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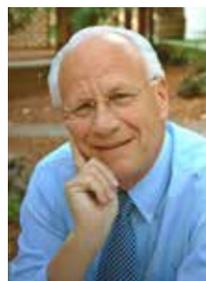
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What About the Trinity?—1

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19, NASB).



▲ George R. Knight

It comes as a surprise to many present-day Seventh-day Adventist that most of the founders of the denomination could not join the church today if they had to agree to the 28 fundamental beliefs. To be more specific, they would have rejected belief number 2, on the Trinity, because they were antitrinitarian; they would have spurned number 4, on the Son, because they held that the Son was not eternal; and they would have denied number 5, on the Holy Spirit, because to them the Spirit was a force rather than a person.

To a large extent, the Christian Connexion had shaped their understanding of these points. In 1835, Joshua V. Himes, a leading minister of the Connexionists, wrote that “at first they [the Connexion believers] were generally Trinitarian,” but they had moved away from that belief when they came to see it as “unscriptural.” Himes noted that only the Father is “unoriginated, independent, and eternal.” Thus, of necessity, Christ was originated, dependent, and brought

► Joshua V. Himes



Courtesy Ellen G. White Estate

into existence by the Father. The Connexionists also tended to view the Holy Spirit as the “power and energy of God, that holy influence of God.”

Joseph Bates, James White and other Connexion adherents brought those views into Sabbatarian Adventism. White, for example, referred to the Trinity in 1846 as that “old unscriptural Trinitarian creed” and, in 1852, as that “old Trinitarian absurdity.”

J.N. Andrews shared White’s views. In 1869, he penned that “the Son of God . . . had God for His Father, and did, at some point in the eternity of the past, have a beginning of days.”

Uriah also rejected the Trinity, arguing in 1865 that Christ was “the first created being” and in 1898 that God alone is without beginning.

Here we have kind of a Sabbatarian Adventist Who’s Who on the Trinity. Only one name, you may have noted, is missing — that of Ellen White. It’s not that she didn’t have anything to say on the topic. Rather, it is impossible to tell exactly what she believed from what she said, at least in the early decades of the movement.

How could most of the early Adventist leaders have been wrong on so important a subject?

Here is part of an answer. God leads His people step by step, and as they progress their vision becomes clearer and clearer. In the next few [issues of the *Herald*], we will see a transformation take place in Adventist thinking on the Trinity. ■

George R. Knight is a retired professor of Church History at the Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. This article is from his book, Lest We Forget, a daily devotional, published by the Review and Herald Publishing Association, page 288.

Whose Plans?

I’ve always been curious about Ellen White’s comment about this statement Jesus made to the priests and rabbis. *The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do (John 5:19 KJV).*

Referring to the priests and rabbis, Ellen reveals, “By their sins they had separated themselves from God, and in their pride were moving independently of Him. They felt sufficient in themselves for all things, and realized no need of a higher wisdom to direct their acts. 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. So should we depend upon God that our lives may be the simple outworking of His will (*Desire of Ages*, p. 208). Christ’s example informs us.

So, for all of us who claim to be followers of Christ (and, therefore, ministers of reconciliation), shouldn’t we follow Christ’s example? Could you or I claim full surrender to the Father’s will and can we claim to be totally dependent upon His power? Could you or I honestly make the statement, “I make no plans for myself”?

So often I catch myself running full speed ahead on my own initiative, chasing some “great” plan or idea that is very much “my own” rather than God’s. Like the priests and rabbis, I have felt “sufficient in myself.” I mean, after all, aren’t we supposed to believe in ourselves and exhibit self-confidence? Isn’t that the message of our culture? How often do we as Seventh-day Adventist members and leaders fall into the norms of our culture? How often do we mirror the culture of our national political leaders?

Recently, I’ve been impressed by the leadership of Carmelo Mercado as our prayer team has been

preparing for a number of initiatives in preparation for the General Conference Session next summer in Indianapolis. Our diverse team of representatives from each conference has demonstrated a desire to be in line with God’s plans rather than our own. Through prayer and honest conversations with one another, I sense God is leading us into something that is not our own initiative.

In Christ’s time, His people had chosen their own ways. They were not building according to heaven’s pattern. How is it going in your local setting? How are you building your church? Join us in our commitment to follow Christ’s pattern being attentive to His Spirit, guidance and direction.

Would you please join us in the spirit of Christ to pray that we make no plans for ourselves, that we be open to seek and accept God’s plans for us, that our lives may be the simple outworking of His will?

Our Lake Union Prayer Conference is scheduled for March 6–7, 2020, in Plainfield, Ind., in preparation for the General Conference Session. You can get more information and register at: ourunitedcry.org. ■

Gary Burns is Prayer Ministries coordinator for the Lake Union Conference.



▲ Gary Burns