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*Please note: - Unless otherwise stated, all emphasis included in this article has been supplied by the author.

The challenge

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31st December 2013

Dear Max

Greetings in the name of God our Father and Jesus Christ. I hope this finds you in good health.

Over the years, you and I have exchanged a number of emails, all of which have concerned the topics of the trinity doctrine and the writings of Ellen White. This communication is no different. On this occasion I am writing in response to your challenge to the non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists. This is the challenge found on your website here <http://thetrinitydoctrine.com/home>

I am also writing in connection with your views concerning Ellen White's writings. This is mainly as they are found in your website article 'Ellen G. White and the Trinity Doctrine' - which according to you tells the truth about her. As you believe it does tell the truth about her, I know you will be very happy with me quoting from it. This will have at least two definite advantages. First it will ensure I do not misrepresent your beliefs whilst secondly it will help others to understand the reasoning behind your challenge. It appears to me that if your views regarding Ellen White are not understood, then it is quite possible that your challenge will not be understood. With this I am sure you will agree. I have also quoted from other of your articles – all of which I found freely accessible through the internet (either on your website or elsewhere).

When reading through your challenge (also your various articles), I soon came to realise that quite a number of very important issues were involved, all of which, it seemed to me, needed to be addressed. This is why I have set out my response in the format you have received it. I hope you will find it helpful. In keeping with your request I shall be putting it on my website.

I have divided my response into three basic sections. The first section (the one you are reading now) deals with the article containing your challenge. The second deals with the trinity doctrine itself whilst the third accents primarily on my approach to the writings of Ellen White. It is in this third section that in the main I have included your views of these writings. All of this has resulted in my response becoming very large but necessary I believe to adequately cover all the salient points. For ease of reading I have also divided sections 2 and 3 into sub-sections.

Whilst I have taken great care to correctly present your views, it should go without saying that like anyone else I can make a mistake therefore if you feel I have in some way misrepresented what you believe, please let me know. I hope I have not done so.

Before continuing any further, I would like to make this one very important observation – at least I believe it to be important.

Regarding the two issues of Ellen White and the trinity doctrine – which in our present denominational Godhead controversy appear to be inextricably linked - you and I, because of our past communications with each other, are well aware of our differences in beliefs. This is why I believe it safe to say that when you read my response, you will not be surprised to find that your views and mine are still quite different. This does not mean though that this reply to your challenge will prove to be unprofitable. It may be that through the public airing of these differences, God is seeking to bring to the attention of His people the problems involved in both of these issues. These are problems which I freely admit do exist. It is therefore in the Spirit of our Saviour that in response to your challenge I submit the following for your consideration. May God bless you as you read through it.

First I would like to comment regarding some of the things you say in your article challenging the non-trinitarians. You say to us

“My challenge is for you to answer this question: Why is it that you refuse to follow the direction of Ellen G. White who insists that her writings must not be used to formulate doctrine? (Max Hatton, Website article, ‘A Challenge to Anti-Trinitarians in the Seventh-day Adventist Church’)

To be honest with you Max, I have studied Ellen White’s writings for over 40 years but I have never yet encountered such a statement. What I am aware of that she did counsel us not to use her writings as a final proof of doctrine. This I can well understand. All of our denominational beliefs, Godhead or otherwise, should be able to be proven from using Scripture alone. If this cannot be done then we should not be holding them. Again I am sure you will agree.

As I read through your challenge, it became all too obvious that using or not using Ellen White's writings to *settle* doctrinal debates is not really the issue you have in mind. This is because later in your article you say to us (this would apply of course to the Seventh-day Adventist trinitarians as well as to the non-trinitarians)

“Why do you not honour Ellen White and confine your arguments to a study of the Bible alone?” To be a genuine Seventh-day Adventist you must do this.” (Ibid)

You appear to be suggesting that in our discussions concerning the Godhead (or any other doctrine) we should not even give consideration to what has been written by Ellen White. If this is what you are saying, then it is evident that when you say she “insists that her writings must not be used to formulate doctrine” (see above) what you actually mean is that she has told us that when considering what the Scriptures teach, we must not allow her writings to influence our reasoning. This is tantamount to saying she wants us to ignore what she has written. This would only be the same as suggesting (because I am sure you would not be asking us to do something you believe God does not want us to do) that God wants us to ignore what she has written.

This reasoning I find very strange. This is because as far as I am concerned, it is only the same as saying God wants us to ignore the light that He has shed on the Scriptures through Ellen White. If this is what you are saying, then apart from anything else, you and our church leadership seem to be in conflict with each other.

It was only last year (2012) that Merlin Burt, Associate Professor of Church History at Andrews University, also Director of the White Estate Branch Office at Andrews University, wrote in the 'Ministry' magazine

“We can be grateful that God has led throughout the history of the church to build an understanding of the Bible through the influence of the Holy Spirit in the gift of prophecy.” (Merlin Burt, Ministry, April 2012, ‘Ellen White and the Personhood of the Holy Spirit’)

This was only the same as said earlier this year in a Review article ('Why a Modern Prophet') written by Alberto Timm, Associate Director of the Ellen White Estate. He shared the following thoughts with his readers (this was under the sub-heading 'Need for a Modern Prophet')

“If modern Christianity were a homogeneous religious body, solidly grounded on the authority of God’s Word, there would be no need for a manifestation of the prophetic gift in these last days. But in a world in which Christianity is more divided about the understanding of the Bible than ever before, such a gift is needed to scrub clean the misinterpretations of Scripture caused by the vast amount of antibiblical assumptions derived from human

traditions, human reason, personal experience, and modern culture. So instead of replacing the Bible, the modern gift of prophecy helps readers to allow the Bible to interpret itself without being distorted by human biases.” (*Alberto R. Timm, Associate Director of the Ellen White Estate, Adventist Review, ‘Why a Modern Prophet’, posted April 19th 2013*)

The same author concluded (this time under the sub-heading 'Function of a Modern Prophet')

“Even those who spend time with the Bible are tempted to distort its true meaning. As already mentioned, God gave us in Ellen White a modern prophet to help free us from the human traditions that tend to distort our understanding of God’s Word. Her writings are “a divine prophetic filter that helps us to remove all the human rubble that tradition has artificially imposed on the Bible, so that the divine message of the Scriptures can flow pure and clean into our hearts.” (*Ibid*)

Timm is saying that the Bible and the spirit of prophecy are to be used in conjunction with each other. This appears to be the exact opposite of what you are saying. Along with Merlin Burt (see above), he is making the point that one of the reasons why God gave this gift to our church was to help us in our understanding of Scripture – which is also my understanding of one of the operations of the Holy Spirit through this gift. More about this later.

It needs to be borne in mind that as a denomination, we believe that God called Ellen White to the prophetic office; thus we believe He spoke to her through revelation, dreams and visions. This is exactly the same as He did with the Bible writers. This is how the Scriptures came to be written. God led these authors to write as they did. They were all inspired by His Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21, 2 Timothy 3:16). Very often we refer to these people as prophets. They are as the voice of God to His people (God's spokespersons); the conveyors of God's thoughts to humanity.

God gives spiritual gifts to His church (Ephesians 4:8-15). One of these gifts is the gift of prophecy (Ephesians 4:11). The Scriptures tell us that it was Christ’s Spirit that was in the prophets of old (1 Peter 1:10-12). The angel talking to John said that the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy (Revelation 19:10). This is the gift that God gave to our church. We regard it as one of the identifying marks of God’s remnant people of Bible prophecy (Revelation 12:17). God also tells us that “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (see Proverbs 29:18). Our Creator obviously rates this gift very highly. We, His remnant people, should do the same.

This gift was explained very well by our longest serving General Conference President – namely A. G. Daniells. He held this office from 1901-1922. In his book 'The Abiding Gift of Prophecy' he wrote

“The gift of prophecy is one of God's choicest gifts to the human family. Indeed, it ranks next to the supreme gift of His only-begotten Son and of His Holy Spirit to a world estranged and separated by sin.

But the giving of His Son made necessary the bestowal of another gift - the gift of prophecy. This was imperative. It was required as a medium of communication through which the Lord might tell a lost, perishing world why He gave His only Son. Through this channel - the prophetic gift - God has held communion with man since the fall. By this method of communication He has ever given messages of information, guidance, warning, and entreaty to the entire human family.” (*A. G. Daniells. The Abiding Gift of Prophecy, Chapter 1, page 15, ‘The Prophetic Gift Bestowed’, 1936*)

He later went on to say

“The gift of prophecy” is one of the special gifts of God extended through the Holy Spirit to the human family. 1 Cor. 12:4-11. This gift is also called “the testimony of Jesus” (Rev. 12:17), which is defined by the same inspired writer to be “the spirit of prophecy.” Rev. 19:10.

The term, the prophetic gift, which we shall constantly employ, is thus clearly identical in meaning with the several Biblical expressions here cited.

God's purpose in providing and bestowing the prophetic gift is clearly to re-establish and maintain communication with man, who has been estranged and separated from Him through sin. This gift operates through prophets, by means of visions, dreams, inspiration, and revelation. The product, prophecy, is a divine message from God to the human family. The great Book called "the word of God" (Heb. 4:12) and the "Holy Scriptures" (Rom. 1:2) came to mankind through the gracious operation of the prophetic gift (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21).

The prophetic *gift* is not the message itself, nor is it the gospel; neither is it the Bible. Rather, it is the method, the process, the means, by which the divine message comes from God to man. It is an essential and inseparable part of the great plan of redemption. The gift, therefore, dates back to the day when the Lord resumed communication with Adam after his banishment from Eden. This gift has never been withdrawn; it still remains God's abiding gift to the human family. Through this channel He has been revealing Himself and giving His messages to the world, ever since our first parents left their Eden home. There have been periods, some short and some long, when the gift has not been manifested in "open vision" (1 Sam. 3:1), but the gift has never been permanently withdrawn. At such times as God has deemed best, the manifestation of the gift has reappeared, and through the medium of visions and dreams prophets have brought divine messages to the Lord's needy people." (*Ibid, Chapter 2, pages 22, 23, Prophetic Terms Defined*)

From this can be sensed the importance that as a church we once placed upon the prophetic gift. This is in keeping with Scripture (see 1 Corinthians 14:1, 5, 39). As Daniells said, it is "the method, the process, the means" chosen by God to communicate with His people (Numbers 12:6, Nehemiah 9:30, Amos 3:7, Hosea 12:10, Ephesians 3:5). Through this gift, God has made known the entire plan of salvation (Luke 1:68-70, Acts 3:21, Romans 1:1-2, Hebrews 1:1). In this way He has revealed Himself to humanity through humanity.

It must follow therefore that the office work of those who receive this gift is very important. This is why I would have thought that the acceptance of Ellen White as having received it would be enough to warrant the belief that her writings are very important. Surely because God gave to her this gift, her writings should be regarded as having a value above and beyond the writings of someone who has not been given it? If this is not so, then what value is the gift - and what purpose would it serve?

It is clear from Scripture that the recipients of this gift do not elect to receive it. God decides to whom He will give it (1 Corinthians 12:4-11, Ephesians 4:11 see also Jeremiah 1:5, Amos 7:14-15).

Although Ellen White was given the gift of prophecy, her writings are still subject to the Scriptures. As the apostle Paul wrote, "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets" (1 Corinthians 14:32). In this sense, Ellen White's writings should not be considered equal to the Scriptures. On the other hand, God counsels us in His Word not to despise prophesyings but "prove all things" and "hold fast that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:20-21). As John wrote, we are to "try" (test) the spirits to see if they are of God (1 John 4:1). This is the same counsel that centuries earlier we had received through the prophet Isaiah (see Isaiah 8:20). It should go without saying that if we fail to test someone who claims to have a message from God, we would not know whether it was from Him or not.

We can be sure that where God has His genuine, Satan will have his counterfeit. This is why anyone professing to have a message from God must be tested to see if they are of God. This is the duty of each one of us. Ellen White fully agreed. She made it clear that

"The Word of God is the great detector of error; to it we believe everything must be brought. The Bible must be our standard for every doctrine and preaching. We must study it reverentially. We are to receive no one's opinion without comparing it with the Scriptures. Here is divine authority which is supreme in matters of faith." (*Ellen G. White 1888 Materials, pages, 44-45, August 5th 1888 to those who shall assemble in General Conference*)

She then made it so clear that no mistake could be made

"It is the Word of the living God that is to decide all controversies" (*Ibid*)

Note well this final sentence. Nothing is excepted – not even the spirit of prophecy writings.

The same counsel is found in the book 'Christ's Object lessons'. Concerning our Saviour it says

"He taught that the word of God was to be understood by all. He pointed to the Scriptures as of unquestionable authority, and we should do the same. The Bible is to be presented as the word of the infinite God, as the end of all controversy and the foundation of all faith." (*Ellen G. White, Christ's Object Lessons, page 39, 'The Sower went forth to sow'*)

The following is also written in 'The Great Controversy'

"But God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority--not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain "Thus saith the Lord" in its support.

Satan is constantly endeavoring to attract attention to man in the place of God. He leads the people to look to bishops, to pastors, to professors of theology, as their guides, instead of searching the Scriptures to learn their duty for themselves. Then, by controlling the minds of these leaders, he can influence the multitudes according to his will." (*Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, page 595, 'The Scriptures a safeguard'*)

So taking into considering all of the above, how should we regard Ellen White's writings?

Consider for a moment the respect we have for the Scriptures. We regard them as sacred and authoritative. This is because we believe that those who wrote them were called by God to the prophetic office (those receiving revelation, dreams and visions from God). How therefore should we regard the gift of prophecy as manifested in the life and writings of Ellen White?

When it is reasoned through, our options concerning Ellen White are quite limited. We can either give consideration to the things she has written or we can ignore them. If you are saying we should ignore them - which it certainly does look as though you are saying (at least when considering what the Scriptures teach) - then I am sure Ellen White would disagree with you. God has not given us light through her just so that we can ignore it. To appreciate this light, her writings need to be studied. If God had wanted us to be ignorant of this light, then there was no point in Him giving it in the first place. Needless to say it has never been God's design that His people should ignore the messengers or the messages He sends.

These messengers would include those prophets mentioned in Scripture whose books did not become part of the canon of Scripture. These were such as Jasher (Joshua 10:13, 2 Samuel 1:18), Ahijah (1 Kings 11:29, 2 Chronicles 9:29), Jehu (2 Chronicles 20:34, Shemaiah (2 Chronicles 12:5,15), Nathan (2 Samuel 7:2, 1 Chronicles 29:29, 2 Chronicles 9:29) and Gad (1 Samuel 22:5, 1

Chronicles 29:29) etc. Even though their books were not included in the Bible, there is no reason to believe that these men were not inspired as were the Bible writers. This was commented on by Ellen White in the introduction to 'The Great Controversy'.

“In harmony with the word of God, His [God's] Spirit was to continue its work throughout the period of the gospel dispensation. During the ages while the Scriptures of both the Old and the New Testament were being given, the Holy Spirit did not cease to communicate light to individual minds, apart from the revelations to be embodied in the Sacred Canon. The Bible itself relates how, through the Holy Spirit, men received warning, reproof, counsel, and instruction, in matters in no way relating to the giving of the Scriptures. And mention is made of prophets in different ages, of whose utterances nothing is recorded. In like manner, after the close of the canon of the Scripture, the Holy Spirit was still to continue its work, to enlighten, warn, and comfort the children of God.” (*Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, page viii, 'Introduction', 1911 edition*)

Ellen White occupies the same place as the non-canonical prophets (messengers). Her writings are not a part of Scripture, nor an addition to it, neither are they equal in all respects with Scripture. Most certainly we are not to use them as the final authority for what we believe and teach (the Bible alone has this distinction) but by those who believe she was given the gift of prophecy, surely they must be regarded as a part of God's on-going communing with His people. As is said above, even after the closing of the canon of Scripture, the Holy Spirit was to continue to “enlighten, warn, and comfort” God's children.

Before we move on there is one more thing to remember. This is that as a church, we do not believe that Ellen White's writings exhausts the meaning of any particular Scripture. In other words, there can be another application of Scripture other than what is spoken of by her. On the other hand, to interpret certain Scripture in such a way as to totally contradict what she has said God has shown her would be a denial that God had actually shown it to her. This is because God would never have 'shown' (revealed) anything to her that is not true. Thus it would be concluded that God is not the source of this 'revealing'.

It is important to point out too that Seventh-day Adventists do not believe in verbal inspiration. This means they do not believe that the words used by Ellen White were inspired. The same applies to the words used by the Bible writers. It is the writers themselves who were inspired, not the words they used. The writers chose the words to explain what God had revealed to them. This has been explained through the spirit of prophecy this way

“The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God's mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not His pen. Look at the different writers.

It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the Word of God.” (*Ellen G. White, Manuscript 24, 1886*)

This same reasoning led God's messenger to write

“The Lord speaks to human beings in imperfect speech, in order that the degenerate senses, the dull, earthly perception, of earthly beings may comprehend His words.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 121, 1901*)

This is why inspired writings can be said to be, like the man Christ Jesus, a blend of the divine and the human. This was also explained very well in the introduction to 'The Great Controversy' (these paragraphs are not contiguous)

“The Ten Commandments were spoken by God Himself, and were written by His own hand. They are of divine, and not of human composition. But the Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." John 1:14.”(Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy, 'Introduction', Pages 00v*)

“God has been pleased to communicate His truth to the world by human agencies, and He Himself, by His Holy Spirit, qualified men and enabled them to do this work. He guided the mind in the selection of what to speak and what to write. The treasure was entrusted to earthen vessels, yet it is, nonetheless, from Heaven. The testimony is conveyed through the imperfect expression of human language, yet it is the testimony of God; and the obedient, believing child of God beholds in it the glory of a divine power, full of grace and truth.” (*Ibid page vi*)

There are no degrees of inspiration. A person cannot be 'partially inspired'. This is why there is no reason to believe that non-canonical prophets are not as equally inspired as the Bible writers. To those who accept them as coming from God, the words of non-canonical prophets are as authoritative (when they were spoken) as those who wrote the Scriptures. This is also why Ellen White could say

“The Holy Ghost is the author of the Scriptures and of the Spirit of Prophecy.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 92, July 2nd 1900, to J. H. Kellogg*)

Max - please don't misunderstand me. I can well understand your concern. All of our doctrines should be able to be proven (settled) from Scripture alone. With this I agree with you 100%. What does bother me is your idea that when considering what the Scriptures teach (doctrine), Ellen White's writings should be ignored. I cannot see any valid reason for occupying such a position. In fact if it is believed that she was given the gift of prophecy, your counsel does not seem very reasonable. Why should anyone want to ignore the light that has come from God through His chosen channel of communication? What purpose would it serve? Certainly I cannot bring myself to believe that Ellen White wanted us to ignore it. In fact in one letter, in the early 1900's when her ministry was drawing to a close (she was then almost 80 years of age), she did write to one lady

“The Bible must be your counselor. Study it, and the Testimonies God has given; for they never contradict His word.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 106, to Sister Rasmussen, March 19th 1907*)

I am sure that most would agree that this does not sound as though Ellen White is saying we are to ignore the light that has come from God through her. To me it is saying exactly the opposite.

I may be very simplistic in my thinking but the way I look at it is this: as long as our fundamental doctrines can be proven from using Scripture alone, then why should giving consideration to her writings be a problem? Surely a problem only arises when non-canonical writings, regardless of who wrote them, are accepted as the final proof for these beliefs. Wouldn't you agree?

It appears to me Max – and probably to many others – it is somewhat extreme to say that those who give consideration to Ellen White's writings (when studying the Scriptures and considering doctrine) are not genuine Seventh-day Adventists. Again I can only say it must be remembered that God did call this lady to the prophetic office.

The non-trinitarians with whom I am acquainted, very much appreciate the fact that God gave to her the gift of prophecy. They greatly value the light that He has chosen to shed on the Scriptures through this gift. Is not this the way it should be?

It should go without saying that any revelation that has come from God through Ellen White – or for that matter through anyone else - will always be in keeping with Scripture. Certainly it will never be contrary to Scripture. Again I am sure you will agree. The Bible therefore is the test as to whether this 'revealing' came from God or from some other source. As we noted previously, if her work does not stand the Bible test then it must be rejected as spurious (Isaiah 8:20).

Speaking personally, I can only say that Ellen White's writings have greatly enhanced my understanding of the Scriptures. This was especially so during the early years of my Christian experience (I began reading the spirit of prophecy at the age of 30 in 1973). Her writings also encouraged me to seek a deeper understanding of God's Word. Certainly they have led me to have a greater appreciation of the work of God in the salvation of mankind. I have therefore been very thankful to God for this gift. It has been a wonderful blessing to me. I wish that many others could experience this same blessing.

I am sure that many, if they are asked, would freely admit that from reading Ellen White's writings they have gained many precious insights into God's Word. This I would say was one of the purposes of the spirit of prophecy. I would also say that through reading her books etc., many have been drawn to the Scriptures.

From reading the articles on your website, it can only be concluded that you condemn the non-trinitarians for the way they are using those things she has written but here I would remind you of something very important that in your condemnation of us you appear to have overlooked. At least I cannot find it mentioned in your challenge.

This is that over the years through our denominational publications, the trinitarians, often those of our church leadership, have repeatedly made the claim that the reason why the Seventh-day Adventist Church eventually became a trinitarian denomination (this was after being a non-trinitarian denomination for over 100 years) was because of what has been written by Ellen White. In fact this claim was made only 4 years ago in our Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly.

In the first quarter's lesson study of 2009 (the main contributor was Gerhard Pfandl, then Associate Director of the Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Research Institute) it said

“All through biblical history, God has used the prophetic gift to protect His people from theological errors. It was no different with the ministry of Ellen White.”(Sabbath School Lesson Study, 1st Quarter, 2009, Lesson 12, page 89. ‘The Prophetic Gift’, Main Contributor, Gerhard Pfandl, Associate Director of the SDA Biblical Research Institute)

From what we have read above, it is apparent that our church leadership have quite definite ideas concerning the work of Ellen White. Certainly they do not seem to have any problem with it. This is not even where doctrine and theology is concerned. These remarks in this lesson study are in keeping with those in the Adventist Review article by Alberto Timm (see above).

The author of the lesson then added

“During the Kellogg crisis at the turn of the century, Ellen G. White’s advice saved the church from pantheism. At the same time, almost by herself, she led the church from a semi-Arian (a belief that Jesus was not God) to a Trinitarian belief.” (Ibid)

Whilst I agree that the counsel that came through Ellen White during the “Kellogg crisis” did guide the church to safety (interestingly, Kellogg said he had come to believe in the trinity doctrine which

was not then accepted by our church as one of our principle beliefs), I cannot agree with the remainder of this statement. This is because if this phrase “semi-Arian” is referring to our past Sonship belief - which is the belief that in eternity Christ was begotten of (came forth from) the very being of God - then it is actually saying that during the time period we held this belief, which we did for the entire time of Ellen White's ministry, also for decades after her death, we were not teaching that Christ is God. This is about as misleading as it gets. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has always taught that Christ is divine. It is the trinity doctrine we once rejected – not the divinity of Christ. This is where many who participated in this 2009 lesson study were led to believe error.

Just because the trinity doctrine is rejected does not mean that those doing the rejecting are denying the divinity of Christ. This is a gross misconception. Whilst we will not go into this further here, we will do so in the next section. This is when we consider the trinity doctrine itself. My comments concerning this can be found under the sub-heading 'The trinity doctrine – not needed to establish the divinity of Christ'.

Over and over again the claim has been made, by the trinitarians, that Ellen White, in her writings, particularly the writings of her later years, speaks of God as a trinity of persons (as in the trinity doctrine). As proof of these assertions, these same trinitarians quote certain of her statements. These are statements that will fit quite legitimately into a trinitarian concept of God. Unfortunately, statements she made that would only fit a non-trinitarian view are often ignored. I am sure Max that you are very well aware of this particular usage of her writings – also of these claims. In fact in your article 'Ellen G. White and the Trinity Doctrine' you make the very same claim. You say that whilst in her early years as God's messenger she did present views in her writings that can only be described as non-trinitarian, in her later years she spoke of God as a trinity of divine beings (as in the trinity doctrine) – which would mean of course, if the latter were true, that over the years her writings reflect a complete reversal of views. To put it more succinctly, it would mean she changed her mind about what she said God had shown her.

This is obviously why you say

“The Church needs to acknowledge quite clearly that Ellen White was not a Trinitarian in her early years so consequently her comments on who and what God is in those years should not be used to decide questions related to the Trinity doctrine.” (*Max Hatton, 'The Early Ellen G. White and the trinity doctrine', April 2013*)

In early Seventh-day Adventism, it was no secret that Ellen White was not a trinitarian. Her writings testified so vividly to this fact. In fact in an article published in the Review and Herald of June 13th 1871 (this was 27 years after God had called her to the prophetic office), her husband James White (then General Conference President) made this rather interesting comment

“We invite all to compare the testimonies of the Holy Spirit through Mrs. W., with the word of God. And in this we do not invite you to compare them with your creed. That is quite another thing. The trinitarian may compare them with his creed, and because they do not agree with it, condemn them. The observer of Sunday, or the man who holds eternal torment an important truth, and the minister that sprinkles infants, may each condemn the testimonies' of Mrs. W. because they do not agree with their peculiar views. And a hundred more, each holding different views, may come to the same conclusion. But their genuineness can never be tested in this way.” (*James White, Review and Herald, June 13th 1871, 'Mutual Obligation'*)

This is very true. In Ellen White's writings there can only be found “testimonies of the Holy Spirit” which would disagree with such teachings as infant baptism, eternal torment of the unrighteous, Sunday keeping and the trinity doctrine. This was after she had been receiving visions etc. from God for something like 27 years (1844-1871).

The majority of Seventh-day Adventists would readily agree that three of these beliefs are only

traditions of the church (not Scriptural) but what about the trinity doctrine? Would they say that this teaching is only traditional and not Scriptural? We shall see later, in the next section, that no such teaching can be found in Scripture.

The claim that Ellen White changed her mind about what she said God had shown her and eventually became a trinitarian is not accepted by the non-trinitarians. We regard this as a serious misrepresentation of her writings. This has led to us openly refuting these claims – which could only be done of course by using what she has written. In fact in a very real sense, the trinitarians have compelled us to use her writings the way we do. This is the only way we can refute their trinity claims. We needed to correctly present what she has written. This is one of the reasons why we find it necessary to quote her as we do. I would say it is almost certain that if the trinitarians had not made this claim, then we, the non-trinitarians, would not be using her writings as we do today.

This claim that Ellen White was a trinitarian (or eventually became a trinitarian after being a non-trinitarian for many years) appears now to be an integral part of our present denominational Godhead dispute. In fact I would say that more than anything else, this entire debate has actually become a battle over what Ellen White said - or should I say, what she is supposed to have said.

Ellen White knew there would be those who would be using what she was 'supposed to have said' to bring false teachings into Seventh-day Adventism. This is why she wanted her writings to be brought before our people. It was so that we could see for ourselves what she had written. Certainly she did not want us to ignore it. This is the last thing she wanted us to do.

In one letter she wrote (this was in 1903, almost 60 years after her initial call to the prophetic office)

“Soon every possible effort will be made to discount and pervert the truth of the testimonies of God’s Spirit. We must have in readiness the clear, straight messages that since 1846 have been coming to God’s people. There will be those once united with us in the faith who will search for new, strange doctrines, for something odd and sensational to present to the people. They will bring in all conceivable fallacies, and will present them as coming from Mrs. White, that they may beguile souls. The light that the Lord has given should be in the hands of our people, so that they may see that the reports made are false, that there is in the testimonies nothing of what these men declare to be in them.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 73, 1903, see Selected Messages book 1 page 41*)

This is an appeal to understand the messages that have come from God through the spirit of prophecy. Ellen White obviously wanted us to know and understand what God had revealed through this divinely appointed avenue of communication. Certainly she was not saying we should ignore what she has written. Why would she do such a thing?

In a very real sense, this was also a prophecy – a prophecy that myself and many others believe has been fulfilled. Ellen White was explaining how, in the future, her writings would be misused to bring “fallacies” into the church. These fallacies she said would “beguile souls”. This is quite a startling thought – that Ellen White’s writings would be used to deceive people.

Notice in particular we are told that the reason why “The light that the Lord has given should be in the hands of our people” was to thwart the efforts of those who were inclined to use false reports of her words to bring in these false teachings (fallacies). These were obviously teachings that we did not hold in 1903 - which would of course include the trinity doctrine. As we have noted, it is claimed that this teaching was brought into Seventh-day Adventism because of what was written by Ellen White – although this was only claimed after she was dead. This is why it is important to know for ourselves what she has written. We need to be able to check out the validity of such claims. It should go without saying that if we do not have a substantial knowledge of these writings then we would not know if they are being misused (or that we are being misled by a misuse of them). Many like myself have concluded that the trinity doctrine is one of these “fallacies” (false beliefs).

Three years later in 1906, Ellen White wrote a letter to Butler, Daniells and Irwin explaining the reason why God had instructed her to write out the things she had been shown. She explained

“I am instructed that the Lord, by His infinite power, has preserved the right hand of His messenger for more than half a century, in order that the truth may be written out as He bids me write it for publication, in periodicals and books, Why?—Because if it were not thus written out, when the pioneers in the faith shall die, there would be many, new in the faith, who would sometimes accept as messages of truth teachings that contain erroneous sentiments and dangerous fallacies.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 136, April 27th 1906 to G. I. Butler, A. G. Daniells, and G. A. Irwin 1906, 8MR page 35*)

Ellen White was now almost 80 years of age. She was saying that God wanted her to write out what He had bidden her to write so that those “new in the faith” would be protected from accepting false teachings (fallacies) that some would attempt to bring into the church. This I believe is one of the purposes of God giving someone the gift of prophecy. Again it can only be said she was not saying that what she has written should be ignored. She was in fact saying exactly the opposite.

There can be no doubt that Ellen White wanted her writings to be brought before our people. It was to show what she really did say – as opposed to what she was supposed to have said. She was pleading with us to have a knowledge of the testimonies that came from God through the spirit of prophecy. This is in keeping with the purpose of the gifts. As the apostle Paul wrote, the gifts were given so

“That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;” Ephesians 4:14

During the time period of her ministry (1844-1915), Ellen White was quite able to defend her writings for herself but today her voice is silent – except of course as it is heard speaking through her written words. This is why those of us who realise her writings are being misrepresented, feel the need to do everything we can to remedy this situation. Our only other option was to do nothing about it - which as far as I am concerned is not really an option.

Speaking from a personal perspective, I can only say that prior to becoming involved in our present Godhead controversy (I became involved in the year 2000), even though for over 25 years I had believed that God had given to Ellen White the gift of prophecy, I cannot remember in any discussions concerning doctrine that I had used her writings in such a way as I am doing today. This is whether it concerned the Godhead or anything else. Like many others though, I feel duty-bound to protect the integrity of her writings. This is why I shall continue to speak out against the idea that she intended her words to be used in support of the trinity doctrine. This is also why many of us (the non-trinitarians) are using Ellen White's writings in the way that we do. It is to show how we believe the trinitarians are misrepresenting her words. It is not to formulate doctrine.

I can only assume Max, seeing that you believe the non-trinitarians are wrong in the way they are using Ellen White's writings, that you also condemn your fellow trinitarians for the way they are using them. After all, they are the ones who are claiming it was because of certain things written by her that we became a trinitarian denomination. Wouldn't you say that this is using her writings to formulate doctrine? Remember too, you say that those who give consideration to her writings, when studying Scripture, are not genuine Seventh-day Adventists. You would also need to apply this to the trinitarians, many of whom are of our leadership.

After 13 years of being involved in this Godhead dispute, I have drawn the conclusion that much of this controversy revolves around the writings of Ellen White. This I believe, regardless of the rights and wrongs of it, is the reality of the situation. Your challenge helps confirm this to be true.

It appears to me that our church, in its justification for the stand it is taking today in favour of our version of the trinity doctrine, relies very heavily upon these writings. Very often when I have posed a question to the ministry concerning our Godhead beliefs, the very first response I have received is "Ellen White said". Does this not show a decided dependence upon her writings?

It must also be noted that in the articles in our denominational publications promoting the trinity doctrine, Ellen White's writings usually figure prominently. In fact they are often quoted as 'proof' of this teaching. This gives the impression that the real issue is not whether we should give consideration to the things she has written but rather how to use and interpret them. The authority of her writings does not seem to come into question – at least not as far as our church leadership is concerned. This can be seen in the quotations taken from the 2009 Sabbath School Lesson Study and the Adventist Review article by Alberto Timm (see above) etc.

It also appears to me that this 'usage' of Ellen White's writings, by our leadership, is intended to make up for the lack of support from the scriptures for the trinity doctrine. I am not alone in drawing this conclusion. There are many others who believe the same.

You go on to say in your challenge

"Why do you deny her counsel on such matters as the Trinity doctrine?" (Max Hatton, Website article, 'A Challenge to Anti-Trinitarians in the Seventh-day Adventist Church')

Again I am not aware that the non-trinitarians, at least not the ones that I know personally, are doing as you allege (denying Ellen White's counsel). This is whether it is with respect to the trinity doctrine or anything else. I can only repeat what I have said previously. This is that we greatly value the fact that God gave to this lady the gift of prophecy. This is why we give her writings the respect and consideration they deserve. We regard the light that God has revealed through her to be very important. Is this something with which you would agree or would you reason differently?

Ellen White believed it to be very important.

Just 5 years prior to her death when referring to what she had written in her diaries (journals), she wrote to her son W. C. White saying (this was obviously said in the realisation that in a few days time she would be 83 years of age and that her life could very soon come to an end)

"I want that which is deemed worthy to appear, for the Lord has given me much light that I want the people to have; for there is instruction that the Lord has given me for his people. It is light that they should have, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little. This is now to come before the people, because it has been given to correct specious errors and to specify what is truth. The Lord has revealed many things pointing out the truth, thus saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it." (Ellen G. White, Letter 127, to W. C. White, November 22nd 1910)

Does this sound as though Ellen White wants us to ignore in any way what she has written?

William Clarence White (Willie White) was Ellen White's third son. Following the death of James White (his father) in 1881, he played a major part in helping his mother with her work. He was appointed by his mother as one of the trustees who following her death was to manage her writings. The above letter again reflects Ellen White's desire, not only for the preservation of her writings but also that we, God's remnant people, should be made aware of them.

From what she wrote, we can see she gave a number of very good reasons why she believed her writings were to be given to us. She said it was so that we should have what she described as the "much light" that came from God through her. She said it is to "specify what is truth" and to "correct

specious errors". In every age this has been the work of the Holy Spirit. Why should this be any different through Ellen White? It is obvious she is not saying that what she has written should be ignored. We noted above she said that a knowledge of her writings was necessary to refute what she was 'supposed' to have said.

Ellen White had no doubts concerning the way God had used her. In another letter (commending an elder by the name of Simpson for his teaching) she wrote

"In his teaching, Elder Simpson showed that the Spirit of prophecy has an important part to act in the establishment of the truth." (*Ellen G. White, Letter to Bro Olsen, December 26th 1906*)

These two letters are dated 1906 and 1910. This was the latter part of Ellen White's ministry. By then she had been called to the prophetic office (receiving revelation, visions and dreams from God) for over 60 years.

Earlier that year she had written to a Bro. Burden saying

"Brother Burden, carry your work intelligently, even consulting the word of God; for this word is very precious to the worker in the cause. Study the messages that God has sent to His people for the last sixty years through the Spirit of Prophecy. Do not seek the counsel of men, but by earnest prayer seek the wisdom of God. A mistake has been made in the past by leaning upon the guidance of men. Seek to correct this mistake." (*Ellen G. White, Letter to Bro. J. A. Burden, November 2nd 1906*)

Burden was advised to study both the Bible and the messages that God had been sending to His people "for the **last sixty years through the Spirit of Prophecy**". The latter is as opposed to seeking "the counsel of men". This was in 1906. Ellen White was referring back to when she was first called to the prophetic office (December 1844). It is quite apparent she is not saying ignore her words.

In the 4th Volume of the Testimonies we are counselled (concerning our response when people 'attack' those who believe that light has come from God through Ellen White)

"When brethren manifest the spirit of the dragon, to make war upon those who believe that God has communicated light and comfort to them through the Testimonies, it is time for the brethren and sisters to assert their liberty and perfect freedom of conscience. God has given them light, and it is their privilege to cherish the light and to speak of it to strengthen and encourage one another. Brother J would confuse the mind by seeking to make it appear that the light God has given through the Testimonies is an addition to the word of God, but in this he presents the matter in a false light. God has seen fit in this manner to bring the minds of His people to His word, to give them a clearer understanding of it." (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies Volume 4, page 245, 'Opposition to faithful warnings'*)

The light that has come from God through the spirit of prophecy is not to be invalidated by the reasoning of finite men. This is much the same as she said to Brother Burden (see above). It is given said Ellen White, to give a "clearer understanding" of God's Word. We must ask ourselves, can we afford to be ignorant of this light?

It also says here that in order to "strengthen and encourage one another", it is the privilege of God's people to "cherish" and "speak" to each other of this light. We are also told that when people 'attack' those who believe that God has given this light, it is time for the latter to "assert their liberty and perfect freedom of conscience". In other words, those who believe that through the spirit of prophecy God has enlightened His people are not to feel repressed because of the attacks of those who do not believe it. God has obviously given us what we needed and we are not to feel guilty or embarrassed because of it. It is our privilege to believe.

Max – you say to us non-trinitarians regarding the trinity doctrine

“The Bible unquestionably supports this doctrine but you confuse the issue, and uninformed Church members, by bringing in bits and pieces from all over the place from the writings of Ellen G. White. You do this in an endeavour to try and deny the Trinity doctrine. You greatly dishonour her in doing this.” (Max Hatton, Website article, ‘A Challenge to Anti-Trinitarians in the Seventh-day Adventist Church’)

It should not be necessary to say Max that we, the non-trinitarians, do not accept that the Scriptures support the idea that God is a trinity - at least not as depicted by the trinity doctrine. This is why we are not trinitarian. We do not believe either – as has been duly noted above - that the revelation that has come from God through Ellen White supports this three-in-one teaching. We believe it serves only to recommend our non-trinitarian beliefs. You obviously disagree.

We also believe, as was confirmed by James White (see above), that a reasonable portion of that which was written by Ellen White could only fit into a non-trinitarian concept of the Godhead – or to put it another way – some things she claimed God had shown her could not possibly fit a trinitarian view. It appears from your article ‘Ellen G. White and the Trinity Doctrine’ that you believe the same – albeit it seems that you do not regard this as revelation from God but her own imaginings. We also believe that when her ‘trinitarian looking’ statements (used by the trinitarians in an attempt to prove she spoke of God as a trinity as in the trinity doctrine) are understood in their context, they do fit into a non-trinitarian view. In other words, we believe that everything written by her, when correctly understood, will fit into a non-trinitarian view.

It must also be said that we do not, as you assert, use “bits and pieces” of Ellen White’s writings.

In our endeavour to appreciate all of the enlightenment (light) that has come from God through her, we take into consideration everything she has written – which I can only assume is something you would say is inadvisable to do. This is because according to you, some of the things she wrote, even regarding God and Christ, are not true. You even go as far as saying that some of the things she claimed to have seen in vision (again regarding God and Christ) should be denounced as unscriptural. We have great difficulty with this type of suggestion. This is even though we do not regard her as infallible.

In our study of Ellen White’s writings we use the ‘weight of evidence’ method. This is the same method we use when studying the Scriptures. This is why we take into consideration, not just ‘certain statements’ from what she has written but all of it. Certainly we should not base our conclusions on one turn of phrase she used.

Nowhere does Ellen White give a systematic exposition of what God had shown her. This is no more than a systematic exposition of any topic can be found in Scripture. This is why these writings must be studied not in part but as a whole. As the Scriptures say

“Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little.”
Isaiah 28:9-10

This is the way we are to study Scripture and to formulate doctrine. It is by adding knowledge to knowledge - “here a little, and there a little”. This is also the way we are to study the spirit of prophecy. We are to take an overall view of it. This is because as did the revelation that came from God through the Bible writers, the light that came from God through Ellen White was given at different times, for particular purposes, to suit specific situations.

In the light of your views concerning Ellen White, it seems only reasonable to conclude that in

support of your belief that God is a trinity of persons, as purported by the trinity doctrine, you would not quote her where you say that what she has written is not in keeping with Scripture. On the other hand, in support of your beliefs (your trinitarian beliefs), you do quote her where you believe her words are in keeping with Scripture, which means of course you 'pick and choose' between which of her writings you will use and which you will not use. In other words Max, you are the one using "bits and pieces" of Ellen White's writings – not the non-trinitarians.

The evidence for this can be seen in your book 'The Trinity Doctrine for Seventh-day Adventists' (available online and on CD only). In this book you use a selection of Ellen White's writings – at least those 'bits and pieces' which you regard as supporting your own particular theology. Obviously you do not use her writings that you regard oppose the belief that God is a trinity. It is evident therefore that you are 'picking and choosing' between which of her writings you will use and which you will not use.

Strangely though, in another article on your website – again criticising the non-trinitarians - you say that to suit our beliefs, we (the non-trinitarians) are the ones who are omitting parts of Ellen White's writings. You say of us

"Their publications are deficient in that they rely very heavily on a twisted view of Ellen White's writings. They are able to leave out evidence that does not suit them, apparently without shame" (Max Hatton Website article, 'Dodgers of the Trinity Doctrine in History')

As I said Max, this is something we certainly are not doing. We take into consideration everything she has written. We take an overall view of her work.

So who is dishonouring Ellen White?

Those who read this response to your challenge, as well as those who read your articles, will need to answer that particular question for themselves. I for one cannot see that it is the non-trinitarians who are doing so.

As we noted previously, you say to the non-trinitarians (this is under the heading 'I repeat my challenge')

"My challenge is for Seventh-day Adventist anti-Trinitarians to provide a clear reply to the question – "Why do you not honour Ellen White and confine your arguments to a study of the Bible alone?" To be a genuine Seventh-day Adventist you must do this." (Max Hatton, Website article, 'A Challenge to Anti-Trinitarians in the Seventh-day Adventist Church')

I can only assume Max that when you say "arguments", you do not mean only the conclusions themselves but also the reasoning behind our beliefs. For this you say we should use "the Bible alone".

You appear to be saying that when it comes to our beliefs, we should not in any way engage (use or employ) or be influenced by, the writings of Ellen White. This would mean of course, if we did do this (give consideration to Ellen White's writings when studying Scripture), you would say we are not genuine Seventh-day Adventists.

As I said above, this to me seems very strange reasoning – particularly as God gave to Ellen White the gift of prophecy. What reason could we give to God for ignoring the enlightenment that has come from Him through His appointed messenger? Surely her writings should be able to make a valid contribution to what we, as God's remnant people, believe and teach. After all, they are a gift to us from God. In your reasoning, you appear to have gone to unjustifiable extremes.

As the Scriptures tell us, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are given

“For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;” Ephesians 4:12-14

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to aid to our Christian experience. Admittedly they are given to an individual (or individuals) but God's intention is that they are to serve the community of God's people – meaning the entire body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27-28). These gifts should be highly valued. They are meant to unite, guide, help and protect us. They are intended to prevent us being led astray by Satan's deceptions. Certainly God has not given the gifts so that we can ignore them. This would not make any sense.

What though about your own writings? If as you say we are to study the “Bible alone” (and lay aside Ellen White's writings), shouldn't you be telling us to ignore (lay aside) what you have written? Instead though, you are continually urging us to read your books and articles. Why should we give heed to what you have written and lay aside what Ellen White has written? What exactly is your objective?

Another point is this; why be prejudiced against Ellen White? Why single out her writings for exclusion? If when giving consideration to doctrine we are to ignore her writings (someone who was called to the prophetic office) then surely everyone else's writings should be ignored. Wouldn't you agree?

As has been said previously, as long as Ellen White's writings are not used in the place of Scripture – meaning that as long as we can produce the evidence for what we believe from Scripture without support from what she has written - then why would it be wrong to give them consideration?

It must be remembered too that what you have written in your books and articles etc. is not Scripture alone but also *your personal interpretation of Scripture*. This means you are asking us to lay aside the writings of someone who has been given the gift of prophecy and accept your interpretation of Scripture – which as you agree is sometimes very different than that which Ellen White said that God had shown her. This is particularly so concerning God and Christ.

I did notice that in your book ‘Understanding the Trinity’, you do quote, in support of your beliefs, many non-Seventh-day Adventist scholars and authors, yet you say to us non-trinitarians that for our beliefs we should not give consideration to that which has been written by Ellen White. This is even though God gave to her the gift of prophecy. As I also pointed out, in your CD book (‘The Trinity Doctrine for Seventh-day Adventists’) you use an abundance of quotations from Ellen White's writings so why condemn the non-trinitarians for doing the same? You also quote from many other writers – Seventh-day Adventist and otherwise.

For your justification for quoting Ellen White, you may say that your CD book was intended for Seventh-day Adventists alone (hence its title), a people who know about her. This though is only the same as we non-trinitarians are saying about our books and articles which include quotations from her work. They are also intended only for those such as Seventh-day Adventists – meaning those who understand that she was given the gift of prophecy. Obviously we would not use her writings when putting forward our views to those who have no knowledge of her calling. In this case we would use the Bible only.

Changing the subject - I notice too (see above) you say that the Bible “unquestionably supports” the trinity doctrine – not that the trinity doctrine can actually be found in the Bible. This appears to

be in keeping with what you have said to me in the past. This is that whilst this teaching itself cannot be found stated in Scripture, the information is there for it to be formulated.

We, the non-trinitarians, deny this claim. We believe that the trinitarians, in their reasoning from Scripture, are 'going much too far'. We maintain that unless a teaching can be proven from using Scripture alone, which I would say many theologians (even trinitarian theologians) will freely admit cannot be done with the trinity doctrine, it should not be held as a fundamental belief. Just because 'Scripture only' is used in formulating a belief does not automatically make it correct. The Scriptures can be – and very often are – misapplied.

Before proceeding any further, it must clearly be understood that this communication is not intended to be an organised study of what the Bible says concerning the three persons of the Godhead, neither is it intended to be a systematic study of what has been written on this subject by Ellen White. It is simply my response to your challenge concerning the non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists.

If you would like to read my views on the Godhead, you can do so on my website. Here you will find many articles dealing with this topic. One such article (showing in detail what I believe the Scriptures and the spirit of prophecy writings reveal concerning the three persons of the Godhead) can be found at the following link. Please feel free to comment.

[A study of the Godhead – as it pertains to Seventh-day Adventism](#)

I will now address your belief that the trinity doctrine is a Biblical teaching. I will then continue my reply to your challenge "[Why do you not honour Ellen White and confine your arguments to a study of the Bible alone?](#)" (see above). This I will do by sharing with you my approach to her writings. In this latter section I will also include your views concerning certain of the things she has written. These are all tied in with the trinity doctrine.

My apologies for my response being quite lengthy but as you will see, I believe there is much to be taken into consideration.

The trinity doctrine

The missing essentials

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Max - you maintain that when formulating doctrine, only the Bible should be used but I cannot understand why you reason this way. This is because even apart from what I have said above, in the past when I have asked you to show me where in the Bible the trinity doctrine can be found – which you insist is a Scriptural teaching - you have openly admitted it cannot be found there.

What you do claim, in keeping with other trinitarians, is that ‘the ingredients’ are there for such a doctrine to be formulated. In 2010 you wrote to me saying

“I accept that it [the trinity doctrine] is the clear teaching of Scripture. It may not be set down in the form of a formul [sic] but all the ingredients are there for it nevertheless. Sorry that you are unable to understand what Scripture teaches.” (*Max Hatton, email to Terry Hill, 19th July 2010*)

Although you maintain that to formulate a trinity doctrine “**all** the ingredients” can be found in Scripture, you have never shown me where can be found the ones that are absolutely essential to this teaching. What I mean is, you have never shown where in the Scriptures it says that the three persons of the Godhead (of divinity) subsist inseparably together in one single being of existence (in one single substance) making the ‘one God’ (one divine being) – which is the very basis and the essentials of our trinity doctrine. Without these ‘essentials’ there wouldn’t be such a teaching.

If you are unable to produce this evidence (these ‘essentials’) from the Scriptures, then I cannot see any point in you claiming that for your belief in the trinity doctrine, you use the ‘Bible only’. Surely you would need to admit that you are assuming things not revealed in Scripture. In other words, to formulate your belief, you are using Scripture plus speculation (assumption).

A few years ago you expressed your trinity belief by saying

“I believe that there are Three Persons (for want of a better word) in the One Divine Being” (*Email, Max Hatton to Terry Hill and undisclosed recipients, 16th June 2010*)

This is only the same as you say here

“The following is perhaps the simplest definition of the Trinity I have seen:

Within the one Being that is God, there exists eternally three coequal and co-eternal persons, namely, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” (*Max Hatton, The Trinity Doctrine for Seventh-day Adventists, Chapter one, page 5, 'The Biblical basis for our belief in the Trinity doctrine'*)

It is this “One Divine Being” belief which is the problem. Where in the Bible can it be found? As you know it cannot be found, so why say it is Biblical?

One thing we know for sure is that there is no value in you or anyone else saying it is just common sense to believe these things. This is because we need for our beliefs a “thus saith the Lord”. This is why I am asking for your proof from Scripture that this “One Divine Being” belief is true. If you cannot produce this proof, then you must admit that you are making an assumption.

You quote Ellen White where she says

“Let all prove their positions from the Scriptures and substantiate every point they claim as truth from the revealed Word of God.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 12, 1890*)

Who would argue with his statement? This is why I am asking you to show me where in the Bible these 'trinity essentials' can be found. I quite accept that we can justifiably say there are three persons of the Godhead (three persons of divinity all of whom can be quite rightly termed God) but as you know, this is not the trinity doctrine.

I would have thought that most trinitarian theologians will admit that the trinity doctrine itself cannot be found in Scripture. A number of examples of this can be found in chapter 2 of the previously mentioned study on my website.

These theologians do say it is a teaching *based* upon what the Scriptures reveal but this does not make it a Biblical teaching. The same claim is made of many teachings found today in Christianity that we, as Seventh-day Adventists, say are not Biblical. We should not be overly impressed simply because someone says that for their beliefs they use the Bible only. This would be a very naïve thing to do. People hold many wrong beliefs, even though in formulating them they use 'the Bible only'. We must not give the impression that if we use Scripture alone, our beliefs must be correct. This could not be further from the truth.

Some say that the trinity doctrine is a teaching that can only be accepted 'by faith'. This is because they know it is a teaching not formally expressed in Scripture but only assumed.

To formulate a trinity doctrine does involve speculation – meaning assuming things (those 'trinity essentials') not found in Scripture. This is why it is not a belief that can be said to be 'Scripture only' (Sola Scriptura).

Seventh-day Adventists admit

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In July 1981, a special issue of the Adventist Review was published. It was special because its sole purpose was to explain the reasoning behind what were then our 27 (now 28) fundamental beliefs. This was the year following the General Conference session held at Dallas Texas (1980). This is where the trinity doctrine, as expressed today in our fundamental beliefs, was first voted in as part of these beliefs. Prior to this, our fundamental beliefs did not include a separate trinity doctrine from what was believed concerning the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

In the section dealing with our Fundamental Belief No. 2 (The Trinity), the following statement was made

“While no single scriptural passage states formally the doctrine of the Trinity, it is assumed as a fact by Bible writers and mentioned several times.” (Adventist Review, Special issue, Volume 158, No. 31, 30th July 1981, ‘The Trinity’)

Whilst it is true to say that the trinity doctrine itself is not explicitly stated in Scripture, it should not be said that the Bible writers assumed it “*as a fact*”. This is because we have no evidence to support such a conclusion (how would we know such a thing?). Certainly the Bible writers did not mention it “*several times*”. How could they have mentioned it several times if it cannot even be found expressed in the Bible? Obviously they did not.

The reality is that the trinity doctrine was not officially formulated until the 4th century. This was almost three centuries after the last of the books to be included in the Bible had been written. Even then not everyone accepted it. Amongst Christians it met with a great deal of opposition.

Admittedly the Bible writers speak of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as deity but this is far from being a trinity doctrine. Some of the early church fathers (in their writings) tended to allegorise concerning the nature and personality of God but these ideas were never officially accepted by the church.

The article later said

“Only by faith can we accept the existence of the Trinity.” (*Ibid*)

This is obviously said in the realisation that the trinity doctrine itself cannot be found in Scripture.

In 1985 (this was now 5 years after the trinity doctrine was first voted into our fundamental beliefs) the following was written in one of our denominational publications

"The role of the trinity in a doctrine of God always raises questions. One reason is that the word itself does not appear in the Bible, nor is there any clear statement of the idea. But the Bible does set the stage for its formulation, and the concept represents a development of biblical claims and concepts." (*Richard Rice, The Reign of God, An Introduction to Christian Theology from a Seventh-day Adventist Perspective*, page 89, 'A constructive proposal', 1985)

The fact that the word 'trinity' cannot be found in the Bible should not be considered a problem. To describe certain teachings we often use words and phrases not found in Scripture. The problem is that the concept of God being three-in-one (three persons in one divine being as in the trinity doctrine) is absent. As Richard Rice said, a "clear statement of the idea" cannot be found in the Bible.

Rice is an ordained minister in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He is described as Professor of Religion and Director of the MA Program in Religion and Sciences at Loma Linda University.

Rice also said that the Bible "set the stage" for the "formulation" of the trinity doctrine – also that this was "a **development** of biblical claims and concepts". This is the admittance that the formulation of the trinity doctrine was still future to the final Scripture being written – meaning it is not a teaching found in Scripture.

The same author continues

"So even though the doctrine of the trinity is not part of what the Bible itself says about God, it is part of what the church must say to safeguard the biblical view of God." (*Ibid*)

Here again is the admittance that the trinity doctrine itself cannot be found in Scripture – also that the church has adopted this teaching ("what the church **must say**").

Rice is correct – at least as far as saying that the trinity doctrine is "not part of what the Bible itself says about God" so why say it's "the biblical view of God" - and why say it was necessary for the church to adopt such a teaching? In other words, why do we feel the necessity to add to the Scriptures – and why do we believe there is a need to hold fundamental beliefs that cannot be proven from using Scripture alone? Is not the Word of God sufficient in itself without inventing doctrines not found within its pages?

As we have been told through both the Bible and the spirit of prophecy

"Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar." Proverbs 30:5-6

"The Lord has pronounced a curse upon those who take from or add to the Scriptures." (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, February 19, 1894, 'Romanism the Religion of Human Nature'*)

In keeping with what we have seen was said by Richard Rice (see above), J. A. McMillan, then a member of the British Union Executive Committee, (later to become South England Conference President) had previously written in 1949

“The doctrine of the Trinity was formulated to define in express terms this revelation of three Persons who act together for the redemption of men. The Bible nowhere presents any formal expression of the Trinity.” (*J. A. McMillan, September 22nd 1949, Present Truth, ‘Three in One’*)

Whilst the latter is very true (that the trinity doctrine is not formally expressed in the Bible) the reason given here for its existence is very much an over-simplification. For a more detailed understanding of why the trinity doctrine was initially formulated see section 8 here

A Detailed History of the Trinity Doctrine

In summary we can see that if we did as you say Max – meaning use “the Bible alone” (see above) – there wouldn’t be such a teaching as the trinity doctrine. This is because as already pointed out, not only is this doctrine not found in the Bible, the ‘essential ingredients’ for such a teaching are noticeably absent. This is why the early Seventh-day Adventists refused to have anything to do with it. They knew it attempted to explain something concerning which, God has been totally silent (the nature of the Godhead – divine nature - God's being etc.).

In the early 1900's (this was around 60 years after our beginnings as God's remnant people of Bible prophecy), Ellet Waggoner, one of the main speakers at the now famous 1888 General Conference Session held at Minneapolis, was editor of the British 'Present Truth'. In the 'Editor's Private Corner' he answered questions sent in by its readers. In 1902 when replying to one question (which concerned the trinity doctrine) he made the following comment (we shall see later that Waggoner made it very clear that Seventh-day Adventists then taught that Christ is God)

“You ask what we teach about the Trinity. Inasmuch as we find no such expression in the Scriptures, we do not teach anything about it. But as to the Being of God, - the Godhead, - Divinity as revealed in the Father, the Word (the Son), and the Holy Spirit, we believe and teach just what the Bible says, and nothing else. No man can by searching find out God. No creature can understand the Almighty to perfection. The finite mind cannot comprehend infinity. Therefore, in discussions about the Trinity, about the nature of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, are manifestations of gross presumption.” (*E. J. Waggoner, Present Truth February 6th 1902, ‘The Editor’s Private corner, ‘The Spirit that Witnesses’*)

Since our beginnings in 1844 we had rejected the trinity doctrine. This was not simply because of its theology – which was very often said to be both incomprehensible and contradictory to Scripture - but because as Waggoner is saying here, it attempts to explain something that God had not revealed. This is why his remarks concerning “gross presumption” are very true. Where God has chosen to be silent, so too we should be silent. Take note that this was in 1902 - which was 4 years following the publication of 'The Desire of Ages'. It could be reasoned that by this time, Seventh-day Adventists had not read anything in this book suggesting that God is a trinity – at least not as in the trinity doctrine.

In this same year (1902), Waggoner was elected first president of the South England Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. This is the conference to which I belong.

The following year, a reader asked if Seventh-day Adventists believed in the trinity. Waggoner, still cited as editor of the Present Truth, replied

“If I knew what you meant by the term [trinity], I might tell you; but from the days of Athanasius until now all discussion about the Trinity has been an attempt to define the indefinable and the incomprehensible. Thousands have been put to death for not professing belief in a formula which even its professors could not comprehend, nor state in terms that anybody else could comprehend.” (*E. J. Waggoner, Present Truth – British edition, 30th July 1903, ‘The editor’s private corner’*)

This is the reason why early Seventh-day Adventists made no profession of the trinity doctrine. As Waggoner said, it is “an attempt to define the indefinable and the incomprehensible”. In other words, it is an attempt to explain something God has not revealed.

The next year, in 'Questions and Bible Answers', this comment was made under the heading 'The Trinity'

“While the Bible speaks clearly of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and tells us all we need to know, or can understand of their relation to one another, it does not define any of them within exact limits, as men have tried to do. In the Authorised Version of the Bible (1 John v. 7), we find these words : " There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are One." These words are not found in the early manuscripts of the New Testament, and scholars are agreed that they were inserted by those who felt that the Bible ought to contain one text at least proving their particular view of the Trinity. The verse was omitted in the Revised Version. God does not wish us to spend time in guessing at His Divine and Infinite Being.” (*Present Truth, Questions and Bible Answers, March 10th 1904, page 149, 'The Trinity'*)

This final sentence is very true. How can we 'guess' at something God has not revealed – especially where it concerns His very being? The latter is totally beyond our comprehension.

Did you notice what was said about the Scriptures not defining the Father, Son and Holy Spirit “within exact limits, as men have tried to do”? This is obviously with reference to the trinity doctrine – which does limit God to acting and existing within the confines of a man-made formula. In other words, in defining God by the use of a formula, men have confined (limited) God according to their own finite conceptions of Him. This should not be done. God is far beyond our understanding. He cannot be defined within limitations conjured up by human reasoning (Job 11:7).

Note the remark concerning 1 John 5:7. This is very interesting although we will not pursue the thought any further here. Suffice to say that I would say that many scholars agree today that this is a spurious text. I will leave you to check this out for yourself and draw your own conclusions.

Two years later, another reader enquired what was believed by Seventh-day Adventists regarding the trinity doctrine. The editor replied

“With regard to your further question concerning the Trinity, we shall better understand the Bible the more closely we hold to its teaching. The ideas of the Trinity which are found in the Creeds are human attempts to define an incomprehensible mystery, and bewilder rather than assist the mind.” (*Present Truth, January 11th 1906, 'Questions and Bible Answers, 'The Unpardonable Sin'*)

How very true are these observations. It was said in conclusion

“The truth concerning the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost is altogether too large to be bound about by any definitions that created minds can frame.” (*Ibid*)

This sums it up perfectly. By the use of a man-made formula such as the trinity doctrine, we, the finite, cannot explain the infinite. To believe that we can explain God's being (something God has not revealed) really is presumption on our part. It is like saying we have God 'sorted'. Note that this was now 8 years following the publication of 'The Desire of Ages'.

It is reasonable to believe that because of what we have just read, it certainly would not have been thought that in this book, Ellen White had spoken of God as a trinity of persons (as in the trinity doctrine) – else why make these remarks?

The fact that at times the word 'trinity' was used to describe the three persons of the Godhead (of divinity) does not mean that a belief in the trinity doctrine was accepted. This is very often two different things. Sometimes, without making any profession of believing the trinity doctrine itself, the word 'trinity' was used as an alternative for the word 'Godhead'. Unfortunately, the word 'trinity' is very often thought to be synonymous with the word 'Godhead' when in reality it is not. This is because there is not, within the word 'Godhead', any connotation of threeness or tri-unity.

The trinity doctrine is restrictive. It limits God. The word 'Godhead', without incorporating any limitations, pertains to that which is divine. For an explanation of the word 'Godhead', see chapter 3 of this study here

[A study of the Godhead – as it pertains to Seventh-day Adventism](#)

The original trinity doctrine – a 4th century invention

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The original (orthodox) trinity doctrine was formulated by the church in the 4th century. This was when the church was fast declining into apostasy – which in itself should automatically set the alarm bells ringing. This was also the time when Sunday-keeping was steadily becoming established within Christianity - which is another teaching not in keeping with Scripture (albeit the claim is often made that it is based upon what is revealed in the Bible). When all is said and done, the trinity doctrine, like Sunday keeping, is only a tradition of the church.

I did say previously that in chapter 2 of my website study mentioned above, I had quoted a number of trinitarian theologians who freely admit the trinity doctrine formula cannot be found in Scripture. One such person is the late Edmund J. Fortman - a renowned Roman Catholic (Jesuit) priest who for 40 years taught in the churches and seminaries in which he served. He also wrote a book called 'The Triune God' which on a number of occasions for the purpose of research I have taken to reading. Fortman adored the trinity doctrine. He regarded it as the central teaching of the Christian faith.

In the introduction to his book, Fortman explains a number of times that neither in the Old or the New Testament is the trinity doctrine formally stated. In chapter 2 by way of summary he says

“The Biblical witness to God, as we have seen, did not contain any formal or formulated doctrine of the trinity, any explicit teaching that in one God there are three co-equal divine persons. Rather it contained the data from which a doctrine of this kind could be formulated.”
(Edmund J. Fortman, The Triune God, chapter 2, 'The Triune God in the Early Christian Church', page 35)

This is the confession of most trinitarian theologians. It is more or less in keeping with what was said by Richard Rice (see above). This is inasmuch as that whilst the trinity doctrine itself cannot actually be found in Scripture, the information (“data”) is there for such a teaching to be invented (“formulated”). This is the same as you say Max although as I have just pointed out, the essentials needed for a trinity doctrine are noticeably absent from Scripture.

Fortman further explained

“And it would take three centuries of gradual assimilation of the Biblical witness to God before the formulation of the dogma of one God in three distinct persons would be achieved.”
(Ibid)

Again this is very true. It was not until near the end of the 4th century that the trinity doctrine was formulated. As has been said already, this was almost 300 years after the final Scripture had been written. It was not though the “Biblical witness to God” that brought about this teaching. It was, as Ellet Waggoner so aptly put it (see above), men attempting to “define the indefinable and the

incomprehensible”.

History reveals that the trinity doctrine, although invented by the church (or perhaps better said – formulated by a 4th century council of bishops), only became established within Christianity because it was ‘forced’ upon Christians by the secular power of Rome. This was as Rome gave its support to the church. This is obviously one of the reasons why J. N. Andrews wrote of the trinity doctrine

“The infamous, measures by which it was forced upon the church which appear upon the pages of ecclesiastical history might well cause every believer in that doctrine to blush.” (*J. N. Andrews, Review and Herald ‘The Fall of Babylon’ March 6th 1855*)

Without this ‘support’ from Rome, it is quite possible (even more than likely) that the trinity doctrine would not have become established in Christianity.

You can find an account of this history in section 9 of a study found on my website at the following link. This section is appropriately called ‘The establishing of trinitarianism within Christianity’.

[A Detailed History of the Trinity Doctrine](#)

**Scripture only
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Max – I can assure you that all the non-trinitarians of my acquaintance do appreciate that

“The testimonies of Sister White should not be carried to the front. God's Word is the unerring standard. The Testimonies are not to take the place of the Word.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 12, 1890, as quoted in Evangelism page 256*)

The implication is of course that Ellen White did expect the testimonies to be used. This is why she said they “[should not be carried to the front](#)”. She was not saying we should not use them. Why else would they have been given except that they were to be used? As we noted above, late in her ministry she wrote to one person saying

“The Bible must be your counselor. Study it, and the Testimonies God has given; for they never contradict His word.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 106, to Sister Rasmussen, March 19th 1907*)

In saying that the testimonies “[are not to take the place of the Word](#)” (see above), one of the things she probably had in mind was that they were not to be used as a final proof of doctrine. All doctrines should be able to be supported by using Scripture alone (independently of anything written by Ellen White or anyone else). Surely though, as Ellen White counsels here, we should give consideration to the light that has come from God through the spirit of prophecy. Wouldn't you agree? She would also have meant that reading the testimonies should not be a substitute for Bible study.

So what was God's purpose in giving Ellen White the gift of prophecy? She explains

“Little heed is given to the Bible, but the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, January 20th 1903, ‘An open letter’*)

This “[greater light](#)” will always be the Bible. The Scriptures do not tolerate the idea of having a superior (a greater authority). It is also the ‘acid test’ for all major beliefs – including the trinity doctrine. Ellen White's work leads us to the Scriptures. Her work and ministry is this “[lesser light](#)”.

I also agree with what was said by her in the previously quoted letter. She wrote

“Let all prove their positions from the Scriptures and substantiate every point they claim as truth from the revealed Word of God.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 12, 1890, as quoted in Evangelism page 256*)

This is only has been said above. This is why I am asking you Max; can you “prove” your position (“substantiate every point”) of the trinity doctrine from the Scriptures? If you believe you can, then you will need to show me where in the Bible it says that the persons of the Godhead (of divinity) exist together in one single existence of being (in one substance) as the ‘one God’ (one divine being) and are inseparable – which as has been said, is the essentials for any version of the trinity doctrine. I would suggest that this is something you cannot do – else by now you would have shown where it says these things.

It can only be said therefore that unless you can produce this evidence from the Scriptures, your claim that the trinity doctrine is ‘Bible only’ is impotent. I do agree that the Scriptures reveal a tri-personality Godhead (three persons of divinity) but this is not the trinity doctrine.

The Seventh-day Adventist version of the trinity doctrine

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For those reading this response who may not have encountered the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of God being a trinity, here is how it is stated in our Fundamental Belief No. 2

“There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons.” (*Seventh-day Adventist 2012 Yearbook, page 5, Fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists, 'The Trinity'*)

Note the ‘unity’ part. This is extremely important. If this is absent there is no trinity doctrine. This ‘three-in-one’ belief then describes this unity (trinity) “one God” (one divine being) this way (please note my emphasis)

“God is immortal, all-powerful, all knowing, above all, and ever present. **He** is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through **His** self-revelation. **He** is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation. (Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2; 1 Tim. 1:17; Rev. 14:7.) (*Ibid*)

These texts are obviously chosen as the ‘prime texts’ (the best texts) that supposedly reveal from Scripture that God is a trinity of persons (as depicted by the trinity doctrine) but none of them do so. This is not even when they are taken collectively. At the very best they only tell us of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – all of whom can quite rightly be termed God - which as has been said already, is far from being a trinity doctrine. The ‘essentials’ required for a trinity doctrine, as explained above, are noticeably absent.

The truth of the matter is that there cannot be found in Scripture any explanation of the nature of divinity – meaning how the persons of the Godhead exist together. This is why we should not make any attempt to explain it. Certainly we should not invent a formula to try to explain it.

This having been said, there are those who in attempting to prove the trinity doctrine from the Scriptures, do use Deuteronomy 6:4 (as is done above). This text though does not even establish a plurality in God let alone reveal that God is three persons in one single indivisible being of existence. To use this text to ‘prove’ the trinity doctrine to be true is definitely taking things much too far. For an explanation of this text, see chapter 3 (‘Godhead not trinity’) of the study found here

[A study of the Godhead – as it pertains to Seventh-day Adventism](#)

Note that fundamental belief No. 2 describes this unity (three-in-one) God as a 'He'. Throughout this belief, personal pronouns are used. It must be asked therefore - if this trinity "one God" (three persons in 'one indivisible being') is a 'He', then what would "He" look like? Certainly not like us.

Important to note too is that our fundamental belief No. 2 is not an explanation of our beliefs concerning the individual persons of the Godhead – namely the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These explanations are found in beliefs No 3, 4 and 5.

In these beliefs (No.'s 3, 4 and 5), each individual person (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit) is also called a 'He'. This gives the impression that the 'one God' (the trinity God), as officially espoused today by the Seventh-day Adventist Church (belief No. 2), is three 'He(s)' in one 'He' (three individual persons in one person). If this is not what is meant (which hopefully I would not think it was), then I would suggest to anyone in authority who is reading this article that at the next General Conference session in 2015, belief No. 2 should be subject to revision – at least re-worded. In fact to be in keeping with Scripture, it would need to be removed completely.

If chapter 28 of the above study is read, it will be seen that at the 1980 General Conference session where this belief first became part of our fundamentals, there was a great deal of difficulty in wording it. Seeing that the Bible is silent concerning such matters, this is not really surprising.

In reality, we only need to have fundamental beliefs No. 3, 4 and 5 (concerning Father, Son and Holy Spirit). This is because there is nothing in Scripture to show how the three exist together (the nature of the Godhead). If this is something God had wanted us to know He would have made this information available to us. This shows us that God does not want us to delve into such mysteries.

This is why belief No. 2 (the trinity doctrine) is not only speculative but also presumptuous, unnecessary and pointless. In fact when it is reasoned through, what purpose does it serve? All it does is promote debate, argument and division over something God has not revealed. At least concerning the three personalities of the Godhead (the three persons of divinity) we can discuss what is taught in the Scriptures. This is something that cannot be done with the trinity doctrine. This is because the Scriptures say nothing about it – meaning they offer no explanation concerning the nature of divinity. To put this in another way: whatever the beliefs concerning Father, Son and Holy Spirit – assuming they are Biblical – they would never produce a trinity doctrine. This is why at the 1980 General Conference session there was so much trouble in formulating the wording of this belief. It was something that was trying to be done without support from Scripture.

It is possible though, concerning the three divine persons, for 'trinity formulas' (doctrines) to have differing beliefs. This is where the Seventh-day Adventist version differs from orthodoxy. We shall return to this point later.

It would be beneficial now to take a look at how the Seventh-day Adventist Church officially explains their version of the trinity doctrine. This is as it was set out in 'Reflections', the newsletter of the Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Research Institute (BRI). It is in the form of a Bible study by Ekkehardt Mueller – Deputy Director of the BRI. It is also found on the BRI website.

This same issue of 'Reflections' (No. 23 – July 2008) also detailed the events of a congress held earlier that year in Sydney Australia. This was when a number of our leading administrators, scholars, theologians and pastors met together to discuss our trinity belief. This congress came about because of the growing animosity towards the trinity doctrine, within our church in Australia.

It was explained in 'Reflections'

"The congress was for invitees only and limited to a certain academic level." (Biblical Research Institute, Reflections newsletter, July 2008, Page 4 'Trinity Congress in the South Pacific Division')

As would be expected, these 'top' theologians and scholars etc. concluded our trinity doctrine to be correct. This study by Mueller was obviously intended to support this conclusion.

Under the heading "One God and Three Persons" he wrote

"There is only one God (Deut. 6:4), however, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all called God (Matthew 27:46, John 20:28: Acts 5:3-4). Consequently, we do not worship three Gods, but one God who reveals Himself in and consists of three "persons". The three persons share one indivisible nature." (*Ekkehardt Mueller, Biblical Research Institute, Reflections newsletter, July 2008, Page 8, 'Scripture Applied, - A Bible Study'*)

This is basic trinity reasoning. It goes beyond what God has revealed but without it (that the three persons exist inseparably together in "one indivisible nature" as the 'one God') there would be no such teaching as the trinity doctrine - at least not as it is generally known today.

Mueller also explained

"Each person of the Godhead is by nature and essence God, and the fullness of the deity dwells in each of them. On the other hand, each person of the Godhead is inseparably connected to the other two. This concept of God surpasses our experiences and our intellect." (*Ibid*)

Note the emphasis - "each person of the Godhead is ***inseparably connected*** to the other two". Again this is the basis for any version of the trinity doctrine but where in the Scriptures is this stated? The answer is it isn't stated. It is simply an assumption. Without this assumption there is no such thing as a trinity doctrine – albeit I do agree that it is Scriptural to say that "the fullness of the deity" dwells in each of the three persons of the Godhead.

Mueller concluded (under the heading 'Results')

"We do not believe in three Gods but one God in three persons. These three personalities participate ***in one substance***. In the divine unity there are three coeternal and coequal persons, who, though distinct, ***are the one undivided God***." (*Ibid page 9*)

Mueller's Bible study is called 'Our God'. It can also be found on the Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Research Institute website here

<http://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/Bible%20Study/Our%20God.pdf>

An orthodox priest explained the trinity doctrine to me this way

"We maintain rather the invariability of the Godhead (its simplicity and unity) in the sense that no action can lead to ontological change; namely in this case that the Word, one ousia [substance] with the Father and the Spirit, never leaves the Father's side even when He joins with our human nature in the Incarnation." (*Email, Father Gregory Hallam, Orthodox Priest, to Terry Hill, 16th May 2007*)

This is standard to any version of the trinity doctrine. It is saying that all three divine personalities exist in one substance (one divine being) and together comprise the one God (who is immortal) – meaning that under no circumstances can this ever change. In other words, God existence (as a trinity) is static (unchanging) – which taken to its ultimate conclusion means, as is said here by the orthodox priest, that even in the incarnation, Christ remained at the Father's side in the one being of God.

It also means that under no circumstances can any of the three be separated from each other. As Mueller said, “each person of the Godhead is *inseparably connected* to the other two”. This is why in trinitarianism, the belief that in the incarnation a risk was taken concerning Christ's existence is impossible. This is my main objection to any version of the trinity doctrine. It denies the risk, taken by God and Christ, in redeeming us from sin. Without this risk belief, Christ's incarnation would be devoid of all reality. It would simply have been play-acting. For it to have been real there must have been a risk. This is spoken of more fully in the next section. It is under the sub-heading of 'An immature or mature Ellen White'.

There are other implications. These include the reasoning that the divine Son of God did not actually vacate Heaven – also the belief that He did not really die at Calvary - although we will not go into that in detail here – suffice to say that some trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists have made it very clear to me that this is their belief. Certainly these are conclusions drawn from accepting trinitarian theology. We will return to this point later.

I wonder if those at the 1980 General Conference session who voted for the acceptance of this doctrine fully realised what they were actually voting in as part of our denomination's fundamental beliefs? Did they realise it was as explained in Mueller's study? I very much doubt it.

The reality is that in the incarnation, the divine Son of God did exile Himself from the Father – also from the angelic beings of Heaven. In other words, He literally and bodily vacated the courts of Heaven. He separated Himself from the Father – not as in trinitarianism where He is never separated from the Father (see Mueller's remarks above).

A confusion of views

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In the orthodox view of the trinity doctrine (this is the original trinity doctrine born of the Councils of Nicaea in AD 325 and Constantinople in AD 381), the Father is said to be unbegotten, the Son begotten of God (not created), with the Holy Spirit proceeding (not begotten nor created). This denotes a real Father and Son relationship – with both omnipresent through the Spirit. This is in keeping with Scripture.

Unfortunately, that which was introduced (added) to make it a trinity doctrine is the belief that all three are of one substance – meaning they all constitute *one divine being* – which needless to say goes beyond what we are told through the Scriptures. This is a major part of the trinity debate.

If you would like to read about the councils that initially developed the trinity doctrine, also the two major schools of thought involved in the discussions, you can do so by reading sections 7 and 8 of the study found here

[A Detailed History of the Trinity Doctrine](#)

As previously noted, the Seventh-day Adventist version of the trinity doctrine is different to orthodoxy. It differs regarding the three divine persons.

In contrast to orthodoxy, the Seventh-day Adventist version says that whilst all three persons are co-eternal and co-equal, none are begotten and none proceed therefore according to this theology, they are not really a father nor a son nor a holy spirit but are only role-playing these parts (pretending to be these things).

As we have seen above though, all three are said to share the one substance and are thus inseparably connected to each other. In this respect (the one substance/one divine being belief), the Seventh-day Adventist version is exactly the same as orthodoxy. It is this type of oneness that makes it a trinity doctrine. Without this oneness there wouldn't be such a teaching.

In September 2011, I sent my latest Godhead study to our Biblical Research Institute. It is called 'A

study of the Godhead – as it pertains to Seventh-day Adventism'. This is the study found here [A Study of the Godhead – as it pertains to Seventh-day Adventism](#)

The chapters dealing with what the Bible and the spirit of prophecy say concerning the three persons of the Godhead are 5 through to 10 and 18 through to 20. Gerhard Pfandl, Associate Director of the BRI, agreed to read it and let me know his thoughts.

In his reply (which I received just over 6 months later) he said he agreed with me where I had said that there cannot be found in Scripture any explanation of how the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have their existence together – meaning that the nature of the Godhead is not explained in Scripture (which is why I had said we should not have such a teaching as the trinity doctrine) - but he did add

“I believe you are reading too much into certain Trinitarian expressions, e.g., Ekkehardt Mueller’s expressions “three persons share one indivisible nature “ (p. 58) or “each person of the Godhead is inseparably connected to the other two” (p. 64) should not be understood in some physical sense as if they were not three separate persons.” (*Email, Gerhard Pfandl to Terry Hill, 14th March 2012*)

I must admit that this reply did take me by surprise. Certainly it was nothing like I had expected. In fact the latter part of his statement really shocked me.

I replied saying that if it was agreed that there is nothing in Scripture explaining how the three persons exist together, then why, as a denomination, do we have a trinity doctrine, which, as we all know, is said to explain it? I believed this to be a very fair question (still do) – and one that I believe demands a reply from our church. After all, the trinity doctrine itself, meaning our fundamental belief No. 2, is a major part of our present denominational Godhead dispute.

I also asked (concerning the part of his reply which shocked me) that if I am not to take Mueller's expressions literally (as all three persons existing inseparably together in one indivisible substance) then how am I supposed to take them? After all, these are the expressions which constitute a trinity doctrine. Without these expressions being taken literally there would be no such teaching. In other words, when it says “[each person of the Godhead is inseparably connected to the other two](#)”, how else am I to understand it other than each of the three persons is inseparably connected to the other two? What other meaning can there possibly be? It seems to me that by his remarks, Pfandl is actually denying the trinity doctrine. This is why I am left wondering what our church leadership really is teaching today. Certainly there seems to be confusion over it.

Unfortunately, instead of receiving answers to my questions, I was told that regarding this subject there would be no more discussions with me. This is why I still do not know what our church means when it uses these 'trinity expressions' although without them we certainly would not have a trinity doctrine. Prior to receiving those comments from the BRI (along with most others I would think who have read Mueller's study) I had accepted these expressions at face value (as in the trinity doctrine). Now it appears there is a hidden meaning behind them. What this is though I have no idea. Perhaps someone reading this article can explain them to me.

Pfandl went on to say that because the three persons of the Godhead are not 'physically one' (one divine being), my belief that the trinity doctrine forbids there having been a risk, in the incarnation, to Christ's existence, was not “really accurate”. He explained

“Hence your statement, “This ‘risk belief’ is totally prohibited by the trinity doctrine” (p. 12) is not really accurate, because we all, like Roy Adam, believe that Christ could have sinned. What would have happened if he had sinned? That is another question, which I cannot answer and I don’t want to speculate.” (*Ibid*)

It was probably not intentional on Pfandl's part but his remarks completely misrepresented my reasoning. I was not saying that the trinity doctrine prohibited Christ from sinning but that it prohibited Him from losing His existence if He had sinned. This is saying two different things.

The reason why I say the trinity doctrine forbids this risk belief is because if the 'one living God' (who cannot cease to exist) is an unchangeable trinity of persons as described by the trinity doctrine, then as Muller said (see above), never can any of the three ever change, neither can they ever become separated from each other, meaning of course that none can ever cease to exist. This is why Pfandl's remark "[I don't want to speculate](#)" does not really make very much sense – at least not if the trinity doctrine is correct (which is what our church is saying today). This is because concerning the possibility of Christ ceasing to exist, there is nothing to speculate about (if you see what I mean). This is because according to trinitarian theology, nothing could possibly change amongst the three – not even if Christ had sinned. On the other hand, if the persons of the Godhead can be separated, with the possibility of One of them losing His existence, then the 'one God' cannot be an unchangeable trinity of persons (as in the trinity doctrine). It has to be one way or the other.

If these remarks by Pfandl are now the 'official view' of the church, then it appears that as a denomination we want a foot in both camps. This is because it makes it look as though we want to say like popular Christianity that God is a trinity of persons (as purported by the trinity doctrine) yet say at the same time that the three persons of the Godhead are three separate individual persons. The question is though, how can it be both?

This is where we come back to the same question. What does it mean in Mueller's study where it says that the "[three persons](#)" of the Godhead "[share one indivisible nature](#)" and what does it mean that "[each person of the Godhead is inseparably connected to the other two](#)"? Whichever way this is explained, whether physically, spiritually or otherwise, it must mean that the three are inseparable. After all, inseparable does mean inseparable. What else can it mean? To say it means separable would be a violation of the English language, also the demise of all intelligent reasoning.

Your version of the trinity doctrine Max is in keeping with our fundamental belief No.2 although it does differ somewhat from what Pfandl said to me. You maintain, as does the Seventh-day Adventist Church, that Christ is not begotten of God neither does the Holy Spirit proceed (meaning that all three are only role-playing these parts) but you do say

"I believe that there are Three Persons (for want of a better word) in the One Divine Being" (Email, Max Hatton to Terry Hill and various recipients, 16th June 2010)

"The fact that Mrs White says she saw in vision that Jesus and the Father are quite separate individuals does not fit with the Trinitarian concept found in Scripture." (Max Hatton, Website article, Ellen G. White and the Trinity Doctrine)

You conclude therefore, as a trinitarian, that the persons of the Godhead constitute "[One Divine Being](#)" and are not, as you put it, "[quite separate individuals](#)". This to me is the same as orthodox trinitarianism although seemingly different from what Pfandl said to me. Your version also seems to be in keeping with the way our Fundamental Belief No. 2 is expressed – which does describe the 'one God' (the trinity God) as 'one divine being'.

Within the Scriptures though, no such teaching can be found. All through the Scriptures, God and Christ are spoken of as two separate individuals, each having a personality of their own (Matthew 10:32, 11:25, Mark 13:32, John 5:23, 36, 17:3 etc.). We shall see later that this is something Ellen White emphasised over and over again. This she did after John Harvey Kellogg, the chief physician in Seventh-day Adventism, confessed to have come to believe in the trinity doctrine. Needless to say, she did this for a purpose. Most I think would realise this purpose.

Interestingly you say in another article

“Seventh-day Adventists believe that the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are all fully God and exist in a single Divine Substance. There are not three gods but a single God consisting of Three Divine Persons.” (*Max Hatton, Website article, ‘A revealing futile joust by semi-Arians’*)

At one time I would have agreed with you (that this is what we officially believe) but after receiving those comments from our Biblical Research Institute, I am not now so sure.

As I have said, this is where the entire issue has become extremely confusing. I find it very difficult to equate our denominational fundamental belief No. 2 (the trinity doctrine) with Pfandl's remarks (see above) although it is easily equated with your “One Divine Being” (“single God”) belief. You can see therefore why I say that regarding the trinity doctrine there is a confusion of beliefs. It is no wonder that concerning this teaching, R. F. Cottrell, one of the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism, wrote in 1869

“This has been a popular doctrine and regarded as orthodox ever since the bishop of Rome was elevated to the popedom on the strength of it. It is accounted dangerous heresy to reject it; but each person is permitted to explain the doctrine in his own way.” (*R. F. Cottrell, Review and Herald, 1st June 1869, ‘The Doctrine of the Trinity’*)

Cottrell then went on to say (referring to trinitarians and the doctrine of the trinity)

“All seem to think they must hold it, but each has perfect liberty to take his own way to reconcile its contradictory propositions; and hence a multitude of views are held concerning it by its friends, all of them orthodox, I suppose, as long as they nominally assent to the doctrine.” (*Ibid*)

It seems to me that Cottrell was 'spot on' with his remarks. Wouldn't you agree?

A speculative doctrine – not essential for salvation

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As we have already noted, the nature of God's being is not explained in Scripture. This is why we should never attempt to explain it. Even Dr Canale, in our denominational 'Handbook of Theology', readily admits

“The concept of the Trinity, namely the idea that the three are one, is not explicitly stated but only assumed.” (*Fernando L. Canale, the Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology, Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia Volume 12, page 138, ‘Doctrine of God’*)

This is only as I have said above. Trinitarians are assuming things not revealed by God.

To formulate such a teaching as the trinity doctrine does necessitate speculation. This is something we should not do. We should never speculate concerning those things that God has chosen to keep to Himself. This is especially where it concerns the very nature of His being. This particular knowledge is far beyond our comprehension. As we have been counselled through the spirit of prophecy (note these paragraphs are not contiguous)

“Our first parents were led into sin through indulging a desire for knowledge that God had withheld from them. In seeking to gain this knowledge, they lost all that was worth possessing ... The lesson is for us. The field into which Satan led our first parents is the same to which he is alluring men today. He is flooding the world with pleasing fables. By every device at his command he tempts men to speculate in regard to God. Thus he seeks to prevent them from obtaining that knowledge of God which is salvation.” (*Ellen G. White, Ministry of Healing, pages 427-8, ‘Dangers in Speculative knowledge’, 1905*)

“Neither by searching the recesses of the earth nor in vain endeavors to penetrate the mysteries of God's being, is wisdom found. It is found, rather, in humbly receiving the revelation that He has been pleased to give, and in conforming the life to His will.” (*Ibid, page 431*)

“No mortal mind can penetrate the secrecy in which the Mighty One dwells and works. Only that which He sees fit to reveal can we comprehend of Him. Reason must acknowledge an authority superior to itself. Heart and intellect must bow to the great I AM.” (*Ibid, page 438*)

Whilst it may only seem like common sense to assume certain things about God (basing the assumptions upon what the Scriptures reveal) it is still a dangerous thing to do. We are liable to end up with all sorts of erroneous conclusions. The nature of God's existence is a mystery - a mystery that humanity has not been given to solve.

On the other hand, everything necessary for our salvation can be found in Scripture. This is why, for our salvation, it is totally unnecessary to believe a teaching such as the trinity doctrine – which is designed to explain the unexplainable (the nature of the Godhead). This is also why it should never be urged upon anyone. Certainly it should not be held as either a fundamental belief or as a belief to be professed as a pre-requisite to baptism – and most definitely it should not be regarded as a test of fellowship.

Baptism is extremely important. It is far much more than just a requirement for becoming a church member. It is a personal testimony that Christ requires of all those who express faith in Him (Mark 16:15-16, Matthew 28:19). This is why, as a denomination, we should not refuse baptism to someone just because they refuse to believe a teaching such as the trinity doctrine, which, when all is said and done, is only a tradition of the church. Would Jesus, if He were here on earth today, sanction such a requirement? Obviously not! This would be asking us - rather than believing only those things that God has chosen to reveal - to surrender ourselves to what the church teaches. Jesus would never ask us to do such a thing. He would tell us we should be able to say “It is written” – meaning we should always be able to prove our beliefs from using Scripture alone. We should not be asking people to believe something simply because the church teaches it. This is nothing less than a returning to the principles of Roman Catholicism – and remember, we have been told through the spirit of prophecy

“It is a backsliding church that lessens the distance between itself and the Papacy.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, February 19, 1894, 'Romanism the Religion of Human Nature'*)

This is where she had written (at the beginning of the paragraph)

“The Lord has pronounced a curse upon those who take from or add to the Scriptures.” (*Ibid*)

I would hope that most Seventh-day Adventists could see why the two statements go hand in hand.

Our church today, in saying that to become one of its members a person has to make a confession of the trinity doctrine, is certainly placing itself above Scripture. This is because it is making a demand on people to believe something that God does not require to be believed (something not found in Scripture). To put it in another way - our church today is requiring people to believe speculation else they cannot become one of its members. This is speculation concerning how God has His existence – which is something He has chosen to be totally silent about. God does not require us to believe something that cannot be found in Scripture. Everything He requires us to believe can be proven from Scripture. As we have been counselled through the spirit of prophecy

“The Bible was not written for the scholar alone; on the contrary, it was designed for the common people. The great truths necessary for salvation are made as clear as noonday; and

none will mistake and lose their way except those who follow their own judgment instead of the plainly revealed will of God.” (*Ellen White, Steps to Christ, page 89, ‘A knowledge of God’*)

No one can say that in the Scriptures the trinity doctrine is “as clear as noonday”. In fact it cannot even be found in the Bible. God's messenger continued

“We should not take the testimony of any man as to what the Scriptures teach, but should study the words of God for ourselves. If we allow others to do our thinking, we shall have crippled energies and contracted abilities.” (*Ibid*)

For our beliefs – and for our eternal safety - we must have a “thus saith the Lord”. We must not allow others, whether it be the church leadership or otherwise, to tell us what to believe. We must study for ourselves drawing our own conclusions – albeit they may differ from what any particular denomination may teach.

Much of the past persecution of Christians has been because ‘the church’ has attempted to force people to believe a teaching not found in Scripture. The trinity doctrine is a prime example.

As we previously noted Ellet Waggoner as saying

“Thousands have been put to death for not professing belief in a formula which even its professors could not comprehend, nor state in terms that anybody else could comprehend.” (*E. J. Waggoner, Present Truth – British edition, 30th July 1903, ‘The editor’s private corner’*)

This is the end result of ‘the church’ holding as prime importance a teaching that cannot be found in Scripture. It develops within people a wrong attitude - particularly towards those who demand a ‘thus saith the Lord’ for what they believe. This wrong attitude probably develops because of the frustration of not being able to prove this teaching from using the Scriptures alone. The following words seem rather appropriate

“Any man, be he minister or layman, who seeks to compel or control the reason of any other man, becomes an agent of Satan, to do his work, and in the sight of the heavenly universe he bears the mark of Cain.” (*Ellen G White, Manuscript 29, 1911*)

All too often, because there has been a refusal on the part of some to accept a teaching unsupported by Scripture, the church has resorted to using coercion and intimidation. It has persecuted those who will not conform to its beliefs. This is not God's way. It is contrary to and misrepresentative of His character. God never seeks to compel (force) a person to believe anything. Through His Spirit He reasons with us intelligently – gently encouraging us to accept whatever truth He desires us to believe. Persecution in any form is an attribute of anti-Christ.

God’s silence concerning the nature of His existence reminds me of where He tells us

“The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.”
Deuteronomy 29:29

In keeping with this we have been told through the spirit of prophecy (this was after quoting the above text of Scripture)

“The revelation of Himself that God has given in His word is for our study. This we may seek to understand. But beyond this we are not to penetrate. The highest intellect may tax itself until it is wearied out in conjectures regarding the nature of God; but the effort will be fruitless. This problem has not been given us to solve. No human mind can comprehend

God. Let not finite man attempt to interpret Him. Let none indulge in speculation regarding His nature. Here silence is eloquence. The Omniscient One is above discussion.” ”(Ellen G. White, 8th Volume Testimonies, page 279, ‘The essential knowledge’, 1904)

This counsel is so easy to understand. Why is it that so many choose to ignore it?

In 1904, the editors of our periodicals were counselled

“Publish the truth; do not publish error. Do not try to explain in regard to the personality of God. You cannot give any further explanation than the Bible has given. Human theories regarding Him are good for nothing.” (Ellen G. White, Letter 179, 1904)

Again how very true this is – yet the trinity doctrine, by attempting to explain the nature of God’s being, goes far beyond what God has revealed. It is simply human theory – man’s attempt to explain something that God has chosen to keep to Himself.

This reveals the audacity of humanity - to think that we are able to invent a formula to explain how the Almighty has His existence. How can we fathom the depths of such a mystery? Obviously we cannot. It is just an act of presumption on our part – and may I say a very serious one. Those who do this kind of thing are elevating themselves above the Word of God.

God’s servant refused to enter into controversy concerning the nature and personality of God. In 1903 when our beliefs were being challenged from ‘within’ by John Harvey Kellogg (who said in support of his ‘God in creation’ beliefs that he had come to believe in the trinity doctrine) she wrote

“I say, and have ever said, that I will not engage in controversy with any one in regard to the nature and personality of God. **Let those who try to describe God know that on such a subject silence is eloquence.** Let the Scriptures be read in simple faith, and let each one form his conceptions of God from his inspired word.” (Ellen G. White, Letter to Magan and Sutherland, October 9th 1903)

We should only believe and teach the things God has chosen to reveal. These alone are for our study. Take particular note of the final sentence. It tells us of the freedom that God has given to each individual to study and interpret the Scriptures for themselves. From reading the above, it appears that some had previously attempted to engage Ellen White in this type of discussion (concerning the nature and personality of God) but she refused to enter into it.

During the time period of Ellen White's ministry, neither the trinity doctrine nor anything like it was a test of fellowship to become a Seventh-day Adventist. Today though it is very different. The rejection of this teaching may not only prohibit a person being baptised within the Seventh-day Adventist Church but may also stop them from being an active member (as has happened to me). It may even lead to them being censured or disfellowshipped (as has happened to some). This is a far cry from how it used to be in Seventh-day Adventism.

In 1902, Ellen White addressed herself to the type of situation we have today in our church. Referring to those who during the very early days of the Christian church lost their first love and were quibbling over non-essential matters, she wrote in a letter to C. P. Bollman (who was then editor of the Gospel Herald)

“They quibbled about matters of no special importance which were not given by the Lord as tests, and dwelt upon their differences of opinion till these differences became as mountains, separating them from Christ and from one another, destroying unity and love.

“We are in danger of falling into similar errors. Never should that which God has not given as a test be carried as was the subject of the law in Galatians. I have been instructed that the terrible experience at the Minneapolis Conference is one of the saddest chapters in the

history of the believers in present truth.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 179 to C. P. Bollman 19th November 1902*)

As to the nature of the Godhead, the Word of God offers no explanation, yet today, as a church, we say that the acceptance of the trinity doctrine (which does attempt to explain it) is now a test of orthodoxy for becoming a Seventh-day Adventist. This is not in keeping with God's order of things. If Ellen White were here today, it is more than likely that she would say that our present 'trinity situation' has now become one of the saddest chapters in our history. Notice she said she had been “instructed” that this was the case at Minneapolis. She must have meant that God Himself regarded 'Minneapolis' as one of the saddest chapters in our history. This really is something to think about although having said that, I wonder how many Seventh-day Adventists today even understand why God should regard it as such?

Some may say that the trinity doctrine is a very important teaching but this is impossible. This is because God has been totally silent concerning the nature of His existence. This silence therefore is the absolute proof that He does not deem it something important for us to know. This is why we should not try to explain it neither should we attempt to impose this teaching upon others or make it a test of fellowship etc. This is where, as a denomination, we are out of harmony with God's will for us. As we have been told through the spirit of prophecy (Proverbs 30:5-6 quoted)

“We are not doing the will of God when we speculate upon things that He has seen fit to withhold from us. The question for us to study is: "What is truth, the truth for this time, which is to be cherished, loved, honored, and obeyed?" The devotees of science have been defeated and disheartened in their efforts to find out God. What they need to inquire at this time is: "What is the truth that will enable us to win the salvation of our souls?" (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies Volume 8, page 317, 'The essential knowledge', 1904*)

This speculative doctrine (the trinity doctrine) is probably prohibiting many from joining those whom God has ordained should be heralding His end time message. It certainly is dividing God's people. In fact the present policy of our church has led to disfellowshipping members who would not accept it. This is an extremely serious situation. It must be remedied immediately. Speculation concerning God has nothing to do with our salvation, neither has it anything to do with winning people to Christ. It serves no purpose whatsoever. It is completely unnecessary.

In 1904, in answering a question regarding the trinity doctrine, the editor of the British Present Truth wrote

“The quarrel over the Trinity in the early church was one of the steps by which the Papacy climbed to power.

The historian Stanley says of that ancient controversy "It was the excess of dogmatism founded upon the most abstract words in the most abstract region of human thought." Rival disputers were more anxious to fasten on each other the odious charge of heresy, than to understand one another. Fierce debate and narrow quibbling drove out brotherly love, and prepared the church for the spiritual tyranny of the Papacy which soon followed. This is a warning to Christians in all ages.” (*The Present Truth (UK), March 10th 1904, Questions and Answers, 'The Trinity'*)

Has not this trinity issue separated brethren? Has it not destroyed unity and love amongst God's remnant people? Of course it has – and may I say it has all been completely unnecessary. The present situation in Seventh-day Adventism is simply history repeating itself. Could it once again be preparing the way for “the spiritual tyranny of the Papacy”? After all, it is this same “excess of dogmatism” - much of which concerns sheer speculation - which is mainly to blame for causing this split today within our church. Why should we be dogmatic over mere speculation – and why should people be persecuted for not accepting it? Surely this cannot be said to be the will of God. Perhaps

this “[spiritual tyranny](#)” has already found its way into Seventh-day Adventism.

In 1904, with John Harvey Kellogg's beliefs in mind, these words were found in the Review and Herald (note the article title)

“Present in the simplicity of Christ the truths that he came to this world to proclaim, and the power of your message will make itself felt. Do not present theories or tests that have no foundation in the Bible. We have grand solemn tests to present. "It is written" is the test that must be brought home to every one.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 21st January 1904, 'Beware of fanciful doctrines'*)

The words “[It is written](#)” cannot be said of the trinity doctrine therefore it's “[foundation](#)” is not in the Bible. This is why it is not a test of fellowship or of anything else. All it achieves is unnecessary controversy and division. It is a doctrine that should not be taught.

The trinity doctrine - not needed to establish the divinity of Christ

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In order to establish the divinity of Christ correctly, there is no need of the trinity doctrine. All that needs to be done is to accept what the Bible tells us, which we know is silent about God being a trinity of persons - at least as depicted by the trinity doctrine. This was realised by the early Seventh-day Adventists. This is why they rejected the trinity doctrine but they did not deny the divinity of Christ.

The trinitarians hold a different view. They say that if the trinity doctrine is rejected then the divinity of Christ is rejected – at least as they view it. They say that their teaching is the only way to correctly depict that Christ is God.

Not so long ago, this claim was made very clear in one of our Sabbath School lesson studies. This is when it was said (we noted this previously)

“During the Kellogg crisis at the turn of the century, Ellen G. White's advice saved the church from pantheism. At the same time, almost by herself, she led the church from a semi-Arian (a belief that Jesus was not God) to a Trinitarian belief.” (*Sabbath School Lesson Study, 1st Quarter, 2009, Lesson 12, page 89. 'The Prophetic Gift', Main Contributor, Gerhard Pfandl, Associate Director of the SDA Biblical Research Institute*)

As also noted previously, this “[semi-Arian](#)” belief is referring to the teaching once held by us (as a denomination) that in eternity Christ came forth of the very being of God. This was the Sonship belief of early Seventh-day Adventists. Christ was said to be truly the Son of God. This was our denominational belief. It was still taught by us, in our publications, even in the 1950's. This can be seen in chapter 17 of the study found here

[A study of the Godhead – as it pertains to Seventh-day Adventism](#)

. A detailed study of my views concerning Christ can be seen in chapters 6 to 11.

Our trinitarian leadership today is saying that this Sonship belief is heresy. They say it is something that Ellen White led us to reject. The non-trinitarians deny both of these claims. They say our once held belief that Christ is truly the Son of God is in keeping with Scripture. They also say that throughout her ministry, Ellen White endorsed this Sonship belief – and that this can be very plainly seen in her writings.

As you are well aware Max, these two opposing views constitute a major part of our present denominational Godhead dispute. It is because of this that I have included this section in my response to your challenge.

This misrepresentation of our past beliefs concerning Christ can be seen in a recent Review article. This was amongst a clutch of other articles celebrating the 125th anniversary of the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference session. This misrepresentation was when it was stated

“But the two [Jones and Waggoner] lifted up Jesus—both His divinity and humanity. Concerning the former, they sought to herald His full divinity, maintaining, contrary to the prevailing Adventist sentiment, that Christ was not created but was eternal. For, Waggoner proposed, “no one who holds this view [that Christ was created] can possibly have any just conception of the exalted position which Christ really occupies.” (*Bill and Shawn Brace, Adventist Review, 10th October 2013, 'The Theological issues – another perspective'*)

This makes it look as though concerning Christ, Jones and Waggoner were teaching differently than what was generally taught at that time by Seventh-day Adventists. This is not the truth. It is not true either that at that time (1888), the prevailing belief amongst Seventh-day Adventists was that Christ is a created being. The belief of the majority was that Christ was begotten of God (truly the Son of God). Unfortunately – also adding to the confusion - Bill and Shawn Brace, whilst saying Jones and Waggoner taught that Christ is eternal (also that they taught Christ's full divinity), failed to point out that both of these men (Jones and Waggoner) believed Christ to be truly the Son of God – begotten of God in eternity – which as has been said, was only the same as almost every other Seventh-day Adventist believed at that time. In other words, in 1888, this Sonship belief was our denominational faith. Such it seems is the confusion of our present ministry concerning our past beliefs. In turn they are causing others to become confused.

A statement typical of this past Sonship belief was made as early as 1869. This was when J. G. Matteson wrote in the Review and Herald

“Christ is the only literal Son of God. "The only begotten of the Father." John i, 14.”(*J. G. Matteson, Review and Herald, October 12th 1869, 'Children of God'*)

He then explained

“He is God because he is the Son of God;” (*Ibid*)

The fact that Christ is truly the Son of God (begotten of God) is the proof of His divinity. This is the very thing that many of the Jews refused to accept (see John 5:17-18, 10:23-39). They maintained that the reason Jesus deserved to die was because of His claim of Sonship with God (Matthew 26:63-66, Mark 14:61-65, John 19:6-7). They said He was being blasphemous (Matthew 26:65, Mark 14:64, John 10:33). This shows they knew exactly what He was claiming. It also shows they realised He was not speaking figuratively but literally. Whilst Jesus may not have actually said the words “I am God”, they knew very well that His claim to Sonship with God was equivalent to saying ‘it. In other words, they knew very well that by claiming to be the Son of God, He was claiming to be God (see also John 8:58-59 and 10:33).

The Bible clearly tells us of the divinity of Christ. He is 'the I AM' of the Bible. Whilst space prohibits me detailing all the reasons for my belief here, they can be found in chapters 8 and 9 of the aforementioned study.

The early Seventh-day Adventists accepted the very thing that the Jews rejected. This is that Christ is truly the Son of God. This is why they believed Him to be fully and completely divine; God in the person of His Son.

In 1877, in an article called 'Christ equal with God', James White, the husband of Ellen White, wrote these words

“Paul affirms of the Son of God that he was in the form of God, and that he was equal with

God. "Who being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God." Phil. 2:6. The reason why it is not robbery for the Son to be equal with the Father is the fact that he is equal." (*James White, Review and Herald 29th November 1877, 'Christ Equal with God'*)

He also made it clear that

"If the Son is not equal with the Father, then it is robbery for him to rank himself with the Father." (*Ibid*)

In 1967, Russell Holt wrote a term paper for Dr. Mervyn Maxwell. In this paper he referred to the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists (concerning Christ) up to the time period of the death of James White (1881). He explained

"A survey of other Adventist writers during these years reveals, that to a man, they rejected the trinity, yet, with equal unanimity they upheld the divinity of Christ." (*Russell Holt, "The doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination: Its rejection and acceptance", A term paper for Dr. Mervyn Maxwell, 1969*)

Russell Holt was telling the truth about our history. Early Seventh-day Adventists did reject the trinity doctrine but they did not reject the divinity of Christ.

Many hold to the idea that if the trinity doctrine is rejected, then the divinity of Christ is rejected but nothing could be further from the truth. The divinity of Christ is easily proven from Scripture. It does not need a teaching such as the trinity doctrine – which cannot be found in Bible – to explain it.

Joseph Waggoner addressed this very issue. In his much acclaimed work concerning the atonement he explained (here he was referring to the "difficulty" of the trinitarians)

"Their difficulty consists in this: They take the denial of a trinity to be equivalent to a denial of the divinity of Christ. Were that the case, we should cling to the doctrine of a trinity as tenaciously as any can; but it is not the case." (*J. H. Waggoner, 'The Atonement in Light of Nature and Revelation', 1884 Edition, chapter 'Doctrine of a Trinity Subversive of the Atonement'*)

This is exactly how it is in Christianity. Many adhere to the idea that if a person is a non-trinitarian then he or she does not believe in the divinity of Christ but as Waggoner says here, this is clearly "not the case".

He then explained concerning the beliefs of the early Seventh-day Adventists

"They who have read our remarks on the death of the Son of God know that we firmly believe in the divinity of Christ; but we cannot accept the idea of a trinity, as it is held by Trinitarians, without giving up our claim on the dignity of the sacrifice made for our redemption." (*Ibid*)

This latter comment was made because many of those who term themselves trinitarian do not believe that a divine person died at Calvary. We shall return to this thought later.

In the Signs of the Times in response to a passing remark made in a Methodist book which said that Seventh-day Adventists did not believe in the divinity of Christ (probably because we were not trinitarian), Ellet Waggoner (Joseph Waggoner's son), wrote a series of articles defending what we did believe. This was in 1889. Waggoner and Alonzo Jones were then co-editors of the 'Signs'.

In the first article, Waggoner quoted John 1:1 which says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God". He also quoted verse 14 which says "And the Word

was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth". He then made this comment

"Indeed, we never heard of anyone who doubted that the evangelist has reference to Christ in this passage. From it we learn that Christ is God. That text alone, if we had no other, is sufficient to establish the divinity of Christ, for the word "divinity " means, "the nature or essence of God." We believe in the divinity of Christ, because the Bible says that Christ is God." (*E. J. Waggoner. Signs of the Times, March 25th 1889, article 'The Divinity of Christ'*)

This really is so easy to understand. We do not need a trinity doctrine to explain that Christ is God. All we need is Scripture. Many texts of Scripture can be found confirming this same belief. Again I can only refer you to the previously mentioned study for details (see chapters 5-9).

Did early Seventh-day Adventists, because of their belief that Christ is truly the Son of God, deny that He is God? Obviously not!

In a book published the next year (1890), Ellet Waggoner penned a statement concerning Christ that was representative of what was then believed and taught by Seventh-day Adventists. In fact the book itself is said to be representative of Waggoner's message at the now famous General Conference session held two years earlier at Minneapolis. He wrote

"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." (*E. J. Waggoner, Christ and His Righteousness, pages 21-22, 1890*)

At that time (1890), Seventh-day Adventists would not have disputed these words. This is because it was then our standard belief. On the next page he made clear

"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 ..." (*Ibid, page 23*)

After quoting John 1:14, Waggoner wrote these words

"No words could more plainly show that Christ was both God and man. Originally only Divine, He took upon Himself human nature, and passed among men as only a common mortal, except at those times when His Divinity flashed through, as on the occasion of the cleansing of the temple, or when His burning words of simple truth forced even His enemies to confess that "never man spake like this man." (*Ibid page 24*)

It can clearly be seen from the above - and much more could be cited from our past literature saying exactly the same - that early Seventh-day Adventists did not deny the divinity of Christ, neither did they deny that Christ is God Nevertheless, in spite of all this evidence, the idea is continually presented, usually by the present-day trinitarians, that they did deny these things. This they do because these early Seventh-day Adventists held to the Sonship belief concerning Christ and rejected the trinity doctrine. The trinitarians obviously do not appreciate such reasoning. Strangely though (see above), Bill and Shawn Brace said that at Minneapolis in 1888, Waggoner sought to to herald the "full divinity" of Christ. This is even though Waggoner believed that in eternity Christ is begotten of God. This Sonship belief today is often referred to, by the trinitarians, as semi-Arianism. Personally I do not give it any such title.

The 2009 lesson study claims that throughout the time period we held this Sonship belief - which we did as God's remnant people for over 100 years - we were not, with regards to Christ, teaching the truth. This is the claim made today by those of our leadership.

One such remark was made by William Johnsson. This was when he was editor of the Review. He

wrote in an article called 'Present truth – Walking in the light' (here he was referring to our past Sonship belief)

“Only gradually did this false doctrine give way to the Biblical truth, and largely under the impact of Ellen Whites writings in statements such as “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. (Desire of ages p 530)” (William Johnsson, Adventist Review, January 6th 1994, Article ‘Present Truth - Walking in God’s Light’)

Johnsson is saying that the Sonship belief we once held concerning Christ (this was throughout the entire time period of Ellen White's ministry and for decades afterwards) is “false doctrine”. This is something I would like to think that the vast majority of Seventh-day Adventists would find very difficult to believe although this having been said, this today is what we are being asked to believe – by of course the trinitarians. I wonder how those ten's of thousands of past Seventh-day Adventists would respond if they knew that their beliefs and teachings concerning Christ were being said to be, by our present leadership, “false doctrine”?

The trinitarians, in attempting to prove that in her writings Ellen White depicts God as a trinity of divine beings (as in the trinity doctrine), have made a great deal of the above statement from the 'Desire of Ages'. Whilst it is too much to go into here, you will find my thoughts concerning this on pages 83-86 of the following study

[A study of the Godhead – as it pertains to Seventh-day Adventism](#)

I believe most would agree that if God had wanted us to change our beliefs, particularly those beliefs concerning Himself and of His Son, it would have been a very strange thing for Him to do if to achieve this objective He had led Ellen White to quite unobtrusively insert a single sentence in one of her books, thus leaving the reader to assume that what had been taught since our beginnings (1844) as God's remnant people was heresy.

If God had chosen to tell Seventh-day Adventists they were wrong in their beliefs, whether concerning Christ or their rejection of the trinity doctrine – then I am sure He would have found a far more noticeable way to do it. Wouldn't you agree? After all, it is said by the trinitarians that in no uncertain terms in the late 1800's Ellen White clearly stated that the Holy Spirit is a person – which was not then generally believed and taught by Seventh-day Adventists. Why not therefore, in the same manner, correct our views concerning Christ – if of course they were wrong?

It appears to me that anyone who is a thinking person will be wondering why it was, if throughout all those years we were teaching error concerning Christ, that Ellen White didn't just say so. After all, she was God's messenger – and she was amongst us for 71 years. As we noted earlier – and shall see again later - she said one of the purposes of the spirit of prophecy was to correct error. These thinkers will also be asking why it was that we only 'discovered' the truth about Christ (as well as the trinity doctrine of course) in her writings after she was dead.

These are very good questions. They are deserving of some very good answers.

There is also something else to ponder. It is not simply a case of why did Ellen White keep silent about these things but why did God keep silent? After all, He was the One who was inspiring her to write and counsel as she did. If all of this time (71 years) we were teaching error about Himself and His Son – thus deceiving thousands of people in the process (who were passing on this deception to others) – then why through His messenger did He not plainly say so? All of this does seem very strange (if it were true).

It becomes even more strange when it is realised that Ellen White made it abundantly clear that our Sonship belief concerning Christ is the truth. This was when in response to one accusation that Seventh-day Adventists did not believe in the divinity of Christ she explained

“This man may not have known what our faith is on this point, but he was not left in ignorance. He was informed that there is not a people on earth who hold more firmly to the truth of Christ's pre-existence than do Seventh-day Adventists.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 5th December 1893, 'An appeal for the Australasian field'*)

At this time (1893), this would have been assuring Seventh-day Adventists that what they were then teaching concerning Christ's pre-existence – which was that He is truly God's Son (begotten of God in eternity) – is the truth. What else could it have been saying to them? It is not that difficult to understand. This was now 49 years after Ellen White's initial call to the prophetic office.

Ellen White was simply confirming that what we were then teaching concerning Christ's pre-existence is in keeping with Scripture. She was obviously endorsing this Sonship belief. This is why, in her writings, can only be found support for this Sonship belief, not condemnation – although as we have seen from the above, our church leadership today, in opposition to what was said by her, is saying it is false doctrine (heresy). If you would like to read the background to Ellen White's statement – also read more of how she endorsed these Sonship beliefs - you can do so by reading chapter 14 of the study at the aforementioned link (see previous page).

Two years later in 1895, again confirming Seventh-day Adventists in their Sonship belief, Ellen White made this statement

“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, 30th May 1895, 'Christ our complete salvation'*)

Six weeks later she wrote (again confirming the same belief)

“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 9th July 1895 'The Duty of the Minister and the People'*)

In the penultimate statement it is said that Christ is “a Son **begotten** in the express image of the Father's person” whilst in the latter it says He “**was made** in the express image of his [the Father's] person”. This was the belief generally held at that time by Seventh-day Adventists. It was that because Christ is begotten of God (not created) He is God. In the Scriptures He is the only One said to be the “**express image**” of God's person. Nowhere is this said of the Holy Spirit. Christ therefore is the 'unique' Son of God. This is in keeping with the words of Jesus found in John 3:16. He claimed to be the one and only begotten (unique) Son of God (see also John 1:18). How else could Nicodemus have understood the Saviour's words?

Christ's Sonship was from eternity – not just from the incarnation or the resurrection. In keeping with this we have been told through the spirit of prophecy

“Satan well knew the position which Christ had held in Heaven as the Son of God, the Beloved of the Father; and that Christ should leave the joy and honor of Heaven, and come to this world as a man, filled him with apprehension. He knew that this condescension on the part of the Son of God boded no good to him.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 4th August 1887, 'Christ's Triumph in our Behalf'*)

We have also been told concerning Christ's pre-incarnate Sonship with the Father

“This fact the [fallen] angels would obscure, that Christ was the only begotten Son of God, and they came to consider that they were not to consult Christ.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 42, to Elder D. A. Parsons, April 29th 1910, as quoted in 'This day with God, page 128*)

According to what we have been told here, there was, in the courts of Heaven, a major controversy concerning the position held by Christ. Needless to say, this concerned His relationship to the Father (His Sonship). It was this “fact” - that He is truly the Son of God - that the fallen angels disputed. This same controversy was brought down to earth. This was when Satan disputed with Christ in the wilderness. This concerned Christ's Sonship with God (see Matthew 4:3, 6 Luke 4:3, 9). As we have seen from the above, this very same controversy continued throughout the entire time of Christ's ministry. It eventually led to His death (Matthew 26:63-66, John 19:6-7).

In contrast to the work of the fallen angels, the following was said of the angels who remained loyal

“They [the loyal angels] clearly set forth that Jesus was the Son of God, existing with him before the angels were created; and that he had ever stood at the right hand of God, and his mild, loving authority had not heretofore been questioned; and that he had given no commands but what it was joy for the heavenly host to execute.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 9th January 1879, 'The fall of Satan', see also Spirit of Prophecy Volume 1 page 17, 'The Fall of Satan'*)

Even now, whilst you are reading this document, Satan is still trying to obscure the “fact” that Christ is truly the Son of God – and many are being fooled by his deceptions. We each need to make sure he is not fooling us. Our eternal life may depend on it.

Note that this endorsement of Christ's Sonship with God was written by Ellen White as late as 1910. This was almost at the end of her ministry. This was also 12 years after the publication of 'The Desire of Ages'. This is the book in which our leadership claims she spoke of God as a trinity of divine beings (as in the trinity doctrine). Nothing could be further from the truth. We can see that late in her ministry, as she did earlier, she was still writing as a non-trinitarian – someone who believed that Christ is truly God's Son.

Some may say that this Sonship belief was once the truth (when we held it) but is not the truth today. This is impossible. If this was true yesterday then it must still be true today – else it wasn't true in the first place.

“That which was truth in the beginning is truth now. Although new and important truths appropriate for succeeding generations have been opened to the understanding, the present revealings do not contradict those of the past. Every new truth understood only makes more significant the old.” (*Ellen White, Review and Herald, 2nd March 1886, 'The Two dispensations'*)

In 1906, Seventh-day Adventists were counselled

“He who denies the personality of God and of his Son Jesus Christ, is denying God and Christ. “If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.” If you continue to believe and obey the truths you first embraced regarding the personality of the Father and the Son, you will be joined together with him in love.” (*Ellen G White, Review and Herald, March 8, 1906, 'A God of Knowledge, by Whom Actions Are Weighed'*)

This appeal was being made to Seventh-day Adventists living at that time (1906). They were being counselled that concerning God and Christ, they were not to change their beliefs. As has been said

so many times previously, this was when it was the majority belief that Christ is truly the Son of God, begotten of God in eternity.

Is Christ God? Of course He is but not in personality. In personality He is the Son of God. Jesus Himself said that the “only true God” is His Father (John 17:3). As Ellen White so aptly put it

“The Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of the Father, is truly God in infinity, but not in personality.” (*Ellen G. White, Manuscript 116, Dec. 19, 1905, ‘An Entire Consecration’, see also The Upward Look, page 367*)

This is the begotten faith (the Sonship belief) of the non-trinitarians. It is opposed to anything that can be termed trinitarian. The trinitarians would never accept such a statement. Take note that this was in 1905. Ellen White was not writing as a trinitarian. This was 7 years after the publication of 'The Desire of Ages'.

Here I would like you to do another little bit of reasoning with me. I believe it is very important. In 1903, the chief physician of Seventh-day Adventism, namely John Harvey Kellogg, published a book called 'The Living Temple'. Whilst we will not go into all the details here, this book was condemned as containing heresy. Ellen White wrote such as

“In the book "Living Temple" there is presented the alpha of deadly heresies. The omega will follow, and will be received by those who are not willing to heed the warning God has given.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Volume B No. 2, page 50, ‘Beware’*)

This “alpha” is obviously the first or beginning of “deadly heresies” that Ellen White said had found its way into Seventh-day Adventism. This was Kellogg's views of God and Christ. She said the “omega” would soon follow.

In another testimony concerning Kellogg's book she wrote

“I knew that the omega would follow in a little while; and I trembled for our people. I knew that I must warn our brethren and sisters not to enter into controversy over the presence and personality of God. The statements made in "Living Temple" in regard to this point are incorrect. The scripture used to substantiate the doctrine there set forth, is scripture misapplied.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Volume B No. 2, page 53, The foundation of our faith*)

Whatever it was that Ellen White saw was coming must have terrified her. Notice she associated this “omega” (the final heresy to come into Seventh-day Adventism) with beliefs concerning “the presence and personality of God”. She also associated it with the misapplication of Scripture - and as we shall see later, with the misapplication of her own writings. This is why she wrote to the teachers of the Emmanuel Missionary College (now Andrews University) saying

“The new theories in regard to God and Christ, as brought out in "The Living Temple", are not in harmony with the teaching of Christ.” (*Ellen G. White, September 23rd 1903, To the teachers in Emmanuel Missionary College, ‘A Warning of Danger’*)

This is where I am asking you to reason with me.

Ellen White referred to Kellogg's beliefs (regarding God and Christ) as “the alpha of deadly heresies” yet at this time (1903), just as we had been doing since our beginnings as God's remnant people (1844), we were teaching that Christ is truly the Son of God (begotten of the Father in eternity). Why therefore, if this Sonship belief is such a terrible heresy (which is what our church today is saying), was Ellen White referring to what Kellogg had written concerning God and Christ as the “**the alpha** [the first or beginning] of deadly heresies” within Seventh-day Adventism? In

other words, why didn't she say our Sonship belief was the 'alpha' of these heresies? After all, we had been teaching it for 60 years. Do you see the point I am making? This was now 1903.

She says here that Kellogg's views of God and Christ, as found in his book 'The Living Temple', "are not in harmony with the teaching of Christ". This is why she condemned this book. Yet never did she say this of our denominational books. This is even though these books (and the articles in our periodicals etc.) were replete with the belief that Christ was truly the Son of God (begotten of God in eternity). In fact she only said that this Sonship belief is true. What is this telling us today?

In Volume 5 of the Testimonies, Ellen White spoke of a Brother D who claimed to have 'special light'. She commented

"Error is never harmless. It never sanctifies, but always brings confusion and dissension. It is always dangerous. The enemy has great power over minds that are not thoroughly fortified by prayer and established in Bible truth." (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies Volume 5, page 292, 1889, 'Deceitfulness of Sin'*)

Don't you think that if Ellen White had thought our belief concerning Christ was error (our Sonship belief) that she would have said so? Do you believe that if she had thought this belief to be wrong she would have endorsed it the way she did? It does not seem possible that anyone could draw this conclusion but some do – particularly the trinitarians amongst us. They say that even though she did not speak out against this belief – and even though she did endorse it - it is still error. Notice the title of the testimony.

In 'Steps to Christ' are found these words

"We may have the witness in ourselves that the Bible is true, that Christ is the Son of God. We know that we are not following cunningly devised fables." (*Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, page 112, 'What to do with doubt'*)

When Kellogg went public with his beliefs (in 'The Living Temple'), Ellen White came down upon him (and his beliefs) like a 'ton of bricks' yet never did she even intimate that what Seventh-day Adventists were teaching concerning Christ was error – not throughout the entire 71 years of her ministry. In fact as we have seen above, she actually said that our belief concerning Him (our Sonship belief) was the truth – meaning it was in keeping with Scripture and with what God had shown her.

In fact at the 1905 General Conference session, when our sanctuary and Godhead beliefs were under attack from 'within', Ellen White said this to the delegates (probably with John Harvey Kellogg's beliefs in mind)

"Men may put their own interpretation upon God, but no human mind can comprehend him. This problem has not been given us to solve. Let not finite man attempt to interpret Jehovah. Let none indulge in speculation regarding his nature. Here silence is eloquence. The omniscient One is above discussion.

Christ is one with the Father, but Christ and God are two distinct personages. Read the prayer of Christ in the seventeenth chapter of John, and you will find this point clearly brought out. How earnestly the Saviour prayed that his disciples might be one with him as he is one with the Father. But the unity that is to exist between Christ and his followers does not destroy the personality of either. They are to be one with him as he is one with the Father. By this unity they are to make it plain to the world that God sent his Son to save sinners. ***The oneness of Christ's followers with him is to be the great, unmistakable proof that God did indeed send his Son into the world to save sinners. But a loose, lax religion leaves the world bewildered and confused.***" (*Ellen G. White,*

Review and Herald, 1st June 1905, 'The work in Washington')

From what we have read above, it is easily seen that even after having been called to the prophetic office for almost 61 years (she was now 77 years of age), Ellen White did not consider our Sonship belief to be heresy – not even that late in her ministry. As can be seen, even many years after the publication of 'The Desire of Ages', she was still confirming this Sonship belief to be true. Never either did she say we were wrong in rejecting the trinity doctrine.

We really do need to reason these things through for ourselves and not allow others to do our thinking for us. To do the latter could be fatal to our soul. It could lead to us losing our eternal life.

The most important teaching

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It should go without saying that Ellen White regarded our beliefs concerning Christ to be of the utmost importance. If she had thought they were wrong in any way she would have very plainly said so. If you remember, we noted above she counselled the editors of our periodicals

“Publish the truth; do not publish error.” (Ellen G. White, Letter 179, 1904)

Needless to say, Ellen White never thought we were in error on these things (our Sonship belief and our rejection of the trinity doctrine). In fact she did counsel (this was when referring to the 'Southern work' in America)

“Our policy is, Do not make prominent the objectionable features of our faith, which strike most decidedly against the practises and customs of the people, until the Lord shall give the people a fair chance to know that we are believers in Christ, that we do believe in the divinity of Christ, and in his preexistence.” (Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies to Ministers and Workers, Series A No. 5 page 4, 1896)

From these remarks can be seen the importance Ellen White placed on letting people know that Seventh-day Adventists believed in the divinity of Christ. She must have regarded this belief (our Sonship belief concerning Christ) to be the most important teaching of the Scriptures – and therefore of our faith. This was only three years after saying we were teaching the truth concerning Christ's pre-existence (see page 41).

This Sonship belief is in keeping with what was said by Jesus. He said His church would be built upon the belief that He is the Son of God (see Matthew 16:14-17). This is the truth that many of the Jews rejected. It was for claiming to be the Son of God that Jesus was said to be worthy of death (Matthew 26:63-66, Mark 14:61-65, John 19:6-7). Christians today are still being persecuted for believing it. This is hardly surprising. Jesus warned His followers that they would be persecuted for believing His words (Matthew 10:16-20). The passing of 2000 years has made no difference.

We can see therefore that even though early Seventh-day Adventists rejected the trinity doctrine, they did not reject the divinity of Christ. As Ellen White said, it was imperative that this was made known. This was so that some of the prejudice against us would be broken down. This was a prejudice that often came about because of what she described as *“the objectionable features of our faith”*.

One of these *“objectionable features”* must have been the fact that we were not a trinitarian denomination. This is probably why it was often thought we did deny Christ's divinity. This is why Ellen White said it was imperative to let people know we did not deny it. If we had been a trinitarian denomination, this would not have been questioned.

It must also be said that because the majority of the popular churches were trinitarian – and because we were a non-trinitarian denomination - the claim that we were God's remnant people

was probably far more difficult to accept than if we had been trinitarian. This is because it was generally believed, as it still is by many today, that the trinity doctrine is the most important teaching of the Christian faith. More often than not, those who did not accept it were deemed non-Christian (perhaps even a cult).

It is also more than likely that our outspoken views against the trinity doctrine would have prevented many people from even giving consideration to our message. This is obviously one of the reasons, perhaps the main one really, why Ellen White stressed that before anything else we should let people know we believed in the divinity of Christ. She knew how much prejudice there was against those who rejected the trinity doctrine. Even so, these early Seventh-day Adventists, including Ellen White, knew very well they could not espouse this teaching. This is because they knew it could not be supported by Scripture.

It must be remembered that Ellen White was amongst us for 71 years therefore if we had been wrong in rejecting the trinity doctrine, God had plenty of time to counsel us through her that we were wrong. Never once though did the message come from Him saying we were in error. In fact the trinity doctrine, as we hold it today, was not voted in as part of our fundamental beliefs until as late as 1980. This was 136 years after our beginnings as God's remnant people - which was 65 years after the death of Ellen White.

Ellen White's purpose in making it known that as a denomination we did believe Christ to be divine was to break down any *unnecessary* prejudice. As she obviously knew, being a non-trinitarian denomination was enough to be the cause of immense prejudice. Apart from anything else (as we noted above was said by Joseph Waggoner), she obviously knew it normal for trinitarians to believe that if the trinity doctrine is rejected then the divinity of Christ is rejected. She also knew that this reasoning was erroneous.

It is very unfortunate that even today this very same erroneous reasoning is still going on - even amongst Seventh-day Adventists. It is inflamed by remarks such as those found in the previously mentioned Sabbath School lesson study (this is where it was said that early Seventh-day Adventists did not believe that Christ is God). This is causing tremendous confusion amongst our people today. This type of heedless remark is also causing unnecessary division in the church. It seems to me that those who are intent on propagating this kind of misinformation are attempting to discredit those who do not accept the trinity doctrine. This I believe is a major contributory factor to the division amongst us. This is a very sad situation.

With respect to Christ's divinity, James White, Ellen White's husband, saw very little difference between what was believed by the early Seventh-day Adventists (with their Sonship belief) and what was believed by the trinitarians. As he said when commenting on the difference in beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists and Seventh-day Baptists

"The S.D. Adventists hold the divinity of Christ so nearly with the trinitarians that we apprehend no trial here." (James White, Review and Herald, Oct 12th 1876, 'The two bodies - The Relation Which the S.D. Baptists and S.D. Adventists Sustain to Each Other')

Although we were then a non-trinitarian denomination, we certainly did not regard Christ to be any less divine than did the trinitarians. We believed Him to be fully and completely divine.

It is more than likely though that many trinitarians would reason differently. As has been said above, they usually posit the idea that if the trinity doctrine is rejected, then the divinity of Christ is rejected (at least the way they see it) – either that or they try to make it appear that the non-trinitarians believe Christ to be some sort of semi-divine being. When all is said and done, Christ is either fully divine or He is not divine at all. There is no such thing as a semi or partial divinity. In exactly the same way as you and I are fully human, the pre-existent Son of God was fully divine.

The reality is that during the time of Ellen White's ministry - also for decades following (this was

whilst we were still a non-trinitarian denomination) - our denominational belief was that Christ is God. This was the Sonship belief of past Seventh-day Adventists. This can be seen in chapters 13 and 14 of the aforementioned study on my website. This same Sonship belief is still held today by myself and many other non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists. Like the early Seventh-day Adventists, we do not in any way deny the complete and full divinity of Christ.

There is seen therefore, in the above 2009 Sabbath School study, a very serious misrepresentation of the beliefs of the early Seventh-day Adventists. It implies of course that anyone today who holds to this Sonship belief is in error.

There is also seen the on-going claim it was Ellen White who led our church away from the so called 'error' of this Sonship belief and into trinitarianism. In fact it is said she accomplished this "almost by herself". It must be remembered though that throughout the entire time of her ministry (1844-1915) we remained a non-trinitarian denomination. In fact in 1936, this Sonship belief was still said to be, by our church, the official belief of Seventh-day Adventists. You can read about this in chapter 16 of the above study. It must be remembered too that Ellen White said that this Sonship belief was correct. This obviously played a major part in assuring the early Seventh-day Adventists that what they taught concerning Christ was in keeping with Scripture. This is one of the reasons why this belief was held by us for so long. It was deemed to have the approval of Heaven.

As we move into the final two sections of this brief appraisal of the trinity doctrine, it is important to remember that this teaching 'hangs' on one basic concept. This is that the personalities of the Godhead are 'one in substance', meaning having one existence of being together (this is the three-in-one concept of God). This is obviously meant in the sense that together they constitute 'one unit' (one God or one divine being) meaning that none of them can ever become separated from each other. This is the reasoning that denies that there ever was a risk to Christ's existence in Him becoming incarnate. As we noted above was said by Ekkehardt Mueller "each person of the Godhead is *inseparably connected* to the other two".

Important observations

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In November 1905, Ellen White wrote a testimony (one of many) concerning John Harvey Kellogg. He said he had come to believe in the trinity doctrine. This was when the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still a non-trinitarian denomination. In this testimony she quoted from a very popular book of that time. It was called the 'The Higher Christian Life'. Its author was a Presbyterian minister by the name of William Boardman.

In his book in support of the trinity doctrine, Boardman used various three-in-one illustrations from nature although in fairness to him, he did have certain reservations concerning their usage. He wrote

"These likenings are all imperfect. They rather hide than illustrate the tri-personality of the one God, for they are not persons but things, poor and earthly at best, to represent the living personalities of the living God. So much they may do, however, as to illustrate the official relations of each to the others and of each and all to us. And more. They may also illustrate the truth that all the fulness of Him who filleth all in all, dwells in each person of the Triune God."(William Boardman, *The Higher Christian Life, part ii 'How attained, chapter 1, page 105*)

Ellen White, in her testimony concerning Kellogg (who remember had said he had come to believe in the trinity doctrine), quoted these very same 'three-in-one' illustrations (as they are in Boardman's book) and made this remark

"All these spiritualistic representations are simply nothingness. They are imperfect, untrue. They weaken and diminish the Majesty which no earthly likeness can be compared to. God can not be compared with the things His hands have made. These are mere earthly things,

suffering under the curse of God because of the sins of man. The Father can not be described by the things of earth.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies, Series B, No. 7, page 62 ‘Come out and be separate’ 1906*)

I am sure you will agree that this is very similar to the words Boardman wrote.

Boardman had said though that whilst these illustrations hid more than they reveal concerning “the tri-personality of the one God”, they did show “the **official relations of each** [of the persons of the Godhead] **to the others**” - which is what the trinity doctrine is all about (and obviously why Boardman had used them to depict God as a trinity). Ellen White obviously disagreed with him. She said that these illustrations are “**simply nothingness**”.

Following on from his three-in-one illustrations, Boardman made the following summary statement (in upper case as it is here). Note particularly the highlighted words. This is as they are in his book.

“THE FATHER IS ALL THE FULNESS OF THE GODHEAD INVISIBLE.
THE SON IS ALL THE FULNESS OF THE GODHEAD MANIFESTED.
THE SPIRIT IS ALL THE FULNESS OF THE GODHEAD MAKING MANIFEST.”
(*William Boardman, The Higher Christian Life, part ii ‘How attained, chapter 1, page 105*)

Boardman's words will sound very familiar to Seventh-day Adventists – especially to those involved in our Godhead dispute. This is because Ellen White used them as a basis for those things she wrote in this testimony to Kellogg – which in turn is used by the trinitarians to so say prove she spoke of God as a trinity of persons (as depicted by the trinity doctrine). As we shall see now though, this testimony proves exactly the opposite.

Here is what she wrote (this was after condemning the three-in-one illustrations Boardman had used)

“The Father is all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and is **invisible** to mortal sight.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B No.7, page 62 1906 ‘Come out and be Separate’*)

Notice she does not say as Boardman did (see above) that the Father is invisible. She said that the Father “**is invisible to mortal sight**” (meaning invisible to fallen humanity). This is saying two different things. It is actually saying that God the Father can be visibly seen – or to put it in another way, the Father is not an intangible spirit. As Jesus said, the angels in Heaven behold the face of our Father (see Matthew 18:10). Boardman had previously said that the Father is not only invisible but also without form (see page 101 of his book). This is not in keeping with what Jesus has told us, neither is it in keeping with what God has revealed through the spirit of prophecy. We shall see this later.

God's servant continued (again elaborating on what Boardman had written)

“The Son is all the fullness of the Godhead **manifested**. The Word of God declares Him to be “the express image of His person.” "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Here is shown the personality of the Father.” (*Ibid*)

Note the last sentence. It is very important. It is in keeping with the begotten (Sonship) belief of the past and present non-trinitarians. She then wrote concerning the Holy Spirit (again with Boardman's words in mind – see above)

“The Comforter that Christ promised to send after He ascended to heaven, is the Spirit in all the fullness of the Godhead, **making manifest** the power of divine grace to all who receive

and believe in Christ as a personal Saviour.” (*Ibid*)

In describing the three persons of the Godhead, Ellen White used the same basic premise as did Boardman (the Father **invisible** – albeit to mortal sight, the Son all the fullness of the Godhead **manifested**, the Holy Spirit **making manifest** this fullness) but each time she elaborated on his words.

In keeping with Scripture, she did make abundantly clear that the fullness of the Godhead dwells in all three divine personalities yet illustrations that make God appear three-in-one, as in the trinity doctrine, were condemned by her. In other words, she went as far as can be shown from Scripture but no further. Boardman had thought that these illustrations were necessary to show “**the truth that all the fulness of Him who filleth all in all, dwells in each person of the Triune God**” (see above) but Ellen White obviously disagreed with him. She said that not only were they unnecessary but also derogatory.

Now we come to the part that is very interesting. This shows once again that Ellen White did not support the trinity doctrine – not even in the early 1900's.

William Boardman, in summary of what he had previously written, penned these words (this was in keeping with his belief in the trinity doctrine)

“The persons are not mere offices, or modes of revelation, but living persons of the living God.” (*William Boardman, the Higher Christian Life, part II 'How Attained, chapter I, 'For me: then what must I do? Page 105)*

This is basic trinitarianism. This is exactly what is believed by today's trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists – that all three persons constitute “**the living God**”(one divine being). Notice though how Ellen White modified Boardman's words. Instead of saying as Boardman did that the three persons are “**living persons of the living God**” she wrote

“There are three living persons of the heavenly trio;” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B No.7, page 62 1906 'Come out and be Separate'*)

It is very important to understand the way that Ellen White modified Boardman's statement. It is very significant. Do you see what she did?

Boardman had said that the three personalities were “**living persons of the living God**”. Ellen White changed this to read “**living persons of the heavenly trio**”. This is saying two entirely different things.

So what is the difference?

The difference is that Boardman's statement is trinitarian whilst Ellen White's statement is not. In other words, Boardman spoke of God as a three-in-one being - three “**persons of the living God**” (one divine being) - whilst Ellen White spoke of the three as a “**heavenly trio**”. In brief she removed from Boardman's words the trinitarianism (the one divine being belief).

Today the Seventh-day Adventist Church is saying that Boardman is correct. They are saying that this is the way God should be described – meaning as three persons in one living God (as in the trinity doctrine). As Gerhard Pfandl explains as Associate Director of our Biblical Research Institute

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

From what we have read above, Ellen White would not agree with this statement. She would say it needed to be changed in exactly the same way as she had changed Boardman's words.

The fact that Ellen White used Boardman's words and deliberately changed them (removed the trinitarianism from them – as well as condemning the three-in-one illustrations) shows incontrovertibly that she did not agree with the trinity doctrine – and this was in 1905, which was 7 years after the publication of her book 'The Desire of Ages'. This is the book in which she supposedly revealed, according to many Seventh-day Adventist trinitarians, that God is a trinity of divine beings (as in the trinity doctrine). Needless to say, this reasoning is not true.

Unfortunately as well, because they do not understand how Ellen White changed Boardman's words, many use her ["three living persons of the heavenly trio"](#) statement as so-called proof that she was a trinitarian when a correct understanding of it shows she was actually denying the trinity doctrine. This is why it is always very important to understand the background to Ellen White's words.

Many say that by this time (1905), Ellen White was a confirmed trinitarian but all the evidence says otherwise. The evidence is that through to her death in 1915, she remained a non-trinitarian. We shall also see this in the next section.

That in this testimony Ellen White was addressing the trinity doctrine is reasonably easy to see.

Kellogg had made a confession of coming to believe in the trinity doctrine. In this testimony concerning his beliefs, Ellen White quoted and condemned the type of three-in-one illustrations used by trinitarians to show how God is a trinity. To achieve this she quoted from a book supporting the trinity doctrine – and as we have seen, in using Boardman's words to express what God had shown her, deliberately removed from them the trinitarianism. For those who wish to know the truth, the evidence is overwhelming. In this testimony concerning Kellogg, Ellen White was addressing the trinity doctrine – and condemning it.

We know that this was not simply her own opinion she was expressing. This is because she wrote (this was prior to quoting and condemning the three-in-one illustrations of God)

["I am instructed to say," \(Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B No.7, page 62 1906 'Come out and be Separate'\)](#)

God obviously gave her instruction to write as she did. For this He must have had a very good reason. We need to think on these things. This testimony was written in 1905.

The next year (1906), the following statement was made in the Review and Herald

["There are light and glory in the truth that Christ was one with the Father before the foundation of the world was laid. This is the light shining in a dark place, making it resplendent with divine, original glory. This truth, infinitely mysterious in itself, explains other mysterious and otherwise unexplainable truths, while it is enshrined in light, unapproachable and incomprehensible. \(Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 5th April 1906 'The Word Made Flesh'\)](#)

Here we are counselled that to us (to fallen humanity), the oneness that exists between God and Christ is ["enshrined in light, unapproachable and incomprehensible"](#). This is as good as saying that even if we had it explained to us we would still not be able to understand it – although as Ellen White says here, the acceptance of its existence does explain a lot of things that otherwise would be unexplainable. This 'oneness' therefore is beyond human comprehension. This is the reason why the trinity doctrine should never have been formulated. It attempts to define and explain it.

Even if we were to conclude that the Father and the Son are of 'one substance', we would still not be able to define what this would actually mean. This is because we have no knowledge of what constitutes divinity (divine nature).

Speaking personally, although I believe that God and Christ are two separate persons I still believe there is between them a certain 'oneness of existence' although I would not go as far as saying I can explain it. Certainly I would not explain it as in the trinity doctrine. This is because first of all the Bible is silent concerning this oneness (therefore it would be presumptuous to speculate) whilst secondly, 'trinity oneness' forbids Christ being separated from the Father. This I believe is neither in keeping with Scripture or what we have been told through the spirit of prophecy. We shall return to this particular thought later.

Take note that in this 'oneness', Ellen White does not include the Holy Spirit. This is even though by this time (1906), on a number of occasions, she had said He is 'a person'.

Interestingly, in 1993, Raoul Dederen (professor emeritus, systematic theology, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University) made the following remark in the Adventist Review (the article was called 'The Mystery of the Trinity')

"Some will tend to resist this doctrine [the trinity doctrine] because it is not found expressly stated in the Scriptures. But although it may indeed at first view seem contradictory, let me urge my modern readers not to reject it prematurely on the premise that it does not make sense, for without it some biblical statements would remain meaningless." (Raoul Dederen, Adventist Review, August 26th 1993, 'The Mystery of the Trinity')

Again this is the admittance that the trinity doctrine cannot be found in Scripture. Understandably, this is the very reason why many "resist" it.

Why I say Dederen's remarks are interesting is because he said that without the trinity doctrine, certain passages of Scripture "would remain meaningless". On the other hand, Ellen White said that without accepting there is a 'certain oneness' between God and Christ, there are truths in the Bible which would remain unexplainable. This sounds very much the same but there is a difference.

The difference is that the trinitarians (like Dederen) say they understand this oneness. They say their trinity doctrine explains it. Completely opposite to that, through the spirit of prophecy, we have been told it is unexplainable.

Who and what you believe is up to you. Speaking personally, I go along with what was said by Ellen White. This is because regarding God's being – the nature of divinity, the Godhead etc., the Scriptures are totally silent. This is why we should not make any attempt to explain it. As far as the trinity doctrine itself is concerned, this is the difference between the belief of the trinitarians and the belief of the non-trinitarians. We, the non-trinitarians, believe that the Scriptures depict the Father and the Son as two separate individuals. We reject any teaching that lends itself to contradicting this belief. This we believe is not only in keeping with Scripture but also with the counsel that has come from God through Ellen White. We shall see this now.

An early 1900's emphasis

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Following Kellogg's confession of believing the trinity doctrine (1903), Ellen White often emphasised that throughout the Scriptures, God and Christ are spoken of as two separate individuals – and who can argue with that conclusion? This is exactly how they are spoken of in Scripture.

In 1903, the very year that Kellogg made his confession, she wrote this to the teachers at Emmanuel Missionary College (now Andrews University)

"The new theories in regard to God and Christ, as brought out in "The Living Temple", are not in harmony with the teaching of Christ. The Lord Jesus came to this world to represent the Father. He did not represent God as an essence pervading nature, but as a personal being. Christians should bear in mind that God has a personality as verily as has Christ." (*Ellen G. White, September 23rd 1903, To the teachers in Emmanuel Missionary College, 'A Warning of Danger'*)

Take a special note of what Ellen White said that "Christians should bear in mind". It is that God and Christ each have a personality of their own – meaning they are two separate individual beings. The context in which she wrote this was Kellogg's book 'The Living Temple'. To those who have read the previous section, her emphasis will hardly be surprising.

The next year, Ellen White penned these words (this was under the heading 'Testimony of Scripture')

"The Scriptures clearly indicate the relation between God and Christ, and they bring to view as clearly the personality and individuality of each." (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies Volume 8, page 268*)

Then, after quoting Hebrews 1:1-5 (showing again that God and Christ are two separate persons – also that Christ is the only begotten Son of God) she makes very plain

"God is the Father of Christ; Christ is the Son of God. To Christ has been given an exalted position. He has been made equal with the Father. All the counsels of God are opened to His Son." (*Ibid*)

This is pointing out that these verses in Hebrews say that Christ received everything through His inheritance as the Son of God. This is the Sonship belief of the non-trinitarians. This is why it can rightfully be said that Christ is God Himself in the person of His only begotten Son. Again this reveals God and Christ as two separate persons (two individual beings).

God's messenger then quoted John 5:17-20 (which records Jesus telling the Jews that God was His Father) and wrote

"Here again is brought to view the personality of the Father and the Son, showing the unity that exists between them." (*Ibid page 269*)

On the same page she wrote (after quoting John 17:2-23)

"Wonderful statement! The unity that exists between Christ and His disciples does not destroy the personality of either. They are one in purpose, in mind, in character, but not in person. It is thus that God and Christ are one.

The relation between the Father and the Son, and the personality of both, are made plain in this scripture also:

"Thus speaketh Jehovah of hosts, saying,
Behold, the man whose name is the Branch:
And He shall grow up out of His place;
And He shall build the temple of Jehovah; . . .
And He shall bear the glory,
And shall sit and rule upon His throne;
And He shall be a priest upon His throne;
And the counsel of peace shall be between Them both."
Zechariah 6:12, 13, A. R. V. 270" (*Ibid*)

Note the final line of verse 13. Only two divine beings are mentioned– not three.

In her journal the following year, after quoting John 1:1-4, 14-16 and John 3:34-36, again Ellen White wrote of God and Christ as two separate beings

“In this Scripture God and Christ are spoken of *as two distinct personalities, each acting in their own individuality.*” (Ellen G. White, Manuscript 760, Diary note, October 31st 1905)

In one particular sermon she is reported as saying

“Our ministers must be very careful not to enter into controversy in regard to the personality of God. This is a subject that they are not to touch. It is a mystery, and the enemy will surely lead astray those who enter into it. We know that Christ came in person to reveal God to the world. *God is a person and Christ is a person.* Christ is spoken of in the Word as “the brightness of His Father’s glory, and the express image of His person.” (Ellen G. White, Talk given on May 18th 1904, Sermons and talks, Volume one, page 343, Manuscript 46, 1904, ‘The Foundation of our Faith’)

In 1905, Ellen White said this to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference session

“And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” *All through the Scriptures, the Father and the Son are spoken of as two distinct personages.* You will hear men endeavoring to make the Son of God a nonentity. He and the Father are one, but they are two personages. Wrong sentiments regarding this are coming in, and we shall all have to meet them.” (Ellen White, Review and Herald, 13th July 1905, ‘Lessons from the First Epistle of John’)

Did you notice each time that only two divine beings are mentioned?

I believe that the point Ellen White is making is very easy to see. This is that the Scriptures clearly portray God and Christ as two separate individual beings (two separate personages), each having a personality of their own. In none of these statements is the Holy Spirit mentioned. Note the date. It was the early 1900’s. This was 60 years after her initial call to the prophetic office. Ellen White was still speaking as a non-trinitarian. Yet with reference to her remarks that God had shown her in vision that He and Jesus are two separate individuals, each having a form of their own, you say (your emphasis)

“The fact that Mrs White says she saw in vision that Jesus and the Father are quite separate individuals bothers me no end. I cannot accept that they are just as she said she saw them. There is nothing Trinitarian about the whole scene she describes. In fact it is quite contrary to it. On the other hand it is quite in line with the teaching of the Semi-Arians. I have wondered whether what she saw was in a dream which she mistook for a vision?” (Max Hatton article, ‘Excuse me but I have a very worrying problem’ www.restorationministry.com/studies/maxhatton.doc)

All the non-trinitarians quite agree with you. There is nothing trinitarian about what Ellen White said God had shown her. This is one of the reasons why we are not trinitarian. As she did clearly warn though (see above), with regards to God and Christ being two separate individuals, wrong sentiments were on their way into Seventh-day Adventism. As we noted previously Max, this “Trinitarian concept” (as in the trinity doctrine) that you say is “found in Scripture” is not really found there. It is something invented by the trinitarians.

With regards to the trinity doctrine therefore, the only thing that can be said in summary is that it is very much a speculative teaching - and speculating, particularly when it concerns God's being, is not something God wants us to do. If God has chosen not to reveal something then He has a very

good reason for it. This is where it should remain. This is why any attempt to explain the nature of His existence – as attempted by the trinity doctrine - is definitely a wrong thing to do. Speculation will, if it is accepted, inevitably lead to erroneous conclusions being drawn. I could say more but I am sure that you can see the point I am making.

I would now like to offer for your consideration, my approach to Ellen White's writings. This will continue to answer your question - "[Why do you not honour Ellen White and confine your arguments to a study of the Bible alone?](#)" (as per your challenge). I will also comment on some of the things you say about these writings. This is because it seems to me that what you are saying is that in her 'early years', as you put it, she was a non-trinitarian whilst in her later years she changed her views and became a trinitarian. This I believe is far from factual. I believe her writings show that she was still writing statements that can only be termed 'non-trinitarian' in her later years – even in what many would say was her 'old age'.

Again my apologies for this response being so lengthy but there are so many different aspects to consider. I do believe that all of them needed to be addressed.

The writings of Ellen White

The problem

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Max - I will be the first to admit that there is a 'certain problem' with God blessing our church with a modern-day messenger – the latter meaning of course Ellen White. This is because we now have two sets of writings, namely the Scriptures and the spirit of prophecy, both of which were God ordained to exist. Whilst there is never a real problem accepting the Scriptures to be the supreme authority for everything we believe and teach, it is inevitable that regarding Ellen White's writings, there will be amongst us a 'certain tension' (perhaps better said contention) concerning their usage.

This is because those like me who believe that God gave to Ellen White the gift of prophecy will, quite naturally, regard her writings with the highest of respect. This is only to be expected. After all, her work, like the work of the Bible writers, is the end result of the leading of God's Holy Spirit. Like the authors of the Scriptures, she was an inspired writer. This was explained in the first section of this article.

To some though, this particular claim appears to be a problem. They feel that because of it, the authority of the Bible is being undermined – or at least being challenged. Thus it is, in the minds of some, a contest is generated between the two sets of writings.

In blessing our church with the gift of prophecy, God did not ordain that such a situation should exist. His intention was that His gift should be of help to us, not a cause of division or dissension.

As the apostle Paul explained, these gifts were given

[“For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:” Ephesians 4:12-13](#)

Jesus said that the unity of His followers (His church) is of paramount importance (see John 17:11, 21-23). This is why the gifts of the Spirit have been given. They serve to unite, not to separate. God seeks the unity of His people.

As is explained in Volume 1 of the Testimonies (here the reference is to those who did not accept

that Ellen White's visions were of God and opposed those who did believe)

“God's people should not cringe and yield, and give up their liberty to such disaffected ones. God has placed the gifts in the church that the church may be benefited by them; and when professed believers in the truth oppose these gifts, and fight against the visions, souls are in danger through their influence, and it is time then to labor with them, that the weak may not be led astray by their influence.” (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies Volume 1, page 328, 'Northern Wisconsin'*)

Here can be seen the importance of the gift of prophecy. In fact when it is reasoned through, how else, other than being important, can a gift from God be regarded? Even amongst humanity it is an insult to the giver if a gift is refused or unappreciated, Notice the reference to “disaffected ones”. These are very strong words but again it shows the importance placed upon this gift. Ellen White was referring to those who even though they had no first-hand experience of the visions, fought against them. She said that “souls are in danger” from the influence of “professed believers in the truth” who oppose the gifts. This certainly shows the importance she placed upon the visions. She was talking here in terms of salvation.

At the latter end of her ministry In 1907, in an article in the Review and Herald confirming the faith of Seventh-day Adventists in the spirit of prophecy, are found these words (note the article is called 'A message to the Churches')

“A wealth of moral influence has been brought to us in the last half century. Through his Holy Spirit the voice of God has come to us continually in warning and instruction, to confirm the faith of the believers in the spirit of prophecy. Repeatedly the word has come, Write the things that I have given you to confirm the faith of my people in the position they have taken.”(*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 18th July 1907, 'A message to the Churches'*)

The article continued

“Time and trial have not made void the instruction given, but through years of suffering and self-sacrifice have established the truth of the testimony given. The instruction that was given in the early days of the message is to be held as safe instruction to follow in these its closing days. Those who are indifferent to this light and instruction must not expect to escape the snares which we have been plainly told will cause the rejecters of light to stumble, and fall, and be snared, and be taken. If we study carefully the second chapter of Hebrews we shall learn how important it is that we hold steadfastly to every principle of truth that has been given.” (*Ibid*)

These remarks were clearly intended to convey to the readers of the Review the importance of God giving to His remnant church the gift of prophecy. This is as it was manifested in the life and work of Ellen White. Notice particularly the warnings concerning indifference to the light as it came from God through her.

One of the reasons why God blessed our church with this gift was so that we, His remnant people, would be united on one platform of truth. This is why the writings of someone given this gift will continually point us to the Scriptures. These writings will also promote the Bible as the ultimate test for all Christian teachings and experiences. In brief, the gift will serve to draw us to the Scriptures - not away from them. Its design, as Ellen White says above, is to benefit the church.

This does not mean that we should regard her writings as being on the same level as Scripture where usage is concerned. The Bible remains, as it has always been, the supreme test of all beliefs and experiences. The Scriptures therefore are the final authority for all doctrine. Once this is understood, the function and place of the writings of Ellen White, particularly in relation to Scripture, becomes far less problematic.

All of our principle beliefs should be able to be proven from using Scripture alone – meaning without support from any other source. In this sense, the writings of Ellen White are secondary to Scripture. This is why they do not constitute 'a threat' to the authority of the Bible.

This having been said, if it is accepted that Ellen White was given the gift of prophecy, then surely it must be believed that her writings carry an authority above the likes of that which you and I (who have not been given the gift of prophecy) have written. Either way, in common with everyone's writings, Scripture must test Ellen White's writings. It is not the other way around.

In the introduction of 'The Great Controversy' are found these words

"In his Word, God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of his will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience." (*Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, page vii, 'Introduction'. 1911 edition*)

After quoting 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17 it was further explained

"Yet the fact that God has revealed his will to men through his Word, has not rendered needless the continued presence and guiding of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, the Spirit was promised by our Saviour, to open the Word to his servants, to illuminate and apply its teachings. And since it was the Spirit of God that inspired the Bible, it is impossible that the teaching of the Spirit should ever be contrary to that of the Word." (*Ibid*)

Note well the final sentence.

Concerning the on-going work of the Holy Spirit it is also made clear

"The Spirit was not given—nor can it ever be bestowed—to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the Word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. Says the apostle John, "Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world." 1 John 4:1." (*Ibid*)

Anything that the Holy Spirit led Ellen White to write will never contradict Scripture. It will only be in harmony with it. This is why she added

"And Isaiah declares, "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Isaiah 8:20.

Certainly a person given the gift of prophecy will never attempt to have his or her writings take the place of the Bible; neither would they seek to depreciate the Scriptures. If someone is seen to do these things, it will be known that they are not of God.

"The Testimonies are not to belittle the word of God, but to exalt it and attract minds to it, that the beautiful simplicity of truth may impress all." (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies Volume 2, page 605, 'A solemn dream'*)

Some believe that reading the spirit of prophecy has a tendency to depreciate the value of Bible study but this could not be further from the truth. After all, is our understanding of Scripture due to our own personal efforts alone or is it because the Holy Spirit illuminates our minds (our understanding) as we study God's Word? Surely it is the latter. As the servant of God pointed out (see above) "... the Spirit was promised by our Saviour, to **open the Word** to his servants, to **illuminate and apply** its teachings". As she wrote in another place

“No one is able to explain the Scriptures without the aid of the Holy Spirit.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 18th February 1890, 'How to meet a controverted point of doctrine'*)

Ever since the Scriptures were given, this has been the work of the Holy Spirit. God inspired their existence. He can explain them.

If God, through someone to whom He has given the gift of prophecy, illuminates our understanding of Scripture – also enlightens us as to the best way to live our lives - then why should this be a problem to us? Surely we should be very grateful to God for these things. He only ever seeks to help us, not to hinder.

It is important to remember that as long as the probation of mankind continues, so too in the church the work of the Holy Spirit will continue. This is why when we say 'the Bible only', we must allow in the church the work that the Scriptures assign to the Holy Spirit – meaning that His presence will continually be at work to lead, enlighten, correct and unite. In other words, if we say 'Bible only', then we must allow in the church the work of the Holy Spirit through the gifts. If we disallow (forbid) the gifts, we shall then depart from the position of 'Bible only'.

In the Review and Herald of October 3rd 1854, James White (its editor) published an article that was first published in the Review of April 21st 1851. It was to remind its readers the position our church took regarding the gifts of the Spirit. After repeating the article he pointed out

“The position that the Bible. And the Bible alone, is the rule of faith and duty, does not shut out the gifts which God set in the church. To reject them is shutting out that part of the Bible which presents them. We say, Let us have a whole Bible, and let that, and that alone, be our rule of faith and duty. Place the gifts where they belong, and all is harmony.” (*James White, Review and Herald, October 3rd 1854*)

It seems to me that even apart from this, the very knowledge of the claims of Ellen White should encourage us to read and search the Scriptures for ourselves. It should at least lead us to check to see if what she has written is in keeping with them.

It must be clearly said that the writings of Ellen White are not to be used as a substitute for Bible study. They were given to aid our understanding of Scripture – also to help us understand today what God requires of us - and to explain what is best for us as far as daily living is concerned. As it explains in Volume 4 of the Testimonies

“In His providence the Lord has seen fit to teach and warn His people in various ways. By direct command, by the sacred writings, and by the spirit of prophecy has He made known unto them His will. My work has been to speak plainly of the faults and errors of God's people.” (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies Volume 4 page 12, 'Bible biographies'*)

There are those who have said 'Bible only' in an attempt to deny the visions – either that or they say it to downplay the influence of Ellen White's writings. In 1863, Uriah Smith addressed this problem. He explained

" THE Bible, and the Bible alone," " The Bible in its purity," "The Bible a sufficient and only reliable rule of life," &o., &o., is now the great cry of those who are giving vent to their opposition to the visions, and are working with their might to prejudice others against them. This course reminds us of the low tricks and maneuvers resorted to by political demagogues to gain their nefarious ends.” (*Uriah Smith, Review and Herald, January 13th 1863, 'Do we Discard the Bible by Endorsing the Visions?'*)

Two paragraphs later he said

“The Protestant principle, of "The Bible and the Bible alone," is of itself good and true; and we stand upon it as firmly as any one can; but when re-iterated in connection with outspoken denunciations of the visions, it has a specious appearance for evil. So used it contains a covert insinuation, most effectually calculated to warp the judgment of the unguarded, that to believe the visions is to leave the Bible, and to cling to the Bible, is to discard the visions.”
(*Ibid*)

In other words, the phrase 'Bible only' can be used quite deceptively. It can be used in such a way to actually deny 'the Bible only'. It can be used to deny where God tells us in the Scriptures He will place gifts in His church (see Romans 12:6, 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, 14:1, Ephesians 4:11-16 etc.).

In order to explain the relationship of Ellen White's writings to Scripture, Smith gave what I believe is a very helpful illustration. He wrote

“Suppose we are about to start upon a voyage. The owner of the vessel gives us a book of directions, telling us that it contains instructions sufficient for our whole journey, and that if we will heed them, we shall reach in safety our port of destination.” (*Ibid*)

The same writer went on to explain that upon opening the book we find general instructions for a safe voyage. We also see it says that when we approach the end of our journey, the owner has arranged for a pilot to come on board to guide us through some 'dangerous waters'. The book says that we must pay heed to this pilot's instructions. Smith continues

“With these directions we reach the perilous time specified, and the pilot, according to promise, appears. But some of the crew, as he offers his services, rise up against him. 'We have the original book of directions,' say they, 'and that is enough for us. We stand upon that, and that alone; we want nothing of you.' Who now heed that original book of directions? those who reject the pilot, or those who receive him, as that book instructs them? Judge ye.”
(*Ibid*)

As Smith said, “**Judge ye**” who is following the original instructions of the book. Is it those who accept the pilot or those who say they do not need him?

When all is said and done, how a person perceives the writings of Ellen White is something personal to each individual. How we accept and apply them we each need to decide for ourselves.

This having been said, it does appear to me Max that your understanding of these writings is often very misleading. You make it sound as though Ellen White was not even given the gift of prophecy. Admittedly this may not be your intention or your confession but this I find is the way you come across. I say this because your reasoning appears to reduce her writings as having no more value than the writings of anyone else. You even appear at times to promote your own writings as having more credibility than those of Ellen White. I will return to this point later.

Surely the fact that God blessed Ellen White with the gift of prophecy must elevate her writings above the norm – meaning above the likes of that which you and I (who have not been given this gift) have written? This seems only reasonable to believe. After all, if you had been given the gift of prophecy - and had written about those things which God had shown you in visions and dreams etc. - wouldn't you regard what you had written as 'something above' the norm? Surely there must be a difference between the writings of someone who has been given this gift and the writings of someone who has not been given it. If not, then why place any particular value upon the gift?

An individual responsibility

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Although already mentioned, I believe it very important to emphasise that *how* Ellen White's

writings are accepted – also *how* they are used and understood – and *how* each applies it to their own individual lives – everyone is free to choose for themselves. It is the same with the Scriptures. We cannot *tell* people how these writings are to be understood and applied. This is something they need to do for themselves.

We have no right either to attempt to compel others to accept our own personal view of these writings. This is regardless of how ‘rational’ we may believe that view to be. We may give advice but when all is said and done, individuals need to draw their own conclusions.

This entire issue revolves around personal freedom and personal responsibility – meaning each one of us is free to respond in any way we wish to the things God reveals although it must be emphasised that the Scriptures say each of us will eventually answer to God for our responses (Matthew 12:35-37, Romans 14:12, 2 Corinthians 5:10). This is whether this revelation comes through the Scriptures or through the writings of Ellen White or for that matter through anyone else. This is why I did say previously, we cannot *tell* people how they are to treat these writings. This is not our prerogative. God has given to each one of us freedom of choice – and He values it as priceless.

As He says to every individual who would care to read the Scriptures

“Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21

It is very important to heed this counsel. We each need to investigate very carefully for ourselves the claims of those who say they have a message from God. We also need to closely investigate any teaching claimed to be in keeping with Scripture. This is an individual responsibility. No one can do this on behalf of someone else.

It will be seen later Max that you say some of the things written by Ellen White, particularly concerning God and Christ, are not Biblical. Like me though, you are not to be a judge of this for anyone else. Each person needs to make up his or her own mind about these things. Neither you nor I are a criterion for what others believe.

Lay Sister White to one side

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Max - The crux of your challenge, to the non-trinitarians, is your claim that when studying the Scriptures, particularly regarding the formulation of doctrine, Ellen White’s writings should be laid aside (ignored).

You say in your challenge (as we have already read above)

“My challenge is for Seventh-day Adventist anti-Trinitarians to provide a clear reply to the question – “Why do you not honour Ellen White and confine your arguments to a study of the Bible alone?” To be a genuine Seventh-day Adventist you must do this.” (Max Hatton, Website article, ‘A Challenge to Anti-Trinitarians in the Seventh-day Adventist Church’)

As already pointed out though, this is only the same as saying we should ignore the light that has come from God through Ellen White but why would we want to do such a thing? It has also been suggested that if all of our principle beliefs can be proven by using Scripture alone, then why should taking her writings into consideration be a problem? As long as we can prove our doctrines by using Scripture alone, her writings can never be regarded as a threat to the authority of Scripture. You would also need to apply your counsel to the trinitarians. They too, according to your reasoning, would not be genuine Seventh-day Adventists if, when considering doctrine, they employed Ellen White's writings .

As a proof of your assertion (that Ellen White has told us that when considering doctrine we should ignore everything she has written) you quote her as saying (this is as it is found in your article 'Ellen G. White and the Trinity Doctrine'; also in your article challenging the non-trinitarians)

["Lay Sister White to one side. Do not quote my words again as long as you live until you can obey the Bible. When you make the Bible your food, your meat, and your drink, when you make its principles the elements of your character, you will know better how to receive counsel from God. I exalt the precious word before you today. Do not repeat what I have said, saying, "Sister White said this," and, "Sister White said that." Find out what the Lord God of Israel says, and then do what He commands." 3 Selected Messages, page 33](#)

This is taken from a talk given by Ellen White in the library of Battle Creek College. It was a pre-conference talk, given the day prior to the opening of the 1901 General Conference session. It was given to those who were then the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This was shortly after she had returned to America from Australia. It was the first time for 10 years she had directly addressed our leadership. She was then 73 years of age.

Unfortunately, as others have done previously, you have removed these words from their context – and in so doing you have made it look as though she is saying something that I believe she never meant her words to convey. For those who would like to read her talk, an edited version is found [here](#)

[Ellen White Library talk \(edited\)](#)

A verbatim report can be found [here](#)

[Ellen White Library talk \(verbatim\)](#)

The quotation you used (as above) is from the edited version. This is as it is found in Selected Messages Book 3.

The above reveals that the words ["Lay Sister White to one side"](#) were spoken by Ellen White in the backdrop of her saying to our church leadership that they were failing to heed messages that they had received from God. These were messages (testimonies) that had come from God through her. She said that although these messages had been accepted as coming from God (this was not the problem), our leadership were not implementing them (this was the problem) – which means in one sense she was actually reproofing our leadership for 'laying her words to one side' (not heeding the messages). As she said to these leaders

["But when we see that message after message given by God has been received and accepted, yet no change has been made, we know that new power must be brought into the regular lines." \(Ellen G. White, Pre-conference talk, Battle Creek College Library, 1st April 1901\)](#)

It is evident that at conference level there were very serious problems – and from what is said here, it is also evident that this had partly come about because messages (testimonies) from God were being ignored (not being implemented). In the way you have used Ellen White's words, this is not the idea you convey.

You make it look as though in the penultimate quote she is actually counselling her listeners to lay her words to one side – which is obviously not what she is saying. This is what happens when statements from Ellen White's writings are taken out of their context. It very often makes them appear to be saying something quite different (sometimes even the opposite) to what she intended them to mean.

Even a cursory glance at these words reveals that Ellen White was not suggesting that her writings should be ignored (laid aside). What she was actually saying to our leadership was that they were to “obey the Bible” by making the principles they found therein the elements of their character. She said that when they did this, they would then “know better how to receive counsel from God”. This was obviously the counsel they had been failing to implement. In other words, she was appealing to the leadership to allow Bible principles to control their lives so that in turn they would “know better” how to heed the messages that had come from God through her that they had not been putting into action. She was certainly not telling them to ignore these messages. She was saying that to a degree, the reason why problems existed at Conference level was because the messages were being ignored (not being implemented). If you read it for yourself you will see what I mean.

It appears that our leadership were using Ellen White herself (as opposed to the counsel that came from God through her) as a criterion for how to live their lives. She said some were saying she ate cheese and drank tea. From what was also said by her, it appears that this was being used by them as an excuse to do the same. In other words, it was being said, “if Ellen White can do it so can I”. As she explained

“The Lord desires His people to adopt the light on health reform, leading out in paths of self-denial and self-sacrifice.

Oh, how it has hurt me to have blocks thrown in my way in regard to this subject. Some have said, “Sister White eats cheese, and therefore we are at liberty to eat cheese.” I have tasted cheese once or twice, but that is a different thing from making it an article of diet. Once when at Minneapolis, I sat down at a table on which there was some cheese. I was quite sick at the time, and some of my brethren told me that they thought if I ate a little cheese, it might do me good. I ate a small piece, and from then it has been reported in large assemblies that Sister White eats cheese.

I have not had meat in my house for years. But do not give up the use of meat because Sister White does not eat it. I would not give a farthing for your health reform if that is what it is based upon. I want you to stand in your individual dignity and in your individual consecration before God, the whole being dedicated to Him. “If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.” (*Ellen White, Library talk at Battle Creek College, 1st April 1901*)

The point Ellen White is making is reasonably easy to see. We should not be doing something just because someone else does it – not even if that person is God's chosen messenger. Instead we should be heeding the counsel that we believe has come from God. This is our bounden duty.

The additional problem is Max (as I see it) is the way you have quoted these words. Not only have you removed them from their original setting but you have also omitted sentences immediately previous to them (as quoted in 'Selected Messages Book 3') that would show she was addressing those who were walking contrary to God's counsel. These two sentences are

“How can the Lord bless those who manifest a spirit of “I don't care,” a spirit which leads them to walk contrary to the light which the Lord has given them. But I do not ask you to take my words. ” (*Ibid*)

As I have said, these sentences come immediately before the words you quote. If they had been quoted, at least it would have shown she was not saying we were to ignore the light that has come from God through her but take notice of it. She was saying that God could not bless those who did not heed this light.

Even apart from this, there is nothing in her talk that would suggest she had the formulation of doctrine in mind. Her talk was aimed at (a) the way the Conference was operating (b) the work that

was not being done that should have been done (c) the lack of love shown between each other (d) the animosity that existed between the ministry and our chief physician John Harvey Kellogg (e) God's intention that our health message should not become separated from the gospel message and (f) that she should not be made a criterion for the way people live their lives. There is more – but you can read this for yourself.

Much of the talk was given over to admonishing our church leadership to return to Bible principles – also to heed the counsel they had been 'laying aside'. When it is reasoned through, why has God given us counsel? Certainly it is not so that we can ignore it. That really would not make any sense. As she wrote concerning the 1901 conference

“At the General Conference, held in Battle Creek in 1901, the Lord gave His people evidence that He was calling for reformation. Minds were convicted, and hearts were touched; but thorough work was not done. If stubborn hearts had then broken in penitence before God, there would have been seen one of the greatest manifestations of the power of God that has ever been seen. But God was not honored. ***The testimonies of His Spirit were not heeded.*** Men did not separate from the practices that were in decided opposition to the principles of truth and righteousness, which should ever be maintained in the Lord's work.” (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies Volume 8 page 97, 'Counsels often repeated'*)

Ellen White wrote much concerning the 1901 General Conference session, particularly John Harvey Kellogg's refusal to heed the testimonies of God's Spirit. In fact two years after the conference, when writing to Dr. Paulson telling him to beware of the influence that Kellogg was having on him, she wrote the following

“Before I went to the [1901] Conference, the Lord declared to me: "In going to Battle Creek, and bearing your testimony in clear, decided lines, all who hear the instruction given by you, the Lord's messenger, will be left without excuse. I will put my words in your lips." I went, and the Lord gave me a message to bear before the thousands assembled.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter to Dr. Paulson, October 14th 1903*)

Ellen White was certainly not telling people to lay her words to one side. She would have only done exactly the opposite. She knew it was counsel from God.

As has been said, there is nothing whatsoever in the talk that would give the impression that she was saying, as you suggest she was saying, that when studying Scripture and giving consideration to doctrine we should lay her words to one side (ignore the light that came from God through her). I can only repeat, read it for yourself and you will see what I mean.

As in the alpha so in the omega

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In the early 1900's (this was only a couple of years after Ellen White gave the above library talk), a very serious crisis developed within Seventh-day Adventism. John Harvey Kellogg, then still our chief physician, was publicly presenting views of God that were deemed to be unscriptural. In defence of his beliefs (that God's presence was everywhere, even in the things that God had created), Kellogg said that he had come to believe in the trinity doctrine. The latter is a teaching that at that time was not generally believed by Seventh-day Adventists. We noted above that Ellen White wrote a testimony concerning Kellogg in which she addressed this teaching. This shows she was not only aware of this situation (with Kellogg and the trinity doctrine) but also the problems involved with it.

It appears that Kellogg came to believe that the Holy Spirit was no different in nature than the Father or the Son – hence He reasoned that by saying it was the Holy Spirit (and not the Father) that was personally present in the things that God had created, this was the same as saying God was in everything.

Kellogg also claimed that those things he had written in his recently published book 'The Living Temple' (concerning the presence and personality of God) was only in harmony with that which Ellen White had written. God's messenger refuted this claim. She said that Kellogg was misrepresenting her words.

In one testimony written against the contents of Kellogg's book she wrote

"I am compelled to speak in denial of the claim that the teachings of "Living Temple" can be sustained by statements from my writings. There may be in this book expressions and sentiments that are in harmony with my writings. And there may be in my writings many statements which, taken from their connection, and interpreted according to the mind of the writer of "Living Temple," would seem to be in harmony with the teachings of this book. This may give apparent support to the assertion that the sentiments in "Living Temple" are in harmony with my writings. But God forbid that this sentiment should prevail." (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies, Series B, No.2, page 53, 'Our Foundation', 1904, see also Review and Herald, 22nd October 1903, 'Teach the Word'*)

The expression used here - "taken from their connection" – is equivalent to us saying today that words are being 'taken out of their context'.

In 1906, Ellen White wrote a letter to Butler, Daniells and Irwin explaining that one of the reasons why God had led her to write as she did (in our publications and books etc.) was so that future newcomers to the faith would not be seduced by error. In other words, contained in her books was established truth. She then gave this warning

"There are some, who upon accepting erroneous theories, strive to establish them by collecting from my writings statements of truth, which they use, separated from their proper connection and perverted by association with error. Thus seeds of heresy, springing up and growing rapidly into strong plants, are surrounded by many precious plants of truth, and in this way a mighty effort is made to vindicate the genuineness of the spurious plants." (*Ellen G. White, Letter 136, April 27th 1906 to G. I. Butler, A. G. Daniells, and G. A. Irwin, 8MR page 35*)

Then, after saying that this is how it was with the errors in Kellogg's book ('The Living Temple'), she wrote

"The seductive fallacies of Satan undermined confidence in the true pillars of the faith, which are grounded on Bible evidence. Truth is sustained by a plain "Thus saith the Lord." But there has been a weaving in of error, and the use of scriptures out of their natural connection, in order to substantiate fallacies, which would deceive, if possible, the very elect." (*Ibid*)

The above is highlighting the misuse of both Scripture and Ellen White's writings.

Ellen White also referred to Kellogg's reasoning as the 'alpha of deadly heresies'

"In the book "Living Temple" there is presented the alpha of deadly heresies. The omega will follow, and will be received by those who are not willing to heed the warning God has given." (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Volume B No. 2, page 50, 'Beware'*)

Whilst there is much that could be said concerning this "alpha of deadly heresies", particularly Kellogg's perceptions of God and where God's presence is etc., suffice to say for now that he attempted to have people believe that what he had written in his book was in keeping with that which Ellen White had written.

It is only reasonable to believe that as it was in 'the alpha', so too it will be in 'the omega' - meaning in order that Ellen White's words should be taken to mean something other than she intended them to mean, we can expect that again they will be "taken from their connection". We noted above she said she wanted her writings to be made available to us so that we could refute those who attempt to use her writings to bring in false teachings. This is why we need to know for ourselves what she has written, and not take someone else's word for it.

In another testimony, also written against 'The Living Temple', we find this warning

"I knew that the omega would follow in a little while; and I trembled for our people. I knew that I must warn our brethren and sisters not to enter into controversy over the presence and personality of God. The statements made in "Living Temple" in regard to this point are incorrect. The scripture used to substantiate the doctrine there set forth, is scripture misapplied." (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Volume B No. 2, page 53, The foundation of our faith*)

This was written almost 110 years ago. Here we are informed, "the omega would follow in a **little while**". Whatever Ellen White saw coming must have terrified her. She said because of it she "trembled for our people". She must have regarded it as extremely serious.

Notice too that Ellen White said that the Scriptures Kellogg had used as evidence for his beliefs, was "scripture misapplied". Kellogg was obviously using the Scriptures (this was not the problem) but he was making a wrong application of them (this was the problem). This too we can expect to happen in the omega.

Although people use Scripture - also claim that for their beliefs they use 'the Bible alone' – this is not proof that what they are teaching is correct. This is whether it has to do with the trinity doctrine or anything else. Scripture can be misapplied – just as Ellen White's writings can be misapplied.

An official explanation regarding Ellen White's writings

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In the October 1981 issue of the 'Ministry' magazine (a magazine dedicated to serving the ministry of our denomination and of other churches), articles were included explaining how Seventh-day Adventists understood the inspiration and usage of Ellen White's writings. The front cover carried the title "How does God speak?"

William Johnsson, then Associate Editor of the magazine, wrote one of the articles. He said in his article (explaining how her writings are of a higher level of authority than those of other Christian writers)

"Ellen White's writings, therefore, are not to be put on a level with those of other great Christian commentators. Although she often deals with subjects common to Luther, Calvin, and Wesley, and although there is often similarity of ideas, Ellen White's work differs in two respects — claim to superintendence by the Holy Spirit and to authority. "I was shown," she often commences; and, unlike the writers mentioned above, she received many of her messages through visions and dreams." (*William G. Johnsson, Ministry, October 1981, 'How does God speak?'*)

Notice the reference here to authority and superintendence of the Holy Spirit. This was spoken of in the first section. He continued

"She wrote with authority; to disregard or treat lightly her words would be to spurn the word of the Lord. Thus she could write: "Sister White is not the originator of these books. They contain the instruction that during her lifework God has been giving her. They contain the precious, comforting light that God has graciously given His servant to be given to the world." (*Ibid*)

Johnsson also quoted Ellen White as claiming (this was when she was accused of basing her reproofs of the church on gossip she had heard)

“I do not write one article in the paper expressing merely my own ideas. They are what God has opened before me in vision—the precious rays of light shining from the throne.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 67.” (*Ibid*)

Ron Graybill, then assistant secretary of the Ellen G. White Estate, wrote another of these articles. It was called ‘Ellen White’s role in Doctrine formation’. It is very illuminating and well worth reading. It also has a bearing on your challenge to the non-trinitarians in our church.

He made these two important observations (the paragraphs are not contiguous)

“One of the most helpful aids for Seventh-day Adventists is the writings that the Spirit of prophecy led Ellen White to pen. Her writings have proved instructive and worthwhile in the church's efforts to formulate its doctrines. She offers the church aid, direction, and insight for this process.” (*Ron Graybill, Assistant secretary of the Ellen G. White estate, Ministry, October 1981, ‘Ellen White’s role in Doctrine formation’, page 8*)

“We believe the revelation and inspiration of both the Bible and Ellen White's writings to be of equal quality. The superintendence of the Holy Spirit was just as careful and thorough in one case as in the other.” (*Ibid*)

Concerning how Ellen White’s writings should be used in doctrinal discussions he explained

“The writings that the Spirit of prophecy inspired Ellen White to pen certainly should not be ignored in doctrinal debate. They promise us valuable insight into the message of Scripture, they highlight the importance of certain themes and truths. In the final analysis, however, those debates that are ended must be ended by appeals to Scripture alone.” (*Ibid, page 9*)

Graybill refers to doctrinal debates that “are ended”. I take this to mean that when studying Scripture – also formulating doctrine – whilst it is good and proper to give consideration to Ellen White’s writings, any conclusions drawn, when the debate is ended, should be able to be proven from using Scripture alone. This I believe is a very well balanced view. Graybill makes the point that in doctrinal debates, Ellen White’s writings “certainly should not be ignored” - which appears to be the opposite of what you are saying.

Interestingly he added

“Since we believe that Mrs. White received revelations equal in quality to those received by Bible writers, though different in purpose and function, we bring her counsel and witness to bear on all stages of the doctrine-forming process— not as a final authority, but as a source of influence and insight. If we are to do this in the most effective, useful, and unifying way, we must also make Ellen White's writings the subject of careful study.” (*Ibid, page 10*)

Again I would consider this very-well balanced counsel.

Take particular notice of the final sentence. It is very true. It is all too easy to select a little bit of Ellen White’s writings from here, a little bit from there, ending up with a perverted view of what she really meant (or perhaps better said, a perverted view of what God has revealed through her) – albeit it may be done so innocently. To be able to correctly present what she has written on any particular subject, we need to have a very broad and a very well balanced knowledge of what she wrote respecting it.

We are not though to appeal to her writings as a final authority for what we believe and teach. As Graybill said, we use her writings “not as a final authority, but as a source of influence and insight”. This is only the same as he had said previously – which was that doctrinal debates “that are ended must be ended by appeals to **Scripture alone**”.

If you would like to read these articles in their entirety, you can do so at the following link.

http://docs.adventistarchives.org/docs/MIN/MIN19811001-V54-10__B.pdf?q=docs/MIN/MIN19811001-V54-10__B.pdf#view=fit

Ellen White’s writings – not to be used in public evangelism

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It has clearly been established that we are not to use Ellen White's writings as a final proof of doctrine – which I quite agree is the counsel that came through God's servant. This is because everyone's writings, including Ellen White's (also yours and mine), are ultimately to be tested by Scripture. They are not a final authority.

This is one reason we should not, as proof of doctrine, use Ellen White's writings in anything that can be described as public evangelism. This is because the public in general would not have knowledge of the source of these writings therefore would have no confidence in them (which is quite understandable). This is when we need to use the Bible only. This is just one of the reasons why we need to be able to prove our doctrines by using the Bible alone. Saying “Ellen White said” will not mean anything to those who have no knowledge of her or who do not accept that she was called to the prophetic office.

We must remember too that even though the various denominations in the world hold different beliefs from each other, most recognise the Bible as the ultimate authority for what Christians believe. We must not even give the impression that in this respect we believe differently.

The counsel we have received is

“In public labor do not make prominent and quote that which Sister White has written as authority to sustain your positions. To do this will not increase faith in the testimonies. Bring your evidences, clear and plain, from the Word of God. A Thus saith the Lord is the strongest testimony you can possibly present to the people. Let none be educated to look to Sister White, but to the mighty God, who gives instruction to Sister White.” (*Ellen G. White, letter to Brother and Sister Colcord, Letter No. 11, January 16th 1894*)

It appears from what Ellen White wrote here that at that time her words were being taken as authoritative – else why make these remarks?

Note she says here that it was “the mighty God” who was giving her instruction – also that she did not say do not quote her amongst those who accept her calling. She simply said do not quote her (in support of a belief) amongst those who do not know of her work. She counselled us that for our beliefs we are to bring the evidence “clear and plain, from the Word of God”.

This is much the same as she said in Testimonies Volume 5

“The first number of the Testimonies ever published contains a warning against the injudicious use of the light which is thus given to God's people. I stated that some had taken an unwise course; when they had talked their faith to unbelievers, and the proof had been asked for, they had read from my writings instead of going to the Bible for proof. It was shown me that this course was inconsistent and would prejudice unbelievers against the truth. The Testimonies can have no weight with those who know nothing of their spirit. They should not be referred to in such cases.” (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies Volume 5, page 669, 'The Nature and Influence of the Testimonies'*)

She also wrote in the Testimonies (again this was with reference to evangelical work)

"In all the sermons and in all the Bible studies, let the people see that on every point a plain "Thus saith the Lord" is given for the faith and doctrines which we advocate." (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies Volume 6, page 68, 'Evangelistic Work'*)

This is one of the reasons why our church was once a non-trinitarian denomination. It was realised that the trinity doctrine was dealing with a subject regarding which, God is silent. This is why we would not have anything to do with it. When it comes to the trinity doctrine, there is no such thing as a "Thus saith the Lord". This teaching is merely the speculations of finite humanity.

Whilst we must not quote Ellen White (as authoritative) when talking to those who have no knowledge of her calling, it should be very much different amongst 'believers'. Those who have the confidence that her work is of God should be able to, like mature Christians, intelligently discuss, the things she has written – although even then her words are not to be used as the final authority of our beliefs. Even amongst 'believers' we must be able to prove our teachings from using Scripture alone.

So we are all in agreement on this one Max. We all agree, as Ellen White wrote here in this letter (this is why I say to you – please show us in the Bible where those 'trinity essentials' can be found)

"Let all prove their positions from the Scriptures and substantiate every point they claim as truth from the revealed Word of God." (*Ellen G. White, Letter 12, 1890*)

As has been said though, this does not negate the use of the spirit of prophecy writings – as long as they are used correctly. After all, they are a gift from God.

Ellen White had no qualms about her writings being given to the public. As she wrote herself (when being accused of suppressing some of her early writings)

"So far from desiring to withhold anything that I have ever published, I would feel great satisfaction in giving to the public every line of my writings that has ever been printed." (*Ellen G. White, Ms 4, 1883, written from Healdsburg, California*)

What God expects

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If God, through Ellen White, has given us light on the Scriptures (or on anything else), it is only reasonable to believe He will hold us responsible for the way we treat that light. This is something I would have expected a minister of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to help our people understand. After all, our church does make the claim that she was given the gift of prophecy. This is the same gift given to the writers of the Bible. They all wrote under the leading of the Holy Spirit. I would have thought therefore that those of our ministry would be encouraging our members to read her works – not in any way discouraging them from doing so.

Prayerful Bible study should be the 'meat and drink' of every Christian - and if we are obedient to what God requires of us, it will lead us to investigate (and determine for ourselves) if the life and work of Ellen White is in harmony with someone whom God has called to the prophetic office. In this way we will be obeying the very thing He has counselled we should do (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21). This having been done, God says we should then "hold fast that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

James White, in 1856, in answer to a brother in the church who was saying that some thought that he, James White, was placing less estimation on the visions that should be done, explained that some were putting forth the idea that as a church we were using the visions to test people. In his reply he said

“To say unqualifiedly that they [the visions] are a test, and carry out the principle with those who know nothing of their teachings, spirit and fruit, at this time when the world is full of manifestations as near the genuine as Satan can get up, would be the wildest fanaticism. On the other hand for those who profess to believe them to say they will in no wise be tested by them, is most irrational. I still say that the Bible is my rule of faith and practice, and in saying this, I do not reject the Holy Spirit in its diversities of operations.” (*James White, Review and Herald, February 14th 1856, 'Communications'*)

He also said concerning the visions

“I believe them to be the property of the church, and a test to those who believe them from Heaven.” (*Ibid*)

James White was making a valid point. If we say we have light from God then it must be believed He expects us to live up to that light. As Jesus Himself said

“... If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.” John 9:41

We need to think on these things.

Notice James White said that even though the Bible was his “rule of faith and practice” he did not reject “the Holy Spirit in its diversities of operations”. In other words, we can accept a modern manifestation of the spirit of prophecy as a valid method of God communicating with His people (whether given to Ellen White or anyone else) yet still say our beliefs are 'Bible only'. In Testimonies Volume 2 we find these words

“We are accountable only for the light that shines upon us. The commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus are testing us.” (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies Volume 2, page 693, 'No probation after Christ comes', see also Review and Herald, 13th July 1897*)

We must remember too that Jesus said we are to teach to others those things He has led us to observe (Matthew 28:19-20). This would mean of course, if we did come to believe that God did give to Ellen White the gift of prophecy, that we are called to, at an appropriate time, share our faith with others. This is so that they in turn may benefit from the gift - meaning benefit from the light that comes from God through these writings. Surely if we have personally been blessed by these writings (this gift), we would desire others to experience the same blessing.

A gift from God

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To maintain an even balance on this topic, we need to remember it was God Himself who gave to Ellen White the gift of prophecy - thus He spoke to (and through) her in dreams and visions etc. It should go without saying therefore that it is His desire that we should heed the things He has revealed in this way.

As the Scriptures tell us, God gave us gifts of prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers etc.

“For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;” Ephesians 4:12-14.

These gifts are given through the ministration of the Holy Spirit. They are to help us grow into

strong, mature Christians (“[the perfecting of the saints](#)”), a people who will be able to withstand the deceptions and wiles of Satan. They are also meant to unite us as a people. This is the purpose of these gifts. This is why God gave our church a gift we needed. It was to unite and help us safely through the final days of this world’s history. He did not give us a gift we did not need. Who would dare cast such an aspersion at God? This is why I believe that we need the revelation and counsel that has come from God through Ellen White. Wouldn’t you agree Max?

The gift therefore has its proper place and function. It would not make any sense to reason otherwise. After all, it is a gift from God.

Through the Holy Spirit, God substantiates truth. As we are counselled here

“When the power of God testifies to what is truth, that truth is to stand forever as the truth. No after suppositions contrary to the light God has given are to be entertained. Men will arise with interpretations of Scripture which are to them truth, but which are not truth.” (Ellen G. White Selected Messages book 1 page 161, ‘What to Preach and Not to Preach’)

Note well the final sentence. Not all interpretations of Scripture are correct. This is why I said previously, just because someone says they use Scripture alone for their beliefs, this does not make those beliefs correct.

The Bible tells us that the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy (Revelation 19:10). This is one of the identifying marks of God’s remnant people (Revelation 12:17). It is God’s seal of approval of the movement of people to which you and I belong.

Understanding this gift to be from God does not detract from the Scriptures, neither does it lead to the gift itself being placed above Scripture but correctly used it will do the work that God intended it to do. As Ellen White said (we noted this above)

“Little heed is given to the Bible, but the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light.” (Ellen White, Review and Herald, January 20th 1903, ‘An open letter’)

Certainly we are not to hide or belittle this gift. It is a wonderful gift from God.

Here Max is where I would ask you to recall something.

In your past emails to me, you have repeatedly urged me to ‘lay aside’ the writings of Ellen White whilst at the same time you have continually pressed me to read what you have written (such as in your book ‘Understanding the Trinity’ – also in your articles etc.). As I have said to you though, why do you believe I should regard as important what you have written and at the same time lay aside the writings of someone whom God has given the gift of prophecy? Needless to say, this makes no sense at all – at least not to me. This is one of the reasons why I said earlier, it is just as though you are placing what you have written above the writings of Ellen White.

It appears to me that what you are actually saying is not that we should use ‘Scripture alone’ but we should accept your personal explanation of the Scriptures. This is saying two different things. As you freely admit, your understanding (interpretation) of Scripture is very much different to certain revelation that Ellen White said she had received from God. Is this one of the reasons why you are saying we should ‘lay Ellen White aside’?

Disagreement with Ellen White’s visions

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When reading your website article ‘Ellen G. White and the Trinity Doctrine’, I did notice that on a number of occasions you say you disagree with certain things written by God’s servant. In one

place you even say you do not agree with that which she claims to have been shown by God when in vision. You say it is not Biblical. This is where she wrote

"I saw a throne, and on it sat the Father and the Son. I gazed on Jesus' countenance and admired His lovely person. The Father's person I could not behold, for a cloud of glorious light covered Him. I asked Jesus if His Father had a form like Himself. He said He had, but I could not behold it, for said He, "If you should once behold the glory of His person, you would cease to exist.'" (*Ellen G. White, Early Writings, page 54, 'Experience and views'*)

You also said you disagreed with Ellen White where she said

"I have often seen the lovely Jesus, that He is a person. I asked Him if His Father was a person and had a form like Himself. Said Jesus, "I am in the express image of My Father's person." (*Ibid 77*)

Explaining why you disagreed with these statements you made the following comments (your emphasis)

"The fact that Mrs White says she saw in vision that Jesus and the Father are quite separate individuals does not fit with the Trinitarian concept found in Scripture." (*Max Hatton, Website article, Ellen G. White and the Trinity Doctrine*)

"Statements such as these must have been very pleasing to husband James and his associates for they are clearly Semi-Arian but they are contrary to the Bible. However, they must have felt comfortable having Ellen share their Semi-Arian belief." (*Max Hatton, 'The Early Ellen G. White and the trinity doctrine', April 2013*)

This is only the same as saying that what Ellen White said she saw in vision is not in keeping with Scripture. It is also saying that concerning the person of Christ, James White and "his associates" (the other pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism), just like Ellen White, were believing error. I assume that when you say "Semi-Arian belief", you mean the belief that Christ is truly the Son of God. We noted this Sonship belief concerning Christ in the sub-section 'The trinity doctrine - not needed to establish the divinity of Christ' (page 37). We noted too that Ellen White endorsed this Sonship belief as being the truth concerning Christ's pre-existence (see page 41 and ensuing comments). You obviously disagree.

After quoting where it says in our denominational book 'Seventh-day Adventists believe' (page 27) that God "is fully present in every part of space" you have written

"This being the case we cannot possibly confine Him to existing in a humanlike body as the early Ellen White does. Neither can we accept that they are quite separate Individuals as the Tritheists among us would have us believe." (*Ibid*)

I can quite understand why you say that what Ellen White saw in vision concerning the Father and Jesus does not fit into a trinitarian concept of God. This is one of the reasons why we, the non-trinitarians, do not accept that God, as depicted by the trinity doctrine, is a trinity of persons. As Ellen White says she was shown, we believe that the Scriptures reveal that God the Father and Jesus are two separate individual persons – each with separate forms of their own. This is something that as a trinitarian you obviously deny. Remember though that God, through the spirit of prophecy, will never reveal anything that is not in harmony with Scripture. This means that this vision was either from God – in which case it must be telling the truth - or it was not from God. It cannot be both. You obviously do not believe Ellen White's claim that it was from God.

As we shall see later, Ellen White did say that God is everywhere present (omnipresent) but she did make clear, in accordance with Scripture, that this was accomplished through the Holy Spirit.

Interestingly though, Gerhard Pfandl, as Associate Director of our Biblical Research Institute said to me (we noted this previously)

"I believe you are reading too much into certain Trinitarian expressions, e.g., Ekkehardt Mueller's expressions "three persons share one indivisible nature " (p. 58) or "each person of the Godhead is inseparably connected to the other two" (p. 64) should not be understood in some physical sense as if they were not three separate persons." (*Email, Gerhard Pfandl to Terry Hill, 14th March 2012*)

It is evident that you and Pfandl, although you both confess to be trinitarians, have two opposing theologies – and as you say

"It is unfortunately true that many in our Church are Tritheists. This is true of some Ministers and people in high places." (*Max Hatton, 'The Early Ellen G. White and the trinity doctrine', April 2013*)

One is left to wonder as to who you actually believe are these "ministers and people in high places" but from what you say here, it is apparent that the church is divided over the trinity doctrine. According to you, even the ministry and leaders cannot agree upon it. How therefore can they teach the laity 'the truth' about it?

The term "Tritheists" is obviously meant to be derogative (as are the terminologies 'Arian' and semi-Arian) yet the fact of the matter is, as we have noted so many times previously, nothing is explained in the Scriptures regarding the nature of God (how God has His existence in the three persons of the Godhead). This is why those who express what the Scriptures say concerning the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, yet refuse to accept the explanation of God as in the trinity doctrine, are not tritheists but are those who are expressing only what the Scriptures reveal. This is why the Rev Samuel Spear wrote in 1889 (making the point that Christians should only believe what the Scriptures teach and go no further)

"Bible trinitarians are not tritheists. They simply seek to state, in the best way in which they can, what they regard the Bible as teaching." (*Rev Samuel Spear, The New York Independent, 1889, 'The Subordination of Christ'*)

Interestingly, Spear's article, with a small modification, was used as a tract in our Bible Student's Library. This was in 1892. An explanation if this, as well as the article itself, can be read here

The Spear Article

In conclusion Spear wrote (undoubtedly referring to those who believe the extreme views of the trinity doctrine)

"It is only when men speculate outside of the Bible and beyond it, and seek to be wiser than they can be, that difficulties arise; and then they do arise as the rebuke of their own folly. A glorious doctrine then becomes their perplexity, and ingulfs them in a confusion of their own creation. What they need is to believe more and speculate less." (*Ibid*)

As we have previously noted, without speculation there would be no such teaching as a trinity doctrine.

As you do not accept that the Father and Jesus are two separate individuals, I would also imagine you would not agree with Ellen White where she wrote

"Christ left heaven and the bosom of His Father to come to a friendless, lost world to save

those who would be saved. **He exiled Himself from His Father** and exchanged the pure companionship of angels for that of fallen humanity, all polluted with sin.” (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies Volume 3, page 190, 'Laborers in the Office'*)

In trinitarianism, it is impossible for Christ to exile Himself from the Father. This is because in the trinitarian view, these two divine beings are inseparably united in one indivisible substance. They are said to be, along with the Holy Spirit, united in 'one divine being' as the one God. This is why I have had trinitarians say to me that even when Christ was here upon earth (in the incarnation), He was also with His Father in Heaven.

I would also think Max, you would not agree with the following statement

“From eternity there was a complete unity between the Father and the Son. **They were two, yet little short of being identical; two in individuality**, yet one in spirit, and heart, and character.” (Ellen G. White, *Youth's Instructor 16th December 1897 'The New Commandment part 1'*)

This is because in your book 'The Trinity Doctrine for Seventh-day Adventists' you say

“It will be obvious to all who are well informed that the Three Members of the Trinity are equal in every possible way.” (Max Hatton, *The Trinity Doctrine for Seventh-day Adventists, page 18, 'Jesus as the Son of God'*)

As we can see from the above quote from Ellen White, she does not agree with you. She says that the Father and Son are a “**little short of being identical**” - meaning they are not exactly the same (albeit the difference is very little). Her remarks therefore do not fit our denominational trinity doctrine. To be in harmony with this view, it would need to be said that all three divine persons are exactly the same in every detail.

It is evident therefore, because of her views concerning Christ, that Ellen White was not, at this time (1897), a trinitarian – and this was only one year previous to the release of her book 'The Desire of Ages'. From reading your remarks it is apparent you do not believe that regarding this matter she was very “**well informed**”. Note that nothing is said concerning the Holy Spirit.

Ellen White did emphasise though (this was to delegates at the 1905 General Conference session)

"And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." **All through the Scriptures, the Father and the Son are spoken of as two distinct personages.**" (Ellen G. White, *address to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference session, Review and Herald 13th July 1905*)

The non-trinitarians wholeheartedly agree with this statement. This is what they believe the Scriptures to say – meaning the Scriptures reveal that God and Christ are two separate, distinct personages. Ellen White is simply pointing out what the Scriptures reveal. This is not new light. It is simply pointing out that which is there. Again there is no mention of the Holy Spirit.

Another Ellen White statement refuted

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Under the heading “My first encounter with a statement from Ellen White which bothered me”, you also wrote (in your article 'Ellen G. White and the Trinity doctrine') that shortly after becoming a Seventh-day Adventist, you were astonished to find that Ellen White had written that

"Man was to bear God's image, both in outward resemblance and in character" (Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets, page 45, 'The Creation?'*)

You explained

"I was quite puzzled by this. I had recently spent well over a year intensely studying things about God that caused me to become a Trinitarian. Now could I accept that God was much like me to look at?" (*Max Hatton, Website article, Ellen G. White and the Trinity Doctrine*)

You also wrote in much the same vein of thought

"In some way we are made in God's image, but does that suggest that He exists in our physical image? Surely we can agree that such a conclusion would be taking the matter too far." (*Ibid*)

It is not surprising you were "quite astonished". Trinitarians would never reason as Ellen White says here. This is because as far as "outward" appearance is concerned, trinitarians do not believe that we look anything like their three-in-one God. This is also a denial on your part that Ellen White was telling the truth about God. You say she was taking the matter "too far". It is just as though you are saying she was simply voicing her own opinion.

I notice you say you have held this view (regarding the above statement) since "Not long after" you became a Seventh-day Adventist. This appears to be prior to you entering the Seventh-day Adventist ministry. Certainly it was many decades prior to you writing your book 'Understanding the Trinity'. From all that we have read above, you obviously wrote your book knowing that what you had written in it was not in harmony with what Ellen White had written. This is particularly where she says that God and Christ are two separate individuals. It can only be assumed that you have held these views throughout your entire ministry.

You later commented referring to the above statement found in 'Patriarchs and Prophets'

"Now I can see this was from the pen of Ellen White who had been conditioned to be a Semi-Arian." (*Ibid*)

Again we (the non-trinitarians) quite agree with you. Ellen White was conditioned to speak as someone opposed to the trinity doctrine (whether her beliefs are called Semi-Arian or given some other designation). The question is though, who was it that did the conditioning? I would say it was God rather than man. You say it was man rather than God.

It will be seen later that your opinion is that Ellen White reasoned as a non-trinitarian (and made statements that can only fit into a non-trinitarian concept of the Godhead) because the non-trinitarians around her – which included her husband James White - conditioned her mind to think this way. This is a very serious allegation - seeing that she claimed God had led her to write these things.

You then continued

"God looks something like me? How could a single human look something like the Great Spirit Trinity God who is everywhere present at the same time? The statement of our dear lady does fit the Semi-Arian God quite well, but certainly not the Trinitarian God!" (*Ibid*)

Again this is a denial that Ellen White's words are in keeping with Scripture. It denies where she wrote that we resemble God in "outward" appearance. It is also proof again that she did not write here as a trinitarian but as a non-trinitarian. You speak of God here (the trinity God) as though He is some sort of essence who is everywhere at the same time ("the Great Spirit Trinity God who is everywhere present at the same time").

This invites another question. Was Ellen White speaking of God as a trinity (a three-in-one entity) as you perceive Him to be or as an individual personal being?

In an email you sent around to certain 'undisclosed recipients' you wrote

"Think this matter through for yourself – If you are a modern day Semi-Arian you might believe as Ellen White did. However, if you are a Seventh-day Adventist Trinitarian you can't possibly believe such a thing. How could we possibly be made in the physical image of a Three in One God? (*Max Hatton, email to undisclosed recipients, 10th October 2010*)

If you are correct in saying that God is a three-in-one entity (as described by the trinity doctrine), then the answer to your question is that in outward appearance we cannot possibly resemble Him. This much really is obvious. If you do believe He has an outward form, it is difficult to imagine how you picture 'Him'.

Whilst space does not allow me here to go into too much detail, your words remind me of those found in John Harvey Kellogg's book 'The Living Temple'. This was as he attempted to explain God. He claimed that God was too big for us to imagine.

He wrote such as (supposedly showing the absurdity in estimating the size of God)

"This great being [God] is represented as sitting on the circle of the earth. The orbit of the earth is nearly two hundred million miles in diameter. A being so great as to occupy a seat of such proportions is quite beyond our comprehension as regards his form. The prophet recognizes this, and so diverts our attention away from speculation respecting the exact size and form of God by showing us the absurdity of trying to form even a mental image, intimating that this is closely akin to idolatry." (*J. H. Kellogg. The Living Temple, page 33, 'The Mystery of life'*)

He had earlier written (referring to God's size and form)

"A hand large enough to hold the waters of the earth in its hollow would be as large as the earth itself. Hence no human eye could ever see more than a very small fraction of it at a time. A span great enough to mete out even the earthly heavens would cover at least 9,000 square miles. Try to form a conception of a hand of such proportions; when outstretched, the distance from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the little finger would be 9,000 miles. The height of a person is nine times the length of the span, so the height of a being with such proportions must be at least 81,000 miles." (*Ibid*)

You wrote Max, after quoting Jeremiah 23:23-24 (your emphasis)

"The attributes of God are far beyond our complete understanding really. It is clear however that God is everywhere. Yet Scripture says we are made in His image (**Genesis 1:26, 27**). It cannot be physically for God is a spirit of immense, even unlimited, proportions." (*Max Hatton, Website article, Ellen G. White and the Trinity Doctrine*)

Kellogg said that God was 'much too big' for us to imagine whilst you say He "is a spirit of immense, even **unlimited, proportions**" - which does tend toward the belief that He has some sort of a form although having said that, to say that He is of "unlimited proportions" is to say that there is no end (no limit) to His being – which means that this 'one (three-in-one) being' would be everywhere at the same time (filling all space) – which is exactly what Kellogg was saying.

Under the heading "Dangers in Speculative Study" the following is written in Volume 9 of the Testimonies (this was written with reference to Kellogg's ideas concerning God)

"The light of truth which God designs shall come to the people of the world at this time is not that which the world's men of learning are seeking to impart, for these men in their research often arrive at erroneous conclusions and in their study of many authors become enthused

with theories that are of satanic origin.” (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies Volume 9 pages 67-68, 'Literature in service'*)

In the next paragraph it explains

“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.” (Ibid)

We then find these words

“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)

In other words, it was not the Father who came to this world and was made human but the Son. Again this is portraying God and Christ (the Father and the Son) as two separate and distinct individuals. Note there is no mention of the Holy Spirit.

She also wrote in her journal in 1904

“Satan is not ignorant of the result of trying to define God and Jesus Christ in a spiritualistic way that sets God and Christ as a nonentity. The moments occupied in this kind of science are, in the place of preparing the way of the Lord, making a way for Satan to come in and confuse the minds with mysticisms of his own devising. Although they are dressed up in angel robes they have made our God and our Christ a nonentity. Why?—because Satan sees the minds are all fitted for his working. Men have lost tract of Christ and the Lord God, and have been obtaining an experience that is Omega to one of the most subtle delusions that will ever captivate the minds of men.” (Ellen G. White, *Diary, #48, pp. 153, 163, August 25th and August 28th, 1904*)

Very importantly, take note there is no mention here of the Holy Spirit being made to look a non-entity. We need to ask why not? Interestingly, it was the Holy Spirit that Kellogg said was in the things of nature and filled the whole of space. Notice too that again Ellen White clearly differentiates between God and Christ, especially where she says “Men have lost tract of **Christ and the Lord God**”. Again she emphasises that God and Christ are two separate individual persons.

Like you Max, Kellogg said that he had once been wrong in rejecting the trinity doctrine. This is something you tell us you did when you were a Jehovah's Witness. In similar fashion to you, Kellogg ultimately confessed that he had come to accept the trinity doctrine.

Ellen White though had nothing but condemnation for the way Kellogg attempted to explain God. As she explained in 1905

“When Dr. Kellogg receives the messages of warning given during the last twenty-years; when he is sincerely converted; when he acts as a consistent, level-headed Christian worker; when his energies are devoted to carrying forward, medical missionary work in right lines; when he bears a testimony that has in it no signs of double meaning or of a misconstruction of the light God has given, then we may have confidence that he is following the light. But until then, we have no right to regard him as a safe leader in the interpretation of the Scripture.” (Ellen G. White, *The Kress Collection, page 19, May 24th, 1905*)

This is even though Kellogg said he had come to believe in the trinity doctrine.

In another testimony (written in 1906), again written in consequence of what Kellogg was teaching, Ellen White made this comment (she was urging a physician not to be influenced by Kellogg's reasoning)

“If the angels were deceived by Lucifer’s ingenious methods of misrepresenting God, if Adam and Eve were deceived by his declaration that God was withholding from them the higher education that would make them as gods, is there not danger that men today will be deceived? Please read the first chapter of *Patriarchs and Prophets* and see if the precious truths contained in this book are not given by the Lord to protect His people from deceptions that are urged upon them just now.” (*Ellen G. White to A. J. Read, an Adventist physician/missionary, Letter 212, July 2nd 1906, 10 MR page 163*)

God's servant was directing this physician's mind to the book 'Patriarchs and Prophets' (published in 1890). She is saying it contains the truth, given by God, that would protect God's people from the deception that was being urged upon them at that time (1906). This was when Kellogg was promoting views that Ellen White said were making non-entities of both God and Christ.

It was in this book ('Patriarchs and Prophets') she wrote that at creation, "Man was to bear God's image, both in outward resemblance and in character". You deny this statement to be true. You say, "How could a single human look something like the Great Spirit Trinity God who is everywhere present at the same time" (see above).

How though are we to imagine your trinity (three-in-one) God? You say He cannot be imagined. We shall see later you say that 'He' – this three-in-one unity divine being - is 'pure spirit', someone who does not have 'body and parts'. I need to ask myself, would Ellen White say that that by your reasoning you are making both God the Father and Christ a nonentity?

If as you say God is "the Great Spirit Trinity God" – meaning He is three persons (not separate persons) in one indivisible substance of existence (and pure spirit) - then certainly we would look nothing like Him. As you quite rightly say though, that which Ellen White wrote in 'Patriarch's and Prophets', also that which she said she had seen in vision, certainly does not fit the trinitarian view of God.

Concerning the belief that God and Christ are separate individual persons (both having forms of their own) you have also written

“Our Pioneers were clearly going down a wrong track and for whatever reason Ellen White was now going down the same track with them.” (*Max Hatton, Website article, Ellen G. White and the Trinity Doctrine*)

This is in keeping with your assertion (in your article) that James White (Ellen White's husband) and the other early Seventh-day Adventists were leading Ellen White astray. You also commented (this is where you say God is pure spirit)

“However, my readers may not know that it was common among Trinitarians to acknowledge that God is without body or parts. He has always been acknowledged among Trinitarians as being pure spirit. (John 4:24).

James White, and I guess others, were successful in helping persuade the young Ellen White to accept that God does have body parts. How they could reconcile this with the fact that He is plainly said to be Spirit is quite beyond me. A body would place severe limits on God and confine Him to particular places constantly.” (*Ibid*)

It is also in keeping with what you had commented earlier

“It is not strange to believe that God is pure Spirit, without body or parts” (*Ibid*)

You reason that by the non-trinitarians around her, Ellen White’s mind was conditioned to think and believe as a non-trinitarian. You are also saying that what she claimed to have seen in vision - rather than being in keeping with Scripture - was in keeping with those things she was persuaded to believe by her fellow church members. In other words Max, according to you, these things Ellen White said she saw in vision - also what she wrote - was not revelation from God but was just something that others persuaded her to believe although she thought (and told others) it was from God.

This is much different than the way Ellen White viewed things. As we noted above, she said

“I do not write one article in the paper expressing merely my own ideas. They are what God has opened before me in vision—the precious rays of light shining from the throne.” (*Testimonies for the Church, Volume 5, page 67, 'The Testimonies slighted'*)

When suggestions were made that certain people were influencing her she wrote

“My opinion has nothing to do with what God has shown me in vision.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 6, April 1st 1851, to Brother and Sister Loveland, 1MR 29.5*)

It is apparent that 55 years later in 1906 she had not changed her mind

“There are those who say, “Someone manipulates her writings.” I acknowledge the charge. It is One who is mighty in counsel, One who presents before me the condition of things.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 52, January 29th 1906 to Brother and Sister Farnsworth, 1MR 30.1*)

Ellen White had no doubts about who was influencing her writings.

You also make it clear you do not believe that God has a body or parts. As I said, I assume by this you mean He does not have a tangible (material) existence. This is because you say “A body would place severe limits on God and confine Him to particular places constantly.” Surely though if He does not have a tangible existence, this would make Him intangible – especially as you say He is “pure spirit” and three persons in one single being of existence. So if this “Great Spirit Trinity God” (three-in-one God) of “unlimited, proportions” has neither a material existence but is pure spirit and is “everywhere present at the same time”, is He not a nothingness? If not then what is He?

No one would suggest that divine nature is comparable to flesh and blood but to say God does not have a tangible existence (if this is what you are saying) is saying something different again.

Throughout her writings, as do the Scriptures, Ellen White speaks of God not as some sort of indescribable, intangible, three-in-one nothingness but as a person. This reminds me of where she wrote

“The word and works of Christ testified to a divine power which accomplishes miraculous results, of a future, eternal life exalted above the finite life, of God as a Father to the children of men, watchful of their true interests, and guarding them. He taught that God was a rewarder of the righteous, and a punisher of the transgressor. **He was not an intangible spirit, but a living ruler of the universe.** This gracious Father was constantly working for the good of man, and mindful of all that concerns him. The very hairs of his head are numbered.” (*Ellen G. White, Spirit of Prophecy, Volume 3, page 47, 'Jesus and the Pharisees'*)

Again this speaks clearly of the Father being a separate person from Christ. It also reminds me of

when Ellen White said to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference session (this was when talk of God being a trinity was circulating amongst Seventh-day Adventists)

""And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." All through the Scriptures, the Father and the Son are spoken of as two distinct personages. You will hear men endeavoring to make the Son of God a nonentity. He and the Father are one, **but they are two personages**". (*Ellen G. White to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Takoma Park Washington D. C., May 25th 1905 Review and Herald 13th July 1905, 'Lessons from the first Epistle of John'*)

She did warn though

"Wrong sentiments regarding this are coming in, and we shall all have to meet them" (*Ibid*)

So we can see Max, in 1905, even though you and our church leadership say that by this time Ellen White had become trinitarian, she was still saying that God and Christ are "two distinct personages" although she did emphasise that concerning this, wrong sentiments were on their way into Seventh-day Adventism. This is where we need to remember that you say concerning Ellen White's claim that in vision she saw that God and Christ are two separate persons having forms of their own

"The fact that Mrs White says she saw in vision that Jesus and the Father are quite separate individuals does not fit with the Trinitarian concept found in Scripture." (*Max Hatton, Website article, Ellen G. White and the Trinity Doctrine*)

I quite agree with you Max. There is nothing trinitarian about that which Ellen White said God had shown her but she did write in 1905 (this was when Ballenger was challenging our sanctuary beliefs)

"It will be one of the great evils that will come to our people to have the Scriptures taken out of their true place and so interpreted as to substantiate error that contradicts the light and the testimonies that God has been giving us for the past half century." (*Ellen G. White, Manuscript 59, MR 760, May 20th 1905*)

Does this sound as though Ellen White wants us to ignore what she has written. I don't think so.

When referring to those who were disputing that the testimonies were of God and that God had made revelations to her "which cannot successfully be contradicted or disputed", she wrote

"All the arguments of men, all their opposing influence, is of no force to me. Whatever may be the position or the doctrines of these men, and however firm may have been my confidence in them heretofore, when they take false positions, all their arguments against what I know the Lord has shown me to be truth, are vain. The words spoken to me of God are as if imbedded in the rock forever. All the experiences and the wise assertions of the best and wisest men, men who have been exalted to positions of influence, cannot change or alter the ideas which God has written on my soul. Let God be true and every man a liar.

Every word spoken is in harmony with the living Oracles, and it is only by wresting the Scriptures from their true meaning, by misapplying and misinterpreting them and the testimonies which God has given me, that this can be gainsaid. Those who do this are like the impenitent Jews, who had eyes but saw not, ears had they, but they heard not, neither would they understand. Why? Lest they should be converted and have to acknowledge that not all their ideas were correct. This they were too proud to do, and therefore persisted in rejecting God's counsel and the light and evidence which had been given. Thus they deluded their own souls and the souls of others." (*Ellen G. White, Manuscript Release 13, January 7th*)

1890)

The final sentence is a very interesting one.

How God the Father and Christ are omnipresent

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From what you say Max, it does appear you do not believe that God has a material (physical) existence. You say, as a trinitarian, He is “without body or parts” (see above). You also say that if He did have these things, then this “would place severe limits” on Him “and confine Him to particular places constantly” (see above). The non-trinitarians would not agree with you. This is because as is revealed in the Scriptures, they believe that God is everywhere present by His Spirit (see Psalm 139:7-10).

Although many of us (meaning myself and the non-trinitarians that I know personally) believe the Holy Spirit to be a person, we do not understand Him to be of the same nature as God the Father and Christ. We believe, mainly because of how He is portrayed in Scripture, that His nature (the type of person He is) cannot be understood by humanity.

We do believe though, in keeping with what was said by Jesus, that we are able to *identify* the Holy Spirit. As Jesus said when referring to the coming of the Comforter (John 14:16-17)

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

Jesus said it was Himself who would be coming as our Comforter (“I will come to you” said Jesus) but obviously this was not to be in bodily form. This is because bodily He would be in the sanctuary in Heaven. He will though, one day very soon, return bodily. This is the event we refer to as the second coming or return of Jesus. Jesus referred to this when he had said earlier

“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” John 14:1-3

Jesus was making reference here to His physical (bodily) return (see also Acts 1:9-11, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 etc.).

In answer to the question, “Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?” Jesus replied

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

This time Jesus was referring to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (conversion). He said that the coming of the Comforter (the Holy Spirit) would be the indwelling of both Himself and His Father.

This is exactly how Ellen White explained it. As we have just seen above, she related how she was shown (in vision) that both God the Father and Christ have forms of their own but needless to say she also believed they were both everywhere present.

We can see this because under the heading ‘A true knowledge of God’ she explained

“***The Bible shows us God in His high and holy place***, not in a state of inactivity, not in silence and solitude, but surrounded by ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of holy beings, all waiting to do His will. Through these messengers He is in active communication with every part of His dominion. ***By His Spirit He is everywhere present.*** Through the agency of His Spirit and His angels He ministers to the children of men.

Above the distractions of the earth He sits enthroned; all things are open to His divine survey; and from His great and calm eternity He orders that which His providence sees best.” (Ellen White, *Ministry of Healing*, page 417)

So we can see that whilst Ellen White said that corporeally God is in Heaven, she also believed that by means of His Spirit, He is everywhere present. This was the same as she wrote in the book 'Education'

“The greatness of God is to us incomprehensible. "The Lord's throne is in heaven" (Psalm 11:4); yet by His Spirit He is everywhere present. He has an intimate knowledge of, and a personal interest in, all the works of His hand.” (Ellen G. White, *Education*, page 132, 'Science and the Bible')

She also said that the Comforter is the Spirit of Christ, explaining that we cannot understand His nature. She wrote in one letter to a man named Chapman

“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.” (Ellen G. White, *letter to Brother Chapman June 11th 1891, Manuscript Release volume 14, No. 1107*)

Take careful note of these words. Chapman was told it was “not essential” to “know” or “define” “**just what**” the Holy Spirit is. He was not told we do not know **who** He is. As we have just seen from Scripture, the Holy Spirit is the presence of both the Father and the Son – when the Father and Son are not physically present. This presence therefore, of the Holy Spirit, is a spiritual presence. It is the presence of God.

Then, after quoting the words of Jesus where He had spoken of the coming of the Comforter as found in John 14:16-17 she penned these words

“This refers to the omnipresence of the Spirit of Christ, called the Comforter.” (*ibid*)

It is not being said here that the Holy Spirit is Christ Himself in bodily form (as He is now in the Heavenly sanctuary), neither is it said He is another person exactly like God and Christ (of exactly the same nature as God the Father and Christ who have forms of their own) but we are clearly told that this is “**the omnipresence of the Spirit of Christ**”. His actual nature (**what** the Comforter is) Ellen White said we cannot understand. If you remember, Jesus breathed on His disciples saying “... Receive ye the Holy Ghost” (John 20:22). He was breathing on them His own Spirit. We can no more understand the nature of the Holy Spirit than we can understand the nature of our own spirit.

It is also explained in another place

“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. 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.” (Ellen G. White, *Manuscript No. 1084, February 18, 19th 1895, page 21*)

Here it is said that the Holy Spirit is Christ minus (stripped of) His humanity.

When Christ was here upon earth He did not exercise omnipresence. He chose to walk this earth as we have to walk it (see Hebrews 2:14-17). This restricted Him to being in one place at any given time (just as you and I can only be in one place at a time). Following His ascension though, He was

omnipresent by the Holy Spirit. Did not Jesus say that where two or three are gathered in His name He Himself would be with us (Matthew 18:20)? Jesus therefore is our Comforter.

Even with the release of 'Acts of the Apostles' in 1911, Ellen White made clear

"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. 52

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

It only reasonable to believe that Ellen White was not saying, as our church is saying today, that the Holy Spirit is simply another divine person exactly the same as God the Father and Christ. If this was the case, why would this be difficult for us to understand?

Whilst it is not possible to explain the nature of the Holy Spirit, we have seen beyond a doubt that this is a spiritual manifestation of Christ. This was something that Ellen White said the disciples had difficulty in understanding. This can clearly be seen from Scripture. If you remember, Judas (not Iscariot) said to Jesus "...Lord, how is it that **thou** wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" (see John 14:22). Notice Judas said "thou". He understood very clearly what Jesus was saying (that Jesus would personally be with the disciples but be unseen by the world) but what he could not understand was how Jesus was going to do it. We can imagine the rest of the disciples having the same problem. With respect to this, Ellen White wrote the following

"That Christ should manifest Himself to them, and yet be invisible to the world, was a mystery to the disciples. They could not understand the words of Christ in their spiritual sense. They were thinking of the outward, visible manifestation. **They could not take in the fact that they could have the presence of Christ with them**, and yet He be unseen by the world. **They did not understand the meaning of a spiritual manifestation.**" (*Ellen G. White, Southern Watchman, 13th September 1898, 'Christ's representatives'*)

It can truthfully be said that concerning the Holy Spirit, God has, through the spirit of prophecy, explained so much to us but it seems as though there are still many Seventh-day Adventists today who cannot understand this "spiritual manifestation" of Christ. It appears they have the same (or very similar) 'problem' as did the early disciples. Ellen White said they could not understand Christ's words in their "spiritual sense".

She had also written 5 years earlier

"By the Spirit the Father and the Son will come and make their abode with you." (*Ellen G. White, Bible Echo 15th January 1893, 'The source of our strength'*)

This is exactly as we have seen above was said by Jesus (see John 14:18, 23). Ellen White is simply echoing the words of our Saviour.

So as we have just seen, believing that God the Father and His Son both have forms of their own did not stop Ellen White believing that they were both omnipresent. Unlike you, she saw no problem with it. In keeping with what is revealed in Scripture, she said that by the Holy Spirit they were both omnipresent. The non-trinitarians – at least the ones that I know personally – believe exactly the same.

From this we can see that Ellen White was definitely not trinitarian. She was very aware that God the Father and Christ are two separate personages each with forms of their own. She also regarded them both omnipresent by the Holy Spirit.

It seems Max that this is something you fail to grasp and understand. You say of the non-trinitarians

“They [the non-trinitarians] claim that He [God] is “everywhere present by His representative, the Holy Spirit.” Of course their contention is that in themselves the Father or Jesus are not Omnipresent:” (Max Hatton article, ‘Excuse me but I have a very worrying problem’ www.restorationministry.com/studies/maxhatton.doc)

The latter really is a failure to understand what the non-trinitarians believe and teach. Of course we believe that the Father and Christ in themselves are omnipresent. They are omnipresent by means of the Holy Spirit.

This misunderstanding on the part of trinitarians is because of their failure to understand what the Bible says. We are told that the Holy Spirit is God's Spirit. It belongs to Him – just like our spirits belong to us. This is why both God and Christ are omnipresent. The Holy Spirit is themselves (God and Christ) omnipresent (John 14:18, 23, Romans 8:9). As was said by Ellen White, they both have forms of their own. Never have I read where she has said this concerning the Holy Spirit. Neither in Scripture is there any intimation of Him having a form.

Whilst this is not intended to be a study of what the Scriptures reveal concerning the Holy Spirit, I will say that what I do find interesting is that the Bible reveals that both God the Father and Christ are said to have a Spirit (Luke 23:46, Romans 8:9-11, 1 Corinthians 2:9-11). This is just like the Scriptures reveal that each one of us has a spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:23, Romans 8:16, 1 Corinthians 2:11 etc.). This because we are individual beings. Individual beings have individual spirits. Yet interestingly, nowhere in Scripture does it say that the Holy Spirit has a spirit. I say this is interesting because the Seventh-day Adventist Church is saying today that the Holy Spirit is another divine being exactly like God the Father and Christ. Personally speaking, I believe this to be not only an erroneous view but also an over-simplification of the matter.

Denying the visions

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Unless I am missing something very important somewhere, it seems to me that it can only be concluded that even though Ellen White says she was shown certain things in vision, you do not believe it was God who had shown them to her. I say this because as I am sure you will appreciate, God would never have shown her anything that was not in keeping with Scripture (meaning something that was not true). In simple terms Max, you obviously do not believe that God gave her the vision showing that God and Jesus are two separate individual persons each with forms of their own.

If God did not show her these things (in vision), then it must be that either (a) the things she said she saw was just her own imagination or (b) that she did actually see these things in vision but they did not come from God (meaning they came from another source) or (c) she was making it up (prefabricating it), which when all is said and done is the same as saying she was telling lies. The only other alternative is that she completely misunderstood what she had been shown. I cannot see any other alternatives.

It is only reasonable to believe that God would never have told Ellen White a lie (Numbers 23:9) so I cannot see that this is an option. It can only be concluded therefore that what she said she ‘saw’ in vision was either from God or it was not from God. It has to be one way or the other. Certainly it cannot be both. The fact that she asked Jesus if the Father had a form like Himself – and that Jesus answered in the affirmative – must rule out that she misunderstood what she had been told.

We shall see shortly that you said that many of these visions were just the results of her imagination.

An immature or mature Ellen White?

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Max - you say in your article that it was in her 'early years' when Ellen White wrote the statements saying that God the Father and Jesus each have a form of their own (see above). You also placed these statements under the heading '[Here are a few of the statements of Ellen White that convince me that she was semi-Arian in her early years](#)'. These were years when in your article you say she was 'immature'.

The fact is though; these statements, detailing a vision she had in 1845, were included in a book published in 1882. This book is called, quite appropriately, 'Early Writings'. It was published when she was 55 years of age. By this time, she had been called to the prophetic office (receiving visions, dreams and revelation from God) for 38 years. I cannot see how this can be termed her 'early years' or when she was 'immature'. If by then (1882) she had thought this vision had just been her imagination, then why publish it saying it was a vision from God?

You also go on to show (in your article) that even in the year 1900 - which was two years after the publication of her much-acclaimed book 'The Desire of Ages' (which our church claims led our denomination to become trinitarian) - Ellen White was still writing statements that can only be termed non-trinitarian. These quotes you placed under the heading of "[A few other matters indicating the semi-Arianism of Ellen White](#)".

Prior to quoting these statements you wrote

["There was a time when Ellen White seemed to believe that Jesus could be obliterated, annihilated." \(Max Hatton, Website article, Ellen G. White and the Trinity Doctrine\)](#)

This is very true. This is exactly what she did believe. Here are the statements from her writings which show it. As you will see, they were all made comparatively late in her ministry. The latest one is 1900. As I said, this was not exactly her early years. She was then 73 years of age.

["Remember that Christ risked all; "tempted like as we are," he staked even his own eternal existence upon the issue of the conflict. For our redemption, heaven itself was imperiled." \(Ellen G. White, General Conference Bulletin 1st December 1895 'Seeking the Lost'\)](#)

["Though Christ humbled Himself to become man, the Godhead was still His own. His Deity could not be lost while He stood faithful and true to His loyalty." \(Ellen G. White, The Signs of the Times, 10th May 1899, 'Christ glorified'\)](#)

["He became subject to temptation, endangering as it were, His divine attributes. Satan sought, by the constant and curious devices of his cunning, to make Christ yield to temptation." \(Ellen G. White, Letter 5, 1900, as quoted in the Seventh-day Adventists Bible Commentary Volume 7 page 926\)](#)

In a letter she wrote in 1895 she had also said

["Christ has found his pearl of great price in lost, perishing souls. He sold all that he had to come into possession, even engaged to do the work, and run the risk of losing his own life in the conflict." \(Ellen G. White, Letter 119, 1895\)](#)

Repeatedly Ellen White said that Christ could have sinned. In keeping with this she said

["If one single sin had tainted His character the stone would never have been rolled away from the door of His rocky chamber, and the world with its burden of guilt would have](#)

perished.” (Ellen G. White, Manuscript 81, 1893, p. 11, Diary entry for Sunday, July 2, 1893, Wellington, New Zealand)

The very same year as the 'The Desire of Ages' was published she said (if Satan had managed to tempt Christ to sin)

“Divine wrath would have come upon Christ as it came upon Adam. Christ and the church would have been without hope.” (Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, June 9th 1898, see also Selected Messages Book 1 page 256)

This is one of the reasons (the main one really) why I am a non-trinitarian. I believe that in the making of the decision for the pre-existent Christ to become incarnate, a risk was taken concerning His existence – which is obviously something that a trinitarian would find impossible to accept.

In 1911, the following was written in an article in the Signs of the Times

“The issues at stake were beyond the comprehension of men, and the temptations that assailed Christ were as much more intense and subtle than those which assail man as His character was purer and more exalted than is the character of man in his moral and physical defilement. In His conflict with the prince of darkness in this atom of a world, Christ had to meet the whole confederacy of evil, the united forces of the adversary of God and man; but at every point he met the tempter, and put him to flight. Christ was conqueror over the powers of darkness, and **took the infinite risk** of consenting to war with the enemy, that He might conquer him in our behalf.” (Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 30th May 1911, 'The plan of Salvation – No. 3')

It can be seen here that the risk taken by the divine Christ (in becoming incarnate) is described as “the infinite risk”. This could only mean the risk to His eternal existence. Notice we are told too that the issues at stake were beyond our comprehension. This article was requested to be repeated in April 1940.

Interestingly, quite recently, I listened to a presentation on the spirit of prophecy given by Merlin Burt. It had been given on Sabbath, November 22, 2008 at the Stoneham Memorial SDA Church. This was at a Bible symposium called 'The Spirit of Prophecy in Scripture and Adventist History'. Burt is the Director of the Centre for Adventist Research and White Estate Branch Office at Andrews University.

In his talk he referred to an interview that James R Nix had with Ella Robinson (the oldest granddaughter of Ellen White). Burt also referred to this same interview in an article in the Adventist Review in 2001. This was concerning Ellen White's conversion. In this interview with Nix, Ella Robinson spoke of a sermon she had heard Ellen White preach. She recalled

“I see grandma standing in the pulpit, dressed in her loose fitting, black sack suit, narrow cuffs of white, narrow white collar secure at the throat by a small broach. She's been telling of the matchless love of Christ in suffering ignominy and death and even running the risk of eternal separation from His Father in heaven by taking upon Himself the sins of the world. She pauses, look up, and with one hand resting on the desk and the other lifted heavenward she exclaims in a ringing voice, 'Oh, Jesus, how I love you, how I love you, how I love you.' There is a deep hush. Heaven is very near.” (As quoted by Merlin Burt, Adventist Review, October 25th 2001, 'My burden left me')

It is evident that those close to Ellen White, those who had heard her preach, those who knew of her beliefs, knew that she firmly believed that in the making of the decision for Christ to become incarnate (made flesh), there was a risk taken concerning His eternal existence. As Ella Robinson recalled, Ellen White spoke of Jesus “running the risk of eternal separation from His Father in

heaven". This is in keeping with the statements of Ellen White that we have read above. She said that if Christ had sinned, "the stone would never have been rolled away from the door of His rocky chamber", thus He would never have been resurrected by His Father.

In 'The Desire of Ages', are penned these words

"Satan in heaven had hated Christ for His position in the courts of God. He hated Him the more when he himself was dethroned. He hated Him who pledged Himself to redeem a race of sinners. Yet into the world where Satan claimed dominion God permitted His Son to come, a helpless babe, subject to the weakness of humanity. He permitted Him to meet life's peril in common with every human soul, to fight the battle as every child of humanity must fight it, at the risk of failure and eternal loss.

The heart of the human father yearns over his son. He looks into the face of his little child, and trembles at the thought of life's peril. He longs to shield his dear one from Satan's power, to hold him back from temptation and conflict. To meet a bitterer conflict and a more fearful risk, God gave His only-begotten Son, that the path of life might be made sure for our little ones." (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 49, 'Unto you a Saviour'*)

In allowing His Son to be met with Satan's temptations, God took a far "more fearful risk" than we do when we bring children into the world. There was no saviour for Christ if He had failed. If He had sinned He would have been lost for eternity. It is no wonder that Ellen White exclaimed

"Herein is love." Wonder, O heavens! and be astonished, O earth!" (*Ibid*)

Those who do not believe there was a risk to Christ's existence, fail to see the depth of God's love in giving His Son for our redemption. Ellen White realised it. This is why she wrote in this same book

"Never can the cost of our redemption be realized until the redeemed shall stand with the Redeemer before the throne of God. Then as the glories of the eternal home burst upon our enraptured senses we shall remember that Jesus left all this for us, that He not only became an exile from the heavenly courts, but for us took the risk of failure and eternal loss." (*Ibid page 131*)

Some may say that when Ellen White says that Christ "took the risk of failure and eternal loss" she was only referring to our loss if Christ had failed. This though cannot be so. We were already lost. As far as our existence was concerned, there was nothing to risk. Allow me to explain.

Take for example if we lose something (imagine it was some important papers). If we go looking for them, can it be said we take a risk of not finding them? This would not make sense. They are already lost. The only risk there would be is if there was danger to ourselves in searching for them. Do you see the point I am making?

This is how it was with Christ. In making the decision for Him to come to earth, there was a risk to His existence. If there was no risk then the plan of redemption is only a well-rehearsed farce.

The Scriptures tell us that Christ took our place in all things. If He had sinned, which the Scriptures say was possible, then like us He would have become a sinner (Hebrews 2:16-17, 4:15, Ezekiel 18:4, 20). As we have been told through the spirit of prophecy (see above), not only would He have forfeited His attributes of Deity but He would also have lost His eternal existence. Certainly God would not have resurrected Him. As Peter said, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34). Whatever is incumbent on us in our fallen condition, Christ, in the incarnation, took upon Himself – even all of our liabilities.

Roy Adams, as Associate Director of the 'Advent Review', summed it up perfectly. He wrote

“To say there was no risk in the Incarnation is to argue the biblically untenable position that it was impossible for Jesus to sin. If that were the case, then we'd be into divine playacting of the most cynical kind. And Jesus' 40-day fast in the desert, His all-night prayer vigils, and His agony in Gethsemane would all amount to a cruel farce.

No one is talking here about God being surprised by anything. The issue is not that God in His foreknowledge was unaware of the final outcome. The unassailable point, rather, is that *it all could have turned out differently*. Reality is not all cut and dried. And if Jesus was at all an example for us, He had to have come with the same freedom we all have as humans to choose God's will or to reject it.” (Roy Adams, *Advent Review*, April 17th 2008, 'An impenetrable mystery')

As you are well aware Max, in trinitarianism, it is impossible to hold the belief that there was a risk to Christ's existence. This is because in trinitarianism, the 'one God' (the trinity God), who is said to be the three persons inseparably connected together as one single being (in one indivisible substance) is said to be both unchangeable and immortal. We noted this above. This would mean of course that none of the persons can ever lose - or even put at risk - their eternal existence. To put it more simply, if it is believed that the divine Christ did put at risk His eternal existence then it cannot be believed that God is a trinity – at least not as described by the trinity doctrine. On the other hand, if it is believed that God is a trinity, as depicted by the trinity doctrine, it cannot be believed that a risk to Christ ever existed. It is either one way or the other. It cannot be both.

As has been said above, Ellen White was still publishing these 'risk to Christ' statements in 1900 – which is not exactly when she was young or immature. She was now 73 years of age. This was 56 years since her initial call to the prophetic office. So whether it is with reference to age or calling, this was obviously not 'her early years'. So what can be concluded from this realisation?

It can only be concluded that up to then, meaning up to the early 1900's, Ellen White was still writing as a non-trinitarian. This is even though our church claims that the things she wrote in her book 'The Desire of Ages' - which was published **some years earlier** in 1898 - showed that God is a trinity of persons. Obviously there is something wrong with the reasoning of our church. How in 1898 could Ellen White have been a trinitarian if years later she was still writing things that can only be described as non-trinitarian?

Strangely though, at least it is to me, after quoting these same 'risk' statements in your article 'Excuse me I have a worrying problem' you say (your emphasis in bold)

“As I have already stated, I conclude that Ellen White was a Semi-Arian in her early years in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Her statements, that I have offered cannot be reconciled with the Trinity doctrine. Thankfully she did grow in understanding and consequently changed her stand as she gained a clearer picture of what God is. She unquestionably became a Trinitarian and made many positive statements declaring this fact to be so.” (Max Hatton, 'Excuse me I have a worrying problem' www.restorationministry.com/studies/maxhatton.doc)

We, meaning the non-trinitarians, 100% agree with you – at least where you say that Ellen White wrote things that “cannot be reconciled with the Trinity doctrine”. We also agree with you where you say she had been “in harmony with her associates who did not believe in the Trinity”. Who can argue with these facts? What we cannot agree with is that very late in her life (as you say) she had a complete reversal of thought.

The other thing is: How is it possible to say that the early 1900's were Ellen White's “early years in the Seventh-day Adventist Church”? As noted above, she was then 73 years of age. She had been

receiving visions and dreams from God for 56 years. In another 15 years she would be dead.

Yet you say Max (my emphasis)

“Ellen White was quite wrong in her acceptance of Semi-Arianism **in her early experience with our Church group**. I cannot be faithful to her as she was then and to Scripture at the same time. I am proud to stand with her in her later experience as a Trinitarian.” (*Max Hatton, Website article, Ellen G. White and the Trinity Doctrine*)

This is also in keeping with a previous comment (my emphasis)

“**The early Ellen G. White** seems to have been in harmony with her associates who did not believe in the Trinity. The Anti-Trinitarian Adventists today try to carry her **early concepts** through to the end of her life. I see a clear reversal in her thinking so that later in life she moved from being a non-Trinitarian to being a true Trinitarian.” (*Ibid*)

You keep referring to Ellen White as being non-trinitarian in her “early” years but as we have seen, she was still non-trinitarian in her 'old age'.

You reason though Max that after she had made these statements (saying that Christ could have lost His eternal existence) she changed her mind about it. You write in your article

“It seems that she became quite clear on this matter by 1904 when she reversed her belief.” (*Max Hatton, Website article, Ellen G. White and the Trinity Doctrine*)

This was 60 years after her call to the prophetic office - 6 years after the publication of 'The Desire of Ages'. She was then 77 years of age. Are you saying you believe that up to this time she had not been a trinitarian?

As proof of your assertions (that she changed her mind about the possibility of Christ losing His existence) you quote her as writing in a letter

“In Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. When Christ was crucified, it was His human nature that died. Deity did not sink and die; that would have been impossible.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter to Ministers, Physicians and Teachers, September 3rd 1904*)

By the use of this particular quotation, especially the phrase “Deity did not sink and die”, are you attempting to have people believe that Ellen White is saying that a divine person cannot even die let alone lose His eternal existence? In other words, are you trying to make it appear she is saying that a divine person did not die at Calvary? It certainly looks this way to me. It is my belief that when this quote is read in its context, it is not saying this at all. We shall see this now.

This letter was written concerning John Harvey Kellogg. Ellen White was writing about the confusion he had caused, in our church – especially regarding the relation of the gospel message to the health message. She said he had exalted himself so much (because of the skills he possessed and the knowledge that God had given to him) that he could not now discern truth from fable. Such is a warning to each of us – and remember, he said he had come to believe the trinity doctrine. She said that his ideas and plans had not been of heavenly origin – also that he had retarded the work. In this instance she was addressing the mystery of the incarnation. You can read the entire letter here

[Ellen White – Letter 280a](#)

The words that Ellen White actually wrote were (putting what you quoted in its context)

“Was the human nature of the Son of Mary changed into the divine nature of the Son of God? No; the two natures were mysteriously blended **in one person—the Man Christ Jesus**. “In Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. When Christ was crucified, it was His human nature that died. Deity did not sink and die; that would have been impossible.” (Ellen G. White, *Letter to Ministers, Physicians and Teachers*, September 3rd 1904)

Now it reads so much differently from how you quoted it. It can be seen that when she said “Deity did not sink and die” she was not referring to a divine person but to divine nature. Notice she said that the two natures (the divine and the human) “were mysteriously blended in **one person—the Man Christ Jesus**”. Each nature was not a person. In Christ there was not a human person and a divine person. The man Christ Jesus is the divine Son of God incarnate (made flesh). It was He, the divine Son of God made incarnate (one person), who died at Calvary. The divine Christ died in His humanity. This is something that in His pre-existence as God He could not do. In His pre-existence He only existed in His divine nature – and because divine nature cannot die He could not die. So that He could die, He adopted human nature (was made flesh).

As Ellen White explained (this was just weeks before 'The Desire of Ages' was released)

“Jesus Christ laid off His royal robe, His kingly crown, and clothed His divinity with humanity, in order to become a substitute and surety for humanity, **that dying in humanity** He might by His death destroy him who had the power of death.” (Ellen G. White, *Letter 97*, 1898, p. 5. To “My Brethren in North Fitzroy,” November 18, 1898)

Now notice these next words. They really are very important.

“He could not have done this as God, but by coming as man, **Christ could die.**” (*Ibid*)

Who is Ellen White saying died at Calvary? It was the pre-existent divine Son of God. Here we are told emphatically that a divine person really did die at Calvary. This was the incarnate personage of the pre-existent divine Son of God – God in human flesh. It was divine nature that did not die. In other words, she is saying, God died at Calvary.

Those who say that the divine Christ did not die at Calvary are saying that even though He became flesh He still could not die – which is exactly the opposite to what we have been told here through the spirit of prophecy . It is also contrary to Scripture.

When Jesus told His disciples He was going to be put to death, Peter rebuked Him for saying such a thing (see Matthew 16:13-23). In commenting on this, Ellen White penned these words

“When Jesus had opened before his disciples the fact that he must go to Jerusalem to suffer and die at the hands of the chief priests and scribes, Peter had presumptuously contradicted his Master, saying, “Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee.” **He could not conceive it possible that the Son of God should be put to death. Satan suggested to his mind that if Jesus was the Son of God he could not die.**” (Ellen G. White, *Spirit of prophecy Volume 3*, page 231, ‘Jesus at Galilee’)

In keeping with Scripture (Philippians 2:5-8, Hebrews 2:9, 2:14-17 and 9:16), we are told here through the spirit of prophecy that the reason why the divine Christ became flesh was so that He could die. It is a suggestion of Satan that He could not die. Satan wants us to disbelieve both Scripture and the spirit of prophecy. The divine person died. This is the testimony of Scripture and the SOP. Ellen White was only stating what the Scriptures tell us.

That the divine person of Christ died is something that appears not believed by trinitarians. This is why by failing to quote Ellen White's words in their context, you give the impression that God's servant was saying exactly the same.

The truth of the matter is though, over and over again she made it abundantly clear that a divine person really did die at Calvary. Here is one such statement. The reader can decide for him or herself who she is saying died at Calvary.

“Jesus was the Majesty of heaven, the beloved Commander of the angels, whose delight was to do his pleasure. He was one with God, in the bosom of the Father; yet He thought it not a thing to be desired to be equal with God while man was lost in sin and misery. He stepped down from his throne. He left his crown and royal sceptre, and clothed his divinity with humanity. He humbled Himself even to the death of the cross, that man might be exalted to a seat with Him upon his throne. In Him we have a complete offering, an infinite sacrifice, a mighty Saviour, who is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by Him. In love He comes to reveal the Father, to reconcile man to God, to make him a new creature, renewed after the image of Him who created him.” (*Ellen G. White, Bible Echo, 15th March 1893, 'The way to Christ'*)

This is saying very clearly that the person who died at Calvary was the One who thought it not robbery to be equal with God. This is only the same as the Scriptures tell us which is

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” Philippians 2:5-8

It was the pre-existent Son of God who died at Calvary. He was the only one who could pay the price of our redemption. It was He, the One equal with God, who became flesh and died on our behalf (John 1:1, 14, Philippians :5-8, Hebrews 2:14-17)

Note this next statement. Is it really that difficult to understand? It is only in keeping with Scripture

“To rescue the fallen race from the thralldom of sin, Christ came to the world, and died on Calvary. He gave his all to us. What are we willing to give to him? (*Ellen G White, Review and Herald, 27th May 1902, 'An appeal for the southern work'*)

Three years later she wrote

“Christ came to this world, and died on the cross of Calvary, that human beings might not "perish, but have everlasting life." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 23^d February 1905*)

Just one year before the book 'The Desire of Ages' was published, these words were found in the Review and Herald

"Human passions were raging at the foot of the cross when the earth was bereft of the light of the sun. The Sun of Righteousness was withdrawing his light from the world, and **nature sympathized with her dying Author.**" (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald 28th December 1897 'He was Wounded for our Transgressions'*)

It was the “Author” of nature who died. If only the human body of Jesus died - and not the person of the divine Son of God – these words make no sense. A few paragraphs later are found these words

“Again came the cry, as of one in mortal agony, "It is finished." "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost." **Christ, the Majesty of heaven, the King of glory, was dead.**" (*Ibid*)

There is no mistaking as to who and what Ellen White said died at Calvary. It was the pre-existent

divine Son of God who died. He died in His humanity. In fact in 1899, one year after her supposedly trinitarian book 'The Desire of Ages' was released, she wrote this in the Review and Herald

“Teach the great, practical truths that must be stamped upon the soul. Teach the saving power of Jesus, “in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.” All should be made to comprehend the power of the truth to those who receive it. **“In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.”** (Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, 4th April 1899, 'After the camp-meeting')

She then added, showing that she was saying that a divine person died at Calvary

“Men need to understand that the Deity suffered under the agonies of Calvary. The Majesty of heaven was made to suffer at the hands of wicked men,— religious zealots, who claimed to be the most enlightened people on the face of the earth.” (Ibid)

So we can see Max, even in 1899, which was the year following the publication of 'The Desire of Ages', Ellen White was still saying that a divine person died at Calvary. This is not the trinitarian view. Notice that Ellen White regarded Deity suffering at Calvary as one of the “great, practical truths that must be stamped upon the soul”.

It is needful here to remember something very important. This is that whoever or whatever died at Calvary, this is to whom we owe our salvation. If it was not the divine Son of God who died, then it is not to Him we owe the precious gift of eternal life.

You will find a more detailed account of who and what died at Calvary in chapter 25 here ... [A study of the Godhead – as it pertains to Seventh-day Adventism](#)

There is something else I would like to mention.

You said in your article 'Ellen. G. White and the Trinity Doctrine' (we noted this above) that because Ellen White wrote in Patriarchs and Prophets that "Man was to bear God's image, both in outward resemblance and in character", this showed she was a Semi-Arian (not a trinitarian). Interestingly, in 1903, 5 years after her book 'The Desire of Ages was published', she was still saying exactly the same thing. In the book 'Education' she wrote

“When Adam came from the Creator's hand, he bore, **in his physical**, mental, and spiritual nature, a likeness to his Maker. "God created man in His own image" (Genesis 1:27), and it was His purpose that the longer man lived the more fully he should reveal this image--the more fully reflect the glory of the Creator.” (Ellen G. White, *Education*, page 15, 1903, 'The Eden School')

In keeping with this she also wrote 5 pages later

“Created to be "the image and glory of God" (1 Corinthians 11:7), Adam and Eve had received endowments not unworthy of their high destiny. Graceful and symmetrical in form, regular and beautiful in feature, their countenances glowing with the tint of health and the light of joy and hope, **they bore in outward resemblance the likeness of their Maker. Nor was this likeness manifest in the physical nature only.**” (Ibid, page 20)

We can see here that in 1903, Ellen White was still saying that God had a tangible form and that Adam and Eve were created in the physical likeness of that form. This you say is a semi-Arian view – not one that is trinitarian. This shows that in 1903 she was still non-trinitarian. How can this be said to be her early years? She was now 76 years old – and still writing as a non-trinitarian.

Three years later in 1906, Ellen White wrote a letter to Butler, Daniells and Irwin explaining the reason why God had instructed her to write out the things she had been shown. She explained

“I am instructed that the Lord, by His infinite power, has preserved the right hand of His messenger for more than half a century, in order that the truth may be written out as He bids me write it for publication, in periodicals and books, Why?—Because if it were not thus written out, when the pioneers in the faith shall die, there would be many, new in the faith, who would sometimes accept as messages of truth teachings that contain erroneous sentiments and dangerous fallacies. Sometimes that which men teach as “special light” is in reality specious error, which, as tares sown among the wheat, will spring up and produce a baleful harvest. And errors of this sort will be entertained by some until the close of this earth’s history.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 136, April 27th 1906 to G. I. Butler, A. G. Daniells, and G. A. Irwin 1906, 8MR page 35*)

Ellen White was now almost 80 years of age. From what she said here, it is quite obvious that for the purpose of distinguishing between truth and error, she did expect her writings to be used. They would be instrumental she said in helping newcomers to avoid accepting “**erroneous sentiments and dangerous fallacies**” which some would attempt to bring in following the death of our pioneers. It is quite evident that she did not believe, in 1906, that any of our denominational beliefs were fallacies (false doctrine). This is in keeping where she wrote a few weeks later

“The light that I have received, I have written out, and much of it is now shining forth from the printed page. There is, throughout my printed works, a harmony with my present teaching. ... These messages were thus given to substantiate the faith of all, that in these last days we might have confidence in the spirit of prophecy. ... For the past half century my faith in the ultimate triumph of the third angel's message and everything connected with it, has been substantiated by the wonderful experiences through which I have passed. This is why I am anxious to have my books published and circulated in many languages. I know that the light contained in these books is the light of heaven.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 14th June 1906, 'Notes of Travel, No. 1 (Journey to Southern California)*)

Needless to say, Ellen White is saying that what she wrote in her books and in our other publications etc. is the truth that God had bidden her to write. I believe it also reasonable to conclude that in saying this she was upholding the teachings of these early Seventh-day Adventists. She is also saying (note this was in 1906) that there was no change in what she had written since she began her ministry (“**There is, throughout my printed works, a harmony with my present teaching**”).

In the light of all of the above, how can it be said that Ellen White changed from being a non-trinitarian to a trinitarian? We can see that even very late into her ministry, she was still writing as a non-trinitarian.

A confusion of reasoning

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I can only say Max that there appears to me to be some confusion in the things you have written – at least I cannot understand what you mean. You and I know that a trinitarian would never say that there was a risk to Christ’s existence - which as we have seen above, Ellen White did say in the years 1893, 1895, 1898, 1899 and 1900. Yet under the heading “**Here are just a few of her statements which require us to accept that in her *later years* Ellen white was a *convinced trinitarian***” you list, in your article 'Ellen G. White and the Trinity Doctrine', a number of quotations dated 1889 onwards. Not surprisingly, these included statements from ‘The Desire of Ages’ (1898).

How can this be? How in 1889 could Ellen White have been a “**convinced trinitarian**” and yet still be writing statements many years later, even after the Desire of Ages was published, which show she was not a trinitarian? I cannot see how this can be. You will need to explain it.

What I also cannot understand is that you say two of these statements could only have been made by a trinitarian. Why therefore do you quote all of them as showing that Ellen White was a “convinced trinitarian”? I cannot get to grips with this one.

Something else I cannot get to grips with is where you say (your emphasis)

“At one time Ellen White was convinced that Jesus was the only Person in the Universe who could atone for our sins.” (Max Hatton, Website article, 'Ellen G. White and the Trinity Doctrine')

As proof of this you quote where she wrote

“The Son of God was next in authority to the great Lawgiver. He knew that his life alone could be sufficient to ransom fallen man.” (Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 17th December 1872, 'The First Advent of Christ')

In disagreement you say (your emphasis)

“How could it possibly be true that Jesus was the only one who could be an atonement for our sins? What about the Father? What about the Holy Spirit? Ellen White could only say what she did because she held to Semi-Arian concepts.” (Max Hatton, Website article, Ellen G. White and the Trinity Doctrine)

According to your reasoning, the fact that Ellen White said in 1872 that Christ's “life alone” could make the atonement, this proves she still “held to Semi-Arian concepts” yet the truth of the matter is that 33 years later she was still saying exactly the same thing. We know this because she wrote in the Review and Herald in 1905

“Think of how much it cost Christ to leave the heavenly courts, and take his position at the head of humanity. Why did he do this? -- **Because he was the only one who could redeem the fallen race.**” (Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 9th March 1905, 'God's purpose for us')

So we can see Max, as I am sure you will agree, Ellen White was still writing (according to your reasoning) non-trinitarian statements in 1905.

There is another thing to note. This is that as can be seen from these last two quotes from Ellen White, it was only a divine person who could make the atonement therefore a divine person had to die (not just something or someone only human).

This is why I said that there is confusion in the things you write. Perhaps you would like to re-assess your position. As you say near the beginning of your article

“Truth and honesty are vitally important to me. If anyone can show me to be in error in the assessments which I make in the following material, I would be most thankful for your advice. I can change, I have had to in the past, and I will change again if I can clearly be shown to be out of harmony with the facts.” (Max Hatton, Website article, Ellen G. White and the Trinity Doctrine)

Interestingly, you also go on to point out something that was written just over 5 years ago in our Sabbath School quarterly (Roy Adams, Associate Editor of the Review, was the main contributor of these studies). This is where it was said

“But imagine a situation in which the Being we have come to know as God the Father came to die for us, and the One we have come to know as Jesus stayed back in heaven (we are

speaking in human terms to make a point). **Nothing would have changed, except that we would have been calling Each by the name we now use for the Other.**” (*Seventh-day Adventist Sabbath School Quarterly, page 19, Thursday April 10th 2008, ‘The Mystery of His Deity’*)

This is the role playing idea that as a denomination we officially teach today – meaning that the Father is not really a father, the Son of God is not really a son – and the Holy Spirit is not really a holy spirit but all three persons are just pretending to be these things. In other words, as the lesson study states, whichever of the three persons 'came to earth to die' (whatever that may mean to a trinitarian), that person would still have been called the Son of God. This is why you are saying that any of the three could have come – and not as Ellen White said that the One who came was the “only one” who could do it (see above).

Some say that the divine person who is called ‘the Father’ should really be termed ‘the first person of the Godhead’ but the truth of the matter is that in this role-playing idea, if this ‘first person’ of the Godhead had come to earth instead of the One who did come (which the lesson study is saying could have happened), then either the one we now call ‘the Son’, or the one we call ‘the Holy Spirit’, would be known as the first person of the Godhead (the Father). It would simply depend on which roles each chose to play.

Surely if anyone is totally honest here they will admit that in the current official Seventh-day Adventist view of the Godhead, the personal identities of all three persons have been well and truly lost. They have simply become, in this theology, three unnamed (unidentified) divine persons who are role-playing certain parts. It is no wonder J. N. Andrews wrote of the trinity doctrine

“This doctrine destroys the personality of God and his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” (*J. N. Andrews, Review and Herald, March 6th 1855, ‘The Fall of Babylon’*)

In your CD book ‘The Trinity Doctrine for Seventh-day Adventists’, you say concerning our pioneers (this was under the heading ‘Our Pioneers Confused the Persons of the Trinity’)

“They misunderstood terribly the true facts of the Trinity doctrine. Wherever they obtained their concepts from I cannot guess. I have never read anything from a competent Trinitarian that sounds anything like the garbled ideas our Pioneers gained from who knows where.” (*Max Hatton, ‘The Trinity Doctrine for Seventh-day Adventists’, page 12*)

Personally speaking, I believe the early Seventh-day Adventists knew exactly what they were opposing. This is that in trinitarianism (this can particularly be seen in the Seventh-day Adventist version of the trinity doctrine) the personal identities of the persons of the Godhead are completely lost. This is because these three divine persons are said to be only role-playing their various parts. In other words, according to current Seventh-day Adventist theology, any one of the three could have been the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit. This means that in this role-playing theology, the reality of the Father giving His Son as a sacrifice (John 3:16, Romans 5:10, 8:3, 32 etc.) is also completely lost.

The 2008 Sabbath School lesson study commented regarding this role-playing theology

“That is what equality in the Deity means” (*Sabbath School Quarterly, Lesson 2, 2nd Quarter, 2008*)

Not everyone would agree with this reasoning.

You also say, in your trinitarian reasoning (your emphasis)

“Obviously, any of the Three could have come as the sacrifice but in the wisdom and

Counsels of the Trinity Jesus accepted that responsibility.” (Max Hatton, Website article, Ellen G. White and the Trinity Doctrine)

Obviously Ellen White disagrees with you. She said that Christ was the “only one” who could have done it.

Strangely though, you also wrote in your CD book 'The Trinity Doctrine for Seventh-day Adventists' (this was under the sub-heading of 'Our Pioneers Confused the Persons of the Trinity)

“The Athanasian Creed, which comes from early Christian centuries, rightly insisted that Trinitarianism does not confuse the Persons of the Trinity. Unfortunately, these Pioneers were apparently not aware that this is so” ... “Trinitarians have always believed and taught that the Persons of the Trinity must not be confused. Our non-Trinitarian Pioneers were obviously not at all well informed on what they opposed.” (Max Hatton, 'The Trinity Doctrine for Seventh-day Adventists', page 12, 'Semi-Arianism and our early Pioneers')

Six pages later you wrote

“It will be obvious to all who are well informed that the Three Members of the Trinity are equal in every possible way. Yet for the purposes of the Plan of Redemption they each adopted a particular role.” (Ibid page 18, 'Jesus as the Son of God')

Max - I cannot understand your reasoning. In one place you say that the personalities of the Godhead must not be confused with each other yet you also say that the three persons of the Godhead are only role-playing the parts of Father, Son and Holy Spirit – meaning that either of them could have taken the part of the Son (or the Father or Holy Spirit). Is not this confusing the persons of the Godhead? Even in your latest article you say

“Neither can we [trinitarians] accept that they are quite separate Individuals as the Tritheists among us would have us believe. I can't help wondering what names or other means of identification the Three will have after the plan of redemption is over and we live in the world made new?” (Max Hatton, 'The Early Ellen G. White and the trinity doctrine', April 2013)

From this it also appears you believe that in the earth made new, we shall be able to actually see each of the three persons of the Godhead yet you also say that trinitarians such as yourself cannot accept that they are “quite separate Individuals”. This is something else that seems rather confusing – at least it does to me.

In keeping with your trinitarian view you wrote

“I believe that there are Three Persons (for want of a better word) in the One Divine Being” (Email, Max Hatton to Terry Hill and various recipients, 16th June 2010)

Putting all of this together you are saying that the three are not separate individuals but “One Divine Being” yet you also say (see above) that you “can't help wondering what names or other means of identification the Three will have” in the world made new. This leaves me wondering, with respect to these three persons, what trinitarians are expecting to see on the new earth. This is especially when you say “How could we possibly be made in the physical image of a Three in One God”, “It cannot be physically for God is a spirit of immense, even unlimited, proportions” (see above). In fact you say in your latest article (this was regarding where Ellen White said that in vision God had shown her that the Father and Jesus are two separate beings, each with forms of their own)

“There is no possibility of reconciling the doctrine of the Trinity with what Ellen White claims she saw in vision.” (Max Hatton, 'The Early Ellen G. White and the trinity doctrine')

I can only say that I find all this very bewildering. It also seems to me that it is depriving the gospel of its simplicity – that God the Father (one divine person) loved the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son (another divine person) to die for us so that we may have eternal life (John 3:16). If in our search to 'explain' God we lose sight of this one great truth, then we lose sight of everything. As we have noted so many times previously, throughout the Scriptures, God and Christ are spoken of as two separate individual personages – each with a personality of their own. This is exactly what our pioneers believed. How can it be said therefore, as you insist, that they confused the persons of the Godhead?

In keeping with your role playing theology, you say in your book 'The Trinity Doctrine for Seventh-day Adventists'

“If we may be allowed the luxury to speculate a bit we might expect that if the Scriptures were written today, in our western culture, Inspiration might be expected to use something like the following descriptions for the Three:

The Father might be referred to as the Architectural Managing Director.

The Son could be said to be the Roving Project Manager.

The Holy Spirit might be described as someone similar to a Field Director and Communications Manager.

We do not know how each of the Three Persons would be described apart from the plan of redemption. Probably, when the work of God for our salvation has been completed, we will be given further understanding of these things.” (Max Hatton, *The Trinity Doctrine for Seventh-day Adventists*, page 19)

As far as I am concerned, this really is losing sight of the Gospel.

An imaginary conversation with Ellen White

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In one of your articles you include an imaginary conversation that you say you hope to have in Heaven with Ellen White. You explain (your emphasis)

“I have tried to imagine a conversation I hope to have with Ellen White in heaven. In response to my queries about her early years as an Adventist, this is what I expect she might say:

“I was very young then and somewhat immature. I reported things as I understood them to be. I was no doubt influenced by my husband and other associates and I also had visions from God. I can see now that I had some dreams as well as visions and mistakenly interpreted them to be visions too. As I grew in knowledge and understanding I came to see who Jesus was really and I also came to understand that the Holy Spirit was a Divine Person too. Gradually, I became a Trinitarian and I think I made this very clear in my later writings.”
(Max Hatton, Website article, *Ellen G. White and the Trinity Doctrine*)

The non-trinitarians that I know, refuse to accept this type of reasoning. We do not believe that this conversation (or anything like it) will ever take place at any time anywhere. I would say that this is something you have dreamt up in your own imaginings – something totally fictional. Personally, I believe that your “hope” of having this conversation with Ellen White is well and truly hopeless.

According to your reasoning, this ‘immaturity’ of Ellen White would have needed to continue for something like the first 60 years of her calling to the prophetic office (until she was in her mid-70’s). This is obviously a very long time to remain immature. It also reduces much of what she wrote (which you say is error) to be just her own opinion and imagination. You actually believe that when we get to Heaven, if she is asked, she will admit that what she thought were visions from God were

only dreams of her own imagining.

As you say in your article 'The Early Ellen G. White and the trinity doctrine' (this was with reference to where Ellen White said she saw in vision that God and Christ are two separate individuals who each have forms of their own)

"There is no possibility of reconciling the doctrine of the Trinity with what Ellen White claims she saw in vision. I am not willing to say that she was a fake. It must have been a difficult time for her trying to sort out what her husband and others believed when compared with the Trinity which she probably understood but a little. She must have been going over and over with these things in her mind. I am inclined to accept that she had dreams involving them and thought they were prophetic dreams from God. They could not have been for they contradict all that we know of God from the Bible. As we shall yet see they also contradict what Ellen white revealed about God in her later years.

I suppose that another possibility is that God gave Ellen a symbolic vision which she misunderstood and interpreted it in harmony with her newfound Semi-Arian beliefs. I guess this is possible but I regard it to be unlikely." (*Max Hatton, 'The Early Ellen G. White and the trinity doctrine'*)

Here you say very plainly that Ellen White could not have had these visions from God (saying that God and Christ are two separate persons) because "they contradict all that we know of God from the Bible" yet as we have seen above, in the early 1900's (this was after Kellogg had confessed to come to believe in the trinity doctrine) she stressed over and over again – as they are portrayed in Scripture - that they are separate divine beings.

You make it appear that Ellen White was quite 'mixed up' about what she saw. It is obvious from what you say here (if what you say is true), we could not place any confidence at all in what she said God had shown her.

I believe it is important to remember here that we have been told

"God is either teaching His church, reproving their wrongs and strengthening their faith, or He is not. This work is of God, or it is not. God does nothing in partnership with Satan. My work . . . bears the stamp of God or the stamp of the enemy. There is no halfway work in the matter. The Testimonies are of the Spirit of God, or of the devil.

As the Lord has manifested Himself through the spirit of prophecy, past, present, and future have passed before me." (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies Volume 5, page 671, 'The nature and influence of the Testimonies'*)

A few sentences later she asks the question

"Is this work of the last thirty-six years from above or from beneath?" (*Ibid*)

This is a question we all need to answer for ourselves. Which way is it? Consider this for the moment.

Some say that Jesus was only a good man but how can this be? If He was not who He claimed to be (the divine Son of God) then He must be the biggest fraudster (fake) that has ever walked this earth. How then can He be called a good man?

We can say the same concerning Ellen White. Over and over again she claimed that God had revealed things to her, either in dreams or in visions etc. If God did not do this then she cannot be

described as simply a good person. She would have been a fraudster (a fake).

God's servant always had to contend with those who do not accept that she was called to the prophetic office – also that she has changed her mind about what she had written in her earlier days. In 1897 she wrote

“The greatest tirade may be made against me, but it will not change in the least my mission or my work. We have had this to meet again and again. The Lord gave me the message when I was only 17 years old.” (*Ellen White, Selected Messages, Book 3, page 74, Manuscript 29, 1897*)

She explained

“The message the Lord has given me to bear has been in a straight line from light to light, upward and onward from truth to advanced truth” (*Ibid*)

Anyone believing the things that Ellen White said she had seen in vision – at least without understanding she had changed her mind about them (which she did according to you) - would have continued to believe error. If this situation were true (which I do not believe it was), this too would be quite a realisation. It would mean that she would have been the cause of tens of thousands of people (if not hundreds of thousands or even more) believing error. This too would be quite an assertion.

I would also say it was just about the height of deception. Satan Himself could not have made a better job of it (mixing truth with error and claiming it was from God). In fact this is what many of the enemies of Seventh-day Adventism are saying today – that Ellen White did not have these visions from God - also that much of what she said she had ‘seen’ and had written was just her own imagination - also that it was unscriptural anyway. You obviously agree with them – either to a greater or lesser degree.

As I said previously though, everyone is entitled to his or her own opinion. I am simply responding to your challenge and sharing with you my personal views. Here are a few things Ellen White said about the visions. This will give the readers of this response another perspective apart from yours and mine.

The visions - the work of God

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Ellen White had no doubts that the visions she had were from God. In fact she said that those who denied this were working against God. She wrote in 1849 (when these visions were doubted by some)

“I saw that in striking against the visions they did not strike against the worm the feeble instrument that God spake through; but against the Holy Ghost. I saw it was a small thing to speak against the instrument, but it was dangerous to slight the words of God.” (*Ellen G. White, Broadside 2, 31st January 1849*)

“I saw if they were in error and God chose to show them their errors through visions, and they disregarded the teachings of God through visions, they would be left to take their own way, and run in the way of error, and think they were right, until they would find it out too late.” (*Ibid*)

We need to give this very serious consideration. It is in keeping with where we read in the Scriptures that those who reject the warnings that come through God's messengers (prophets etc.) will do so until they come to the point where there is ‘no remedy’ (2 Chronicles 36:16).

We are told here that these people who disregard God's correcting through the visions will "think they were right, until they would find it out too late" they were in error. Note this was with reference to Ellen White's early visions.

When speaking of the Testimonies (which came through those things which Ellen White said that God had shown her in vision) she wrote

"And now, brethren, I entreat you not to interpose between me and the people, and turn away the light which God would have come to them. Do not by your criticisms take out all the force, all the point and power, from the *Testimonies*. **Do not feel that you can dissect them to suit your own ideas, claiming that God has given you ability to discern what is light from heaven and what is the expression of mere human wisdom.**" (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies Volume 5, page 691, 'The nature and influence of the Testimonies'*)

She then counselled (making the acceptance or rejection of the Testimonies a personal responsibility)

"If the Testimonies speak not according to the word of God, reject them. Christ and Belial cannot be united. For Christ's sake do not confuse the minds of the people with human sophistry and skepticism, and make of none effect the work that the Lord would do. Do not, by your lack of spiritual discernment, make of this agency of God a rock of offense whereby many shall be caused to stumble and fall, "and be snared, and be taken." (Ibid)

In 1906, Ellen White wrote a letter in which she said

"I have my work to do, to meet the misconceptions of those who suppose themselves able to say what is testimony from God and what is human productions.

If those who have done this work continue in this course, **Satanic agencies will choose for them.**" (Ellen G. White, *Letter 28, To Brother George Amadon, January 15, 1906*)

Again this is a very serious warning – and a very frightening one. She explained

"Those who have helped souls to feel at liberty to specify what is of God in the Testimonies and what are the uninspired words of Sister White, will find that they were helping the devil in his work of deception." (Ibid)

This perhaps is something that not too many people have considered.

In another letter written later that same year (1906), Ellen White wrote of her call to the prophetic office. The entire letter is well worth reading but space here only allows a portion of it to be quoted. In one place she said that Christ spoke to her saying

"Be not afraid of man, for my shield shall protect you. It is not you that speaketh; it is the Lord that giveth the messages of warning and reproof. Never deviate from the truth under any circumstances. Give the light I shall give you. The messages for these last days shall be written in books, and shall stand immortalized, to testify against those who have once rejoiced in the light, but who have been led to give it up because of the seductive influences of evil." (Ellen G. White, *letter May 26th 1906*)

She also wrote the following (note these paragraphs are not contiguous but are extracts from the letter)

“God has made plain to me the various ways in which he would use me to carry forward a special work. Visions have been given me, with the promise, “If you deliver the messages faithfully and endure to the end, you shall eat of the fruit of the tree of life, and drink of the water of the river of life.”” (*Ibid*)

“I understand that some were anxious to know if Mrs. White still held the same views as she did years ago when they had heard her speak in the Sanitarium grove, in the Tabernacle, and at the campmeetings held in the suburbs of Battle Creek. I assured them that the message she bears today is the same that she has borne during the sixty years of her public ministry.” (*Ibid*)

“I have written many books, and they have been given a wide circulation. Of myself I could not have brought out the truth in these books, but the Lord has given me the help of his Holy Spirit. These books, giving the instruction that the Lord has given me during the past sixty years, contain light from heaven, and will bear the test of investigation.” (*Ibid*)

There can be no doubt that Ellen White believed that the visions she had received - also the things she had written in her books etc. - were of God.

In an open letter in 1903 concerning the books she had written, she made abundantly clear

“Sister White is not the originator of these books. They contain the instruction that during her life-work God has been giving her. They contain the precious, comforting light that God has graciously given his servant to be given to the world. From their pages this light is to shine into the hearts of men and women, leading them to the Saviour. The Lord has declared that these books are to be scattered throughout the world. There is in them truth which to the receiver is a savor of life unto life. They are silent witnesses for God.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 20th January 1903, ‘An open letter’*)

This is when she referred to her work as the lesser light

“The Lord has sent his people much instruction, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little. Little heed is given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light. O, how much good would be accomplished if the books containing this light were read with a determination to carry out the principles they contain! There would be a thousandfold greater vigilance, a thousandfold more self-denial and resolute effort. And many more would now be rejoicing in the light of present truth.” (*Ibid*)

In a letter written in 1906 in reply to someone asking about her writings she explained

“I do not write one article in the paper, expressing merely my own ideas. They are what God has opened before me in vision -- the precious rays of light shining from the throne,” is correct. It is true concerning the articles in our papers and in the many volumes of my books. I have been instructed in accordance with the Word in the precepts of the law of God. I have been instructed in selecting from the lessons of Christ. Are not the positions taken in my writings in harmony with the teachings of Jesus Christ? If not, point it out to me.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald 30th August 1906, ‘Correct views concerning the testimonies (A reply to an enquirer)’*)

In 'Testimonies to Ministers', Ellen White spoke of the dangers of those who trusted to human reasoning. She also spoke of those who “reject the words of reproof sent to them from God through His Holy Spirit”. She added

“What reserve power has the Lord with which to reach those who have cast aside His

warnings and reproofs, and have accredited the testimonies of the Spirit of God to no higher source than human wisdom? In the judgment what can you who have done this offer to God as an excuse for turning from the evidences He has given you that God was in the work? (*Ellen White, Testimonies to Ministers, page 466, written 3rd November 1890*)

This was Ellen White's perspective of the visions – also of what she had written.

Revelation directly from God

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At the 1905 General Conference session (where in attendance would have been those who would not have had 'first hand' experience of 'how things were' in the very early days of Seventh-day Adventism – and who perhaps did not appreciate how the early Seventh-day Adventists had established Bible truth or how God had used Ellen White in the establishing of our church etc.) - Ellen White spoke of how, in determining truth, the pioneers came together in prayer and Bible study. So why at this time (1905) did she choose to do such a thing?

At that time (1905), our denominational beliefs were under attack from within. This was on two basic fronts. Albion Fox Ballenger was challenging our sanctuary beliefs whilst John Harvey Kellogg, with his 'God-in-nature' idea, invalidated the belief that the Holy Spirit only dwelt within the converted. Kellogg's reasoning culminated in the idea that the Holy Spirit was within everyone – thus doing away with the need of conversion. Kellogg had also said, in contrast to what was then the denominational faith of Seventh-day Adventists, he had come to believe in the trinity doctrine.

Whatever the specific details of Kellogg's God-in-nature beliefs, he was obviously challenging our views of the Godhead – which in 1905 was still very much non-trinitarian. If the minds of Seventh-day Adventists could be unsettled regarding this or our sanctuary beliefs, then the foundation of our message would have been swept away.

Ellen White though was assuring the delegates that our 'last day message' had been built upon an immovable foundation. She informed the delegates concerning the pioneers (repeating what she had said a couple of years previously)

“When they came to the point in their study where they said, "We can do nothing more," the Spirit of the Lord would come upon me. I would be taken off in vision, and a clear explanation of the passages we had been studying would be given me, with instruction as to how we were to labor and teach effectively. Thus light was given that helped us to understand the Scriptures in regard to Christ, his mission, and his priesthood. A line of truth extending from that time to the time when we shall enter the city of God, was made plain to me, and I gave to others the instruction that the Lord had given me.” (*Ellen G. White to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference, Review and Herald 25th May 1905 'The Work for this Time'*)

Whilst I will not go into all that is said here, suffice to say there is no intimation from Ellen White that what she had seen in vision in her early days was just her own imaginings – and this was in 1905 which was 61 years after she had been given her first vision (December 1844). Notice she says that she “gave to others the instruction that **the Lord**” had given her. She claimed that what she had seen in vision was revelation directly from God Himself. Notice too she said that in vision, God had shown her the truth concerning “Christ, his mission, and his priesthood”. This is very important. It is no wonder that in 1893 she could say that “there is not a people on earth who hold more firmly to the truth of Christ's pre-existence than do Seventh-day Adventists.”(*Review and Herald, 5th December 1893*). This was when we were teaching that Christ is truly the Son of God, begotten (brought forth) of God in eternity.

Keep one thing in mind. This is that these pioneers were studying their Bibles (and I am sure in a very prayerful spirit) – yet in itself this did not mean that they fully understood everything they read.

In a very marked manner, God opened their understanding to the meaning of certain Scripture. This was not by the Holy Spirit speaking to each individual's mind (which He could have done) but by giving Ellen White a vision through which the true meaning of Scripture was given. So it was that instead of enlightening each person's mind directly, God used a human being as an intermediary to convey truth to others.

In one sense, this can be likened to the Ethiopian eunuch who could not understand the Scripture he was reading (Acts 8:26-40). To give him understanding, God could have, through the Holy Spirit, spoken his mind directly but He chose not to do it this way. Instead He told Philip to go to the eunuch to explain the Scripture to him (see verse 29). This was still the work of the Holy Spirit. He was enlightening the eunuch's mind through Philip.

The point I am making is that concerning the passages of Scripture with which the pioneers were studying, God could have, through the Holy Spirit, enlightened their minds individually (as He very often does) but this time He chose not to do it this way. Instead, He enlightened their understanding through visions He gave to His servant Ellen White. This provided not only for enlightenment (an increased understanding) of Scripture but also for unity of belief amongst God's remnant people. It was not just one person saying, "I believe a certain Scripture means this" and another saying "I believe it means something else" – with both probably thinking they were enlightened by the Holy Spirit (which very often happens). God obviously wanted to unite His people on one platform of truth. As is explained in Ephesians chapter 4 (as quoted above), this is one of God's purposes in giving the gift. It is to unite His people.

If God wishes to enlighten His people in such a manner as this then this is His prerogative. He can enlighten our minds to the meaning of Scripture in any way He chooses. Who is going to say to Him He cannot do it this way or that way?

I have had people say to me when I have mentioned Ellen White, "I have my Bible. I don't need anything else". We need to appreciate though, the pioneers had their Bibles but God saw fit to enlighten their minds through the spirit of prophecy. We need to be careful that we do not spurn the means that God has chosen to enlighten and unite us. Remember, God has said (this was when Aaron and Miriam were speaking against Moses)

“... Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream.” Numbers 12:6

When God's people heed the words of His chosen servants (prophets etc.) they flourish and they prosper. As Jehoshaphat said to the people

“Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.” 2 Chronicles 20:20

We need to remember too that there cannot be found in Scripture any time when a messenger of God (a prophet) was rejected and everything went well for the rejecters. Only the opposite is true.

When the Jews were involving themselves in things that God had prohibited, the Scriptures say

“And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy.” 2 Chronicles 36:15-16

Notice the final sentence. We can reject God's messengers (prophets) to the point where there is “no remedy”. Obviously we need to take this very seriously. God only sends His messengers because He has “compassion on his people”. Notice too it says here that God's prophets were

“misused”.

When relating the experiences of the Jewish nation, Nehemiah wrote

“For many years you were patient with them. By your Spirit you admonished them through your prophets. Yet they paid no attention, so you handed them over to the neighboring peoples.” Nehemiah 9:30 NIV

Returning our thoughts to the 1905 General Conference session, Ellen White went on to relate to the delegates (again repeating what she had said previously)

“During this whole time I could not understand the reasoning of the brethren. My mind was locked, as it were, and I could not comprehend the meaning of the Scriptures we were studying. This was one of the greatest sorrows of my life. I was in this condition of mind until all the principal points of our faith were made clear to our minds, in harmony with the Word of God.” (*Ellen G. White to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference, Review and Herald 25th May 1905 ‘The Work for this Time’*)

“The brethren knew that, when not in vision, I could not understand these matters, and they accepted, as light directly from heaven, the revelations given.” (*Ibid*)

Here we are told that what she had seen in vision the pioneers accepted “as light **directly from heaven**”. She was claiming that what she related was not her own personal opinion neither was it her imagination but was revelation from God. If what she claimed to have been shown was only her own imaginings (particularly if it is said that what she ‘saw’ is not Biblical), then how can we say these things were from God – also how can we say she was given the gift of prophecy? Obviously we cannot.

She is also emphasising that when not in vision she could not understand these things – also that she remained in this condition until “**all the principal points**” of the faith of these early Seventh-day Adventists were made clear to their minds. This must have included what we believed about Christ.

Reason with me for a moment.

Ellen White is referring to a time in the past when “**all the principal points**” of our faith were established (remember, she was saying this in 1905). She had also said that when in vision, “**light was given that helped us to understand the Scriptures in regard to Christ, his mission, and his priesthood**”.

The most important part of any Christian denomination's beliefs is what is believed concerning Christ. By 1905, this belief was well and truly established within Seventh-day Adventism. It was that Christ is truly the Son of God – begotten of God in eternity. This is the belief endorsed as correct through the spirit of prophecy. This same belief was held by Seventh-day Adventists not only during the time of Ellen White's ministry but also for decades after her death. Our church today though says that this belief is error. The non-trinitarians who hold this belief are condemned for believing it. If these early Seventh-day Adventists had been wrong in this belief, don't you think that by then (1905), over 60 years after our beginnings as God's remnant people, that God, through the spirit of prophecy, would have pointed this out to us? What would have been the sense in allowing us to continue to believe and teach it if it was error - particularly as Ellen White had said that God had shown her the truth concerning Christ's pre-existence?

There is another question that springs to mind. If by this time (1905) Ellen White had come to realise that much of what she had ‘seen’ was just her imagination, then why was she telling these delegates that it was from God? This would be tantamount to lying and deception.

When relating the same events the following year in the Review and Herald, Ellen White wrote that at times when “it seemed as if no explanation [to certain Scripture] could be given” – and when the brethren came to the place where they could go no further in study, “the Spirit of God would rest upon me, and I would be taken off in vision, and be instructed in regard to the relation of Scripture to Scripture.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 14th June 1906 ‘Notes of Travel No. 1 (Journey to Southern California)’*)

“These experiences were repeated over and over and over again. **Thus many truths of the third angel’s message were established, point by point.**” (*Ibid*)

Again there is no intimation here from Ellen White that what she claimed to have seen in vision was her just own imagination – and this was in 1906. In fact she said that by this means (visions etc.) God had enabled us to establish our message. In other words, through the spirit of prophecy, God enlightened us (Seventh-day Adventists) to the meaning of certain Scriptures - and had also helped us to formulate our doctrines.

As has been said already, this is God’s prerogative. If in this way He wishes to enlighten His people, then this is entirely up to Him. Who can argue with God? Who would say He should not do things this way or that? Certainly not me!

Another question to ask is this: – were those early Seventh-day Adventists correct in receiving as light directly from Heaven those things Ellen White said she saw in vision or should they have said they were going to ignore them and only go by what they believed the Scriptures were saying? To put this another way, were they correct in using this light (that came from God through Ellen White) to help them understand Scripture or were they wrong? What would you say Max?

Please do not get me wrong. I am not saying that through the spirit of prophecy God gave us our beliefs without us studying the Scriptures but through the spirit of prophecy He certainly aided us in our understanding of them. As J. N. Andrews once explained

“The object of spiritual gifts is to maintain the living work of God in the church. They enable the Spirit of God to speak in the correction of wrongs, and in the exposure of iniquity. They are the means whereby God teaches his people when they are in danger of taking wrong steps. They are the means by which the Spirit of God sheds light upon church difficulties, when otherwise their adjustment would be impossible.” (*J. N. Andrews, “Our Use of the Visions of Sr. White,” Review and Herald, Feb. 15, 1870*)

In continuing he wrote

“They also constitute the means whereby God preserves his people from confusion by pointing out errors, by correcting false interpretations of the Scriptures, and causing light to shine out upon that which is in danger of being wrongly understood, and therefore of being the cause of evil and division to the people of God. In short, their work is to unite the people of God in the same mind and in the same judgment upon the meaning of the Scriptures. Mere human judgment, with no direct instruction from Heaven, can never search out hidden iniquity, nor adjust dark and complicated church difficulties, nor prevent different and conflicting interpretations of the Scriptures. It would be sad indeed if God could not still converse with his people.” (*Ibid*)

Yes indeed – very sad!

Statements concerning Ellen White

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In emails you have sent around to numerous ‘undisclosed recipients’ (so it is known to many and not exactly private), you have made it very clear that it is your belief that certain of Ellen White’s

words cannot be trusted. You wrote such as

“She was certainly wrong in her early years on Who and What God is. She believed that God had a form (body and parts) not unlike we who are human. She was sadly wrong.” *(Max Hatton, email to undisclosed recipients, 10th October 2010)*

This is when you said (as we noted above)

“Think this matter through for yourself – If you are a modern day Semi-Arian you might believe as Ellen White did. However, if you are a Seventh-day Adventist Trinitarian you can’t possibly believe such a thing. How could we possibly be made in the physical image of a Three in One God? *(Ibid)*

You also wrote two days later (again to your ‘undisclosed recipients’)

“I cannot accept the Trinity doctrine and at the same time accept that what Ellen White says is correct...What Ellen White said back there clearly contradicts the Bible” *(Max Hatton, email to undisclosed recipients, 12th October 2010)*

As I said Max, like everyone else, you are entitled to your opinion.

I did notice you say in your website article ‘Ellen G. White and the Trinity Doctrine’

“Silly people have written a lot of silly garbage about Ellen White, particularly on the Internet. My friends, only silly other people take notice of this discrediting nonsense.” *(Max Hatton, Website article, Ellen G. White and the Trinity Doctrine)*

Obviously Max, you do not believe you are in any way discrediting Ellen White. You continued

“Some will think that I am attacking Ellen White, that will sadden me because I am endeavouring to discover the truth about her. Truth and honesty are vitally important to me” *(Ibid)*

Drawing your article to a conclusion you wrote

“Some have presented what is really a mythical Ellen White and we must not get carried away with the myth. We need to know the truth on this matter and as Scripture says, the truth will set us free. The evidence for the truth is there and I have tried to unravel and reveal it to the best of my limited ability. I trust that what I have presented is clear enough for ordinary readers.” *(Ibid)*

Earlier you had asked a rather pertinent question

“Now, some of my readers begin to get real worried, am I trying to depreciate Ellen White? Why would I want to do that? I have no reason to want to do such a thing – what I want is the truth about Ellen White and that is not hard to see by anyone willing to accept the truth.” *(Ibid)*

In answer to your question Max, some might reason that you are saying this about Ellen White because some of the things she claimed that God had revealed to her are not in harmony with your views. You must consider this a possibility.

What I find rather strange is that you quote No. 18 of our fundamental beliefs. This is where concerning the writings of Ellen White it says

“One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord’s messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. (Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14-21; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 12:17; 19:10.)” (*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook, page 7, 2009 edition*)

I for one cannot see how - if as you say Ellen White was writing so much error contradicting the Bible (particularly concerning God and Christ) – that her writings can be said to be “a continuing and authoritative source of truth” – also that they provide us with “comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction”. If I thought they contained as much error as you say they contain I would see no point in reading them.

Another point is this; why should anyone want to read the writings of someone who claimed to have had visions from God that were not from God but were just her own imaginings? Most Christians would class such a person as a false prophet – someone who should not be trusted. This is how many of those who oppose the Seventh-day Adventist Church regard Ellen White. It seems to me that you are confirming them in their belief.

In 1891, in a General Conference Bulletin, Ellen White wrote of those who cast doubts in people's minds about her work. She said

“Some have manifested a spirit of Pharisaic prejudice and criticism. As soon as this is indulged, the holy angels depart from you; for they cannot administer to sin. You possess in a large degree the same spirit that was revealed in the Conference at Minneapolis. The deception that was upon minds there still exists. Some have not been willing to see and acknowledge their errors, and their blindness of mind remains.

You who have been educating yourselves and others in a spirit of criticism and accusing, remember that you are imitating the example of Satan. When it suits your purpose, you treat the Testimonies as if you believed them, quoting from them to strengthen any statement you wish to have prevail. But how is it when light is given to correct your errors? Do you then accept the light? When the Testimonies speak contrary to your ideas, you treat them very lightly.

It does not become any one to drop a word of doubt here and there that shall work like poison in other minds, shaking their confidence in the messages which God has given, which have aided in laying the foundation of this work, and have attended it to the present day, in reproofs, warnings, corrections, and encouragements. To all who have stood in the way of the Testimonies, I would say, God has given a message to his people, and his voice will be heard, whether you hear or forbear. Your opposition has not injured me; but you must give an account to the God of heaven, who has sent these warnings and instructions to keep his people in the right way. You will have to answer to him for your blindness, for being a stumbling-block in the way of sinners.” (*Ellen G. White, General Conference Daily Bulletin, April 13th 1891*)

Fourteen years later in 1905, Ellen White wrote a letter to O. A. Olsen. In this letter she addressed herself to the issue of her calling to the prophetic office

“The meeting on Sunday afternoon was attended by many of the citizens of Battle Creek. They paid the best of attention. At this meeting I had opportunity to state decidedly that my views have not changed. The blessing of the Lord rested upon many of those who heard the words spoken.

I understood that some were anxious to know if Mrs. White held the same views as she did

years ago when they had heard her speak in the Sanitarium grove, in the Tabernacle, and at the camp meetings held in the suburbs of Battle Creek. I assured them that the message she bears today is the same that she has borne during the sixty years of her public ministry. She has the same service to do for the Master that was laid upon her in her girlhood. She receives lessons from the same Instructor. The directions given her are, "Make known to others what I have revealed to you. Write out the messages that I give you, that the people may have them." This is what she has endeavored to do.

I have written many books, and they have been given a wide circulation. Of myself I could not have brought out the truths in these books, but the Lord has given me the help of His Holy Spirit. These books, giving the instruction that the Lord has given me during the past sixty years, contain light from heaven, and will bear the test of investigation.

The question is sometimes raised, "What if Mrs. White should die?" I answer: "The books that she has written will not die. They are a living witness to what saith the Scriptures". (*Ellen G. White, Letter 55, to Elder O. A. Olsen, January 30, 1905, 1 MR, pages 140-141*)

Ellen White obviously did not regard herself as ever changing her mind about what she said God had shown her. She said these views were the same in 1905 as they always had been. Notice particularly the last sentence. This is why her writings are not to be ignored. They are the work of God.

As you said yourself Max, Ellen White was writing non-trinitarian statements (which you say are not Biblical) even when she was in her mid to late 70's. This is the same as she had been doing in her early years.

By this time (the early 1900's) she had been writing for something like 60 years – which as I am sure you will agree is a long time to be consistently writing error (if she was writing error) – especially for someone given the gift of prophecy.

If for this length of time she had been writing error, particularly concerning the most important teachings of the Bible (meaning regarding God and Christ etc.) - also telling people she had visions from God that were only her imaginings (that were not even Biblical) - which in turn means for this length of time she was leading people astray as to what the Bible says - then how can it be said that she had been given the gift of prophecy? Surely one of the identifying marks of a prophet of God is that he or she speaks according to the Word of God.

Look at it this way. How would you today identify someone as having the gift of prophecy? Would you say they had this gift if they were continually speaking contrary to Scripture or if they said they had visions from God that were not from God? I think not!

Before moving on there is one more point to consider.

Last year, in an email to undisclosed recipients, you made this remark

"It is true that I used to misuse the writings of Ellen White until I saw how wrong I was in doing this. What did I have to do? I had to cast off the practice and while I still appreciate her proper use I rely now on the Bible and the Bible only for my understanding of doctrine. Abundant evidence has revealed to me that the virus can be fatal." (*Max Hatton, Email to undisclosed recipients, 18th April 2012*)

You refer here to the "proper use" of Ellen White's writings. Unfortunately, I cannot find anywhere on your website where this is explained. Obviously you are saying what she wrote cannot be trusted, so what would this "proper use" be exactly? Surely if her writings contain as much error as

you say they contain, the best advice would be not to use them. After all, are not people going to be influenced by what she has written? How can we recommend people to read an author's writings if they contain so much error as you maintain? We need to remember that Ellen White claimed that God had shown her these things. Could not her claim influence people to accept as true those things she wrote that you say are not true (not Biblical)?

You also say Max that you "[rely now on the Bible and the Bible only for my understanding of doctrine](#)". This is all well and good – as far as it goes - but we must remember that many people whom we say believe error say exactly the same thing. In other words, they say that for their beliefs they rely on 'the Bible only' but we say they believe error. It is not therefore just a question of "Bible only" but how do we interpret and understand what the Bible says. This is very often two different things. If we rely on our own understanding, we can misinterpret the Scriptures. We need the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. Is not this one function of the work of the Holy Spirit through someone given the gift of prophecy?

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Unless I have missed it somewhere, you have not quoted Ellen White where she says

["I recommend to you, dear reader, the Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice. By that Word we are to be judged. God has, in that Word, promised to give visions in the "last days"; not for a new rule of faith, **but for the comfort of His people, and to correct those who err from Bible truth.** Thus God dealt with Peter when He was about to send him to preach to the Gentiles." \(Acts 10.\)" \(Ellen G. White, *Early Writings, page 78, 'Experience and Views' 1882*\)](#)

This is written in the same book where Ellen White said she saw in vision that God the Father and Jesus are two separate persons each having forms of their own.

I would think that in a very real sense, the above statement is of little value to you. This is because as you say yourself, Ellen White will admit, when she is in Heaven, that much of what she said were visions from God were only dreams of her own imagination. You also say that certain of her visions are not Biblical. This would mean of course, if it were true, that no more than Ellen White could differentiate between visions from God and her own imaginings neither can we.

This would be quite a predicament in which to find ourselves. It would mean that the only safe thing to do would be to completely disregard everything she said she was shown in vision. The other thing is this; why should anyone, already believing that much of what she had written is error, want to read her writings? Certainly anyone believing this would have no confidence in them. This seems to defeat the entire purpose in God giving someone the gift of prophecy.

The previously quoted statement from the spirit of prophecy is in keeping with what we have read above in Ephesians 4. The gifts were given by God to shield us from deception – either directly from Satan or from Satan through human instrumentalities. It is to correct us, as we have been told, when we "[err from Bible truth](#)". Obviously God has the right to do this in any way He chooses. He corrects people through the working of the Holy Spirit. If the 'visions' themselves were wrong (false) then where does that leave us?

In the book 'Life Sketches' (1915), there is an account of how it was in the very early days of our movement. In this account, Ellen White told of one of the Sabbath conferences that was held in 1848. She related how around 35 were present and then wrote

["But of this number there were hardly two agreed. Some were holding serious errors, and each strenuously urged his own views, declaring that they were according to the Scriptures."](#)

(Ellen G. White, Life Sketches of Ellen G. White, page 111)

After detailing a number of these wrong beliefs and explaining how heavily they had weighed upon her she explained

“The light of heaven then rested upon me, and I was soon lost to earthly things. My accompanying angel presented before me some of the errors of those present, and also the truth in contrast with their errors. These discordant views, which they claimed were in harmony with the Scriptures, were only according to their opinion of Bible teaching; and I was bidden to tell them that they should yield their errors, and unite upon the truths of the third angel’s message.” *(Ibid)*

As has been said previously, just because we study the Bible alone – and draw opinions based upon what we have studied – this does not make that belief correct. Imagine how many people do this and yet hold beliefs totally contradictory to each other. To understand the Bible correctly, particularly the deeper things of God’s Word, we need the need the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. Wouldn’t you agree?

The gift of prophecy points us to the truth found in the Bible. The truths given through the gift never contradict Scripture. As we have been told

“The Bible must be your counselor. Study it, and the Testimonies God has given; for they never contradict his word.” *(Ellen G. White, letter to Sister Rasmussen, March 19, 1907. Manuscript Releases, Volume 8 No. 544)*

This is obviously something different than you are saying. We also find written in her book ‘The Great Controversy’

“Yet the fact that God has revealed His will to men through His word, has not rendered needless the continued presence and guiding of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, the Spirit was promised by our Saviour, to open the word to His servants, to illuminate and apply its teachings. And since it was the Spirit of God that inspired the Bible, it is impossible that the teaching of the Spirit should ever be contrary to that of the word.” *(Ellen G. White, ‘The Great Controversy’ 1911 edition, ‘Introduction’)*

Whatever the Holy Spirit inspired Ellen White to write must be in harmony with Scripture - not contrary to it.

Ellen White claimed that God had shown her the truth. As she wrote in one letter to a brother

“Bible truth is our only safety. I know and understand that we are to be established in the faith, in the light of the truth given us in our early experience. At that time one error after another pressed in upon us; ministers and doctors brought in new doctrines. We would search the Scriptures with much prayer, and the Holy Spirit would bring the truth to our minds. Sometimes whole nights would be devoted to searching the Scriptures, and earnestly asking God for guidance. Companies of devoted men and women assembled for this purpose. The power of God would come upon me, and I was enabled clearly to define what is truth and what is error.

As the points of our faith were thus established, our feet were placed upon a solid foundation. We accepted the truth point by point, under the demonstration of the Holy Spirit. I would be taken off in vision, and explanations would be given me. I was given illustrations of heavenly things, and of the sanctuary, so that we were placed where light was shining on us in clear, distinct rays.

All these truths are immortalized in my writings. The Lord never denies His word. Men may get up scheme after scheme, and the enemy will seek to seduce souls from the truth, but all who believe that the Lord has spoken through Sister White, and has given her a message, will be safe from the many delusions that will come in these last days.”(Ellen G. White, Letter to W. W. Simpson, Letter 50, January 30th 1906)

So we can see Max, according to what was said here by Ellen White, we should be encouraging our people to read the spirit of prophecy writings - not leading them to lay them aside. To encourage people to lay aside these writings, if they are from God, would certainly be doing a work that would be pleasing to Satan. Wouldn't you agree?

Did you notice that Ellen White wrote that all who believe God spoke through her “will be safe from the many delusions that will come in these last days”? This is because as has been said, the Spirit of God always leads to – and is in agreement with – the truths found in the Scriptures. As she said “The Lord never denies His word”. The above is another quotation I cannot remember seeing used by you. Certainly she was not telling us to ignore what she has written.

Notice too she says that “the points of our faith” (meaning the beliefs held by Seventh-day Adventists during the time of her ministry) are “immortalized” in her writings. These were non-trinitarian beliefs. It is no wonder her writings are replete with statements that can only be fitted into a non-trinitarian view of the Godhead.

As she wrote the next year, which was just 8 years prior to her death

"Abundant light has been given to our people in these last days. Whether or not my life is spared, my writings will constantly speak, and their work will go forward as long as time shall last. My writings are kept on file in the office, and even though I should not live, these words that have been given to me by the lord will still have life and will speak to the people." (Ellen G. White, Letter October 23 1907, also as quoted in General Conference Bulletin, 1st June 1913)

We need to reflect on these words. Certainly she is not saying we should be laying her writings aside? As we are told in the Testimonies to the Church

“We must follow the directions given through the spirit of prophecy. We must love and obey the truth for this time. This will save us from accepting strong delusions. God has spoken to us through His word. He has spoken to us through the testimonies to the church and through the books that have helped to make plain our present duty and the position that we should now occupy. The warnings that have been given, line upon line, precept upon precept, should be heeded. If we disregard them, what excuse can we offer?” (Ellen White, Testimonies Volume 8, page 298, ‘The essential knowledge’)

What excuse indeed?

We should be very careful not to cut down the tree that God has planted. God has given us the spirit of prophecy writings to help us through these last days – which if heeded, will, in the finality, keep us safe from Satan's delusions. Yet you say in your website article challenging the non-trinitarians

“My challenge is for Seventh-day Adventist anti-Trinitarians to provide a clear reply to the question – “Why do you not honour Ellen White and confine your arguments to a study of the Bible alone?” To be a genuine Seventh-day Adventist you must do this.” (Max Hatton, Website article, ‘A Challenge to Anti-Trinitarians in the Seventh-day Adventist Church’)

I believe Max that I have answered your challenge. I believe I have shown conclusively why we

must not ignore what God has revealed through Ellen White. As I have said so many times previously, I fully agree that regarding any teachings we hold, we must be able to establish them by using Scripture alone but to say we must use the “Bible alone” (meaning ignore what we have been told through Ellen White) is saying something entirely different. After all, I think we would all agree that God did not, for 71 years, give us abundant light through Ellen White so that we could ignore it. Again I can only ask - what sense would that make and for what reason would we want to do such a thing?

As we noted earlier on she said (in the latter stages of her ministry)

“I want that which is deemed worthy to appear, for the Lord has given me much light that I want the people to have; for there is instruction that the Lord has given me for his people. It is light that they should have, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little. This is now to come before the people, because it has been given to correct specious errors and to specify what is truth. The Lord has revealed many things pointing out the truth, thus saying, “This is the way, walk ye in it.” (*Ellen White to W. C. White, Letter 127, November 22nd 1910*)

Conclusion

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Regarding the trinity doctrine, I believe it safe to say that there are many who realise that this is a teaching not found in Scripture although they seem so afraid to either speak out against it or reject it. It also seems that these same people prefer tradition to the Word of God. It would be so much better if they were to realise that to have a plain ‘thus saith the Lord’ for their beliefs is far safer than believing something just because the majority believe it. Why people feel there is safety in numbers is bewildering – especially where their salvation is concerned. We are not saved ‘en bloc’ – either as a church or any other group - and just because we may be a conference leader, a minister, an elder, editor or even a General Conference President, this does not in itself grant us special favour in the eyes of God. Regardless of our status, we will answer to God as individuals.

Regarding Ellen White’s writings, particularly the usage of them, much more could have been written but enough has been said above to make my point. My personal advice to anyone is to make sure that when quoting Ellen White, a balanced view of what she wrote is presented. If this isn’t done, the light that came through her will be seriously distorted.

Max - please don’t take me the wrong way. In herself, Ellen White was not infallible. Like everyone else she made mistakes. Even the prophets of the Bible made mistakes. What we need to remember though is that God did call her to the prophetic office. This in itself, if we believe it, must add a dimension to her life that you and I must regard as having great importance. After all, I believe we can safely say that God deems it important.

Needless to say, God had a purpose in giving her (and us) this gift. If we lose sight of this purpose we shall undo all the work that God desires to accomplish through her.

I would also say this – if people become convinced that for 60 years Ellen White was writing error – also that she said she had visions from God that were not from God - this may stop them from reading her writings altogether. This would obviously be in opposition to what God wants people to do. In other words, this is exactly what Satan would like to achieve – and remember, as you said yourself, this is not a game we are playing.

On this topic of Ellen White and God’s purpose for her work, this reminds me of one last statement from her writings. This is where she said

“The very last deception of Satan will be to make of none effect the testimony of the Spirit of God. “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18). Satan will work ingeniously, in different ways and through different agencies, to unsettle the confidence of God’s remnant people in the true testimony. He will bring in spurious visions to mislead, and will mingle the false with the true, and so disgust people that they will regard everything that bears the name of visions as a species of fanaticism; but honest souls, by contrasting false and true, will be enabled to distinguish between them.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 12, August 12th 1890 to Bro and Sister Garmire*)

In the same letter came the warning

“Likewise, he works through persons who have been reproved for some inconsistency in their religious life, for some course of action which was dangerous to themselves and others. Instead of receiving the testimony as a blessing from God, they refuse the means God uses to set them right. Such apparently may be very zealous for God, but they put their own interpretation upon the Word and make it contradict what the Lord has revealed in the testimonies. They think they are doing God’s service, but such work God has not given them to do.” (*Ibid*)

We need to be careful that we do not get caught up in this deception. We must not unsettle the faith of God's people in the spirit of prophecy writings.

May God bless you as you consider these things

Christian regards

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