

**LEARNING AND UNLEARNING: A CONTEXT FOR IMPORTANT
DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST
UNDERSTANDING OF THE TRINITY, 1888–1898**

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Abstract

A close study of new documentary sources enables historians to know much more about the historical context for major developments in the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity than what has previously been written. None of the previous studies on the development of the Trinity doctrine in Adventism seem to have considered the implications of a cluster of letters written in the 1940s in which Leroy Froom, then editor of *Ministry*, and Arthur Spalding, author of the *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists*, dialogued with Herbert Camden Lacey about the background to this development. As the brother-in-law to W. C. White and a retired theology teacher at the time of the exchange of correspondence, Lacey recounts a series of important theological developments in Australia in the mid-1890s. Lacey's account correlates with real-time evidence from the mid-1890s correspondence between W. W. Prescott, A. G. Daniells, E. G. White, and W. C. White, as well as with Seventh-day Adventist periodicals of the time. This article discusses this important background and its implications for the historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Keywords: Trinity, theological development, Seventh-day Adventism

*Introduction*¹

Seventh-day Adventist scholars have sometimes observed that Seventh-day Adventists came to their view of God as Trinity rather late. George Knight rightly claims in his book, *Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs*, that most of Adventism's original founders and pioneers would not have been able to join the church today if they had been required to agree to the fundamental beliefs as currently articulated. Knight points out that most of them would not have been able to get past the second belief statement

¹Material in this paper extends research that was presented briefly in two earlier articles, Gilbert M. Valentine, "A Slice of History: How Clearer Views of Jesus Developed in the Adventist Church," *Ministry* 77.5 (2005): 14–19; idem, "Clearer Views of Jesus and the Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist Church," *Spectrum* 42.1 (2014): 66–74. The present study deepens and broadens the inquiry, exploring new correspondence and examining church periodical literature in Australia in the 1890s.

that describes the doctrine of the Trinity.² The fourth belief statement on the eternal deity of Christ and the fifth belief statement on the personality of the Holy Spirit would have been equally problematic. This stark contrast between early Adventist views on the Trinity and those of later Seventh-day Adventists sparks the question, how did such a marked change in Seventh-day Adventist theology happen?

Some have suggested that it is not entirely clear how and when the transformation took place but that it did so through a slow process of development in which E. G. White played a significant role through her 1898 book, *The Desire of Ages*.³ Knight notes that it was not until 1928 that LeRoy E. Froom would write the first book on the Holy Spirit from a Trinitarian perspective.⁴ But how and why did the church develop in its convictions about the nature of God and in the way it expressed these convictions? Recent historical research enables us to know more clearly how this transformation happened. It is a fascinating story of learning and unlearning.

Three and a half years after the contentious 1888 General Conference Session in Minneapolis, MN, E. G. White noted, in a prominent front-page article in *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (hereafter *The Advent Review*), that Seventh-day Adventists “had many lessons to learn and many, many to unlearn.” This was not an article discussing evangelistic methods or forms of church organization.⁵ Her focus and concern was biblical study and doctrinal understanding. This present paper will first discuss why Adventist pioneers were anti-Trinitarian and then note the motivations that accounted for the denomination’s change in belief. It will then explore in detail a sequence of significant but little known events from the mid-1890s in Australia. New research of this period casts important light both on the context for the Trinitarian development in the church and on the development itself, and it opens a window into the process of learning and unlearning in Seventh-day Adventist doctrinal development.

²George R. Knight, *Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 2000), 6. The list now comprises twenty-eight fundamental belief statements with a statement on “Growing in Christ” (belief statement number eleven) added at the 2010 General Conference Session.

³For example, see Richard Rice, “Adventists Finding Identity in God,” *Spectrum* 41.4 (2013): 25. E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA, Pacific Press, 1898).

⁴Knight, *Search for Identity*, 143. See LeRoy E. Froom, *The Coming of the Comforter: Studies on the Coming and Work of the Third Person of the Godhead* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1928). Froom devotes thirty pages to defending and explaining the personality of the Spirit (see *ibid.*, 22–53).

⁵E. G. White, “Search the Scriptures,” *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 69.30 (26 July 1892): 465–466. Further references to *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* will be abbreviated as *RH*.

Anti-Trinitarian Antecedents

Out of the fragmentation of the Millerite movement that followed the Great Disappointment of October 22, 1844, arose the Sabbatarian Adventist movement that later became the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Some of its prominent founders shared a background of involvement in Christian Connectionist congregations.⁶ Emerging in the early decades of the nineteenth century, Christian Connection churches formed a loosely organized “neo-restorationist” movement that was strongly anti-creedal, individualistic, anti-organization, and anti-Trinitarian. Appealing to Christians dissatisfied with the formalism and rigidity of their Baptist and Methodist Episcopalian beliefs, the movement was antagonistic to classical Trinitarianism. It seems that this was largely due to the fact that this doctrine did not fit their rationalist, nineteenth-century, “common-sense” approach to understanding Scripture. Their way of interpreting the Trinity led them to associate it with the “great apostasy” of the early Christian church, and in their desire to “restore” the authentic church of the New Testament, they believed that this heresy needed to be dropped.⁷ The prominent founders of Sabbatarian Adventism who came from Christian Connectionist congregations brought their anti-Trinitarianism with them. Thus, many Sabbatarian Adventists viewed the classical doctrine of the Trinity as a departure from Scripture and thus adamantly rejected it.

A number of Seventh-day Adventist scholars, beginning with Erwin R. Gane in 1963, have tried to document this “sin” of “the fathers” of Adventism.⁸ The list of “sinners” is extensive and included luminaries among the early leaders, such as James White, Joseph Bates, J. N. Andrews, M. E. Cornell, J. H. Waggoner, J. N. Loughborough, Uriah Smith, and R. F. Cottrell. These earliest Adventists were not just passive objectors to the doctrine as

⁶According to Henry Morrill, “several thousand” members of the Christian Connection congregations were lost to the Millerite movement in the early 1840s. See Milo True Morrill, *A History of the Christian Denomination in America, 1794–1911 AD* (Dayton, OH: Christian Publishing Association, 1912), 175–176. See also Elizabeth C. Nordbeck, “Origins of the Christian Denomination in New England,” in *Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ*, ed. Barbara Zikmund, 2 vols. (New York: United Church Press, 1987), 2:48.

⁷Christian Connection congregations often drifted into Unitarianism (see *ibid.*, 2:36–37).

⁸Erwin R. Gane, “The Arian or Anti-Trinitarian Views Present in Seventh-day Adventist Literature and the E. G. White Answer” (MA thesis, Andrews University, 1963). Arthur Spalding, in reviewing the final draft of what he called his “episodic history,” *Captains of the Host* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1949), made an enquiry to Herbert Camden Lacey about his knowledge of early anti-Trinitarian Adventists and asked, tongue-in-cheek, “Did all the fathers sin?” (Herbert Camden Lacey to L. E. Froom, 30 August 1945, Center for Adventist Research [CAR], Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI). See also H. C. Lacey to A. W. Spalding, 5 June 1947, CAR.

non-Trinitarians; they were actively hostile to the doctrine. They were *anti*-Trinitarian. And they were hostile to any “creed” that enshrined it.

Following Gane, other scholars have not only documented the anti-Trinitarian view of early Adventist leaders, but they have also tried to account for how and why the remarkable change to the acceptance of Trinitarianism took place. These later scholars have included Russell Holt;⁹ Froom (1971);¹⁰ Merlin D. Burt;¹¹ Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, and John W. Reeve;¹² Jerry Moon;¹³ and the present author.¹⁴ These studies show that, during the decades following the late 1890s, tentative expressions of the doctrine began to appear in Seventh-day Adventist literature. These expressions became more and more confident until a fully Trinitarian statement of fundamental beliefs was published in the *1931 Year Book of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination*.¹⁵ In 1980, a fully-fledged doctrine of a triune godhead was voted prominently as belief statement number two in the list of the church’s carefully crafted statement of twenty-seven fundamental beliefs. This statement of beliefs was based on earlier doctrinal lists, but in 1980 it became the first list to be actually formally voted by the church—a vote that was taken at a General Conference Session in Dallas, Texas.¹⁶

A Paradigm Shift

If early Adventist leaders were predominantly anti-Trinitarian, the question raised earlier still remains: How did such a marked change in Seventh-day Adventist theology come about? How did the movement change from being

⁹Russell Holt, “The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination: Its Rejection and Acceptance” (Term Paper, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 1969).

¹⁰LeRoy E. Froom, *Movement of Destiny* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1971).

¹¹Merlin D. Burt, “Demise of Semi-Arianism and Anti-Trinitarianism in Adventist Theology, 1888–1957,” (Unpublished Research Paper, Andrews University, 1996); idem, “History of Seventh-day Adventist Views on the Trinity,” *JATS* 17.1 (2006): 125–139; idem, “The Trinity in Seventh-day Adventist History,” *Ministry* 81.2 (2009): 5–8; idem, “E. White and the Personhood of the Holy Spirit,” *Ministry* 84.4 (2012): 17–20.

¹²Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, and John W. Reeve, *The Trinity: Understanding God’s Love, His Plan of Salvation and Christian Relationships* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 2002).

¹³Jerry Moon, “The Adventist Trinity Debate, Part 1: Historical Overview,” *AUSS* 41:1 (2003): 113–129; idem, “The Adventist Trinity Debate, Part 2: The Role of E. G. White,” *AUSS* 41:2 (2003): 275–292.

¹⁴Gilbert Valentine, *W. W. Prescott: Forgotten Giant of Adventism’s Second Generation* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 2005).

¹⁵*1931 Year Book of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination*, prepared by H. E. Rogers (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1931), 377.

¹⁶“Session Proceedings: April 25, 1980,” *RH* 157.24 (1 May 1980): 22.

anti-Trinitarian to having a full but carefully honed expression of the doctrine listed prominently as number two in their statement of beliefs? All of the studies on this question have pointed to the role of E. G. White and her book, *The Desire of Ages* (1898), as playing a significant role in the process of change.¹⁷ Is there more to be understood about this process of remarkable development and of E. G. White's role in that process?

Tracking this development reveals that it happened gradually and with considerable discomfort. Moon suggests that a study of Adventist literature reveals a five-stage sequence of development from anti-Trinitarian dominance (1846–1888), to a period of dissatisfaction (1888–1898). A paradigm shift then occurred (1898–1913), which was followed by a general decline in anti-Trinitarian advocacy (1913–1946) and finally a growing Trinitarian dominance (1946–1980). Moon locates the paradigm shift after the publishing of E. G. White's *The Desire of Ages* in 1898, which, he suggests, occasioned the change.¹⁸

Periodization is always an inexact exercise given the fluid nature of historical development, and paradigm shifts are never simple, straightforward events. Rather, they tend to be lengthy, messy processes of intellectual reflection, adjustment, change, and realignment. A closer study of the correspondence of church leaders of the period allows a more nuanced and a much clearer understanding of the early steps in the process of development. This article suggests that the paradigm shift—or to express it another way, the process of unlearning and relearning—should be understood as beginning a decade earlier, starting in 1888.

This paradigm shift that took place in Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the Godhead emerged out of the discussions and debates on soteriology that began in 1886, boiled over at the historic 1888 General Conference Session in Minneapolis, MN, and then flowed out across conferences and congregations. Somewhat like the Copernican Revolution, which involved a shift from a geocentric to a heliocentric understanding of the solar system, the slow historic Trinitarian shift that took place in Seventh-day Adventism gradually removed the Ten Commandments and a legalistic law-keeping from the center of Seventh-day Adventist thinking and replaced it with a focus on the person and work of Jesus. Seventh-day Adventist theology tentatively and imperfectly moved to become Christo-centric. And just as the Copernican Revolution took an extended period of time to become settled, so did the change in Adventism. Or to change to a computing metaphor

¹⁷Holt, "Doctrine of the Trinity," 25. Burt, "Demise of Semi-Arianism," 9, 10; Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, 279; Moon, "Adventist Trinity Debate, Part 1," 113–129; idem, "Adventist Trinity Debate, Part 2," 275–292; Knight, *Search for Identity*, 17–32, 110–117, 152–154, 196; Whidden, Moon, and Reeve, *The Trinity*, 190–231; Valentine, *W. W. Prescott*, 119–124, 277–284; Burt, "Personhood," 17–20; Denis Kaiser, "The Reception of E. White's Trinitarian Statements by Her Contemporaries (1897–1915)," *AUSS* 50.1 (2012): 25–38.

¹⁸Jerry Moon sees the publishing of *The Desire of Ages* as the "continental divide" ("Adventist Trinity Debate, Part 1," 120).

for the purpose of illustration, what occurred in 1888 may be understood as something like the reprogramming of Adventism—a replacement of core code and the establishment of new algorithms. The new code removed bugs and framed Adventism as much more user-friendly for a new worldwide mission.

The 1888 General Conference Session initiated a radical realignment in Seventh-day Adventist soteriology. Clearer views of Jesus and the wonder of God's grace opened windows on new theological landscapes for Seventh-day Adventists. The clearer understanding of soteriology—particularly the primacy of justification by faith—struggled for recognition in Adventism during the decade following 1888. This was associated with a growing awareness by leading church thinkers during this time that the new and clearer emphasis on the atoning work of Christ and on righteousness by faith needed to be integrally linked with a more adequate understanding of the full deity of Christ. This eventually led to the undermining of anti-Trinitarianism in Adventism.

The controversy over new soteriological insights that shook the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1888 may be seen as paralleling similar developments in the early Christian church. As Maurice Wiles points out, the decisive factor in the triumph of Athanasius over Arianism during the Christological controversies of the third and fourth centuries can be attributed to a clearer understanding of soteriology on the part of the wider church. The underlying conviction strengthened in the early Christian church that the source of salvation for the believer can only be God. In its simplest form, it found expression in the affirmation that “Created beings cannot be saved by one who himself is a created being.”¹⁹ Robert Gregg and Dennis Groh also point out that early Arianism “is most intelligible when viewed as a scheme of salvation.”²⁰ At the center of the scheme was “a redeemer whose life of virtue modeled perfect creaturehood and hence the path of salvation for all Christians.”²¹ Salvation was ultimately by virtuous living. The Athanasian system clearly presented Christ as a fully divine savior (albeit with a beginning in timelessness rather than in time) in a way that Arianism failed to do. Was early Adventism, with its strongly legalistic understanding of salvation, perhaps linked to and dependent on its anti-Trinitarian semi-Arianism in subtler ways than previously realized?

Sources for a New Understanding

Scholarly studies that have looked for the sources of this theological realignment have recognized the 1888 General Conference Session as a watershed event, but, as noted earlier, they have tended to see the publishing of E. G. White's

¹⁹Maurice Wiles, *The Making of Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 95.

²⁰Robert C. Gregg and Dennis E. Groh, *Early Arianism—A View of Salvation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), x. I am indebted to my colleague, John Brunt, for suggesting this helpful source.

²¹Ibid.

The Desire of Ages (1898) as the primary source and cause of the resultant change to Trinitarianism. However, this is only partially true. The preparation of *The Desire of Ages* was not a simple process of new insights and draughts of truth streaming out through E. G. White's pen. That is an oversimplified and necessarily distorted understanding. It does not adequately account for the complex reality of how E. G. White herself came to a new emphasis or how the Seventh-day Adventist community developed in its journey of faith and deepened its grasp of biblical teaching. A close reading of correspondence of the period and of the periodical literature enables a more detailed and complex understanding of the context and of the actual historical process involved. What Arthur L. White would later call a "factual concept" of the ministry of E. G. White also applies to understanding theological development.²² It does not diminish confidence in the way God led in the process. A faith perspective still discerns the mystery of providence at work.

As already noted, the process of *how* the change occurred and *why* it occurred has recently become much clearer as wider correspondence sources have been given new attention. None of the standard accounts by Moon; Whidden, Moon, and Reeve; Burt; or Knight seem to have been aware of a cluster of letters written in the 1930s and 1940s. In these letters, W. C. White, Froom, then editor of *Ministry*, and Arthur W. Spalding, author of the *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists*, dialogue with Herbert Camden Lacey, W. C. White's brother-in-law, about the background to the change.

Lacey's story had been known and apparently quietly talked about at Elmshaven since the 1930s. In early 1936, when Lacey was teaching religion at Loma Linda, he had talked briefly with Froom during the General Conference Session of that year about Trinitarian developments in the 1890s in Australia and his own involvement in them.²³ Apparently, Froom had been discombobulated by the discussion, and, according to Lacey, he "was not very friendly." Soon rumors that were damaging to Lacey's reputation and questions about his orthodoxy circulated widely around the field. His brother-in-law, W. C. White, had written him about reported "startling statements" and a distressed Lacey found himself having to reply to "Brother Will," explaining what he had told Froom. Feeling somewhat betrayed, he asserted his confidence in the genuineness of E. G. White's gift and affirmed the spiritual value of her writings. He asserted to W. C. White that what he had shared with Froom had been nothing but the facts and that they should not be understood as "anything against the Spirit of Prophecy." Nevertheless, he regretted that the information shared in confidence had troubled Froom so much. Lacey, aged 65 at the time, moved once again back into pastoral work rather than continuing his teaching position.²⁴

²²Arthur L. White, *The Ellen G. White Writings* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1973), 13–48.

²³This General Conference Session was held in San Francisco, CA, in May 1936.

²⁴H. C. Lacey to W. C. White, 27 July 1936, CAR. Lacey was clearly hurt by the incident. "The present time of uncertainty is very harrowing, and the pain is not

By 1945, Froom's correspondence with Lacey suggests that he had come to terms with the unsettling information Lacey had shared with him in 1936. Now he was troubled by M. L. Andreasen's public claims that E. G. White was the sole source of the change in the church's Trinitarian theology and that there had been no prior discussion or Bible study by the community itself. In a collegial way, Froom now inquired of Lacey, retired in Glendale, California, seeking to understand more of the historical background to the discussions, particularly as they might have related to developments in understanding the doctrine of the eternal existence of Christ.²⁵ Two years later, in preparation for his General Conference authorized denominational history project, Arthur Spalding inquired about the same events. In both sets of letters, Lacey recounts in detail his involvement in the series of important theological developments in Australia in the mid-1890s.²⁶

Dores E. Robinson—who served on the staff of the E. G. White Estate as a highly respected and valued assistant and who had married E. G. White's granddaughter, Ella (Lacey's niece)—was the conduit for both Spalding and Froom. His recommendation of Lacey as a reliable source provides a basis for confidence for those who suggest Lacey's account should be treated with caution. He had in some way become acquainted with Lacey's involvement. Early in 1947, Robinson had suggested to Spalding, for example, that Lacey was "the first one" he knew of "to teach the straight doctrine of the trinity," and that this had been in Australia. Robinson's introduction prompted both men to initiate correspondence with Lacey to find out more. Lacey did not deny Robinson's attribution, but he explained that the story was much more complex and nuanced than what Spalding had heard.²⁷

Lacey had been a minister and Bible teacher in Australia, and he served as the Union Conference secretary during the events he relates. Evidence from the contemporary 1890s correspondence between W. W. Prescott, A. G. Daniells, E. G. White, and W. C. White and from the periodical literature of the period closely correlate with and confirm the general account by Lacey. Furthermore,

lightened by the discovery that all kinds of rumors are being circulated behind your back" (ibid.). This episode highlights the difficulty that confronted the church and the risk associated with trying to communicate a factual understanding about the nature of E. G. White's work and her methods of labor. Lacey had encountered similar reactions when teaching at the Church's college in Washington, DC. Leading denominational editors expressed their sympathy and support. See F. M. Wilcox to H. C. Lacey, 5 December 1924, CAR; L. E. Froom to H. C. Lacey, 13 April 1925, CAR.

²⁵L. E. Froom to H. C. Lacey, 8 August, 26 September 1945, CAR.

²⁶Froom based his enquiry on discussions he had had with Dores E. Robinson rather than memories of the earlier conversation with Lacey. Apparently, Robinson was confused about the time of the events in Australia in which Lacey had been a participant, and Froom sought clarification (ibid.; H. C. Lacey to A. W. Spalding, 2 April, 5 June 1947, CAR; A. W. Spalding to H. C. Lacey, 2 June 1947, CAR. If the earlier studies mentioned above were aware of this collection, they fail to note the significance and implications of the letters.

²⁷Ibid.; H. C. Lacey to A. W. Spalding 5 June 1947, CAR.

they add important details and perspectives that now enable us to construct a much clearer and larger understanding of the flow of development. The events related by Lacey, Prescott, and Daniells unfold a fascinating back story that helps us understand why and how new perspectives on the nature of the Godhead came to be found in the *The Desire of Ages*.

It is now clear that, in Adventism, the steps toward a more orthodox Christology were accompanied in the mid-1890s by a clearer acknowledgement and recognition of the personality of the Holy Spirit. With those two theological convictions taking root in the minds of the church's thought leaders, the implications for the acceptance of a doctrine of the Trinity followed. These developments happened in a way that illustrates an important truth about the forming of Christian doctrine. Such developments in theology grow out of the experience and understanding of salvation, closer Bible study, the experience of worship, and the need for better apologetics. Such was the context for the developments in Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the nature of the Godhead.

The Context of Development

The names of A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner often feature prominently among Seventh-day Adventist writers as the agents of change in connection with the soteriological developments emerging out of the 1888 General Conference Session.²⁸ Close study of the correspondence of the period, however, suggests that the President of Battle Creek College and Education Secretary for the General Conference, Prescott, was a more creative and enduring change agent during this particular process. Following 1888, Prescott had experienced forgiveness and the richness of the grace of God in a way he had never experienced them before. In the years following the landmark 1888 session, Prescott began to seriously and intentionally rethink Seventh-day Adventist evangelism and apologetics in order to cast them in the new soteriological and more Christocentric framework. He took seriously E. G. White's 1892 challenge that "Ministers need to have a more clear, simple manner of presenting the truth as it is in Jesus."²⁹ His thinking crystalized in late 1893 in a public evangelistic program he conducted in the Independent Congregational Church in Battle Creek. In these meetings, Prescott pioneered a public presentation of Seventh-day Adventist teachings, the Sabbath, the Sanctuary, the Covenants and the law, the Advent, and the prophecies in a fresh gospel setting. One prominent citizen who attended, James Upton, remarked to W. A. Spicer that "they had heard more gospel" in the meetings,

²⁸Two recent biographies explore the nature and extent of the contribution of these two men who helped Adventism to become more Christocentric. See George R. Knight, *A. T. Jones: Point Man on Adventism's Charismatic Frontier* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 2011); Woodrow W. Whidden II, *E. J. Waggoner: From the Physician of Good News to Agent of Division* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 2008).

²⁹E. G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Battle Creek, MI: Review & Herald, 1892), 262.

“than they have heard for many years.”³⁰ It was a Christocentric presentation of Seventh-day Adventist theology and mission—and it represented a radical departure from a traditional approach to presenting Seventh-day Adventist teaching. During 1894 and early 1895, Prescott continued to read and reflect on what a Christocentric focus for Seventh-day Adventist teachings meant.

In mid-1895, Prescott travelled to Australia to spend almost a year “down under,” helping to start Avondale College and working with Daniells (Australian Conference President), E. G. White, and W. C. White in strengthening the Seventh-day Adventist presence in Australia and New Zealand. Just prior to leaving for the South Pacific, Prescott had accepted an assignment to write the study material for the Sabbath School lesson quarterly scheduled for use in the church in late 1896. The assigned topic was a study of the Gospel of John, but the series was to be different in an important way. Instead of taking one quarter to study the Gospel, fairly superficially, it had been decided that the whole year—fifty-two weeks of lessons over four quarters—would focus on the fourth Gospel, and Prescott would write all four quarterlies. On his month-long voyage out to Australia, the professor spent much of his time studying the Gospel of John, and the notion apparently began to develop with him that the church needed to be clearer in its convictions about the eternal preexistence of Christ and its corollary, the eternal full deity of Christ.

Not long after he landed in Sydney, Australia, in late August, he made his way to a secondhand book store and bought himself an English translation of the influential *Lectures on the History of Christian Dogma* by the German theologian, Augustus Neander.³¹ He focused his study on chapter six, which deals with the Christological and Trinitarian controversies of the early Christian centuries.³²

This doctrinal history informed Prescott’s thinking about the implications of the teaching of the fourth Gospel. By December of 1895, at the Tasmanian camp meeting, he had completed the first quarter of readings and had shown the manuscript to W. C. White to get feedback. W. C. White was impressed with the lesson manuscript because the notes opened up a new “wide field of thought.”³³

In the meantime, Prescott was featured as the lead preacher at an innovative evangelistic camp meeting in the upper-class suburb of Armadale

³⁰W. A. Spicer to W. C. White, 4 January 1893, W. C. White Folder 1, Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research (ASTR), General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, MD. The meetings later shifted to the Opera House. See Valentine, *W.W. Prescott*, 86.

³¹Augustus Neander, *Lectures on the History of Christian Dogmas by Dr. Augustus Neander*, ed. J. L. Jacobi, trans. J. E. Ryland (London: H. G. Bohn, 1858–1882).

³²Prescott’s underlined copy of the book was still on the shelves of the Andrews University Library when I studied there in the early 1980s. It was heavily underlined in Prescott’s distinctive style in the chapters dealing with those controversies.

³³W. C. White to A. G. Daniells, 13 December 1895, William Clarence White Correspondence File, Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD.

in Melbourne, Australia (October 1895). There he presented his new Christocentric, gospel-centered approach to doctrine to highly appreciative audiences there. The camp meeting was an experiment located in an open space of a densely populated urban area, which was only a five-minute walk from Toorak, the city's most elite suburb. The seventy-seven family tents on the ground that surrounded the big canvas top made a decided impression on the predominantly Anglican community.³⁴ Church leaders were delighted that the meetings drew a more refined, "better class" of listener, and they were even more delighted that Prescott's distinctive preaching was ideally suited to the needs of the thoughtful and serious congregations.³⁵ As E. G. White and her son, W. C. White, sat in the audience, they were very impressed with Prescott's new Christocentric approach. "His theme from first to last and always is Christ,"³⁶ reported an awed W. C. White; his mother was certain that "the inspiration of the spirit had been on him."³⁷ Hardly a discourse was given, E. G. White wrote in *The Advent Review*, that "could be called a doctrinal sermon."³⁸ According to Daniells, "preaching Christ and him crucified" rather than traditional Seventh-day Adventist doctrinal sermons made for sermons "full of power." Twenty converts were baptized before camp ended.³⁹

Prescott's continuing study of John informed his preaching, and it also served to be adapted particularly to meet and correct a serious misunderstanding in the surrounding, very religious, Trinitarian community.⁴⁰

³⁴James Jupp, ed., *The Australian People: An Encyclopedia of the Nation, Its People and their Origins* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 324. Anglicans constituted about fifty percent of the population, Catholics represented approximately twenty-six percent and Methodists made up about ten percent (W. A. Colcord, "The Melbourne Camp Meeting," *The Bible Echo* 10.46 [18 November 1895]: 364).

³⁵Prescott noted that those who had embraced the truth were "of an unusually refined class, very intelligent and of excellent standing in the community" (W. W. Prescott to O. A. Olsen, 20 November 1895, Miscellaneous Letters [1893–1902], ASTR).

³⁶W. C. White to "Brethren," 21 November 1895, William Clarence White Correspondence File, E. G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD.

³⁷E. G. White to S. N. Haskell, 6 November 1895 (Letter 25, 1895), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD.

³⁸E. G. White, "The Australian Camp-Meeting," *RH* 73.1 (7 January 1896): 3.

³⁹Several leaders commented on the quality of audience that were drawn to the meetings (W. C. White to Brethren, 21 November 1895, William Clarence White Correspondence File, Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD; E. G. White to J. E. White, 18 November 1895 (Letter 83, 1895), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD; A. G. Daniells to O. A. Olsen, 14 February 1896, O. A. Olsen Folder 2, ASTR. A compilation of E. G. White's enthusiastic reflections on Prescott's preaching can be found in E. G. White, "E. White's Observations," *Lest We Forget* 10.3 (2000): 2–5, www.aplib.org/files/lwf/LWFFV10N3.pdf.

⁴⁰See for example, W. W. Prescott, "Abiding in Christ and Walking in Christ," *The Bible Echo* 10.47 (2 December 1895): 372–373; idem, "The Word Became Flesh," *The Bible Echo* 11.1 (6 January 1896): 4–5. In addition to utilizing their assigned family tent on the ground, Prescott had rented an office room in a nearby street so that he

Prior to the meetings, E. G. White informed her readers, it had been “commonly reported” in the suburbs around the campsite that Seventh-day Adventists “did not believe in Christ.” Some attendees had told her that they came expecting to hear nothing but “Moses and Sinai,” but instead they had heard “nothing but the plain gospel.”⁴¹ Prescott’s preaching corrected things. In every sermon, Christ was preached. Daniells’s private correspondence adds more specific detail on the apologetics problem so effectively addressed by Prescott’s Christocentric preaching.⁴²

In the months prior to the meetings, Uriah Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation* had been sold widely by colporteurs around the strongly Anglican city. The book had developed a strong reaction among the public that Seventh-day Adventists were a semi-Arian sect that did not believe in the preexistence of Christ and, therefore, did not accept the full divinity of Jesus. Prescott’s preaching of “sound Christian doctrine” addressed this problem, and his “uplifting of Jesus,” with its strong emphasis on the full deity of Christ, “completely disarmed the people of prejudice,” reported Daniells. “The minds of the people have been completely revolutionized with regards to us as a people,” he added in a letter reporting the circumstances to the General Conference president.⁴³ If Prescott did not specifically address the Trinitarian problem in a disputatious way, he was clearly understood by his hearers to affirm the eternity and the full deity of Christ. “He . . . had all Glory with the Father,” he asserted in his sermon on the incarnation. It was a “truth that was the foundation of all truth.”⁴⁴ Clearly, the Christocentric approach, apologetics, and deeper Bible study were working together in a symbiotic way to bring about the clarifying and reshaping of Seventh-day Adventist thinking about the nature of the Godhead.⁴⁵ The desire to have the essence of Adventism correctly understood by the public on this occasion was as much a motivation as the need to understand Scripture better.

Further evidence of the subtle shift taking place in the clarifying process at this time is found in *The Bible Echo*, the South Pacific evangelistic magazine. Someone, either Prescott or *The Bible Echo* editor, was reading the Dutch

could study and have time for prayer and preparation for his heavy preaching schedule and thus produced new sermons (W. W. Prescott to O. A. Olsen, 20 November 1895, Miscellaneous Letters [1895–1902], ASTR).

⁴¹E. G. White, “The Australian Camp-Meeting,” 4.

⁴²A. G. Daniells to O. A. Olsen, 22 November 1895, O. A. Olsen Folder 2, ASTR.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Prescott, “The Word Became Flesh,” 4–5.

⁴⁵Moon’s assertion that Seventh-day Adventists eventually changed their view of the Godhead because they came to a different understanding of the biblical texts” is true, but it is only part of the picture (see Moon, “Adventist Trinity Debate, Part 1,” 118). The need to address apologetic matters prompted the reassessment of the biblical texts both in the late 1880s (clarifying Seventh-day Adventist teaching on the law and the atonement) to avoid being misunderstood by non-Adventists and in the mid-1890s to avoid being misunderstood on the deity of Christ. See also Moon, “Adventist Trinity Debate, Part 2,” 275–292.

Reformed Andrew Murray's devotional classic, *Abide in Christ*.⁴⁶ Pithy extracts from Murray were used repeatedly in *The Bible Echo* as fillers at the same time as Prescott's Christocentric sermons were being published, emphasizing the Johannine figure of Christ as the Vine and disciples as the branches.⁴⁷ Murray's book had a strongly Trinitarian base undergirding his teaching about Christ abiding in the life of the believer through the Holy Spirit as a person. Anglican and Methodist converts at the Armadale camp meeting were convinced of the Sabbath, the State of the Dead, the Sanctuary, the Second Advent, and the prophecies, and their Trinitarian beliefs apparently stayed intact just as they had for the Anglican Lacey family of Tasmania whose daughter, May, had married W. C. White five months previously. Thus, the new converts brought their orthodox Christian beliefs with them into Adventism. Prescott's preaching would have affirmed them in the essentials of these beliefs.⁴⁸ Just as early Adventism had been shaped by the anti-Trinitarian Christian Connectionist convictions of its earliest converts, so now over time the movement's understanding of the Godhead would again be shaped, but this time by the Trinitarian convictions of a new generation of converts to the church.

Further Reflection on the Full Deity of Christ

Prescott continued his intensive study of the Gospel of John as part of his preparation of the second-quarter sequence of Sabbath School Bible study guides. This study led him to a reconsideration of the theological implications of the series of Jesus's "I Am" statements in the fourth Gospel. These insights led to a deepening conviction about the eternal deity of the Son.

Early January 1896 found Prescott in Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia—about eighty miles north of Sydney, New South Wales, Australia—

⁴⁶Andrew Murray, *Abide in Christ* (Chicago: Fleming & Revell, 1895). The book had originally been published in 1888. E. G. White's personal library contains an 1895 edition.

⁴⁷For samples of citations in *The Bible Echo*, see *The Bible Echo* 10.48 (9 December 1895): 381, 384; *The Bible Echo* 10.49 (16 December 1895): 388, 392; *The Bible Echo* 11.3 (20 January 1896): 24. Selections from Murray were also occasionally used in the *RH*. Uriah Smith was familiar with his work (see Uriah Smith, "Receiving," *RH* 74.41 [12 October 1897]: 647).

⁴⁸E. G. White arranged for her secretaries to take shorthand transcriptions of these sermons. They were circulated around the neighborhood as tracts, and a number of them were published in *The Bible Echo*. For examples, see Prescott, "Abiding in Christ and Walking in Christ," *The Bible Echo* 10.47 (2 December 1895): 372–373; idem, "Sermons in Stone," *The Bible Echo* 10.49 (16 December 1895): 388–389; idem, "The Word Became Flesh," *The Bible Echo* 11.1 (6 January 1896): 4–5; idem, "The Faith of Jesus, The Commandments of God, and The Patience of the Saints," *The Bible Echo* 11.3 (20 January 1896): 18–19; idem, "The Law in Christ," *The Bible Echo* 11.15 (20 April 1896): 114 (this sermon ran as a series of short articles for seven weeks). In 2014, Fred Bischoff published the sermons as an online collection. See "The W. W. Prescott Armadale Sermons," comp. Fred Bischoff, 9 June 2014, <http://www.fredbischoff.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Prescott-Armadale-Sermons.pdf>.

where he shared in the pioneering of a new school, Avondale College. Although the teachers were already on hand, legal complications over the transfer of land delayed the erection of buildings and the planned beginning of classes in March. This frustrating delay led to the decision that, beginning in late March, the church leaders would convene what moderns would call a professional development program for the teachers and ministers instead of having classes for students. They called it an “institute”—a month-long general Bible and education conference. A large tent was pitched, and Prescott was the featured instructor. Participants considered matters of curriculum and pedagogy, but the meetings were most memorable for Prescott’s preaching on the Gospel of John and the divinity of Christ.

The integrating theme for Prescott’s studies on the Gospel of John was the “I Am” statement of Jesus in John 8:58, which Prescott linked with the “I Am” declaration of Yahweh in Exod 3:14. For Prescott, this now clearly established the eternal existence and the deity of the Son. He then went on to see the same theological implications in all the other “I Am” statements of Jesus in the Gospel. Christ was therefore the Yahweh of the Old Testament, fully God and coeternal with the Father.

Lacey, the twenty-five-year-old brother-in-law to W. C. White, also attended the institute meetings. He had recently returned from the United States, where he had obtained his BA degree in the classics from Battle Creek College in Battle Creek, Michigan. Appointed to teach at the new school, he had arrived in time to attend the October Armadale Camp Meeting, where he had been appointed secretary of the Australasian Union Conference and had stayed on to help Prescott and Daniells with the evangelistic meetings that had continued after the camp meeting. Now back in Cooranbong, he was also invited to speak at the institute. He and his new wife boarded with May, his younger sister, and W. C. White, and thus they became part of the extended E. G. White household around her new house, which she called “Sunnyside,” along with his stepmother and aging father, who had moved up from Tasmania to be close to their daughter. In his later recalling of the events of 1896, Lacey reported on other highly significant related factors which now enable us to see how and why this particular year becomes so significant in the development of Seventh-day Adventist theology.

Lacey explains in his 1945 correspondence with Froom that, during early 1896 and even as the institute was being held, E. G. White was working through an extensive revision process on the manuscript for her book on the life of Christ—eventually published two years later as *The Desire of Ages*.⁴⁹

⁴⁹Original plans proposed the publishing of the manuscript in two thematic volumes, “Christ Our Brother,” and “Christ our Sacrifice,” and these would be later supplemented by “Christ our Teacher,” and “Christ our Saviour.” The configuration finally decided on was to add *Christ’s Object Lessons* (n.p.: Review & Herald, 1900), and *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1896), as two additional volumes (W. C. White to G. I. Gibson and E. R. Palmer, 20 January 1896, William Clarence White Correspondence File, Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD).

E. G. White had personally asked Prescott to read the entire manuscript critically and she was happy that he was spending time with Marian Davis, E. G. White's "book maker," on the project.⁵⁰ According to Lacey, Davis was struggling with the collation and arrangement of materials for the first chapter and also the sequencing of some events in the narrative for other early chapters. Both Davis and E. G. White attended Prescott's Bible studies on John and were deeply engaged and impressed. Davis took extensive notes of the sermons, and there were a number of moments of new insight.

Davis sought further help with the editorial and book-making process, and, according to Lacey, both he and Prescott helped extensively with the difficult first chapter and also in clarifying significant parts of the harmony of the gospel events that provided the undergirding story line for the book. With the input from Prescott's preaching and his Sabbath School lessons, according to Lacey, Prescott also had a significant impact in the shaping of its teaching about the eternity of the Son. "Professor Prescott was tremendously interested in presenting Christ as the great 'I Am.' . . . Sr. Marian Davis seemed to fall for it, and lo and behold, when *The Desire of Ages* came out, there appeared that identical teaching on pages 24 and 25, which I think can be looked for in vain in any of Sr. White's published works prior to that time."⁵¹ Lacey went on to

⁵⁰E. G. White, "Diary," 18 February 1896 (Manuscript 62, 1896), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD. See also W. W. Prescott to O. A. Olsen, 10 February 1896, Miscellaneous Letters (1893–1902), ASTR. "Bookmaker" was the term E. G. White used to describe the kind of editorial assistance provided by Marian Davis, in particular. It described her work of reviewing E. G. White's letters and published articles, selecting and assembling sentences and paragraphs, and then organizing them into a coherent narrative or thematic development on a given topic in addition to her copyediting. While not generating content, the assistant contributed significantly to E. G. White's literary style and flow of thought in her major works. The work was done under E. G. White's supervision, and she took full responsibility for the completed work. For a recent helpful discussion of the role of Marian Davis, see Denis Fortin, "Historical Introduction," to the 125th Anniversary Edition of E. G. White's inspirational classic, *Steps to Christ* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2017), 10–20. Fortin suggests that "the flow of thought in each chapter and the personal appeal to the reader to a great degree reflect Marian Davis's knowledge and understanding of E. White's thoughts" (ibid., 15).

⁵¹H. C. Lacey to L. E. Froom, 30 August 1845, CAR. Lacey himself thought Prescott's interpretation to be stretched too far and that in the latter cases of the use of the "I Am" in the Gospel the statements were a simple use of the copula in the Greek. While Lacey's observation that E. G. White's "I Am" statements in *The Desire of Ages* may be the first time she develops this theme, she had referred to Jesus as "the eternal Son" on five previous occasions: three times in published articles and twice in private correspondence. See E. G. White, "An Appeal to the Ministers," *RH* 52.7 (8 August 1878): 49; idem to M. E. Cornell, 8 September 1880 (Letter 6, 1880), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD; idem, "Search the Scriptures," *Youth's Instructor*, 35.35 (31 August 1887): 165; idem to E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones, 18 February 1887 (Letter 37, 1887), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD. Her 1883 use of the phrase is as a citation from the first stanza of Charles Wesley's hymn, "Soldiers of Christ, Arise!" See idem, *The Signs of the Times* 9.1 (4 January 1883): 2. As Moon

explain, “Professor Prescott’s interest in the ‘Eternity of the Son’ and the great ‘I Am’s’ coupled with the constant help he gave Sr. Davis in her preparation of *The Desire of Ages*, may serve to explain the inclusion of the above-named teaching in that wonderful book.”⁵²

Another noticeable inclusion in *The Desire of Ages* that reinforced the changing paradigm was E. G. White’s statement that Christ’s life was “original, unborrowed and underived.”⁵³ This statement was also in the context of an “I Am” statement: “Jesus declared, ‘I am the resurrection, and the life.’ In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. ‘He that hath the Son hath life’ (1 John 5:12). The divinity of Christ is the believer’s assurance of eternal life.”⁵⁴ The wording in this expression was a paraphrase from an 1857 book titled *Sabbath Evening Readings on the New Testament: St. John* that was written by a virulent anti-Catholic Scottish clergyman, John Cummings. This book was a part of E. G. White’s library. Cummings uses the phrase twice in his introductory chapter which is an exposition on the first chapter of the Gospel. He reflects on the text, “In Him was life.”⁵⁵ E. G. White adopts the expression for her reflection on the discussion between Martha and Jesus in front of Lazarus’s tomb well over halfway through her book and is used to illustrate Jesus’s power over death and that he is the believer’s assurance of eternal life. It is interesting to notice that most of the scriptural passages that E. G. White drew on to underline her new emphasis on the divinity of Jesus in *The Desire of Ages* came from the Gospel of John.⁵⁶

Prescott would later cite Paul’s statement that in Christ “dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col 2:9 [KJV]) in defense of his emphasis that one cannot believe in the deity of Christ without also believing in the eternity of Christ. He believed, with Lacey, that there never was a time when the Son was not. He expressed this as Christ’s “co-eternity” with the Father. However, in an attempt to accommodate a plain reading of the Johannine subordination statements, such as the saying of Jesus, “For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself,” (John 5:26 [KJV]), he adopted the explanatory idea of eternal generation of the Son even

suggests, her usage during the period before the 1890s reflected a “relative ambiguity” (“Adventist Trinity Debate, Part 2,” 278).

⁵²H. C. Lacey to L. E. Froom, 30 August 1845, CAR. See also the corroborating letter, H. C. Lacey to A. W. Spalding, 5 June 1947, CAR. The general account is confirmed by contemporary records.

⁵³E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 530.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵The passage in Cummings reads, “Now John says nothing about the birth of Christ. . . . He at once begins by asserting the deity of Christ as God and Lord of all; and he states, ‘In Him was life,’—that is original, unborrowed, underived. In us there is a streamlet from the Fountain of Life; . . . But in Jesus was life unborrowed, underived” (John Cummings, *Sabbath Evening Readings on the New Testament: St. John* [London: Arthur Hall, Virtue and Company, 1857], 5).

⁵⁶John 1:1; 8:57–58; 10:30; 11:25; 14:16–18, 26; 16:8, 12–14.

while insisting that this did not make Christ “any less” than the Father. “Cold reasoning” was inadequate to comprehend the mystery, he acknowledged.⁵⁷

The Holy Spirit as a Person

Before the 1890s, E. G. White uses the personal pronoun for the Holy Spirit in her published work when quoting directly from Scripture. The only exception where she uses such a personal pronoun outside of directly quoted Scripture in her published work appears to be in an 1884 expository comment on the work and office of the Spirit, which she follows with a direct citation of John 16:14.⁵⁸ In 1893, E. G. White mentions in a short diary entry that the Holy Spirit “personifies Christ, yet is a distinct personality,” and in the next sentence continues on referring to the Spirit as “it.” The diary manuscript fragment was never sent to anyone or read by anyone other than herself or perhaps her staff.⁵⁹ The document may be a later filling out of her diary, a record of the general content of one of her sermons.⁶⁰

The account provided by Lacey is of value because it informs us how this second strand of theological insight concerning the personality of the Spirit contributed to the development of the Seventh-day Adventist doctrine of the Godhead. It had also become a significant topic of discussion in Australia in 1896. This discussion occurred in connection with the same events associated

⁵⁷“Report of the 1919 Bible Conference,” 6 July 1919, ASTR, 235, 245. For a more extended discussion of Prescott and Trinitarianism, see Valentine, *W. W. Prescott*, 277–284, 324.

⁵⁸“It is His office to present Christ . . . Says Christ, ‘He shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you’” (E. G. White, “Man’s Obligation to God,” *The Signs of the Times* 10.14 [3 April 1884], 209).

⁵⁹Merlin D. Burt suggests that this 1893 use of “personality” for the Spirit in 1893 by E. G. White corrects or at least qualifies Lacey’s claims for the significance of the 1896 discussions (Burt, “Personhood,” 19). Lacey had reported to W. C. White that he knew of “no reference up to 1896” in which E. G. White had spoken of the Spirit as a person. Clearly, he did not know of the 1884 or the 1893 examples. It should be noted, however, that the 1893 diary reference remained a private document in E. G. White’s files until 1965, when it was transcribed as “Privileges and Responsibilities of Sons of God,” 1893 (Manuscript 93, 1893), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, by Martha Odom and published as White, “MR No. 1487—Privileges and Responsibilities of Christians; Depend on Holy Spirit, Not Self,” in vol. 20 of *Manuscript Releases* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1993), 323–325. The entry is in a preprinted 1892 diary with a printed date of 17 September 1892, but corrected to 24 September 1893, by E. G. White. I am indebted to Ron Graybill for details about the provenance of the 1893 diary entry.

⁶⁰E. G. White’s diary for November and December of 1893 records a number of entries where she intended to return at a later date and give a more extended account of details of the day or of a talk she had given. See E. G. White, “Diary,” 20 November and 3, 4, and 6 December, 1893 (Manuscript 88, 1893), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD. Stephen N. Haskell authored an article on the Holy Spirit in November that emphasized strongly the role of the Spirit as a “power” and a “spiritual force” (“The Gift of the Holy Spirit,” *The Bible Echo* 8.21 (1 November 1893): 344.

with the new emphasis on the eternity and deity of Christ. This second strand involved the beginning of a shift to understanding the Holy Spirit as a person instead of as an impersonal “it.” Again, as explained below, documentation from the 1890s corroborates Lacey’s recollections.

Following the successful camp meeting at Armadale, Prescott had stayed on to assist Daniells and his evangelistic team, conducting further meetings, cultivating the slower interests, nurturing the newly baptized members, and establishing a new church. They shifted the meetings to a hall in East Prahran, another exclusive suburb close-by. Lacey and his wife also stayed on with the team. After some weeks of further preaching, Prescott left to attend camp meetings in Tasmania and Adelaide and then returned to Cooranbong. After Prescott’s departure, the ministers in East Prahran decided to study together the ministry of the Holy Spirit each morning in their regular daily workers’ meetings. Daniells related to Prescott some weeks later that shortly after they had begun their study series, he had found, in Cole’s secondhand bookstore in Melbourne, a little volume titled *The Spirit of Christ*—published in 1888—that was written by the well-known Dutch Reformed South African author, Andrew Murray.⁶¹ Daniells had read the book “with very deep interest,” asserting that its theme was “a great one” and that it was “handled in a very pleasing way.”⁶² It seems that the book, organized as a set of thirty-one daily readings, may have served as a study or devotional guide for the workers’ meetings. The book, which has since become a Christian classic, discusses in detail the person and work of the Holy Spirit and is strongly Trinitarian. In the opening chapter Murray asserted,

It is generally admitted in the Church that the Holy Spirit has not the recognition which becomes Him as being the equal of the Father and the Son, the Divine Person through whom alone the Father and the Son can be truly possessed and known, in whom alone the Church has her beauty and her blessedness.⁶³

Daniells remarked to Prescott, who by now had become a spiritual mentor to the Australian Conference president, that he found chapter sixteen on the Holy Spirit and Mission to be particularly helpful and wished that it could

⁶¹A. G. Daniells to W. W. Prescott, 3 March 1896, O. A. Olsen Folder 2, ASTR; Andrew Murray, *The Spirit of Christ: Thoughts on the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Believer and the Church* (New York: Anson D.F. Randolph, 1888). The reference to the shop by name, “Cole’s,” suggests that Prescott was familiar with it and would have recognized the connection.

⁶²A. G. Daniells to W. W. Prescott, 3 March 1896, O. A. Olsen Folder 2, ASTR.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 20. In support of his statement, Murray cites the Presbyterian-Jewish theologian, Adolph Saphir, who makes the point that the truth about the personality of the Spirit—like other important truths clearly revealed in scripture—has “been allowed to lie dormant for centuries . . . until it pleased God to enlighten the Church by chosen witnesses, and to bestow on His children the knowledge of hidden and forgotten treasures” (*The Lord’s Prayer* [London: Thomas Nisbet, 1872], 179). This was a neo-restorationist argument that would have resonated well with Daniells and his fellow Seventh-day Adventists.

be read by every one of the Seventh-day Adventist missionaries in Australia. Daniells soon shaped his reading of Murray's book and his Bible study on the topic into a series of talks on the person and work of the Holy Spirit, which he had the opportunity of sharing with his fellow missionaries and others at the site of the new college.⁶⁴

The 1896 correspondence between Daniells and Prescott corroborates the 1936 and 1940s recollection of Lacey that the topic of the personality of the Holy Spirit had become a subject of discussion among the circle of workers around E. G. White in 1896. At the Cooranbong Bible Institute in March and April, according to Lacey, he had been assigned the early morning Bible Study series, and for these he had developed a series of talks on the personality and work of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁵ Daniells, who arrived a little late for the institute, also presented a series of Bible studies on the Holy Spirit—a report confirmed by Anna Ingles, who wrote in *The Advent Review* that “brother Daniells conducts the study in the evening on the work of the Holy Spirit.”⁶⁶ Daniells, who was occasionally called away, also invited Lacey to assist him with the evening series on the Holy Spirit. Lacey, coming from an Anglican background, was a Seventh-day Adventist who considered himself “really a Trinitarian at heart,” and had developed a particular interest in teaching what he believed was the biblical perspective that the Holy Spirit was a person and a member of the triune Godhead.⁶⁷ Thus, the lack of recognition of the Holy Spirit as equal with the Father, as Murray had expressed it, was now being addressed in Adventism.

Lacey's recollections provide further context for the developments. In March 1894, as an official student delegate from Battle Creek College, he had attended a convention of the International Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions in Detroit. There he had met Georgia Burrus, a student delegate from Helderberg College, who would become Adventism's first missionary to India in the next year. Together they heard famous preachers, such as Hudson Taylor, A. J. Gordon, J. R. Mott, and A. T. Pierson, speaking on mission and the person and work of the Holy Spirit. They both agreed that they “had never felt the deep moving of the Spirit of God” as they had at that convention, recalled Lacey. Lacey had studied the topic on his month-long voyage back home to Australia in September 1895.⁶⁸ The encounter with

⁶⁴A. G. Daniells to W. W. Prescott, 3 March 1896, O. A. Olsen Folder 2, ASTR.

⁶⁵H. C. Lacey to W. C. White, 27 July 1936, CAR.

⁶⁶Anna Ingles, “The Cooranbong Institute,” *RH* 73.24 (16 June 1896): 378.

⁶⁷H. C. Lacey to L. E. Froom, 30 August 1947, CAR. Lacey's mother had been an organist at the St John's Anglican Church in Hobart, Tasmania, when the family became Seventh-day Adventists in 1887, but continued to play for services at St John's and remained friends with the rector. Herbert and his sister, May, continued to sing in the Anglican church choir. In Leicester, England, the family had been personally acquainted with the famous Congregational preacher and author F. B. Meyer through Mrs. Lacey's music ministry (H. C. Lacey to A. W. Spalding, 2 April, 5 June 1947, CAR).

⁶⁸Lacey noted to Spalding that after his E. G. White collection the most favored books in his personal library were those by holiness authors, such as the twelve volumes by A. J. Gordon, twenty-eight by A. T. Pierson, and scores of others by such noted

Daniells's second hand copy of Andrew Murray provided a timely opportunity to share his convictions in Melbourne and later in Cooranbong. They were soon agreeing that Seventh-day Adventists should begin to think of the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Godhead instead of just a power or influence. According to Lacey, there was considerable discussion amongst the ministers on the matter of the personhood of the Holy Spirit and a realization that they would need to adjust their language to accommodate this understanding. According to Lacey, Davis "was among the most interested ones," along with Daniells.⁶⁹ Thus, it was at the 1896 institute meetings at Cooranbong where these twin streams of the eternity and deity of Christ and the personality of the Holy Spirit converged.

A Quiet Revolution

It is clear from a close survey of both *The Bible Echo* and *The Advent Review* that the subject of Trinitarianism versus anti-Trinitarianism did not become a public subject of discussion and debate. "As to any special controversy, or agitation over the matter of the Trinity," Lacey told Froom in 1947 that he could not "recall anything serious at all." There were more urgent and more important matters of interest for Seventh-day Adventists. A current concern was over challenges to the personality of Satan. *The Bible Echo* ran a seven-part series by J. N. Loughborough on the "Personality of the Devil," during the period of the Armadale meetings. Loughborough argued against other authors, demonstrating from Scripture that Satan was not simply an evil essence of force, but a personal being.⁷⁰ On prophetic matters, the "Eastern Question" dominated headlines in a highly polemical way in *The Bible Echo* for this period. The European nations were feverishly preparing for war, and both Daniells and Prescott preached sermons pointing out to congregations that before their eyes, Turkey was in the process of being driven from Istanbul. The horrific Arminian massacres of late 1895 and early 1896 being reported daily in newspapers were a sign of the general collapse. The Sultan would be in Jerusalem within months and Armageddon would soon follow.⁷¹ And besides

authors as F. B. Meyers, Andrew Murray, F. W. Farrar, and A. B. Simpson (H. C. Lacey to A. W. Spalding, 2 April 1947, CAR). The library of La Sierra University in Riverside, CA, has Lacey's copy of A. T. Pierson, *The Acts of the Holy Spirit* (Chicago: Fleming Revell, 1894), still on its shelves. It appears to have been purchased in 1937 and is extensively marked up in red and blue pencil. Lacey donated his library to the university in the 1950s.

⁶⁹H. C. Lacey to A. W. Spalding, 5 June 1947, CAR.

⁷⁰J. N. Loughborough, "The Personality of the Devil," *The Bible Echo* 10.42 (21 October 1895): 330–331. The series ran until 9 December 1895.

⁷¹"The Coming War," *The Bible Echo* 11.9 (2 March 1896): 86. Feverish Articles on "The Eastern Question" were run in *The Bible Echo* for the remainder of the year, since the topic was of "intense interest" (W. W. Prescott, "The Eastern Question," *The Bible Echo* 11.23 [15 June 1896]: 184). "The expulsion of the Turk from Europe is certain. The temporary establishment of his government with headquarters at

this, the economic depression was making life difficult for the church and for its missionaries and its members. Public debates over the Trinity would not have been appropriate or relevant. Nevertheless, the key ideas on the person and work of the Holy Spirit had taken root with the emphasis being on the practical aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit in Christian experience.

Just two weeks after the institute, on 10 May 1896, E. G. White, in her own words (not the language of Scripture), used the personal pronoun “He” to describe the Holy Spirit in a publicly issued manuscript she wrote on the “Holy Spirit in the Schools.” But then she also used “it” in a later sentence.⁷² It took some time for Daniells and E. G. White to reprogram their long established speech and writing patterns, and often later they would refer to the Holy Spirit as “it” sometimes within the same paragraph, even after speaking of the Holy Spirit as a person. Part of this messy confusion, as Froom explained decades later, was because the language of the Authorized Version (AV) itself was not consistent. In a key passage, it used impersonal pronouns for the translation of πνεῦμα, a Greek neuter noun: “The Spirit itself beareth witness,” and “the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us” (Rom 8:16, 26). Corrections were made in the 1881 Revised Version to achieve consistency with the teaching of the rest of Scripture, but most Seventh-day Adventists still used the AV.⁷³

The changes in Seventh-day Adventist thinking had nevertheless begun. The specific assertion that the Holy Spirit was the “third person of the Godhead” was publicly expressed by E. G. White in an 1897 letter written to ministers.⁷⁴ The teaching was also reflected in *The Desire of Ages*, published in 1898.⁷⁵ Lacey remembered the great interest with which Daniells pointed out to him and Loretta Robinson, Doris E. Robinson’s mother, this particular statement after seeing the first edition of the book. Then the following year E. G. White addressed the students at Avondale College in even stronger terms: “We need to realize that the Holy Spirit who is as much a person as God is a person, is walking through these grounds.”⁷⁶ Further similar statements appeared in 1906.

Jerusalem is likewise certain, as is also his final wiping out as a nation very soon thereafter” (“The Wiping Out of Turkey,” *The Bible Echo* 11.24 [22 June 1896]: 192).

⁷²E. G. White, “The Holy Spirit in the Schools,” in *Special Testimonies on Education* (n.p., 1897), 202–212. “From the Holy Spirit proceeds divine knowledge. He knows what humanity needs to promote peace” (ibid., 31). But in the same manuscript, E. G. White would also say, “It is not commissioned to you to direct the work of the Holy Spirit, and to tell how it shall represent itself” (ibid., 29).

⁷³Froom, *Coming of the Comforter*, 36.

⁷⁴E. G. White, *Special Testimonies for Ministers and Workers*, Series A, no. 10 (Battle Creek, MI: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1897), 25, 37.

⁷⁵Idem, *The Desire of Ages*, 538.

⁷⁶H. C. Lacey to L. E. Froom, 30 August 1945, CAR; H. C. Lacey to A. W. Spalding, 5 June 1847, CAR; E. G. White, “Extracts from Talks Given by Mrs. E. G. White at the Opening of College Hall, Avondale, and in the Avondale Church” (Manuscript 66, 1899), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD.

As Lacey observed, there does not seem to have been much turmoil over the quiet developments in far-off Australia. Prescott continued his Christocentric emphasis. Daniells tried to emulate him in his own preaching. Lacey taught Bible and Trinitarianism quietly at Avondale College. *The Desire of Ages* was read more and more widely and the church's patterns of thought slowly began to change until it was more common to talk of Seventh-day Adventists believing in the doctrine of the Trinity. Eventually, seventeen years later, in a tentative way, the new understanding was included in an informal summary of the "cardinal features" of the Seventh-day Adventist faith in *The Advent Review* in 1913. The unsigned statement referred to Seventh-day Adventist belief in the "Divine Trinity." It is important to notice however, that the statement was still ambiguous enough on the divinity of Christ as to be acceptable to those who were of the old view. The statement referred to Jesus as "the Son of the Eternal Father."⁷⁷ Within the General Conference building in Washington, DC, however, there were leaders who were increasingly aware of the need not only to clarify and restate Seventh-day Adventist theology but also of the need to make sure that other Christians and the general public had a correct understanding of what Seventh-day Adventists now believed about soteriology and Christology. Apologetics—the need to avoid being misunderstood—continued to be a driving motivation in the widening consensus on the doctrine of the Trinity in Adventism. Spicer, the well-informed General Conference secretary, reported to L. R. Conradi in the early months of World War I that the Review & Herald Publishing House had appointed a committee tasked with the work of revising the widely circulated book *Bible Readings for the Home Circle* to ensure the removal of the now inappropriate semi-Arian expressions on the nature of Christ. Urgent work had also been undertaken to revise the Arianism out of *Thoughts on Daniel*, while *Thoughts on Revelation* still needed to be addressed.⁷⁸

During the 1920s, as is evidenced by the 1919 Bible Conference transcripts, the topic of the Trinity was still a very sensitive issue, with pastors being labeled either as progressives or conservatives, depending on their stance on the issue. Discomfort with Prescott's Trinitarian emphasis in these discussions arose because he was understood by some to be advocating a Unitarian perspective when he asserted that the three persons of the Godhead should not be regarded as separable beings. Others were uncomfortable because he was perceived to be advocating a classical view of the Trinity that sounded just like the dogma of Roman Catholicism.⁷⁹ Discussions on the topic became tense at one stage during the conference so that Daniells needed to urge calm. The stenographer was asked not to record his pastoral

⁷⁷"The Message for Today," *RH* 90.41 (9 October 1913): 21.

⁷⁸W. A. Spicer to L. R. Conradi, 30 November 1914, ASTR. "We lately have been attacked in publications as believing this teaching, the attack being based on *Thoughts on Revelation* which in this matter certainly does teach Arianism straight" (ibid., 4).

⁷⁹"Report of the 1919 Bible Conference," 6 July 1919, ASTR, 237.

intervention. But that was about as disruptive as the topic became.⁸⁰ Again, in 1930, Wilcox and a committee of four church leaders were requested to draft a more formal summary statement of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs in response to a perceived need to have such a document in the denomination's yearbook. According to Froom, Wilcox drew up the twenty-two-point statement for consideration of his colleagues. It was also reviewed by F. D. Nichol before being published without any further formal consideration or approval in the *1931 Year Book*.⁸¹ Froom reports Nichol as telling him that Wilcox still had to word the statement conservatively "in the hope that it might be acceptable to those who had held divergent views, especially over the Godhead."⁸²

The recollection of Andreasen illustrates how the general church membership and the ministry generally understood the change to have occurred. A leading Bible teacher in the 1930s and 1940s, Andreasen attributed the change exclusively to E. G. White and *The Desire of Ages*. "I remembered how astonished we were," he recalled, "for it [*The Desire of Ages*] contained things that we considered unbelievable; among others the doctrine of the trinity" (he was twenty-two years old at the time and just beginning his ministry). He cited the statement about Christ's life being "original, unborrowed, underived" as being almost revolutionary.⁸³ Andreasen was unaware of the events of 1896 and the background to the writing of *The Desire of Ages*. If any church leader was in a position to correct the over-simplification represented by Andreasen's perspective, none of them did. It was very difficult and risky to appear to challenge the received orthodoxies about E. G. White's role.⁸⁴

The influence of *The Desire of Ages* and other works slowly led to a broad consensus of understanding on the nature of the Trinity and helped in the delicate process of learning and unlearning.⁸⁵ Clearer views of Jesus and of

⁸⁰Daniells urged delegates, "Now let's not get a bit nervous nor scared." He made suggestions "as to the delegates not becoming uneasy . . . and asked that [the suggestions] be not transcribed" (ibid., 245).

⁸¹*1931 Year Book*, 377–380. See Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, 413–414.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³M. L. Andreasen, "The Spirit of Prophecy" (unpublished chapel talk, Loma Linda, CA, 30 November 1948), cited in Knight, *Search for Identity*, 117.

⁸⁴An attempt by W. C. White to present a more nuanced view at the General Conference session in 1913 had brought a conservative reaction. Lacey's more private attempt in the 1920s and 1930s had resulted in work reassignments. See F. M. Wilcox to H. C. Lacey, 5 December 1924, CAR; L. E. Froom to H. C. Lacey, 12–13 April 1925, CAR; L. E. Froom to H. C. Lacey, 27 July 1936, CAR.

⁸⁵A recent study by Donny Chrissutiantio argues that E. G. White's role was one of "guiding and directing the acceptance of the concept of the Divinity of Christ," and that she "was the most significant influence in clarifying the nature and role of each of the divine persons" ("Contrasting Views about the Divinity of Christ and their Impact on the Acceptance of the Doctrine of the Trinity in Seventh-day Adventist Theology," [paper presented at the Autumn Symposium of the Adventist Theological Society, San Antonio, TX, 19 November 2016], 16, 19, <http://www.atsjats.org/site/1/docs/2016/papers-triune-god/Chrissutiantio%20-%20Contrasting%20Views%20>

the Holy Spirit who testifies of Him changed the way Seventh-day Adventists think about the Godhead. The change, profound though it was, never seemed to have seriously threatened the unity of the church. Rather, the temperature of the discussions over the issue seemed to have stayed at a low level with an occasional localized boiling over. For example, Prescott was vigorously attacked by a fundamentalist pastor in the late 1940s over his Trinitarian views.⁸⁶ In the mid-1950s, debate over the nature of the deity of Christ and Trinitarian doctrine again moved to center stage following discussions with evangelical leaders Walter Martin and Donald Barnhouse. On this occasion, the issue of apologetics again became the main motivating factor in the attempt to find ways to express Seventh-day Adventist understandings more clearly and adequately both for those inside and those outside the community.

Conclusion

Seventh-day Adventists both learned and unlearned in their reflections on the nature of the Godhead. Seventh-day Adventist theology has changed in this area for a number of reasons. It changed because the church came to understand the doctrine of salvation more clearly. It changed because church leaders came to have clearer views of Jesus. It changed because evangelists and theologians needed to help others understand Seventh-day Adventists better and in the process Seventh-day Adventists understood themselves better. It changed because successful evangelism drew into the church substantial numbers of believers who were already Trinitarian. It changed because the church studied Scripture more closely. It changed because Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would continue to lead this community into truth, toward clearer understandings of God and the wonder of God's grace. And for that we can be grateful.

%20ATS%202016.pdf). Chrissutiantio overstates E. G. White's role. It seems more accurate to speak of her endorsing, encouraging, and amplifying a developing, clearer understanding of the deity of Christ among church leaders. Chrissutiantio cites, for example, quotations from E. G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1890), 36, in support of his view that she, in essence, had a clear Trinitarian understanding of the deity of Christ quite early. He fails to note the distinct echoes and themes from a Miltonian Christology that are the narrative context for such statements. See also E. G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 4 vols. (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1858–1864) 1:18. A wider study of E. G. White's early Christology awaits attention.

⁸⁶J. S. Washburn's vigorous public protest against Prescott's Trinitarian teaching echoed the misunderstandings of 1919. He objected to Prescott's explanation that "we cannot regard the three persons of the Godhead as separable beings, each one dwelling in and confined to a visible body, the same as three human beings," and that the three persons are "so mysteriously and indissolubly related to each other that the presence of each one is equivalent to the presence of the other." This was a "monstrous doctrine" in Washburn's view. See J. S. Washburn, "The Trinity," (1940), McEllhany Papers, ASTR, 3.