

# Is the Holy Spirit a Person?

By Terry Hill

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“It is not essential for you to know and be able to define just what the Holy Spirit is. Christ tells us that the Holy Spirit is the Comforter, and the Comforter is the Holy Ghost, “the Spirit of truth, which the Father shall send in my name.” [John 14:26.] “I will pray the Father, and he shall send you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him; but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.” [Verses 16, 17.] This refers to the omnipresence of the Spirit of Christ, called the Comforter.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 7 1891, to Brother Chapman June 11<sup>th</sup> 1891,*)

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# Section one

## A Historical Perspective

### Part A: How it used to be

#### Introduction

As far as most Seventh-day Adventists are concerned, the question “Is the Holy Spirit a person” may at first seem very easy to answer, particularly as Ellen White has said that He is a person, but as will be seen in this study, there is more to this ‘seemingly simple’ enquiry than initially meets the eye. In other words, this is a question that is not so easily answered as it first may appear.

In their very early years, it was not generally taught within Seventh-day Adventism that the Holy Spirit is ‘a person’. Even when God revealed through Ellen White that He is a person (this was around the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century/beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), they still did not regard Him as someone with individuality like God and Christ. In section two of this study we shall see why they reasoned this way. This is where we shall be taking a look at what the Scriptures reveal concerning the Holy Spirit.

It was only after Ellen White had died (1915) that the idea developed amongst Seventh-day Adventists that the Holy Spirit is an individual person like God and Christ but it took decades after her death for this belief to become normative. This ‘new view’ eventually led to the development and acceptance of a certain rendering of the trinity doctrine, which, for the very first time in 1980, was officially voted into the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This was accomplished at the General Conference Session held at Dallas, Texas.

This latter belief, although not exactly the same as orthodoxy, does have enough of the basics to term it a trinity doctrine.

In summary it can be said that throughout the 71 years of Ellen White’s ministry (1844-1915), also for the decades immediately following her death, this trinity teaching was not a belief that was held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The reason for this was twofold.

Firstly the Holy Spirit was not regarded as an individual like God and Christ whilst secondly the trinity concept itself cannot be found in the Scriptures. The latter is why the trinity doctrine must always remain an assumed doctrine.

It must also be said that during this changeover of beliefs concerning the Holy Spirit, Seventh-day Adventists changed their beliefs concerning Christ. This is because after Ellen White’s death, some of our leaders began to say that what was taught whilst she was alive is error. Again this ‘new view’ eventually caught on but like the new view of the Holy Spirit, it did take decades to do so.

## **The nature of the Holy Spirit a mystery**

In 1903, the chief physician of Seventh-day Adventism, namely John Harvey Kellogg, published a book called 'The Living Temple'. Whilst it is not the purpose of this study to go into all the details here, suffice to say it was considered to be heretical. In other words, it was not in keeping with that which was believed and taught by Seventh-day Adventists. The Seventh-day Adventist Church did not publish this book. Kellogg had it published privately.

Ellen White condemned certain teachings found in Kellogg's book. She said that by these teachings, both God and Christ were being made to look non-entities (nothingness). This is because Kellogg was saying that wherever God's power is manifested (as in the tree and the flower etc), God Himself is present. This would mean that God was not only everywhere (filling all space) but that He was also 'in everything'.

Kellogg's reasoning also made God to appear to be 'in everyone'. This was one of the main objections that Ellen White had with Kellogg's teaching. She regarded it as being in opposition to the gospel. We shall see this in section four.

Very interestingly, particularly with regards to this study, is that Ellen White never said that Kellogg was making the Holy Spirit look a non-entity. This was even though she had said that the Holy Spirit is a person. Contrary to common belief, she never said either that the Holy Spirit is an individual personage like God and Christ but that by us, meaning by fallen humanity, His nature could not be understood.

Some will say that as time progressed, Ellen White changed her views (or had added light on the subject) but a comparison of two of her statements spanning 20 years (1891-1911), the latter of which was just 4 years before she died, shows that this is not true. We shall see this now.

In 1891, Ellen White replied to a letter that had been written to her by a Seventh-day Adventist named Chapman. He held to views of the 'Holy Ghost' that were not in keeping with what was believed by Seventh-day Adventists. It was because of this that he was refrained from employment by our church and was urged to take up the canvassing work.

In her letter to Chapman, Ellen White called for unity amongst Seventh-day Adventists. She said

“Brethren should not feel that it is a virtue to stand apart because they do not see all minor points in exactly the same light. If on fundamental truths they are at an agreement, they should not differ and dispute about matters of little real importance. To dwell on perplexing questions that, after all, are of no vital importance, has a direct tendency to call the mind away from truths which are vital to the saving of the soul. Brethren should be very modest in urging these side issues which often they do not themselves understand, points that they do not know to be truth and that it is not essential to their salvation to know. When there is difference of opinion on such

points, the less prominence you give to them the better it will be for your own spirituality and for the peace and unity that Christ prayed might exist among brethren.” (Ellen G. White, letter to Brother Chapman June 11<sup>th</sup> 1891, Manuscript Release volume 14, No. 1107)

Note the emphasis here on “minor points”, “matters of little real importance”, “perplexing questions”, “side issues” and things that are “not essential” to salvation.

So what did Chapman believe that was considered to be error? In her reply to him, Ellen White quoted what he had written regarding his own beliefs. He had said to her

“My idea in reference to the Holy Ghost's not being the Spirit of God, which is Christ, but the angel Gabriel, and my belief that the 144,000 will be Jews who will acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah.” (*Ibid*)

Ellen White responded

“Your ideas of the two subjects you mention [the Holy Ghost and the 144,000] do not harmonize with the light which God has given me. The nature of the Holy Spirit is a mystery not clearly revealed, and you will never be able to explain it to others because the Lord has not revealed it to you.” (*Ibid*)

Here it is being said that an understanding of **the nature** of the Holy Spirit is not essential to salvation. Obviously, if it had been essential, then God would have revealed it. God has not hidden anything that is essential for us to know even though Satan would like us to believe differently (see Genesis 3:5). Ellen White added

“You may gather together scriptures and put your construction upon them, but the application is not correct. The expositions by which you sustain your position are not sound.” (*Ibid*)

She then said to Chapman (which is very important)

“It is not essential for you to know and be able to define just what the Holy Spirit is. Christ tells us that the Holy Spirit is the Comforter, and the Comforter is the Holy Ghost, “the Spirit of truth, which the Father shall send in My name.” (*Ibid*)

Take very careful note of Ellen White’s words. She said that it was “not essential” to “know” or “define” “just what” the Holy Spirit is. This was in 1891. This she never said of God or Christ. She did tell Chapman that the Holy Ghost is the Holy Spirit, also that this is the Comforter and the Spirit of truth.

After quoting the words of Jesus where He spoke of the coming of the Comforter as found in John 14:16 and 17 she explained

“This refers to the omnipresence of the Spirit of Christ, called the Comforter. Again

Jesus says, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth" [John 16:12, 13]." (*Ibid*)

We are not told here that the Holy Spirit (the Comforter) is another person like God and Christ but that this is "the omnipresence of the Spirit of Christ". Please note this very carefully. Ellen White does not say either that the Holy Spirit is Christ in bodily form but that this is omnipresence of His "Spirit".

If there are those who attempt to reason how this is possible, they would do well to heed the words that Ellen White wrote next to Chapman. This is when she said to him

"There are many mysteries which I do not seek to understand or to explain; they are too high for me, and too high for you. On some of these points, silence is golden. Piety, devotion, sanctification of soul, body, and spirit -- this is essential for us all. "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent" [John 17:3]". (*Ibid*)

Some things are beyond our ability to understand. The nature of the Holy Spirit is obviously one of them. Regarding this matter Chapman was told - "silence is golden".

Ellen White then relates what Jesus said *is essential* for us to know. This is that we "know" the Father, "the only true God" as Jesus called Him, also Jesus who had been sent by the Father.

Note very importantly that Jesus said nothing about 'knowing' the Holy Spirit (see John 17:3). This is even though He had just spoken at great length to His disciples concerning the Holy Spirit's coming (see John chapters 14, 15 and 16).

So why didn't Jesus say that eternal life was to know the Holy Spirit - and why didn't Ellen White say that Kellogg was making the Holy Spirit look a non-entity? We need to give these questions very serious consideration. They are obviously very important. They also appear to be related to each other. We shall return to this thought later.

Some may say that during the years that followed, meaning between 1891 and when she died (1915), Ellen White changed her views or was given added light on this subject (the nature of the Holy Spirit) but as we shall now discover, this is far from being true.

### **No change of view**

In her book 'Acts of the Apostles' (1911), which was published 20 years after she had written to Chapman, also 13 years after the publication of 'The Desire of Ages' and 8 years after Kellogg had published 'The Living Temple', these words of Ellen White can be found

"It is not essential for us to be able to define just what the Holy Spirit is. Christ tells us that the Spirit is the Comforter, "the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father."

It is plainly declared regarding the Holy Spirit that, in His work of guiding men into all truth, "He shall not speak of Himself." John 15:26, 16:13." (*Ellen G. White, 'Acts of the Apostles' pages 51-52, 1911*)

By 1911, Ellen White had been God's messenger to the remnant for 67 years. She was therefore drawing upon this same amount of revelation from God. This was just 4 years before her death. God had still not revealed the nature of the Holy Spirit.

In her letter to Chapman, Ellen White had told him that it was not essential for *him* to be able to define "just what" the Holy Spirit is but in 'Acts of the Apostles' she says it is not necessary "for us" to know. She was making this latter statement inclusive of all who would read her book. This would particularly be Seventh-day Adventists.

Notice also that Ellen White quotes Jesus as saying that the Holy Spirit will "not speak of Himself" (John 16:13). Jesus must have had a very good reason for making this remark. This is why we need to give these things very serious consideration. If we fail to do this we shall never be able to understand them.

These words of Ellen White are more or less the same as 20 years previously she had written to Chapman. During this time period (1891-1911), which included when her book 'The Desire of Ages' was published (1898), she had obviously not received new light on this subject neither had she changed her views. She then went on to say in 'Acts of the Apostles'

"The nature of the Holy Spirit is a mystery. Men cannot explain it, because the Lord has not revealed it to them." (*Ibid*)

This should be very simple to understand but she did add as a warning (very similar to her counsel to Chapman)

"Men having fanciful views may bring together passages of Scripture and put a human construction on them, but the acceptance of these views will not strengthen the church. Regarding such mysteries, which are too deep for human understanding, silence is golden." (*Ibid*)

Again we are warned about putting "a human construction" on certain Scriptures and drawing conclusions that God never intended to be drawn. Ellen White is saying the same as she said to Chapman – regarding the nature of the Holy Spirit, "silence is golden".

Ellen White gave this warning even though **13 years earlier** she had said in 'The Desire of Ages'

"Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the third person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power." (*Ellen G. White, 'The Desire of Ages' page 671 chapter 'Let not your heart be troubled' 1898*)

We can see from this that whilst Ellen White did say that the Holy Spirit is a person, she also made it clear that God had not revealed His nature. In other words, she did not say that the Holy Spirit is an individual person exactly the same as God and Christ.

In summary we can say that in 1911, Ellen White was still saying that it was not essential (not important) to understand *the nature* of the Holy Spirit. She also warned that no attempts should be made to define it.

If Seventh-day Adventists had heeded this counsel, the trinity doctrine would not have been included in our fundamental, beliefs. Certainly it cannot be said that its inclusion into these beliefs has strengthened the church (see Ellen White above where she said that fanciful views of the Holy Spirit will not strengthen the church). By the amount of antagonism it has created, this trinity teaching can only be said to have weakened our denomination. We can see therefore that whilst we were once united on the subject of the Godhead (whilst Ellen White was alive), today we are seriously divided.

This returns our thoughts to Kellogg's beliefs and reasoning.

### **Kellogg attempts to justify his reasoning**

We will now take note of the reasoning used by Kellogg to justify the beliefs that he expounded in his book 'The Living Temple'. It is very interesting and very relevant to our study. Remember Kellogg maintained that wherever God's power is manifested (as in the tree and flower etc), God Himself is present. This is not pantheism as some may suggest it to be although it is akin to it. Pantheism is the belief that 'all is God'. Within pantheism there is no personal God.

Following the Autumn Council at which his book was condemned, Kellogg held a conversation with A. G. Daniells. The latter was then the General Conference President. In this conversation, Kellogg attempted to justify himself for his views of God as found in 'The Living Temple'. We are aware of this conversation because Daniells recorded it in a letter to W. C. White (Ellen White's son). Daniells wrote

"He [Kellogg] then stated that his former views regarding the trinity had stood in his way of making a clear and absolutely correct statement but that within a short time he had come to believe in the trinity and could now see pretty clearly where all the difficulty was and believed that he could clear up the matter satisfactorily." (*Letter, A. G. Daniells to W. C. White Oct 29<sup>th</sup> 1903*)

As were the vast majority of Seventh-day Adventists who were alive at that time, also had been the vast majority who by this time had passed to their death, Kellogg had once been a non-trinitarian. He had even written against the trinity doctrine, saying that it was "unphilosophical, unreasonable, and unreconcilable with common sense" (see Review and Herald August 19<sup>th</sup> 1880, page 131).



In other words, although Kellogg's Godhead beliefs had once been in harmony with that which the church as a whole believed (non-trinitarianism), in 1903 he was making confession that "he had come to believe in the trinity".

To Seventh-day Adventists therefore, Kellogg's 'trinity confession' was heretical. As will be seen later, the evidence of our denominational history strongly suggests that in 1903, Seventh-day Adventists still did not accept that the Holy Spirit is a person, at least not a person with individuality like God and Christ.

Kellogg's book 'The Living Temple' was published in 1903. This was after the press at Battle Creek that had agreed to print it on his behalf, was burnt to the ground (December 30<sup>th</sup> 1902). Needless to say, the plates that had been made for the printing of this book were destroyed in the fire. Kellogg took the order to another publisher.

When his book was published (early 1903), Kellogg, just like most Seventh-day Adventists who were living at that time, did not believe the Holy Spirit to be a person like God and Christ but by October 1903 he said he did believe it. This is obviously why He told Daniells that "within a short time he had come to believe in the trinity". Daniells continued

"He (Kellogg) told me that he now believed in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost and his view was that it was God the Holy Ghost and not God the Father that filled all space and every living thing." (*Ibid*)

Although frequently used by trinitarians, nowhere in the Scriptures are found the phrases "God the Son" or "God the Holy Ghost" (or 'God the Holy Spirit'). They are also noticeably absent in Ellen White's writings. They are trinitarian terminologies.

In his thinking, by saying that the Holy Spirit is a person with individuality like God and Christ, Kellogg had managed to 'separate' this divine personality from God the Father, thus saying it was the Holy Ghost (using Daniells' words) "that filled all space and every living thing". This enabled Kellogg to explain how it could be said that God is in everything without saying that God the Father is in everything.

To Seventh-day Adventists, saying that God is in everything (as Kellogg was saying in his book) was the same as saying that God the Father is in everything. This is why Kellogg's views were said to be making God nothingness. Kellogg had to find a way of resolving this problem so he said that he had come to believe in the trinity and that it was "God the Holy Ghost" that was in everything. In this way he could maintain that God was in everything but not God the Father.

Within what was then generally accepted Seventh-day Adventist theology, this 'separating' of the Holy Spirit from the Father could not be done. This is because the Holy Spirit was not regarded as a 'separable individual being' from God but was said to be the omnipresence of both the Father and Christ whilst they (God the Father and Christ) were still bodily in Heaven.

Daniells also told Ellen White's son that



“He [Kellogg] said that if he had believed this [the trinity] before writing the book, he could have expressed his views without giving the wrong impression the book now gives” (*Ibid*)

It appears that in Kellogg’s thinking, believing the Holy Spirit to be a person like God and Christ was tantamount to believing in the trinity doctrine. Today many reason the same way although it must be said that this idea does fall short of a genuine trinity doctrine. It could even be interpreted as tritheism (three Gods).

### **Kellogg’s dilemma**

The day previous to A. G. Daniells writing the above letter to W. C. White, Kellogg had written to G. I. Butler. The latter was then the President of the Southern Union Conference. Kellogg wrote saying

“As far as I can fathom, the difficulty which is found in the Living Temple, the whole thing may be simmered down to this question: is the Holy Ghost a person? You say no.” (*Letter, Kellogg to G. I Butler, October 28<sup>th</sup> 1903*)

Kellogg continued

“I had supposed the Bible said this [that the Holy Ghost is a person] for the reason that the personal pronoun he is used in speaking of the Holy Ghost. Sister White uses the pronoun he and has said in as many words that the Holy Ghost is the third person of the Godhead.” (*Ibid*)

Kellogg also said

“How the Holy Ghost can be the third person and not be a person at all is difficult for me to see” (*Ibid*)

Reading between the lines, it is reasonable to conclude that there had been attempts to convince Kellogg that the Holy Ghost (the Holy Spirit) is a person but ***not with individuality like God and Christ.***

In the February of the next year, Kellogg again attempted to justify himself to Butler for what he had written. In this much longer letter he said

“I believe this Spirit of God to be a personality, you don't. But this is purely a question of definition. I believe the Spirit of God is a personality; you say, No, it is not a personality. Now the only reason why we differ is because we differ in our ideas as to what, a personality is. Your idea of personality is perhaps that of semblance to a person or a human being. This is not the scientific conception of personality and that is not the sense in which I use the word.” (*J. H. Kellogg to G. I. Butler, Letter, February 21<sup>st</sup> 1904*)

In reply Butler wrote

“God dwells in us by His Holy Spirit, as a Comforter, as a Reprover, especially the former. When we come to Him, we partake of Him in that sense, because the Spirit comes forth from him; it comes forth from the Father and the Son” (*G. I Butler, letter to J. H. Kellogg April 5<sup>th</sup> 1904*)

Remember here what was said above. This is that at that time (early 1900's), Seventh-day Adventists regarded the Holy Spirit to be both God and Christ omnipresent whilst they (God and Christ) were both bodily in Heaven. The Holy Spirit was not thought of as a separate (or separable) individual like God and Christ are separate (and separable) individuals. This was even though He was regarded as a person.

The truth of the matter is that when Ellen White said that the Holy Spirit is a person, this did not bring about a change in theology. Seventh-day Adventists still maintained that the Holy Spirit was both God and Christ omnipresent. This is obviously why regarding the Holy Spirit, Butler said to Kellogg

“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.” (*Ibid*)

This was the view of the Southern Union Conference President. It was more than likely the view in 1904 of Seventh-day Adventists in general.

### **Ellen White condemns Kellogg's beliefs**

In his book 'The Living Temple', Kellogg maintained that wherever God's power is manifested, God is personally present. Ellen White condemned these views. She said that this reasoning was making both God and Christ look non-entities (nothingness). We shall see this now. Regarding Kellogg's beliefs she said such things as

“This subject [Kellogg's teachings] has been kept before me for the past twenty years, yea, for more than twenty years. Before my husband's death, Dr. Kellogg came to my room to tell me that he had great light.” (*Ellen G. White to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference, Ms 70, 1905, pp. 3, 4. "A Message of Warning"*)

Note that this was said to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference Session. She then went on to say concerning Kellogg

“He sat down and told me what it was. It was similar to some of the views that he has presented in Living Temple. I said, "Those theories are wrong. I have met them before. I had to meet them when I first began to travel." (*Ibid*)

As found in 'The Living Temple', Kellogg's teachings were no surprise to Ellen White. She knew of them even before her husband's death. James White had died 24 years previously in 1881. She went on to say

"Ministers and people were deceived by these sophistries. They lead to making God a nonentity and Christ a nonentity. We are to rebuke these theories in the name of the Lord." (*Ibid*)

As we have previously noted, Ellen White did not say that Kellogg was making the Holy Spirit a non-entity. It must be asked why not? There must have been a reason for it. After all, she did say that He is a person.

Remember that this was said by her **7 years** after the publication of 'The Desire of Ages'. This was the book in which she had said that the Holy Spirit is a person (see above). Strange to relate, it was the Holy Spirit that was in question with Kellogg.

In 1908, Ellen White penned the same thoughts. She said in the 9<sup>th</sup> Volume of the Testimonies

"There is danger that the false sentiments expressed in the books that they have been reading will sometimes be interwoven by our ministers, teachers, and editors with their arguments, discourses, and publications, under the belief that they are the same in principle as the teachings of the Spirit of truth. The book Living Temple is an illustration of this work, the writer of which declared in its support that its teachings were the same as those found in the writings of Mrs. White. Again and again we shall be called to meet the influence of men who are studying sciences of satanic origin, through which Satan is working to make a nonentity of God and of Christ." (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies Volume 9, page 68, 'Literature in Service'*)

She then added

"The Father and the Son each have a personality. Christ declared: "I and My Father are one." Yet it was the Son of God who came to the world in human form." (*Ibid*)

Notice as previously that Ellen White does not mention the Holy Spirit. Again concerning Kellogg's views of God she said

"Few can see the meaning of the present apostasy. But the Lord has lifted the curtain, and has shown me its meaning, and the result that it will have if allowed to continue. We must now lift our voices in warning. Will our people acknowledge God as the supreme Ruler, or will they choose the misleading arguments and views that, when fully developed, make Him, in the minds of those who accept them, as nothingness?" (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B NO. 7, 'Decided Action To Be Taken Now'*)

She continued

“These words were spoken to me in the night season. The sentiments in "Living Temple" regarding the personality of God have been received even by men who have had a long experience in the truth. When such men consent to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, we are no longer to regard the subject as a matter to be treated with the greatest delicacy. That those whom we thought sound in the faith should have failed to discern the specious, deadly influence of this science of evil, should alarm us as nothing else has alarmed us.” (*Ibid*)

Rather than being surprised at Kellogg’s reasoning, Ellen White was more surprised that experienced people around her (more than likely the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church) had not seen the evil in it. As we shall see in section four, she did say that Satan was by the side of Kellogg influencing his thinking.

We shall now see that Kellogg’s understanding of the Holy Spirit (that He is a person like God and Christ) eventually became Seventh-day Adventist reasoning.

### **Part B: - A changing view of the Holy Spirit**

The evidence of our denominational history reveals that even into the 1930’s, it was still not the view amongst Seventh-day Adventists that the Holy Spirit was a person with individuality like God and Christ although having said this, it is evident that by this time there were those of our leadership who were teaching it. In other words, there were those of our leaders who were teaching something that was not in harmony with the main body of Seventh-day Adventists. This can be seen from a letter that a Seventh-day Adventist named Carr wrote to W. C. White. We shall look at this now.

Carr was asking Willie White (as he was known to his closest friends) what his mother’s views were regarding the Holy Spirit. Note very importantly that this was in 1935 which was 20 years after the death of Ellen White. As will be seen, Carr was concerned with the development of Seventh-day Adventist Godhead theology.

Carr wrote making reference to several statements from Ellen White where she speaks of God and Christ together but not the Holy Spirit. He wrote

“In the first pages of Great Controversy it is stated that the ‘Father had an associate - A co-worker...The only being that could enter into all the councils and purposes of God.’ ‘The Father wrought by His son in the creation of all heavenly beings...He holds supremacy over them all.’ ‘Sin originated with Satan, who next to Christ had been most honoured of God, and was highest in power and glory among the inhabitants of heaven. Next to Christ he was first among the hosts of God.’ ‘The Son of God had wrought the Fathers will in the creation of all the hosts of heaven.’ The Son of God was exalted above Satan as one in power and authority with the Father.’ Christ created Satan. Ez.28:15.” (*H. W. Carr, letter to W. C. White, 24<sup>th</sup> January 1935*)

Carr is quoting Ellen White as saying that the Son of God was “The only being that could enter into all the councils and purposes of God”. He also quoted her as saying that “Next to Christ” Satan “was first among the hosts of God”. So where is the Holy Spirit? He is not mentioned. This is obviously what Carr was pointing out to Willie White. In other words, Carr was pointing out, Ellen White was saying that Satan was “next to Christ”, also that Christ was the “only being” whom God could take into His counsel, so if the Holy Spirit is a person with individuality like God and Christ, where is He? Carr added

“It is urged by some of our leaders now that The Holy Spirit is a third person of the same nature of the Father and Son, a member of the heavenly trio, cooperative in creation and personally active with the Father and Son.” *(Ibid)*

Here we can see the evidence of a ‘changing’ view of the Holy Spirit. This was 1935. It was the transitional time between the ‘old theology’ and the ‘new’.

We noted previously that in 1891 and 1911, Ellen White had said that because God had not revealed the nature of the Holy Spirit we could not understand it. Carr was saying in 1935 that it was being “urged by some of our leaders now” that the Holy Spirit was of “the same nature of the Father and Son”. These leaders were obviously attempting to change the long-held views of Seventh-day Adventists.

It is apparent therefore that amongst many of our leadership by 1935, the belief that the Holy Spirit is a person like God and Christ had not yet ‘caught on’. I say this because Carr had said that only “some” of our leaders were teaching it. It would therefore be reasonable to assume that the majority of the laity had not yet come to believe it. Carr then said to W. C. White

“For many years I have used these statements of Sr. White in combating false teachings relative to defining the Holy Spirit. “Will you kindly tell me what you understand was your mother’s position in reference to the personality of the Holy Spirit?” *(Ibid)*

It is evident that Carr was holding on to the ‘old view’ meaning that he was ‘up against’ those who were using Ellen White’s writings to promote the ‘new view’. The latter is the same as the majority of our leadership are doing today.

Carr finished his letter by saying

“I know Brother White you would not depart from your mother’s teachings, and that you have as perfect an understanding of them as any one. I shall appreciate your opinion very much. Assuring you of the high esteem and respect I have had from my childhood in your father, mother and family, I am very truly yours in this blessed faith.” *(Ibid)*

Carr was obviously a ‘long-time’ Seventh-day Adventist but regarding the Godhead in 1935, he was now concerned at the development of Seventh-day Adventist theology. Remember, Seventh-day Adventists were still not then a trinitarian denomination although

it is evident that some were pushing for it to be so.

So what did Carr mean when he said that Willie White had “as perfect an understanding” of Ellen White’s writings as anyone? We shall consider this now.

### **William Clarence White (1854-1937)**

W. C. White was born in 1854. He was Ellen White’s third son. He was not someone who as we sometimes say today was ‘a bit slow on the uptake’, neither was he naïve or ignorant of his mother’s views.

When his mother died in 1915, Willie White was 61 years of age. Can you imagine how many of her sermons and talks he had heard during this time, also the number of Bible studies that he attended with her? Can you imagine also the number of private discussions that he had with his mother about matters of a spiritual nature, even concerning the Holy Spirit? These are obviously inestimable. He had over half a century experience on these matters. This is apart from what he knew of what his mother had written. We can see therefore that Willie White’s knowledge of his mother’s views was far beyond that which was known by most people.

At the age of 21, Willie White had been elected to the office of president of the board, also as business manager, of the Seventh-day Adventist Pacific Press Publishing Association. This was the main body responsible for our publishing work. Throughout his lifetime he was integrally involved in the publishing work (far too much to detail here).

After the death of his father (James White) in 1881, he spent much of his time assisting his mother with her literary work. He also travelled extensively with her wherever the work took her. In a very brief space of time this all-important responsibility absorbed the vast majority of his time. He even accompanied his mother to Australia, helping to establish there the faith and beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists.

By 1900, Willie White had been a member of the General Conference Committee for 35 years and when in 1915 his mother died, he was one of the five persons who were nominated in her will as trustees of her writings. Along with the others, he was to ‘take care’ of these writings for future publication. It was through his personal leading that after the death of Ellen White, certain books containing her writings were published. It was also by him that her writings were so comprehensively indexed.

We can see therefore that when Carr said that W. C. White had “as perfect an understanding of them [Ellen White’s teachings] as any one”, he could not have spoken a truer word.

There was probably no one alive who knew Ellen White’s writings, or her personal views, better than W. C. White. This makes his reply to Carr not only very interesting but also very relevant to our study although you may be surprised at what he said.



## W. C. White's reply to Carr

Willie White replied to Carr saying

“In your letter you requested me to tell you what I understand to be my mother's position in reference to the personality of the Holy Spirit. This I cannot do, because I never clearly understood her teachings on the matter.” (*W. C. White to H. W. Carr, letter, April 30th 1935*)

In the light of what has been said above (regarding W. C. White's knowledge of his mother's writings and beliefs etc) this is truly an amazing statement. It is also very interesting and very relevant to our study. Ellen White's son then said

“There always was in my mind some perplexity regarding the meaning of her utterances, which to my superficial manner of thinking, seemed to be somewhat confusing. I have often regretted that I did not possess that keenness of mind that could solve this and other perplexities.” (*Ibid*)

He then added

“And then remembering what Sister White wrote in “Acts of the Apostles”, pages 51 and 52, “regarding such mysteries which are too deep for human understanding, silence is golden”. I thought best to refrain from discussion and have endeavored to direct my mind to matters easy to understand”. (*Ibid*)

Here we need to do some sanctified reasoning.

If Ellen White had believed that the Holy Spirit was simply another person with individuality like God the Father and Christ, then it is transparently obvious that Willie White would not have had any problems in understanding it. As it was he said that what his mother believed and how she explained it was beyond his understanding. It is quite obvious therefore that Ellen White did not simply believe that the Holy Spirit was just another person like God the Father and Christ but regarded His being as a far more complex issue. Those who say that Ellen White did simply believe that the Holy Spirit is another person like the Father and Christ should very seriously contemplate Willie White's words.

Ask yourself a question here. Do you believe that the Holy Spirit is another person with individuality like God the Father and Christ? If so, do you have any difficulty understanding how this can be? In other words, is it a complex issue to you – so difficult in fact that it is beyond words to explain it? If not, then I would suggest that you are missing something very important. Perhaps in the next section this will become evident.

W. C. White then concluded (he was obviously addressing where Carr had mentioned statements from Ellen White where she referred to the Father and the Son but did not mention the Holy Spirit)



“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.” *(Ibid)*

W. C. White was saying here that there are many texts of Scripture that speak of the work of the Father and the Son together but do not mention the Holy Spirit. Note he says that he believed the Holy Spirit to be “without individuality”. This was even though he would have believed (as said Ellen White) that the Holy Spirit is a person. Obviously he did not believe that the Father or Christ were without individuality.

This reminds us that Ellen White said of Kellogg that by his teachings he was making both God and Christ to look non-entities but did not say he was doing the same regarding the Holy Spirit. Remember also that Jesus said that eternal life was to know both His Father and Himself but said nothing about ‘knowing’ the Holy Spirit (see John 17:3). Remember too He said that the Holy Spirit would not speak of Himself (John 16:13). There must be a reason for all of these things. We need therefore to give them serious consideration.

During the time period of Ellen White’s ministry, these latter views expressed by Willie White were the views generally held by Seventh-day Adventists. It is also apparent that in 1935, which was 20 years following his mother’s death, Willie White, along with Carr, still believed the same although we can see from what Carr said, different views were being “urged by some of our leaders” (see above).

As time went on, our leadership began to express this ‘new view’. It was published in our books, periodicals and our Sabbath School lessons etc. This led to it eventually becoming normative although it did take decades to do so. This eventually led to the acceptance of a certain rendering of the trinity doctrine although not the same as orthodoxy.

In his reply to Carr, it is interesting that W. C. White had previously said

“The statements and the arguments of some of our ministers in their effort to prove that the Holy Spirit is an individual as are God the Father and Christ, the eternal Son, have perplexed me and sometimes they have made me sad.” *(Ibid)*

It is evident from this that Willie White knew that some ministers were pushing the ‘new view’. It is also evident that he did not accept it. We can say that he believed his mother’s view to be the same as his, at least on this point. It also seems that in irony of this realisation (that some were attempting to make the Holy Spirit a person like God and Christ) W. C. White said to Carr

“One popular teacher said “We may regard Him (the Holy Spirit) as the fellow who is down here running things”. *(Ibid)*

Willie White does not reveal the identity of this “popular teacher” but I would think that by making an ‘educated guess’, some have probably arrived at the correct answer.

### **More evidence of a changing view**

In a letter written by LeRoy Froom in 1960 we can find more evidence of this ‘changing view’.

Froom (1890-1974) is considered a leading historian in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He wrote a number of books regarding the history of this denomination, also of Christianity, although by saying in his ‘Movement of Destiny’ (1971) that it was only ‘a minority few’ early Seventh-day Adventists who had been non-trinitarian, he totally misrepresented our denominational history, at least regarding this part of it. Our church recognizes this today.

Froom’s letter reveals that in the early decades of the 1900’s, even though they may have accepted that the Holy Spirit is a person/personality, many of our leaders did not accept that He was a person with individuality like God and Christ. This means that they could not have been trinitarians. It shows also that there was decided resistance to this change. In this letter Froom wrote

“May I state that my book, *THE COMING OF THE COMFORTER* was the result of a series of studies that I gave in 1927 – 1928, to ministerial institutes throughout North America. You cannot imagine how I was pummelled by some of the old-timers because I pressed on the personality of the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Godhead.” (*L. Froom, letter to Otto Christenson, 27<sup>th</sup> October 1960*)

Note the dates here (1927-1928). Could Froom be the “popular teacher” to whom Willie White referred (see above)? Willie White’s letter to Carr was written in 1935. Froom then adds

“Some men denied that [the personality of the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Godhead] – still deny it. But the book has come to be generally accepted as standard.” (*Ibid*)

This is evidence that in 1960, some Seventh-day Adventists were still holding on the ‘old view’. By this time though (said Froom), the ‘new view’, as found in his book ‘The Coming of the Comforter’ had become the norm within Seventh-day Adventism.

He also said that when he had introduced this thought during 1927-1928, he was “pummelled by some of the old-timers”. Notice too he said that the extent of this pummelling could not be imagined. It was obviously quite aggressive.

These “old-timers” could not have been the original pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism. This is because by 1927-1928 they were all dead. These Seventh-day Adventists to whom Froom was here referring must have been the ‘older ones’ who were alive during the latter part of Ellen White’s ministry. They were obviously still holding to the ‘old view’ of the Holy Spirit. This was as the 1930’s approached.

As has been said above, this 'new view' of the Holy Spirit eventually led to the trinity doctrine being introduced although this did not become normative until the late 1950's. This is in keeping with Froom's remarks in 1960 (see above). This shows that even by then, this teaching was not held by all Seventh-day Adventists. In other words, there was still division over it. This is the same as it is today.

### **One final and very interesting observation**

In her previously mentioned letter to Chapman, Ellen White ended by saying

"It is your duty to come as near to the people as you can, and not to get as far away from them as possible, and by your interpretation make a difference that should not exist. Here is your danger, of diverting minds from the real issues for this time. And you are not the only one who seems to be moved with ambition in this direction."  
*(Ellen G. White, Letter 7 1891, to Brother Chapman June 11<sup>th</sup> 1891)*

She then added

"It would not be right or prudent to send you out as a worker to promulgate your peculiar ideas and thus cause division; we have plenty of this now. We want men of solid experience, who will anchor minds and not send them adrift without chart or compass." *(Ibid)*

By telling Chapman that the church did not need men who would cause division but required men of "solid experience" who would "anchor minds", Ellen White was obviously saying that what was needed within Seventh-day Adventism were men who would teach established truth. She concluded by saying

"Now, my brother, it is truth that we want and must have, but do not introduce error as new truth." *(Ibid)*

Notice that this was in 1891. At this time, the Seventh-day Adventist Church not only taught that the Holy Spirit was the omnipresence of both God and Christ (not an individual person like them as it teaches now) but also that Christ was truly the Son of God, meaning that in eternity He had been begotten (brought forth) of the Father. At that time, this was the accepted denominational view. This was regarded as 'the truth'.

In 1890, **one year previous** to Ellen White writing to Chapman condemning his views, E. J. Waggoner published a book called 'Christ and His Righteousness'. This book was said by him to be a representation of his message at the now famous 1888 General Conference session.

As we know, Ellen White fully endorsed Waggoner's message. She said it was a message that God "commanded" to be given. She said such as

“The Lord in his great mercy sent a most precious message to his people through Elders Waggoner and Jones. This message was to bring more prominently before the world the uplifted Saviour, the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.” (*Ellen G. White, Testimony to Battle Creek 1<sup>st</sup> May 1895 written from Hobart, Tasmania, Australia to O. A. Olsen, MR 1100 Vol. 14, see also Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers page 91*)

This letter was written when Ellen White was in Australia. It was now 7 years after the Minneapolis General Conference (1888), also 5 years after Waggoner had published his book (1890). She then said

“Many had lost sight of Jesus. They needed to have their eyes directed to his divine person, his merits, and his changeless love for the human family. All power is given into his hands, that he may dispense rich gifts unto men, imparting the priceless gift of his own righteousness to the helpless human agent.” (*Ibid*)

She concluded

“This is the message that God commanded to be given to the world. It is the third angel's message, which is to be proclaimed with a loud voice, and attended with the outpouring of his Spirit in a large measure.” (*Ibid*)

These were very strong words and they came from God's messenger to the remnant.

Waggoner's message at Minneapolis was a message that concerned righteousness by faith. This is why early in his book, because the righteousness that saves us is the righteousness of God, it was imperative that Waggoner showed that Christ is truly God. To this end he made such statements as (referring to John 1:1)

“The Word was “in the beginning”. The mind of man cannot grasp the ages that are spanned in this phrase.” (*E. J. Waggoner, 'Christ and His Righteousness', page 9, 1890*)

Waggoner was saying that from this point of “in the beginning”, time was inestimable (incalculable). In other words, it is an ‘age’ known to God alone. He then said

“It is not given to men to know when or how the Son was begotten; but we know that He was the Divine Word, not simply before He came to this earth to die, but even before the world was created.” (*Ibid*)

Generally speaking, Waggoner's views concerning Christ were in keeping with what was then believed by Seventh-day Adventists. It can be said to have been the denominational belief. This is why these views did not cause controversy at Minneapolis. He also said

“We know that Christ “proceeded forth and come from God” (John 8:42) but it was so

far back in the ages of eternity as to be far beyond the grasp of the mind of man.”  
(*Ibid*)

On pages 21- 22 Waggoner confirms what he had said on page 9 (see above)

“There was a time when Christ proceeded forth and came from God, from the bosom of the Father (John 8:42 and 1:18) but that time was so far back in the days of eternity that to finite comprehension it is practically without beginning. But the point is that Christ is a begotten Son and not a created subject.” (*Ibid pages 21-22*)

Reiterating the point that Christ is a begotten Son Waggoner said

“But the point is that Christ is a begotten Son and not a created subject. He has by inheritance a more excellent name than the angels. He is “a Son over His own house.” Heb. 1:4; 3:6. And since He is the only-begotten Son of God, He is of the very substance and nature of God, and possesses by birth all the attributes of God; for the Father was pleased that His Son should be the express image of His person, the brightness of His glory, and filled with all the fullness of the Godhead.” (*Ibid page 22*)

Waggoner had solidly laid the foundation that because Christ was begotten of God, He was truly God therefore He is Jehovah. This is why he said

“Christ “is in the bosom of the Father;” being by nature the very substance of God and having life in Himself, He is properly called Jehovah, the self existing one and is thus styled in Jer. 23:56, where it is said that the righteous Branch, who shall execute judgment and justice in the earth, shall be known by the name of Jehovah-tsidekenu -- THE LORD, OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.” (*Ibid page 23-24*)

As can be clearly seen here, during their early years, Seventh-day Adventists did believe and teach that Christ is Jehovah. This was because they believed He was begotten (brought forth) of God. It could be said that they believed He was God from God.

Very important to our study is that Waggoner also said of the Holy Spirit

“Finally, we know the Divine unity of the Father and the Son from the fact that both have the same Spirit. Paul, after saying that they that are in the flesh cannot please God, continues: “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.” Rom. 8:9. Here we find that the Holy Spirit is both the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ.” (*Ibid page 23*)

Concerning the Holy Spirit, this was in keeping with what was taught in general by Seventh-day Adventists. This is that the Holy Spirit “is both the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ”.

During the time period of Ellen White’s ministry, this same reasoning was the teaching of

the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is also part of that which in 1895 Ellen White endorsed as “a most precious message” that God had sent to His people. This is why she said that to those who had “lost sight of Jesus” it had directed their minds to “his divine person” (see above).

Ellen White obviously considered Waggoner as someone who (unlike Chapman with his divisive views) would “anchor minds and not send them adrift without chart or compass” (see Chapman letter above). Note that Ellen White’s letter endorsing Waggoner’s message was written in 1895 whilst her letter condemning Chapman’s view was 4 years earlier in 1891.

Unlike the beliefs of Chapman, Ellen White did not consider Waggoner’s beliefs as error or being divisive. This means that in 1895, she did not regard Waggoner’s Minneapolis message concerning Christ or the Holy Spirit as being error. She only saw it as uniting God’s people. In fact by saying it was a message commanded to have been given by God, she endorsed it as being the truth.

Waggoner’s views of Christ and the Holy Spirit were those that were then being taught by Seventh-day Adventists. This is why it did not produce any objections at Minneapolis. Note too that this was the same time period that ‘The Desire of Ages’ was nearing completion.

Unlike she did with Kellogg’s book (‘The Living Temple’), Ellen White never condemned Waggoner’s book, neither did she condemn his views of God, Christ or the Holy Spirit found therein. For this there was obviously a very good reason. She was in agreement with them.

### **In agreement with Waggoner**

Some have said that Ellen White did not endorse Waggoner’s views concerning Christ but this would be nonsensical. At Minneapolis it constituted the entire basis of His message of righteousness by faith. This is why very early in his book he had established it as the foundation of his message (the foundation of the gospel).

We know that Ellen White agreed with this part of Waggoner’s reasoning because in May 1895, which was only a matter of 9 or 10 weeks after she had written that letter to the General Conference endorsing his message at Minneapolis (see above), she echoed Waggoner’s thoughts in an article she wrote.

Waggoner had said in his book

“It is true that there are many sons of God, but Christ is the “only begotten Son of God,” and therefore the Son of God in a sense in which no other being ever was or ever can be.” (E. J. Waggoner, ‘Christ and His Righteousness’, page 12, 1890)

He then added



“The angels are sons of God, as was Adam (Job 38:7; Luke 3:38), by creation; Christians are the sons of God by adoption (Rom. 8:14, 15), but Christ is the Son of God by birth. The writer to the Hebrews further shows that the position of the Son of God is not one to which Christ has been elevated but that it is one which He has by right.” (*Ibid*)

Now note how ‘near’ to Waggoner’s latter words are these from Ellen White (this was 5 years later in 1895)

“A complete offering has been made; for "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son,"-- not a son by creation, as were the angels, nor a son by adoption, as is the forgiven sinner, but a Son begotten in the express image of the Father's person, and in all the brightness of his majesty and glory, one equal with God in authority, dignity, and divine perfection. In him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 30<sup>th</sup> May 1895, ‘Christ our complete salvation’*)

Although not exactly ‘word for word’, it is reasonably obvious that Ellen White repeated Waggoner ‘thought for thought’. She also said just 6 weeks later

“The Eternal Father, the unchangeable one, gave his only begotten Son, tore from his bosom Him who was made in the express image of his person, and sent him down to earth to reveal how greatly he loved mankind.” (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald 9<sup>th</sup> July 1895 ‘The Duty of the Minister and the People’*)

In 1895, Ellen White’s views of God, Christ and the Holy Spirit were no different than what was then being taught by Seventh-day Adventists. This is that Christ is begotten (brought forth) of God therefore because of this He is truly the Son of God. It was also that the Holy Spirit is the presence of them both (the Father and the Son) whilst they were not bodily present. She did not recognise these views as peculiar or divisive but in keeping with the Scriptures.

Today the Seventh-day Adventist Church condemns these views and says that they are heretical but there is no record of Ellen White saying that they were wrong. All of the evidence points to her agreeing with what Seventh-day Adventists were then teaching. These same views continued until she died (1915), even for decades beyond. In section two of this study we shall take particular note of what the Scriptures say concerning the Holy Spirit.

## **Section two**

### **What the Scriptures reveal**

We noted in the previous section that throughout the time of Ellen White’s ministry (1844-



1915), it was not generally believed within Seventh-day Adventism that the Holy Spirit is an individual divine being like God and Christ. This was even though by the early 1900's, it was accepted, as Ellen White had said, that He is a person and that "There are three living persons of the heavenly trio" (see Bible Training School, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1906, 'The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost').

The belief of Seventh-day Adventists was that the Holy Spirit (Holy Ghost) is both God the Father and Christ omnipresent (the Spirit of them both) whilst they (God the Father and Christ) were both bodily in Heaven. This would mean that although bodily in Heaven, both God the Father and Christ were present everywhere by the Holy Spirit. For decades after Ellen White's death, this same view continued to permeate Seventh-day Adventism.

Eventually a 'changed view' emerged. This view depicted the Holy Spirit as a separate individual (another divine being) like God and Christ which, coupled with changed views of Christ, eventually led to the adoption of the trinity doctrine. This latter belief did not become normative until the mid to late 1950's. As a movement of people, this was over 100 years after our beginnings.

So who is right and who is wrong in this Godhead debate?

This can only be decided by a personal study of the Scriptures. This means that whatever God has chosen to reveal through His written word, it will need to be studied and then a belief formulated based on the weight of evidence that is found. There is no other way to draw an honest conclusion. Simply taking the word of someone else for what is believed, or believing something is true just because a certain church teaches it (whatever church that may be) is not a very good reason for believing anything. The entire debate needs personal study.

### **The problem**

Most would agree that concerning the Holy Spirit, much of what is believed today by Christians is based upon New Testament revelation – particularly the words of Jesus as recorded in the gospel of John. These are such as

"And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;" ... "These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." ... But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me." ... "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." John 14:16, 14:25-26, 15:26, 16:7

From reading the above Scriptures, also from reading other texts that are very similar to them, most Christians have come to the conclusion that the Holy Spirit is a person –

meaning a person like God the Father and Christ. Others take an alternative view. They will say that although the Holy Spirit is a person, the Scriptures do not depict Him as a person exactly like the Father and Christ. In total contrast to both of these conclusions, some say that the Holy Spirit is simply the power or influence of God.

This reminds us of the Kellogg problem.

In section one of this study we noted that in attempting to justify himself for what he had written in his much-debated book 'The Living Temple' (which was condemned because of the views of God it contained), Kellogg said that he had come to believe in the trinity, meaning that he had come to believe that the Holy Spirit is a person like God and Christ.

By accepting this belief, Kellogg found himself at variance with the main body of Seventh-day Adventists. This is because it was not generally believed by the latter that the Holy Spirit had individuality like God and Christ. Certainly they did not believe, as expressed in the trinity doctrine, that God is a trinity of divine beings. Whilst Ellen White was alive, the Seventh-day Adventist Church did not hold this latter belief.

It is evident that the church attempted to show Kellogg where he was wrong. We can see this because Kellogg wrote to G. I. Butler (then the Southern Union Conference President) saying

*“As far as I can fathom, the difficulty which is found in the Living Temple, the whole thing may be simmered down to this question: is the Holy Ghost a person? You say no.” (Letter, Kellogg to G. I Butler, October 28<sup>th</sup> 1903)*

He also said

*“How the Holy Ghost can be the third person and not be a person at all is difficult for me to see” (Ibid)*

Today this same problem still exists within Seventh-day Adventism. The trinitarians are saying to those who are non-trinitarian - “How can the Holy Spirit be a person and yet not be a person”?

The truth of the matter is that the majority of Seventh-day Adventist non-trinitarians are not saying that the Holy Spirit is not a person. They are saying that He is not a person with individuality **like** God and Christ.

Whilst all of this may sound rather confusing, by taking a look at what God has told us through His written Word (which we shall be doing in this section) we shall discover why they reason this way. We shall also be taking note of both sides of the argument – which is the correct way to deal with this issue.

## **The way to resolve the problem**

During a morning talk at Battle Creek on February 6<sup>th</sup> 1890, Ellen White spoke these words

“Our brethren should be willing to investigate in a candid way every point of controversy. If a brother is teaching error, those who are in responsible positions ought to know it; and if he is teaching truth, they ought to take their stand at his side. We should all know what is being taught among us, for if it is truth, we need to know it.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 25<sup>th</sup> March 1890, ‘Open the heart to light’*)

The only honest way to deal with this question of the Holy Spirit is to study both sides of the argument. This being done, there will then be the need to draw conclusions from what is discovered – also taking into account anything else that can be brought to mind that is not mentioned in this paper.

Three years later when in New Zealand, Ellen White spoke of those in that country who were saying that Seventh-day Adventists did not believe in the divinity of Christ. This is probably because Seventh-day Adventists were not trinitarians. They believed that in eternity, Christ was begotten of the Father therefore He was God the Father in the person of His Son.

Ellen White upheld the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. She said that they were teaching the truth about Christ. She wrote

“In this country [New Zealand], the denominational ministers tell the most unblushing falsehoods to their congregations in reference to our work and our people.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 12<sup>th</sup> May 1893, ‘An appeal for the Australasian field’*)

She followed this by saying

“Whatever false report has been started, is circulated by those who oppose the truth, and is repeated from church to church and from community to community. The circulators of these falsehoods take no pains to find out whether or not they are true, for many of those who repeat the reports, though not the framers of them, still love the false reports, and take delight in giving them a wide circulation.” (*Ibid*)

This is very often how it is today. She then added

“They do not, like honest, just men, come to those who are accused, and seek to find out what is the truth concerning what they have heard in regard to their faith; but without inquiry they spread false statements in order to prejudice the people against those who hold the truth.” (*Ibid*)

This is the way of the world. This should not be found in Christianity – certainly not within Seventh-day Adventism. It is not the way of Christ. Notice that Ellen White was saying that Seventh-day Adventists were teaching the truth. As an example of this prejudice against this truth she wrote

“For instance, an effort was made to obtain the use of the hall at a village four miles from Hastings, where some of our workers proposed to present the gospel to the people; but they did not succeed in obtaining the hall, because a schoolteacher there opposed the truth, and declared to the people that Seventh-day Adventists did not believe in the divinity of Christ.” (*Ibid*)

We can see from this that Ellen White was saying that Seventh-day Adventists were teaching the truth concerning Christ. She upheld these beliefs. This was in 1893.

Seven years later in 1900 Ellen White wrote (note the title of the chapter)

“To hold yourselves aloof from an investigation of truth is not the way to carry out the Saviour's injunction to "search the Scriptures." (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies on Sabbath School Work, 1900, page 65, 'The Spirit of Investigation Essential'*)

She then asks

“Is it digging for hidden treasures to call the result's of some one's labor a mass of rubbish, and make no critical examination to see whether or not there are precious jewels of truth in the collection of thought which you condemn? (*Ibid*)

In a letter written to G. I. Butler who was then the General Conference President Ellen White advised

“If a brother differ with you on some points of truth, do not stoop to ridicule, do not place him in a false light, or misconstrue his words, making sport of them; do not misinterpret his words and wrest them of their true meaning.” (*Ellen White, letter to G. I Butler, written from Minneapolis October 14<sup>th</sup>, 1888, Volume 12 Manuscript Releases, MR 998*)

She then said

“Do not present him before others as a heretic, when you have not with him investigated his positions, taking the Scriptures text by text in the spirit of Christ to show him what is truth.” (*Ibid*)

In this study of the Holy Spirit, this heavenly advice is heeded. We shall be taking a look at both sides of the debate.

When all is said and done, the author of this paper has drawn exactly the same conclusion as did G. I. Butler who in reply to Kellogg's dilemma wrote saying

“God dwells in us by His Holy Spirit, as a Comforter, as a Reprover, especially the former. When we come to Him, we partake of Him in that sense, because the Spirit comes forth from him; it comes forth from the Father and the Son” (*G. I Butler, letter to J. H. Kellogg April 5<sup>th</sup> 1904*)

He also said

“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.” *(Ibid)*

Bearing in mind that the Scriptures are to be the final rule for our faith, we will now take a look at what they tell us concerning the Holy Spirit.

### **The Holy Spirit a person**

First we shall take a look at the Scriptures that tell us the Holy Spirit is a person. As it is evident why these Scriptures are employed to this end, lengthy and detailed comments are unnecessary. These texts are

“And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.” Ephesians 4:30

We conclude from this that because the Holy Spirit can be grieved (caused distress, be upset and be made sad etc) He must be a person. Luke wrote

“But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?” Acts 5:3

The Holy Spirit must be a person because otherwise it would not be possible to lie to Him. It is impossible to lie to something that is just a power or influence. Jesus said

“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

Luke also wrote

“Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot” Acts 8:29

“While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee.” Acts 10:19

These Scriptures tell us very clearly that the Holy Spirit hears, speaks and reveals therefore He must be a person. Paul also wrote

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

This text is very important. We shall return our thoughts to it in the **next section**. This is when we shall be taking a look at what the Scriptures say concerning the human spirit. This I believe will help us to better understand God's Spirit (the Holy Spirit). The Holy Spirit has to be a person else He could not witness to our spirit. Paul added

“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” Romans 8:26

The Holy Spirit intercedes for us therefore this must show Him to be a person. Note Paul says He intercedes with “groanings which cannot be uttered”. Perhaps a better word for ‘groanings’ would be ‘sighs’ (that cannot be uttered) or perhaps even better, as the Weymouth translation puts it, “But the Spirit Himself pleads for us in yearnings that can find no words”. We must also remember that Jesus said

“For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say.” Luke 12:12

The apostle Paul also wrote

“Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” 1 Corinthians 2:13

Just a little earlier Paul had said

“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

We can see from this that just like the spirit of man knows the things of man, it is the Spirit of God that knows the things of God.

### **The pronoun ‘he’ and ‘him’**

When explaining why he believed the Holy Spirit to be a person, John Harvey Kellogg said

“I had supposed the Bible said this for the reason that the personal pronoun he is used in speaking of the Holy Ghost. Sister White uses the pronoun he and has said in as many words that the Holy Ghost is the third person of the Godhead.” (*Letter, Kellogg to G. I Butler, October 28<sup>th</sup> 1903*)

As we noted above, ‘the comforter’ that Jesus spoke of in John 14:16, 26, 15:26 and 16:7



is referred to by using the personal pronouns 'he' or 'him'. Understandably, many Christians use this argument (as did Kellogg) to show that the Holy Spirit is a person. It must be remembered though that many of the non-trinitarians today are not saying that the Holy Spirit is not a person but that He is not a person with individuality like God and Christ.

In 1878, a Seventh-day Adventist minister named Dudley Canright wrote an article called 'The Holy Spirit'. It was published in the Signs of the Times. He explained

*"Another fact which has a strong bearing on this question [of the Holy Spirit] is that the word spirit, Greek *pneuma*, is always neuter, that is neither masculine or feminine." (D. M. Canright, Signs of the Times, August 8<sup>th</sup> 1878, 'The Holy Spirit')*

Canright then says

*"All the pronouns referring to the Holy Ghost are neuter, except when the Holy Ghost is personified, as the comforter, Greek, *Parakletos*, John 14:16. 26. Here of course it would have to be masculine." (Ibid)*

Canright's reasoning appears to be that because the Greek word (*pneuma*) translated 'Spirit' is neuter, then the pronouns 'he' or 'him' etc should not be used with respect to it. He also maintained that it is by the use of the Greek word 'Parakletos' (which is masculine) that the Spirit "is personified" as the comforter and specific gender is applied. Note he says that "it would have to be masculine". In other words (Canright is saying), the reasoning behind why the Bible translators refer to the 'comforter' as 'he' or 'him' is that they are required to do so to be grammatically correct. Canright concluded

*"If the Holy Spirit is a person, the pronouns referring to it should be in the masculine, which they never are." (Ibid)*

Like most other Seventh-day Adventists living at that time, Canright could only reason that the Holy Spirit is either a person or not a person. He could not see an 'in between' belief, meaning that the Holy Spirit is a person but His nature cannot be understood by fallen humanity. He concluded therefore that the Holy Spirit is an influence from God.

Unlike us today, Canright was not privileged to have the counsel of Ellen White saying that the Holy Spirit is a person. This is because at that time (1878), God had not revealed it through her.

Interesting is that 9 years later when Canright apostatised from the Seventh-day Adventist Church (1887) he became a Baptist minister. He then accepted the trinity doctrine he had heretofore rejected. One would assume from this that he changed his mind regarding the Holy Spirit.

In the process of his apostasy, Canright rejected not only the Seventh-day (Saturday) Sabbath but the distinctive message of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, meaning that he



denied that the latter was God's remnant church. In brief he totally rejected Seventh-day Adventism, hence the title of his well-read book 'Seventh-day Adventism Renounced'. Canright never rejoined the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He died in 1919.

As well as those texts of Scripture we have seen above, there are other texts that show the Holy Spirit to be a person but the ones we have looked at should suffice for our purposes.

It can only be concluded that if the Holy Spirit was not a person then He could not hear, speak, teach or communicate etc but what about the other side of the argument - meaning the texts of Scriptures that do not depict Him as a person in the normal usage of the word? We shall look at these now. This will give us a balanced view of the issue.

### **The Holy Spirit – the glory of God**

Those who believe that the Holy Spirit is an individual divine being like God and Christ, usually attempt to justify their beliefs by quoting such Scriptures as we have just read above. Interestingly though, they seldom present the texts of Scripture that show He is not a person in the sense we normally use the word 'person'.

This is very poor biblical exegesis. I say this because if we are to present an honest study of any subject (whatever it is) then we must show all the texts that are relevant to what we are studying and not just some of them. In other words, we must not use texts that 'prove' what we wish people to believe whilst at the same time ignore the texts that lend themselves to being contrary to that belief. In reality, this is being dishonest. This is why this study presents both sides of the argument.

Although in the finality this overall view may not provide a satisfactory answer to what the Holy Spirit is exactly, it is an honest study of what the Scriptures reveal.

Regarding the texts of Scriptures that fail to speak of the Holy Spirit as a person (as we would normally think of a person to be), take for example something that Jesus did shortly after His resurrection.

After showing His disciples the nail marks in His hands and feet, also after saying to them "Peace be unto you", He

“ ... [breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost](#)” John 20:22

Anyone who is being honest could never say that Jesus breathed on His disciples a person as we normally perceive a person to be – a person like Himself and His Father (or like you and me).

It is interesting that when quoting this verse in 'The Desire of Ages', Ellen White explained (remember this happened **after** the resurrection but **prior to** the ascension)

“The Holy Spirit was not yet fully manifested; for Christ had not yet been glorified. The more abundant impartation of the Spirit did not take place till after Christ's ascension. Not until this was received could the disciples fulfill the commission to preach the gospel to the world. But the Spirit was now given for a special purpose.” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 805, 'Peace be unto you'*)

Note that Ellen White said that the “more abundant impartation” of the Holy Spirit could not be given until “after Christ's ascension”. We will come back to this point shortly. She then said

“Before the disciples could fulfill their official duties in connection with the church, Christ breathed His Spirit upon them.” (*Ibid*)

As we can clearly see, Ellen White says that Jesus breathed upon these disciples “His Spirit” yet He did say “receive ye the Holy Ghost” (the Holy Spirit). Note that Jesus did not say “receive me”. In keeping with this, Ellen White said next

“He [Jesus] was committing to them a most sacred trust, and He desired to impress them with the fact that without the Holy Spirit this work could not be accomplished.” (*Ibid*)

Here Ellen White is saying that in giving the Holy Spirit, Jesus was giving of **His Spirit**. This is also in keeping where she wrote (as we noted in section one)

"This [the Holy Spirit] refers to the omnipresence of the Spirit of Christ, called the Comforter. Again Jesus says, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth" [John 16:12, 13]." (*Ellen G. White, letter to Brother Chapman June 11<sup>th</sup> 1891, Manuscript Release volume 14, No. 1107*)

Here we are told that the Holy Spirit is Christ Himself omnipresent. Remember that when writing of the time between His resurrection and His ascension that Christ breathed the Holy Spirit upon His disciples, Ellen White said that the Holy Spirit “was not yet fully manifested; for Christ had not yet been glorified” (see above).

At Pentecost, Peter spoke of this glorification of Christ. He said

“Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he [Jesus] hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.” Acts 2:33

Notice that Christ received of the promise of the Holy Spirit “of the Father”. This was something that He did not possess previously. If He had possessed it previously, then it would have been unnecessary for Him to receive it later from the Father. It was after receiving of this promise that the Holy Spirit was “fully manifested”.

Concerning the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost Ellen White wrote

“Now [at Pentecost] the disciples understood the words spoken by Christ when He was yet with them, "At that day ye shall know that I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you." (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 17<sup>th</sup> May 1899, 'The Promise of the Spirit'*)

It is also interesting that when Jesus received the Holy Spirit at His baptism, John records

“And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.” John 1:32-33

It is very difficult to imagine being anointed with a person, at least with a person like you and me (or like God and Christ). Notice here that the Holy Spirit was seen to descend from Heaven “like a dove”. God gave it. We have been told through the spirit of prophecy

“The Baptist saw the Saviour walking at a distance, and his face lighted up.”Behold the Lamb of God," he cried, "which taketh away the sin of the world." There Christ stood revealed before the people. The glory of God descended upon him in the form of a dove like burnished gold, and the voice of the infinite One declared, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (*Ellen White, Review and Herald, 13<sup>th</sup> February 1900, 'By What Authority Doest Thou These Things?'*)

Take note that the Holy Spirit is described here (as Ellen White describes Him in a number of places) as “The glory of God”. Notice also that this glory was “in the form of a dove like burnished gold”. Again it is difficult to imagine this dove-like form as a person like God and Christ, especially when it is realised that at the very same time He was seen descending upon Jesus at His baptism, the Holy Spirit was also dwelling within every believer living at that time. We shall consider the latter now.

### **Within every believer**

The Holy Spirit dwells within every person who is born again (John 3:16). This is how a person’s attitude is changed, also because of which, his (or her) behaviour becomes more and more ‘Christ-like’. It is only by the power of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that any of us can keep the commandments of God (see Ezekiel 36:24-27, Hebrews 8:10-12, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:16 etc). As Paul said to the believers in Corinth

“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” ... “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?” 1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19

Paul also wrote to Timothy

“That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.” 2 Timothy 1:14

Throughout this study we need to remember that the Holy Spirit dwells within every believer in every age at the same time (see also Ezekiel 36:24-27 and Romans 8:9 etc). This means He is within hundreds of thousands of Christians at the same time, perhaps even millions. Does this sound as though He is a person like God and Christ (or like you and me)? This indwelling is not metaphorical. It is literal. The Holy Spirit does not dwell within the unconverted (Proverbs 15:29).

This belief concerning the ‘indwelling’ of the Holy Spirit is in keeping with Jesus saying to His disciples

“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 14:17

We can see much the same concerning the gift of the Holy Spirit. It was said of the disciples at Pentecost

“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

It can easily be seen why our pioneers had difficulty in regarding the Holy Spirit as a person.

### **The Holy Spirit given, sent, taken away and belonging**

The Scriptures reveal that the Holy Spirit does not function independently from God but is used by Him. This is shown quite a number of times. Jesus said

“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” Luke 11:13

Note it is the Father who **gives** the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul also wrote

“He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.” 1 Thessalonians 4:8

In the Old Testament David wrote

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

The prophet Isaiah penned these words

“But they rebelled, and vexed his [God’s] holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them. Then he remembered the days of old, Moses, and his people, saying, Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? where is he that put his holy Spirit within him?” Isaiah 63:11

We can see from the above that the Holy Spirit is sent, given and taken away. We can also see that He ‘belongs’ to God (his holy Spirit). Paul also said

“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

Notice here it says that having the Holy Spirit within is the same as having the Spirit of Christ within. This is the same as Waggoner said in his book ‘Christ and His Righteousness’. This is the book that is said to depict his message at the Minneapolis General Conference session (1888). As we noted in the previous section he said

“Finally, we know the Divine unity of the Father and the Son from the fact that both have the same Spirit. Paul, after saying that they that are in the flesh cannot please God, continues: “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.” Rom. 8:9. Here we find that the Holy Spirit is both the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ.” (*E. J. Waggoner, ‘Christ and His Righteousness’, page 23, 1890*)

This was the belief of Seventh-day Adventists whilst Ellen White was alive. The apostle Paul also said

“But if the Spirit of him [the Father] 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 8:11

Note here who it is said that raised Jesus from the grave. It was the Father (see also Galatians 1:1). Note also that the Spirit of God that dwells within them will raise Christians to life. Paul also wrote

“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)

We can see from the above that the Holy Spirit ‘belongs’ to God (it is God’s Spirit) and is used by Him (given and taken etc). Yet Ellen White comments

“The Holy Spirit is a free, working, independent agency. The God of heaven uses his Spirit as it pleases him, and human minds and human judgment and human methods

can no more set boundaries to its working, or prescribe as to the channel through which it shall operate, than they can say to the wind, "I bid you to blow in a certain direction, and to conduct yourself in such and such a manner" (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald. 5<sup>th</sup> May 1896 'Operation of the Holy Spirit made manifest in the life'*)

By "independent", it appears that Ellen White does not mean that the Holy Spirit chooses what to do but rather is used by "the God of Heaven". Note she says "as it pleases him". This independency therefore is not from His 'ownership' (belonging to God) but from God the Father's bodily presence. As Ellen White said, God "uses his Spirit". Note Ellen White's use of the word "it" with reference to the Holy Spirit. She does this on quite a number of occasions.

We noted in the previous section that whilst Ellen White was alive, Seventh-day Adventists did not believe that the Holy Spirit was another individual divine being exactly like God and Christ but believed instead that He was both God and Christ omnipresent. In section three we shall see that this is a parallel to what the Bible says concerning the human spirit.

This parallel is that the human spirit belongs to a person but is not a separate individual from that person. In contrast to God's Spirit, the human spirit cannot function independently of the body. This is why at death, when the human spirit separates from the physical body (Ecclesiastes 12:7) it is no longer conscious or animate. It can be said to be 'sleeping'.

### **Never 'from the Holy Spirit'**

It is very interesting that in each of Paul's introductions to his letters, he only says "from God the Father and from Jesus Christ" (or words that are very similar). Never does he say "from the Holy Spirit". For this there must be a very good reason. He says such as

"Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ."  
1 Corinthians 1:3

Paul's consistent omitting of the Holy Spirit from the introduction of his letters must be considered as strong evidence that he did not believe the Holy Spirit to be a person like God and Christ. If he had believed it then surely he would have included Him. To look at this another way, if Paul did regard the Holy Spirit to be a person like God and Christ, why in these introductions did he not mention Him? It was not now and again that he omitted the Holy Spirit but every time.

This 'omitting' of the Holy Spirit can be seen by reading Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:3, 2 Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:3, Ephesians 1:2, Philippians 1:2, Colossians 1:2, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2 Thessalonians 1:2, 1 Timothy 1:2, 2 Timothy 1:2, Titus 1:4 and Philemon 1:3. There are also other places in Paul's writings where he refers to the Father and the Son together but not the Holy Spirit (see 2 Corinthians 11:30-31, Ephesians 6:23, Colossians 2:2, 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 etc).

James, Peter, Jude and John, in the introductions to their letters, did exactly the same as Paul. They also said from God the Father and Jesus Christ but never included from the



Holy Spirit (see James 1:1, 1 Peter 1:1-3, 2 Peter 1:1-2, Jude 1:1, 1 John 1:3).

If these inspired writers did believe the Holy Spirit to be a person like God and Christ, then it is very strange indeed that in these introductions they not mention Him. After all, they were writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This means that the Holy Spirit led these writers to write this way.

We can look at this in another way. This is that if God wanted us to think of the Holy Spirit as another person like God and Christ, then why didn't He have these writers say from the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit?

It can only be reasonably concluded that if these inspired writers did believe the Holy Spirit to be a person like God and Christ, they would have included Him in their introductions. I say this because there must have been a reason for every one of these writers, each under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, not including Him.

### **Reasoning from John's letters**

When John's epistles are read (these were penned over half a century after the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost) – and remember that like the other Bible writers he wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit - it becomes apparent that like the other Bible writers, he did not regard the Holy Spirit as a person like God and Christ. This is because he said that as Christians, our fellowship is with the Father and the Son but does not include the Holy Spirit. He wrote

“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

If the Holy Spirit is a person in the same sense as God and Christ are persons, then why in these Scriptures did not John mention Him? Why mention only fellowship with the Father and the Son? There must be a reason for John writing this way. John also said that those who deny the Father and the Son are anti-Christ but does not say the same regarding the Holy Spirit. He wrote

“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

Again John makes no mention of the Holy Spirit so again we must ask why not – especially if the Holy Spirit is a person like God and Christ? Is it not anti-Christ not to believe that the



Holy Spirit is a person like God and His Son? The answer is ‘apparently not’, although Jesus did say that evil speaking against the Holy Spirit is unforgivable (see Matthew 12:31).

John also records in his gospel (which was written around the same time period as his epistles), that Jesus said that life eternal is to know Him (Jesus), also the only true God who had sent Him. He records Jesus as praying

“And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” John 17:3

Jesus does not mention ‘knowing’ the Holy Spirit. Why not - if the Holy Spirit is a person like God and Himself? Is it not eternal life to know the Holy Spirit?

All of these are very important questions. It is easy to see why so many people do not accept the Holy Spirit to be a person with individuality like God and Christ.

This reminds us of that which we noted in the previous section was said by Willie White. He wrote to a person named Carr saying

“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*)

### **More reasoning from the Scriptures**

In the Bible, the Father and the Son are sometimes described as sitting upon a throne (see Psalm 47:8, Hebrews 12:2, Revelation 3:21, 12:5 etc) but the Holy Spirit is never depicted as doing so. Why not, if He is a person like God and Christ?

The same could be said as revealed in the spirit of prophecy writings. Nowhere in them is the Holy Spirit depicted as sitting upon a throne yet the Father and the Son are often described as doing so. For this there must be a very good reason. This is why we need to think these things through.

In the Bible, neither God nor Jesus are ever seen expressing their love for the Holy Spirit although they are seen expressing their love for each other (see John 10:17, John 14:31, John 15:9-10). Neither is it shown where the Holy Spirit expresses His love for the Father and the Son. Why not, if He is a person like God and Christ?

The Bible never says that the Holy Spirit loves fallen humanity although it does tell us that both the Father and the Son love us (see John 3:16, 14:21, 15:9, Romans 5:7-8, Romans 8:39, 1 John 3:1 etc). Never are we told to love the Holy Spirit but we are called to love the

Father and the Son (see Deuteronomy 6:5, Joshua 23:11. Matthew 22:37, John 14:21, 14:23). If the Holy Spirit is a person just like God and Christ are both individual persons, why are we not encouraged to love Him - also why doesn't the Bible say that He loves us?

We also read in the Scriptures of the sacrifice made by the Father and Son (see John 3:16, Ephesians 5:2, Hebrews 10:12, 1 John 3:16, 1 John 4:9-10) but never is the Holy Spirit depicted as making a sacrifice. Why not, if He is a person like God and Christ?

There is also something else very important to consider here. This is that we are never told to pray **to** the Holy Spirit but we are told to pray for His presence. Jesus did not direct His prayers to the Holy Spirit or talk to Him – neither are we told to speak or pray to the Holy Spirit. Why not, if He is a person like God and Christ?

Note something else very important, which should also be very relevant to our reasoning. When talking to His disciples concerning the Holy Spirit, Jesus said

“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

It is only reasonable to ask here, if the Holy is a person like God and Christ, why doesn't He speak of Himself? I ask this because God and Christ speak of themselves.

As we have already seen above, the Holy Spirit dwells within everyone who accepts Christ as Saviour. It must be admitted that this is not acting as a person like God and Christ (or like you and I) are persons. His nature therefore, because of our limited understanding, must remain beyond our comprehension. As we noted in the previous section, Ellen White did say

“The nature of the Holy Spirit is a mystery. Men cannot explain it, because the Lord has not revealed it to them.” (*Ellen G. White, 'Acts of the Apostles' page 52, 1911*)

There is also something else to consider here. This is that if God the Father has a Spirit, also if Christ has a Spirit (as we have seen from above that they have), does the Holy Spirit, if He is an individual divine being like God the Father and Christ, also have a Spirit?

In other words, if it is said that the Holy Spirit is an individual divine being like God and Christ, then like God and Christ does He also have a Spirit? In brief it could be asked, does the Holy Spirit have a Spirit? We need to reason these things through.

### **The Comforter – God the Father and Christ omnipresent**

Throughout this study it has been said that the Holy Spirit is both God and Christ omnipresent whilst they (God and Christ) are bodily in Heaven. We shall now look at Scripture that confirms this to be true.

Shortly before the crucifixion, Jesus was explaining to His disciples that although He was going away He would not leave them comfortless. During this conversation, Philip said to Him "Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us" (see John 14:8). Jesus replied by saying

"... Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake." John 14:9-11

Shortly after this Jesus said

"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. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" John 14:16-18

It is very plain to see that when Jesus said the "Comforter" is coming He said that it was **Himself that would come**. Obviously though, this was not in bodily form because bodily He was in Heaven with His Father (Acts 2:39, 7:56, Hebrews 8:1, 12:2). The Scriptures also tell us that bodily He will return to earth (Matthew 26:64, Acts 1:10-11, 1 Thessalonians 4:17, Revelation 1:7 etc). There is a difference therefore in Jesus coming as the Comforter and Jesus coming bodily.

Concerning Christ coming as the Comforter but not in bodily form, Ellen White wrote

"Then said the Jews unto Him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast Thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I AM. Then took they up stones to cast at Him" because of that saying [verses 57-59]. Christ was using the great name of God that was given to Moses to express the idea of the eternal presence." (*Ellen G. White, Manuscript No. 1084, February 18, 19<sup>th</sup>, 1895, page 21*)

Two pages later we find these words

"Cumbered with humanity, Christ could not be in every place personally; therefore it was altogether for their advantage that He should leave them, go to His father, and send the Holy Spirit to be His successor on earth." (*Ibid*)

She then added

"The Holy Spirit is Himself divested of the personality of humanity and independent thereof. He would represent Himself as present in all places by His Holy Spirit, as the Omnipresent." (*Ibid*)

Note first of all the final remark of Ellen White. She says that Christ is “the Omnipresent”. This is the Holy Spirit. We can also see here that she is making it very clear, just like she said in her letter to Chapman, that the Holy Spirit is the “omnipresence of the Spirit of Christ” (see above and [previous section](#)).

Note also that she said that this divine personality (the Holy Spirit) was **Christ Himself** not “cumbered with” but “divested of the personality of humanity” also “independent thereof”.

Cumbered means troubled, restricted, hindered, or obstructed by etc., therefore Ellen White is saying that the Holy Spirit is the person of Christ unrestricted and unhindered by the humanity which at His ascension He took into Heaven. Remember we noted above that she said the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ omnipresent.

When we remember that she also said that Christ was claiming to be “the eternal presence” (this is when Christ claimed the name ‘I AM’ John 8:58 – see above), it is hardly surprising that she said that the Holy Spirit is the presence of Christ Himself but not in bodily form (in His humanity).

As Ellen White wrote in ‘The Desire of Ages’

“The Holy Spirit is Christ's representative, but divested of the personality of humanity, and independent thereof. Cumbered with humanity, Christ could not be in every place personally. Therefore it was for their interest that He should go to the Father, and send the Spirit to be His successor on earth. No one could then have any advantage because of his location or his personal contact with Christ. By the Spirit the Saviour would be accessible to all. In this sense He would be nearer to them than if He had not ascended on high.” (*Ellen G. White, ‘The Desire of Ages page 669, ‘Let not yet your heart be troubled’*)

Two paragraphs later she added

“He that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him.” Jesus read the future of His disciples. He saw one brought to the scaffold, one to the cross, one to exile among the lonely rocks of the sea, others to persecution and death. He encouraged them with the promise that in every trial He would be with them. That promise has lost none of its force. The Lord knows all about His faithful servants who for His sake are lying in prison or who are banished to lonely islands. He comforts them with His own presence. When for the truth's sake the believer stands at the bar of unrighteous tribunals, Christ stands by his side.” (*Ibid*)

She also said

“At all times and in all places, in all sorrows and in all afflictions, when the outlook seems dark and the future perplexing, and we feel helpless and alone, the Comforter will be sent in answer to the prayer of faith. Circumstances may separate us from

every earthly friend; but no circumstance, no distance, can separate us from the heavenly Comforter. Wherever we are, wherever we may go, He is always at our right hand to support, sustain, uphold, and cheer." (*Ibid*)

We can see here that although a person Himself, the Holy Spirit is the very presence of Christ. He is the comforter. He is the one at our right hand to help us.

Returning our thoughts to the discourse that Jesus had with His disciples at the last supper, Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him "Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" (See John 14:22). 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." (See John 14:23)

From what Jesus said here to His disciples, it is very evident that when the Comforter came it would be both God and Christ that came ("we will come unto him") yet not bodily. This is because bodily, both God the Father and Christ would both still be in heaven. This is why the early Seventh-day Adventists believed that the Holy Spirit was not another person with individuality like God and Christ but was both of them (God and Christ) omnipresent. In other words, the Holy Spirit was said to be the Spirit of both God and Christ.

As Ellen White wrote

"He that believeth in the Son, hath the Father also." He who has continual faith in the Father and the Son has the Spirit also." (*Ellen G. White, Bible Training School, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1906, 'The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost'*)

Notice here that Ellen White said nothing about having faith in the Holy Spirit.

### **One final thought**

There is one final thought to consider here. This is that in the book of Revelation, when referring to the time period after the saints have been delivered from earth, John was shown scenes of Heaven.

"And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him:" Revelation 22:1-3

John also had written

"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 mention of the Holy Spirit. Why not if He is a person like God and Christ

(like “the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb”)?

It concludes in the last chapter of the book

“And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him:” Revelation 22:3

## **Conclusion**

From reasoning the above Scriptures, it can only be concluded that in a nature that we cannot understand, the Holy Spirit is a person but it could never be concluded that He is a person like God and Christ (or like you and I) are persons. As G. I. Butler wrote to John Harvey Kellogg regarding the Holy Spirit (see previous section)

“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 5<sup>th</sup> 1904)*

In section three of this study we shall be taking a look at what the Scriptures say concerning the human spirit. We shall see that this has a certain relevance to our understanding of the Holy Spirit.

## **Section three**

### **The Human Spirit**

At this juncture you may be asking why the third section of this study on God’s Spirit (the Holy Spirit) is dealing with the human spirit. For this there is a very good reason.

It is the author’s belief that if we have a correct understanding of the human spirit (at least as far as possible from what God has revealed) it will help immensely in understanding God’s Spirit (the Holy Spirit). As we progress through this section, the reasoning behind this will become evident.

### **Seventh-day Adventists Believe**

In their official explanation of their fundamental beliefs, the Seventh-day Adventist Church describes the human spirit as the “energizing spark of life”, also the “divine energy” or “life principle” that every person who is born on earth possesses. They also say that this very same life principle is possessed by every animal that is given life (see Seventh-day Adventists Believe... A biblical explanation of 27 fundamental doctrines pages 81- 83, chapter ‘The Nature of Man’). Later we shall be taking a look at the actual quotations.



The author of the notes you are now reading differs in beliefs with this 'official' understanding of the human spirit. He maintains that the Scriptures reveal that the human spirit is that part of a person which 'survives' the physical body at death but never as a functioning entity. He also believes that at death, this spirit is returned to God for 'safe keeping' (preservation), also from that time onward, until it is given a new body in which it can again function (meaning become 'alive' again) it will remain dormant (inactive/unconscious). It is at the resurrection that this re-uniting will take place.

We shall now take a look at the Scriptures by which he arrives at this understanding. As we do so, please keep in mind that he believes that at death, a person ceases to function and therefore neither here on earth or in Heaven above does he or she have any more part in anything that happens. In other words, the author of these notes believes in what is commonly referred to as 'soul sleep'. He does not believe that at death a person continues to function (continues to live). In summary he believes that the dead do not know anything, neither do they experience anything any more – at least not until the resurrection. Certainly he believes that the dead can neither speak to the living (or vice versa) nor influence them in any way (see Psalm 146:1-4; Ecclesiastes 9:5-6 &10; Isaiah 38:18). This means that the only influence that dead people can have on the living is the influence they had whilst they were alive.

The Bible also tells us that the dead are not even able to praise God (see Psalm 6:5 & 115:17 etc). This shows us that the belief generally held amongst Christians today that after death the spirit of a person continues to 'live on' (either above in Heaven or below in hell) is error. We shall return to this point later.

### **The human spirit**

It is abundantly clear from the Scriptures that everyone has a spirit. The apostle Paul said to the believers in Thessalonica

“And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Thessalonians 5:23

Notice particularly Paul said he prays that along with the soul and the body, the spirit would be “**preserved blameless**”. When writing these words, he could not have been reasoning that a person's spirit (Gr. pneuma) is the 'spark of life' or energizing spirit' etc. This would not make any sense at all.

There are many other texts that tell us that each individual person has a spirit. Take for example the following: Jesus said

“Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.” Mark 14:38

When visiting Elizabeth (the mother of John the Baptist), Mary the mother of Jesus said

“And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.” Luke 1:47

The apostle Paul said under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit

“For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers;” Romans 1:9

Paul also said later in the same letter

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

He also said the following to the believers in Corinth

“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 2:11

“For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.” 1 Corinthians 6:20

“There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband.” 1 Corinthians 7:34

“For they have refreshed my spirit and your's: therefore acknowledge ye them that are such.” 1 Corinthians 16:18

“I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother: but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia.” 2 Corinthians 2:13

There are many other texts that speak of the human spirit. These were just a sample.

As we noted in the previous section, the Scriptures refer to the Holy Spirit as displaying all the attributes of a person. This is why many regard Him to be a person.

So too the Bible writers depict the human spirit as displaying all the attributes of a person yet strange to relate, our spirits are never regarded as a separate personage other than ourselves so why should we believe differently regarding God's Spirit (the Holy Spirit)? Looking at this another way, because we regard our spirit as belonging to us (not separate from us), why should we not regard God's Spirit as belonging to Him (no separate from Him)?

At this point, there may be those who are saying that the human spirit (as it says in the book 'Seventh-day Adventists Believe... ') is simply the human life force or, as it is

sometimes said, 'the spark (or breath) of life' but that would not be consistent with what the Scriptures reveal. We concluded that the Holy Spirit, because of His person-like attributes, could not be just a force or power so why reason differently when it comes to the human spirit? After all, in exactly the same manner the Scriptures speak of the Holy Spirit, so too they speak of the human spirit.

It is often asked by those believing the Holy Spirit to be a person, "How can a life force (power) communicate, serve and experience as we have seen in the way the Holy Spirit functions?" Obviously it cannot - therefore neither the Holy Spirit nor the human spirit can simply be a life force. They both must be very much more.

### **More than just the spark of life**

We need now to take a closer look at what the Scriptures say concerning the human spirit but before we do I would draw your attention to what is said by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We mentioned this earlier (see above). In their official 'Seventh-day Adventists Believe... ', it says in the section that deals with the nature of man

"When God changed the elements of earth into a living being, He "breathed" the "breath of life" into the nostrils of Adam's lifeless body. This breath of life is "the breath of the Almighty" that gives life (Job 33:4)—the spark of life." (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe ... a Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines, page 81, chapter 7 'The Nature of Man'*)

It then adds by way of explanation

"We might compare it with the streams of electricity that, when they flow through various electrical components, transform a quiet, gray panel of glass in a box into a pulsating splash of color and action—when we flip the switch on a color TV. The electricity brings sound and motion where once there was nothing." (*Ibid*)

This same book says concerning the Biblical meaning of the word 'spirit'

"The Biblical meaning of spirit. Whereas the Hebrew word *nephesh* translated *soul*, denotes individuality or personality, the Old Testament Hebrew word *ruach*, translated *spirit*, refers to the energizing spark of life essential to individual existence. It stands for the divine energy, or life principle, that animates human beings." (*Ibid page 83*)

This "energizing spark of life", or "divine energy, or life principle, that animates human beings" is obviously meant to be (according to the 'Seventh-day Adventists Believe...') the same as "the breath of life" or "the breath of the Almighty that gives life – the spark of life" as above. It is likened to "streams of electricity" that "brings sound and motion where once there was nothing". This, says this same book, is that which brought life to the lifeless form of Adam that God had made from the dust of the ground. I would ask you to note one thing though. The Scriptures tell us

“And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath [Heb. Neshamah] of life; and man became a living soul.” Genesis 2:7

The Hebrew word here for the “breath” that God breathed into Adam is not ‘ruach’ but ‘Neshamah’. It is this ‘Neshamah’ that is here spoken of as the spark of life.

Concerning the Hebrew ‘ruach’ translated as spirit, it also says on page 83 of the ‘Seventh-day Adventist Believe

*“In the sense of breath, the ruach of men is identical with the ruach of animals (Eccl. 3:19). The ruach of man leaves the body at death (Ps. 146:4) and returns to God (Eccl. 12:7; cf. Job 34:14)” (Seventh-day Adventists Believe ... a Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines, page 83, chapter 7 ‘The Nature of Man’)*

To substantiate this, the words of the wise man are used where he says (speaking of what happens when a person dies)

“Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit [ruach] shall return unto God who gave it.” Ecclesiastes 12:7

This means that Seventh-day Adventists are saying it is the “breath of life” or “breath of the Almighty” that is returned to God at death (see Ecclesiastes 12:7) – also that this is the same with humans and animals alike. We shall return to this thought later.

It is interesting that in the Old Testament Scriptures, the word ‘ruach’ is used a total of 372 times. On 92 occasions it is translated ‘wind’ whilst 27 times it is translated ‘breath’ (KJV) but by far and away it is mostly translated ‘spirit’ or ‘Spirit’. In the KJV, this is done **over 230 times**.

In the book of Job, which by Ellen White was said to have been written by Moses (see Signs of the Times 19<sup>th</sup> February 1880), the words ‘ruach’ and ‘neshamah’ are used together as follows

“All the while my breath [neshamah] is in me, and the spirit [ruach] of God is in my nostrils.” Job 27:3

“The spirit [ruach] of God hath made me, and the breath [neshamah] of the Almighty hath given me life.” Job 33:4

“If he set his heart upon man, if he gather unto himself his spirit [ruach] and his breath [neshamah]; All flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust.” Job 34:14-15

Isaiah also wrote

“Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath [neshamah] unto the people upon it, and spirit [ruach] to them that walk therein.”  
Isaiah 42:5

### **A difference in understanding**

The author of these notes differs with the reasoning as found in this ‘Seventh-day Adventists Believe’ – the official explanation of what Seventh-day Adventists believe.

From his study of the Scriptures, which can be found outlined below, he concludes that the ‘spirit’, which at death returns to God, is not simply the life force (the spark of life) of a person but is far much more.

He has concluded that the spirit includes all of that which constitutes the ‘inner’ person (the character) of each individual. In other words, the spirit that is returned to God is who and what a person is (in my case what makes ‘me’ what I am and in your case what makes ‘you’ what you are). To put it in brief it is each individual’s ‘personal identity’.

It is this ‘personal identity’ that ‘parts company’ from the body at death and returns to God. It is then retained by God in His safe keeping (preserved). At the resurrection, a new body will be formed by God in which each spirit (the personal identity of a person) will reside and once again become ‘alive’. In the meanwhile, whilst retained by God, this ‘spirit’ is inanimate. It knows nothing and experiences nothing. It is just as though it is sleeping. We shall see why he believes this way now.

### **Old Testament texts that show the human spirit is not simply the life force**

Even from an Old Testament standpoint, it is very difficult to draw the conclusion that the human spirit is simply “the energizing spark of life essential to individual existence” or the “life principle” that animates humans and animals or that it is ‘the breath of the Almighty’.

Take the following Scriptures for an example.

“And it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled; and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all the wise men thereof: and Pharaoh told them his dream; but there was none that could interpret them unto Pharaoh.” Genesis 41:8

“But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him: for the LORD thy God hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate, that he might deliver him into thy hand, as appeareth this day.” Deuteronomy 2:30

“And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD.” 1 Samuel 1:15

“But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said unto him, Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread?” 1 Kings 21:5

“And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.” 2 Kings 2:9

“And the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, and the spirit of Tilgathpilneser king of Assyria, and he carried them away, even the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh, and brought them unto Halah, and Habor, and Hara, and to the river Gozan, unto this day.” 1 Chronicles 5:26

“Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying,” Ezra 1:1

“As for me, is my complaint to man? and if it were so, why should not my spirit be troubled?” Job 21:4

“But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.” Job 32:8

“Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.” Psalms 32:2

“The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.” Psalms 34:18

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.” Psalms 51:17

“I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search.” Psalms 77:6

“And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God.” Psalms 78:8

“Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud.” Proverbs 16:19

“He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.” Proverbs 25:28

“Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that



goeth downward to the earth?” Ecclesiastes 3:21

“The burden of the word of the LORD for Israel, saith the LORD, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him.” Zechariah 12:1

In each of these texts, the word ‘spirit’ is translated from the Hebrew word ‘ruach’. As I am sure you will agree, it is very difficult to accept, as it says in ‘Seventh-day Adventists Believe ...’ (see above), that “the Old Testament Hebrew word *ruach*, translated *spirit*, refers to the energizing spark of life essential to individual existence”. Remember, the word ‘ruach’ is translated in the KJV either ‘spirit’ or ‘Spirit’ over 230 times. It must also be said that in the book ‘Seventh-day Adventists believe...’, it does say on page 83 that ‘ruach’ also denotes vitality, courage, temper and various other emotions.

There is one other Old Testament Scripture to which I would draw your attention. This confirms that ‘ruach’ (spirit) cannot simply mean ‘breath’ or ‘spark’ of life. This is the text that refers to a person’s experience of conversion. It says

“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit [*ruach*] 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 [*ruach*] within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.” Ezekiel 36:26 -27

Notice two things happening here! One is that God **renews our spirit** and the other is that He puts **His Spirit** (the Holy Spirit) within us.

This passage of Scripture is describing what we usually term conversion, or as we sometimes say, ‘being born again’. It is a person becoming a ‘new creature’ – or to put it another way, God dwelling within us through His Holy Spirit (see 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:15, 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 1 Corinthians 6:19 etc). Note very importantly that ‘ruach’ is used to refer to both the human spirit and God’s Spirit (the Holy Spirit).

Strange to relate though, when applied to God’s Spirit (the Holy Spirit), Seventh-day Adventist theologians do not say that ‘ruach’ is just the “divine energy, or life principle” (spark of life) that animates God. They say that it is another person like God the Father and Christ. There is a serious inconsistency with this reasoning.

At conversion, God does not renew our ‘spark’ of life or ‘energising principle’. He renews the ‘inner man’ (our inner person). As the apostle Paul says

“But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.” Romans 7:6

As David also put it

“Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit [*ruach*] within me.”

## Psalms 51:10

So we can see that even in the Old Testament, the spirit of man is definitely not simply the spark (breath) of life or energising principle. It is something so much more.

In passing, there is one more thing which we should note.

This is that the 'Seventh-day Adventists Believe...' book concludes

"Ruach is used frequently of the Spirit of God, as in Isaiah 63:10. Never in the Old Testament, with respect to man, does *ruach* denote an intelligent entity capable of sentient existence apart from a physical body." (*Seventh-day-Adventists Believe* page 83)

The word "sentient" means having the faculty or faculties of sensation or perception, therefore what is being said is that the word 'ruach' (translated "Spirit" here) never "with respect to man" denotes an intelligent entity capable of perception or sensation apart from a physical body. With the latter I would totally agree but why do it when it refers to God's Spirit (the Holy Spirit)? Again there appears here to be a very serious inconsistency.

### God's Spirit – an integral part of God

It is freely admitted by Seventh-day Adventists (as in their 'Seventh-day Adventists Believe...') that the word 'ruach' is frequently used of the ***Spirit of God meaning the Holy Spirit*** yet nowhere in the Scriptures do I find that the Holy Spirit is ever separated from God. In other words, just as the spirit of man is always seen as belonging to and being an integral part of a man (when a person is alive), the Holy Spirit is always spoken of as ***belonging to and being an integral part of God***. This is one of the reasons why I did say that an understanding of the human spirit can help us in understanding God's Spirit (the Holy Spirit).

This 'belonging' can be seen in the multitude of times that the Scriptures say such as

"And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." Genesis 1:2

"And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding in his tents according to their tribes; and the spirit of God came upon him." Numbers 24:2

"And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel, and went out to war: and the LORD delivered Chushanrishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed against Chushanrishathaim." Judges 3:10

"But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; and Abiezer was gathered after him." Judges 6:34

“And the Spirit of the LORD will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man.” 1 Samuel 10:6

“And when they came thither to the hill, behold, a company of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them.” 1 Samuel 10:10

“And the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard those tidings, and his anger was kindled greatly.” 1 Samuel 11:6

From these texts and others like them, we can see that the Holy Spirit belongs to and is an integral part of God. This will become relevant later but for now we still need to ask – “What about the human spirit?”

### **The human spirit, separate but integral**

Whether it is in application to God’s Spirit (the Holy Spirit) or with reference to the human spirit, we have seen that the word ‘spirit’ must mean more than just an energising principle or spark or breath of life. This we can also see clearly by the way that Paul ended some of his letters. Note these for instance

“Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.” Galatians 6:18

“The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit. Grace be with you. Amen.” 2 Timothy 4:22

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.” Philemon 1:25

Today we would never think of bidding farewell to a friend in this manner but Paul in his time, along with the other Bible writers, specifically spoke this way. Paul was obviously not bidding farewell to someone’s energising principle or spark (breath) of life or emotions but something entirely different.

The Scriptures say that the human spirit is a separate but integral part of a person. For those who are not convinced, perhaps a look at 1 Corinthians 5:4-5 will help.

In the church at Corinth there were many problems of a moral nature. This is why Paul wrote to them such a ‘strong’ letter (1 Corinthians). In the following passage, he addresses the problem of a man who had committed fornication with his father’s wife (assumed to be his step mother). This is when he said

“In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” 1 Corinthians 5:4-5

Note very carefully just what it is that Paul says could be saved? He is saying that it is the **human spirit that could be saved**. Obvious to relate, Paul was not referring here to the breath of life or the spark of life or the energising principle etc but something else. Certainly it would not make sense to think that he was referring to the “breath of the Almighty”. This is very important.

Jesus also spoke of the human spirit as being a separate, yet integral part of the body. In the Garden of Gethsemane when the disciples fell asleep He said

“Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Matthew 26:41

Jesus spoke of the human spirit as being much more than just a power, a feeling or the spark (breath) of life. He said that the spirit was **willing** but the flesh was weak. A power, life force or spark of life cannot be willing. Willingness involves intellectual reasoning, ability and the freedom to choose. In the sermon on mount Jesus said

“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:3

Being ‘poor in spirit’ is the first requirement of those who are to enter into God’s kingdom. This word ‘poor’ (Gr. ptochos) actually means *abject* poverty. It depicts someone who is begging (or is a beggar). This gives the idea that the only ones who are fit for God’s kingdom are those who in place of their own sin filled life, feel the need of the righteousness of Christ. This ‘spirit’ is not referring to a power or ‘life force’. It is referring to a person. It is the **person** who feels abject poverty not the ‘spark of life’ or “breath of the Almighty”.

One of the main reasons why many regard the Holy Spirit as a person is that He communicates with us. In Romans 8:16 Paul says

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

It can clearly be seen here that the Holy Spirit communicates. From this there are those who assume the Holy Spirit to be a person in His own right, separate from the Father and Son yet with whom is the Holy Spirit communicating? It is with the human spirit. Do we now conclude that the spirit of a person is a separate person other than to whom the human spirit belongs? Of course we would not. We would never draw that conclusion. The only conclusion that can be drawn is that both spirits, the Holy and the human, communicate with each other. It cannot be said that it is only the Holy Spirit that is communicating and not the human spirit.

We can also conclude that just as the human spirit belongs, so too does the Holy Spirit belong. The former to humanity whilst the latter to God. As Ellen White said

“The Holy Spirit always leads to the written word. The Holy Spirit is a person; for He

bearth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God.” (Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases, Volume 7, MR No. 487, 1906*)

She also wrote

“The Holy Spirit has a personality, else He could not bear witness to our spirits and with our spirits that we are the children of God. He must also be a divine person, else He could not search out the secrets which lie hidden in the mind of God. "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.” (*Ibid*)

Here we are told that the Holy Spirit is a person, also that He witnesses to “our spirits”. Must we now conclude that our spirits exist separately from ourselves – just as many conclude that the Holy Spirit exists separately from God the Father (meaning that He is a divine being with individuality like God and Christ)?

We shall return our thoughts to this reasoning later. Notice that Ellen White also quotes Paul when He said that it is the Holy Spirit that ‘knows’ the things of God whilst the human spirit ‘knows’ the things of man. This can be found in 1 Corinthians 2:10-11 where Paul says

“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 2:10-11

Under the inspiration of God, Paul is saying here that it is only the Spirit of God that knows the things of God. Likewise he says that it is the spirit of man that knows the things of man. Here we see that the spirit is the ‘knowledgeable’ part of the person whether it is of God or the human. Certainly the human spirit is much more than what we refer to as the spark or breath of life.

### **The human spirit experiences**

Note now the following texts of Scripture that speak of the human spirit. Notice that they all speak of the spirit experiencing emotions. It is recorded in Luke 1:46-47 that when pregnant with the child Jesus, Mary met Elizabeth and said

“...My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour”.  
Luke 1:46-47

Paul said concerning Titus

“Therefore we were comforted in your comfort: yea, and exceedingly the more joyed we for the joy of Titus, because his spirit was refreshed by you all.” 2 Corinthians 7:13

The spirit of Jesus also experienced emotions when it is said in Luke 10:21

“In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.” Luke 10:21

In the Gospel of John it says

“When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled.” John 11:33

John also records

“When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.” John 13:21

The human spirit is also capable of **development**. Look at these next two passages of Scripture which speak of John the Baptist and Jesus respectively.

Luke 1:80 “And the child [John the Baptist] grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.”

Luke 2:40 “And the child [Jesus] grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.”

This study of the human spirit is enough to show us that it (or He) communicates, knows and experiences. These are all exactly the same attributes that lead us to conclude that the Holy Spirit is a separate person from and like the Father. Yet do we draw the conclusion that the human spirit is a separate person other than ourselves? Of course we do not.

So what do we conclude about the human spirit?

The only conclusion that can be drawn is that the human spirit is ‘a person’ but not in the usual sense as we normally perceive a ‘person’ to be. It is part of our being both separate and integral - yet it is nonetheless a person.

### **A person (spirit, soul and body)**

When we look at each other, what we see we usually describe as ‘a person’ but the Bible defines a ‘person’ as being made up of spirit, soul and body. As we noted previously, the apostle Paul said to the believers in Thessalonica

“And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Thessalonians 5:23



So what are the spirit, soul and the body? In the account of creation in Genesis chapter two, it says that God first formed Adam out of the dust of the ground. It says

“And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” Genesis 2:7

We have here two separate actions from God and one result. The first action of God was to form Adam from the dust of the ground. Adam was not just ‘spoken into being’ but was made up of the elements of earth. When God ‘made’ Adam, he was comprised of only the inanimate form of the ‘bits and pieces’ of humanity. This form was ‘lifeless’.

It was the second action of God that brought about ‘life’ (animation) to Adam. God breathed into this lifeless form the breath of life. According to Scripture, this action resulted in the inanimate form of Adam becoming “a living soul”.

In the act of creation, we have a lifeless bodily form becoming a living soul. We note also (see above) that each living person has their own personal spirit (who and what they are). Now note the following.

In Luke chapter eight we find the story of Jesus bringing back to life the 12-year-old daughter of Jairus. This young girl was truly dead yet when Jesus said that she was sleeping (meaning of course to us dead), He was laughed at by many of those present. The Scriptures say

“While he yet spake, there cometh one from the ruler of the synagogue's house, saying to him, Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the Master. But when Jesus heard it, he answered him, saying, Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole. And when he came into the house, he suffered no man to go in, save Peter, and James, and John, and the father and the mother of the maiden. And all wept, and bewailed her: but he said, Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn, knowing that she was dead.” Luke 8:49-53

Here we have a reversal of Adam’s creation. Instead of an inanimate body becoming animated, we have an animated body becoming inanimate. The account continues

“And he put them all out, and took her by the hand, and called, saying, Maid, arise. And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway: and he commanded to give her meat” Luke 8:54-55

The Scriptures clearly tell us “her spirit came again”. So where had this girl’s spirit been in her death? As concerning this question, note again what Solomon says in the book of Ecclesiastes. He was directly referring to a person growing old and eventually dying. He says regarding what happens at death

“Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” Ecclesiastes 12:7.

Here is a direct answer to our question as to what happens to the human spirit at death. The Scriptures reveal that whilst the body returns to dust, the spirit returns to God. In other words, there is a parting of the ways. This separation is only temporary (until the resurrection) but it is a separation.

Many people have tried to explain Ecclesiastes 12:7 as meaning that at death, the spirit which they often refer to as being the 'life force', or the 'spark of life', or the 'breath of life', or the 'energising principle' 'or the 'prerogative to give life' is returned to God, but as we have just seen, this would do great violence to the scriptural view of the human spirit. The human spirit is certainly something different (more) than just the spark of life.

So what then is the answer?

### **The body and the spirit**

As we have just noted, Solomon spoke of death as the separation of the body and spirit. Let's just look at this in reality and experience.

When Jesus was about to die on the cross, He said in a loud voice that everyone could hear

“... Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit ...” Luke 23:46

At that point He died. Luke continues

“... and having said thus, he gave up the ghost”

This Scripture is specific but what was it that Jesus was putting into God's care and keeping (entrusting to God)? It was His “spirit”, but it was definitely not a separate person other than Himself, neither was it just His life force or spark of life. The Greek word here used that is translated ‘commend’ (Gr. paratithemi) means ‘to place alongside’ or to ‘place near’. It has the implication of putting something into ‘care and safekeeping’, meaning to deposit as a trust for protection (preservation). It also gives the idea of ‘resting’.

The Spirit of Prophecy Volume 3 page 203 has this to say about Jesus resting in the tomb

“Jesus said to Mary, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father." When he closed his eyes in death upon the cross, the soul of Christ did not go at once to Heaven, as many believe, or how could his words be true--"I am not yet ascended to my Father"? (Ellen G. White 3<sup>rd</sup> Volume Spirit of Prophecy Page 203 'The Women at the Tomb')

Ellen White then adds

“The spirit of Jesus slept in the tomb with his body, and did not wing its way to Heaven, there to maintain a separate existence, and to look down upon the mourning

disciples embalming the body from which it had taken flight.

It is quite obvious that Ellen White believed that Jesus had a spirit. It is also obvious that she is not referring to this spirit as the breath or spark of life. It is something entirely different. She is referring to the spirit as being what much of the Christian world generally describes as the 'soul' of a person. Read it again and you will see what I mean. Notice she said that the “[spirit of Jesus slept in the tomb with his body](#)”. She is obviously speaking of these (spirit and body) as being two separate things. She then says

“All that comprised the life and intelligence of Jesus remained with his body in the sepulcher; and when he came forth it was as a whole being; he did not have to summon his spirit from Heaven. He had power to lay down his life and to take it up again.”

Again we can see that Ellen White's understanding of “[spirit](#)” is not that it is simply the breath or spark of life. Jesus was dead. Her words convey the thought that it was included in “[All that comprised the life and intelligence of Jesus](#)”. This she said “remained **with** his body”.

In this paragraph, God is telling us a number of different things about His Son. These are such as

- During His life here on earth He was **not** in Heaven with His Father. He had not yet ascended.
- During His death in the tomb, He was **not** in Heaven with His Father. He had not yet ascended.
- His spirit **slept** in the tomb with His body.
- His spirit did not have a **separate** existence from His body.
- He was **not aware** of anything that was being done by the living, just as we in death are **not aware** of what the living are doing. He was sleeping.
- **All** that comprised of His **life and intelligence** was still with His body in the tomb.
- **He** had the power to lay down His life and to take it again.

It must be recognised that unlike sinful human beings, the body of Jesus did not at death begin to corrupt. This is the difference between the death of Jesus and the death of sinful humanity.

In the synagogue at Antioch, the apostle Paul had this to say about Christ

“And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption” But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.” Acts 13:30-37.

When Jesus came from the grave, he came forth with a glorified body but still bearing the marks of the crucifixion. When Thomas refused to believe without seeing, it was these marks that Jesus told him to handle (see John 20:24-27).

In His death, Jesus had been as unconscious as is every human being that dies. In this condition, He could not call or raise Himself back to life. He had left everything that comprised of His life into the hands of His Father. This was shown in His dying words

“... Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit ...” Luke 23:46

As the Scriptures also tell us

“Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;)” Galatians 1:1

### **The human spirit – our personal identity**

We have seen that ‘the spirit’, whether it belongs to God or humanity, is far more than just the spark of life or energising principle. So what is it?

We shall see now that the spirit is actually the **personal identity** of the person to whom it belongs. In other words, it is who and what a person is (the mental disposition of the person), meaning the character.

Look at the experience of Stephen as he was about to be stoned to death.  
The Scriptures tell us

“And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Acts 7:59

As did Jesus, Stephen was calling on God to receive his spirit. He was placing it into God’s care and safekeeping.

Ellen White says of this spirit that returns to God

“Our personal identity is preserved in the resurrection, though not the same particles of matter or material substance as went into the grave. The wondrous works of God are a mystery to man. The spirit, the character of man, is returned to God, there to be preserved. In the resurrection every man will have his own character.” (*Ellen G. White*,

She then adds

“God in His own time will call forth the dead, giving again the breath of life, and bidding the dry bones live. The same form will come forth, but it will be free from disease and every defect. It lives again bearing the same individuality of features, so that friend will recognise friend. There is no law of God in nature which shows that God gives back the same identical particles of matter which composed the body before death. God shall give the righteous dead a body that will please Him.” (*Ibid*)

Here we are told that the spirit of a human being (that which is returned to God at death) is the **character** of a person. It is his or her personal identity. Ellen White does not say that it is simply the spark or the breath of life. Note she wrote this in 1900, which was 2 years after the publication of ‘The Desire of Ages’. Notice too that she says “The spirit [the character of a person] “is returned to God, there to be preserved”.

Whilst Ellen White does not mention any particular Bible reference here, it can only be reasoned that she is referring to Ecclesiastes 12:7. This is the text of Scripture that says

“Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it”. Ecclesiastes 12:7

In commenting on the words “the spirit” as in this verse, the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, in keeping with the ‘Seventh-day Adventists Believe...’ (see above) says

“That which here returns to God is simply the life principle imparted by God to both man and beast (see on Eccl. 3:19-21, where *ruach* is translated “breath”).” (*Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary Volume 3 page 1104*)

This appears to be contrary to what we have been told through the spirit of prophecy which is that the spirit that returns to God at death to be preserved is the character of a person (see above). So what is my character?

My character is who I am. It is my person ... the real me (the inner me), being displayed through a visible and tangible (physical) body. Yes my spirit is a person but it is not a person separate from me. My spirit is who I am. It is my character, my personal identity. It is me - personally present within a physical body. Now we can see more clearly what the apostle Paul meant when he said

“In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus”. 1 Corinthians 5:5

Paul was intent on saving the spirit of this individual (the ‘person’ that the physical body

contained). This is because he knew that the Scriptures say that at death the physical body returns to dust and will be no more. This is not so with the human spirit. The human spirit (who and what we are – our characters) survives the human body (whether of the righteous or unrighteous) and does not corrupt as the body. It exists as long as God permits it to exist.

In keeping with his Scripture Ellen White wrote

“A character formed according to the divine likeness is the only treasure that we can take from this world to the next.” (*Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, page 332, ‘Talents’*)

She had also said previously

“Profession is as nothing in the scale. It is character that decides destiny.” (*Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, page 74, ‘Tares’*)

She later added the thought

“Therefore Christ lifts the veil from the future and bids all to behold that it is character, not position, which decides man's destiny.” (*Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, page 122, ‘The Net’*)

### **Serving God with our spirits**

You and I serve God with our spirits. The Holy Scriptures say

“For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers” Romans 1:9

Paul also spoke of serving God in the newness of spirit. He said

“But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.” Romans 7:6

Serving in the newness of the spirit is something that happens because of conversion or as the Bible says “being born again”. At conversion, what happens to a person? Jesus said

“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” John 3:3

Jesus says that it is impossible for someone who is not born again to see the kingdom of God.

The apostle Paul had this to say about the same experience to the believers at Corinth



“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” 2 Corinthians 5:17

He also said to the Galatians

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.” Galatians 6:15

Whilst at my conversion I did become a ‘new person’, this was not in the sense that we normally use the word person.

I was ‘born again’ and I did become a ‘new person’ but I was still Terry Hill. In that sense I was still the same person as I had been previously. I was not an entirely new and different individual! Yet something had changed. My character (spirit) had undergone change. Where does this change take place? The Scriptures say

“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” Romans 12:2

“If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” Ephesians 4:21-24

At conversion, a persons thinking pattern is changed. This thinking takes place in the mind, therefore the character (spirit) of the person changes. This is why the spirit can be regarded as the mental disposition of a person. It is his or her character.

As the wise man Solomon said

“For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: ...” Proverbs 23:7

In the finality, it is the character (spirit, person, mind, who and what we are) that is saved and not the ‘old’ worn out corrupt physical body.

In the resurrection we shall not have our old bodies. As was said by Ellen White above, there is no reason to suggest that our new bodies will comprise of any of the particles of which the first body was made. When our unconscious spirits (who and what we are) become fused (integrated) within these new bodies, they will become ‘alive’ once more. At the moment, as was the spirit of Jesus in the grave, they are ‘sleeping’.

The resurrection is not a literal resurrection of our old bodies from the grave. It is God making new bodies fit for the eternal dwelling place of our spirits (our personal identities) that are preserved by Him in death.

If you are still not sure about these conclusions, then take a look at what James had to say about the spirit and the body

“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” James 2:26

The fact is that without a body in which to reside, the human spirit cannot function. This is why at death, when the spirit and the body are separated, they both become inanimate (dead). To put it another way, at death, both the spirit and the body become non-functioning.

The human body is only the medium through which the human spirit functions. The spirit is also that which animates the body. Without the two together, neither functions. Both are inanimate.

As we have discovered from the Scriptures, the human spirit is the ‘knowing’, ‘experiencing’ part of the person. It is also the ‘communicating’ part. This is why when the body and the spirit are separated as in death, the person no longer ‘knows’, ‘communicates’ or ‘experiences’. It is truly a state of unconsciousness.

### **In death the human spirit is preserved but not the body**

In death, a person does not know or experience anything, neither do they communicate, not even with God. The Scriptures say concerning death.

“For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun.” Ecclesiastes 9:4-6

In death, a ‘person’ cannot communicate with the living neither can he or she know or experience anything. The dead cannot even communicate with God. This is because that part of a person (i.e. the spirit) which when functioning within a body knows, communicates and experiences, is now inanimate (sleeping) in God’s safe keeping. As the Psalmist wrote

“Return, O LORD, deliver my soul: oh save me for thy mercies’ sake. For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?” Psalms 6:4-5

“The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence.” Psalms 115:17

In death the human spirit is ‘sleeping’ (inanimate). It is ‘awaiting’ the time when God will create for it a new body. This is the time when our Creator will put our spirits (personal identities, our characters, who and what we are) within those new bodies so that we can

live eternally with Him and with each other. This is the resurrection. When this happens, the entire person will function as he or she did before death. Thus the person is brought 'back to life' (animated).

The human spirit is 'the personal life' of the person. It is not just the life force (spark or breath of life). It is the character. It is the person himself or herself, an individual's personal identity. Without the spirit, the body is dead and without the body, the spirit cannot function.

So, would I describe the human spirit as a person? The answer to that question is yes and no, depending on what is meant by the word 'person'. It is the 'personage' revealed through the body, but it is not a person in the sense that it is a person as we normally describe and see each other (a personal individual human being). So too it is with God's Spirit (the Holy Spirit). It is not an individual divine being like the Father and the Son but both of them omnipresent.

### **The Holy Spirit - the presence of God**

Whist we cannot repeat all of what has been said in the [previous section](#), it is important here to remind ourselves as to what was said concerning the Holy Spirit being the presence of God.

Jesus said

“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. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.” John 14:16-18

He later 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.” (See John 14:23)

Jesus said that when the “Comforter” (the Holy Spirit) is come it will be as Himself and the Father dwelling within a person yet we know that bodily they are both in Heaven. It is both God and Christ omnipresent, therefore the Holy Spirit is seen in the Scriptures as doing something that the human spirit cannot do. This is that it can operate independently from the Father, meaning operate as a separate person from Him, yet remaining an integral part of Him.

I would ask you to compare these two Scriptures. I would also ask you to note the Hebrew parallelism.

“Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth.”  
Psalms 31:5

“Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?” Psalms 139:7

In the first Scripture pertaining to man (more or less the same words as both Jesus and Stephen spoke at their deaths – see Luke 23:46 and Acts 7:59), the words “my spirit” are paralleled to “me”. In the second Scripture pertaining to God, the words “thy spirit” is paralleled to “thy presence”. In both instances, the word “spirit” refers to the person.

As we have already noted, the human spirit cannot function apart from the human body but God’s Spirit (the Holy Spirit) can function independently. Both though are the person present. As we have been told through the spirit of prophecy

“The Holy Spirit is a free, working, independent agency.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald. 5<sup>th</sup> May 1896 ‘Operation of the Holy Spirit made manifest in the life’*)

Ellen White then added

“The God of heaven uses his Spirit as it pleases him, and human minds and human judgment and human methods can no more set boundaries to its working, or prescribe as to the channel through which it shall operate, than they can say to the wind, “I bid you to blow in a certain direction, and to conduct yourself in such and such a manner.” (*Ibid*)

We noted in the previous section that Ellen White did not mean that the Holy Spirit chooses Himself what to do but rather is used by God “as it pleases him”. This independency therefore is from God the Father’s bodily presence but not from His ‘ownership’ (belonging to God). As Ellen White said, God “uses his Spirit”. This is the difference between the Holy Spirit and the human spirit. The Holy Spirit can function as a separate person from God but the human spirit cannot function independently from the human body. When separated from the human body at death, the human spirit is inanimate and unconscious.

The realisation concerning this independency of the Holy Spirit can be seen when Ellen White said

“There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers--the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit -- those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will co-operate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B No. 7 page 63*)

As we have already established (see section one), because God has not revealed the nature of the Holy Spirit, it cannot be understood by humanity, therefore it cannot be said that He is a person like God and Christ (or like you and me). From the Scriptures and the writings of Ellen White, what we know for sure is that He is both God and Christ omnipresent.

**A great difficulty**

If the Holy Spirit is considered to be another person like God and Christ, it makes it extremely difficult (almost impossible) for those who believe it to explain how the Father and Christ are omnipresent. It would mean that the presence of the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit Himself present (another person like the Father and the Son) which means that the Holy Spirit is not the Father and the Son present. As a result, the Holy Spirit is only seen as the **representative** of God the Father and Christ without being the actual presence of them both. There is no compatibility between these two views.

It is very clear that by taking an overall look at what God has revealed through His written word, the Holy Spirit is not a person with individuality like God the Father and Christ. As far as His divine nature is concerned, this is where we should let it remain – a mystery. As Ellen White said to a brother named Chapman (this was with reference to what the Holy Spirit is)

"This [the Holy Spirit] refers to the omnipresence of the Spirit of Christ, called the Comforter. Again Jesus says, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth" [John 16:12, 13]." (*Ellen G. White, Letter 7 1891, to Brother Chapman June 11<sup>th</sup> 1891*)

She then added

"There are many mysteries which I do not seek to understand or to explain; they are too high for me, and too high for you. On some of these points, silence is golden. Piety, devotion, sanctification of soul, body, and spirit -- this is essential for us all. "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent" [John 17:3]". (*Ibid*)

In repeating the words of Jesus, Ellen White does not say that it is essential to 'know' the Holy Spirit but it is essential to know "the only true God, and Jesus Christ". Again we can see from this that whilst it is said that the Holy Spirit is a person, He cannot be said to be a person with individuality like God and Christ (or like you and me). Whilst we may like to further conjecture, this is as far as we can go from what God has revealed. The Holy Spirit is God and Christ omnipresent whilst they are both bodily in heaven. It is my belief that this study on the human spirit helps explain these things. My prayer is that to you the reader, this has been an interesting and beneficial study.