

THE RECEPTION OF ELLEN G. WHITE'S TRINITARIAN STATEMENTS BY HER CONTEMPORARIES, 1897–1915

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Introduction

Recent Adventist scholarship has shown convincingly that the understanding of the Godhead, Christ's divinity, and the personality of the Holy Spirit underwent significant changes since the beginning of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Several studies address the semi-Arian position of many early Adventists, the development of the trinitarian position of the denomination, and Ellen G. White's role in that developmental process.¹ Some, however, question if this transition really happened with White's knowledge, or if the change took place after she passed away.² Tim Poirier, vice director and archivist of the Ellen

¹Between the 1950s and 1970s only a handful of studies were done on the topic. See Christie Mathewson Taylor, "The Doctrine of the Personality of the Holy Spirit as Taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church up to 1900" (B.Div. thesis, SDA Theological Seminary, 1953); Erwin R. Gane, "The Arian or Anti-Trinitarian Views Presented in Seventh-day Adventist Literature and the Ellen G. White Answer" (M.A. thesis, Andrews University, 1962); Russell Holt, "The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination: Its Rejection and Acceptance" (term paper, Andrews University, 1969). Between 1996 and 2010, however, far more studies were produced on that subject. See Merlin D. Burt, "Demise of Semi-Arianism and Anti-Trinitarianism in Adventist Theology (1888-1957)" (term paper, Andrews University, 1996); Gerhard Pfandl, "The Doctrine of the Trinity Among Adventists" (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1999); Woodrow W. 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), 190-220; Jerry Moon, "The Adventist Trinity Debate, Part 1: Historical Overview," *AUSS* 41 (2003): 113-129; idem, "The Adventist Trinity Debate, Part 2: The Role of Ellen G. White," *AUSS* 41 (2003): 275-293; Michael Dörnbrack, "Die Rolle Ellen Whites bei der Entwicklung der Trinitätslehre in der Adventgemeinde: Aussagen, Auswirkungen und Reaktionen" (term paper, Theologische Hochschule Friedensau, 2004); Merlin D. Burt, "History of the Seventh-day Adventist Views on the Trinity," *JATS* 17/1 (2006): 125-139; Denis Fortin, "God, the Trinity, and Adventism: An Introduction to the Issues," *JATS* 17/1 (2006): 4-10; Denis Kaiser, "A Comparative Study on the Trinity as Seen in the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Christian Connexion, and among Seventh-day Adventists until 1870" (research paper, Andrews University, 2008). In this article, the bibliographic references are arranged in a chronological sequence rather than in an author-oriented order, to show when certain statements were quoted for the first time and to visualize the increasing reception of Ellen White's trinitarian statements.

²Allen Stump, *The Foundation of Our Faith: Over 150 Years of Seventh-day Adventist*

G. White Estate, gathered the original handwritten and typed manuscripts containing White's handwritten notes to show that she did, in fact, write those trinitarian statements.³ Nevertheless, it was still not known when and how that transition occurred. Is there any proof that White's contemporaries knew and acknowledged her trinitarian statements? If so, how did they respond? To answer these questions, the present article will look at how two of her well-known trinitarian statements were received from when she made them in 1897 until the end of her life in 1915. This article will examine, first, how White's statements were quoted and referenced. Then the focus will shift to a chronological overview of the reception of her trinitarian phraseology, before moving to an analysis of three major interpretations of her trinitarian language.

Ellen G. White's Trinitarian Statements

The book *The Desire of Ages* (1898) contains White's most famous trinitarian statement, in which the phrase, "the third person of the Godhead," was used.⁴ However, this was not the first time that she had referred to the Holy Spirit in this way. The first time the phrase appeared in print was a year earlier in *Special Testimonies for Ministers and Workers*,⁵ as a reprint of a letter she had written on 6 February 1896, from Cooranbong, Australia, to the "brethren in America."⁶ In subsequent years, the same phrase is found in other articles by White.⁷ As may be expected, these statements did not go unnoticed. Various writers began to use the same phrase without providing a reference; some

Christology, 5th ed. (Welch, WV: Smyrna Gospel Ministry, 2003), 87-102; *Leichte Veränderungen in den Büchern von Ellen G. White und in anderen Büchern?* (http://www.sabbat.biz/html/leichte_veraenderungen_.html, accessed March 30, 2008).

³Tim Poirier, "Ellen White's Trinitarian Statements: What Did She Actually Write?" *Ellen White and Current Issues Symposium 2* (2006): 18-40.

⁴Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), 671.

⁵Ellen G. White, *Special Testimonies for Ministers and Workers*, series A, no. 10 (n.p., 1897), 25, 37.

⁶Ellen G. White to My Brethren in America, 6 February 1896 (Letter 8, 1896), quoted in idem, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials* (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1987), 1493.

⁷Ellen G. White, "The Outpouring of the Spirit," *Signs of the Times*, 1 December 1898, 754; idem, "The Promise of the Spirit," *Review and Herald*, 19 May 1904, 7; idem, "The Holy Spirit," *Bible Training School*, November 1904, 81; idem, "The Holy Spirit," *Workers' Bulletin*, 17 January 1905, 113; idem, "The Gift of the Spirit," *Southern Watchman*, 28 November 1905, 773; idem, "The Promise of the Father—John xiv.15-27," *Present Truth*, 24 May 1906, 333; idem, "Christ's Most Essential Gift to His Church," *Review and Herald*, 19 November 1908, 16; idem, "Christ's Most Essential Gift to His Church," *Union Conference Record* [Australian], 3 May 1909, 13; idem, "The Gift of the Holy Spirit—No. 2," *Signs of the Times* [Australian], 4 December 1911, 773.

used quotation marks, and others did not.⁸ Still others referred explicitly to *The Desire of Ages* or to the *Special Testimonies*.⁹

⁸For those who used quotation marks, see R. A. Underwood, "Will You Receive Him?" *Review and Herald*, 10 May 1898, 294-295; S. N. Haskell, "Who Is Melchisedec?" *Signs of the Times* [Australian], 13 February 1905, 81; Arthur G. Daniells, "The Ministry of the Holy Spirit," *Review and Herald*, 22 November 1906, 6; idem, "The Church's Greatest Need To-Day," *Signs of the Times* [Australian], 30 September 1907, 617-618; G. B. Thompson, "Studies on the Holy Spirit—No. 3," *Australasian Record*, 16 January 1911, 2; idem, "The Promise of the Holy Spirit," *Present Truth*, 4 January 1912, 2.

For those who did not use quotation marks, see E. W. Farnsworth, "The Vicar,—The Holy Ghost," *Union Conference Record* [Australian], 1 October 1899, 1-2; W. W. Prescott, "Creator and Redeemer," *Review and Herald*, 26 January 1905, 4; Haskell, 81; Arthur G. Daniells, "The Church's Greatest Need To-day," *Liberty*, April 1906, 20; [M. C. Wilcox], "With Our Inquirers: 2089—The Holy Spirit," *Signs of the Times*, 22 May 1907, 2; W. W. Prescott, "Editorial," *Review and Herald*, 4 June 1908, 3; R. D. Quinn, "The Practical Results of Prevailing Prayer," *Review and Herald*, 11 November 1909, 12; G. B. Thompson, "A Study of Christian Science—No. 7," *Youth's Instructor*, 30 November 1909, 3; M. E. Stewart, "The Third Person of the Godhead—the Holy Spirit," *Review and Herald*, 29 December 1910, 4; G. B. Thompson, "Elder Thompson's Talk: November 14, 1911, 2 P.M.," *Lake Union Herald*, 22 November 1911, 4; R. W. Munson, "Is Triple Immersion Scriptural?—No. 4," *Signs of the Times* [Australian], 12 June 1911, 372; G. B. Thompson, "The Holy Spirit," *Pacific Union Recorder*, 21 March 1912, 9; Francis M. Wilcox, "The Message for Today," *Review and Herald*, 9 October 1913, 21; *Bible Readings for the Home Circle*, new rev. and enl. ed. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1914, 1915), 182; W. M. Adams, "Utah Conference," *Pacific Union Recorder*, 26 March 1914, 16; G. B. Thompson, "The Sealing Work of the Angel," *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, 17 March 1915, 1, reprinted in idem, "The Sealing Work of the Angel," *Field Tidings*, 7 April 1915, 4; T. E. Bowen, "That the Excellency of the Power May Be of God," *Youth's Instructor*, 20 July 1915, 3; F. M. Wilcox, "The Final Funeral Services of Mrs. Ellen G. White at Battle Creek, Mich., July 24, 1915: Death of a Mother in Israel; She Rests From Her Labors," *Review and Herald*, 5 August 1915, 7; C. J. Cole, "Southern Oregon Conference: Eugene," *North Pacific Union Gleaner*, 5 August 1915, 5.

⁹For those referring explicitly to the *Desire of Ages*, see E. W. Farnsworth, "The Spirit,—The Teacher," *Union Conference Record* [Australian], 1 December 1899, 1-2; A. G. Daniells, "The Ministry of the Holy Spirit," 22 November 1906, 6; idem, "The Church's Greatest Need To-Day," 30 September 1907, 617-618; G. B. Starr, "The Holy Spirit," *Union Conference Record* [Australian], 31 December 1906, 1-2; R. A. Underwood, "Who Shall Be Able to Stand," *Review and Herald*, 21 November 1907, 13; Arthur G. Daniells, "The Ministry of the Holy Spirit," *Union Conference Record* [Australian], 15 April 1907, 2; idem, "The Holy Spirit in the Church: Place in the Church," *Lake Union Herald*, 19 May 1909, 5; idem, "The Holy Spirit in the Church: Place in the Church," *Echoes from the Field*, 2 June 1909, 3; [M. E. Kern], "Society Studies in Bible Doctrines: Lesson I—The Trinity," *Youth's Instructor*, 19 October 1909, 12; idem, "Society Studies in Bible Doctrines: Lesson XI—The Holy Spirit," *Youth's Instructor*, 25 January 1910, 13; O. A. Johnson, *Bible Doctrines Containing 150 Lessons*, rev. ed. (College Place, WA: Author, 1911), 28-29; G. B. Thompson, "The Holy Spirit: Lesson No. 3," *Pacific Union Recorder*, 28 March 1912, 4; M. E. Stewart, "The Holy Spirit," *Review and Herald*, 7 November 1912, 5; G. B. Thompson, "The Holy Spirit," *Review and Herald*, 27 February 1913, 198; H. C. Hartwell, "The Office Work of the Holy Spirit," *Atlantic*

Nine years later, White stated that there are “three living persons in the heavenly trio.” With various writers adopting and using her language in print, she must have realized how people understood her statement that the Holy Spirit is “the third person of the Godhead.” Nevertheless, she reiterated, in 1906, that there are “three living persons in the heavenly trio.” She used this phrase initially in a manuscript on 6 January 1906, but it probably stems from her diary of November 1905.¹⁰ The phrase was published shortly after in church periodicals,¹¹ as well as in the *Special Testimonies*.¹² Some writers took notice of this statement and also began using it in print. While some referenced their use of the phrase to the *Special Testimonies*, others quoted from an article in the *Bible Training School*.¹³

The Reception of the Statements

R. A. Underwood, E. W. Farnsworth, and W. W. Prescott were apparently the first to take notice of White’s initial trinitarian declaration and to follow

Union Gleaner, 28 January 1914, 2; Elbridge M. Adams, “The Holy Spirit—No. 3: Place in the Plan of Salvation,” *Review and Herald*, 23 December 1915, 11.

For those referring explicitly to the *Special Testimonies*, see R. A. Underwood, “The Holy Spirit A Person,” *Review and Herald*, 17 May 1898, 310-311; “Family Readings for the Week of Prayer: The Holy Spirit,” *Union Conference Record* [Australian], 1 May 1900, 2; W. W. Prescott, “Week of Prayer Readings: Our Message,” *General Conference Bulletin* 4/4 (1901): 566; idem, “Week of Prayer Readings: Our Message,” *Union Conference Record* [Australian], 1 June 1902, 5; G. B. Thompson, “Our Greatest Need,” *Review and Herald*, 19 October 1905, 10; Underwood, “Who Shall Be Able to Stand,” 13; idem, “Consecration Needed,” *Review and Herald*, 18 November 1910, 11.

¹⁰Ellen G. White, Manuscript 21, 1906 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White, 9 January 1906). The first page of the manuscript shows that the statement was intended as a critical response against John Harvey Kellogg’s claim that his presentation of God’s “personality” was in harmony with previous statements of White on the subject.

¹¹Ellen G. White, “The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,” *Bible Training School*, February 1906 [probably March 1906], 145; idem, “The Father, the Son, and Holy Ghost,” *Workers’ Bulletin*, 3 April 1906, 153-154.

¹²Ellen G. White, *Special Testimonies for the Church Containing Messages of Warning and Instruction to Seventh-day Adventists Regarding Dangers Connected with the Medical Missionary Work*, series B, no. 7 (n.p.: published for the Author, 1906), 63. In that publication the following statement is also found: “We are to co-operate 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” (see *ibid.*, 51 [from 18 November 1905]).

¹³[Ellen G. White], “Editorial: The Heavenly Trio,” *Review and Herald*, 22 February 1906, 3; Starr, “The Holy Spirit,” 1-2; R. Hare, “The ‘Trinity,’” *Union Conference Record* [Australasian], 19 July 1909, 2; G. B. Thompson, “Elder Thompson’s Talk,” 4; idem, “Studies on the Holy Spirit—No. 5,” *Australasian Record*, 30 January 1911, 1; Underwood, “Consecration Needed,” 11.

her lead. One year after the publication of *Special Testimonies*, Series A, no. 10, Underwood even admitted, “It seems strange to me, now, that I ever believed that the Holy Spirit was *only* an influence.” Although “it was once hard for me to see how a spirit could be a person,” after having studied the biblical usage of the word “spirit/s,” he could testify, “I could understand better how the Holy Spirit can be a person.”¹⁴ Then, for a few years (1901–1903) the matter was not much debated until, in 1904 and 1905, White wrote three articles, repeating the wording found in *Desire of Ages*. Now Prescott, S. N. Haskell, and G. B. Thompson began to use the phrase “third person of the Godhead.” Early in 1906, White wrote another two articles in response to J. H. Kellogg’s views on the Godhead, in which she stated that “there are three living persons in the heavenly trio,” and that believers are baptized “in the name of these three powers.”¹⁵ Again, various writers—Prescott, A. G. Daniells, G. B. Starr, Underwood, and M. C. Wilcox—took notice and began using and quoting these and the former statements from *The Desire of Ages* and the *Special Testimonies*. In 1908, there was only one article published using the phrase “third person of the Godhead” by an author other than White (i.e., Prescott).¹⁶ White, nevertheless, was still the first individual in 1908 and again in 1909 to publish an article using the mentioned phrase.¹⁷ After this, various writers started to employ the wording of her statements, to quote these, and to promote the idea of the personality of the Holy Spirit.

It is interesting to note that the writers who used the trinitarian wording belonged to various generations and theological groups (see **Table 1**). Both the conservative O. A. Johnson (1851–1923) and the rather moderate Daniells (1858–1935) used White’s trinitarian phrases. Similarly, Haskell (1833–1922) and Prescott (1855–1944), who stood on opposite sides in the conflict over the *tāmīd* in Dan 8:9-14,¹⁸ especially between 1908 and 1910, were in harmony in their use of the trinitarian statements. These appeared in publications in the United States and in Australia.

The writers not only used Bible texts in reference to the Holy Spirit, but they believed firmly that “the Holy Scriptures everywhere attribute to Him [the Spirit] all the characteristics of a person,” and that “the Scriptures teach that

¹⁴Underwood, “The Holy Spirit A Person,” 310-311, emphasis original.

¹⁵White, “The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,” 145; idem, *Special Testimonies for the Church*, 1906, 63.

¹⁶Prescott, “Editorial,” 3.

¹⁷Ellen G. White, “Christ’s Most Essential Gift to His Church,” 19 November 1908, 16; idem, “Christ’s Most Essential Gift to His Church,” 3 May 1909, 13.

¹⁸See Denis Kaiser, “The History of the Adventist Interpretation of the ‘Daily’ in the Book of Daniel from 1831 to 2008” (M.A. thesis, Andrews University, 2009), 41-44, 49, 53-54, 93-100; idem, “Ellen White and the ‘Daily’ Conflict,” *Ellen G. White and Current Issues Symposium* 6 (2010): 14-17, 27.

	1898	1899	1900	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906
White	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	4
Others (Articles)	2	2	1	1	1	0	0	3	4
Others (Books)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

	1907	1908	1909	1910	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915
White	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Others (Articles)	5	1	6	3	4	4	2	2	7
Others (Books)	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1

there are three persons in the Godhead.”¹⁹ Further, they not only attributed the trinitarian statements to White, but they affirmed their conviction that “Jesus through the Spirit of Prophecy gives to the Holy Spirit the position of the third person of the Godhead,” and that “the Spirit himself, speaking to the church through his chosen instrument [Ellen White], calls the Holy Spirit the ‘third person of the Godhead.’”²⁰ Thus, they affirmed that the Scriptures taught the personality of the Holy Spirit, while they admitted at the same time that it was White who had made them aware of this biblical truth. In 1913, F. M. Wilcox, one of the five individuals appointed by White as trustees²¹ of her writings, made a list of the fifteen “cardinal features of the [Adventist] faith.” The first point declares that Adventists believe

in the divine Trinity. This Trinity consists of the eternal Father, a personal, spiritual being, omnipotent, omniscient, infinite in power, wisdom, and love; of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the eternal Father, through whom all things were created, and through whom the salvation of the redeemed hosts will be accomplished; the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, the one regenerating agency in the work of redemption.²²

The Understanding of the Statements

While all the writers agreed that the trinitarian statements originated with White, there were differences as to how her statements were understood: (a) a few writers promoted kinds of trinitarian subordinationism or modalism; (b) the majority of authors wrote from a clear trinitarian perspective; and (c) Kellogg, who constitutes an exception, promoted a pantheism veiled in trinitarian language.

Subordinationism and Modalism

Some writers affirmed a trinitarian view that was characterized by different nuances of subordinationism and modalism. Although Haskell affirmed that the Holy Spirit is the “third person of the Godhead” and “has no more beginning of days nor end of life” than the Father, he repeatedly used the pronoun “it” for the Spirit.²³ Hence the details of his position are not entirely clear.

¹⁹Starr, “The Holy Spirit,” 1-2; cf. Thompson, “Elder Thompson’s Talk,” 4.

²⁰Starr, “The Holy Spirit,” 1-2; Hare, “The Trinity,” 2; G. B. Thompson, “The Holy Spirit,” 27 February 1913, 197. See also how Daniells, in his list of the Holy Spirit’s characteristics, always referred to White’s writings, with only one reference to a Bible text. See Daniells, “The Holy Spirit in the Church,” 19 May 1909, 5; idem, “The Holy Spirit in the Church,” 2 June 1909, 3.

²¹Ellen G. White, “Last Will and Testament of Mrs. Ellen G. White,” n.p., 9 February 1912, 2, Q&A 43-B-27 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1912).

²²Francis M. Wilcox, “The Message for Today,” 21.

²³Haskell, 81.

While Johnson affirmed that “there are three persons in the Godhead . . . the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost,” he nevertheless argued that Christ was God because he was “begotten of the Father” and was therefore “of the same substance as the Father,” having “the same divine attributes.” Similarly, the Holy Spirit had “the same divine attributes as God,” since “it” “proceeds from the Father.”²⁴ That is why he considered the Father as the “greatest,” or “the head of this trinity” of three persons.²⁵ Thus Johnson assumed that the second and the third persons of the Trinity came into being through the Father.

M. C. Wilcox, however, promoted a slightly different view. When describing the “great threefold manifestation of Deity,” he admitted that “the Scriptures speak of the Holy Spirit as a person.” Yet, he regarded “it” “not [as] an individual person,” but as the “Spirit that is common to both the Father and the Son,” bringing “to every soul that believes the personal presence of our Lord Jesus Christ.”²⁶ Hence his concept of God was not fully trinitarian, though he talked about “three manifestations of Deity.”

G. I. Butler, in turn, did not regard Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as one and the same person. While he considered the Father and the Son two different persons, he believed that since the Spirit comes forth from both the Father and the Son, “it” is not a person in such a sense as the Father and the Son are, as a “literal being,” walking or flying around. He was aware that White had made statements that suggested that the Holy Spirit is, in fact, a person; and he rejected Kellogg’s claim to be in harmony with White’s concept of God, based on the fact that she herself insisted that “there is not perfect agreement” between the two concepts. “As to the personality of the Holy Ghost,” he had to admit, “I do not know that I am quite settled in regard to that point.” However, he left White “to decide in what sense her words are to be used.”²⁷ Hence Butler’s position was comparable with M. C. Wilcox’s stand, although he recognized that White had made statements that gave “strong ground” to the view that the Holy Spirit is a personality.

Thus, Haskell, Johnson, and M. C. Wilcox affirmed that there are three divine persons or manifestations, but by using the pronoun “it” they demonstrated that they believed the Spirit to be a “neuter” entity. While Haskell granted the Holy Spirit to be without beginning or end, Johnson believed the Spirit to have a beginning of “its” existence when “it” issued

²⁴Johnson, 26-29.

²⁵Ibid., 26.

²⁶M. C. Wilcox, “The Personality of the Spirit,” *Signs of the Times*, 24 November 1914, 730-731.

²⁷G. I. Butler to J. H. Kellogg, 18 October 1903 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University, Center for Adventist Research); G. I. Butler to J. H. Kellogg, 5 April 1904 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University, Center for Adventist Research).

from the Father and the Son. However, these views were minority positions in the published media.

Full Personhood of the Holy Spirit

Those who wrote most frequently about the personality of the Holy Spirit were Thompson, Underwood, and Daniells, declaring that Adventists “regard Him [the Holy Spirit] as a Person.” While they used masculine personal pronouns for the Spirit,²⁸ they admitted that this should not lead one to conclude that he is “confined to one body” and can occupy “but one place at a time.” Of course, it is difficult to define the exact nature of the Spirit, and that is why it is expedient to keep close to what has been revealed regarding him.²⁹ However, the Bible clearly suggests that “there is a trinity, and in it there are three personalities.” As Christ “is one of the divine trio” and “one with the Father from the days of eternity,” so also the “the Holy Spirit is spoken of through the Scriptures as a personality.” Yet, the oneness of the three persons is “not one in which individuality is lost,” but is rather a union of “mind, not of personality.”³⁰ The Holy Spirit was viewed by the writers “as an independent, separate, and personal agent.”³¹ Being eternal, omnipresent, and omniscient, he inspired the Scriptures and worked miracles.³² He is the one who creates new life, makes individuals acquainted with God, guides into all truth, and foretells the future.³³ It is the Spirit who appoints, sends out,

²⁸E.g., Underwood, “Will You Receive Him?” 294-295; idem, “The Holy Spirit A Person,” 310-311; Farnsworth, “The Vicar,” 1-2; idem, “The Spirit,” 1-2; Daniells, “The Ministry of the Holy Spirit,” 22 November 1906, 6; idem, “The Church’s Greatest Need To-Day,” 617-618; Starr, “The Holy Spirit,” 1-2; Stewart, “The Third Person of the Godhead,” 4-5.

²⁹“Personality of the Holy Spirit,” *Present Truth*, 20 April 1911, 245; Thompson, “The Holy Spirit,” 197; Adams, “The Holy Spirit,” 11. While M. E. Kern basically belonged to this group, he made some statements that are quite ambiguous. He defined the three persons of “the holy trinity constituting the Godhead” as “God,” “Christ,” and the “Holy Spirit.” The Father is equated with the self-existent, omniscient, omnipotent, eternal, and infinite God. Yet, after declaring Christ and the Spirit to be “also God,” he went on to emphasize that this “one God” is “a personal spiritual being.” Immediately such questions arise as: Are the Son and the Spirit two additional beings, or do they belong to the first being? Kern’s terminology seems to be ill-conceived, and his presentation of the topic lacks some details, which is why it remains ambiguous and lacks clarity. See M. E. Kern, “Society Studies in Bible Doctrines,” 19 October 1909, 12-13.

³⁰Hare, “The Trinity,” 2.

³¹Underwood, “Will You Receive Him?” 294-295.

³²M. E. Kern, “Society Studies in Bible Doctrines: Lesson XI,” 25 January 1910, 13.

³³Stewart, “The Third Person of the Godhead,” 4.

and directs ministers.³⁴ As Christ testified of the Father, so the Spirit testifies of Christ; but the Holy Spirit does not speak of himself.³⁵ There are two paracletes, two comforters, one in heaven, which is Jesus Christ, and another one on earth, which is the Holy Spirit. Christ pleads the cause of humanity in heaven, whereas the Spirit pleads the cause of God on earth.³⁶ The Spirit is the “divine Personality that is in charge of the work of the Lord here in the world.”³⁷ He is Christ’s representative,³⁸ his successor on earth,³⁹ and rightful vicar⁴⁰ in the church.

Most statements on the personality of the Holy Spirit are random remarks in the context of the practical results of prevailing prayer,⁴¹ consecration,⁴² communion with God,⁴³ preparation for the latter rain,⁴⁴ and the seal of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁵ The writers wanted to urge and lead people into a “personal

³⁴Kern, “Society Studies in Bible Doctrines: Lesson XI,” 13.

³⁵G. B. Thompson, “The Holy Spirit: Lesson No. 4,” *Pacific Union Recorder*, 28 March 1912, 5.

³⁶Thompson, “The Holy Spirit,” 27 February 1913, 198.

³⁷Thompson, “Elder Thompson’s Talk,” 4.

³⁸Farnsworth, “The Vicar,” 1-2; W. W. Prescott, “Week of Prayer Readings: Our Message,” 4/4 (1901): 566; idem, “Week of Prayer Readings: Our Message,” 1 June 1902, 5; Haskell, 81; Daniells, “The Church’s Greatest Need To-Day,” April 1906, 20; idem, “The Ministry of the Holy Spirit,” 6; idem, “The Church’s Greatest Need To-Day,” 617-618; Starr, “The Holy Spirit,” 1-2; Prescott, “Editorial,” 3; Daniells, “The Holy Spirit in the Church,” 19 May 1909, 5; idem, “The Holy Spirit in the Church,” 2 June 1909, 3; Stewart, “The Third Person of the Godhead,” 4; Thompson, “Studies on the Holy Spirit—No. 3,” 16 January 1911, 1; idem, “Elder Thompson’s Talk,” 4; idem, “The Holy Spirit: Lesson No. 3,” 28 March 1912, 4; idem, “The Promise of the Holy Spirit,” 2; idem, “The Holy Spirit,” 27 February 1913, 198; *Bible Readings for the Home Circle*, 182.

³⁹Daniells, “The Church’s Greatest Need To-Day,” April 1906, 20; Starr, “The Holy Spirit,” 1-2; Daniells, “The Holy Spirit in the Church,” 19 May 1909, 5; idem, “The Holy Spirit in the Church,” 2 June 1909, 3; Thompson, “Studies on the Holy Spirit—No. 3,” 16 January 1911, 1; idem, “The Holy Spirit,” 27 February 1913, 198.

⁴⁰Farnsworth, “The Vicar,” 1-2; Thompson, “Studies on the Holy Spirit—No. 3,” 16 January 1911, 1; idem, “The Holy Spirit,” 27 February 1913, 198.

⁴¹Quinn, “The Practical Results of Prevailing Prayer,” 12; Thompson, “The Promise of the Holy Spirit,” 2.

⁴²Underwood, “Consecration Needed,” 11.

⁴³Thompson, “The Holy Spirit: Lesson No. 3,” 28 March 1912, 4.

⁴⁴Stewart, “The Third Person of the Godhead,” 4-5; Thompson, “The Promise of the Holy Spirit,” 2.

⁴⁵Thompson, “The Sealing Work of the Angel,” 17 March 1915, 1, reprinted in idem, “The Sealing Work of the Angel,” 7 April 1915, 4.

fellowship with a personal God,⁴⁶ which is possible only through the Holy Spirit. That is why the articles dealt with practical questions of how to receive and retain the Holy Spirit,⁴⁷ and how believers can “listen to the gentle promptings” of the Spirit.⁴⁸ It was suggested that many had tried to overcome sin in their own strength and had been defeated, for they failed to recognize the “office work of the Holy Spirit in the development of Christian character.”⁴⁹ Thus, when the receiving of the Holy Spirit was regarded as “the greatest need,”⁵⁰ it is understandable that the third person of the Godhead was the subject of several “week of prayer” readings.⁵¹

A few articles reflect a rather apologetic purpose. The idea, as promoted by Christian Science and others, that the Holy Spirit is a kind of science, power, influence, or emotion of the Father and the Son, rather than a person, was rejected.⁵² Other writers addressed two “absurd” extremes regarding the Trinity that mystify God. One such extreme is the view of “one God in three Gods” or “three Gods in one God,” namely tritheism.⁵³ The opposite extreme would be the “erroneous idea . . . that there is no trinity, and that Christ is merely a created being.”⁵⁴ Another set of statements is directed against the teaching that a human being in Rome would be the vicar of Christ on earth.⁵⁵

⁴⁶Prescott, “Editorial,” 3.

⁴⁷Stewart, “The Third Person of the Godhead,” 4-5; idem, “The Holy Spirit,” 7 November 1912, 5.

⁴⁸Thompson, “The Holy Spirit: Lesson No. 3,” 28 March 1912, 4; cf. Thompson, “The Promise of the Holy Spirit,” 2.

⁴⁹Hartwell, “The Office Work of the Holy Spirit,” 2.

⁵⁰Thompson, “Our Greatest Need,” 19 October 1905, 10; Daniells, “The Church’s Greatest Need To-Day,” April 1906, 20; idem, “The Church’s Greatest Need To-Day,” 30 September 1907, 617-618; Thompson, “Studies on the Holy Spirit—No. 3,” 16 January 1911, 1; W. M. Adams, “Utah Conference,” 26 March 1914, 16.

⁵¹“Family Readings for the Week of Prayer: The Holy Spirit,” 1 May 1900, 2; Prescott, “Week of Prayer Readings,” 4/4 (1901): 566; idem, “Week of Prayer Readings,” 1 June 1902, 5; Daniells, “The Ministry of the Holy Spirit,” 22 November 1906, 6; idem, “The Ministry of the Holy Spirit,” 15 April 1907, 2; idem, “The Church’s Greatest Need To-Day,” 30 September 1907, 617-618; Underwood, “Who Shall Be Able to Stand?” 13; White, “Christ’s Most Essential Gift to His Church,” 3 May 1909, 13; Underwood, “Consecration Needed,” 11.

⁵²Underwood, “The Holy Spirit A Person,” 310, 311; Starr, “The Holy Spirit,” 26; Thompson, “A Study of Christian Science,” 3; idem, “The Holy Spirit,” 21 March 1912, 9; *ibid.*, “The Holy Spirit,” 27 February 1913, 197-198.

⁵³Hare, “The Trinity,” 2.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 2; Munson, “Is Triple Immersion Scriptural?” 372.

⁵⁵Thompson, “Studies on the Holy Spirit—No. 3,” 16 January 1911, 1; idem, “The Holy Spirit,” 27 February 1913, 198; *Bible Readings for the Home Circle*, 182.

Since many people accepted that teaching, “it is left for pure Protestantism to proclaim to the world the true God consisting of three persons but of one spirit and aim.”⁵⁶

Panentheism

A third view of White’s trinitarian statements is found in the writings of Kellogg. When his book *The Living Temple*⁵⁷ appeared in 1903, he was greatly criticized for the panentheistic views woven throughout the volume.⁵⁸ He responded to the allegation that his book promoted an impersonal God by arguing that he believed most strongly in God as “a personal being.”⁵⁹ Hence he attempted to seek refuge in White’s statements on the Holy Spirit’s personhood and her emphasis of God’s presence.⁶⁰ The basic tenet was that the Holy Spirit was a universally present person, and since “God” was also a person, he, too, should be universally present.⁶¹ In Kellogg’s understanding, the whole discussion revolved around the question, “Is the Holy Ghost a

⁵⁶Munson, “Is Triple Immersion Scriptural?” 372.

⁵⁷John Harvey Kellogg, *The Living Temple* (Battle Creek, MI: Good Health, 1903).

⁵⁸See, e.g., S. N. Haskell to John Harvey Kellogg, 16 September 1903 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University, Center for Adventist Research); cf. LeRoy Edwin Froom, *Movement of Destiny* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1971), 349-356; Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Elmhaven Years, 1900-1905* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1981), 5:280-306; Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, rev. and updated ed. (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2000), 267-269; Richard W. Schwarz, *John Harvey Kellogg: Pioneering Health Reformer*, Adventist Pioneer Series (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2006), 188-191.

⁵⁹John Harvey Kellogg to G. I. Butler, 14 September 1903 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University, Center for Adventist Research); John Harvey Kellogg to S. N. Haskell, 21 September 1903 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University, Center for Adventist Research); cf. Arthur G. Daniells to W. C. White, 29 October 1903 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University, Center for Adventist Research); S. N. Haskell to John Harvey Kellogg, 29 October 1903 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University, Center for Adventist Research).

⁶⁰John Harvey Kellogg to G. I. Butler, 30 September 1903 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University, Center for Adventist Research); John Harvey Kellogg to W. C. White, 26 October 1903 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University, Center for Adventist Research); John Harvey Kellogg to G. I. Butler, 28 October 1903 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University, Center for Adventist Research); John Harvey Kellogg to S. N. Haskell, 29 October 1903 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University, Center for Adventist Research); John Harvey Kellogg to S. N. Haskell, 3 November 1903 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University, Center for Adventist Research).

⁶¹Kellogg to Haskell, 21 September 1903; Kellogg to Butler, 30 September 1903.

person?”⁶² While at times he seemed to distinguish the Holy Spirit and “God,” he reasoned at other times that “God and the Holy Ghost are one and the same person.”⁶³ He tried, on one hand, to assure Daniells that he believed in the Trinity and in the presence of the Holy Spirit, rather than that the Father is personally present in every living thing. On the other hand, when talking to Haskell, he suggested that it did not really matter to him if it was the Holy Spirit or the Father who was present.⁶⁴ His emphasis was on “God”—either “he himself” or through his Spirit—as actively and personally present “in all created things in every part of the great universe, wherever life or energy is manifested.”⁶⁵ Although he recognized the similarity to “pantheism,”⁶⁶ he rejected the logical conclusion—the worship of the god who is present in all created things.⁶⁷ Kellogg tried to convince people that his view was in harmony with White’s concept of God, but she strongly disagreed.⁶⁸ She argued that he would depersonalize God, while she was concerned with the

⁶²John Harvey Kellogg to W. C. White, 26 October 1903; Kellogg to Butler, 28 October 1903.

⁶³To Haskell, who had no problem viewing the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Godhead, Kellogg presented the Spirit as a separate entity from the Father. See Kellogg to Haskell, 21 September 1903. In contrast, he described the Holy Spirit as being “one and the same person” with “God” when debating with Butler. See Kellogg to Butler, 30 September 1903; cf. Butler to Kellogg, 18 October 1903.

⁶⁴Daniells to W. C. White, 29 October 1903; John Harvey Kellogg to S. N. Haskell, 20 April 1904 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University, Center for Adventist Research).

⁶⁵Kellogg to Butler, 14 September 1903; idem to Haskell, 21 September 1903; idem to Butler, 30 September 1903; idem to Haskell, 20 April 1904.

⁶⁶Although the term used in the discussions was the word “pantheism,” it would be more correct to denote Kellogg’s views as panentheism. Pantheism basically says that God is synonymous with the universe, whereas panentheism teaches that God is present in and interpenetrates nature. See, e.g., Frank M. Hasel and Denis Kaiser, “Begriffsdefinitionen,” in *Die Lehre von Gott: Biblischer Befund und theologische Herausforderungen*, ed. Ekkehardt Müller (St. Peter am Hart, Austria: Seminar Schloss Bogenhofen, 2010), 295-296.

⁶⁷Kellogg to Butler, 30 September 1903; idem to S. N. Haskell, 9 April 1904 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University, Center for Adventist Research); cf. Butler to Kellogg, 18 October 1903; Kellogg to Haskell, 20 April 1904.

⁶⁸Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church Containing Letters to Physicians and Ministers Giving Messages of Warning and Words of Counsel and Admonition Regarding Our Present Situation*, Special Testimonies, Series B, no. 2 (N.p.: n.p., 1904), 51, 53-54; idem, *Testimonies for the Church Containing Messages of Warning and Instruction to Seventh-day Adventists Regarding Dangers Connected with the Medical Missionary Work*, Special Testimonies, Series B, no. 7 (N.p., 1906), 62-64; idem, “The Heavenly Trio,” 3; cf. Butler to Kellogg, 5 April 1904. Kellogg questioned Butler’s belief in the *Testimonies* due to the latter’s insecurity regarding the personhood of the Spirit. See Butler to Kellogg, 18 October 1903; Kellogg to Haskell, 29 October 1903.

personality of the divine persons. Although he was employing some of her language in describing God, it only veiled his own very different concept.

Summary

In commemoration of White's life, ministry, and contribution, Daniells, then president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, remarked that her writings "set forth and exalt" the "Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead and Christ's representative on earth, . . . as the heavenly teacher and guide sent to this world by our Lord to make real in the hearts and lives of men all that he had made possible by his death on the cross."⁶⁹ The study of the sources has shown that regardless of the theological orientation, age group, or location in the world, every writer attributed the phrases "third person of the Godhead" and "three living persons in the heavenly trio" to White. The trinitarian implications of those statements were also recognized by these writers. Thereupon, most adopted a trinitarian concept of God, though a few diverged in details. It is striking that White saw no need to correct those writers who quoted her statements in order to promote a trinitarian concept of God. However, when Kellogg began to employ her trinitarian terminology to propagate his panentheistic view of God, she insisted that he misused her statements and depersonalized God, whereas she upheld the personality of the divine persons. She and her contemporaries, in their presentation of the personality and work of the Holy Spirit, were primarily concerned to lead people into an abiding personal fellowship with a personal God who transforms hearts and lives.

⁶⁹Cited in F. M. Wilcox, "The Final Funeral Services," 7.