

A brief undocumented overview of the history of the rejection and the acceptance of the trinity doctrine within Seventh-day Adventism

By Terry Hill

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“The work is soon to close. The members of the church militant who have proved faithful will become the church triumphant. In reviewing our past history, having traveled over every step of advance to our present standing, I can say, Praise God! As I see what God has wrought, I am filled with astonishment and with confidence in Christ as leader. We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and his teaching in our past history.” *(Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, October 12th 1905, Lessons from the Life of Solomon—No. 5)*

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Section one: An introduction and a personal testimony

This is the first of a six part undocumented overview (summary or outline) of the history of the trinity doctrine within Seventh-day Adventism.

By laying aside all the documentary details that are usually employed when portraying such a history, the intent of this article is to give its reader a 'feel' for the changes that over the years have taken place to the fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. It is written in consequence of the continuing trinity debate within this denomination.

For a detailed and documented paper on this history, [please click here](#). If you have any questions relating to it, please email me. Where possible I will only be too glad to help. Concerning this dispute, I am not saying that I have all the answers (far from it) but I am willing to share with others what God has led me to realise. Apart from this I can do no more.

In outlining this history, I have also included some personal observations. Please note that the emphasis is on the 'personal'. Each will have their own views, which, like everyone, they are at liberty to hold. This is the very essence of Protestantism. It is the freedom to hold a belief without being constrained (forced) to believe as the majority believes. It is also the liberty to believe and worship as the conscience dictates. Those not working in this spirit are not working in the Spirit of Christ.

Personal details

My name is Terry Hill and I live in the UK. This is the place where I was born and where for over 45 years I have been a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

My initial encounter with our denomination was at the age of 30 in 1973. This came about when I first met the young lady who was to later become my wife. At that time she had been a Seventh-day Adventist for about five years but as for me, even though I held certain religious convictions, I could only admit to being then of no particular persuasion.

Two years later in 1975, also spiritually a very much wiser person, I was baptised into Christ and became a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

This leaves me today a person of 77 years of age, who, with regards to the Scriptures as well as to Seventh-day Adventism, has acquired more than 47 years of knowledge and experience. Some of this, especially regarding this trinity debate within our own denomination, I would like to now share with you.

Claims of apostasy

It was in the year 2000 that I purposed to 'get to grips' with our present 'trinity debate'. This was shortly after I had heard it claimed that as expressed in what we term our 28 fundamental beliefs, the trinity doctrine is 'part and parcel' of, within our denomination, an ongoing apostasy. Having then been a Seventh-day Adventist for over 24 years, also a professed trinitarian for as long as I can remember, you can imagine how I responded to that claim. I freely admit that because I thought it nothing more than just a ludicrous suggestion made by 'certain extremists' (those not quite rightly balanced in their beliefs), I simply ignored it.

How could anyone (so I reasoned) draw the conclusion that the trinity doctrine had anything to do with an ongoing apostasy, particularly within Seventh-day Adventism? This teaching is the mainstay of the Christian faith (so I then believed). It is its very foundational belief.

Even apart from this, my church is 'the church' that God Himself had brought into being. It is the remnant of Bible prophecy - a people with a last day message for the world. It is also the church that I dearly love and have been an active member of for over 24 years. How could this church possibly find itself in any sort of apostasy? Apostasy was a word that was only applicable to other denominations.

It is no surprise therefore that regarding these trinity/apostasy allegations, I treated them as not deserving of a second thought. Understandably, this is the way that many Seventh-day Adventists would reason.

At this time I was totally oblivious to the fact that my self-created comfort zone was soon to be invaded, also that my spiritual life was about to be shaken up. In arousing His people from their self-inflicted 'spiritual contentment', God has a habit of doing such things. In matters such as this we need to be aware of both His leading and His providences.

Early realisations

Just a short while after hearing about this so-called 'trinity' apostasy, also upon retiring to bed one evening, I was looking for something interesting to read. As usual I found myself rummaging through a pile of old magazines that I keep by my bedside. These were magazines, some many years old that, from time to time, had been passed on to me. I find that very often they make better reading than some of our newer publications.

That particular evening my attention was drawn to the *Ministry* magazine of October 1993 (not so very old but it was now 6 years on from its original publication date). How long this magazine had been in my possession I do not know but obviously I

had not read it before.

I was attracted to it because of its front cover. It had on it an illustration of a man dressed in mid 1800's clothing. He was looking into a full-length mirror. The eye-catching part was that the reflection in the mirror was the very same man dressed in modern day clothing. This was appropriately promoting an article called 'Adventists and Change'. George Knight had written it. He is one of our leading historians. It looked quite interesting so I settled down to read it.

Not realising that this article had anything to do with my experience of a few weeks previous (re the trinity/apostasy claims etc), I turned to the appropriate page and began to read.

Much to my amazement (more shock really), the article began by saying that the majority of our pioneers, even if they wished to do so, could not today become Seventh-day Adventists. This was because, so George Knight explained, our present day beliefs would not be acceptable to them. This is particularly (again as the author explained) with regards to the trinity doctrine and what our pioneers had believed concerning Jesus. He also went to say that their beliefs concerning the Holy Spirit were different. In other words, our official profession of what we believe today concerning God, Christ and the Holy Spirit is far different than what our pioneers had taught.

George Knight then went on to say that in its early days, the Seventh-day Adventist Church had rejected the trinity doctrine: therefore we had once been a non-trinitarian denomination. He very clearly said that our pioneers had consciously rejected this teaching as not being Scriptural.

To say that all of this startled me would be one huge understatement. I was nothing short of being totally stunned. I had no idea that our pioneers had rejected the trinity doctrine – one or two maybe (with quirky ideas) but the vast majority? This was something entirely different.

I had no idea either that over the years our fundamental beliefs had changed - at least not any that I would term 'major'. Certainly I had not realised that our beliefs had changed concerning Christ, which in the main was the thrust of what George Knight was saying. In all honesty I can say that never before had I read anything like this in our publications. It was all completely new to me – and to say the very least, it was very much mind-blowing.

Whilst momentarily mystified at what I was reading, the one thing I quickly realised was that I could not do with this article as I had done with those 'trinity/apostasy claims of a few weeks previous. In other words, I could not regard George Knight's article as just being the ramblings of certain extremists. This author is said to be one of our leading historians - and there was no mistaking what he was saying. Our

pioneers, because they regarded the trinity doctrine as error, had firmly rejected it. Obvious to relate, my thoughts immediately returned to my experience of a few weeks previous, and I must admit I did begin to feel a bit uneasy. I began to feel the prompting of God. He was certainly 'grabbing' my attention but what all this was saying to me I did not then understand.

The one thing that I did realise was that without first checking out those trinity claims, I should never have rejected them. My initial reaction had not been appropriate for someone who was supposed to be a seeker after truth. I knew that I must never again react the same way. This was a lesson well and truly learnt but it was only the beginning of my realisations. There was much more to come.

There was no doubt in my mind that all of this was providential. God was leading and I could do no other than follow. As a Christian this was 'my lot'.

The Ministry article

George Knight is recognised as being one of the leading historians of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He had written his *Ministry* article to explain, also in an attempt to justify, our denominational changeover from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism. At that time (1993), just as it still is now, this change was being challenged from within.

This article was obviously written and published in answer to this internal criticism. This is what really took me by surprise. I had not even realised that there had been such a changeover, let alone that it was being criticized. In other words, not only was I unaware of a trinity controversy within our denomination, but had not realised either that over the years we had changed our beliefs - and this realisation was in the year 1999. It appears therefore that by that time, this debate had not come to the fore here in England. No one I spoke to at that time appeared to know anything about it - not even concerning the changeover. All seemed quite oblivious that it had taken place.

Even though I had been a Seventh-day Adventist for 24 years, I did believe that we had always been a trinitarian denomination. Such at that time (1999) was my blissful but very unfortunate ignorance of this particular part of our denominational history but this state of bliss was not to continue. God was overseeing.

By reading this *Ministry* article, I came to realise that throughout the entire time of Ellen White's ministry (1844-1915), our overall denominational beliefs had been decidedly non-trinitarian. Putting this in another way, it was only after Ellen White's death that the trinity doctrine was introduced into Seventh-day Adventism. This is what had surprised me so much, and what led me to realise that I needed to study this issue for myself. To say the least, there seemed to be something 'very odd'

about it.

During my personal studies that were to follow, I also came to realise that for decades after Ellen White's death, we were still recognised as being a non-trinitarian denomination. This was not only by our own members but also by other denominations. This reveals that within our ranks, this non-trinitarianism was very deeply rooted.

Although this *Ministry* article had been written by one of our leading historians, I must admit that I was not very impressed with some of the justification that was offered for such a change in beliefs. It did not seem to me to be very plausible or very convincing. This aroused within me a suspicion that there was more to this controversy than was 'meeting the eye'. As much as anything else, it was this doubt that led me to realise that further investigation was necessary.

Although creating in my mind more questions than it had actually answered, George Knight's article did primarily serve to change my 'Laodicean' attitude. It also reminded me of the obligation that God places upon us, as His people, to search for and establish what is truth. Certainly I now wanted to know the truth regarding this particular part of our denominational history. This much the article had definitely achieved.

More than anything else it had arrested my attention. It is also true to say that it had 'stopped me in my tracks'. This was obviously God's intention of me reading it. Looking back now I also believe that this was His intent of initially allowing some of those 'older magazines' to come into my possession. Such I have found is often the manner of God's leading. This is why we need to recognise this leading, also His providences.

A voyage of discovery

After reading the *Ministry* article through a number of times, also becoming increasingly dissatisfied with what I was reading, I knew that the entire matter called for personal study. So it was that in the year 2000 I embarked on what has now become, in 2021, 21 years of research on this topic.

Apart from the history aspect, the one thing that really did interest me was the reasoning behind *why* our pioneers had rejected the trinity doctrine. This was something that I felt really did need investigation. Did they know something that I did not know? As it happened I found out that the answer to that question is yes, but this is jumping ahead of my story. We shall return to this thought in later sections.

After reading George Knight's article, I also felt the need to understand why for such a long period of time that God had allowed His remnant people to reject this

teaching. After all I reasoned, for the first 71 years of our existence we had His very own chosen messenger amongst us, namely Ellen White, so why through her had He not said anything about this situation. Remember, at the beginning of my studies I still believed that the trinity doctrine was the most important belief in Christianity. This same reasoning remained with me for some while. Traditional beliefs are not always easily abandoned.

Apart from anything else, this *Ministry* article also led me to question my beliefs regarding our pioneers. It was certainly making me look at them in a different light. It did cast a lot of doubts about what I then believed - meaning about them and our history. It had also generated a lot of questions for which I had no answers. This certainly needed to be resolved.

This article also made me realise that I did not know as much as I thought I knew. Admitting having a shortage of knowledge is not a customary confession made by Seventh-day Adventists.

I knew that this 'trinity history' demanded my attention and investigation. I also realised it was my God given duty to study it. When placed in such a position, what else can a Christian do?

So it was that with many questions in my mind demanding an answer, I set out on what became for me a voyage of discovery.

Looking back now I was totally unprepared for the surprises that would come my way. In fact I can honestly say that this particular part of my Christian journey was filled with discoveries regarding our denominational history that up to then I had never even heard mentioned. Certainly I had not read of them in any of our denominational books – and this was after being a Seventh-day Adventist for 24 years.

This trinity side of our history is not something that had been previously brought to the fore – at least not as far as I was concerned. This was something else that intrigued me. Why had it been kept 'under wraps' for so many years - which to me it seemed had been done?

As would be expected, initially I began to talk to others about my 'discoveries'. They were just as surprised as I was regarding this part of our history, and some had been Seventh-day Adventists for longer than I had been. This was my only consolation. I was just glad that in my blissful ignorance I was not on my own.

Section two - Early history

Anti-trinitarianism and non-trinitarianism

Twenty-one years ago at the very beginning of my 'trinity studies', my first realisation was that certain of our leading brethren had been anti-trinitarian. Through our denominational publications, also in a very clear and decisive manner, they had spoken out against the trinity doctrine.

These pioneers believed that this teaching should never have been introduced into Christianity. Some wrote passionately against it, saying that it was a 'leftover' from the Reformation, a long-held tradition that the reformers had failed to denounce.

The remainder of the pioneers I describe as non-trinitarian. This is because whilst they were not as openly hostile towards 'the trinity' as those I term anti-trinitarian, they did hold to beliefs that were not trinitarian. Needless to say, because of their beliefs, they too were opposed to this teaching.

This may surprise many Seventh-day Adventists but I would certainly include Ellen White amongst the non-trinitarians. This is because some of her beliefs would never fit into a genuine trinitarian theology.

History attests that all of our pioneers were either anti-trinitarian or non-trinitarian. As to yet I have not encountered any who, prior to the 20th century, professed a belief in the trinity doctrine.

An unnecessary and confusing terminology

There are a number of different understandings of 'the trinity'. This is probably why neither for nor against did Ellen White ever mention it, at least not by naming it. In her writings she never once mentioned the word 'trinity' – at least with respect to the Godhead - although it is reasonable to believe that she did at times allude to this teaching.

This is a valuable lesson for today's Seventh-day Adventists. I say this because when explaining our theology, rather than employ a word or phrase that can portray a variety of different meanings (such as 'the trinity'), there is a necessity to be more specific. It must be said that if not very careful, the word 'trinity' can conceal a multitude of errors. It can also be the cause of considerable confusion.

In her 71 years of speaking and writing for God, Ellen White never found the necessity of employing the expression of 'the trinity' regarding the Godhead, so why should Seventh-day Adventists today find it necessary to use it? It is all too obvious

that it is best not to do so. Unquestionably it is an unnecessary and confusing expression.

The first trinity confession

The very first Seventh-day Adventist that I have found to profess anything like a belief in the trinity doctrine was our one-time chief physician John Harvey Kellogg. This he did as a means to justify what he had written in his book 'The Living Temple'. This was in 1903, which as a movement of people was almost 60 years after our beginnings (1844). This heralded a time of very serious doctrinal crisis for Seventh-day Adventists.

Ellen White condemned Kellogg's views of God and Christ. She said that with regards to God's presence and personality, this physician was speculating about something that God had not revealed.

During the ministry of Ellen White, Seventh-day Adventists did not believe that the Holy Spirit was a personal being such as God and Christ are personal beings but Kellogg said, as do trinitarians, he had come to believe it. This is the way he explained that God was personally in everything but not God the Father. He said that God the Holy Spirit was in everything. Ellen White condemned this reasoning.

When Kellogg made his trinity confession, Seventh-day Adventists believed that the Holy Spirit was the personal presence of both God and Christ when neither were bodily (physically) present. To Seventh-day Adventists therefore, the Holy Spirit was God and Christ omnipresent. By saying that the Holy Spirit is actually in everything (Kellogg's teaching), this according to Seventh-day Adventist reasoning was saying that both God and Christ were in everything. This is what made Kellogg's teachings unacceptable. Apart from anything else, Ellen White said that it was making both God and Christ non-entities.

Some may say that when Seventh-day Adventists came to accept that the Holy Spirit was a personality (which they were led to believe through the spirit of prophecy), this constituted a change of faith but this is not strictly true. This is because whilst this was an ongoing revelation from God regarding His very being (meaning how He exists), they still continued to believe Him to be both God and Christ omnipresent. Certainly they did not believe Him to be another personage like God and Christ therefore someone separate from them. According to their theology, the Holy Spirit belonged to God and Christ.

In brief, Seventh-day Adventists were still as non-trinitarian as they always had been although they could talk in terms now of three living personalities of the Godhead (a trio of personalities but not God a trinity).

No condemnation from Ellen White

Concerning the Godhead, never once did Ellen White tell Seventh-day Adventists that they were wrong in their beliefs. Neither did she say they were wrong in their rejection of the trinity doctrine. In fact it can only be found that she did exactly the opposite. In other words, regarding their beliefs, Ellen White supported the pioneers.

The latter was especially evident when during the early 1900's and from within our own ranks, our denominational faith was very seriously challenged. She then told Seventh-day Adventists to hold fast to it.

At the 1905 General Conference, Ellen White reminded the delegates that it was God that had given them this faith therefore it should never be changed. She said that it had been held sacred by them for 50 years. Note that this was 7 years after 'The Desire of Ages' had been published therefore showing that what she had written in this book was in accordance to what was believed then by Seventh-day Adventists. It also shows us that she did not expect this book to contribute to changing our beliefs in the future. This is something else about which we can be sure.

Throughout the time period to which Ellen White referred (1855-1905), our established denominational faith had been strictly non-trinitarian. Needless to say, we did eventually change our faith (our fundamental beliefs) but this was not until after Ellen White had died. It took decades for the changeover to take place. A denomination's faith cannot be changed overnight.

A remarkable realisation – or is it?

To many pro-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists, it probably seems remarkable that never once did Ellen White tell our pioneers that they were wrong in their rejection of the trinity doctrine. This is because these same pro-trinitarians believe that she was a trinitarian. In contrast to this, the non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists are far from being surprised at her silence. They believe that like all of our other pioneers, she was a non-trinitarian. Whether Ellen White was a trinitarian or not is obviously a major part of the ongoing trinity debate within Seventh-day Adventism.

A number of our leading pioneers were decidedly anti-trinitarian. By this I mean that they spoke out directly against the trinity doctrine. These were such as Joseph Bates, James White, J. N. Andrews, Uriah Smith, R. F. Cottrell, M. E. Cornell and J. H. Waggoner etc although never did Ellen White say to any of them that in their attacks on this teaching that they were wrong. We can only assume therefore that God never told her to tell them that they were wrong.

Even in her later years, Ellen White still maintained that concerning God and Christ, the beliefs of our pioneers had been correct. To anyone who is attempting to understand the truth regarding the present trinity debate within Seventh-day Adventism, this should be a crucial observation. Certainly it needs to be given very serious consideration.

If God had told Ellen White that these pioneers were wrong in their anti-trinitarianism, then it can only be said that her silence really is remarkable. I say this because as God's messenger to the remnant (having been blessed with the gift of prophecy), it would have been her 'lot' to correct them. As it was, she said nothing. This is one of the reasons why when she died in 1915, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still a predominantly non-trinitarian denomination.

As we shall see in later sections, not everyone was 'happy' with this non-trinitarian faith but never did Ellen White condemn this concept. She only supported it. It was only after she died that moves were openly made to introduce trinitarian concepts into the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This should be telling us something very important.

James White

If the trinity doctrine is correct, meaning that God wants His people to believe this teaching, there is an even more remarkable realisation than Ellen White's silence. This realisation is that in 1848, which was just four years after the great disappointment of October 22nd 1844, Ellen White received a vision from God showing that her husband James was to begin publishing a paper. Whilst at first she said it would be a small paper, she did say that she was shown by God that it would "be like streams of light that went clear round the world".

Why I say remarkable is because James White was one of Seventh-day Adventism's most passionate anti-trinitarians. In fact when he died in 1881, he was still as anti-trinitarian as he had been in the beginning. This was even after being married to Ellen White for 35 years.

As far as records show, James White had always been anti-trinitarian. This was even before he allied himself to the advent people. This means that not only did God choose an anti-trinitarian to begin the publishing work of Seventh-day Adventists, but also that He was quite content to allow a non-trinitarian to continue it. We shall return to this thought later.

It also means that God's messenger to the remnant married a devout anti-trinitarian. Some may say that this latter realisation means nothing because James White was not yet a Sabbath-keeper yet Ellen White still married him. This is very

true indeed but at this time (August 1846), and just like her husband, she did not fully understand the truth concerning the true Sabbath (Saturday) although both were considering its significance. It was only after they were married that they both became Sabbath-keepers. This was almost two years after Ellen White has received her first vision from God.

The stark reality is that concerning any major (serious) error of belief that they and the other pioneers may have held, God very quickly dispelled it.

The faith established

It was through earnest prayer, collective Bible study and miraculous revelation through the spirit of prophecy (through Ellen White) that the major beliefs of Seventh-day Adventism became established. It was these 'established truths', meaning what was believed concerning both God and Christ, the Sabbath, the state of the dead, the sanctuary, the pre-advent judgement as well as the nearness of the return of Jesus etc, that was made very clear to them. This was so that these very same beliefs, via our denominational publications, could be sent around the world as constituting an integral part of God's last day message. These truths were obviously the "streams of light" that were to go clear around the world.

God was obviously 'happy' with what He knew was going to be published by James White and the other pioneers, even though it would include anti-trinitarianism (or non-trinitarianism). These were the very same truths embraced by all who became Seventh-day Adventists.

Whilst Ellen White was alive, everything that Seventh-day Adventists believed concerning God and Christ was within a non-trinitarian framework. Up to, and even beyond her death, this is the belief that was consistently published by our denomination. This is obviously very significant with respect to how the trinity doctrine was regarded by early Seventh-day Adventists. They rejected it as being unscriptural.

James White and the publishing work

Needless to say, James White did take up the publishing work. In fact up until the time of his death in 1881, which was 33 years after he was originally given his commission, it was his life work. It is also true to say that during his lifetime, whether it was in our books or in our periodicals, all that was ever published were views that were either anti-trinitarian or non-trinitarian.

It was exactly the same following his death (1881). All that was ever printed could be encompassed within these same two terminologies. This continued right through to the death of Ellen White (1915) and even beyond.

In the light of the knowledge that God knows everything before it happens, it must be asked why He chose someone to begin the publishing work that He knew would be an anti-trinitarian until the day that he died? We can ask as well why He allowed non-trinitarianism to be promoted in all of our denominational publications, also why He allowed it to become the established faith of Seventh-day Adventists.

The only answer these questions is that it was non-trinitarianism that God wanted Seventh-day Adventists and the rest of Christian world to believe. What other answer can there be? If it is thought that this is not the case, then a reasonable answer must be provided as to why He not only allowed it to become the established faith of Seventh-day Adventists but also why He did not reprove those who, through our publications, were promoting it as the truth. In fact seeing that He had given Ellen White the prophetic gift and because through her He offered no rebuke, it can be said that He was encouraging it.

Speaking in terms that are relative to us, God, through Ellen White, had 70 years (1844-1915) to tell the Seventh-day Adventist Church that they were wrong concerning their rejection of the trinity doctrine but as it was He said nothing. Should not this be saying something very important to us today?

A gradual acceptance

It is generally maintained by Seventh-day Adventist trinitarians that over a period of something like 100 years or more (1844-1960's), God gradually led His people from non-trinitarianism into trinitarianism (important to note here is that trinitarianism cannot be said to be established within Seventh-day Adventism until at least the 1960's or even the 1970's). If it did take this length of time and if God was leading, it would be a very strange happening indeed.

I say this because it would be just as strange (if it had happened) as God taking over 100 years to lead us into the truth about the Sabbath, or taking 100 years to lead us into the truth about the state of the dead, or even taking over 100 years to lead us into the truth about the sanctuary and the investigative judgement etc. Why would He take such a long time to do it? This indeed would be a very strange happening.

To put this in another way, if God did lead us into trinitarianism in this manner, why did He very quickly reveal to our pioneers the truth about all of our other major doctrines and yet not do this concerning Him being a trinity (which according to the trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists is what happened)? Does this make any sense? In other words again, why did He wait until non-trinitarianism had become so well established within our denomination that it would literally take decades of time, also a huge amount of hassle, to change it to a faith that is trinitarian? Again this does not make any sense. It would be like us for the same length of time being a

denomination of Sunday-keepers, and then gradually lead us into Sabbath-keeping. From the beginning, it is evident that God wanted us to be 'one in doctrine' so why take so long to develop us into believing that He was a trinity of divine beings (if He did so), also why wait until after the death of Ellen White to do it? Surely the whole point of God giving this lady the gift of prophecy was to direct His people to what the Scriptures say, also to keep us from believing error.

If God wanted us to become trinitarians, none of these questions are easily answered - at least not by the trinitarians amongst us. This is because they say that all through the time of Ellen White's ministry, Seventh-day Adventists were teaching error not Scriptural truth concerning God and Christ. Does this seem a believable conclusion? Is it possible that God allowed these errors to be taught all the time of His servant's ministry and yet say nothing about it? Why wait until after she had died and then do something about it? Again does this make any sense?

God nipped the 'spurious Sabbath' (Sunday) in the bud. This He also did with many other errors that were traditionally held by those who allied themselves to the advent movement. It is only reasonable to believe therefore that if He had considered our anti-trinitarianism (non-trinitarianism) to be wrong, He would also have done the same with that belief. Certainly He would not have allowed it to become our established denominational faith and then change it. That is not reasonable to believe.

This non-trinitarianism was not a side issue within Seventh-day Adventism. It permeated all of our beliefs. It was a major part of our teachings.

Concerning our non-trinitarianism and anti-trinitarianism, God never said anything in condemnation of it. It was promoted year after year in our publications and became the established faith of the body. In other words, it was this non-trinitarianism that was sent around the world as 'streams of light'. This was the teaching that literally thousands were led to believe was the truth concerning God and His Son. Countless thousands died believing and promoting it. This remained the status quo right up until the death of Ellen White and even beyond.

No trinitarianism within early Seventh-day Adventism

Between 1849 (the year of our first official publication) and until the death of Ellen White in 1915, which most would realise is the time period when Seventh-day Adventism was firmly established, no trinitarianism (as purported by the trinity doctrine) is found within our publications. It is no surprise therefore that the trinitarian denominations termed us as being a non-Christian cult.

Just as they still do today, trinitarians have always believed that the central belief of the Christian faith is the trinity doctrine. In fact any group or body of people that

does not teach this doctrine, regardless of their denominational name or any other beliefs they may hold, are regarded as a cult. Within Christianity, this is how it always has been and probably how it will be, at least until Jesus returns.

It was our ongoing and continual promotion of this non-trinitarianism, particularly within our publications, that destined us to become such a decidedly strong non-trinitarian denomination. Regarding the gospel, some of the beliefs once held by our denomination were only possible within a non-trinitarian framework. Obvious to relate, these beliefs we do not appear to teach today. We shall encounter these in a later section.

We need to ask though, should we be more concerned how other people regard us than how God regards us? This is a very important question but the answer is so obvious that it does not even engender discussion.

As long as we are teaching what the Scriptures reveal, even if it is non-trinitarianism, we should not be concerned if the other denominations refer to us as a cult. As a reward for believing only what God says, this may be the price that we have to pay.

In reality, if we are preaching the truth and it does serve to condemn the false teachings of the other denominations, why should we not expect them to level these types of accusations at us? It is only reasonable to believe that this is what they would do. Certainly they are not going to look upon us with favour. If they do look upon us with favour, then it is probably because we are not teaching the truth as it should be taught.

A very weak argument

Any attempt to justify our once rejection of the trinity doctrine on the grounds that it was just because a few of our early pioneers were non-trinitarian (or came from non-trinitarian denominations) is an extremely weak (poor) argument. I say this for a number of reasons.

The first is because at the very beginning of our 'coming together' as a movement of people, we held amongst us many wrong beliefs. We comprised of Sunday worshippers, believers in the immortality of the soul as well as holding all sorts of other errors traditionally held by Christians but through corporate prayer, Bible study and revelation through the spirit of prophecy, God very quickly corrected us in all these things. If He had not done this then it would have been 'error' that through our publications would have been sent around the world as streams of light and not the truth.

This leads us to conclude that if concerning God and Christ we had been believing

error, there is no reason to believe that at the same time that God had corrected us on all these 'other wrong beliefs', that He would not have corrected us also on this one (meaning our opposition to the trinity doctrine). This is especially so as this concerned the most important belief of all, meaning the truth concerning God and His Son. It is not reasonable to believe therefore that it was only because a few of our pioneers were non-trinitarian that we remained non-trinitarian until decades after the death of Ellen White.

It must also be remembered that during the time period of our denominational development, we did have God's own messenger amongst us, namely Ellen White, so up to 1915 and through her, God was guiding us in our beliefs. To say therefore that for such a long period of time (1844-1915) we were a non-trinitarian denomination only because a few of our early pioneers were non-trinitarian, really does not make any sense at all. From our very beginnings, God was overseeing.

This non-trinitarianism was consistently taught within Seventh-day Adventism. It was not something that just a few of our pioneers believed. If it had been, this would be entirely different. It could then be said that it was simply 'the personal' views of some. This though was not the case. Non-trinitarianism was the denominational faith.

We must also take into consideration that no one was forced to become a Seventh-day Adventist. Those who became members knew beforehand that it was a non-trinitarian denomination they were joining. In other words they became Seventh-day Adventists voluntarily.

This is the way that the Seventh-day Adventist Church was built up. It just grew with people joining it who rejected the trinity doctrine. This is another reason why it cannot be said that just because a few of our early pioneers were non-trinitarian we were a non-trinitarian denomination. Our church grew into a non-trinitarian denomination and everyone was aware of it, especially the trinitarian denominations.

Not a development of faith

Some say that God developed our faith from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism but this is not possible. This is because the two concepts are diametrically opposed to each other. Allow me to explain.

The two words 'trinitarianism' and 'non-trinitarianism' speak volumes in themselves. They are obviously two opposing concepts. This is why they are called as such (trinitarianism and non-trinitarianism).

These two beliefs are as different as are Sunday-keeping and Sabbath-keeping.

They are also as different as the belief of the immortality of the soul and soul annihilation. Never can one belief become (develop into) the other. To change from one belief to the other, whichever way it is done, one of the views must be rejected as error. One belief cannot be modified to become the other.

What can happen is that a non-trinitarian denomination can develop into one that is trinitarian. This is what happened to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This means that it was the denomination that developed and not the belief itself. To become trinitarian, the Seventh-day Adventist Church had to consciously reject non-trinitarianism. This was the same as when we were non-trinitarian. We consciously rejected the concepts of the trinity doctrine

This non-trinitarianism was completely across the board within Seventh-day Adventism. It permeated everything that we once believed. It was an integral part of our end time message, the predominant faith of our denomination. The trinitarian denominations recognised us as being anti-trinitarian. This is obviously one of the reasons why they did not accept us as even being 'Christian'. This is something else we shall speak more of later.

Around the world

Wherever our publications went throughout the world, everyone who read them was exposed to this self-same non-trinitarian theology. This was the faith that the entire world was told that Seventh-day Adventists believed was the truth. It can only be reasoned therefore that if our pioneers had been wrong in these beliefs, meaning that as purported by the trinity doctrine God really is a tri-unity of divine beings, this would have been a very strange situation indeed.

I say strange because even apart from our 'other' teachings, thousands were led to believe that our publications were teaching the truth about God and Christ. This was obviously the whole point of the exercise. It is also obviously what Ellen White meant when she said that what we taught in our publications would be like "streams of light" going around the world. This included our non-trinitarianism, even at times our anti-trinitarianism.

Remember too that our pioneers were telling others that we were God's remnant people, and that our message was the final one that God would send to this dying world. We even said to these 'others' that they were to come out of their denominational message and into ours. This meant that we were actually saying to them that through our denomination, God was saying that they were to come out of their trinitarianism and into our non-trinitarianism (even into our anti-trinitarianism).

To many who were trinitarian, this would have been an anathema. Certainly it would have been a major stumbling block in accepting our end-time message. As far as

they were concerned, it would have put a decided damper on whom we claimed to be, meaning God's remnant people. Trinitarians regarded anti-trinitarians as heretics of the highest order. They still do. To the trinitarian, our anti-trinitarianism (non-trinitarianism) was 'proof positive' that we were not God's remnant people. That much is for sure.

Trinitarian non-Seventh-day Adventists

It is important here to give some consideration to the non-Seventh-day Adventist trinitarians. This is because by reason of our continuing rejection of the trinity doctrine, they would have found it very difficult indeed to accept the other 'peculiarities' of our faith.

It is very true to say that in the reasoning of a genuine trinitarian, the trinity doctrine is 'absolutely everything'. It is not just 99% important to their faith but 100% imperative. This is how it has become today within Seventh-day Adventism. The trinity doctrine has become absolutely 'everything' to many Seventh-day Adventists whereas at one time it was totally contrary to our faith. This is a complete reversal from how things were when Ellen White was alive.

When our faith was antagonistic to the trinity doctrine, the trinitarian denominations considered us to be a cult. This was not only because of our rejection of the trinity doctrine (which obviously would have been a major factor in their conclusions) but also because a great deal of our God-given message was also opposed to what they would have termed 'Christian'.

This was such as our beliefs regarding the state of the dead, the seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday), the sanctuary and very much in particular, the investigative judgement. The latter very seriously conflicted with what many other Christians, particularly the evangelicals, believed to be the truth about the atonement.

Our faith would also have included our denominational belief concerning Ellen White. In the main, the other denominations did not regard her as having been given the gift of the spirit of prophecy. They also regarded her as upholding the pioneers in their beliefs, which of course she did.

Let's not forget either that we once taught that we were God's chosen people, also that all the other denominations constituted the falling or fallen Babylon of Bible prophecy. This was obviously a major antagonism between us and the other denominations. Needless to say, for quite a variety of reasons, these 'other denominations' regarded us as being the heretical ones.

Our pioneers were teaching also that Sunday keeping would eventually culminate in an end-time mark of the beast scenario. To Sunday-keeping denominations, this

particular understanding of Bible prophecy was something else that they considered highly heretical.

With a message such as this we could well have done without us being a non-trinitarian denomination, especially if we were wrong in this belief.

Why I have said all of this is because to the vast majority of trinitarians, our anti-trinitarian faith made accepting the above 'peculiarities' of our message an almost impossible thing to do. Can you imagine what it actually takes for a genuine trinitarian to convert to non-trinitarianism? It is much the same as it would take for today's Seventh-day Adventist trinitarian to accept non-trinitarianism. How difficult is that to do?

Whilst there were those who in becoming Seventh-day Adventists did give up their trinitarian faith, there must have been vast numbers that because of our anti-trinitarianism were 'put off' from even an investigation of the 'peculiarities' of our message. I say this because generally speaking, trinitarians believe that those who do not make a profession of the trinity doctrine are denying the divinity of Christ. This was often believed of Seventh-day Adventists, meaning that by some it was believed that Seventh-day Adventists denied Christ's divinity. This non-trinitarianism really was a major stumbling block to many trinitarians.

If therefore we were wrong in our Godhead theology - which in reality did affect every aspect of the gospel as it was understood by the early Seventh-day Adventists = then why did not God, through Ellen White, say so?

This is a question that demands a tremendous amount of consideration because as has been said, to many trinitarians, our non-trinitarianism was one huge stumbling block in accepting our end time message. Many, because of this, would have even gone to their death not accepting it. We must ask therefore, who was responsible for this ongoing situation? Was it our pioneers for teaching it or was it God for not correcting them?

Section three: Early theology

Early Seventh-day Adventists and the deity of Christ

Within Seventh-day Adventism today there is a very serious misapprehension being circulated. This is that because our pioneers were opposed to the trinity doctrine, they did not believe in the full and complete divinity of Christ. This is not only an appalling misunderstanding of our denominational history, but also of our past theology. It is also a very large 'red herring'. I will return to this latter thought later.

Even when we were a non-trinitarian denomination, the predominant faith of Seventh-day Adventists was that Christ is God. This of course was not from a trinitarian perspective but from one that is purely Scriptural. What I mean by this is that non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists based their reasoning on what the Scriptures reveal regarding the personalities of the Godhead, but never did they involve themselves with the extreme speculations of the trinity doctrine. They rejected such suppositions. This is why they were non-trinitarian.

This is where it must be realised that the trinity doctrine is only a speculative teaching, meaning it is only an assumed doctrine. In other words, the trinity doctrine is not explicitly stated within Scripture. This is why the early Seventh-day Adventists were not trinitarians. They believed as much as God has revealed but did not seek to speculate beyond.

Trinitarians claim of course that their teaching is built upon everything that the Bible says concerning the three personalities of the Godhead but it must be said that if any teaching does include what God has not revealed, which is true of the trinity doctrine, then it is only a speculative doctrine. On the other hand, if anything revealed is omitted - which regarding Christ is what is being claimed by the non-trinitarians - then the trinity doctrine itself will be a distorted teaching.

Trinitarians maintain that the only correct way to express the true divinity of Christ is as it is expressed in the trinity doctrine. This cannot be true because the trinity doctrine is not found specifically expressed in the Scriptures. This means that a 'Scripture only' view of the divinity of Christ must be one that is expressed in terms that are non-trinitarian.

'Scripture only' must be non-trinitarianism. This is exactly what our pioneers believed and taught. To put this in another way again, to believe any type of genuine trinity doctrine, a person must assume what God has not revealed. Trinitarians will usually admit to this much being true.

Trinity essentialness

There are many Seventh-day Adventists who fail to understand what the trinity doctrine actually teaches. Prior to my own 'trinity studies', I was one of them.

To be able to be termed truly trinitarian, any trinity formula must contain two essentials. If any doctrine lacks any part of this essentialness, then it is not a true trinitarian formula (doctrine).

This trinity essentialness is both 'threeness' and 'indivisible oneness'. Note well the indivisibility of this oneness. It is of the utmost importance.

The threeness is obviously the three personalities of the Godhead whilst the indivisible oneness is the one being of God. The latter is sometimes referred to as the one substance or the one essence of God, meaning the one God. This oneness also involves a coeternity between the three. Without these essentials there is no trinitarian doctrine.

One very large red herring

The issues that the majority of early non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists had with the trinity doctrine did not just concern the divinity of Christ, or the personhood of the Holy Spirit, although it must be admitted that this is the idea that today is being circulated by many of the pro-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists. This is why I previously said that this type of reasoning is just a very large 'red herring'. The real problem was that the entirety of our denominational faith was built upon non-trinitarianism. This was particularly so with our one-time understanding of the gospel.

There were those of our pioneers who believed that the atonement was very seriously affected by the trinity doctrine. This is because according to trinitarian theology, only human nature died at Calvary, and not the divine personage of the pre-existent Son of God. This is why all that trinitarians have for atonement (a sacrifice for sin) is human nature. They do not have a divine sacrifice. This is obviously why they must emphasise the 'sinlessness' of that human nature. Does this 'ring a bell' with respect to the 'human nature' of Christ controversy that exists today within Seventh-day Adventism? It did not exist as such when we were a non-trinitarian denomination.

Contrary to the trinitarians, the non-trinitarians believe that it was the divine pre-existent Son of God that died at Calvary. This is inasmuch as when He was in the tomb, not only did all that comprised the life and intelligence of Jesus remain with His body in death but also that it was completely out of our Saviour's hands to call Himself back to life. In other words, like as we are in death, Jesus was not only unconscious of what was happening around Him but was also completely dependant upon someone outside of Himself for a resurrection from His death. To put it another way again, if God the Father had not raised Jesus from the grave, He would still be there today. This is non-trinitarianism.

It is the generally held belief of non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists that the divine Christ could have sinned. They also believe that if this had happened, then God would not have resurrected Him from the grave. No true trinitarian would ever believe such a thing. In fact within trinitarian theology, that particular outcome is totally impossible.

According to trinitarian theology, there are no circumstances under which it is

possible for the pre-existent Son of God to actually die or cease to exist. It is no surprise therefore that to the trinitarian denominations we were once a non-Christian cult. The trinitarians regard the teaching of the possible loss of the eternal life of the Son to be anathema. Most 'orthodox' trinitarians believe that it was impossible for Christ to have sinned. This is something else that the trinitarians had against the one time non-trinitarian faith of Seventh-day Adventists (refer to section two). The latter believed that Christ could have sinned.

Our cult image was the way it remained throughout the time of the pioneers. This was even up to decades after the death of Ellen White. It can easily be imagined why some of our leadership were not 'head over heels' in love with this situation. They obviously wanted to be thought of as 'genuine Christians' not a cult. It appears therefore that rather than being concerned about what God had revealed, these were more concerned with how these 'others', particularly the trinitarians, regarded them.

Needless to say, whilst we maintained the status quo with our non-trinitarian faith, it was impossible for the vast majority of Christianity to think of us any differently.

Non-trinitarians - restorers of the true gospel

This reasoning that the pre-existent Son of God did not really die at Calvary, also that it was totally impossible for Him to lose His eternal existence, has now become the reasoning of many pro-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists.

According to many of the non-trinitarians amongst us, it is this reasoning that obscures a true understanding of the love that God has shown towards fallen humanity. In other words, say the non-trinitarians, the real gospel is lost to the theology of the trinity doctrine. This is just one of the reasons why within our denomination today there is an anti-trinitarian movement.

These non-trinitarians are attempting to restore what they believe is the true gospel. They believe that the love of God can only be fully comprehended with the realisation that in attempting to save mankind from sin, God was willing to allow His Son, if He had sinned, to go out of existence.

Regarding this very same issue, I quite recently had a conversation with a Seventh-day Adventist minister. In the same manner as other ministers have attempted to do (Seventh-day Adventist and otherwise), he tried to convince me that it was not a divine person who had died at Calvary but only human nature. He said that it was impossible for this divine personage to actually die or cease to exist. Thus he was expounding what it seems is progressively becoming the established faith of Seventh-day Adventists.

This is rank trinitarianism. It is part and parcel of the reasoning that was objected to by past non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists. It is certainly the reasoning that is being objected to by current non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists. This is why to say that the present trinity debate within Seventh-day Adventism only concerns whether Christ is fully deity or not, really is a very large red herring.

Very much a 'begotten' problem

In 'old time' Seventh-day Adventism, Christ was said to be, in His pre-existence, begotten of God therefore He was said to be truly the Son of God. This Sonship was a pre-existent Sonship. It was not said to be a Sonship because of the events of the incarnation.

This pre-existent Sonship of Christ was once everything to Seventh-day Adventists. In fact it was crucial to their understanding of the gospel. Today, the official position in Seventh-day Adventism is that the Second Person of the Godhead (as He is often termed), because He is not in His pre-existence begotten (sourced) of God, is not the pre-existent Son of God.

After the death of Ellen White, moves were made by certain of our leading brethren to bring about a change to our denominational 'begotten' faith. This can be seen in the 1919 Bible Conference held at Takoma Park in Washington. Some began to push for a trinitarian type of Christ. This was even though a non-trinitarian Christ had been our denominational faith since our beginnings (1844). It does appear therefore that whilst Ellen White was alive, this rebellion was 'waiting in the wings' but partly due to her influence it never gained the pre-eminence.

This is another of the reasons, perhaps the main one really, why today within Seventh-day Adventism there exists an anti-trinitarian movement. The anti-trinitarians are saying that because of trinity theology, Christ is being denied His rightful relationship with God, meaning being deprived of His divine Sonship. To many of the non-trinitarians, the trinity doctrine is a denigration of Christ not an exalting of Him.

A greater part of the trinity debate has always been the begotten issue. The question has always been, just as it still is today, is Christ begotten (brought forth) of the Father or is He not? In the current trinity debate within Seventh-day Adventism, this is still the leading question. It is only the same as asking if Christ is really the pre-existent Son of God or not. In this sense, the non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists say that He is truly the Son of God whilst the Seventh-day Adventist trinitarians say that He is not.

According to early Seventh-day Adventists, also to the non-trinitarians amongst us

today, this begotten concept also maintains that Christ is no one other than God Himself in the person of His own Son. In other words, within begotten theology, the Son of God is God Himself begotten (not a begotten lesser god). This is why although they were non-trinitarians, our pioneers believed in the full and complete divinity of Christ. This is why I have said that the argument that we became trinitarians to depict Christ as full and complete deity is just a red herring (a subterfuge).

Whilst Ellen White was alive, this 'begotten faith' was the prevailing belief of Seventh-day Adventists.

The Desire of Ages

It is the usual claim of today's pro-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists that our denominational changeover from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism came about because of the writings of Ellen White. Particularly they say that this was regards to what she wrote in her book on the life of Christ called 'The Desire of Ages' (1898).

This is an incorrect assessment of her writings. I say this because when they are taken overall, her writings present a non-trinitarian view of Christ, not one that is trinitarian.

Admittedly an overall study of her writings does take time and effort, but if they are going to have any practical importance at all, this is the only way to treat them. It must not be a case of spasmodically quoting her here and there where it suits a certain theology but necessitates instead an orderly comprehensive study of what she wrote. There are too many Seventh-day Adventist quoting Ellen White where it suits them but failing to quote her where it does not suit them. This is an incorrect and abusive way to treat her writings. With regards to any subject, to obtain a balanced and correct view of what was revealed through her, all of what she wrote must be taken into consideration.

It is very true to say that Ellen White did make statements that would fit very nicely into a trinitarian concept of God, but she also made other statements that would fit only into non-trinitarianism. Her writings therefore, when taken overall, cannot be said to be trinitarian.

We must remember here that it is claimed by Seventh-day Adventists that Ellen White was an inspired writer. This means that her writings should not just be taken as her own personal opinion but that which God had revealed through her. This is even though it is expressed in her words. This is how it is with the inspired writers of the Bible. God supplied the thoughts whilst the writers supplied the written words.

Ellen White did not regard her own writings as being trinitarian. We know this

because in the early 1900's when a controversy broke out over our beliefs concerning the Godhead, she very clearly told Seventh-day Adventists not to change from what they then believed about God and Christ. This was when they were still a non-trinitarian denomination. To believe therefore that 'The Desire of Ages' published previously in 1898 is trinitarian is not a reasonable assumption to make. In other words, if in the early 1900's Ellen White was appealing to Seventh-day Adventists to hold on to their non-trinitarian faith, then it is only reasonable to assume that she believed that her previously published book 'The Desire of Ages' (1898) was non-trinitarian. How else is it possible to reason?

As we noted in the previous section, at the 1905 General Conference Session held at Takoma Park, Washington, Ellen White appealed to the delegates to hold fast to the faith that they had held for the previous 50 years. She said that it was God Himself that had given them this faith. This is why she pleaded with them not to change it. How therefore can we say that what she wrote in a book that was published **7 years previous** to this conference, meaning 'The Desire of Ages', was meant by Ellen White to change the faith of Seventh-day Adventists? This does not make any sense at all. This is why if we wish to have a correct understanding of our history, also of our past theology, it is necessary to study this in detail for ourselves and not just take someone else's word for it.

This is why this brief history has been written. It is to inspire every individual to study for him or her self, meaning to find the truth for themselves, and then hold on to it. Hopefully by some, this objective will be realised. Others may not take the opportunity to do so.

Section four: Warnings and rebellion

An early 1900's crisis

During the early 1900's, there was a very serious crisis within Seventh-day Adventism. This was when some, within our own ranks, attacked our leading doctrines. This attack concerned not only what we then believed regarding the sanctuary (as many would be correct in suspecting) but also what we believed respecting the separate personalities of God and Christ. Note very importantly that these challenges to our beliefs (faith) came from within our denomination - not from outside of it.

As we noted in section two, John Harvey Kellogg (then the leading physician in Seventh-day Adventism) suggested that trinitarianism was a correct view of God although for various reasons, Ellen White condemned his views. In the Testimonies to the Church, she also condemned certain illustrations from nature that depict God's being as three-in-one. She said that all of these were imperfect and untrue.

In our understanding of the present trinity debate within our denomination, this should be a very significant realisation.

At this same time, Ellen White appealed to Seventh-day Adventists not to change the faith that they had held for the previous 50 years. This was in the early 1900's, which was 60 years after our beginnings (1844). We were still then a non-trinitarian denomination. It must be concluded therefore that Ellen White was warning Seventh-day Adventists not to change from their non-trinitarian faith.

In the early 1900's, Ellen White regarded the denominational faith of Seventh-day Adventists as the truth. If she had not believed this, then it is quite obvious she would not have been warning us not to depart from it. This is only reasonable to believe.

Warnings of apostasy

In 1904, Ellen White said that heresies were making their way into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This does not mean that these heresies were then part of the predominant faith of Seventh-day Adventists, but that some amongst us were attempting to bring them in. She also said that in the future, more wrong teachings would find their way into our church. She also said that by taking heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, many Seventh-day Adventists would leave 'the faith'. She did not say that they would leave the church.

Ellen White referred to the end of this departing from our denominational faith (beliefs) as the 'omega'. She also said it would be of a 'most startling nature' and that it made her tremble for future Seventh-day Adventists. These were obviously warnings that should never have been ignored.

Many of today's non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists say that this 'omega' warning has a specific application to our denominational acceptance of the trinity doctrine. Some even say that it is 'the omega'. The trinitarians obviously deny it.

Either way it must be asked, "What is this 'omega' that made Ellen White tremble?" Has it already come upon Seventh-day Adventists, perhaps without the majority even realising it, or is it still to come in the future? According to the servant of the Lord it was definitely coming. This she said over 100 years ago in 1904. She said also that it was coming soon. This is one of the reasons why some say today that it has already arrived and is amongst us.

A satanic reformation

At the same time as our denominational faith was challenged (the early 1900's), Ellen White did warn that Satan would suggest a reformation was needed within Seventh-day Adventism. Note again that this was when our denominational faith was still non-trinitarian.

She wrote that if this reformation did take place, our religion would be changed, and the fundamental principles that had sustained the work for the previous fifty years would be accounted as error. She also said that the outcome would be that books of a new order would be published. These would be books that taught differently than what was then, in the early 1900's, generally believed by Seventh-day Adventists. She also said that a system of intellectual philosophy would also be introduced and that whilst evangelism would appear to prosper, the seventh-day Sabbath would be lightly regarded.

We therefore have some of the 'identifying marks' of this satanic reformation.

Open rebellion

The open rebellion to our non-trinitarian faith began at a Bible Conference held at Takoma Park Washington in 1919. This was when W. W. Prescott, an apparent non-trinitarian whilst Ellen White was alive, attempted to introduce into Seventh-day Adventist 'thinking', trinitarian concepts of Christ. Prescott was a very well known administrator.

There was quite an array of well-known names at this conference. These were not just regular Seventh-day Adventist ministers. They were not even allowed to attend. Those who did attend were handpicked high-ranking officials.

A committee of 7 was selected to choose the 40 delegates. These delegates were such as presidents, treasurers and field officers of the various conferences. These were also Bible teachers, history teachers, presidents of colleges as well as editors of our publishing houses. Some were members of the General Conference Committee. The chairman of this conference was A. G. Daniells. He was then the General Conference President.

Taken overall, this was an extremely influential group of Seventh-day Adventists who, if they could be persuaded to take a certain course of action, were certainly in a position to go away from the conference and encourage others to do the same. We can see therefore that assembled together at this conference was a group of delegates that were in a prime position to have a very persuasive influence on the future (1919 onwards) of Seventh-day Adventism. This was the seeming intention of the calling together of such a select (elite) body of leaders.

In his opening address to the delegates, the General Conference President reported that there were many Seventh-day Adventists who were afraid as to why this meeting had been called. He said that the secrecy had alarmed them, also that within Seventh-day Adventism, nothing like this had ever before been seen.

As Prescott got underway with his presentations, some quickly experienced the fear of change. Records show that there were those who interpreted this as a move to bring trinitarianism into Seventh-day Adventism therefore they opposed it. Prescott and others insisted that it would be a good thing to change our long held beliefs concerning Christ. It was even said that these 'changed beliefs' were already being taught within our colleges.

At one time during the discussions, feelings became so passionate that Daniells, the General Conference President, called the proceedings to a halt. After addressing the delegates with remarks that he said should not be recorded by the stenographers (this is why we do not know what he said), the meetings continued. Remember that this was in 1919, just four years after the death of Ellen White. It was also 15 years after Ellen White gave the warnings not to change our faith.

Needless to say, there were those who went away from the conference to promote the 'new theology' that Prescott had presented. Others maintained that the original (and still taught) Seventh-day Adventist faith, a begotten concept of Christ (a true Son), was a correct faith. The latter was obviously the faith that had been held by Seventh-day Adventists throughout the time period of Ellen White's ministry and even then in 1919, was still the predominant faith of our denomination. This was the faith that Ellen White said should not be changed.

By our leading brethren, our one-time non-trinitarian faith was now being brought into dispute. Some saw this as an attack on our once held faith – which obviously it was.

A changed Holy Spirit

To those who were seeking to bring the trinity doctrine into Seventh-day Adventism, our begotten concept of Christ was not the only belief that was a problem. Our non-trinitarian view of the Holy Spirit also needed to be changed. This was the belief, held by our denomination whilst Ellen White was alive, that maintained that this divine personality was the personal presence of both the Father and the Son when the latter two were not bodily (physically) present.

Throughout Ellen White's ministry, the Holy Spirit was certainly not considered to be a person like God and Christ were considered to be persons. This was even after she had said that He is a personality and that He is the third person of the Godhead.

It was the historian LeRoy Froom who pushed the idea of a 'trinitarian Holy Spirit'. This is something he did in the late 1920's and culminated in him writing a book called 'The Coming of the Comforter' (1928). This book was well received by many of the 'progressive' Seventh-day Adventists and is still available today from our

press.

Froom freely admitted that when he began to stress his views on the Holy Spirit, this brought objections from many of the 'old time' Seventh-day Adventists. In the late 1920's, these could not have been the 'very early' Seventh-day Adventists because they would have been dead by then, but the objectors were certainly those who had been contemporary with Ellen White. These objectors were obviously still non-trinitarian.

Froom admitted that for the things he was searching regarding the Holy Spirit, he could not find them in the writings of our pioneers. He said that on this very important subject, even in Ellen White's writings, he could only find what he termed 'priceless leads'. He confessed therefore that for what he was searching, he went to the writings of other denominations.

These 'other' denominations were the trinity denominations. It was also the denominations that Seventh-day Adventists once taught constituted the falling Babylon of Bible prophecy. Froom also said that many of the men in these denominations (the ones who had written of the Holy Spirit in a trinitarian sense) had a far deeper spiritual insight into an understanding of the Holy Spirit than many of our leading men did at that time. He said also that these trinitarians had a better understanding than did many Seventh-day Adventists of how, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to live the triumphant life. Seeing that Froom was contrasting God's commandment keeping people with those of other denominations, this was quite a claim to make.

This was in the 1920's. This was the decade following the death of Ellen White. As can be seen from the above, it did not take long after her death for certain Seventh-day Adventists to make moves to change our denominational faith. It does appear therefore that whilst Ellen White was alive, this changeover was 'waiting in the wings'.

There is evidence to strongly suggest that even by the mid - 1930's, most Seventh-day Adventists still regarded the Holy Spirit in the same sense as it was understood when Ellen White was alive. This was in a non-trinitarian sense (see above).

A revised history

LeRoy Froom was also the one who, by his book 'Movement of Destiny' (1971), attempted to revise our denominational history. This was a history that he urged upon Seventh-day Adventists and non-Seventh-day Adventists alike as being a correct view. Today we know it was not a correct view. This book is not now in publication.

As far as our trinitarian history is concerned, Froom completely misrepresented it. He made it look as though we had always been a trinitarian denomination whilst the truth of the matter is that throughout the time of Ellen White's ministry, also for decades beyond, we had been non-trinitarian. Nevertheless, Froom's publication did the job of making us 'look better' to those of other denominations, particularly those that were trinitarian.

By reading Froom's book, many came to believe that it was 'just a few' Seventh-day Adventists that had managed to get their non-conformist anti-trinitarian views into our publications, and that our denominational faith had been trinitarian. This is why for such a long period of time I believed exactly the same. Very soon after becoming a Seventh-day Adventist (1975), I read Froom's book and had believed what he had reported. What reason did I have then to not believe it?

Froom's book had been highly endorsed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, including a 'Forward' by the General Conference President Robert H. Pierson. It is noted that in a 1978 publication of this book, the latter 'Forward' was removed, and replaced with one by the 'Voice of Prophecy' founder, H. M. S. Richards.

A complete reversal of beliefs

This 'changed faith' from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism was not, as some try to make it, a modification of the old. It was a complete reversal of beliefs.

This is because non-trinitarianism can never develop into trinitarianism. This is simply because the principles that make each belief what it is, are directly opposed to each other. This is the same reason why the teaching of the immortality of the soul can never develop into the teaching of soul annihilation, or that death is an unconscious state of being. They are two entirely different concepts. In other words, a person can change from one view to the other but never can one view develop into the other.

Regarding its Godhead beliefs, our denomination changed from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism. It was a complete reversal of beliefs. One belief did not develop into the other. They always were, just as they remain today, two entirely different concepts. This is evident in our denominational trinity debate.

Section five: The changeover

A gradual process

Within Seventh-day Adventism, the changeover from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism obviously took time. This is because it is not possible to change a denomination's faith overnight, particularly a faith that has had the endorsement of God's last-day messenger, namely Ellen G. White.

In the process of this changeover there were problems. Obvious to relate, a denomination cannot change its 'faith' (fundamental beliefs) without encountering certain obstacles.

So how does any denomination change the thinking of its members worldwide? The answer is - time and death.

Time and death

Time and death were two essential factors in this changeover from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism. Those who held to the 'old theology' of Seventh-day Adventism either died off still holding to it, not wishing to give up their non-trinitarian faith, whilst others changed to trinitarianism. As time went by, more and more holding to the 'old theology' died off; also more and more began to accept the ever-popular trinity concept. This in turn made it much easier for trinitarians of other denominations to accept the 'peculiarities' of the Seventh-day Adventist message. This is how trinitarianism grew in popularity within Seventh-day Adventism. The more that accepted it, the more it was promoted until eventually it became the norm.

This is very similar to how Sunday became a more preferable day of worship than the seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday), also how it was made easier for Sun (day)-worshipping pagans to accept the tenets of Christianity. It was just a gradual process brought about mainly by two factors. One was the urging of church leadership upon its members to accept a tenet of faith not authorised in the Scriptures, whilst the other was popularity. It certainly was not a change because of Biblical authority.

It was not long after the death of Ellen White that our denominational publications began to promote trinitarian concepts of the Godhead. Non-trinitarian books were eventually allowed to go out of print whilst new ones promoting trinitarian concepts were gradually introduced to our members. Our Sabbath School quarterlies also began to promote a trinitarian view of God.

Slowly but surely the evolving took place. This is how the 'thinking' of Seventh-day Adventists worldwide was eventually changed to trinitarianism. It happened very gradually over decades.

As we noted in the previous section, Ellen White, in the early 1900's, did say that Satan would suggest a reformation was needed within Seventh-day Adventism. She also said that if this reformation did take place, books of 'a new order' would be published. These would obviously be books teaching differently than what was believed by Seventh-day Adventists during Ellen White's ministry. How accurate

was her prophetic vision?

The 1931 statement of beliefs

It was in 1931 that for the very first time in our history the word 'trinity' was included in any of our published statement of beliefs. This was 16 years after the death of Ellen White and 87 years after our beginnings (1844) as a movement of people.

This statement of beliefs was the work of one man, namely, F. M. Wilcox. He was then the editor of the Review and Herald. In keeping with a General Conference directive, also on behalf of four duly elected people (one of whom was Wilcox), this statement was written solely by him. It comprised of 22 statements. It was then included in our 1931 yearbook. It was also included in our very first church manual (1932).

Never though, before it was published, was this statement officially accepted by our denomination neither did Wilcox refer it to any committee. He simply wrote it, asked F. D. Nichol (the associate editor of the Review and Herald) his opinion, and then published it in our yearbook.

This statement of belief therefore was far from being an official statement. This is how it remained until 1946. We shall see later how and why this changed.

Not really a trinitarian statement

Whilst the 1931 statement of beliefs did contain the word 'trinity', it was noticeably lacking in trinitarian theology. It had to be this way because at that time, our church was still preponderantly non-trinitarian. Some say that by the 1930's, trinitarianism was the preponderant belief in Seventh-day Adventism but the records of our history do not attest to this conclusion. It was not until around the middle of the 1960s at least that trinitarianism (as in the trinity doctrine) can be said to be anything like established within our denomination.

If this 1931 statement of beliefs had been fully trinitarian, it would have caused uproar and division. This is because even then, the church worldwide would still have been predominantly non-trinitarian. Nevertheless, it was the very first inclusion of the word 'trinity' in a Seventh-day Adventist statement of beliefs therefore it was a very important step in introducing trinitarianism into the ranks of Seventh-day Adventism. This was even though it was done in an unofficial statement.

There was decided ambiguity in this 1931 statement of beliefs, particularly concerning the Godhead. It was just as though Wilcox was attempting to construct a bridge across an otherwise 'impossible to cross' divide. Remember: as has been said previously, non-trinitarianism can never develop into trinitarianism. It was therefore necessary to build a bridge to cross this chasm. This is why the 1931

statement contained the word 'trinity' yet failed to include all the elements of trinity essentialness (see section three of this brief history). This was particularly regarding, as is contained in *all* trinity theology, the indivisible oneness of God. This is the unity part of the three-in-one concept of the trinity. This is what makes a teaching truly and explicitly trinitarian. Without it there is no trinity doctrine.

The ambiguity of this statement was inasmuch as it began by saying "The Godhead or Trinity..."

These two words are far from being synonymous. The various Greek words from which the word 'Godhead' (KJV) is translated pertain to the concept of divinity whilst trinity means tri-unity (three-in-one).

In other words, Godhead and trinity are two entirely different terminologies. They portray two entirely different concepts. Never should it be made to look as though they have the one and the same meaning. To put this in another way, it is not possible to obtain the idea of three-in-one (the trinity belief) from the Greek words translated Godhead (KJV).

The ambiguity in this 1931 statement meant that it was acceptable to both camps, meaning the non-trinitarians and the trinitarians. This is why it was acceptable across the board to all Seventh-day Adventists. This of course can be seen in the phrase "Godhead or trinity..." It was ambiguous but universally acceptable. In brief, in the process of bringing trinitarianism into Seventh-day Adventism, the inclusion of the word 'trinity' into our fundamental beliefs was very important. It was also a very subtle move.

1940's objections to the trinity doctrine

In 1940, one minister who objected vehemently to the attempts to bring the trinity doctrine into Seventh-day Adventism was one of our most prolific evangelists. His name was Judson Washburn.

Wherever his evangelistic efforts took him, Washburn kept Ellen White well informed of how the work was progressing. He played a very big part in establishing Seventh-day Adventism in the UK where I live. He did a great deal of work in Bath, Cardiff and Southampton. Some even say that without his efforts, the work here in England would not have even 'got off the ground'.

Although retired by 1939, Washburn sent a letter of very strong objection to the General Conference regarding the trinity doctrine. He said that this teaching was then 'seeking' to find its way into Seventh-day Adventism. This shows us that by then (1939), this doctrine had far from become the established faith of our denomination.

Washburn described the trinity doctrine as a “cruel heathen monstrosity”. He also said that it was an “absurd invention” that removed Jesus from His true position of Divine Saviour and Mediator.

Washburn had much to say about the errors of the trinity doctrine, particularly as to how it affected the atonement. Whilst what he said is far too much to relate here, suffice to say that certain of the ‘old time’ ministry were also not very pleased with what they saw was happening within Seventh-day Adventism.

One thing that Washburn did say was that by the bringing in of the trinity doctrine into Seventh-day Adventism, meaning teaching that the divine Son of God did not die at Calvary, was nothing less than the ‘omega’ of apostasy that Ellen White had warned was on its way into Seventh-day Adventism. Such were the views of one of our leading evangelists. Remember, very importantly, this was in 1939. Washburn said then that the trinity doctrine was ‘seeking’ to find its way into Seventh-day Adventism.

No more unofficial changes

A crucial aspect of our denominational history is that at the 1946 General Conference session, the decision was made that any change to this 1931 published statement of beliefs, albeit it had been an unofficial statement, could only be made effective by a vote at a General Conference session. Many Seventh-day Adventists today, particularly the non-trinitarians, see this as the beginning of formalism within Seventh-day Adventism. They also see it as the beginning of us creating a creed although we do make the confession that our only creed is the Bible.

Things just went on from there. The more that trinitarianism was promoted, the more that it became accepted, although for a very long period of time there was no hard and fast theology regarding this teaching. As time went by, this theology just ‘came together’ – meaning, like the original trinity doctrine, it evolved.

Today of course we have ‘official explanations’. These can be found in our ‘Seventh-day Adventists Believe...’, a book that was the outcome of the voting in of our fundamental beliefs at the 1980 General Conference. We also have now our official ‘Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology’.

This latter book arrived on the scene in the year 2000. In it there are detailed explanations of all of our beliefs. This includes *The Doctrine of God* by Fernando Canale. This explains the Seventh-day Adventist ‘take’ on the Godhead.

A massive problem (changing our denominational literature)

In the midst of this changeover from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism, our denominational leadership encountered a massive problem. This came in the form of Uriah Smith's classic book *Daniel and the Revelation*. This is a book that was so highly regarded amongst Seventh-day Adventists that it is almost impossible to find the adequate adjectives to describe their estimation of it. It is even reported that there were some who thought it to be inspired.

So what was the problem with Smith's book?

The real problem was that although it was mainly a book on Bible prophecy, it did contain throughout its pages the 'old time' faith (religion) of Seventh-day Adventists. This is because to a degree, our denominational theology is an integral part of Bible prophecy. This especially can be seen in our teaching regarding what we term the pre-advent or investigative judgement and the reasons for our existence as a movement of people (Daniel 8:14 and Revelation 14:6-12 etc).

Smith's book clearly revealed our past non-trinitarianism, therefore the trinitarians would regard it as an anti-trinitarian book.

So what could be done to remedy this imminently embarrassing situation? I say imminently because although we were not yet then considered a trinitarian denomination (1940's), we were then fast heading in that direction. Smith's book was one of those stumbling blocks encountered.

No ordinary book

Smith's book was no ordinary book. It had been very highly endorsed by Ellen White. On numerous occasions she had said that it should be enthusiastically promoted, not only amongst those of our own denomination but also amongst non-Seventh-day Adventists. She even said that because it would explain our long held denominational faith (which included our non-trinitarianism), it should be read and sold by our young people. This is how much Ellen White favoured Smith's work. Outside of her own books, I cannot find any other book that she so highly recommended.

Smith's book was the very first doctrinal book sold by our colporteurs. By the 1940's, although still required as a subscription book (books sold door to door by our colporteurs), it was fast becoming an embarrassment. This was especially to those of our leadership who were pushing for us to be termed trinitarian.

Firstly, because of its popularity, it could not be taken out of publication, yet on the other hand it could not be allowed to continue to promote our 'one time faith' of non-trinitarianism. If it were allowed to continue as such, then concerning our past faith, it would obviously be the cause of many questions being asked. So it was that

when it was demanded for re-publication in the 1940's, the decision was made at General Conference level to edit this book. This is when all of its non-trinitarianism was completely removed from its pages.

This task of editing Smith's book was undertaken by a select group of Seventh-day Adventists. In the process it was totally rewritten from cover to cover. Not only were all of its non-trinitarianism expunged from its pages but also much of Uriah Smith's own words were either changed or deleted. Complete sentences and paragraphs were often removed or restructured; also entire pages were removed, whilst pages that Uriah Smith had never written were inserted. Such was the huge amount of editing that was done to this much valued and greatly loved book.

The unfortunate thing is that when in 1944 it was finally re-issued, it was done so as the work of Uriah Smith. Nothing was said in its 'Forward' about the details of this editing. It just said that it had been 'brought up to date'.

This new edited version was then given a huge promotion. It was also urged upon the unsuspecting public (Seventh-day Adventists and non-Seventh-day Adventists alike) as being the work of Uriah Smith, when in reality, much of it was not his words at all. Having an 'old edition' as well as an 'edited version', I have found that even some of Uriah Smith's thoughts on Bible prophecy were changed. Certainly the 'old time' religion of Seventh-day Adventist was removed from its pages. The edited version was made to look as though its non-trinitarian theology had never been there.

Today there are those who quote from this edited version. They usually say something like "Uriah Smith wrote" or "Uriah Smith said" when in reality he may not have written it at all. Instead they are often quoting the words of the group of Seventh-day Adventists who edited this book.

Objections

This 1940's editing to Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation* did not take place without objections. Even at General Conference level there were those who maintained that in removing statements concerning such a highly debated doctrine (meaning the Godhead) our church leadership, via the few, were making a pronouncement on doctrine (at that time the Godhead was a highly debated topic). Nevertheless the objections were overruled. The edited 1944 version was then published in its thousands and promoted amongst the public. This is the version that most Seventh-day Adventists would have on their bookshelves. Only a detailed comparison between an 'unexpurgated' version and an 'edited' version will disclose how much was changed.

Bible Readings for the Home Circle

Another book that could not be taken out of circulation but was found necessary to be changed was *Bible Readings for the Home Circle*. This was another popular book.

Whilst the alteration itself was only slight as far as the actual editing was concerned, some considered it a major alteration. This is because it had a remark saying that at the incarnation, Christ had partaken of *sinful human flesh*. This remark was totally removed. Ever since then, especially when the book *Questions on Doctrine* was issued, this has been another highly debated topic within Seventh-day Adventism. In the next section we shall return our thoughts to *Questions on Doctrine*.

Into the 1950's

So it was that with the history of non-trinitarianism almost well and truly behind them, Seventh-day Adventists headed towards the 1950's. This was probably the most dramatic period of history within Seventh-day Adventism. This was when for the very first time in our denominational history, the evangelicals declared us to be Christian - at least they did with certain reservations. We shall cover this more fully in the next section.

Up to the 1950's, the SDA Church had been considered by the evangelicals to be a non-Christian cult. This was previous to our acceptance of the trinity doctrine. Needless to say is that if we had not accepted this teaching, they would still be calling us a cult.

Section six: The end result

This is the final section in this brief undocumented history of how the trinity doctrine became a part of the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventism. As the title implies, it reveals the ultimate consequences.

An eventful era

The 1950's was a very eventful era for Seventh-day Adventists. It was also an era of much theological unrest. Certainly, within our denomination, it was by far the worst than it had ever previously been.

In the mid 1950's, two popular evangelicals held talks with certain of our leadership. One of the evangelicals was Donald Barnhouse, then editor of the evangelical magazine *Eternity*. The other was one of its major contributors and employees, namely Walter Martin. The latter, for his exposing of cults, was becoming very well known in evangelical circles.

Martin said that this dialogue was initiated because T. E. Unruh, then president of the East Pennsylvania Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, had contacted him concerning a book that he (Walter Martin) had just written. This book was called *Rise of the cults*. Unruh told Martin that what he had written about Seventh-day Adventists would put them in a very 'bad light'. In reply, Martin told Unruh that he had a considerable amount of evidence, from our published literature, that he (Martin), along with 'mainstream Christianity', regarded as heretical. Martin also told Unruh that he regarded our literature as a "hodge-podge" of contradictions.

The probable reason why, in our publications, that Martin had found so many contradictory statements, was because this was in the mid-1950's. This was 100 years after the beginning of our publications and almost at the end of our transmutation from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism. Martin could have been contrasting the new (changed) theology view with the 'old view'. Certainly he would have been looking at the evolving (developing) theology. He told Unruh that Seventh-day Adventists should make up their mind as to what they really did believe. This is why Martin also informed Unruh that regarding what we really did believe, he wanted 'first hand' information. He made it clear that he was not interested in the view of the laity, or the consensus in the field, neither was he interested in the views of the ministry in general. He just wanted to know what the 'top echelon' of Seventh-day Adventist authority said that as a denomination we believed. In other words he wanted 'official' answers.

These meetings were very eventful. So too were the resulting consequences

Accepted as Christians

The meetings between those of our leadership and the evangelicals continued for eighteen months. Walter Martin produced literally 'a suitcase' of statements from our pioneers denying what the evangelicals believed to be the true Christian faith. Whilst these statements are too much to go into detail about here, the main ones concerned, needless to say, the trinity doctrine, the finished atonement, also salvation by grace (free salvation). These teachings said Martin, as they were taught by Seventh-day Adventists, needed serious explanation. This is because they were regarded as the core beliefs of Christianity. In other words, to be considered a Christian denomination by evangelical standards, these were the beliefs that every denomination had to 'get right' (meaning agree with the evangelicals).

Interesting to note is that along with many other evangelicals, Walter Martin believed that Christians were free from judgment. He maintained that those who accept Christ, pass from judgment the moment they believe. It is why the evangelicals say that the investigative judgment is not Christian. In their way of thinking, there is no need of it. They maintained that what Jesus achieved at the

cross 'paid the price' in full for salvation therefore as long as this was accepted in faith, the believer had already passed from death to life. For those who believed this therefore, a judgment was not necessary. Martin said that only the unrighteous faced judgment.

A major part of that which Martin held against Seventh-day Adventists was their use of the word atonement. Seventh-day Adventists regarded the investigative judgment as the finishing of the atonement whereas Martin believed that the atonement was finished (completed) at Calvary. This is why he said that as long as a person accepted this 'finished work' they were saved.

As is believed by the majority who belong to the other denominations, Martin believed that Christ could not have sinned. Martin is reported to have said that our church leadership had agreed with him on this point.

After considering what our church leadership had told him regarding the deity of Christ, the trinity, the atonement and salvation by grace etc, Martin said that as a denomination we could now safely be termed 'Christian'. This was something that the Christian world at large, ever since our beginnings, had never regarded us as being. As was said in section two, for various reasons they had always regarded us as a non-Christian cult.

Martin's classification of Seventh-day Adventists as a 'Christian denomination' brought an outcry from the evangelical wing of Christianity. Many denied this to be true. They maintained that we were still a non-Christian cult. This led to something like a third (11,000) of the readers of 'Eternity' unsubscribing from this magazine. This shows how strongly they reacted against Walter Martin's claims. This was in 1956.

This pronouncement by Martin also shocked many Seventh-day Adventists. This was because for the very first time in our history, the evangelicals had gone on record as recognising us as being Christian. Needless to say, if we had maintained our non-trinitarian faith, none of this would have happened - meaning that the evangelicals would not have accepted us as Christian. This is because by the trinitarian denominations (often termed 'mainstream Christianity'), a belief in the trinity doctrine, whatever version it may be, is absolutely imperative for any denomination to hold to be termed 'Christian'.

In other words it was not our 'peculiar' beliefs (the Sabbath, the state of the dead, the sanctuary, the investigative judgement, the writings of Ellen White etc) that had stopped the evangelicals from regarding us as Christian because we still held on to those. It was our beliefs concerning the trinity, the atonement and what we believed regarding how a person was saved that concerned them. Perhaps the one thing that they had in mind was whether or not we deemed a belief in our distinctive

doctrines as necessary for salvation. In other words, how does someone who has been saved by grace stand with God if they do not accept the teachings of Seventh-day Adventism? Obviously, the evangelicals wanted to believe in being 'saved by grace' (at least their version of it) and yet not accept our God-given last day message. This today is still a 'hot potato', not only amongst the other denominations but also within Seventh-day Adventism. It comes under the heading of 'righteousness by faith'.

We need to remember here that these 'other denominations' to which those like Walter Martin belonged, we once termed the 'Babylon of Bible prophecy'. It was out of these denominations that we were to call God's people. In the 1950's, we were seeking from them their approval of us being called 'Christian'. Compared with how it was in the time of our pioneers, this was quite a turn around of events. The only approbation we then sought, whether it was for our beliefs or anything else, was from God, not from other denominations.

Questions on doctrine

Regarding the meetings between the evangelicals and our church leadership, the most important consequence of all was that it eventually led to the publication of the book we usually refer to as *Questions on Doctrine* (1957). This book contains, so it is said by those who compiled it (who originally shrouded themselves with anonymity) many of the questions that Walter Martin had put to our leadership. I have heard it claimed that as well as the questions, Martin actually helped our leadership to formulate some of the answers, but as of yet I have found no actual evidence for this claim.

The book *Questions of Doctrines* brought an outcry from many of our own ministers and laity. This is because they said that what our leadership had told Walter Martin was not in keeping with that which Seventh-day Adventists really did believe. Regarding this matter, one such well-known figure by the name of M. L. Andreasen objected profusely. This was with respect to what Walter Martin was informed were our beliefs concerning the human nature of Christ (see section five with reference to the remark being removed from 'Bible Readings for the Home Circle').

Our church leadership had told Martin, at least as Andreasen understood it, that we believed that Jesus had adopted a type of 'sinless' nature whilst Andreasen maintained that it had been an identical nature to the one possessed by Mary. The outcome was that Andreasen had his ministerial credentials withdrawn, albeit he did have them returned to him after he was dead.

It was because of what was written in *Questions on Doctrine* that there were those who believed that our church leadership had 'sold our denomination down the river'. Andreasen referred to it as the 'giving up of Adventism' and 'the rape of a people'.

Regarding what had actually transpired through this meeting with the evangelicals, such were the very strong views of some.

According to Walter Martin, he received many irate telephone calls from disgruntled Seventh-day Adventists telling him that what our leadership had told him was not what Seventh-day Adventists really did believe. Regardless of this, Walter Martin continued to believe what our leadership had informed him were the beliefs of our denomination. This, he maintained, was 'official' Seventh-day Adventism, not what was being said by those of the laity or ministry.

The fact of the matter is that *Questions on Doctrine* was never an official proclamation of beliefs by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It was just the views of the few who compiled it. It is no different today. It is still not official Seventh-day Adventism, although many people believe it to be so.

Needless to say, the evidence we see around us today reveals that we now maintain a much 'friendlier' and closer relationship with the 'other churches' than we did during the time of our pioneers. Unfortunately, so it is said by many Seventh-day Adventists, a high price has been paid for this fellowship. This is because they say our message to them to 'come out' of their denominational message, and into ours, has almost faded into obscurity.

All of this has been part and parcel of the results of accepting into our fundamental beliefs the doctrine of the trinity. We wanted to be like the other denominations, and that is exactly what has happened. We may hold to certain different doctrines than they do but the call to leave their message and accept ours before it is too late is very much diminished. Particular this is so with regards to our call to keep the Seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday) holy and to our one-time warning that the spurious Sunday will eventually culminate in constituting the mark of the beast. This really does seem to have taken a 'back seat'. Some are even asking if, via the Seventh-day Adventist Church, whether those of other denominations will ever be warned.

Old 'faithfuls'

During the 1950's and the 1960's, there were still those who held on to what has now become the 'old theology' of Seventh-day Adventism. This was the Godhead theology that was held by this denomination all the time that Ellen White was alive.

Two of these 'old faithfuls' were ministers by the name W. R. French (1881-1968) and Charles Longacre (1871-1958).

French had joined the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1904. This was the same year when warnings came from Ellen White telling Seventh-day Adventists never to change their faith. French was also a Bible teacher at several of our colleges. He was a very well respected man.

Charles Longacre had completed his ministerial course by 1898. He not only became a minister, but also an evangelist, administrator and author. He was also a champion of religious liberty, and a Bible teacher in our colleges. Much could be said concerning what this man achieved on behalf of Seventh-day Adventism but space here is very limited.

There were also others who held with them in their beliefs. By now though (the 1960's), many Seventh-day Adventists were terming themselves trinitarian. This is even though they may have not realised what it was that they were professing to believe, and probably not even realising, that they were not in harmony with what was once believed and taught by the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism. Such was how things were by the 1960's.

The first official voting in of a trinity doctrine

So it was that as a denomination we made our way into the 1960's and 1970's. This was with many of our 'newer members' (I was one of them) not having any idea of our past history regarding the trinity doctrine. Many it appears do not even know it today.

Throughout this time period, the same version of the trinity as is expressed by many of the evangelicals was given more and more emphasis. This eventually culminated, for the very first time in our history, in the voting in as part of our fundamental beliefs a fully-fledged trinity doctrine. This was accomplished at the 1980 General Conference session held at Dallas Texas.

From that time on (1980 onwards), all of our new members were expected to confess this trinity teaching. What though about those who were already members? Would they also need to confess it to remain a Seventh-day Adventist? This is an unfolding story.

At this 1980 General Conference, there were those who opposed the formation of this fundamental belief, at least as it is now expressed in our 'Seventh-day Adventists believe...', first published in 1988. Some said that it would be much better to use a biblical word such as 'Godhead' whilst others were in favour of using the word 'trinity'. Whilst there was much discussion on this particular topic, the outcome was that what was actually voted in as our 'trinity belief' is now clearly stated as belief No. 2 in our 'Seventh-day Adventists believe...' It is because of this that we are now regarded by other denominations as a fully trinitarian denomination.

A strange realisation

On page 32 of our Church Manual, it says that prospective members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church should be well schooled in the practice and fundamental beliefs of our denomination, particularly as these beliefs are presented in chapter 3 of the same manual. This is where belief No. 2 specifically states our trinity doctrine. It also says on page 32 that in order to “assist evangelists, pastors, and others in giving such instruction and making it Scripture-based and practical” (note these last words), “a specially prepared summary appears as an appendix on pages 219-223”.

The ‘strange realisation’ that I speak of here is that in this baptismal candidate’s summary, the trinity doctrine is not even mentioned, yet at recent baptisms I have attended, those baptised were required to express this teaching as being believed by them. One is obviously left to ponder why our belief No.2 is not included in this baptismal summary. In fact it says in this list of beliefs that the true and living God is the Father and not the trinity God. This was the belief of Seventh-day Adventists whilst Ellen White was alive. This was non-trinitarianism. There is no trinity theology in this summary of baptismal beliefs.*

***An update**

The information in the last paragraph was true when I first wrote this article in 2007. This changed though in 2010.

In that year (2010), these baptismal beliefs were removed from the Church Manual. This was when the manual was rewritten. I emailed the General Conference Secretariat asking why this had been done. I was told that these baptismal beliefs, as expressed for 70 years in our official Church Manual, could cause confusion if compared with what is expressed today in our current official Fundamental beliefs. This shows how much our beliefs have changed in those 70 years.

A startling realisation

This ‘voted in’ trinity confession at Dallas in 1980 is a far cry from any of our published stated beliefs up to that time. This is why our current church leadership admits that even if our pioneers wanted to join our church today (which probably they would not wish to do so because of our profession of a trinity belief) they would be prohibited from doing so. Whichever way this situation is viewed, it must surely constitute a most ‘startling’ realisation. What it means is that our pioneers could not join the church today that by their efforts they had helped to bring into existence. This is where Seventh-day Adventism has arrived at in 2008.

Summary realisations

Through the spirit of prophecy in 1904, Seventh-day Adventists were warned that Satan would suggest a reformation was necessary within Seventh-day Adventism. We were also warned of, if that reformation did take place, what would be some of

its identifying marks (see section four).

There are those who say that these identifying marks can be very clearly seen in the changeover from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism. These were that (a) our religion would be changed, and (b) that a system of philosophy would be introduced. It was also said that in the process of this change, books of a new order would be written. All of this has transpired in our changeover of beliefs. This warning also said that whilst evangelism would increase, the Sabbath would be lightly regarded. Some say that the latter is being seen today in our fast diminishing call for Christians of other denominations to remember God's true Sabbath (Saturday).

Has the prophecy that Ellen White made in 1904 come to pass? I would say that it has, but these are very important questions that every individual Seventh-day Adventist should seek to answer for their own selves.

Where will we be tomorrow?

Where will we be tomorrow is a question to conjecture. Obviously it is open to interpretation. The non-trinitarians say that as a denomination we are heading in the wrong direction, whilst the trinitarians say we are being led by God. What you the reader will believe is entirely up to you. All that I hope is that I have shared enough with you to realise that since the death of Ellen White, a great change has taken place to the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventism. I hope too that this has awakened your interest enough to believe that it warrants your own personal investigation.

As I said in the beginning, if you have any questions concerning this part of our history, please email me. I shall only be too glad to help.

God bless you as you seek to serve God, and discover for yourself what is truth.