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What About the Trinity? — 3

But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit...? You have not lied to man but to God” (Acts 5:3, 4, RSV).



▲ George R. Knight

In spite of the Bible’s clarity on the topic, early Adventism had failed to recognize the personhood and the full divinity of the Holy Spirit. That would have disastrous consequences for the denomination by the end of the nineteenth century.

But first we need to recognize that the 1890s saw more written about the Holy Spirit and Christ than perhaps any decade in Adventist history. That was only natural once they began to talk about righteousness by faith and the centrality of Christ in salvation. After all, if Christ does the saving, then it is important to have a Christ adequate for the task. And if the Holy Spirit is a key player in the process one should expect to speak of His function. It is no accident that discussion of the Godhead erupted in Adventism in the 1890s.

But Adventists weren’t the only people then talking about the Holy Spirit. The Wesleyan holiness denominations with their emphasis on faith healing and

victorious living emerged during those years, and the turn of the new century would see the rise of modern Pentecostalism. Both movements had a great deal to say about the work of the Spirit in people’s lives and in the church. At the other end of the theological spectrum, liberal Christians had begun developing a renewed interest in such spirit-related theories as the immanence of God and the ideas of such Eastern religions as Hinduism, with its pantheistic perspective that everything that exists is God.

Adventism, with its lack of a correct understanding on such topics, would be deeply affected by the movements in the larger religious world. On the one hand, at the turn of the century it would have its own Pentecostal outbreak in the Holy Flesh movement, which proclaimed that even your missing teeth would grow back before Christ returned so that you could have *perfect flesh*. On the other hand, Waggoner and J.H. Kellogg would get caught up in Pantheism, Waggoner claiming to the General Conference sessions of 1897 and 1899, for example, that Christ “appeared as a tree” and that “a man can get righteousness in bathing, when he knows where the water comes from.”

Talk about confusion.

It is into that context that God led Adventism into its next step in the progressive pathway of present truth.

God had a message for His people on the Godhead. But they needed to study their Bibles to discover it.

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 289.