

The Godhead for Seventh-day Adventists

The Godhead

Introduction A

I'm writing from Malaysia where I have made many Muslim friends in the last couple years from Iran, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia and, of course, Malaysia. And as I am connected to most of these electronically, it seems likely to me that one or more of them might read this. So, for the rest of you, please endure a word of explanation to them:

Friends, the reason that I am a Seventh-day Adventist is not because I just accepted the religion of my family or nation. It is because I found incredible power in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is because I found incredible prophecies in the prophetic books that proved that those books were still reliable today. It is because I searched for truth and God helped me find it.

And what kind of truth did I find? Truth about history. Truth about world religions. Truth about how to escape from sinful habits. Truth about how to be justified in the Day of Judgment. Truth about the life and work of Jesus.

What I never did find is prophets writing about a "Trinity." So when I talk to you about religion, I never talk about my views about God. I don't think it is reverent to argue about ideas that are high above us. I won't argue about the nature of God.

But recently, some of my friends have begun arguing about the Godhead, about mysterious questions. And this article is written to help them. It may or may not be interesting to you.

Introduction B

You and I can work together if we have the same mission. We need not agree on minor points if our major aim harmonizes well. This is why James White (a non-trinitarian) could work together so finely with William Miller (a trinitarian) before the Great Disappointment. Their message was to lead people to prepare for Christ's soon return. And little arguments about the great ancient pre-earth past just couldn't hold a candle to questions about the very near future.

I can work with you for the same reason if you and I share a burden for the Three Angels' Messages.

Those messages relate to the whole Bible. But they are not the whole Bible. They are the part of the wide Bible message that is particularly at issue today. They include messages about the Judgment, the work of Creation, the fall of Babylon, the Mark of the Beast, the commandments of

God and about righteousness by faith. And they include instructions about to whom we should be sharing these messages: to every kindred, tribe and people. (This is why I am in Malaysia far from my mother and brother and in-laws and nephews and nieces).

Those messages were given to unite our efforts, and to unite our hearts, and to keep us away from arguments regarding periphery things.

“These messages were represented to me as an anchor to the people of God. Those who understand and receive them will be kept from being swept away by the many delusions of Satan.”
EW 256.2

Our pioneers worked tirelessly to share these three messages.

Those who read broadly in their writings know that the pioneers of the Adventist message were not trying to convert the mainstream church members to a non-trinitarian position. What message did these courageous men present to the world? They wrote books on the Sabbath, on spiritualism, and on the truths of the sanctuary. They wrote about mortality and about God’s law.^[i] These are all themes of the Three Angels’ Messages.

They did not write any books on the Godhead.

Consider this also: The three books designed by Ellen White to warn (GC) and prepare (DA, STC) the world for Christ’s coming can be read with pleasure and appreciation by trinitarians and by many non-trinitarians alike. They just were not written to change the public’s view regarding questions on the Godhead.

I did say that none of the pioneers wrote a book on this topic. Well, J. H. Waggoner almost did. In 1877 he wrote a book titled “*The Holy Spirit*.” He was a non-trinitarian. And in this book was his perfect opportunity to express his core beliefs on this topic. Instead, he said that Adventists had never dared to even enter the discussion of whether the Spirit was a person. And there were reasons, he said, for not entering into the argument. One reason was the ambiguity of the terms. But the other was this: it was not an issue settled by “direct revelation.”

There is one question, which has been much controverted in the theological world upon which we have never presumed to enter. It is that of the personality of the Spirit of God. Prevailing ideas of *person* are very diverse, often crude, and the word is differently understood; so that unity of opinion on this point cannot be expected until all shall be able to define precisely what they mean by the word, or until all shall agree upon one particular sense in which the word shall be used. But as this agreement does not exist, it seems that a discussion of the subject cannot be profitable, especially as it is not a question of direct revelation. We have a right to be positive in our faith and our statements only when the words of Scripture are so direct as to bring the subject within the range of positive proof. We are not only willing but anxious to leave [this topic] just where the word of God

leaves it.

A person then who read between the lines might have been able to conclude that Waggoner was less than persuaded by the Trinitarian creeds. But one would have been equally sure that the author was not writing the book to contradict them.

In other words, the pioneers were private non-trinitarian persons who took the Three Messages to a trinitarian world. And they rarely, *in lectures or books for the public*, even alluded to the issue of the Godhead.

In one other of Waggoner's books did he address his concerns with the Trinity. And there he almost sounded like he would be a trinitarian if the word was only *defined differently*. He did not want to be confused with those who denied Christ's divinity.

[Some] take the denial of a trinity to be equivalent to a denial of the divinity of Christ. Were that the case, we should cling to the doctrine of a trinity as tenaciously as any can; but it is not the case. They who have read our remarks on the death of the Son of God know that we firmly believe in the divinity of Christ; but we cannot accept the idea of a trinity, as it is held by Trinitarians, without giving up our claim on the dignity of the sacrifice made for our redemption. [\[ii\]](#)

This comment comes from his book on the atonement. And it provides quite an insight as to why he opposed the creedal concept of the Trinity. The creeds said some strange things that, to our Biblical-minded pioneers, sounded like so much meaningless gibberish or worse. James White complained that 3 does not equal 1. Joseph Bates couldn't see how Jesus could be at the same time be the Father and the Son. More significantly, several pioneers thought that the creeds made Christ's sacrifice into a merely human sacrifice (since divinity can't die).

And James was right. Three are not one person as some creeds alleged. Bates was right. The Son and the Father do not have interchangeable positions in Scripture. And the pioneers were right that a merely human sacrifice would never atone for our sin.

But on that last point Smith and Waggoner wrote too much. The blending of Christ's two natures, his taking humanity so that he could "taste death" for all of us, are mysteries that we cannot penetrate. How Jesus could really die as He was, is not for us to know.

This is something they got right. And I, for the record, wish that our 28 fundamental beliefs were more ambiguous in regard to the Godhead. There are things we just don't need to know. And consequently, we don't know them.

I mean, we don't know anything about the Spirit's substance. We don't know anything about the Spirit's eternal pre-existence. And if we agree that "in the beginning the Word was with God, and the Word was God" we probably should admit that we don't know anything about something

before that beginning. We don't know if the Son was a Son at that point. We don't know that He was. And we don't know that He wasn't. And as I said a bit ago, there are some things we just don't need to know.

On that very topic where Waggoner said "we" did not dare to go, Uriah Smith did go. A question sent to the *Review* drew it out of him. And the question shows that the readers were not settled on the question at hand as to whether the Spirit was a person. As Editor, Uriah returned answer through the *Review*. He addressed the question again for the General Conference. In other words, when Smith (twice, in 1890-1891) expressed views of the Spirit that are believed by many today, he did both times for an inside audience. (As an aside, these very years were a very low point in the spiritual life of Uriah Smith.)

If during his 30 years writing for the church you were to read about 4,000 pages from his pen, only four of those pages would allude to questions regarding the nature of the Godhead. Did he have non-trinitarian views? Yes. Did he promote them in print? For someone who wrote weekly as an editor, he did so only very rarely^[iii]. If you, friend, also have non-trinitarian views, I wish you would imitate the good pioneers on this point.

Of course, the pioneers are not our models. And their beliefs are not a criterion for what we should believe. So let's get to some other points.

New, Old, Original, Orthodox, and a love of Civil Debate

Our lack of Biblical literacy makes us sitting ducks for well-camouflaged error. When we see an apparently compelling study using much scripture in a persuasive way, we are intrigued and, at the same time, clueless. But I have written on this elsewhere.

In the arguments over the godhead, personality gets involved in a subtle way. Some persons are naturally orthodox. They want to defend the church's position and react bearishly when it is attacked. Others are naturally inquisitive and independent. They don't want to be controlled or boxed. They want to think for themselves. (I am naturally in the latter of these two groups). The trouble with these internal influences is that they make us easily manipulatable. Satan only need bring up an issue to transform us into brawlers (as Paul calls them in Titus 3:1-3).

Again, much could be written about this. But if you are looking for data on the godhead, that writing would weary you.

So let us study some Bible ideas:

Three Types of Sons:

We, in Romans 8, are sons of God by adoption. (And that adoption is evidenced by our conformity

to God's will, Romans 8:14). Our adoption makes us "joint-heirs" (Romans 8:17) "with Christ." But unlike us, He was not adopted.

And in Job 38, the angels are called "the sons of God." There they, holy created beings, are rejoicing as they see the earth being fashioned. They are sons of God by creation. That is what Adam was also, a son by creation (Luke 3:38).

But Jesus is the unique Son of God. Only He is begotten.

A complete offering has been made; for "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son,"—not a son by creation, as were the angels, nor a son by adoption, as is the forgiven sinner, but a Son begotten in the express image of the Father's person, and in all the brightness of his majesty and glory, one equal with God in authority, dignity, and divine perfection. In him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. – ST May 30, 1895.

What this intriguing statement tells us is the same thing that Scripture tells us a hundred times. Jesus is the "only begotten Son."

But when was He begotten? Some trinitarians would say it was about 4 BC when Mary, impregnated by the Spirit of God, gave birth. Some other creeds would say something quite incomprehensible, namely that he is "eternally begotten." (See the Nicene Creed. This is the official position of the Roman Catholic Church).

The Scripture speaks directly to this question regarding the timing of the begetting. Surprised? Psalm 2 tells that there was certainly a day when the Father said to the Son, "this day have I begotten thee."

Psalm 2:7 I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou *art* my Son; this day have I begotten thee.

Hebrews directly points out this declaration regarding Christ to be the event that separates Him from the angels.

Hebrews 1:5 For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?

Notice the future tense of the second statement in the verse. "I *will be* to him a Father..."

But though both verses mention a particular day when the Father spoke to the Son, neither tells us a great deal about when this conversation happened. Psalms 2 does, however, give us some hints. On the same day, apparently, the Father offered to give the heathen to Jesus for an inheritance.

Psalms 2:7 I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou *art* my Son; this day have I begotten thee. 8 Ask of me, and I shall give *thee* the heathen *for* thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth *for* thy possession.

Thankfully the Bible does clearly tell us elsewhere what day this incredible dialogue between the Father and Son happened.

Act 13:33 God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. 34 And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, *now* no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David.

So what day did the Father say, "Today I have begotten you"? It was at the resurrection. And to understand that curious fact there are a few other Bible ideas we need to follow.

First, sonship in the Bible is frequently unrelated to origin. It is, in such contexts, rather related to character. In these verses, to be a "son" or part of the "seed" of a person (or of the devil) has nothing to do with your ancestry. It is related instead to your activities. Notice in the following dialogue (where references to sonship are in bold for your convenience) that the Jews were Abraham's children in terms of origin, but not in terms of character. Jesus said they were children of the devil, not because the devil created them or adopted them, but because they did the works of the devil.

Joh 8:31 Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed; 32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. 33 They answered him, **We be Abraham's seed**, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? 34 Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. 35 And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: **but the Son abideth ever**. 36 If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. 37 **I know that ye are Abraham's seed**; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you. 38 I speak that **which I have seen with my Father**: and ye do that which **ye have seen with your father**. 39 They answered and said unto him, **Abraham is our father**. Jesus saith unto them, **If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham**. 40 But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. 41 **Ye do the deeds of your father**. Then said they to him, **We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God**. 42 Jesus said unto them, **If God were your Father, ye would love me**: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. 43 Why do ye not understand my speech? *even* because ye cannot hear my word. 44 **Ye are of your father the devil**, and **the lusts of your father ye will do**. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for **he is a liar, and the father of it**. 45 And because I tell *you* the truth, ye believe me not.

The way Jesus talks in this chapter is a key to many other passages. The enmity (Genesis 3:15) between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent is not about beings that the devil originated, but about those that followed his pernicious suggestions. Those that do his “lusts” are his children.

This is, of course, the sense in which Abraham is the father of many nations. He isn’t the origin of them. But they are like him.

Galatians 3:7 Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. . . . 9 So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.

What may be a fresh thought to you is that this idea of sonship pre-existed embryos. Genesis 3:15 was given before human pregnancy had happened.

That brings us very naturally back to our key text, “Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.”

In what sense was this fulfilled at the resurrection?

First, it was the resurrection that shows Christ’s divinity according to the Holy Spirit, just as his flesh showed his human relation to King David.

Rom 1:3 Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; 4 And declared *to be* the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:

This verse is not the only one that connects Christ’s sonship to God with his resurrection. Elsewhere he is called, “the first begotten from the dead.” Revelation 1:5.

Some thoughtful readers may have questions about this idea. How, for example, could Jesus be called the “Son of God” in Daniel 3:25 if He wasn’t “begotten” until six centuries later? Those familiar with Ellen White’s writings about the origin of evil know that Jesus was known as the Son of God even before the fall of Lucifer. So how can this harmonize with Jesus being “begotten” at the resurrection? Further, the Father gave his “only begotten Son” to die for us. How could Jesus be the “only begotten” 30 years before he was begotten?

The answer is related to God’s foreknowledge. Notice what Revelation says about Jesus.

Rev 13:8 And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Jesus was the lamb “slain” for four thousand years before He was slain. That is because God

speaks about things that are not yet existing as if they have already happened. Romans 4:17.

This brings us back to Psalm 2. And what time did the Father say to the Son, "This day have I begotten thee?" That was at the resurrection. He is called the "first begotten from the dead" not because he is the first one resurrected, but because His resurrection is preeminent. And He is known as the Son even before the creation of the world in harmony with how God speaks.

What is apparent is that the Divinity of Jesus was not familiar to the angels at the time Lucifer was spreading rebellion. Earlier, angels obediently worshipped Jesus before they understood the basis of the command to worship Him. Later, they came to understand.

The King of the universe summoned the heavenly hosts before Him, that in their presence He might set forth the true position of His Son and show the relation He sustained to all created beings. The Son of God shared the Father's throne, and the glory of the eternal, self-existent One encircled both. About the throne gathered the holy angels, a vast, unnumbered throng—"ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands" (Revelation 5:11.), the most exalted angels, as ministers and subjects, rejoicing in the light that fell upon them from the presence of the Deity. Before the assembled inhabitants of heaven the King declared that none but Christ, the Only Begotten of God, could fully enter into His purposes, and to Him it was committed to execute the mighty counsels of His will. The Son of God had wrought the Father's will in the creation of all the hosts of heaven; and to Him, as well as to God, their homage and allegiance were due. Christ was still to exercise divine power, in the creation of the earth and its inhabitants. But in all this He would not seek power or exaltation for Himself contrary to God's plan, but would exalt the Father's glory and execute His purposes of beneficence and love. *Patriarchs and Prophets* 36.2

The life that Jesus had before coming to earth was not the Father's life. It was his own life. And that is why He could pay for our sins. He was "self-existent."

No one of the angels could become a substitute and surety for the human race, for their life is God's; they could not surrender it. On Christ alone the human family depended for their existence. He is the eternal, self-existent Son, on whom no yoke had come. When God asked, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Christ alone of the angelic host could reply, "Here am I; send Me." He alone had covenanted before the foundation of the world to become a surety for man. He could say that which not the highest angel could say—"I have power over my own life. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." Ms 101, 1897.28

The idea of self-existence is contrary, to many minds, to the idea of a Father-Son relationship. It is completely foreign to the idea of being "begotten." This is where Psalms 2 comes in and helps us. It shows us that Jesus could be self-existent and be begotten at the same time.

The idea of Christ's self-existence is denied by many today. They say that His life came from the Father. But that is precisely what the statement above denies. And if we are frank, it is what a

better-known statement also denies.

Still seeking to give a true direction to her faith, Jesus declared, "I am the resurrection, and the life." In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. "He that hath the Son hath life." 1 John 5:12. The divinity of Christ is the believer's assurance of eternal life. – DA 530

When I have a son, you could argue that my son's life is mine. Certainly, he is derived from me and my wife. But with the Son there is no such relation to the Father according to this statement. His life is "underived."

But suppose you see it another way. I don't condemn you. I don't doubt your intelligence. (I try not to doubt your skill at avoiding over independence while searching for truth.) I think we could even work together if we agree on the main thrust of our message, the Three Angels' Messages as found in Revelation 14.

But let me illustrate our differences (yours and mine if we don't agree) by a famous Adventist disagreement some decades ago. It was about the "daily" found in Daniel 8, 11, and 12. Some Adventists thought this word to be a covert symbol of pagan Rome. Others thought it to be a subtle reference to Christ's continuous work as our intercessor. And these two camps argued with such force of character that it seemed the church might suffer a schism! (I know it is hard to imagine that today). Neither could bear the thought of their brothers confounding paganism for Jesus! And when you word it like that, you can see why it seemed so central to the message of Seventh-day Adventists.

But it wasn't. You can believe in the 490 years of Daniel 9, the 2300 years of Daniel 8, and their fulfillments that pointed to Christ's work as Sacrifice and Priest. You can believe in the ongoing judgment, the future reward of the saved and, later, of the lost. You can believe and teach that Babylon is fallen because of her false doctrines of soul-immortality and Sunday sacredness. You can believe in Jesus and have faith in His life and in His testimony through Ellen White. You can believe intelligently in all these things without even having an opinion about the meaning of the daily in Daniel 8-12.

And that is why Ellen White said that on that point that was causing such agitation, silence was eloquence.

And so, considering these things, I am content that you and I do not make a mountain out of our molehill of difference.

But, you say, it *is* a *mountain*. You say, "We can't fear God unless we know who He is."

Indeed, to know God the Father and His Son is life eternal. There is nothing well to glory in but that you know Him, and that you know that He is the one that exercises loving kindness and

righteousness and judgment in the earth. Jeremiah 9:23-24. In the beginning the Word was God and the Word was with God.

You can believe that Jesus left his heavenly throne, came to earth, took the form of a weak man, lived a life of obedience and suffering, gained a victory for us all, took all our sins as a Divine-human man, and paid our penalty. You can believe that He rose again, responding by his Divinity to the Father's call to him to rise. You can believe that He took up his role as our Advocate and Priest, a comforter who 1800 years later became our Judge. You can believe that He lives with us here on earth by His Spirit, and that He will pour out the Holy Spirit on the sealed persons before leaving His work as Intercessor.

You can believe all these things about Jesus, and thousands of more things about Him, without having any opinion about Him before "the beginning." You can know him savingly, the way patriarchs and prophets knew him when they had the sanctuary service to teach them the saving knowledge. They feared Him knowing those things.

God's Plan to Save us from Deception

Generally, God's plan has been to use the gifts of the Spirit to save us from deception. Those gifts include the Spirit of Prophecy.

Eph 4:11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; . . . 13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, . . . 14 That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

And in the case of the Adventist church and its relation to the truth about the Godhead, it was Ellen White that spurred change.

But she wasn't the first. Just as she wasn't shown the evils of the shut-door theory until Bible study had exposed them, just as she wasn't shown the truth about Sabbath-sundown opening until Andrews had studied it, just so she didn't start making her surprising statements regarding the Godhead until after Camden Lacey began lecturing on the topic in 1896. (The "life original, unborrowed, underived statement" can be found in Ms 22, 1898. The "self-existent" statement in Ms 101, 1897. The "three great powers of heaven" statements begin in 1900. The "third person of the Godhead" statements began with Lt 8, 1896.) After his lectures, within four years, the primary key statements that slowly led the church towards a belief in Christ's eternal pre-existence and in three persons in the Godhead, were penned.

Some confusion exists today because Dr. Kellogg eventually tried to piggy-back his pantheism onto the new ideas Adventists were thinking about the Godhead. He had been reproved for spiritualizing

God's personal existence, making God into an ever-present power. When this was strongly opposed by Ellen White (who began at that time to make many statements about God's "personality" in the sense of God's "person") he was stymied. A few years later he tried again. This time he admitted that the Father and Son have personalities, but alleged that the Spirit was everywhere, the very pantheistic life force he had earlier proposed.

But this did not convert his errors into truths. The Spirit moves and chooses to dwell in some hearts while withdrawing from others. The Holy Spirit is not an everywhere-present force as Kellogg alleged.

Ellen White, in Australia where Lacey had already been teaching regarding three persons in the Godhead, had made statements that countered even the future form of Kellogg's error.

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, unseen by human eyes, that the Lord God is our Keeper and Helper. He hears every word we utter and knows every thought of the mind. Ms66, 1899.11

Such statements seem to have anticipated the confusion that would come in our day. In Ellen's day the idea of "three" was itself a new idea to some. And by 1906 it had been accepted by many Adventists. Kellogg went further and tried to illustrate the three by means of nature's glories. He shouldn't have done that. God is above discussion. In opposing him Ellen made some of her strongest statements. Emphasis below is supplied.

All these spiritualistic representations are simply nothingness. They are imperfect, untrue. They weaken and diminish the Majesty which no earthly likeness can be compared to. God cannot be compared with the things His hands have made. These are mere earthly things, suffering under the curse of God because of the sins of man. The Father cannot be described by the things of earth. 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 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 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.** Ms21, 1906, para 9-11

Who is the Holy Spirit?

Though Ellen White turned the tide in the Adventist church by her statements regarding the “three great powers,” she also made many statements to the effect that Christ lives in our heart through the Holy Spirit. Perhaps the clearest of these is below. Here she explains why Jesus said “I will come to you” when referring to the future gift of the Holy Spirit.

Before offering Himself as the sacrificial victim, Christ sought for the most essential and complete gift to bestow upon His followers, a gift that would bring within their reach the boundless resources of grace. “I will pray the Father,” He said, “and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you orphans: I will come to you.” John 14:16-18, margin.

Before this the Spirit had been in the world; from the very beginning of the work of redemption He had been moving upon men's hearts. But while Christ was on earth, the disciples had desired no other helper. Not until they were deprived of His presence would they feel their need of the Spirit, and then He would come.

The Holy Spirit is Christ's representative, but divested of the personality of humanity, and independent thereof. Cumbered with humanity, Christ could not be in every place personally. Therefore it was for their interest that He should go to the Father, and send the Spirit to be His successor on earth. No one could then have any advantage because of his location or his personal contact with Christ. By the Spirit the Saviour would be accessible to all. In this sense He would be nearer to them than if He had not ascended on high. DA 668-669

When we say that Abraham Lincoln won the civil war, we mean that his armies did the job. When I say, “my knee” I mean part of me. But when I say, “my friend” I mean a person outside of me. In like manner, when the Bible talks about Christ's followers, they are not part of Him. When it speaks of His hair, that is part of Him.

But what about His Spirit? From the *Desire of Ages* quote above we learn that the Spirit abides with us as Christ's representative. But our collective ignorance of Christ's Spirit (which is at times described as a personal being, as in Acts 13:2) makes it difficult for us (impossible for us?) to comprehend how Christ's Spirit could represent him so thoroughly as to be called “Christ in us.” Here we are out of our realm.

The newly released writings in 2015 include a few of these statements where the Spirit in us is identified as Christ. And the best I can make of harmonizing these with *Desire of Ages* is that we are reading about a superhuman representation, that the Spirit represents Christ so well as to be practically Him.

If you harmonize the statements another way, I will not fault you. If you make your way a criterion for faithfulness, or the message for our time, I will fault you gravely.

My Story and Proverbs 8

The antitrinitarian movement that has grown to such large proportions in the last decade, existed 30 years ago also. It was one Mr. Scott Stanley, who had formerly been one of my work supervisors in academy, who approached me in 1990, with his strain of the message. Scott explained that there had been two (from the first page of *Patriarchs and Prophets*) in the Godhead, the Father and the Son. He explained that an ambitious angel, a ministering spirit, aspired to join that two-some and to make a trinity. He gave me quite a Bible study on this as my young mind tried to wrap itself around the ideas he was presenting.

A prominent passage in his Bible study was Proverbs 8. There, he showed me, was the record of Jesus being born to the Father before the creation of the world. These were the two key verses:

Pro 8:24 When *there were* no depths, I was brought forth; when *there were* no fountains abounding with water. 25 Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth:

He showed convincingly that this was speaking of Jesus. And he showed that the Hebrew word for "brought forth" means "to be born." In the following verse it is rendered "calve."

Job 39:1 Knowest thou the time when the wild goats of the rock bring forth? *or* canst thou mark when the hinds do calve?

I left that study shaken up. I went home, prayed earnestly for light, and studied as earnestly as I had prayed. Here is what I found:

First, the Hebrew word "khool" doesn't mean "give birth." Rather, it means "to twist or twirl" or to "writhe." It is the latter meaning that lends itself to the pain involved in child bearing. The word also has a figurative meaning, "to wait." And that is how it is used first in scripture. Khool is rendered "stayed" in the following verse.

Gen 8:10 And he stayed yet other seven days; and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark;

A little more study convinced me that writhing in pain could not describe any birth prior to the curse, for that is when pain became part of birth.

Before my study was over I had discovered that Ellen White's use of Matthew 28:19 harmonized well with the idea that there are three persons in the Godhead.

But back then the antitrinitarian movement was more fanatical, even if less successful. Stanley was

advocating separation from the apostate Adventist Church. And he alleged tampering with Ellen White's writings by such persons as Froom or others. Such accusations have largely been muted now, and the accusers have been roundly shown to have been living in violation of the 9th Commandment.

Today, the use of Proverbs 8 remains from what he presented as a common, but misguided evidence used to oppose the idea that Jesus has existed eternally. (Another reading of the passage will show that Wisdom was established from "the beginning" and was like one brought up with God, of similar age.)

But one modern advocate of non-trinitarianism is Mr. Nader of Australia. I mention him by name because he seems to be revising the dangerous argument that some of Ellen White's materials have been garbled. It began, it seems, with his shock at finding the following statement:

As the saints in the kingdom of God are accepted in the beloved, they hear: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." And then the golden harps are touched, and the music flows all through the heavenly host, and they fall down and worship the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. And then what? What next did I see? Ms139, 1906 para 32.

Our bodies are temples for the Holy Spirit, and temples are for worship. But nonetheless, this is the only statement known to include a reference to worshipping the Holy Spirit. And in this particular sermon, Ellen White made several other statements a few minutes earlier regarding these same Three.

This is the work that is to rest upon us. And then what? Why, it says, "Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Three personalities; and these three personalities are the pledged power from God that His people shall have, if they have been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Now there is no excuse for souls to be left in ignorance and weakness if they will be gospel believers, if they will carry out these principles, and know that the three great Worthies, the Powers in heaven, are pledged to the church of God that will work in harmony with Christ's teachings. Ms139, 1906, para 15.

When one is offended at this statement to the point of suggesting that it is not inspired, one is on very dangerous ground. That is the ground that others have walked on earlier. And it is fearful. But for everyone to know, Ellen White authorized the transcripts made of her sermons up to a certain point before her death. At that point, some transcripts (like Ms 139, 1906) were yet to be approved and published when she died. There is no good reason to doubt she would have done with this transcript differently than she did with hundreds before it, had she lived. (Large numbers of articles in the papers were derived from such transcripts and even a section of *Counsels to Parents, Teachers and Students* was compiled from transcripts of her discussion of its key subjects.)

Ellen White often, in the context of the Kellogg apostasy, alluded to the three persons of the Godhead. It was their “distinct personality” that Kellogg’s early views denied. While the distinct nature of the third person of the Godhead is plain in the following paragraph, and while “personality” simply means “person” in most 19th century writings on such things, still we should admit that there are things hard to be understood in the following paragraph. I do not tell you, non-trinitarian friend, what it means for the Spirit to personify Christ. And I cannot think highly of someone who with great confidence tries to tell me what it means.

The Holy Spirit is the Comforter, in Christ’s name. He personifies Christ, yet is a distinct personality. We may have the Holy Spirit if we ask for it and make it [a] habit to turn to and trust in God rather than in any finite human agent who may make mistakes. Ms93.1893.8

For more on the idea of “three” see Ms27a, 1900. Let’s move on to somethings we can easily agree on.

What my Friends Get Right:

My non-trinitarian friends are certainly right that there is only one God, the Father. (See John 17:2-3). The word God is used that way very many times in Scripture. And in those many cases it means “the ultimate executive of the universe.” So there is just one, and that is the Father.

(There is another sense to the word “God” that means simply “one with the attributes of Divinity.” That sense would include Jesus as you see in John 1:1 and Hebrews 1:8. And the Spirit is the third person of the “godhead” in that sense. That is why our bodies are temples to the Spirit.)

But we shouldn’t deny to our non-trinitarian friends the pleasure of showing us that there is One True God, again, in that ultimate sense.

And our friends are correct that when the Bible says the Father and Jesus are one, it is a reference to their purpose, not to their person. So the middle-age dark ideas of one head with three faces, we all consider to be badly misguided.

And non-trinitarians show correctly that in the future even Jesus will be subject to the Father. That is true. It is the plain teaching of 1 Corinthians 15.

1Co 15:28 And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.

Our friends are also basically right that we should not be directing our prayers to the Holy Spirit. Our instructions are to pray to the Father in the name of Jesus.

(But on that last point, some non-trinitarians makes a mistake. When the Bible says that Jesus is

the one mediator between God and man, that does not mean He is the one intercessor. A mediator makes peace. An intercessor prays. And so men and angels and the Holy Spirit may all make intercession. But only Jesus is the mediator. The Catholic idea of many mediators is completely unlike the Adventist idea of many praying persons.)

Summary and Conclusion

Some of the more radical non-trinitarians say that we should not worship the same God as Rome. That is a tricky idea. It would be like Jesus telling the Jews not to worship the same God as the Sanhedrin. It would be like Paul telling the Athenians that they were worshipping the wrong God when he mentioned the altar to the unknown God.

In reality, the Bible calls men to come to higher understanding of God. But it does not ask Luther to accuse the Catholics of worshipping a separate deity. It does not ask James White to accuse Luther of doing that. And it does not ask non-trinitarians to talk that way either. If they do, they do it on their own initiative.

There is far more that could be written relative to this subject. (And books have been written). But here are my key points in review:

First, the Three Angel's Messages are to unite us in an outward aiming mission to the whole world.

Second, the pioneers didn't understand part of that mission to be to spread their non-trinitarian ideas.

Third, Ellen White became the agent of God in muting those non-trinitarian sentiments in a number of ways.

Fourth, it was a strange view of the Trinity found in many creeds that bothered several of the pioneers.

Fifth, only the sloppiest reading of the actual documents regarding the alpha of apostasy would lead a thoughtful person to think that Kellogg's acceptance of the Trinity was a key component of it. On the contrary, his views were the dangerous alpha both before and after he became trinitarian. And his views of the Spirit in both cases were closer to non-trinitarian views held today than to Ellen White's view of a distinct third person.

Sixth, the non-trinitarians get a lot of things right. Only the Father and the Son are to be exalted in our teachings. The Spirit has neither instructed us to exalt the Spirit, nor given us a model of the apostles doing so. We certainly want more of the Spirit in our lives, but we should yet follow our directions when praising God.

Seventh, we should know the Bible teaching about the timing and reality of the Father begetting the Son. We should understand the idea of Sonship related to character that predated the idea of birth.

Finally, it is Satan that would take us away from our work. And I hope I haven't helped him by giving you 30 minutes of reading on this topic. My aim is to get you back to helping me with the work.

The End. Amen. [Godhead Document no appendix](#)