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Modern Adventist Anti-Trinitarianism: Hermeneutical Reflections

Alberto R. Timm, Biblical Research Institute

Modern Adventist anti-Trinitarian writings are usually crafted with a very assertive tone, giving the impression that their understanding of the Godhead is homogenous, solidly grounded on the Scriptures and on the writings of Ellen G. White, and faithful to the views of the pioneers. Indeed, several early Seventh-day Adventists did not understand the Godhead as William Miller in his “Statement of Faith” (1822), “I believe in one living and true God, and that there are three persons in the Godhead,”¹ or as in beliefs 2–5 of the “Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists” (revised in 2015). But is the hermeneutical approach of modern Adventist anti-Trinitarians biblically sound and in harmony with what Ellen White has affirmed?

The present article provides a brief comparative analysis of the views of some influential Adventist pioneers and of some modern anti-Trinitarians with special emphasis on (1) the divinity of Christ, (2) the divinity of the Holy Spirit, (3) tradition and new light, (4) the trustworthiness of the Bible, (5) the reliability of Ellen White’s writings, (6) the hermeneutical approach, and (7) the apostasy from the truth. Due to the limited scope of this article, only a few representatives from each group are quoted with the purpose of introducing the subject.

The Divinity of Christ

Modern Adventist anti-Trinitarian writings on the divinity of Christ show some parallels with the ancient ecumenical creeds. For example, the Creed of Nicaea (AD 325) affirmed that Christ was “begotten from the Father, that is from the substance of the Father, . . . begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father.”² The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (AD 381) went a step further in asserting that Christ was “begotten from the Father before all the ages.”³ In line with this creedal tradition, modern anti-Trinitarians prefer the translation of the Greek *monogenēs* as “only begotten Son” (John 1:18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9)—preserved in the Latin Vulgate—instead of “only Son” (NASB, NLV, RSV) or “one and only Son” (NIV, NLT, WEB).

Adventist Pioneers

There were divergent views on the nature of Christ among early Sabbatarian Adventists. For example, in 1854 J. M. Stephenson used human logic to support his Arian belief that Christ had an origin and a beginning of days. For him, “the idea of Father and Son supposes priority of the existence of the one, and the subsequent existence of the other.” In his view, this was the case because “to say that the Son is as old as his Father, is a palpable contradiction of terms. It is a natural impossibility for the Father to be as young as the Son, or the Son to be as old as the Father.”⁴

In 1865 Uriah Smith suggested that the expression “the Beginning of the creation of God” (Rev 3:14) implied that Christ was “not the beginner, but the beginning, of the creation, the first created being, dating his existence far back before any other created being or thing, next to the self-existent and eternal God.”⁵ Later, in 1882, while still believing that Christ had a beginning, Smith argued more cautiously that the expression under consideration did not imply “that Christ was the first created being,” but rather “that the work of creation, strictly speaking, was begun by him.”⁶ Likewise, in 1890 E. J. Waggoner stated that “there was a time when Christ proceeded forth and came from God, from the bosom of the Father (John 8:42; 1:18), but that time was so far back in the days of eternity that to finite comprehension it is practically without beginning.”⁷

In contrast, Ellen White quoted many times the expression “only begotten Son” but never portrayed Christ as having had a beginning. For her, Christ was coeternal with the Father. In 1878 she referred to Christ as “the eternal Son of God.”⁸ In 1887 she stated that “as a member of the human family he [Christ] was mortal, but as a God he was the fountain of life to the world.”⁹ Ten years later (1897) she declared in unambiguous terms that in Christ “was life, original, unborrowed, underived.”¹⁰ Reflecting on the expression “before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58), Ellen White added in 1900 that “Christ is the pre-existent, self-existent Son of God” and that “there never was a time when He was not in close fellowship with the eternal God.”¹¹

Modern Anti-Trinitarians

Several Adventist anti-Trinitarians understand the word “begotten” as implying the literal Sonship of Christ. In 1995 Fred Allaback argued that “God the Father is the only being in the universe that did not have a beginning of any kind.”¹² Assuming that “God the Father was the real Father of Jesus” from eternity, the same author claimed that “the Father’s only begotten Son was a duplication of Himself.”¹³ By using the expression “duplication of Himself,” Allaback even exceeded the aforementioned ecumenical creeds in explaining the unexplainable divine nature of Christ.

One year later (1996), Rachel Cory-Kuehl redefined the concept of “eternity” so that Christ could be at the same time begotten from the Father and self-existent. In her own words, if Christ “had existed with the Father from eternity or even ‘all eternity,’ then perhaps eternity, a time concept, had a beginning.”¹⁴ In such case, “eternity began with Christ.”¹⁵ So, in her opinion, “to say that Christ was self-existent does not preclude His being begotten. Once begotten in the Father’s exact image, He would then be self-existent.”¹⁶ But this kind of reasoning does not solve the tension between these two contradictory ideas that cannot be harmonized. In other words, Christ is either self-existent (as Ellen White stated) or He was begotten (as held by anti-Trinitarians). Furthermore, if eternity had a beginning, as suggested by Cory-Kuehl, then eternity is no longer eternity.

With a similar literalistic notion of Christ as being the literal Son of the heavenly Father, Allen Stump argued in 1997 that “the scriptures clearly state that God and Christ are two distinct beings and that the terms ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ *are not* used to express the roles portrayed, but rather to express a real and personal relationship between the two.”¹⁷ This seems to imply that, for Stump, Christ’s existence derived from His literal Father.

Assuming that “Christ had a beginning in the days of old, the days of eternity when there was no earth,” Joe Harricharan suggested more explicitly that “Christ came forth from His Father, and we came forth from our parents.”¹⁸ Without explaining what “begotten” actually means, Ken LeBrun affirmed that “the life of the Father and the life of the Son is one.”¹⁹ For Ingo Sorke, the war in heaven started over the real (not metaphorical) Sonship of Christ and still “incites the fury of the enemy.”²⁰

Several modern anti-Trinitarians tend to twist the meaning of Ellen White’s statements that contradict their own postulates. So, Paul Chung redefined the key words of her classic quote that in Christ “was life, original, unborrowed, underived,”²¹ making them support the theory that Christ had a beginning.²² He qualified her statement that “there never was a time when He was not in close fellowship with the eternal God”²³ as a mere a figure of speech, and proposed that “the correct way”

to understand it would be that “there never was a time when He (Christ) was not in close fellowship with the eternal God (SINCE the Son was begotten by the Father).”²⁴ In this case, “never” would no longer mean “never” (as Ellen White originally stated) but only since His begetting (as suggested by Paul Chung). Undeniably, with this kind of semantic and hermeneutical twisting, the reader can easily make Ellen White say whatever he or she wants her to say.

The Divinity of the Holy Spirit

Another crucial component of modern Adventist anti-Trinitarian thinking is the denial of the distinct personality of the Holy Spirit. At least some of these postulates can be traced back to a few ancient and medieval theologians. For example, Ambrose of Milan (AD c. 339–397) stated that “the Holy Spirit also, when He proceeds from the Father and the Son, is not separated from the Father nor separated from the Son. . . . For where the Father is there is also the Son, and where the Son is there is the Holy Spirit.”²⁵ Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) argued that “if it is true that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son as he does from the Father, it of course follows that the Spirit is the Spirit of the Son as well as of the Father.”²⁶ The Reformed Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) stated, “The Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.”²⁷ These notions would be echoed in more definite terms by modern anti-Trinitarians.

Adventist Pioneers

There was indeed a significant tendency among early Seventh-day Adventists to deny the personality of the Holy Spirit. In 1875 J. H. Waggoner pointed to different nuances of the word “person” as applied to the Holy Spirit. He declared,

There is one question which has been much controverted in the theological world upon which we have never presumed to enter. It is that of the personality of the Spirit of God. Prevailing ideas of *person* are very diverse, often crude, and the word is differently understood; so that unity of opinion on this point cannot be expected until all shall be able to define precisely what they mean by the word, or until all shall agree upon one particular sense in which the word shall be used.²⁸

Interestingly, one of the strongest critics of Adventism, D. M. Canright, penned a two-part series

in 1878 entitled, “The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit Not a Person, But an Influence Proceeding from God.”²⁹ He claimed that “the simple truth is that God is a real person, in bodily form; and that the Holy Spirit is truly the Spirit of God, a divine influence proceeding from the Father and also from the Son, as their power, energy, etc.”³⁰ In 1891 Uriah Smith suggested that “the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God; it is also the Spirit of Christ. It is that divine, mysterious emanation through which they carry forward their great and infinite work.”³¹ Yet, not all shared this view. Already in 1896 George C. Tenney recognized that “we cannot describe the Holy Spirit. From the figures which are brought out in Revelation, Ezekiel, and other Scriptures, and from the language which is used in reference to the Holy Spirit, we are led to believe he is something more than an emanation from the mind of God. He is spoken of as a personality, and treated as such.”³²

Meanwhile, Ellen White wrote in 1896 that evil “could only be restrained and resisted by the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power.”³³ In 1897 she added that “the prince of the power of evil can only be held in check by the power of God in the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit.”³⁴ The same concept also appeared in *The Desire of Ages* (1898): “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.”³⁵ From then on, the expression “the third person of the Godhead” would be echoed over and over again in Adventist writings.

Ellen White also stressed the personality of the Holy Spirit when she stated in Australia in 1899, “We need to realize that the Holy Spirit, who is as much a person as God is a person, is walking through these grounds [of Avondale School].”³⁶ In 1901 she declared, “When we have accepted Christ, and in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit have pledged ourselves to serve God, the Father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit—the three dignitaries and powers of heaven—pledge themselves that every facility shall be given to us if we carry out our baptismal vows.”³⁷

In 1905 Ellen White went further by saying, “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.”³⁸ And the next year (1906) she declared, “The Holy Spirit is a person, for He beareth witness with our spirits 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.”³⁹

Even so, modern Adventist anti-Trinitarians deny the personhood of the Holy Spirit, assuming that a person is only a physical, visible, singular being with a constrained presence and limited activities. But the inspired Word tells us that the Holy Spirit is both a personal and a spiritual Divine Being, who is at the same time united with and distinct from the Father and the Son.

Modern Anti-Trinitarians

There are different opinions about the Holy Spirit among modern Adventist anti-Trinitarians and there is no unity in what they propose. Some speak of the Holy Spirit as being at the same time the Spirit of the Father and of Christ. In 1996 Rachel Cory-Kuehl stated that “there are not two spirits, a spirit of Christ and a spirit of the Father. The Holy Spirit is now the spirit of both the Father and the Son.”⁴⁰ In 2004 Lynnford Beachy added that “when we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, we receive both the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9–11), not a third being or person, separate and distinct from the Father and His Son.”⁴¹

Other anti-Trinitarians refer to the Holy Spirit as being Christ Himself. In this line, David Clayton identified the Holy Spirit as being “the life of Christ” and “Christ Himself glorified.”⁴² So, “when Christ died, His divine life (the Holy Spirit) did not die.”⁴³ The same author suggested that Jesus had to go away before the Holy Spirit could come (John 16:7) “because the Holy Spirit is the life of Jesus and this life of Jesus was not available to us while He was in His human form,” and that Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit as a separate Person from Himself (John 14:16–17, 26) “because He was coming back in ANOTHER form. In a glorified form.”⁴⁴

David Barron stated in 2012 that “the holy spirit is the mind of Christ.”⁴⁵ In 2019 Chung added that “the Holy Spirit is truly Christ but not in personality when it comes to the Spirit in your heart. It is Christ’s mind/character/personality we receive through His spoken word that comes from Himself. . . . Thus we have both the Father and Son as we have their mind/personality within our hearts produced by the word of God.”⁴⁶

Perhaps no other statement by Ellen White has caused so many problems for the anti-Trinitarians than her assertion that “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.”⁴⁷ Instead of keeping the Holy Spirit as a third person of the Godhead, the *As It Reads* ministry proposed that “the Heavenly trio is the Father, Son and Spirit of Christ.”⁴⁸ For Allen Davis, “the Holy Spirit is the mind, power and personal presence

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of the very life of God that the Father sends through His Son to us. This is not a separate person of the Godhead who is being sent, it is the very life of God coming to us through His beloved Son.”⁴⁹

Other modern anti-Trinitarians are not afraid of replacing the Holy Spirit with Lucifer. For example, Fred Allaback claimed in 1995 that Lucifer “succeeded in seducing one third of God’s angels into believing that he should be exalted and worshipped along with the Father and Son; thus forming a co-equal TRINITY.”⁵⁰

It is more than evident that there is no unity among the various anti-Trinitarian voices. These contradictory positions and interpretations leave the seeker for truth much confused about which of the various proposed theories should be followed.

Tradition and New Light

A third crucial aspect of the current Trinitarian debate is the authority of tradition and openness to new light. The Roman Catholic Church has placed much emphasis on the authority of the so-called church fathers. In 1546, the Council of Trent, Session 4, issued a decree prohibiting any interpretation of the Holy Scriptures “contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers.”⁵¹ In 1965, the Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *DEI VERBUM* confirmed that “both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence.”⁵² Modern Adventist anti-Trinitarians quote some Adventist pioneers because they believe they had a more biblically correct view on the issue and because they are in support of their position. In doing so, however, there is the danger of a subtle tendency to have a similar Roman Catholic mindset when they attribute to the Adventist pioneers a similar degree of authority as the church fathers have in Roman Catholic theology.

Adventist Pioneers

Sabbatarian Adventists maintained William Miller’s high view of Scripture as God’s reliable and coherent revelation to humanity.⁵³ For instance, James White stated in *A Word to the “Little Flock”* (1847) that “the [B]ible is a perfect, and complete revelation” and “our only rule of faith and practice.”⁵⁴ The third article of the 1872 statement of Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, crafted by Uriah Smith, asserted similarly that “the Holy Scriptures, of the Old and New Testaments, were given by inspiration of God, contain a full revelation of his will to man, and are the only infallible rule of faith and practice.”⁵⁵

In 1884 Ellen White stated, “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.”⁵⁶ In 1901 she warned, “The truth of God is found in His word. Those who feel that they must seek elsewhere for present truth need to be converted anew.”⁵⁷

While holding to the view that all components of the broad spectrum of truth form a harmonious system, early Seventh-day Adventists saw the formulation of creeds as inhibiting the continuous search for and commitment to Bible truth. In 1892, Ellen White affirmed clearly,

There is no excuse for anyone in taking the position that there is no more truth to be revealed, and that all our expositions of Scripture are without an error. The fact that certain doctrines have been held as truth for many years by our people, is not a proof that our ideas are infallible. Age will not make error into truth, and truth can afford to be fair. No true doctrine will lose anything by close investigation.⁵⁸

The continuous search for a deeper understanding of biblical truth is the very essence of Seventh-day Adventist thought and practice.

Modern Anti-Trinitarians

Modern Adventist anti-Trinitarians claim to accept the full authority of Scripture, but this is not clearly demonstrated in their practical usage. Their continuous references to the Adventist pioneers appears to be giving them an authority that is more important than Scripture. Indeed, many display a strong tendency to consider early Adventist tradition as decisive on doctrinal matters, especially on the nature of the Godhead. For them, the early Adventist non-Trinitarian tradition is the only reliable criterion to understand the nature of Christ and the nature of the Holy Spirit, and to move away from it would mean an unacceptable apostasy from the truth. This is quite evident in several of their publications.

In his published appeal to the delegates of the 1995 General Conference Session in Utrecht, the Netherlands, Fred Allaback quoted several non-Trinitarian pioneers as an endorsement to the modern anti-Trinitarian cause, suggesting that any departure from their views would be an apostasy from the “Historic Adventist position that the ‘one God’ is the Father.”⁵⁹ Even more expanded compilations from the writings of the pioneers were produced by Lynnford Beachy⁶⁰ and the *As It Reads* ministry.⁶¹ Apparently, modern Adventist anti-Trinitarians attribute to some Adventist pioneers the same level of authority that Roman Catholics attribute to the ancient church fathers. We owe, indeed, much to the

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rich biblical groundwork of our pioneers, but we should never elevate their teachings as being the “greater light” to understand the “lesser light” of Scripture.

Modern Adventist anti-Trinitarians label as “progressive error” any new refinement in the understanding of the Godhead.⁶²

The Trustworthiness of the Bible

Another significant issue involved in the Trinitarian debates is the level of trustworthiness of the Holy Scriptures. Some anti-Trinitarians have no difficulty proposing that the Bible passages that do not agree with their own postulates were intentionally corrupted to favor the Trinitarian views. For example, in Appendix N, “Textual Corruptions Favoring the Trinitarian Position,” of their book *One God & One Lord: Rediscovering the Cornerstone of the Christian Faith*, Mark H. Graeser, John A. Lynn, and John W. Schoenheit list forty-one passages of the New Testament that allegedly were adulterated with that intention.⁶³ A similar view can be found also within some modern Adventist anti-Trinitarian circles.

Adventist Pioneers

Early Adventist literature strongly supported the infallibility and trustworthiness of Scripture. In 1867 the *Review* published a series of twentytwo editorials in response to the so-called “self-contradictions” of the Bible raised by infidels against its content. This series emphasized the harmony and trustworthiness of the Bible.

Without subscribing to modern theories of inerrancy, Ellen White believed that the Holy Spirit not only inspired the whole Bible (2 Tim 3:16) but also preserved its trustworthiness throughout the centuries. She confirmed that “the manuscripts of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures have been preserved through the ages by a miracle of God.”⁶⁴ Actually, “the Lord has preserved this Holy Book by His own miraculous power in its present shape.”⁶⁵ So, “the Word of God is infallible; accept it as it reads; look with confidence to God.”⁶⁶ “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.”⁶⁷ “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.”⁶⁸

Modern Anti-Trinitarians

In modern Adventist anti-Trinitarian literature, one can find different approaches to the trustworthiness of the Bible. While many of them accuse Seventh-day Adventist theologians (especially LeRoy E. Froom) of having misinterpreted the Scriptures to sustain the

supposed Trinitarian heresy,⁶⁹ at least some anti-Trinitarians venture themselves into the realm of textual criticism, claiming that Eusebius of Caesarea (AD 263–339) influenced some scribes to insert heretical sentences and expressions into the text of Scripture, one of which was the Trinitarian baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19. They claim that the original baptismal formula was only “in my name” and not “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”⁷⁰

Examining the critical apparatus of the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament, one can see that there is no textual variant to the original Greek text of Matthew 28:19. This means that the suggestion of a heretical insertion of that clause simply does not hold. Even so, could the Trinitarian formula be considered a statement foreign to the actual content of the gospel of Matthew? Not at all. Grant R. Osborne explains that in this formula Jesus is “bringing together his many statements on his Father ([Matt] 5:48; 6:1, 4; 11:25–27; 24:36), himself as the Son (16:27; 24:36), and the Holy Spirit (12:18, 28, 32); and Matthew is once again (as in all the discourses) abbreviating a lengthy teaching of Jesus on the mountain of revelation.”⁷¹

It is noteworthy to mention that Ellen White quoted the baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19 in her writings many times, but she never criticized it as corrupted or problematic. For example, already in 1854 she stated, “Having received their commission from God, and having the approbation of the church, they [the leaders of the apostolic church] go forth baptizing in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.”⁷² 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.”⁷³ 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.⁷⁴

In 1909, after quoting again the Trinitarian baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19, Ellen White affirmed, “These are the words of inspiration. You need not fear that you are making a mistake by believing fully in them.”⁷⁵ The present study does not find any early Seventh-day Adventist questioning the authenticity of the Trinitarian formula.

Modern Adventist Anti-Trinitarianism: Hermeneutical Reflections

The Reliability of Ellen White's Writings

Closely related to the discussions of the trustworthiness of the Bible is also the matter of the reliability of Ellen White's writings. The former-Adventist minister Dudley M. Canright (1840–1919), who became one of the strongest critics of Adventism, already challenged boldly the credibility of Ellen White's prophetic gift because "she often changed what she had written, and wrote it very differently."⁷⁶ It is true that Ellen White revised some of her earlier writings for the sake of clarification, but without contradicting them. Canright's argument is typical for those who believe in a verbal/mechanical inspiration. Similar reasonings are used by some modern Adventist anti-Trinitarians.

Adventist Pioneers

After the October 1844 Disappointment, Sabbatarian Adventists became increasingly convinced that Ellen White's writings were prophetically inspired and fully reliable. Over the years, this confidence has been confirmed not only in Adventist books and articles but also in many official actions of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists taken over the years.

Ellen White herself believed that God called her to be His special messenger and that her writings were prophetically inspired. While deeply concerned about those who distorted the meaning of her writings, she never ever blamed the leadership of the church or any Adventist publishing house for having adulterated her writings. If this would have happened, she could very easily have corrected it, which she never did. So, Ellen White never doubted the authenticity and reliability of her writings published by the denominational publishing houses.

Modern Anti-Trinitarians

In contrast to the Adventist pioneers (including Ellen White herself), several modern Adventist anti-Trinitarians use a critical approach that allows them to question even the authenticity of her writings. For example, Goran Šušlić claimed,

In the 1880s, a small circle of apostate supreme theologians began a "project" of introducing the doctrine of the Trinity. . . . The leaders of the apostasy sent Ellen White to Australia in 1891 (September), against God and her will, for her fight for the truth, so that they could peacefully supplement the book "The Life of Jesus Christ" with added words about the Holy Spirit, i.e. Trinity.⁷⁷

The book *A Divindade* (2003) claimed that in 1888 a process of apostasy began within the church, headed by its own leadership, culminating in the "adulteration of Ellen White's testimonies."⁷⁸ In the same line, someone even stated that "criminal hands adulterated Ellen White's writings."⁷⁹ The natural outcome of this claim is simply that Ellen White's writings are unreliable.

About the Trinitarian statements found in Ellen White's book *The Desire of Ages* (1898), Fred Allaback argued that "the controversial statements found in 'The Desire of Ages' do not represent her attempt to publicly acknowledge any change and/or clarification in her thinking, but rather, represent a manipulation and/or misinterpretation of her writings of which she had no conscious part."⁸⁰ In 1999 Lynnford Beach argued that Ellen White's secretary Marian Davis was influenced by W. W. Prescott and Camden Lacey "to make minor changes so that it appeared as if Ellen White was teaching the Trinitarian doctrine."⁸¹

Tim Poirier, vice director of the Ellen G. White Estate, has convincingly demonstrated the authenticity of Ellen White's Trinitarian statements in *The Desire of Ages*.⁸² Nevertheless, some anti-Trinitarians question the authenticity of the sentence that reads, "The Holy Spirit is Christ's representative, but divested of the personality of humanity, and independent thereof."⁸³ They also criticize how Ellen White's quotations were compiled in the section "Misrepresentations of God" in the book *Evangelism* (1946),⁸⁴ accusing LeRoy E. Froom of having "manipulate[d] E. G. White quotations to seemingly support the Trinitarian position."⁸⁵ Others question the authenticity of her statement that the redeemed in heaven will "fall down and worship the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."⁸⁶ Brendan Paul Valiant alleged that Ellen White's statement that "the Holy Spirit, who is as much a person as God is a person"⁸⁷ "may not have been her exact words."⁸⁸

But if those writings were twisted to support the Trinity, what assurance do we have that they were not twisted also to prove other heretical teachings? Whether modern anti-Trinitarians admit it or not, the natural outcome of their reasonings is that her writings are no longer wholly trustworthy and need to be corrected by the modern reader.

The Hermeneutical Approach

All distorted religious teachings derive from some false hermeneutical principles that are applied in the interpretation of Scripture. Some problematic hermeneutical practices can be found among modern Adventist anti-Trinitarians who try to proof their case.

Modern Adventist Anti-Trinitarianism: Hermeneutical Reflections

Adventist Pioneers

Early Sabbatarian Adventists were much indebted to William Miller and his hermeneutical principles. Prior to his conversion experience, Miller was much perplexed by what he deemed “inconsistencies and contradictions in the Bible.” But after his conversion and thorough study of the Bible, allowing “every word [to] have its proper bearing on the subject of the text,” he was “satisfied that the Bible is a system of revealed truths, so clearly and simply given, that the ‘wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein.’”⁸⁹ In his article “The Bible Its Own Interpreter” (1840), Miller declared, “To understand doctrine, bring all the scriptures together on the subject you wish to know, then let every word have its proper influence,” and allow Scripture to be “its own expositor.”⁹⁰

Following the same line, in the *Present Truth* for December 1849, James White stated that “Scripture must, explain Scripture—then a harmony may be seen throughout the whole.”⁹¹ In 1854 he added, “We say, Let us have a whole Bible, and let that, and that alone, be our rule of faith and duty.”⁹² In this statement, he stressed clearly the Protestant principles of *sola Scriptura* (“that alone”) and of *tota Scriptura* (“a whole Bible”), which forbid any dichotomic and selective readings of the Scriptures. In 1901 Ellen White added, “The Bible is its own interpreter. With beautiful simplicity, one portion connects itself with the truth of another portion, until the whole Bible is blended in one harmonious whole. Light flashes forth from one text to illuminate some portion of the Word that has seemed more obscure.”⁹³

Modern Anti-Trinitarians

A careful overview of the modern Adventist anti-Trinitarian writings identifies at least three questionable hermeneutical approaches. One is the overall tendency to follow a more selective than integrative method. There are Bible passages that speak only of the Father (Deut 32:6; Mal 2:10; Jas 1:27; 3:9; 1 John 3:1; etc.), of the Father and the Son (John 1:1–3; 1 Cor 8:6; Titus 1:4; etc.), and of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14; Eph 1:3–14; 4:4–6; Rev 1:4–8; etc.). The natural approach would be to keep all three groups of passages in a proper balance, allowing the most comprehensive one (in this case, the third group) to remain as the pattern of interpretation, which modern anti-Trinitarians fail to do.

Another hermeneutical problem is the prevailing use of the argument of silence. For example, Rachel Cory-Kuehl argued, “I have found no command in Scripture, or in Spirit of Prophecy writings, that we are to glorify, give thanks to, pray to, or exalt the Holy Spirit.”⁹⁴ “There is no passage saying, ‘the Holy Spirit loved the world.’ At no time did Christ say, ‘I and the

Spirit are one’ or ‘I have come in the Spirit’s name,’ or ‘The Spirit seeketh such to worship Him.’ There is no Spirit of Prophecy statement which says that the Holy Spirit suffered with the Son.”⁹⁵ With these misleading statements, Cory-Kuehl uses the argument of silence to suggest that the Holy Spirit can be a Person only if He is explicitly described as performing the specific functions of the Father and the Son.

On the word Trinity, Lloyd G. Martin wrote, “The word Trinity does not appear in Scripture, nor is there any word for which it is a scriptural counterpart.”⁹⁶ The *As It Reads* ministry adds, “Ellen White never used the word ‘trinity’ to describe God in her approximately 25 million words even though she had plenty of opportunity to do so and clearly knew the word.”⁹⁷ The same ministry also argues, “Is there one verse, anywhere in Scripture, where the Holy Spirit is spoken of as sitting on a throne in heaven?”⁹⁸ In these statements, the absence of the word “Trinity” and of a specific allusion to a “throne” for the Holy Spirit are used to deny His personality.

Modern Adventist anti-Trinitarians use the argument of silence also to redefine the word “person” in the writings of Ellen White. For example, Allen Davis suggested that Ellen White revealed the existence of three “Persons” but only two “Beings” in the Godhead. Since the Holy Spirit is called a “Person” and not a “Being,” He cannot be a distinct Divine Being but only the Spirit of Christ.⁹⁹

In addition to the selective method and the argument of silence, some anti-Trinitarians also use the quantitative method based on the number of occurrences of a given expression. Dealing with the baptismal formula, Ricardo Nicotra suggested a “balance of evidence” in which thirty-six references to “in the name of Jesus” (Act 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; Rom 6:3; Gal 3:27; etc.) should prevail over the only one allusion to “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19).¹⁰⁰

The Apostasy From the Truth

We cannot conclude our reflections without addressing the anti-Trinitarian understanding of the major post-apostolic apostasy of the mainstream Christianity. The apostle Paul alerted of such future apostasy (Acts 20:29–30; 2 Thess 2:3–4). Seventh-day Adventists have viewed this apostasy as taking place within Roman Catholicism and its influence.

Adventist Pioneers

The apostasy of post-apostolic Christianity was usually related, for example, to the unbiblical theory of the natural immortality of the soul, the change from Sabbath to Sunday, and the papal supremacy.

Some non-Trinitarian Adventist pioneers also saw the Trinity as part of this apostasy. For example, in 1861 J. N. Loughborough stated that the “doctrine of the trinity was brought into the church about the same time with image worship, and keeping the day of the sun, and is but Persian doctrine remodeled.”¹⁰¹ In 1869 R. F. Cottrell argued that to hold the doctrine of the Trinity is an evidence of being intoxicated “from that wine of which all the nations have drunk” and from “one of the leading doctrines, if not the very chief, upon which the bishop of Rome was exalted to the popedom.”¹⁰²

Ellen White, however, did not include the Trinity among the false doctrines of Roman Catholicism as listed in chapters 17–19 of *Spiritual Gifts*, volume 1 (1858).¹⁰³ She expanded these concepts significantly in her books *The Spirit of Prophecy*, volume 4 (1884), and *The Great Controversy* (1888, rev. 1911), but without including the Trinity among the apostate teachings of Roman Catholicism. If the argument of silence—so frequently used by modern Adventist anti-Trinitarians—means something for the anti-Trinitarians, then they should reconsider their postulates, being as silent on this matter as Ellen White was.

Modern Anti-Trinitarians

In line with some non-Trinitarian Adventist pioneers—but in sharp contrast to Ellen White—modern Adventist anti-Trinitarians view the Trinity probably as the main component of the Roman Catholic false teachings.

In 2000 Lloyd G. Martin asserted that “an acceptance of the Trinity is, in reality, an acceptance of the Papacy since the formation of one was dependent upon the development of the other.”¹⁰⁴ In 2017, Terry Hill proposed,

In the Seventh-day Adventist Church, this has been a developing apostasy—meaning a gradual moving away from the simple truths of the Scriptures to accepting speculations of God being a trinity. This is exactly how it happened in early Christianity. It is history repeating itself. Sadly, the end result of early Christianity apostatising from the truth ended in a complete apostasy from God. We need to be aware of these things.¹⁰⁵

If the acceptance of the Trinity has such serious implications as stressed by modern Adventist anti-Trinitarians, why then did Ellen White not highlight it as they do? Was she suppressing the truth or are they following a wrong path?

Conclusion

Modern Adventist anti-Trinitarians claim to be the true successors of the non-Trinitarian Adventist pioneers. But a more careful analysis of the writings of both groups does not fully support this claim. While there are some similarities, there are also many differences. On the nature of Christ, some Adventist pioneers understood the Bible expression “only begotten Son” as implying that Christ had a beginning, while Ellen White quoted that expression without ever endorsing that view. On this matter, modern anti-Trinitarians choose to stay with the non-Trinitarian view of those pioneers with whom they agree but neglect other statements that do not fit their views.

With regards to the nature of the Holy Spirit, early Adventists were not clear on this matter and preferred not to speculate. In contrast, modern anti-Trinitarians offer different viewpoints without much constraint or hesitancy about moving into the speculative realm. Ellen White, however, clearly emphasized the distinct personality of the Holy Spirit.

Regarding the tension between tradition and new light, both Ellen White and the Adventist pioneers were open to new and deeper understandings of God’s Word. Distinctively, modern anti-Trinitarians stay with the non-Trinitarian views of the pioneers and consider any move away from those views as unacceptable apostasy.

Neither the Adventist pioneers nor Ellen White ever questioned the reliability of the Bible and of her writings. But some modern anti-Trinitarians have no difficulty teaching that the actual text of both the Scriptures and White’s writings were maliciously twisted to promote Trinitarian views.

While Adventist pioneers used sound integrative hermeneutical methods, modern anti-Trinitarians base many of their postulates on a dichotomic and selective hermeneutics, with frequent use of the argument of silence. Undeniably, some Adventist pioneers included the doctrine of the Trinity among the false teachings of the great post-apostolic apostasy of the Christian church, but Ellen White never endorsed this view. On this matter, modern anti-Trinitarians are in line with some pioneers but not with Ellen White.

Having spent much time with the scattered writings of modern Adventist anti-Trinitarians, we are left with the impression that anti-Trinitarians are quite united in fighting the doctrine of the Trinity and much divided in how to reach that goal. There are among them not so many conflicting views on the nature of the Son as there are on the nature of the Holy Spirit. This makes one wonder: in a time when we need the power of the Holy Spirit, more than ever, to revive us and to empower us

to finish the preaching of the everlasting gospel to the whole world, which of those conflicting views are we supposed to trust? What spiritual benefit do we get from denying the personality of the Holy Spirit?

We need a clear understanding of what the Bible and the writings of Ellen White, as a whole, have to say about the Godhead. But we should never forget that “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.”¹⁰⁶ May the Lord help to have a saving experiential knowledge of God!



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Lessons from Matthew 23

Clinton Wahlen

Christ's fifth and final discourse begins in the temple and concludes on the Mount of Olives, which affords a panoramic view of the temple complex on Mount Zion. The woes that begin this closing discourse contrast with the blessings with which the opening discourse begins. Matthew 23 begins with some words of instruction and warning to Jesus' disciples but also to the crowds among whom were other potential followers (vv. 1–12). Jesus then shifts His attention to the scribes and Pharisees, pronouncing a series of seven woes (vv. 13–33)¹ and promising to send messengers to them who will fare no better than the prophets did or, indeed, Jesus Himself (vv. 34–36). Consequently, Jesus concludes His teaching in the temple with a lament over Jerusalem in view of its impending desolation (vv. 37–39).

Interpretation of Matthew 23

Verses 1–12

- Like the first discourse, this initial section instructs disciples of the kingdom of heaven regarding how they should relate to the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees as well as how they should relate to each other.
- Moses' seat was a special chair in the synagogue in which the person sat while explaining the Scriptures (cf. Luke 4:20). Archeological excavations in Israel and elsewhere have revealed a number of these chairs made of stone. Some were probably made of wood and so did not survive.
- Jesus' instruction to do "whatever" they are told by the scribes and Pharisees seems to be contradicted elsewhere in Matthew (e.g., 12:2–5; 16:11–12) and also just a few verses later (23:13, 15). But throughout this chapter Jesus is concerned more with the contradiction between theory and practice. The teachers of the law do not themselves practice everything they lay on others.
- As Jesus will proceed to explain, the "heavy burdens" (cf. Acts 15:10) are the minutely detailed rules devised by the Pharisees as to how to keep the laws of Moses, including the tithing of minute quantities of herbs (v. 23), straining out from one's drink the smallest potential source of defilement (v. 24), as well as rules regarding Sabbath observance (12:2, 10) and ritual purifications before eating food purchased from the marketplace (15:2, 11; cf. Mark

7:3–4). The accumulated traditions had become so complicated that "none knew when their obligations were met."²

- Several examples are given that reveal a greater concern by the scribes and Pharisees for outward appearance and external performance than inner motivations (justice, mercy, faith, and love, v. 23; Luke 11:42) which is Jesus' real concern and which can only come through the transforming grace of the Holy Spirit working on the heart (Gal 5:22–23).
- Jesus' public denunciation of Israel's premier religious teachers, calling them hypocrites (vv. 13, 15, 23, 27, 29), may sound harsh to modern ears but they were no doubt spoken by Jesus in an appealing way, hoping they would see themselves and their actions as God views them, recognize their delusion, and turn to repentance.³ No doubt it also helped some to realize they were not reliable guides in religious matters.
- Three examples of their focus on outward display as symptomatic of an inner spiritual problem are given by Jesus: the widening of phylacteries and lengthening of tassels on their garments (cf. Exod 13:9) as badges of superior piety, their desiring the best seats at feasts and in the synagogue (cf. Prov 25:6–7), and coveting honorific titles (vv. 5–7). Some may wear ornamental crosses today for a similar reason but it is acceptance of the cross and all it represents in the way of self-sacrifice that signifies true faith.
- Jesus draws a clear line separating such self-serving, prideful practices from the humble, service-oriented attitude that is to characterize His followers as brothers and sisters under one Teacher (Jesus) and one heavenly Father (vv. 8–10). The parallel descriptions of the Father and Christ (the Son) place them on the same level—as divine.

2. Verses 13–33

- The seven woes are judgment oracles pronounced on the scribes and Pharisees (called "blind guides" in v. 16; cf. Matt 15:12–14), organized as a series of three pairs with the concluding woe climaxing in "this generation" (recalling Matt 12:39–45) being charged with murder and condemned to a fiery destruction.⁴
- The first two woes contrast heaven and hell: the first describes how the rejection of Jesus' teaching shut people out of the kingdom of heaven (v. 13), while

the second indicates that the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees make them “twice as much a son of hell” (v. 15)—that is, fit only for destruction in the lake of fire.

- The third and fourth woes describe the result of false teaching: spiritual blindness (cf. 2 Cor 4:4), which makes it impossible to recognize what is of most importance—the temple and the altar because God dwells there (v. 21), sanctifying the gold and the gifts brought to Him. Jesus rejects the minute casuistic distinctions made by the scribes and Pharisees because they tended to confuse people as to what was really important. While warning against leaving tithing undone (cf. Lev 27:30–33), He identifies justice, mercy, and faith as the “weightier matters of the law” (v. 23). Justice and mercy are foundational aspects of God’s character (Ps 89:14; Isa 30:18) and faith is the quality of trust in God and His ways that results in obedience (Matt 8:9–10; cf. Deut 32:20; Hab 2:4).
- Similarly, the fifth and sixth woes describe how concerns with outward piety took precedence over inner rectitude (vv. 25–28), whereas inner purity results in right outward deportment.
- The seventh woe sets forth the irony of those who revere the prophets and righteous people of a previous era while rejecting the prophetic messages of John the Baptist and Jesus, thus proving they are behaving no differently than their ancestors and, in fact, will “kill and crucify” some of those Jesus will send to them (a prophecy to which Paul apparently refers in 1 Thess 2:14–16).
- Telling them to “fill up” their guilt (v. 32) uses the word (*plēroō*) that frequently refers to the fulfillment of prophecy in connection with Jesus’ messianic work (e.g., Matt 5:17; 12:17; 13:35) and, thus, may allude to His own death in fulfillment of prophecy (Matt 26:31, 56).

3. Verses 34–39

- Jesus promises to send prophets, which would begin with the twelve apostles (28:19; cf. Luke 11:49). The “wise men” would be those who submit to God’s revealed wisdom (Ps 111:10) and have been instructed by Jesus (Matt 12:42; Luke 21:15; 1 Cor 1:24, 30), which includes the “scribes” He will send (cf. Matt 13:52).
- The harsh treatment His earliest followers received (Acts 5:40; 16:22–23; 21:32; 22:25; 2 Cor 11:24–25) begins to fulfill this prophecy, and the judgment Jesus alludes to with the words “all these things” points forward to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (24:2). The language used (“assuredly,”

“will come”) underscores the certainty of the prophecy’s fulfillment.

- Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem in view of its ultimate destruction by the Romans is not unlike that of Jeremiah in connection with the Babylonian invasions (Jer 9:1; 13:17; Lam 1:16). As then, so in the time of Jesus, opposition to God’s Word through His prophets bring certain doom.
- Jesus’ desire to gather the children of Israel “as a hen” vividly conveys God’s care over His people (cf. Exod 19:4–6; Deut 32:11–12; Isa 31:5). Unfortunately, their unwillingness portends the nation’s demise as the end of their seventy weeks of probation nears its end (Dan 9:24).
- Calling the temple “your house” rather than the Father’s house (cf. Matt 21:13) indicates it has now been divinely disowned and abandoned to destruction. The term “desolate” specifies that utter destruction awaits (e.g., Lev 26:31–32; Jer 10:25; 12:11; Ezek 6:4; 33:28) and connects with Jesus’ later reference to Daniel’s prophecy (Matt 24:15) predicting the destruction of “the city and the sanctuary” (Dan 9:26).

Application of the Chapter

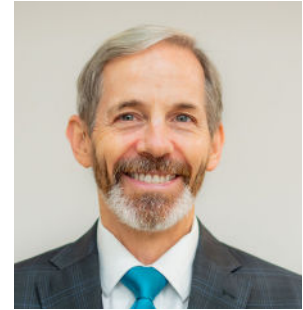
Some important lessons we may glean from Matthew 23 include:

1. Many times it is easier to *say* what should be done than to actually *do* it. Similarly, we may evaluate what others say and do more carefully (and strictly) than we do our own practice, whereas the example of Jesus suggests we be more merciful toward others and more careful about what we say and do since these are things, through God’s grace, we may change.
2. Only God/Christ and His Word are to be the final authority for the Christian’s faith and practice. Such honorific religious titles ascribed to human beings (as distinct from their roles or occupation) are liable to be misconstrued as giving such individuals undue authority or influence over one’s conscience and tend to undermine the principle of brotherly love and unity which should characterize the church.
3. Unlike worldly wisdom, biblical wisdom teaches humility as a sign of true greatness because it reveals that one’s life has been touched by the grace of God (Prov 3:34), surrendered to His will, and aware of the need to walk humbly before Him (Mic 6:8).
4. Making humble service a habit results in a keener awareness of the needs of others and a deeper appreciation of Jesus, the model Servant (Matt 20:28).

Lessons from Matthew 23

5. The sign of a good teacher is the ability to make complicated things clear but, unfortunately, sometimes the opposite happens: things the Bible makes clear become clouded and murky through technical distinctions, numerous qualifications, or elaborate theological discussions.
6. The human tendency is to focus on making sure what people see on the outside looks good, whereas what God sees treasured up in our hearts matters far more (Matt 6:21; 12:35; cf. Luke 16:15; Heb 4:13). Equally important to consider is whether we will have God's blessing on what we do, or if we are determined to push ahead regardless of the warning signs He may send.
7. Ignoring God's Word or creating avenues of interpretation to relegate unwelcome scriptures

to irrelevance is to embark on a perilous path that invites divine retribution and ultimate condemnation in the judgment.



Clinton Wahlen

Associate Director of the
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Endnotes

¹ See verses 13, 15–16, 23, 25, 27, 29. Verse 14 constitutes an additional woe but has weak textual support (cf. Mark 12:40 // Luke 20:47). See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 1994), 50.

² Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), 617. Some of the traditions preserved in the *Mishnah*, the talmuds, and other rabbinic writings seem to reflect practices already prevalent in first-century Israel.

³ White, 353: Jesus “fearlessly denounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity, but tears were in His voice as He uttered His scathing rebukes.”

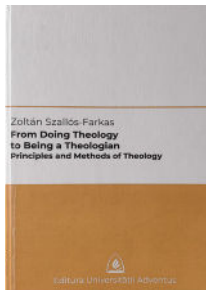
⁴ See Clinton Wahlen, “Lessons from Matthew 5,” *Reflections* 64 (October 2018): 10. “The Greek word translated ‘hell’ (*geenna*) refers to God’s judgment on the wicked, destroying ‘both soul and body’ with unquenchable fire (Matt 10:28)” (ibid.). It occurs seven times in Matthew (5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33).

**“I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you
will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”**

Philippians 1:6 (ESV)

From Doing Theology to Being a Theologian: Principles and Methods of Theology

Frank M. Hasel



From Doing Theology to Being a Theologian: Principles and Methods of Theology

Zoltán Szallós-Farkas.

Cernica, Romania: Editura Universitatii Adventus, 2022. 207 pp.

ISBN: 978-606-9065-25-9

The book *From Doing Theology to Being a Theologian: Principles and Methods of Theology*, written by Zoltán Szallós-Farkas, professor at the Seventh-day Adventist Adventus University in Cernica, Romania, deals with an important but often neglected subject in theology. It addresses the crucial “relationship between Systematic Theology and Christian Spirituality” (p. 7). Dr. Szallós-Farkas is an expert in spirituality. He earned his PhD from the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, and published his dissertation under the title *The Rise and Development of Seventh-day Adventist Spirituality: The Impact of the Charismatic Guidance of Ellen G. White*.¹ In his new book *From Doing Theology to Being a Theologian*, he is not focusing on Ellen G. White and how she has influenced and shaped Adventist spirituality, but he attempts to lay the methodological and theological foundation for the relationship between theology and spirituality. For him, theology and spirituality belong together and “Christian Spirituality, as an academic discipline, cannot be seen as independent from Christian/Systematic Theology” (p. 190).

The book has eight chapters. In the first chapter he introduces the purpose, perspective, and presuppositions for his book. In chapter two he deals with the relationality and spirituality of the divine and human identities and reflects on the nature of God as Trinitarian based on love. He delineates what it means for the nature of doing theology and for our spirituality. The next chapter has a methodological analysis of theological

knowledge to show how human beings know. In chapter four he deals with scientific criteria of theological knowledge formation. The following chapter points out that knowledge and spirituality are dependent on the proper method that is being used. This is followed by a chapter on the interdisciplinary character and implications of this approach. In chapter seven the interdisciplinary usefulness and the interconnectedness of systematic theology and spirituality is unfolded. And in the final chapter the author concludes with a brief summary of his findings.

This book has significant and far-reaching implications for what it means to do theology and for being a proper theologian. He perceptively explores the important connection between theology, spirituality, and ethics. While the author repeatedly points out practical implications of this essential interconnectedness, this book is not a book on practical theology. It rather deals with the subject from an informed academic and methodological perspective. This requires, at times, not just careful reading and personal reflection of complex epistemological questions, but also a sufficient familiarity of theological and epistemological thinking. But when this is brought to the task, the reader will be rewarded with perceptive and rich insights. His chapter on the relational ontology within the Godhead and the Trinitarian spirituality of love (pp. 17–47) is an example of advanced Adventist theological thinking that is in conversation with other theological and philosophical approaches on foundational methodological matters. To see how the Trinity is the foundation of how God relates within Himself, how He relates to His created human beings, and how human beings in turn should pursue their quest for God presents a rich and rewarding biblical and theological reflection. Dr. Szallós-Farkas correctly points out that “whatever the understanding of spirituality, it depends on one’s idea of God” (p. 45).

For the author, the text of Scripture is decisive “for defining both theological method and theological matter” (p. 53). Therefore, “to research God and to

study him actually means to interpret the data that is available about him in the Text, the Scriptures” (p. 59). While the author is certainly right that what God has said or done is connected to the text of Scripture (p. 59), the work of the Holy Spirit in the process of knowing God could have been elaborated and unfolded more than just in the following one and a half pages (pp. 61–62), especially in light of the intra-Trinitarian life of the Godhead that he presents so ably in chapter two.

In chapter three the author utilizes Ludwig Wittgenstein’s concept of language game and claims that it “has contributed to a clearer understanding of the relationship between knowledge and the use of words/language” (p. 74). I am not convinced that Wittgenstein’s model of language game is helpful in what the author tries to do. For Wittgenstein, only those involved in religion can discuss it effectively. This, however, makes it difficult, if not impossible, for those outside to engage in any meaningful discussion. If I understand Dr. Szallós-Farkas correctly, he does affirm the factual reality of propositional statements about God in Scripture (p. 78 and *passim*) and does not draw the conclusion that often is associated with Wittgenstein’s language game—namely, that a statement such as “God exists,” made by religious believers, does not connote a real, empirical argument for the existence of God, but is a statement that has meaning only for those who participate in this language game. A more critical interaction with the concept of “theological language game” (pp. 77, 81, 82, 85, 91, 92–93, 97 and *passim*) is needed, especially considering the correct insight that “it is entirely untenable to study the Bible if the researcher ‘simply takes over methods from other scientific disciplines’” (p. 97).

The author is correct that the fundamental and ultimate presupposition of doing theology is relational faith and not autonomous human reason, which easily reassigns “God’s supreme authority to *ourselves*, thereby seeking to be ultimately *self-governing* and *self-defining*” (p. 134). This becomes visible in the historical-critical method. In his book Dr. Szallós-Farkas perceptively and convincingly shows that the presuppositions of historical-critical methods are inappropriate and detrimental for biblical spirituality and delineates instead the historical-grammatical method. His comparison between the two approaches (pp. 187–190) is insightful and outlines aspects that rarely are taken into consideration when comparing the two approaches. Less

clear is his claim that systematic “theology provides Spirituality with the necessary analytical and evaluative tools with which one is able to assess traditions, text, and ideas that underlie different practices and customs that are specific to a certain way of life” (p. 144). This raises the question of why systematic theology should provide this and not biblical theology, or biblical exegesis. While he is correct that systematic theology should be informed by the findings of a careful historical-grammatical method (p. 168), one wonders whether the outline of different subjects on pages 168–169 really is derived from a careful biblical analysis or reflects more of a systematic theological structure. The subject of creation and its implication for biblical spirituality and systematic theology is strangely absent.

A subject and Scripture index is missing and would have enhanced the usability of the book, especially since the author has read widely and engages numerous different philosophical and theological positions. The bibliography on pages 195–207 unfortunately does not list all the books and references that he refers to in the footnotes.

These details, however, should not detract from the overall very positive contribution of this fine book. Any person interested in exploring the theological rationale for integrating God in our study of the Bible in a way that leads to a biblical-based spirituality will benefit from the engagement with its thoughtful content. Every theological library should have a copy.



Frank M. Hasel

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Biblical Research Institute

Endnotes

¹ Zoltán Szallós-Farkas, *The Rise and Development of Seventh-day Adventist Spirituality: The Impact of the Charismatic Guidance of Ellen G. White* (Cernica, Romania: Editura Institutului Teologic Adventist, 2005).

Biblical Theological Retreat - Kenya 2023

From May 22-28, 2023 a Biblical Theological Retreat for theology teachers of all three African Division convened at the Adventist University of Africa in Kenya. This Pan-African meeting with theology teachers

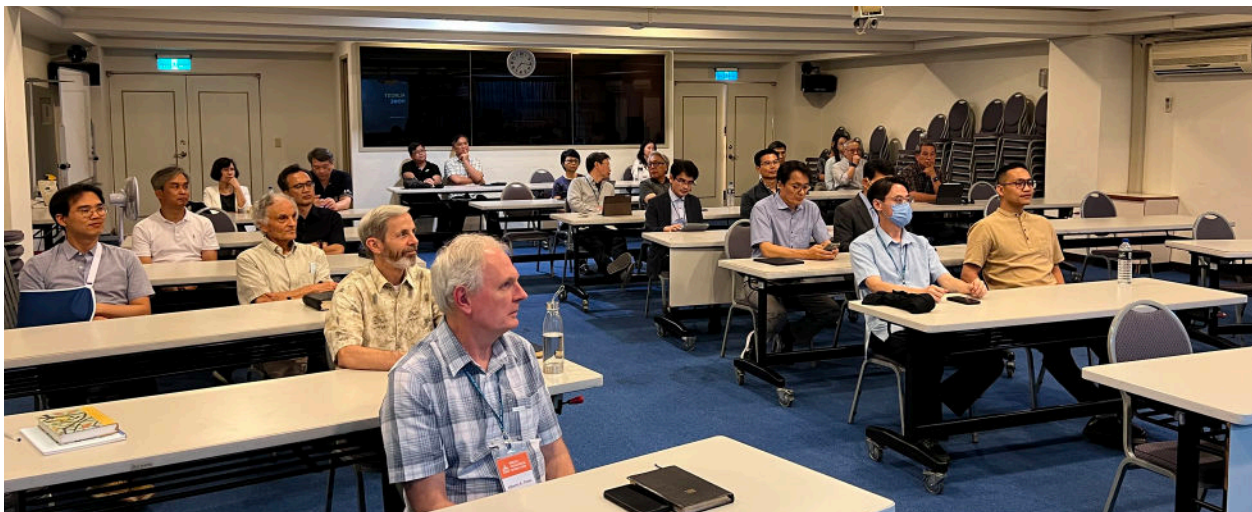
from all Adventist colleges and Universities was a first of its kind. The dialogue with other colleagues helped to foster a spirit of unity and the presentations were geared to specific needs in the African continent.





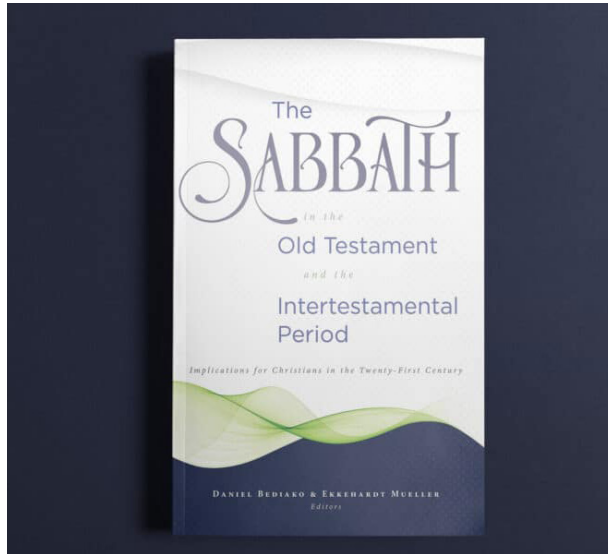
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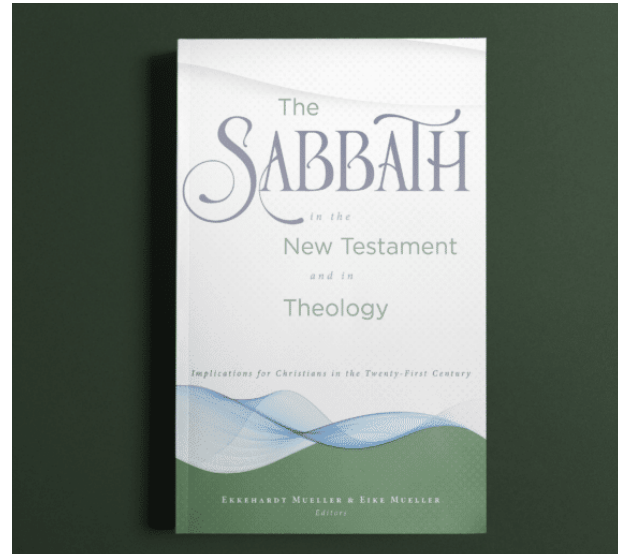
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