discussion in Brand, 121–137; Reinhard Junker, “Die Glaubwürdigkeit der Bibel und die Schöpfungsordnung,” in Stephan Holthaus and Karl-Heinz Vanheiden, eds., *Die Unfehlbarkeit und Irrtumslosigkeit der Bibel* (Nürnberg: Verlag für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft, 2002), 137ff., and Frank M. Hasel, “Presuppositions in the Interpretation of Scripture,” in George W. Reid, ed. *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach*, Biblical Research Institute Studies, vol. 1 (Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), 27–46.

<sup>28</sup> Brand, 133.



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strategies of scientific research. Wolfhart Pannenberg's remarkable words deserve to be taken seriously: "The theologian must not be too quick to adapt theological ideas and language to the latest outlook in the sciences, especially where such adaptation requires substantial readjustment of traditional doctrine. The theological vision of the world can also function as a challenge to science and as a source of inspiration in developing new strategies of research."<sup>29</sup> Such a perspective opens up new windows of opportunities for fresh investigation of origins on the basis of Scripture.

To Ellen G. White, being a Seventh-day Adventist meant, among other things, affirming a recent, literal creation in six consecutive 24 hour days.<sup>30</sup> In dealing with the complex issues of creation, we have to remember that our faith cannot be based on science as our final authority, but must be based on God's Word—even when we have questions without answers. As paleontologist and biologist Leonard Brand has aptly stated: "The God of the Bible is the greatest scholar of all time, and Scripture deals in the highest levels of scholarship, not just in comforting inspirational themes. (When God arranged to have Genesis written, He knew vastly more about radiometric dating than we will ever know.)"<sup>31</sup> God "knows much more than we do about earth history, and if we know Him and trust His Word we can benefit from the insights in Scripture"<sup>32</sup>

Thus, we as SDAs actually have an advantage over non-religious scientists because our worldview is broader and more open to dimensions

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<sup>29</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Theology and Philosophy in Interaction with Science: A Response to the Message of Pope John Paul II on the Occasion of the Newton Tricentennial in 1987," in Robert J. Russell, William R. Stoeger, S.J., and George V. Coyne, eds. *John Paul II on Science and Religion: Reflections on the New View From Rome* (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1990), 78. Unfortunately, Pannenberg himself does not follow his own advice and seems to advocate the readjustment of theological vision and the reassessment of doctrinal affirmations of the past in the light of modern scientific developments as presented by the theory of the evolution of life (*ibid.*, 78–79). An example of how a commitment to Scripture has helped to develop a new strategy of scientific research that successfully explains some existing phenomena (young deposits where radiometric dating indicates greater ages) is the research into the fossil whales in diatomaceous siltstone and sandstones of the Pisco Formation in Southern Peru by Raúl Esperante and his team (cf. Leonard R. Brand, R. Esperante, A. V. Chadwick, O. Poma Porras, and M. Alomía, "Fossil whale preservation implies high diatom accumulation rate in the Miocene-Pliocene Pisco Formation of Peru," *Geology* 32/2 (2004): 165–168.

<sup>30</sup> Contra Nowlan, who proposes that "being a Seventh-day Adventist is much deeper than particular convictions about earth history" (47).

<sup>31</sup> Brand, 122.

<sup>32</sup> Brand, 133.

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that are closed for secular scientists. To respect the biblical creation account and the inspired insights of Ellen G. White on the issue of creation should motivate us to be even more careful in our scientific and theological work than perhaps a non-religious scientist might be because we accept the biblical record (and the insights of Ellen G. White) as inspired and thus as something intrinsically sacred.<sup>33</sup> May this perspective stimulate and motivate us to do sound research and search for better answers.

To dismiss inspired statements made in Scripture and by Ellen G. White as irrelevant, outdated, or incompatible with our faith raises a number of important questions with serious consequences for the SDA church at large.

What is the role of the Bible for our faith and practice? Is the Bible indeed our final norm and ultimate authority, as we profess in our Fundamental Belief 1?<sup>34</sup> Can we trust the Bible in statements that tell us about our salvation if those statements are dependent upon historical events (like the historicity of Adam at creation and Jesus Christ the second Adam in Romans 5:12ff) and those historical statements cannot be trusted?<sup>35</sup>

What role does Ellen G. White and her writings play for SDAs? Can we still maintain that her writings are “a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction” and also “make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested,” as Fundamental Belief 18 states?<sup>36</sup> Are there degrees of divine inspiration?<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Brand, 133.

<sup>34</sup> Fundamental Belief 1 reads: “*The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God’s acts in history*” (emphasis added).

<sup>35</sup> On this important question see the excellent dissertation of Marco T. Terreros, *Theistic Evolution and its Theological Implications: A Critical Analysis of the Affirmation that There was Death on Earth Prior to Adam’s Fall and of Related Theological Problems* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University, 1994, published by the author: Medelin: Marter Editions, 2002).

<sup>36</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 247.

<sup>37</sup> On the question of “degrees of inspiration,” see Frank M. Hasel, “Inspiration, degrees of,” in Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon, eds., *Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, forthcoming.

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Furthermore, can a God who uses an evolutionary process as His method of creation really be worshipped and adored as good and loving? Does a God who allows countless billions of organisms and life forms to suffer and die and even entire species to be wiped out share the same values and the goodness with which he is constantly revealed in the Bible?<sup>38</sup> Does the process of evolution, with its extraordinarily wasteful and cruel mechanisms, which are full of predation, selfishness, randomness, disaster, waste, struggle, suffering, and even the death of whole population groups, not pose a significant problem for the goodness and love of God?<sup>39</sup> Aren't the goodness and love of God fundamental to his nature and his desire to save a world that is lost?

In what areas are the Bible and Ellen G. White authoritative for the SDA church? Only in matters of salvation and personal spirituality, or can we trust God's Word and the writings of Ellen G. White also when they touch the complex issue of God's supernatural creation, the flood, biblical history,<sup>40</sup> etc.?

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. Philip Clayton, "Metaphysics Can be a Harsh Mistress," *CTNS Bulletin* 18/1 (Winter 1998): 18. Clayton adds: "since revelation rules out a pernicious God, it may ultimately be that one must let go of the idea that God directly brings about the details of the evolving biological world" (ibid.).

<sup>39</sup> John Baldwin has pointed out that "the geologic column, if interpreted as the product of millions of years of organic evolution guided by God, actually portrays the way Satan would develop life forms, not God" (John Baldwin, "Revelation 14:7: an Angel's Worldview," in John Tempelton Baldwin, ed., *Creation, Catastrophe and Calvary: Why a Global Flood Is Vital to the Doctrine of Atonement* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2000), 28. On this issue see also the remarkable dissertation by Reinhard Junker, *Leben durch Sterben?* esp. 184ff.

<sup>40</sup> A helpful and fair discussion on Ellen G. White and the comments made by her son William C. White on her as authority in historical questions can be found in Jerry Allen Moon, *W. C. White and Ellen G. White: The Relationship Between the Prophet and Her Son* (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1993): 427–436. Moon has pointed out [speaking about historical information found in the book *The Great Controversy*] that while for W. C. White "the controlling content of her historical writings was derived from visions, she was often dependent on standard histories for geographical and chronological connections" (Moon, 430–431, emphasis added). However, while W. C. White (and Ellen White herself) did not want to treat her writings as authority on dates and details of history, because she was no trained historian, he "also refused to go to the other extreme of denying that her [Ellen G. White] writings had any degree of authority in history and theology" (Moon, 434). While in the technical sense Ellen G. White was not a historian, W. C. White believed his mother was a historian in a broader sense, where a historian is defined as "one who writes, compiles, or relates history" (Moon, 434).

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Does the way we as Christian scientists and theologians do science and present science and theology erode or enrich our faith in God's supernatural creation? How can we engage in science and theology and pass on our findings in such a way that it enriches our faith?

These are some questions that deserve to be taken seriously, and the answer we give to them will have consequences far beyond the issue of creation vs. evolution. It will impact many other fundamental beliefs and ultimately impact our mission and growth.<sup>41</sup>

**Frank M. Hasel**, studied theology in Germany, England, and the U.S.A., where he earned his Ph.D. in Systematic Theology from Andrews University. He is an ordained minister of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and member of the Biblical Research Committee of the Euro-Africa Division. Currently he is dean of the Theological Seminary at Bogenhofen and teaches Systematic Theology and Biblical Hermeneutics at Bogenhofen Seminary, Austria, and is the director of the Ellen G. White Study Center at Bogenhofen. frank.hasel@bogenhofen.at

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Katherine Ching, "The Practice of Theological Pluralism," *Adventist Perspectives*, 5/1 (1991): 6–11; and more recently, Ariel A. Roth, "Adventism and the Challenges to Creation" *Adventists Affirm* 16/1 (2002): 19–21.