

Sent 24th March 2016

Hi David

You asked me what my views were concerning the Holy Spirit. I will do my best to explain but be prepared. It will take more than just a few words.

As you know, within the Seventh-day Adventist Church today there is a great deal of conjecture over this issue although it usually boils down to one question: "Is the Holy Spirit a person"? This is the question I will endeavour to answer.

I am going to be right up front with you and say that I believe that anyone who is honest in their studies could never conclude from a study of the Scriptures that the Holy Spirit is a person - at least not a person in the sense that you and I are persons. This is because there is too much evidence to the contrary (more about this later). This was the view taken by early Seventh-day Adventists. I believe that without the testimony of the spirit of prophecy (that the Holy Spirit is a person), most present-day church members would reason exactly the same way (that the Holy Spirit is not a person).

For the moment, let's put ourselves in the place of those early Seventh-day Adventists. This is BEFORE Ellen White said that the Holy Spirit is a person. Let's see what we can make of it by using Scripture alone – which is what we would need to do if explaining it to someone who does not have the same regard for Ellen White's writings as we do – and after all, we have been counselled to prove our beliefs from using Scripture alone.

When using the word 'person', these early Seventh-day Adventists would have been thinking in terms of what constitutes a person such as you and I are persons. This is only natural. We would all think the same way. If I were to say to you "that person over there" you would immediately think in terms of an individual such as we are individuals. That is how the pioneers would have reasoned.

This same reasoning - because we normally think of the Father and the Son as individual persons such as ourselves - would also have led these early Seventh-day Adventists to conclude that the Holy Spirit is not a person as the Father and Son are persons. That may sound a little convoluted but I am sure you can see what I mean. It is all based on what is conjured up in the mind when the word 'person' is used.

Let's consider some things that the Scriptures reveal concerning the Holy Spirit. Let's see if they meet the criteria of 'a person' – meaning an individual such as you and me. In so doing I am going to assume that you have no objection to my reasoning that the terminologies 'Holy Ghost' and the 'Spirit of God' are equivalent to the 'Holy Spirit'. I see them all as meaning the same. In fact the phrase 'Holy Spirit' is only used 7 times in the entire Bible (KJV) whereas 'Holy Ghost' is used 90 times, all of which are in the New Testament.

John the Baptist said of Jesus

["For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him."](#) John 3:34

This strongly implies that the Spirit of God (the Holy Spirit) can be measured out – meaning that it is possible to have less or more of the Spirit. Can this be said of a person – at least as we generally perceive a person to be? John's words are

equivalent to Luke saying that Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1). If the Holy Spirit is a person like both God the Father and Christ are persons, does it sound reasonable that one person can be full of another person?

The angel told Zacharias that his son (John the Baptist) would be “filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother’s womb” (Luke 1:15). Can a baby be filled with another individual being such as you and I are individual beings? As well as this we are told that the baby’s mother (Elizabeth), also his father (Zacharias), were filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:41-67). This means that all three (mother, father and child) were all filled with the Holy Spirit. I don’t see how we can conclude from this that the Holy Spirit is a person such as you and I are individual persons.

John records that Jesus, after His resurrection, breathed upon His disciples and said, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost” (John 20:22). Could it be concluded that Jesus was breathing upon His followers another person (another individual like Himself)? It would appear that Jesus was breathing upon His disciple His own Spirit.

Very interestingly: I cannot recall one trinitarian, in support of their trinitarian views, quoting John 20:22: neither can I remember a trinitarian using it to ‘prove’ that the Holy Spirit is a person like God the Father and Christ are persons. This Scripture would seem to invalidate that particular reasoning.

As you know, there are many texts of Scripture where we are told that people were either filled with or who had the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Two that immediately spring to mind are these

“And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” Acts 2:4

“And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.” Acts 4:31

These Scriptures tell us that every one of these followers of Christ was filled with the Holy Ghost. Does this sound as though God’s Spirit is a person in the normally accepted sense of the word?

Remember too that on the day of His resurrection, Jesus said to His disciples “Receive ye the Holy Ghost” but here, 50 days later, they were receiving the fullness of the Holy Spirit. This was obviously something different than what had happened previously when they had received the Holy Spirit from Jesus. This is why I believe there are ‘degrees of impartation’ of the Spirit – meaning we can have more and less of the Spirit – meaning the Spirit can come in a fuller or lesser measure.

We have also been told through Paul that Christians are temples (dwelling places) for the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19, 2 Timothy 1:14, see also Romans 8:9). This means that if there were millions of Christians in the world today, the Holy Spirit would be within each one of them. I cannot see therefore how the Holy Spirit can be said to be a person - at least not in the normal sense of the word. Would He be wholly within each person or a portion (a part) of Him in each person?

The Bible also tells us that people are baptised with the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11, Luke 3:16, John 1:33), also that the Holy Spirit is ‘upon’ (Luke 2:25, 3:22), ‘poured out’ (Acts 10:45) and falling on people (Acts 10:44, 11:15-16). It also tells us that we are ‘anointed with’ and ‘sealed’ with the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38, Ephesians 4:30). We

also pray in the Holy Spirit (Jude 1:20). Luke records that the Holy Ghost, when Jesus was baptised, “descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him” (Luke 3:22). None of these ‘acts’ depict the Holy Spirit to be a person in the normal sense of the word.

It is also very interesting that God’s Word tells us that Jesus was conceived of the Holy Ghost (Matthew 1:18-20). Why then, if the Holy Spirit is another person like God the Father and Christ, does Jesus call God (the Father) His father? If the Holy Spirit is an individual person like the Father, should not Jesus be calling the Holy Spirit His father?

I suppose the more we study, the more we can find showing that the Holy Spirit could never be equated with a person in the usual sense of meaning. Enough though has been cited to make the point. Never from Scripture alone could we perceive the Holy Spirit to be a person in the same sense that you and I are persons (individuals) – or even in the way that God and Christ are persons (individuals). To be true to Scripture and to be honest in our studies) we must conclude there has to be a difference. I cannot see how anyone, in the light of the above knowledge, could reason any differently

We must also take into consideration that the New Testament writers such as Paul, John, Jude, Peter, James, in the introduction to their epistles, never say ‘from the Holy Spirit’. They only say ‘from God the Father and from Jesus’. If the Spirit of God is an individual person in the same sense as the Father and Son are individual persons, then why didn’t these inspired writers say ‘from the Holy Spirit (or words to that effect)? There must be a reason.

It must also be asked: If the Holy Spirit is a person like God and Christ, where was He when God gave to John ‘the revelation of Jesus Christ’ (the Book of Revelation)? The opening verses say

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John:” Revelation 1:1

The Holy Spirit appears to be absent.

It’s the same as when Jesus said that eternal life is to know Himself and the Father (John 17:3). He said nothing about knowing the Holy Spirit. All of these things suggest the Holy Spirit is not a person as we normally perceive a person to be. Interesting also is that in the Bible, God and Christ are depicted as sitting upon a throne but never the Holy Spirit. There must be a reason for all of these things.

Some may ask, what about the Scriptures that do depict the Holy Spirit acting as a ‘normal’ person? These are such as where it says the Holy Spirit spoke (Acts 8:29, 10:19 13:2), can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30), communicates (Romans 8:16), teaches (John 14:26, 1 Corinthians 2:13), can be ‘lied to’ (Acts 5:3), intercedes (Romans 8:26) and forbids (Acts 16:6).

The only thing I can say is that we must accept that these Scriptures do depict the Holy Spirit as functioning like a normal person. We must though, before drawing a conclusion, take into account the Scriptures that would lead us to reason differently (such as we have just looked at above). In this respect I take the same view as did the Presbyterian minister the Rev. Samuel Spear.

In his article that we, as a denomination, published as one of our tracts explaining to the public what the Bible says about the Godhead he wrote

“All the statements of the Bible must be accepted as true, with whatever qualifications they mutually impose on one another. The whole truth lies in them all when taken collectively.” (Samuel T. Spear D. D. The Subordination of Christ, published by the Pacific Press as ‘The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity’ and included as No. 90 in ‘The Bible Student’s Library’)

This is wonderfully worded. I quite agree with it. This is the only way we are going to establish what the Bible says about anything. It is to find all we can on any particular subject (in this case the Holy Spirit) and then compare Scripture with Scripture. Only then can we draw a realistic conclusion.

Spear’s article on the trinity was par excellence. It is no wonder we used it to explain our denominational Godhead beliefs. If you have not read it you can do so here

The Spear Article

As you read it, take into consideration that Spear, as a Presbyterian minister, would more than likely have not had the benefit of Ellen White’s writings.

So where does all of this leave us?

It leaves us as saying that some Scriptures depict the Holy Spirit as a person (as we normally perceive a person to be) whilst others do not. Needless to say, this in itself does not lead us to a satisfactory conclusion but this is the reality of it.

I believe that the words of Jesus help us to unravel some of this mystery.

In His final discourse with His disciples, He spoke of His going away. He knew how disappointed they would be. To give them comfort He spoke these words (this was after Philip had said to Jesus “Shew us the Father”)

“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.” John 14:16-17

Jesus spoke as though the disciples already knew the Comforter (“but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you”). He also spoke as though the Comforter would be in them (“and shall be in you”). He also spoke of the world as not being able to know or receive the Comforter. His next words though probably took them completely by surprise. He said

“I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.” Verse 18

There was no mistaking what Jesus was saying. He said it was Himself that would be returning as the Comforter. This promise was not just for a select group of people living at that time but also for all Christians down through the centuries. Remember He has promised

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” Matthew 18:20

How though could this be? This was obviously not a physical presence because bodily, Jesus would be in Heaven with His Father. How therefore could His words be fulfilled?

I believe that what Jesus said to His disciples on the day of His resurrection helps us to understand. The disciples were afraid when they saw Him but He assured them by saying

“Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.” Luke 24:39

Jesus was making a point. Spirits do not have physical bodies.

It is interesting that when the KJV was published, the expression ‘Holy Ghost’ was used 70 times. In the New Testament, the word ‘ghost’ was translated from the Greek ‘pneuma’. At that time (early 17th century), it appears that the word ‘ghost’ was thought of as ‘an immaterial being’. This word is also used in the Bible to denote the human spirit.

The Bible is very clear that each one of us has a spirit. This spirit does not continue to function after we are dead but it is the part of us that is retained by God when our life on earth is over (Ecclesiastes 12:7, Luke 23:46, Acts 7:59, 1 Corinthians 5:5). Our spirit is our character. It is who and what we are. It is what makes me, me – and what makes you, you. It is each individual’s personal identity.

It would be too much to detail here but I firmly believe that a study of what the Bible says concerning the human spirit would bring anyone to this same conclusion. I also believe it helps us to understand God’s Spirit. If you go to section 3 at the following link you will find a study on it.

Is the Holy Spirit a person?

As you will see from this study, the human spirit is the ‘inner personality’ of a person (the individual’s personal identity).

Two texts of Scripture that concern both the human spirit and God’s Spirit are Romans 8:16 and 1 Corinthians 2:11. You will see why I say we can liken them to each other.

“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” Romans 8:16

This is one of the texts of Scripture that speak of the Holy Spirit as a person. It is God witnessing to us. There is communication between us. This communication is between God’s Spirit and the human spirit. If the Holy Spirit is a person, then our spirits must be a person in the very same sense. Why should we reason differently?

The second text is this one

“But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.” 1 Corinthians 2:9-11

This text depicts both the Holy Spirit and the human spirit as 'knowing'. The human spirit knows the things of man (humanity) whilst the Holy Spirit knows the things of God. We do not think of our own spirits as a separate person from us. Why therefore do any differently with God's Spirit? Our spirits belong to us. It is the same with God and Christ. The Holy Spirit belongs to them.

I would ask you to use your imagination for a moment. I know that this is impossible to happen (because our spirits cannot function outside of our physical being) but what if my spirit could come to you and speak to you. Who would it be? Would it be me or would it be someone other than me (another individual person)? It would still be me but not as I am physically. It would be a manifestation of me. It would still though be a person. It would be me ('my person') unrestricted by, and separate from, my physical being.

This I believe is how it is with Christ and the Holy Spirit. Unlike our spirit, it is evident from Scripture that God's Spirit is unrestricted by His physical being. Remember, Christ said that He was the coming Comforter (John 14:18). There can be no denying what He said. The Holy Spirit therefore is Christ not encumbered (not restricted) by His humanity. It is a spiritual manifestation of Christ. It is the omnipresence of Christ's Spirit (Christ omnipresent).

Christ said that He would pray that the Father send 'another Comforter' (John 14:16). Some translations say 'another counsellor' or 'helper' or 'advocate'. The word translated 'another' is the Greek word 'allos'. This literally means another or other(s).

How then can this be explained? We noted that Jesus said that He would be returning as the Comforter. How then can there be 'another'?

Do you remember what Samuel Spear said? He said

"All the statements of the Bible must be accepted as true, with whatever qualifications they mutually impose on one another. The whole truth lies in them all when taken collectively." (see above).

In that final discourse that Jesus had with His disciples, our Saviour spoke these words

"Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." John 14:19-21

This led Judas (not Iscariot) to ask, "...Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" Jesus replied

"... If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. John 14:23

Jesus said the coming of the Comforter was the presence of the Father and the Son but this could not be physically because bodily (corporeally), they are both in Heaven. It must therefore be a spiritual presence (like my spirit coming to you). In this way it can be Christ coming yet not physically.

This is the Holy Spirit. It is the 'person' of the Father and the Son omnipresent (see Romans 8:9). This Spirit must be of a nature we cannot understand – else how could He accomplish all the things we noted above that are not consistent with a 'normal' person?

There is also something else I would ask you to consider.

If God the Father, the Son of God and the Holy Spirit are all individual beings exactly the same as each other, then all three, in their own right, would be omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. That being the case, this would mean that in order to be omnipresent, the Father and the Son would not need the Holy Spirit. They would both be omnipresent of themselves.

In 1931, LeRoy Froom asked H. Cottrell (an old-time Seventh-day Adventist Minister) what was taught concerning the trinity by early Seventh-day Adventists. In replying Cottrell wrote

"From my personal knowledge the doctrine of the "trinity-Godhead," was not taught by Seventh-day Adventists during the early days of my ministry." (H. Cottrell, letter to LeRoy Froom, 16th September 1931)

He further explained

"The conclusion drawn at that time was that the Holy Spirit was not a person in the sense that God and Christ are persons, if so, the same difficulty would be encountered with the Holy Spirit being everywhere present as is held by the Trinitarians concerning God and Christ as persons being everywhere present, and if it should be so conceded Christ would be the son of the Holy Spirit, rather than of God as the Bible declares him to be." (Ibid)

This is the same as I reasoned above. If all three divine persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) are persons as we normally conceive a person to be, then all three are omnipresent. It would also mean that Christ would be the Son of the Holy Spirit.

Consider Romans 8:9. Paul wrote

"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Romans 8:9

Here we have the indwelling of the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ yet we know there is only one Spirit (the Holy Spirit). If the Holy Spirit is another person exactly like God and Christ then He too would have a spirit. Would this make sense? I am sure that none of us would draw this conclusion.

From my study of the Scriptures, it appears to me that the Holy Spirit is THE WAY (the means) that the Father and Son are omnipresent. In other words, the Holy Spirit is THE OMNIPRESENCE of the Father and the Son (the Father and Son omnipresent).

To put it another way, the Holy Spirit belongs to God and Christ – just like our spirits belong to us. The Psalmist wrote

"Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art

there.” Psalm 139:7-8

David was addressing God. He was equating God’s Spirit with God’s presence. He is saying that wherever God’s Spirit is, so God is there. In other words, the presence of the Holy Spirit is the presence of God.

David had also said the same in Psalm 51. He pleaded with God

“Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.”
Psalms 51:11

As we noted above, every Christian is a dwelling place (temple) of the Holy Spirit. At conversion (when a person is born again), God indwells in that person through His Holy Spirit. Prior to this time He does not indwell a person. As Ezekiel wrote (referring to the experience of conversion)

“Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. **And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes**, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.” Ezekiel 36:25-27

This indwelling is essential for salvation. This is why Jesus said to Nicodemus

“...Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.... Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.” John 3:3, 5-7

This is also why the apostle Paul wrote

“But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his....But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.” Romans 8:9 and 11

Again this is saying it is imperative for our salvation to have the Holy Spirit dwelling within. Notice here it says that having the Holy Spirit within is the same as having both the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ within (Romans 8:9).

We noted above the same was said by Jesus to His disciples. This was when talking about the coming Comforter He said

“... If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, **and we will come unto him**, and make our abode with him.” John 14:23

Whilst Ellen White was alive – and even for decades afterwards - this was the belief of Seventh-day Adventists. This was that the Holy Spirit is the Father and the Son omnipresent (the unseen presence of the Father and the Son) – not another individual being like the Father and the Son.

In 1935, H. W. Carr, a Seventh-day Adventist minister who was once president of the

Western New York Conference, sent a letter to W. C. White (Ellen White's son) asking him to relate his mother's views on the Holy Spirit. This was when some, like Leroy Froom, was 'pushing' a trinitarian view of the Holy Spirit. In his reply White wrote

"The statements and the arguments of some of our ministers in their effort to prove that the Holy Spirit was an individual as are God, the father and Christ, the eternal Son, have perplexed me and sometimes they have made me sad. One popular teacher said "we may regard Him, (the Holy Spirit) as the fellow who is down here running things."

My perplexities were lessened a little when I learned from the dictionary that one of the meanings of personality, was characteristics. It is stated in such a way that I concluded that there might be personality without bodily form which is possessed by the Father and the Son.

There are many Scriptures which speak of the Father and the Son and the absence of Scripture making similar reference to the united work of the Father and the Holy Spirit or of Christ and the Holy Spirit, has led me to believe that the spirit without individuality was the representative of the Father and the Son throughout the universe, and it was through the Holy Spirit that they dwell in our hearts and make us one with the Father and with the Son." (*W. C. White to H. W. Carr, letter, April 30th, 1935*)

As Willie White pointed out, there are many occasions in Scripture that the Father and Son are spoken of together without the Holy Spirit being mentioned. Take these for example

"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ ... Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love ... Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son." 1 John 1:3, 2 John 1:3, 2 John 1:9

"Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also. Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father." 1 John 2:22-24

There is no mention here of the Holy Spirit. It is as we noted earlier when Jesus said that eternal life was to know Him and the Father but said nothing about knowing the Holy Spirit (John 17:3).

It is the same in the Book of Revelation. John wrote about the time when all things are finished

"And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it." Revelation 21:22

Again there is no Holy Spirit mentioned.

It does appear from what we have seen that whilst in one sense the Holy Spirit can be said to be a person, in another sense He is not a person. Certainly from Scripture it cannot be concluded that the Holy Spirit is an individual person like you and me or like God and Christ.

Jesus did say to His disciples

“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.” John 16:13

I would conclude that the “the Spirit of truth” (the Holy Spirit) could not speak of Himself because He is not a person in the same sense as God and Christ are (individual) persons. It is in fact the Father and the Son omnipresent – whilst the latter two are actually in Heaven.

This is why, when speaking of the Holy Spirit, the ex-General Conference President said (when John Harvey Kellogg was trying to promulgate the idea that the Holy Spirit is a separate person from God the Father and Christ)

“It is not a person walking around on foot, or flying, as a literal being, in any such sense as Christ and the Father are – at least, if it is, it is utterly beyond my comprehension or the meaning of language or words.” (*G. I Butler, letter to J. H. Kellogg, April 5th 1904*)

Perhaps it was M. C. Wilcox who best summed up this Holy Spirit ‘dilemma’.

In the ‘Question Corner’ of the ‘Signs’ of November 24th 1914 (this was under the heading “The Personality of the Holy Spirit”) the following question was asked. It was included in future publications of the book ‘Questions’ and Answers’ (a collection of these questions). This book had a number of editions. The questioner asked

“Some say the Holy Spirit is a person; others say He is a personality; and others, a power only. Till how long should this be a matter of discussion?” (*Milton C. Wilcox, Signs of the Times November 24th 1914, see also Questions And Answers Volume 11, 1919, page 36, 1938 editions, page 33*)

Wilcox returned the answer

“The personality of the Holy Spirit will probably be a matter of discussion always.” (*Ibid*)

He is probably right. He went on to explain

“The reason why the Scriptures speak of the Holy Spirit as a person, it seems to us, is that it brings to us, and to every soul that believes, the personal presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said (John 14; 18), "I will not leave you desolate," or orphans. "I come unto you." He tells us in verse 16 how He will come. The Father will "give you another Comforter, that He [the Father] may be with you forever." In verse 23, He declares that the Father and He will come to the man who loves Him and keeps His word, and that They will make Their abode with him. But both the Father and the Son come by the Holy Spirit. To the Holy Spirit is given power to make the Father and the Son present to the believer.” (*Ibid*)

Notice Wilcox said, "it seems to us". He appears to have been making reference to Seventh-day Adventists in general – suggesting this was the generally accepted denominational view.

His conclusion was

"Wherever God's children are, there is the Spirit — not an individual person, as we look upon persons, but having the power to make present the Father and the Son. That Spirit is placed upon God's messengers, the angels; but the angels are not the Spirit. That Spirit is placed upon God's servants, His human messengers; but the human messengers are not the Spirit. They are possessed by the Spirit, and used by the Spirit, and have within them the power of the Spirit; but they are not the Spirit The Spirit Deity—Father, Son, and Spirit is independent of all these human or material agencies. Why not leave it here? Why not know that that Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of Deity, goes out into all the earth, bringing the presence of God to every heart that will receive it?" (*Ibid*)

This is exactly how I see it. Notice this was included in the 1938 edition – which was 3 years after the death of M. C. Wilcox. This therefore, in 1938, appears to have still been the standard SDA view of the Holy Spirit – even though some were pushing for a trinitarian view.

It would be too much to detail here but in 1934, the General Conference ordained that a series of Sabbath School lesson studies be produced that would enumerate our official denominational beliefs. Seven sets of quarterlies were produced. They were called 'Bible Doctrines'. The first of these lessons was the 4th quarter's studies of 1936. The final quarter was the 2nd quarter of 1938. They were very detailed.

In lesson 3 of that first quarter, which was a study on the Godhead, it said this concerning the Holy Spirit (this is with reference to Romans chapter 8)

"In verses 8-11, the Spirit is called both "the Spirit of God" and "the Spirit of Christ." (*Sabbath School Lesson Studies, Bible Doctrines, 4th Quarter 1936, Lesson 3, page 10*)

On the next page there is a note that said

"The Father sends the Spirit in the name of the Son, that is, as the Son's representative. The Spirit "proceedeth from the Father," to do His work in the earth. Hence the Father sends the Spirit, and the Son sends the Spirit. The Son speaks what the Father gives Him to speak, and the Spirit speaks what the Son gives Him to speak. The Spirit is both the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ." (*Ibid page 11*)

It is evident that as the 1940's approached, the 'official' stand of the Seventh-day Adventist Church was not that the Holy Spirit was an individual being such as God and Christ are individual beings. This is borne out also in a sub-heading in the third quarter's lesson studies. This said

"CHURCH MEMBERS SHARE FELLOWSHIP OF FATHER AND SON"
(*Sabbath School Lesson Studies, Bible Doctrines, Lesson 9 for May 28, 1938, page 26*)

No mention is made here of the Holy Spirit. This speaks for itself.

In the above-mentioned edition of the 'Signs of the Times' of November 24th 1914, another question was asked concerning the Godhead. Under the heading 'Regarding Deity' a reader enquired

"Is it right to say of the heavenly Trio, "God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit"? Do the heavenly Trio have the same equal eternal existence?"
(*Signs of the Times, November 1914, 'Regarding Deity', See also Questions And Answers Volume 11, 1919, pages 23-24*)

In reply Wilcox advised

"It is always safe to confine ourselves to the terminology of the Word, and we never find these expressions among the Bible terms. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all of Deity; but why try to divide them up in a way that the Bible has not? The counsel we would give is that the closer we adhere to Bible language the better it is." (*Ibid*)

Wilcox was here being critical of the way that trinitarians describe the three persons of the Godhead. In Scripture there is no mention of "God the Son" or "God the Holy Spirit". This is trinitarian language.

He concluded concerning the Holy Spirit

"The Spirit is common to both the Father and the Son; and all God's works are operated through the power of that Spirit, - the great life of God." (*Ibid*)

At this time, this is how Seventh-day Adventists reasoned. This is even though Ellen White had said the Holy Spirit is a person. In their reasoning, God's Spirit was "the great life of God", "common to both the Father and the Son" – not another person like God and Christ. This same belief would be 'standard' for decades to come.

Having said all of the above: even if the Holy Spirit is said to be another person like God and Christ (or like you and me), this would still not constitute a trinity as in the trinity doctrine. As you know yourself, to have a trinity doctrine it must be said that all three persons exist in the one indivisible substance of God as the one God. Our denomination's theologians describe the trinity this way

"The three persons share one indivisible nature. Each person of the Godhead is by nature and essence God, and the fullness of the deity dwells in each of them. On the other hand, each person of the Godhead is inseparably connected to the other two." (*Ekkehardt Mueller, Biblical Research Institute newsletter Reflections, July 2008*)

"Trinitarianism is the orthodox belief that there is but one living and true God. Nevertheless this one God is a unity of three persons, who are of one substance, power and eternity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." (*Gerhard Pfandl, Associate Director, Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Research Institute, 'The Doctrine of the Trinity among Adventists', 1999*)

"In Scripture God has revealed His transcendent nature as Trinity, namely three distinct divine Persons who act directly and historically in history and constituting the one divine Trinitarian being." (*Dr. Fernando Canale, the Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology, the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia Volume 12, page 138*)

Nowhere in Scripture can this concept be found so there is no point in commenting upon it. Unfortunately it is our No. 2 Fundamental belief. All that can be said is that this is just philosophical speculation – something that should not be taught within Seventh-day Adventism. It is I believe, destructive to the gospel but that's another story.

So is the Holy Spirit a person?

It depends upon what is meant by person. If it means an individual such as God and Christ then I would say that the Scriptures prohibit such a conclusion. His nature would have to be something entirely different.

Whatever is concluded, the Spirit of God must be the omnipresence of both the Father and the Son whilst they themselves are in Heaven. That much is clear from Scripture.

Well David, I have written quite a lot – a lot more than I had originally intended. I am not sure whether your views are the same as mine but this is how I see it. Others will obviously disagree.

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is on a par with how the incarnation was achieved. It is a mystery far too deep for mere mortals like you and me to fully understand. We do though need to reason from Scripture as to what God has revealed. This far we may go but no further (Deuteronomy 29;29). We must not speculate about that which God has chosen not to reveal. I am sure you agree with me.

Please feel free make any comments or observations you may have – or ask any questions. I hope I have helped in some way.

God bless

Terry (UK)

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