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THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF GOD IN THE WRITINGS OF ELLEN G. WHITE

Alberto R. Timm



RELEASE

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Biblical Research Institute
Silver Spring, Maryland

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Introduction

The Bible says that “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16),¹ which implies that His creating and saving acts are all love expressions. Consequently, He created Adam and Eve as recipients of His love and care. In the garden of Eden (Gen 1:26–2:25), the first couple had an undistorted and ever-expanding knowledge of God and the wonders of His creation. With open faces they “beheld the glory of the Lord, and talked with God, and Christ, and angels, in Paradise, without a dimming veil between.”² For that couple, the study of God’s creation, with its multiform expressions, was “an exhaustless source of instruction and delight.”³ But this reality changed radically with the mysterious and unjustifiable appearance of sin.⁴

Genesis 3 not only describes the fall of Adam and Eve but also reveals some of its most tragic results. One of them was the rise of theophobia (to be afraid of God), as evident when our first parents hid themselves from God (Gen 3:7–8). Sin also drastically degenerated God’s creation (Gen 3:17–19). “Where once was written only the character of God, the knowledge of good, was now written also the character of Satan, the knowledge of evil.”⁵ In reality, the presence of evil has distorted both our understanding of God and our relationship with Him (Isa 59:2). But God, in His mercy, has provided us the Scriptures and the writings of Ellen G. White⁶ to restore that proper understanding and to function as reliable interpreters of the natural world.

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¹ All biblical quotations are from the NKJV, unless otherwise indicated.

² James White, “The Spirit of Prophecy,” in Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1 (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1870), 7.

³ Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1952), 21.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1950), 492–493.

⁵ E. G. White, *Education*, 26.

⁶ Seventh-day Adventists accept the writings of Ellen G. White as a noncanonical modern manifestation of the gift of prophecy, as stated in the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 19th ed. (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2016), 168: “The Scriptures testify that one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and we believe it was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. Her writings speak with prophetic authority and provide comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction to the church. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. (Num. 12:6; 2 Chron. 20:20; Amos 3:7; Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14–21; 2 Tim.

This paper deals specifically with Ellen White’s reflections on the biblical view of God. The overall content is classified under the following four major subheadings: 1) the knowledge of God, 2) the nature of God, 3) the work of God, and 4) the relationship with God. It is hoped that these reflections can deepen our understanding of God and strengthen our saving relationship with Him.

The Knowledge of God

Ancient Greek philosophy was largely built on the aphorism “Know thyself.” By contrast, the Hebrew-Christian religion is grounded on the experiential knowledge of Yahweh as the only way for someone to really know himself or herself.⁷ This notion is well expressed by the prophet Hosea in his lament “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos 4:6). That adversity occurred because there was no “knowledge of God in the land” (Hos 4:1) and people had “forgotten the law” of God (Hos 4:6). In his attempt to reverse that disastrous condition, the prophet insisted, “So let us know, let us press on to know the Lord” (Hos 6:3, NASB). No wonder that many centuries later Jesus Christ affirmed in His intercessory prayer, “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3).

After recognizing the foundational importance of knowing God, we are faced with the crucial question: to what extent can we know God? In our attempt to answer this question, we should recognize, first of all, the existence of an infinite contrast between the all-powerful Creator and Sustainer of the universe (Isa 40:12–28) on the one hand, and us as fragile and mortal creatures whose life is fully dependent on Him (Isa 40:1–11, 29–31) on the other. Furthermore, our sinful human nature significantly limits our understanding of God (Isa 59:2; John 16:12). So we are utterly dependent on God’s self-revelation in order to understand His nature and work, as well as to develop a saving relationship with Him.

Martin Luther sees a divine paradox between the hidden God (*Deus absconditus*) and the revealed God (*Deus revelatus*), between God Himself and His Word, because “God does many things which He does not make known unto us in His word.”⁸ For John Calvin,

3:16, 17; Heb. 1:1–3; Rev. 12:17; 19:10; 22:8, 9.)”

⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1.2, translated by Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 5. Calvin recognizes that “man never attain to a true self-knowledge until he have previously contemplated the face of God, and come down after such contemplation to look into himself.”

⁸ Martin Luther, *De servo arbitrio*, trans. Henry Cole, sec. 64. See further discussion

“we cannot by our own faculties examine the secrets of God, so we are admitted into a certain and clear knowledge of them by the grace of the Holy Spirit.”⁹ In the same line, Leon Morris adds that “man as man has no access to the inner life of God, no knowledge of God’s essential being. Theology is not a study of ‘God-in-himself’ but of ‘God-as-he-has-revealed-himself.’”¹⁰ Yet, this selectiveness does not distort the prophetic message communicated under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Ellen White explains,

If it were possible for created beings to attain to a full understanding of God and His works, then, having reached this point, there would be for them no further discovery of truth, no growth in knowledge, no further development of mind or heart. God would no longer be supreme; and man, having reached the limit of knowledge and attainment, would cease to advance. Let us thank God that it is not so. God is infinite; in Him are “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” Colossians 2:3. And to all eternity men may be ever searching, ever learning, and yet never exhaust the treasures of His wisdom, His goodness, and His power.¹¹

With these considerations in mind, let us explore some of Ellen White’s statements that shed light on the different ways God has revealed Himself to us. One of those ways is His *general* revelation through nature (Job 12:7–10; Ps 19:1–6; Rom 1:19–20; etc.). Ellen White explains that after the fall (Gen 3), “although the earth was blighted with the curse, nature was still to be man’s lesson book.”¹² By beholding nature in its present fallen condition, one can recognize the overwhelming expressions of God’s *creative* power while overlooking the evidences of His *redemptive* power in nature itself. Ellen White clearly describes,

Though marred by sin, it [nature] speaks not only of creation but of redemption. Though the earth bears testimony to the

in Alberto R. Timm, “Comprendre la révélation et l’inspiration. Une perspective adventiste,” *SERVIR: Revue adventiste de théologie* (France) 3 (Autumn 2018): 68–69.

⁹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. John Owen, Calvin’s Commentaries, vol. 19 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 446–447 (on Rom 11:34).

¹⁰ Leon Morris, *I Believe in Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 11.

¹¹ Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1956), 109.

¹² E. G. White, *Education*, 26.

curse in the evident signs of decay, it is still rich and beautiful in the tokens of life-giving power. The trees cast off their leaves, only to be robbed with fresher verdure; the flowers die, to spring forth in new beauty; and in every manifestation of creative power is held out the assurance that we may be created anew in “righteousness and holiness of truth.” Ephesians 4:24, margin. Thus the very objects and operations of nature that bring so vividly to mind our great loss become to us the messengers of hope.¹³

God’s healing power runs all through nature. If a tree is cut, if a human being is wounded or breaks a bone, nature begins at once to repair the injury. Even before the need exists, the healing agencies are in readiness; and as soon as a part is wounded, every energy is bent to the work of restoration.¹⁴

However, we should never forget that God is infinitely greater and far more majestic than the whole universe. In reality, “from nature we can gain only an imperfect idea of the greatness and majesty of God,”¹⁵ and, in its present condition, the natural world no longer reveals “a perfect knowledge of God.”¹⁶ It now carries an ambiguous message, reflecting not only the character of God and the knowledge of good, but also the character of Satan and the knowledge of evil.¹⁷ And the redemptive messages from nature are fairly limited—without any explicit reference to the plan of salvation through Christ’s atoning sacrifice and heavenly priesthood. Consequently, these transcendent realities can only be appreciated from God’s special revelation in Scripture.

The Bible is indeed a trustworthy revelation from God about Himself, and for Ellen White, the difficulties of Scripture are not “an argument against the Bible” but “a strong evidence of its divine inspiration.”¹⁸ According to her, “He gave His word to men as a revelation of Himself. Every new truth discerned is a fresh disclosure of the character of its Author.”¹⁹ The prophetic record of God’s revelation in Scripture was inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 3:16;

¹³ E. G. White, *Education*, 27.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁵ Ellen G. White, *The Upward Look* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1982), 316.

¹⁶ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 255–256.

¹⁷ E. G. White, *Education*, 26.

¹⁸ E. G. White, *Steps to Christ*, 107.

¹⁹ E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 69.

2 Pet 1:19–21) and has an overall Christ-centered emphasis (John 5:39; Rev 1:1). Ellen White recognizes that “we have only one perfect photograph of God, and this is Jesus Christ.”²⁰ Actually, “Jesus Christ is the great trustee of divine revelation,”²¹ and “the whole Bible is a revelation of the glory of God in Christ.”²²

As the prophet Hosea encouraged the Israelites to “know” and “press on to know the Lord” (Hos 6:3, NASB), so also does Ellen White encourage us. She states that “only by love is love awakened. To know God is to love Him; His character must be manifested in contrast to the character of Satan.”²³ And more,

the knowledge of God as revealed in Christ is the knowledge that all who are saved must have. This is the knowledge that works transformation of character. Received into the life, it will re-create the soul in the image of Christ. This is the knowledge that God invites His children to receive, beside which all else is vanity and nothingness.²⁴

As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe that the Holy Spirit not only inspired the whole Bible (2 Tim 3:16), but also preserved its trustworthiness throughout the centuries. Ellen White confirms that “the manuscripts of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures have been preserved through the ages by a miracle of God.”²⁵ Actually, “the Lord has preserved this Holy Book by His own miraculous power in its present shape.”²⁶ So “the Word of God is infallible; accept it as it reads; look with confidence to God.”²⁷ “If we would not build our hopes of heaven upon a false foundation we must accept the Bible as it reads and believe that the Lord means what He says.”²⁸ “Brethren, cling to your Bible, as it reads, and stop your criticisms in regard to its validity,

²⁰ Ellen G. White, in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1980), 906.

²¹ Ellen G. White, in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1980), 953.

²² E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 8:319.

²³ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1940), 22.

²⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 475.

²⁵ Ellen G. White to Brother and Sister Muckersey, February 14, 1899, Lt 32, 1899.

²⁶ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 15.

²⁷ Ellen G. White, “The Tasmanian Camp-meeting,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 11, 1896, 81.

²⁸ E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:171.

and obey the Word, and not one of you will be lost.”²⁹ This very same conviction should guide all our studies of the Bible, including those related to God and His work.

The Nature of God

When the Lord appeared to Moses in the midst of the burning bush, He told the future leader of Israel, “Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground” (Exod 3:5). The principle of sacredness in the presence of God should guide our studies of God’s Word, especially when dealing with His nature. In 1903, Ellen White wrote to John Harvey Kellogg, “My brother, when you are tempted to speak of God, where He is, or what He is, remember that on this point silence is eloquence. Take off your shoes from off your feet; for the ground on which you are placing your careless, unsanctified feet is holy ground.”³⁰

In line with this statement, Ellen White warns, “In regard to the personality and prerogatives of God, where He is, and what He is, this is a subject which we are not to dare to touch. On this theme silence is eloquence.”³¹ And she insists, “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.”³² About the nature of Christ, Ellen White affirms, “The incarnation of Christ is the mystery of all mysteries.”³³ In a similar tone, she adds, “The nature of the Holy Spirit is a mystery. Men cannot explain it, because the Lord has not revealed it to them. . . . Regarding such mysteries, which are too deep for human understanding, silence is golden.”³⁴

But these warnings should not inhibit us from studying what revelation has to say about the nature of God. Actually, “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.”³⁵ This being the case, why are some professed Christians still engaged in selective and biased studies of the inspired writings, even speculating beyond the borders of those writings? Many other reasons could be mentioned, but this study will highlight a very serious one. There is a

²⁹ E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, 1:18.

³⁰ Ellen G. White to Dr. J. H. Kellogg, November 20, 1903, Lt 253, 1903.

³¹ Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1963), 92.

³² E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 8:279.

³³ E. G. White, in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 6:1082.

³⁴ E. G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 51–52.

³⁵ E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 8:279.

natural human tendency to fill the emptiness of a life without God by speculations about Him. As Ellen White clearly states,

It is those who have no experimental knowledge of God who venture to speculate in regard to Him. Did they know more of Him, they would have less to say about what He is. The one who in the daily life holds closest communion with God, and who has the deepest knowledge of Him, realizes most keenly the utter inability of human beings to explain the Creator.³⁶

So, let us allow the inspired writings to speak to us about the majestic and wonderful God we serve.

The Attributes of God

Love

Scripture reveals several attributes or characteristics of God. A foundational one, as already mentioned, is love. Since “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16) and in Him “there is no variation or shifting shadow” (Jas 1:17, NASB), His love is unconditional and unchangeable (Jer 31:3; John 3:16; Rom 5:8). His whole being is love and whatever He does is an expression of love. Thus, “God’s love has been expressed in His justice no less than in His mercy.”³⁷ As Ellen White superbly states,

All the paternal love which has come down from generation to generation through the channel of human hearts, all the springs of tenderness which have opened in the souls of men, are but as a tiny rill to the boundless ocean when compared with the infinite, exhaustless love of God. Tongue cannot utter it; pen cannot portray it. You may meditate upon it every day of your life; you may search the Scriptures diligently in order to understand it; you may summon every power and capability that God has given you, in the endeavor to comprehend the love and compassion of the heavenly Father; and yet there is an infinity beyond. You may study that love for ages; yet you can never fully comprehend the length and the breadth, the depth and the height, of the love of God in giving His Son to die for the world. Eternity itself can never fully reveal it.³⁸

³⁶ E. G. White, *Medical Ministry*, 92.

³⁷ E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 762.

³⁸ E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:740.

Eternity

Another basic attribute of God is His eternity. Scripture refers to Him as “the everlasting God” (Isa 40:28) and the one “who alone has immortality” (1 Tim 6:16). In Psalm 90 Moses prays, “Before the mountains were brought forth, or even you had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God” (Ps 90:2; see also 1 Chron 16:36; 29:10; Pss 41:13; 106:48). In the same way, Ellen White acknowledges Him as “the eternal, self-existent One”³⁹ and states that “God always has been. He is the great I AM.”⁴⁰ And she adds, “In the word, God is spoken of as ‘the everlasting God.’ This name embraces past, present, and future. God is from everlasting to everlasting. He is the Eternal One.”⁴¹ But the eternity of God does not imply that He is timeless and immovable, as suggested by the Greek philosophers.⁴² The eternal God actually dwells with His people, as evident, for example, in many biblical theophanies (Exod 3:1–6; 19:16–18; Judg 13:3–22; etc.), in the earthly sanctuary (Exod 25:8), and in the incarnated Son of God (Matt 1:23).

Holiness

A third attribute of God is His holiness. In the Song of Moses, after crossing the Red Sea, God is recognized as “glorious in holiness” (Exod 15:11). The prophet Isaiah saw the seraphim crying before God’s throne, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!” (Isa 6:1–3). Many centuries later, the apostle John was taken in vision also to God’s throne room, where he saw four living creatures saying, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” (Rev 4:8).⁴³ In a vision in 1851, Ellen White was given a “sense of the great and terrible God with whom we have to do” and the “faint view some have of the holiness of God.”⁴⁴ The sense of God’s holiness should also be reflected in our worship services, because unless worshippers “put away every evil thing” and “worship Him in

³⁹ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1958), 36.

⁴⁰ E. G. White, *Medical Ministry*, 92.

⁴¹ E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 8:279.

⁴² For an in-depth study of the classical concepts of time and timelessness as related to God, see Fernando Canale, *A Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 10 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983).

⁴³ The relationship between the visions of Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4 is addressed in Laszlo Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation*, Library of New Testament Studies 487 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 21, 43–46, 103–113.

⁴⁴ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1945), 70.

spirit and truth and in the beauty of holiness, their coming together will be of no avail.”⁴⁵

In addition to His attributes of love, eternity, and holiness, God is also omnipotent (has all power), omnipresent (is everywhere), and omniscient (knows everything).

Omnipotence

In regard to His omnipotence, God revealed Himself to Abram (renamed Abraham) as the “Almighty God” (Gen 17:1) and informed Moses that He had revealed Himself to the patriarchs as “God Almighty” (Exod 6:3). Even though He is all-powerful, God cannot act against His own holy nature and character. This means that He cannot lie (Num 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29; Titus 1:2; Heb 6:18), be unfaithful (2 Tim 2:13), or even tempt someone (Jas 1:13). Furthermore, He also chooses to restrain His almighty power, as powerfully described by Ellen White:

O that men might understand the patience and long-suffering of God! He [Christ] is putting under restraint His own attributes. His omnipotent power is under the control of Omnipotence. O that men would understand that God refuses to be wearied out with the world’s perversity and still holds out the hope of forgiveness even to the most undeserving! But His forbearance will not always continue. Who is prepared for the sudden change that will take place in God’s dealing with sinful men? Who will be prepared to escape the punishment that will certainly fall upon transgressors?⁴⁶

Omnipresence

The omnipresence of God is stressed by David when he prays in poetic language, “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast” (Ps 139:7–10, NIV). Omnipresence is also implied in Christ’s promise, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20). Ellen White states, “He [God] is infinite and omnipresent. No words of ours can describe His greatness and majesty.”⁴⁷ That promise has a very personal tone: “Go

⁴⁵ Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1943), 50.

⁴⁶ Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students Regarding Christian Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1943), 415–416.

⁴⁷ E. G. White, *Medical Ministry*, 92.

to all nations, He bade them. Go to the farthest part of the habitable globe and be assured that My presence will be with you even there.⁴⁸

Omniscience

Closely related to God's omnipresence is His omniscience and foreknowledge. The Scriptures say that God "is perfect in knowledge" (Job 37:16) and "knows everything" (1 John 3:20, NIV), even "what is still to come" (Isa 46:10, NIV). No wonder Paul exclaims, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" (Rom 11:33, NASB). As Ellen White states, "nothing can happen in any part of the universe without the knowledge of Him who is omnipresent. Not a single event of human life is unknown to our Maker."⁴⁹ She explains,

God had a knowledge of the events of the future, even before the creation of the world. He did not make His purposes to fit circumstances, but He allowed matters to develop and work out. He did not work to bring about a certain condition of things, but He knew that such a condition would exist. The plan that should be carried out upon the defection of any of the high intelligences of heaven—this is the secret, the mystery which has been hid from ages. And an offering was prepared in the eternal purposes to do the very work which God has done for fallen humanity.⁵⁰

And she confesses, "We are as ignorant of God as little children, but as little children we may love and obey Him. Instead of speculating in regard to His nature or His prerogatives, let us give heed to the word He has spoken: 'Be still, and know that I am God.' Psalm 46:10."⁵¹ So, as already highlighted, our understanding of God needs to stay within the boundaries of His own self-revelation.

Many other attributes and characteristics of God could be mentioned, but those previously mentioned here are among the basic ones. Due to space limitations, we will deal now more specifically with the mystery of the Trinity, the essential unity of the members of the Godhead, and the functional subordination among Them.

⁴⁸ E. G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 29.

⁴⁹ Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 61.

⁵⁰ E. G. White, in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 6:1082.

⁵¹ E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 8:279.

The Mystery of the Trinity

The word “Trinity” (Gk. Τριάδος) does not appear in the Bible and, as far as we know, it was first applied to the three persons of the Godhead by Theophilus of Antioch (*Aut.* 2.15) circa AD 170.⁵² Since then the use of the term has been endorsed in many Catholic and Protestant creeds,⁵³ as well as by such reformers as Martin Luther,⁵⁴ John Calvin,⁵⁵ and the early Adventist leader William Miller.⁵⁶ But in her writings Ellen White never uses the term in allusion to the Godhead. Why? Probably because early Sabbath-keeping Adventists understood the word as carrying the heretical notion of three distinctive “Gods.” For example, in 1861 J. N. Loughborough argued that “if Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are each God, it would be three Gods.”⁵⁷ In 1878, D. M. Canright criticized “the doctrine of the trinity, of three Gods.”⁵⁸ By contrast, Ellen White never spoke against the Trinity as some of her contemporaries did, including her own husband.⁵⁹

⁵² Cf. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 101: Of the Theophilus quote, scholar A. Cleveland Coxe says: “The earliest use of this word ‘Trinity.’ It seems to have been used by this writer in his lost works also; and, as a learned friend suggests, the use he makes of it is familiar. He does not lug it in as something novel: ‘types of the Trinity,’ he says, illustrating an accepted word, not introducing a new one.”

⁵³ For a more detailed study of the word “Trinity” in the Christian creeds and confessions of faith, see, e.g., Joroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss, eds., *Creeds & Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, 3 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

⁵⁴ See, e.g., Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1966), 199–200; William M. Landeen, *Martin Luther’s Religious Thought* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1971), 52–76; and Christine Helmer, *The Trinity and Martin Luther*, rev. ed. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2017).

⁵⁵ See, e.g., I. John Hesselink, *Calvin’s First Catechism: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 112–113 and Arie Baars, “Opera Trinitatis Ad Extra Sunt Indivisa in the Theology of John Calvin,” in *Calvinus sacrarum literarum interpres: Papers of the International Congress on Calvin Research*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2008), 131–141.

⁵⁶ See Articles II and III of William Miller’s Statement of Faith (1822), in Sylvester Bliss, *Memoirs of William Miller* (Boston, MA: Joshua V. Himes, 1853), 77–78.

⁵⁷ J. N. Loughborough, “Questions for Bro. Loughborough,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 5, 1861, 184.

⁵⁸ D. M. Canright, “The Personality of God,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, August 29, 1878, 3.

⁵⁹ See, e.g., Joseph Bates, *The Autobiography of Elder Joseph Bates* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1868), 204–205; James White, “Letter from Bro. White,” *Day-Star*, January 24, 1846, 25; Joseph Bates, *A Vindication of the Seventh-day Sabbath, and the Commandments of God: With a Further History of God’s*

The simple fact that the word “Trinity” does not appear in the Bible and in Ellen White’s writings should never be used to disclaim the notion it carries. The crucial question is whether the Trinitarian concept is present in or absent from the inspired writings. In dealing with this controversial issue, we should keep in mind that “truth is progressive” and, consequently, our understanding of it is also progressive (Prov 4:18; John 16:12–13).⁶⁰ There is indeed the gradual unfolding of this sublime truth in Scripture and in Ellen White’s writings, which can be better understood in light of their respective historical contexts.

Reviewing Scripture, one can easily see that, up to the Babylonian exile, God’s people were strongly tempted by idolatry and polytheism. Therefore, many of the prophetic messages tried to help people overcome those temptations and accept the Hebrew monotheistic religion (Exod 20:3; Deut 6:4; Isa 44:6; 45:5, 18, 21, 22; etc.). Even so, the Old Testament already carries some glimpses of the persons of the Trinity, who are more fully revealed in the New Testament.

Some authors see the Hebrew noun *Elohim* (plural for “God”), when associated with plural verbs (Gen 1:26; 3:22; 11:7), as already carrying the concepts of plurality within it, as well as the fullness of

Peculiar People, from 1847 to 1848 (New Bedford, MA: Benjamin Lindsey, 1848), 69–70; James White, “Faith of Jesus,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, August 5, 1852, 52; James White, “Western Tour,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 9, 1853, 12; J. M. Stephenson, “Atonement,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 14, 1854, 105; Stephenson, “Atonement,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 21, 1854, 114; J. N. Andrews, “Three Angels of Rev. xiv, 6–12,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 6, 1855, 185; James White, “Preach the Word,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 11, 1855, 85; James White, “The Word,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 7, 1856, 149; Sarah Haselton, “From Sister Haselton,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 10, 1856, 87; J. B. Frisbie, “The Trinity,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 12, 1857, 146; R. Rockwood, “From Bro. Rockwood,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 29, 1857, 207; and J. N. Loughborough, “Questions for Bro. Loughborough,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 5, 1861, 184. For further study of the early Seventh-day Adventist anti-Trinitarian views, see, e.g., Jerry Moon, “Trinity and Anti-Trinitarianism in Seventh-day Adventist History” and “Ellen White’s Role in the Trinity Debate,” in Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, and John W. Reeve, *The Trinity: Understanding God’s Love, His Plan of Salvation, and Christian Relationships* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2002), 190–231; Jerry Moon, “The Adventist Trinity Debate Part 1: Historical Overview,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 41, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 113–129; Moon, “The Adventist Trinity Debate Part 2: The Role of Ellen G. White,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 41, no. 2 (Autumn 2003): 275–292; and Merlin D. Burt, “The Trinity in Seventh-day Adventist History,” *Ministry*, February 2009, 5–8.

⁶⁰ Ellen G. White, “The Stone of Witness,” *Signs of the Times*, May 26, 1881, 229. See also Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1946), 33–51.

the one God.⁶¹ But a more explicit distinction between the persons of the Godhead is found, for instance, in Isaiah 48:16 (NASB): “And now the Lord God has sent Me, and His Spirit.” The pronoun “Me” is defined by the previous statements, “I am He, I am the first, I am also the last. Surely My hand founded the earth, and My right hand spread out the heavens” (Isa 48:12–13), and clearly refers to Christ (John 1:1–3; Rev 22:12–13).⁶² In the book of Ezekiel the personality of the Holy Spirit is evident. The Spirit actually carries the prophet to different places (Ezek 3:12, 14; 8:3; 11:1, 24; 37:1; 43:5), speaks to him (Ezek 3:24; 8:3–18; 11:1–12; 37:1–4), and shows him the glory of the Lord (Ezek 3:12; 8:3–4; 10:18–19; 43:5).⁶³

In the four Gospels, that distinction becomes more obvious, for example, in the baptism of Jesus (Luke 3:21–22), in the promise of “another Helper” (John 14:16–17, 26), and in the Great Commission (Matt 28:19). Jesus prays to the Father (Matt 11:25–26; 26:36–44; 27:46; John 17:1–26; etc.) and is assisted by the Holy Spirit—by whom Mary conceived (Matt 1:20) and who even abided in Him and led Him to the wilderness to be tempted by Satan (Luke 4:1).⁶⁴ And Paul’s apostolic blessing confirms, “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Cor 13:14, NIV). In Ephesus, Paul rebaptizes some twelve disciples after they start to believe that “there is a Holy Spirit” (Acts 19:1–7). These and many other similar passages should never be overlooked by those who want to live “by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matt 4:4).

Thus, as we just saw, in Scripture we find a progressive movement trying to lead God’s people, first from polytheism/idolatry to monotheism, and then into a fuller understanding of the triune God. In Ellen White’s writings we find a similar movement helping early Seventh-day Adventists move from

⁶¹ See, e.g., Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Meaning of ‘Let Us’ in Gn 1:26,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 13, no. 1 (Spring 1975): 58–66; Bryan Murphy, “The Trinity in Creation,” *Master’s Seminar Journal* 24, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 167–177; Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Biblical Theology*, vol. 1, *The Common Grace Covenants* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014), 92–93; and Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, “The Lord Our God Is One,” <https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/bible-ot-texts-godgodhead/lord-our-god-one> (accessed March 2, 2020).

⁶² F. Delitzsch, “Isaiah,” in C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 10 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2011), 7:465–466, and Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 228–229.

⁶³ See James Robson, “Ezekiel,” in *A Biblical Theology of the Holy Spirit*, ed. Trevor J. Burke and Keith Warrington (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), 57–70.

⁶⁴ An insightful study of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life and ministry of Jesus is provided in Gerald F. Hawthorne, *The Presence & the Power* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1991).

their early anti-Trinitarian views into a broader and deeper understanding of the biblical doctrine of God. This development can be better understood if we keep in mind that Millerism was an interdenominational movement that emphasized one single doctrine: the second coming of Christ.⁶⁵ Early Sabbath-keeping Adventists were concerned with the definition and consolidation of their system of “present truth.”⁶⁶ Only from the mid-1880s on did they begin to reevaluate the biblical bases of such evangelical doctrines as justification by faith and the Trinity.⁶⁷

Many anti-Trinitarians question the authenticity of the Trinitarian baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19, which reads, “Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”⁶⁸ By contrast, Ellen White never disclaimed this formula. For example, in 1854 she stated that the chosen leaders of the apostolic church went “forth baptizing in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.”⁶⁹ In 1877, she added, “John baptized unto repentance, but the disciples of Jesus, on profession of the faith, baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”⁷⁰ In 1904, she declared,

As a Christian submits to the solemn rite of baptism, the three highest powers in the universe—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—place their approval on his act, pledging themselves to exert their power in his behalf as he strives to honor God. . . .

The three great powers of heaven pledge themselves to furnish to the Christian all the assistance he requires.⁷¹

⁶⁵ Joshua V. Himes, “The Rise and Progress of Adventism,” *Advent Shield, and Review* 1, no. 1 (May 1844): 90–91.

⁶⁶ See Alberto R. Timm, *The Sanctuary and the Three Angels’ Messages: Integrating Factors in the Development of Seventh-day Adventist Doctrines*, Adventist Theological Society Dissertation Series 5 (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society, 1995).

⁶⁷ See George R. Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 55–127.

⁶⁸ The critical apparatus of Kurt Aland, Barbara Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012) does not support the anti-Trinitarian theory that questions the authenticity of the Trinitarian baptismal formula in Matthew 28:19.

⁶⁹ E. G. White, *Early Writings*, 101.

⁷⁰ E. G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, 2:136.

⁷¹ Ellen G. White to W. W. Prescott, January 26, 1904, Lt 53, 1904, published in White, *Reflecting Christ* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1985), 107.

In 1909, after quoting again the Trinitarian baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19, Ellen White stated, “These are the words of inspiration. You need not fear that you are making a mistake by believing fully in them.”⁷²

The King James Version (KJV) still carries the so-called Johannine Comma of 1 John 5:7–8, “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.” This statement is in harmony with the Trinitarian belief, but serious textual criticism has demonstrated that it was not part of the original version of John’s letter. Bruce M. Metzger even warns that “these words are spurious and have no right to stand in the New Testament.”⁷³ It is noteworthy to mention that Ellen White used the King James Version in her daily readings/studies and quoted from it much more extensively than from any other version available during her lifetime.⁷⁴ But in all of her writings, she never quoted this specific passage!

Even without using the term “Trinity,” Ellen White reflected clearly that concept in her writings.⁷⁵ For example, in 1905 she stated, “We are to cooperate with the three highest powers in heaven,—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,—and these powers will work through us, making us workers together with God.”⁷⁶ In the same year she added,

The Comforter that Christ promised to send after He ascended to heaven, is the Spirit in all the fulness of the

⁷² Ellen G. White, “Labor in Faith and Humble Dependence,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 4, 1909, 8.

⁷³ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 3rd ed. (London: United Bible Societies, 1975), 715–717.

⁷⁴ For a more detailed study of Ellen G. White’s use of Bible versions, see “Instances of the Use of Various Versions in the Spirit of Prophecy Writings,” Document File 391-b, Center for Adventist Research, Andrews University; Arthur L. White, “Mrs. White and the Revised Versions,” *Ministry*, April 1947, 17–18; Arlyn D. Stewart, “An Analysis of Ellen Gould White’s Use of the English Versions in the Light of the Greek New Testament” (master’s thesis, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 1954); Don F. Neufeld, “Bible Translation Methods Examined—5: Ellen G. White’s Use of Various Versions,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 21, 1967, 12–13; William Larry Richards, “Ellen G. White and Her Use of Versions” (term paper, Andrews University, 1968); Frank W. Hardy, “Ellen White’s Use of Bible Versions Other than King James,” supplement, *Historicism*, no. 23 (July 1990):1–55; and Arthur L. White, “The E. G. White Counsel on Versions of the Bible” (1953, rev. 2010), in egwwritings.org (accessed May 9, 2019).

⁷⁵ Many Trinitarian statements by Ellen G. White are found, e.g., in Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2002), 613–617 and Whidden, Moon, and Reeve, 204–231.

⁷⁶ E. G. White, *Evangelism*, 617.

Godhead, making manifest the power of divine grace to all who receive and believe in Christ as a personal Saviour. There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will co-operate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ.⁷⁷

In regard to the personality of the Holy Spirit, Ellen White declared in 1899 to the students of Avondale College, “We need to realize that the Holy Spirit, who is as much a person as God is a person, is walking through these grounds.”⁷⁸ In 1906 she added,

The Holy Spirit is a person, for He beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God [Rom 8:16]. When this witness is borne, it carries with it its own evidence. At such times we believe and are sure that we are the children of God. . . . The Holy Spirit has a personality, else He could not bear witness to our spirits and with our spirits that we are the children of God. He must also be a divine person, else He could not search out the secrets which lie hidden in the mind of God. “For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God” [1 Cor 2:11].⁷⁹

Unfortunately, some hermeneutical fallacies have distorted the nature of God as revealed in the Bible and in Ellen White’s writings.⁸⁰ For example, anti-Trinitarians tend to overemphasize those inspired statements they like and disclaim those they do not agree with. For them, many of the Trinitarian statements in the Bible and in White’s writings were either adulterated or inserted by unreliable church leaders to prove the so-called Trinitarian heresy. These issues will not be addressed in this study, because they have already been discussed elsewhere.⁸¹ Tim Poirier, vice director of the Ellen G. White Estate,

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 615.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 616.

⁷⁹ E. G. White, *Evangelism*, 616–617.

⁸⁰ The wide ranges of historical and exegetical fallacies are well addressed by David H. Fischer, *Historians’ Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970) and D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996).

⁸¹ See Alberto R. Timm, “Em *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 14, págs. 23 e 24, estaria Ellen White sugerindo que Cristo e o Espírito Santo são a mesma pessoa?” *Revista do Ancião*,

has also responded convincingly to the charges raised against Ellen White's Trinitarian statements.⁸²

As evident from our discussion, the self-revelation of God through the inspired writings confirms the existence of three persons in the Godhead who are one God. We cannot fully understand this mystery, but we can and should accept it by faith. In reality, in God's revelation to us we find a significant tension between 1) the essential unity and 2) the functional subordination of the divine persons of the Godhead. Many distorted views of God derive from overemphasizing one of those aspects to the detriment of the other. Our discussion briefly addresses these two important concepts, trying to preserve their proper balance.

God's Essential Unity

The Scriptures reveal the existence of an *essential* unity between the three persons of the Godhead, which means that They are one in nature and purpose. In the Old Testament, we have the so-called Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!" Anti-Trinitarians use this statement to deny the plurality of the Godhead, but in this text, the Hebrew word for "one" is not *yachid* (just a single "one") but rather *echad* ("one"), which can refer to just one or to a *composite* unity (Gen 2:24; 11:6; 34:16, 22; 2 Chr 30:12; etc.). At any rate, this is probably the most significant Old Testament passage about the essential unity of the Godhead.

In the New Testament, we find some very meaningful statements in which Christ emphasizes His unity with the Father. For example, at the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, some Jews ask Jesus, "How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." And He answers straightforwardly, "I and My Father are one" (John 10:22–24, 30). In His intercessory prayer, Jesus uses His unity with the Father as a model for the Christian community. He declares,

July–September 2005, 10 (an English version of this article appeared in *Elder's Digest*, October 2005–March 2006, 30); Timm, "Resenha Crítica do Livro 'Eu e o Pai Somos Um,'" *Parousia* (Brazil) 4, no. 2 (2nd Semester 2005): 69–93; Timm, "Hermenêutica Antitrinitariana Moderna: Análise Metodológica," *Parousia* (Brazil) 5, no. 1 (1st Semester 2006): 47–59; and Timm, "Resenha Crítica do Livro *A Divindade*," *Parousia* (Brazil) 5, no. 1 (1st Semester 2006): 79–100.

⁸² See Tim Poirier, "Ellen White's Trinitarian Statements: What Did She Actually Write?," in "*Ellen White and Current Issues*," *Symposium*, eds. Jerry Moon and Merlin D. Burt, vol. 2 (Berrien Springs, MI: Center for Adventist Research, Andrews University, 2006), 18–40.

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me (John 17:20–23).

In addition to His own unity with the Father, Christ confirms also the essential unity of the Holy Spirit within the Godhead. While describing the mission of the Holy Spirit, Christ explains, “For He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak” (John 16:13, NASB). The apostle Paul adds, “For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God” (1 Cor 2:10, NASB). These two meaningful statements imply that the Holy Spirit is not only fully God, but also distinct from the Father and the Son; otherwise He could never *search* “the depths of God.” To carry on these functions, the Holy Spirit must be in full agreement and perfect unity with the Godhead.

Writing to the church in Colosse, Paul states that in Christ “dwells all the fullness [Gk. *pleromatos*] of the Godhead bodily” (Col 2:9). Recognizing that “there are three living persons of the heavenly trio,” Ellen White applies the Pauline expression “the fullness of the Godhead” to each of the three persons of the Godhead. She declares,

The Father is all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and is invisible to mortal sight.

The Son is all the fullness of the Godhead manifested. The Word of God declares Him to be “the express image of His person” [Heb 1:3]. . . .

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.⁸³

By stating that each of the three persons of the Godhead is “the fullness of the Godhead,” Ellen White suggests that They are all co-eternal, omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient; or, in other words,

⁸³ E. G. White, *Evangelism*, 614–615.

They are of the very same nature. No wonder that in Isaiah 9:6 Christ is prophetically called “Everlasting Father,” and Christ Himself refers to God as “My Father,” by which He was “making Himself equal with God” (John 5:17–18). In 1856, John Cumming stated, “In him [Christ] was life, [John 1:4]—that is, original, unborrowed, underived.”⁸⁴ In the late 1890s Ellen White used Cumming’s wording first in an article (1897)⁸⁵ and then in her classic book *The Desire of Ages* (1898), where we read, “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived.”⁸⁶ And in 1900 she added, “Christ is the pre-existent, self-existent Son of God.”⁸⁷

Hebrews 9:14 mentions “the eternal Spirit.” By including the Holy Spirit among “the eternal heavenly dignitaries—God, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit,”⁸⁸ Ellen White emphasizes the co-eternity of the Holy Spirit with the other persons of the Godhead. Once again, she is highlighting God’s *essential* unity, which needs to be balanced by what she also says about the *functional* subordination within the Trinity.

God’s Functional Subordination

In the first three centuries of the Christian era, there was a strong tendency toward *subordinationism* with various nuances.⁸⁹ Some argued for a hierarchy of essence by which the Son and the Holy Spirit were subordinated to God the Father in nature and being. Others recognized an essential unity but proposed an eternal subordination of order within the Godhead. Regrettably, such views never died completely and are still alive in some Christian circles. Yet, if we recognize the essential unity and co-eternity of the three persons of the Godhead, then we should not go beyond the functional *cooperation*, as evident in the work of creation, and the functional *subordination*, as displayed in the work of redemption.

The Genesis creation account begins with the meaningful words “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1). The apostle John highlights the crucial role of the Son in that process by explaining that “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing

⁸⁴ John Cumming, *Sabbath Evening Readings on the New Testament: St. John* (Boston, MA: John P. Jewett, 1856), 5.

⁸⁵ Ellen G. White, “Christ the Life Giver,” *Signs of the Times*, April 8, 1897, 6, and E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, 1:296.

⁸⁶ E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 530.

⁸⁷ E. G. White, *Evangelism*, 615.

⁸⁸ E. G. White, *Evangelism*, 616.

⁸⁹ Philip Schaff, *The History of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 681–683.

was made that was made” (John 1:1–3; see also Col 1:16–17). But the concept of the Father working through the Son is even more evident in Hebrews 1:2, where we read that “in these last days he [God] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe” (Heb 1:2, NIV). The Genesis creation account says that “the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Gen 1:2) but does not explain His specific task in the creation process.

After the fall of Adam and Eve, Christ became the special representative of the Godhead to humanity. The apostle John declares, “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known” (John 1:18, NIV; see also 1 John 4:12). Ellen White clarifies that “since the sin of our first parents there has been no direct communication between God and man. . . . All the communion between heaven and the fallen race has been through Christ.”⁹⁰ “After the Fall, Christ stands as the representative of the Father, the connecting link between God and man.”⁹¹ Even so, there were special moments during Christ’s earthly ministry in which the Father spoke and people heard His voice, such as at Jesus’ baptism (Matt 3:17) and at His transfiguration (Matt 17:5).

The notion of functional *subordination* is highlighted in the passages that speak about the Father *sending* the Son and the Holy Spirit. As already mentioned, in Isaiah 48:16 (NASB) we find the statement “And now the Lord God has sent Me [the Son], and His Spirit.” Promising the Holy Spirit, Christ explains, “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever. . . . But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:16, 26). In His intercessory prayer Christ declares, “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3; see also John 6:38; 9:4; Gal 4:4–5).

During His incarnation, Jesus chose to fully depend on the Father to the extent of praying to Him (Matt 11:25–26; 26:36–44; 27:46; John 17:1–26; etc.) and even confessing, “For My Father is greater than I” (John 14:28) and “The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner” (John 5:19). But one of the key texts to elucidate the

⁹⁰ E. G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 366.

⁹¹ E. G. White, *Education*, 33.

tension between the essential unity and the functional subordination in regard to Jesus Christ is Philippians 2:5–11:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Reflecting on Christ's amazing humiliation in the incarnation process, Ellen White declares,

At what infinite cost to the Father and to the Son was the merciful, wondrous provision made for our redemption! Christ stepped down from His high estate as Commander in the heavenly courts; and laying aside His royal robe and kingly crown, clothed His divinity with humanity, and came to this earth, that He might dwell with us and give to men and women grace to overcome as He overcame.⁹²

Christ lived a life of complete submission to and absolute dependence on the Father. Ellen White states, "But the Son of God was surrendered to the Father's will, and dependent upon His power. So utterly was Christ emptied of self that He made no plans for Himself. He accepted God's plans for Him, and day by day the Father unfolded His plans."⁹³ During His incarnation, Jesus Christ was also fully dependent on the Holy Spirit. Actually, Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matt 1:20), He received at His baptism "the anointing of the Holy Spirit" (cf. Dan 9:25; Luke 3:21–22; John 1:32–34),⁹⁴ was taken to the wilderness by the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1), and even raised from the dead by the same Spirit.⁹⁵ Actually, for Ellen White

⁹² Ellen G. White, "The Grace of God," *Signs of the Times*, August 12, 1908, 3.

⁹³ E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 208.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁹⁵ Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1923), 332 and *Idem, Sons and Daughters of God* (Washington, DC:

the resurrection of Jesus was an act of the Trinity, including Christ Himself (see John 10:17–18; 11:25; Acts 2:24, 32; Rom 8:11; Gal 1:1; etc.).⁹⁶ She explains that “when the voice of the mighty angel was heard at Christ’s tomb, saying, Thy Father calls Thee, the Saviour came forth from the grave by the life that was in Himself.”⁹⁷

But in our attempts to grasp the deepness of Christ’s humiliation, we should realize how far we can go without vulgarizing His human nature. On the one hand, Ellen White recognizes that “Jesus accepted humanity when the race had been weakened by four thousand years of sin. Like every child of Adam He accepted the results of the working of the great law of heredity.”⁹⁸ On the other hand, she also warns,

Be careful, exceedingly careful as to how you dwell upon the human nature of Christ. Do not set Him before the people as a man with the propensities of sin. He is the second Adam. The first Adam was created a pure, sinless being, without a taint of sin upon him; he was in the image of God. He could fall, and he did fall through transgressing. Because of sin his posterity was born with inherent propensities of disobedience. But Jesus Christ was the only begotten Son of God. He took upon Himself human nature, and was tempted in all points as human nature is tempted. He could have sinned; He could have fallen, but not for one moment was there in Him an evil propensity. He was assailed with temptations in the wilderness, as Adam was assailed with temptations in Eden.⁹⁹

Review and Herald, 1955), 112.

⁹⁶ See, e.g., E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 785; Idem, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, 332; and Idem, *Sons and Daughters of God*, 112. A similar Trinitarian view of the resurrection of Jesus is taken also in Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburg: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 346–347: “In distinction from others who were raised from the dead, Christ arose through His own power. He spoke of Himself as the resurrection and the life, John 11:25, declared that He had the power to lay down His life, and to take it up again, John 10:18, and even predicted that He would rebuild the temple of His body, John 2:19–21. But the resurrection was not a work of Christ alone; it is frequently ascribed to the power of God in general, Acts 2:24,32; 3:26; 5:30; I Cor. 6:14; Eph. 1:20, or, more particularly, to the Father, Rom. 6:4; Gal. 1:1; I Pet. 1:3. And if the resurrection of Christ can be called a work of God, then it follows that the Holy Spirit was also operative in it, for all the *opera ad extra* are works of the triune God. Moreover, Rom. 8:11 also implies this.”

⁹⁷ E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 785. See also idem, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 5:1113.

⁹⁸ E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 49.

⁹⁹ Ellen G. White to “Brother and Sister Baker,” February 9, 1895, Lt 8, 1895, published

Undeniably, Ellen White upheld the biblical doctrine of the three persons of the Godhead, including both the essential unity and the functional subordination among Them. Our discussion now deals briefly with the work of each of Them within the context of salvation history.

The Work of God

Scripture reveals a working God who loves and cares for His creatures. Jesus affirms, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working” (John 5:17). Amazingly, God works not only for those who love Him, but also for those who ignore or even hate Him. As affirmed by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount, “for He [the Father in heaven] makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt 5:45). But God cares in a special way for His own faithful children. Paul explains, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28, NIV).

A Creating God

One of the main expressions of God’s loving work is His creation. Beholding the natural world, one is compelled to shout with the psalmist, “How many” and “How great are your works, Lord” (Pss 92:5; 104:24). But how did all the multiform and complex forms of life come into existence? Evolutionists suggest that it took vast geological eras (of many millions of years) for the most primitive forms of life to spontaneously transform themselves into the most complex ones. It is no surprise that under this model, “nature is exalted above the God of nature, and the simplicity of faith is destroyed; for the foundation of faith is made to appear uncertain. Befogged in skepticism, the minds of those who doubt are left to beat on the rocks of infidelity.”¹⁰⁰

Neither the Bible nor Ellen White provides any room for such an evolutionary process. The Genesis creation account speaks of a seven-day week in which all creatures and their respective environments were created and organized by God Himself (Gen 1:1–2:25). In the book of Psalms, we are told that “by the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth. . . .

in *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 5:1128. For further study of Christ’s nature during the incarnation, see *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7A:443–456 and Robert W. Olson, compilation, *The Humanity of Christ: Selections from the Writings of Ellen G. White* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1989).

¹⁰⁰ E. G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, 329–330.

For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Ps 33:6, 9). Ellen White asserts,

The Bible recognizes no long ages in which the earth was slowly evolved from chaos. Of each successive day of creation, the sacred record declares that it consisted of the evening and the morning, like all other days that have followed. At the close of each day is given the result of the Creator’s work. The statement is made at the close of the first week’s record, “These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created.” Genesis 2:4. But this does not convey the idea that the days of creation were other than literal days. Each day was called a generation, because that in it God generated, or produced, some new portion of His work.¹⁰¹

A Caring God

Another expression of God’s loving work is the way He cares for His creation, despite all the degenerating consequences of sin. From a cosmic dimension, the Lord challenges us, “Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing” (Isa 40:26, NIV). From a personal perspective, Christ explains,

Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? (Matt 6:26–30).

Ellen White’s reflections on this passage are very meaningful and tender. She says,

The graceful forms and delicate hues of the plants and flowers may be copied by human skill, but what touch can impart life to even one flower or blade of grass? Every wayside blossom owes its being to the same power that set the starry worlds on

¹⁰¹ E. G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 112.

high. Through all created things thrills one pulse of life from the great heart of God. The flowers of the field are clothed by His hand in richer robes than have ever graced the forms of earthly kings. . . .

On the lily's petals, God has written a message for you, written in language that your heart can read only as it unlearns the lessons of distrust and selfishness and corroding care. Why has He given you the singing birds and the gentle blossoms, but from the overflowing love of a Father's heart, that would brighten and gladden your path of life? All that was needed for existence would have been yours without the flowers and birds, but God was not content to provide what would suffice for mere existence. He has filled earth and air and sky with glimpses of beauty to tell you of His loving thought for you. The beauty of all created things is but a gleam from the shining of His glory. If He has lavished such infinite skill upon the things of nature, for your happiness and joy, can you doubt that He will give you every needed blessing?¹⁰²

But the supreme expression of God's loving work was manifested in the person of Jesus Christ. In the sublime words of the apostle John, "for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16, NIV). Writing to the church in Australia, Ellen White quotes this text and then declares,

The Godhead was stirred with pity for the race, and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit gave themselves to the working out of the plan of redemption. In order to fully carry out this plan, it was decided that Christ, the only begotten Son of God, should give Himself an offering for sin. What line can measure the depth of this love?

God would make it impossible for man to say that He could have done more. With Christ He gave all the resources of heaven, that nothing might be wanting in the plan for man's uplifting.

¹⁰² Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1956), 96–97.

Here is love—the contemplation of which should fill the soul with inexpressible gratitude!

While we were yet sinners, the Son of God died for us. Laying aside His royal robe and kingly crown, and clothing His divinity with humanity, He stooped to our estate to rescue us from the thralldom of sin. For our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich. He came to this earth to take His position at the head of humanity. In our behalf He bore the stroke of divine justice. Because He was just, He became the justifier of all who believe in Him. He assumed human nature that for the transgressor He might suffer the penalty of transgression. He took the place of the sinner, and died that we might live, making His soul an offering for sin.

Oh, what love, what matchless love! The contemplation of this love will cleanse the soul from all selfishness. It will lead the disciple to deny self, take up the cross, and follow the Redeemer.¹⁰³

Actually, Christ's "whole life was a preface to His death on the cross."¹⁰⁴ Reflecting on the decisive hours He spent at the garden of Gethsemane (Matt 26:36–46; Luke 22:39–46), Ellen White pens this touching response to Christ's sacrifice:

Often in the silent watches of the night I think of the sufferings of Christ in our behalf. Behold the Redeemer in the Garden of Gethsemane. The thought of being separated from his Father was the burden pressing so heavily upon his soul. He felt as if he might be unable to pass through such an experience. "If it be possible," he prayed, "let this cup pass from me." So great was his agony that "his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." It was for the sake of ransoming a lost world that he passed through this agony.

While the Saviour was in the garden, the cup trembled in his hand. Should he refuse to drink? Only through his sacrifice could the sinner be saved. Should the divine Sufferer refuse to drink of that cup trembling in his hand? It was then that

¹⁰³ Ellen G. White to "Brethren and Sisters in Australia," January 21, 1901, Lt 12, 1901.

¹⁰⁴ E. G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, 382.

a mighty angel came to strengthen him, and he prayed, “Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.”

At times, when in great trial or pain, I think, What is the use of continuing to work as I do? But I am ashamed of myself as soon as such a thought as this passes through my mind. I see Jesus, my Redeemer, suffering in Gethsemane; I see trembling in his hand the cup that is to separate him for a time, as it were, from his Father; I see him suffering at the hands of cruel men; I see him smitten in the face; and suffering every indignity, and then mockingly commanded to show by a sign that he is the Saviour. O, what if he had refused to drink the cup of bitter agony he endured! What if his prayer had been answered? But God knew best, and strengthened his only-begotten Son to endure the agony and the shame, and become a propitiation for the sins of a lost world.¹⁰⁵

Through His atoning sacrifice on the cross and His powerful resurrection, Christ opened “a new and living way” of access to the heavenly sanctuary, where now He intercedes for us as “a High Priest over the house of God” (Heb 10:19–23, NRSV). The Epistle to the Hebrews invites us, “Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16, NRSV). Building on Scripture, Martin Luther writes extensively about Christ’s atoning sacrifice and heavenly priesthood.¹⁰⁶ He even confesses that “nothing in Scripture is more comforting than what is said about the priestly office of our dear Christ.”¹⁰⁷ And Ellen White adds,

I want to tell you that you have every reason to rejoice today. Christ says, “Come, come unto Me, and I will give you rest.” [cf. Matt 11:28] What have we to rejoice in? That Christ is not in Joseph’s new tomb, and a great stone rolled before it.

¹⁰⁵ Ellen G. White, “Talk/‘Come into Line,’” January 27, 1910, Ms 47, 1910.

¹⁰⁶ See Alberto R. Timm, “The Priesthood of Christ According to Martin Luther,” in *Christ, Salvation, and the Eschaton: Essays in Honor of Hans K. LaRondelle*, ed. Daniel Heinz, Jiří Moskala, and Peter M. van Bemmelen (Berrien Springs, MI: Old Testament Department, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, 2009), 171–187 and Timm, “The Priesthood of Christ in Luther and Adventism,” in *Here We Stand: Luther, the Reformation, and Seventh-day Adventism*, ed. Michael W. Campbell and Nikolaus Satelmajer (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2017), 85–100.

¹⁰⁷ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 13 (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia, 1956), 306.

Where is He? Where is Jesus? He has arisen; He has risen from the dead; He has ascended on high. He is our Advocate, and He pleads in our behalf before the Father. We have a Friend at court. Thank God, we have a Friend at court!¹⁰⁸

The Christ-Centered Role of the Spirit

While still dealing with God's loving work for us, we cannot overlook the crucial role played by the Holy Spirit. That role is essentially Christ-centered (John 16:14) and in full harmony with the Scripture that He Himself inspired (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Peter 1:19–21). Speaking of the mission of the Holy Spirit, Christ states, "He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare *it* to you" (John 16:14), and "He will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). And more, "He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8–11). Even the love of God is "poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Rom 5:5; cf. Gal 5:22–23).

Ellen White refers to the Holy Spirit, for example, as "the Third Person of the Godhead,"¹⁰⁹ and as the "heavenly Guest" and "heavenly Visitant."¹¹⁰ She summarizes His saving work as follows:

The Spirit was to be given as a regenerating agent, and without this the sacrifice of Christ would have been of no avail. The power of evil had been strengthening for centuries, and the submission of men to this satanic captivity was amazing. Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power. It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world's Redeemer. It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure. Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress His own character upon His church.¹¹¹

The Spirit: Our Powerful Helper

The Holy Spirit is indeed our most powerful Helper in our struggles with our own weakness (Rom 7:1–8:17) and against the forces of evil that are trying unceasingly to overcome us and destroy us (Eph 6:10–

¹⁰⁸ Ellen G. White, *Sermons and Talks*, vol. 1 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), 201–202.

¹⁰⁹ E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 671.

¹¹⁰ E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 8:62 and idem, *Counsels to Parents*, 364.

¹¹¹ E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 671.

20). In these ongoing struggles, “the Holy Spirit, the representative of the Captain of the Lord’s host, comes down to direct the battle.”¹¹² In reality, “the omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit is the defense of every contrite soul.”¹¹³ He also nourishes, empowers, and equips us to become victorious Christians. We can receive these blessings only by surrendering our lives to the Holy Spirit and allowing Him to transform our lives. So, unquestionably, “a revival and a reformation must take place, under the ministration of the Holy Spirit.”¹¹⁴ But these are just a few aspects of the broad work of the Holy Spirit on our behalf, in these extremely challenging “last days” (2 Tim 3:1–5; 4:3–4).

A Crucial Question

After considering briefly the person and work of the Holy Spirit, as described in Scripture and in Ellen White’s writings, we are faced with the crucial question: if the Holy Spirit and His word are so important for us in these last days, why do some people still undermine His work and even deny His personality? Different reasons could be mentioned, but the most common one is a selective and biased reading of the inspired writings. In that approach, the individual highlights those statements that seem to endorse his or her preconceived theory and then ignores and disclaims those that do not endorse that theory. Many of them claim to be more faithful to the historical faith of early Adventists, putting strong emphasis on the authority of tradition. In reality, what counts is not so much our historical views, but rather whether they are grounded in an unbiased reading of the Bible and Ellen White’s writings.

As fearful as the concept can be, we should realize that people on the descending path toward sinning against the Holy Spirit tend to question His work, undermine His personality, and even deny His existence. The main phases in the process are 1) to harden the heart (Heb 3:8, 13, 15; 4:7), 2) grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:30), 3) quench the Holy Spirit (1 Thess 5:19), and finally, 4) commit the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit (Matt 12:22–32). “What constitutes the sin against the Holy Ghost? It is willfully attributing to Satan the work of the Holy Spirit.”¹¹⁵ Since one of the main tasks of the Holy Spirit is to protect us from both the powers of evil and their deceptive influences, Satan develops all possible strategies to neutralize and distort the work of the Spirit. We are only safe through a living relationship with God and an a non-negotiable commitment to His Word.

¹¹² E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 352.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 490.

¹¹⁴ Ellen G. White, “The Need of a Revival and a Reformation,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 25, 1902, 113 and *idem*, *Selected Messages*, 1:128.

¹¹⁵ E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:634.

The Relationship with God

All true Christians need to have not only a correct understanding of God and His work but also a saving relationship with Him. Among the disciples of Jesus there were John, one of the two “Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17), and Judas Iscariot. Both had the same opportunities to learn from “the greatest Teacher this world ever knew.”¹¹⁶ But at the end of their intensive learning process, John was transformed into a loving disciple (1 John 2:5–11) while Judas became so selfish that he even betrayed his Master for thirty pieces of silver (Matt 26:14–16; 27:3–5). Unquestionably, truth must have a transforming influence on our lives. In His intercessory prayer, Jesus pleads with the Father, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth” (John 17:17, NASB). And the apostle Paul confesses, “But I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified” (1 Cor 9:27, NRSV).

Ellen White says, “Many accept an intellectual religion, a form of godliness, when the heart is not cleansed.”¹¹⁷ In 1904, she appealed to J. H. Kellogg,

My brother, . . . I greatly desire that you shall have the true God, not a God of your imagination, or of speculative philosophy. It is the true and living God for whom you should thirst. God invites you to draw near to Him. Humble your heart before Him, and if you will grasp His hand of infinite strength and power, He will be to you a shield against the enemy. But it is only in becoming a little child, to be educated in spiritual, sanctified, holy things, that you can break the power of the enemy. When you gain this experience, when as a little child you place yourself in God’s hands, determined to do His will at all times and in all places, He will manifest Himself to you as your sufficiency, the chiefest among ten thousand, and the One in whom you may always trust.

This is an experience that you have yet to obtain. Will you not make a strong, determined effort to get away from your condition of spiritual dwarfage? Never allow yourself to be drawn into discussion regarding the personality of God. On this subject, silence is eloquence.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ E. G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, 328.

¹¹⁷ E. G. White, *Steps to Christ*, 35.

¹¹⁸ Ellen G. White to Dr. J. H. Kellogg, September 10, 1904, Lt 283, 1904.

A genuine relationship with God is built through unceasing prayer and full commitment to God's Word. Jesus warns, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation" (Matt 26:41, NIV; see also 1 Thess 5:17). Actually, "no man is safe for a day or an hour without prayer,"¹¹⁹ and "the reading of the word of God prepares the mind for prayer."¹²⁰ But remember that a true Christian is someone who allows the Holy Spirit to guide him or her "into all truth" (John 16:13) and who lives "by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4; see also 7:21–27). No wonder that "those who think that it matters not what they believe in doctrine, so long as they believe in Jesus Christ, are on dangerous ground."¹²¹ "The soul dwelling in the pure atmosphere of holy thought will be transformed by communion with God through the study of Scriptures."¹²²

After all that has been said before, let us reflect thoughtfully on the following appeal by Ellen White to each of us:

I saw that all heaven is interested in our salvation; and shall we be indifferent? Shall we be careless, as though it were a small matter whether we are saved or lost? Shall we slight the sacrifice that has been made for us? Some have done this. They have trifled with offered mercy, and the frown of God is upon them. God's Spirit will not always be grieved. It will depart if grieved a little longer. After all has been done that God could do to save men, if they show by their lives that they slight Jesus' offered mercy, death will be their portion, and it will be dearly purchased. It will be a dreadful death; for they will have to feel the agony that Christ felt upon the cross to purchase for them the redemption which they have refused. And they will then realize what they have lost—eternal life and the immortal inheritance. The great sacrifice that has been made to save souls shows us their worth. When the precious soul is once lost, it is lost forever.¹²³

Our saving relationship with God is our only safeguard in this life and our only assurance of everlasting life. Amazingly, He treats each one of us individually. We are assured that "if but one soul would have accepted the gospel of His grace, Christ would, to save that one, have

¹¹⁹ E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 530.

¹²⁰ E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:504.

¹²¹ Ellen G. White, *Christ Triumphant* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1999), 235.

¹²² Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1941), 60.

¹²³ E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:124.

chosen His life of toil and humiliation and His death of shame.”¹²⁴ And more, “the relations between God and each soul are as distinct and full as though there were not another soul upon the earth to share His watchcare, not another soul for whom He gave His beloved Son.”¹²⁵ So, “make Christ first and last and best in everything. Constantly behold Him, and your love for Him will daily become deeper and stronger as it is submitted to the test of trial. And as your love for Him increases, your love for each other will grow deeper and stronger.”¹²⁶

Summary and Conclusions

Our brief overview has classified Ellen G. White’s reflections on the biblical concept of God under four major categories. The first dealt with the knowledge of God and emphasized that such knowledge can be obtained only within the borders of His self-revelation through Scripture and Ellen White’s writings. In the second category, dealing with the nature of God, we saw that Ellen White upheld the biblical teachings of God’s basic attributes, as well as the doctrine of the three persons of the Godhead, including both the essential unity and functional subordination among Them. Then, while addressing the work of God, we considered the main tasks of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in salvation history, especially as related to creation and redemption. Finally, category four stressed that we should have not only a correct understanding of God and His work, but also a saving relationship with Him.

Studying Scripture from a chronological perspective, we can see early prophets trying to help God’s people overcome their polytheistic/idolatrous temptations and accept biblical monotheism. At the same time, there was a gradual unfolding of a Trinitarian notion of God. Likewise, in Ellen White’s writings we can also find a gradual appearance of Trinitarian statements, helping early Adventists to replace their traditional anti-Trinitarianism with the biblical view of the three persons of the Godhead. Some critics refer to these processes as adulterations of the inspired writings. By contrast, Ellen White warns, “Brethren, cling to your Bible, as it reads, and stop your criticisms in regard to its validity, and obey the Word, and not one of you will be lost.”¹²⁷ This being the case, we have no excuse to ignore the intensifying light shining from those inspired writings, which is fully available to us today.

¹²⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1942), 135.

¹²⁵ E. G. White, *Steps to Christ*, 100.

¹²⁶ E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 7:46.

¹²⁷ E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, 1:18.

But some people might be tempted to question: what difference does our understanding of God make for our salvation? From a theological perspective, we should recognize that doctrines do not function in isolation. Therefore, any misunderstanding of God can affect and even distort our other beliefs. On a personal level, we have to realize that God is too holy for us to speculate about His being, and His Word too reliable for us to improve its content. As God's faithful children, we cannot pick and choose from the Bible what we like the most and then ignore or distort what we do not like from it. We have to live "by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4). After all, "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever" (Isa 40:8, NIV).

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