

ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTERL No. 149

“The Adventist Trinity Debate”

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“The *Da Vinci Cracks* and *More than a Prophet*”

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During the past two weeks I have enjoyed a peaceful retreat in the home of an Adventist couple in London, England. They have adopted me as their “spiritual son” and have designated my guest room as “the prophet upper room.” It is always with a sense of relief that I come to London, knowing that in-between weekend engagements, I can enjoy a peaceful time for creative reading, thinking, and writing.

If your Summer travels include a stop in London, feel free to contact Gary and Araxi Keshishian at 44 (0) 20 8866 8821, or gary@advent.plus.com They will offer you *royal* hospitality. For pictures and details, visit <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/BED&BREAKFAST.htm>

During the two weeks I spent in London, I spoke at four rallies. The last rally was at the Brixton SDA church, which is the largest church in London with about 800 members. The reception and response has been marvellous. Most of our members come from developing countries and are eager to improve not only their socio-economic status, but also their understanding and experience of Bible truths.

Two major projects have occupied my thinking while here in London. The first has been the preparation for a two hours video taping of a powerpoint lecture on *The Da Vinci Cracks*. The lecture will highlight not only the major cracks of the *Da Vinci Code*, but also the prophetic significance of the desacration of Christ, that is increasingly taking place today in our society.

The second project that has absorbed my interest, is the preparation for publication of a 300 pages manuscript entitled *More than a Prophet*, authored by Prof. Graeme Bradford. The manuscript was delivered to my local Adventist printer, Greg Patterson, on June 12. He promised to deliver the book to our home on June 30, 2006. Printing a book in 18 days, with a nice four-colors laminated cover, is a good speed record. If you need to print a book, feel free to call Greg. He will give you the best price and excellent service. You can reach him by phone at 269-2177, extension 571 or by email at <gpatterson@patterson-printing.com>

THE DVD RECORDING OF THE *DA VINCI CRACKS*

In the last newsletter I asked whether I should consider responding to the *Da Vinci Code*, by writing a lengthy book or by recording an informative video lecture. The overwhelming majority of the responses received, urged me to give priority to a video recording of a two-hours lecture exposing the major “cracks” of the *Da Vinci Code*. The general feeling seem to be that a lengthy book response to the multitude of errors found in Dan Brown’s book and movie, may be more compelling, but ultimately it will reach fewer people. We live in a visual society where most people prefer to watch a two hours lecture on their TV, than to spend days reading a book.

The challenge I am facing in planning for this video recording, is to decide what aspects of the *Da Vinci Code* I should examine. Many books and video have already been produced by competent scholars, who offer compelling refutations of the utterly preposterous lies presented as truth in Dan Brown’s book and movie. This means that there is no much that I can add to what has already been said about the gross historical mistakes and theological heresies found in Dan Brown’s material.

For example, I have in front of me Bart Ehrman’s book *Truth and Fiction in The Da Vinci Code*, published by Oxford University Press. As a knowledgeable historian, Prof. Ehrman thoroughly debunks the following fictitious claims of Dan Brown: (1) The early church engaged in a cover-up to make the man Jesus into a divine being; (2) Constantine selected for the New Testament only 4 Gospels from some contending 80 Gospels, because these were the only ones that taught the divinity of

Christ; (3) Jesus married Mary Magdalene and had a daughter that started a bloodline that runs through to the present; (4) The Catholic church has suppressed the true worship of the Divine Feminine, in order to maintain its patriarchal domination over the people. All of these preposterous claims are refuted with compelling documentation and logic by Prof. Ehrman and other competent scholars.

In view of the many scholarly refutations of the *Da Vinci Code*, any attempt on my part to expose its blatant errors, could ultimately represent a mere repetition of what other scholars have already ably written or recorded. Thus I have decided to focus my attention, not merely on the “cracks” of the *Da Vinci Code*, but primarily on the socio-religious conditions that may account for the unprecedented success of such sacrilegious book and movie. More important still, I intend to look at this event in the light of the endtime false worship predicted especially in Revelation 13-14.

The Last Temptation Versus The Da Vinci Code

The question I intend to pursue is, What is driving millions of people to accept the lies of the *Da Vinci Code*, rather than the truths of the Gospel? Apparently, the situation was different twenty years ago. Long before Martin Scorsese could finish the production of his film *The Last Temptation of Christ*, a groundswelling evangelical protest compelled Paramount to abandon the project. A few year later when the Universal Studio released the movie in 1988, Campus Crusade for Christ founder Bill Bright offered some \$10 million to buy the movie and destroy it. The offer was rejected and Christians responded by staging boycotts and pickets outside theaters. The outcome was that only few people went to see movie, which became a financial disaster.

The evangelical community was strongly opposed to *The Last Temptation*, because it depicts Jesus fantasizing during His crucifixion about marrying and having sex with Mary Magdalene, instead of dying on the Cross.

When we move fast-forward almost 20 years, surprisingly we find that what was portrayed as Jesus’ fantasy in *The Last Temptation*, becomes a reality in the *Da Vinci Code*. Jesus, no longer dreams about marrying

Mary Magdalene, but He actually marries her and has children with her, the descendants of whom still survive to the present day.

The two works have a similar plot which is both sacrilegious and offensive. The difference between the two is to be found in the popular reaction. While in the case of *The Last Temptation*, there was a groundswelling protest by Christian churches that drove the movie-goers away from theaters, in the case of the *Da Vinci Code*, both the book and the movie are enjoying amazing popularity and financial success. In my opinion, the reason for the different reactions, is to be found in the growing secularization of our society, which conditions people to tolerate without questioning even the desecration of Christ, the central figure of the Christian faith.

The Desecration of Christ has Become Culturally Acceptable

The desecration of Christ is exemplified by reaction of the evangelical community to the *Da Vinci Code*, which could hardly have been more different. With the exception of the Catholic Church and a few other smaller churches, the voices of discontent in the evangelical community at large have been remarkably silent this time.

Apparently, Christian leaders realize that any resistance is futile, considering that Dan Brown's best-selling book, on which the movie is based, has penetrated so widely the cultural consciousness of our society. The popular acceptance of the book and movie show that the desecration of Christ Himself, for the purpose of entertainment, has become culturally acceptable.

Paul describes this end time condition when he writes about "The coming of the lawless one . . . with all wicked deception for those who are to perish, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God send upon them a strong delusion to make them believe what is false, so that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thess 2:9-12).

What a description of our times! A time when many people prefer to believe what is false, rather than what is truth. A time when people

find “pleasure in unrighteousness” by reading and watching a novel that desecrates Jesus Christ. But, the question is, Why would persons prefer to read and view a false gospel rather than the True Gospel? The answer is to be found in the storyline of *The Da Vinci Code*.

The Implications of the Storyline of *The Da Vinci Code*

If the storyline of the book and movie were true, namely, that Jesus Christ was a merely human person who came to establish an earthly dynasty and to help us celebrate the divine feminine in order to become part of his enlightened circle, then we do not have to worry about being sinners, needing redemption from our sins. All what we need is to be enlightened and informed. The fact is that most people would rather be told that they are uninformed than they are sinful.

If the truth about Christ is that He was merely a human being, then He has no claim over our present life and future destiny. He has no right to call us to be His disciples, by taking up the cross and follow Him. There is no dying to self and living for Christ. There is no need to worry about a future judgment. This is good news for postmodern people who like to believe that they will never have to face judgment.

The false gospel of *The Da Vinci Code* is more attractive to many of the True Gospel of the Bible, because it makes people believe that their problem is to be found, not internally within themselves, but externally in conspiracies. Mankind has been in darkness because some powerful secret societies have conspired to suppress the truth.

Can Slander Provide the Basis for Dialogue?

The strategy adopted by major evangelical leaders, is to urge members to embrace the book and the movie as an opportunity to dialogue about some of their false claims. Over 40 commentators representing Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox churches, have written essays for *The Da Vinci Dialogue*, a website sponsored by Sony Pictures Entertainment, the studio promoting *The Da Vinci Code*. It is evident that the movie industry welcomes the “dialogue strategy,” because the more people talk about the

book and movie, the greater will be the motivation for people to buy the book and to go to see the movie.

The question is: Can slander be used as an opportunity for dialogue? Can a meaningful dialogue be conducted within the slanderous claims framed by Dan Brown and Sony pictures? Dialoguing about a novel and a movie that defames the Gospel, is like playing with fire. This is the very thing that Paul warned against when he said: “Even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed” (Gal 1:8).

Christians seem to forget that the responsibility of the church, is not to dialogue about the merits or demerits of heretical teachings, but to denounce them for what they are. It is the responsibility of the church to clearly declare as “anathema,” that is, false anything that negates the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. The problem is that we live in a moral relativistic society, where everyone want to smile appreciatively at everything, and pass no judgment on anything. In the midst of such an age, the church is called to expose the false teachings of our times, and to warn people about the dire consequences of false worship.

Revelation’s Warning Against Endtime False Worship

In researching Revelation 13-14 for the DVD recording on *The Mark and Number of the Beast*, I was impressed by the repeated warning against end-time false worship. The warning against end-time false worship, promoted by satanic agencies like *The Da Vinci Code*, is given with frightening words: “If any one worships the beast and its image, an receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also shall drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and he shall be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb” (Rev 14:9-10).

In the DVD recording I discuss at length how the dragon, the sea-beast, and the land-beast are presented in Revelation as an unholy trinity that will attempt to lead the world away from the true worship of God into idolatrous forms of worship. *The Da Vinci Code* represents a significant fulfilment of this end time prophecy, especially by its denial of the divinity of Christ. Viewing the DVD on *The Mark and Number of the Beast*, will help you understand the prophetic significance of *The Da Vinci Code*.

The impact of *The Da Vinci Code* is evident, especially in European countries, where secularism and humanism are fast dismantling the pillars of the Christian faith. For example, in France, a survey conducted by IPSOS found in a sample of 1000 individuals that “48% of readers of the book [*The Da Vinci Code*] do not see in Jesus anything other than a man, as opposed to less than a third—29%—of those who have not read it. . . . More than one-fourth —26.4%—of those who have not read the book think that Mary Magdalene was Jesus’ wife or mistress; this figure is already impressive. But of those who have read the book, close to half—48.3%—came to this conclusion!” (<http://www.zenit.org/english/visualizza.phtml?sid=89215>).

By undermining the belief in Christ’s incarnation, atoning death, and resurrection, *The Da Vinci Code* is leading millions of people away from the true worship of the Savior of mankind, into the false worship of self-centered individualism and humanism.

It is within this context that I plan to frame my DVD recording of *The Da Vinci Cracks*. My focus will be, not merely on the multitude of errors of the book (which I will briefly summarize), but on the secular movement that is leading to the desecration of God Himself. *The Da Vinci Code* must be seen as the *effect*, rather than the leading *cause* of the secular movement. As students of prophecy, it is important for us to look at these developments within the context of the final showdown over worship. Feel free to share with me your comments and ideas. Any insight you wish to offer me in preparing for this recording, is much appreciated. I come from Rome, but I do not claim infallibility.

THE PUBLICATION OF *MORE THAN A PROPHET*

The second project that has absorbed most of my time during the past three weeks, has been the preparation for publication of Prof. Graeme Bradford’s manuscript *More than a Prophet*. This is the first and only book that I have offered to publish as part of the *Biblical Perspectives Series*. The reason I have taken on this project, is because I firmly believe that this study is urgently needed to restore confidence in the validity of the gift of prophecy manifested in the writings, preaching, and teachings of Ellen White.

Prof. Graeme Bradford has served the church with distinction as a pastor, evangelist and professor in the theology department of Avondale College, in Australia. He has written books and numerous articles, prepared a Bible Course for Global Mission, and he is currently preparing a *Revelation Seminar* course together with Prof. Jon Paulien for the South Pacific Division.

Prof. Bradford's interest for the study of the prophetic ministry of Ellen White, was sparked by his painful awareness of thousand of Adventists who have left and are leaving the church, because they have found serious mistakes and contradictions in Ellen White's writings. They assumed that prophets are inerrant all the time, no matter the topics or circumstances of their writings.

According to Prof. Bradford, in many cases the departure of church members could have been prevented, had they been given the opportunity to understand what the Bible teaches regarding the gift of prophecy, namely, that prophets are human. There are times when they communicate a message from God, but there are also times when they speak their own mind.

Prof. Bradford reaches this conclusion through a careful study of how the gift of prophecy was manifested in Bible prophets. In fact he devotes the first 100 pages of his manuscript, to an analysis of the biblical understanding of the working of the prophetic ministry. This provides the basis for evaluating the ministry of Ellen White in the second part of the study.

I first heard Prof. Bradford about 8 years ago, when he was lecturing on Ellen White at the South Queensland Campmeeting, near Brisbane, Australia. We were both guest speakers at the campmeeting. His open, frank, and factual analysis of Ellen White caught my attention. He fully accepts the prophetic gift of Ellen White, but he tries to clear the air of prevailing misconceptions which have caused thousands of Adventists to leave church. An online search on "Ellen White Critics" can yield over 40,000 websites attacking Ellen White.

I first read his manuscript *More than a Prophet* about 5 years ago. The study helped me greatly to gain a balanced understanding of the prophetic ministry of Ellen White. In fact, I used some of the material to prepare the *Endtime Issues Newsletter* No. 88, entitled “A Plea for a balanced Understanding of Ellen White’s Writings” http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/endtimeissues/eti_88.html

More than a Prophet Was Born out of Controversy

The manuscript *More than a Prophet* was born out of the raging controversy over the credibility of Ellen White as an inspired writer. Books, videos, and thousands of websites are attempting to destroy the credibility of the gift of prophecy manifested in the ministry and writings of Ellen White. Surprisingly, most of the writings attacking Ellen White, have been produced by former Adventists, some of whom were church pastors.

To respond to the many attacks against Ellen White, Prof. Graeme Bradford spent twenty years of his life examining and digesting the writings of Ellen White in the light of the manifestation of the gift of prophecy in biblical prophets. By examining the human side of Bible prophets as revealed in scripture, Bradford shows that the problems they encountered, were not much different from the criticism brought against Ellen White.

Bradford clearly states the objective of his manuscript, saying: “Let me say from the outset, I write this book as one having great confidence in the prophetic gift as it has been used in the ministry of Ellen White. After reading and studying the evidence for and against her work, I emerge as a strong believer. However, I also realize that the Adventist Church has not always used this gift wisely. Despite her protests during her lifetime, after her death unrealistic expectations were placed upon her writings by those who saw her as a means to settle questions on a variety of subjects. It is imperative that the Church places her ministry where the Bible would have it placed. If this is not forthcoming then the gift that God designed to be a blessing can become counterproductive.”

The Loss and Recovery of the Ellen White’s Prophetic Gift

The manuscript defends the true nature of Ellen White’s ministry, by showing how her ministry was perceived by herself, her son “Willie,” and

church leaders who worked closely with her. These leaders, including the General Conference President A. G. Daniells, who assisted Ellen White for many years in the preparation of her books, expressed their fears at the 1919 Bible Conference, that the Church was heading in a wrong direction in its understanding and use of her ministry. A few ultra-conservative leaders wanted to glorify Ellen White as an infallible authority on everything that she wrote and said.

Unfortunately, the few ultra-conservative won the day, and the worst fears expressed at the 1919 Bible Conference by the close associates of Ellen White, were realized. The cultural pressures brought upon the Church, caused the ultra-conservative to promote an unrealistic and inaccurate understanding of Ellen White's ministry. This has resulted in the perception still prevailing today among many Adventists, that Ellen White's writings are like "fax messages" she received directly from God.

Fortunately, this misconception is slowly being corrected today, as numerous studies have shown the human aspects of Ellen White's life and writings. Adventism is gradually returning a full circle by coming back to a more biblical understanding of her gift, that acknowledges her prophetic gift, while recognizing at the same time her human limitations. This intriguing story is revealed in Bradford's study.

Simplified Version of *More than a Prophet*

The manuscript has been favorably evaluated by respected Adventist church leaders, scholars, and some officers of the E. G. White Estate. The favorable endorsements will be posted in a forthcoming newsletter with chapters from the book. The endorsements gave me reasons to believe that the manuscript would be speedily published, especially in view of the urgent need to restore confidence in the validity of the gift of prophecy manifested in the writings, preaching, and teachings of Ellen White.

Unfortunately, the publication of Prof. Bradford's manuscript has been delayed for several years. Apparently the perception has been that the manuscript was too demanding for the average Adventist reader accustomed to read simple stories or devotional literature. Eventually the decision was made to repackage the study in an abbreviated and simpler version.

A few weeks ago I received the abbreviated and simplified version of the manuscript *More than a Prophet*, published in two booklets under the titles *Prophets Are Human* and *People Are Human: Look at What they Did to Ellen White!* These two booklets, published by *Signs Publishing Company* (Australia), are written in a fiction-style, with a couple asking questions about Ellen White, and a pastor giving answers which are biblical and faith affirming.

Permission to Publish *More than a Prophet*

The apparent reason for repackaging the manuscript into a simple, fiction-style story, was to popularize the study and make it more appealing to the average reader. I have no doubt that the two booklets will serve a useful purpose. But, my experience has been that an increasing number of educated Adventists, prefer to put their teeth into a substantive study that examines questions in a more analytical way.

With this in mind, I asked Prof. Graeme Bradford if he would grant permission to *Biblical Perspectives*, my publishing venture, to publish the original manuscript which has been edited several times. Bradford enthusiastically accepted my proposal and emailed me the latest edited version of the manuscript in two Microsoft Word files.

Incidentally, he instructed me to pay the royalties into a special South Pacific Division fund established to finance his ministry of reclaiming the thousand of former Adventists who have left the church over the question of Ellen White. I dare to mention this personal matter, simply to help reader appreciate the fact that Prof. Bradford has a passion, not only for truth, but also for reclaiming former Adventists.

Publication of *More than a Prophet* by June 30, 2006

During these past three weeks I have worked every waking moment on this project, because I believe that this study is long overdue. With the help of my assistant, we have designed an attractive cover and imported and laid out the text with the help of the *Indesign* program. You can see the cover and read a detailed description of the book at <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/BradfordOffer/offer.htm>

The camera-ready manuscript was placed in the hand of the printer on Monday, June 12 and the book is scheduled to be delivered on June 30, 2006. Designing the cover, laying out the text, and printing the book in about a month, is a pretty good record. We can only thank God for enabling us to complete this project so speedily.

To make it possible to receive copies of *More than a Prophet* as soon as the book comes off the press, we urge our readers to order the book immediately at a special pre-publication price of \$20.00 for 1 copy or \$30.00 for 2 copies, instead of the regular price of \$25.00 per copy. We guarantee to post the book to your address, as soon as it comes out of the press. The details to order the book are given at the end in the announcement section.

A New CD-ROM Album with Prof. Bradford's Writings

In conjunction with the publication of Prof. Bradford's book *More than a Prophet*, I thought that it would helpful to offer his books, articles, and unpublished studies in a CD album. The album will include also the book *More than a Prophet*. Many have expressed their appreciation for making available Prof. Jon Paulien's 13 books and numerous articles in one CD album. It is marvellous to have immediate access to the lifetime research of an Adventist scholar through a CD disk. I decided to do offer the same service to Prof. Bradford, so that readers can benefit from his extensive research.

During the past 30 years, Prof. Bradford has written books and articles on a wide variety of subjects such as occultism, near death experiences, Israel in Prophecy, expository preaching, kids and drugs, the Bible and Archeology, and endtime prophecies. His articles always offer a refreshing biblical perspective on current issues. If you have a computer with a CD drive, you can access most of Prof. Bradford life-time literary production simply by placing his CD album in your drive.

The CD album with Prof. Bradford books and articles was released on Wednesday, June 16, 2006, that is, a few days before the book *More than a Prophet*. Like the book, the CD album is offered at a special introductory price of only \$35.00, instead of the regular price of \$50.00.

Both the CD album and the book *More than a Prophet* are offered together as a package at this time for only \$50.00, instead of the regular price of \$75.00. The details for ordering the CD album, with or without the book, are given at the end in the announcement section.

To familiarize our subscribers with Prof. Bradford's research, I plan to post in forthcoming issues of our newsletters a few chapters of *More than a Prophet* as well as a sampling of articles from the CD album. I will also post the endorsements he has received from church leaders and scholars.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AT THE END OF THE NEWSLETTERS

A detailed description of the special offers on goods and services is provided at the end of this newsletter. Here is a brief listing of the announcements that are expanded at the end of this newsletter.

1. CALENDAR OF FORTHCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS for the months of June 2006. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

2. NEWLY RELEASED BOOK *MORE THAN A PROPHET* AND NEW CD ALBUM BY PROF. GRAEME BRADFORD. Both the book and the CD album with Prof. Bradford research are offered for the first time. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

3. NEWLY RELEASED (MAY 1, 2006) CD-ROM WITH ALL OF PROF. JON PAULIEN PUBLICATIONS. It contains more than a dozen of books and scores of articles written during the past 20 years of research. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

4. SPECIAL OFFER ON THE NEW DVD ALBUM on *The Number and Mark of the Beast*. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

5. TAGNET SPECIAL NEW WEB HOSTING OFFER for Adventist churches and members. TAGnet provides an incredible number of services to our churches and members. This newsletter comes to you through their gracious and efficient service. For detail information, visit their website at <http://www.netadventist.org> or <http://home.tagnet.org/> You may also call their office 800 - 9TAGNET

6. SPECIAL OFFER ON THE PACKAGE OF ALL MY RECORDINGS CONSISTING OF 5 ALBUMS, including the newly released DVD album on *The Mark and the Number of the Beast*. The special offer is only \$100.00 for the 5 albums, instead of the regular price of \$500.00. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

7. SPECIAL OFFER ON PROF. JON PAULIEN'S 5 ALBUMS with 60 CD DISKS, containing 120 lectures that explain verse by verse the book of Revelation. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

8. HITACHI PROJECTORS: Few days ago HITACHI offered an additional discount to help especially our churches and schools in developing countries. For examples, the special offer for the new 2000 LUMENS PROJECTOR CP-X250 IS ONLY \$1095.00, instead of the previous SDA price of \$1995.00. See the details at the end of this newsletter or call me at 269-471-2915

9. REMOTE PRESENTER: Special offer on the smallest and most powerful REMOTE powerpoint presenter by Honeywell. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

Editorial Introduction to "The Adventist Trinity Debate"

The essay you are about to read on "The Adventist Trinity Debate," by Prof. Jerry Moon, follows the study on "The Personality and Deity of the Holy Spirit," by Woodrow Whidden, Ph. D., posted in the last newsletter.

My goal is to offer to our readers the benefit of significant studies done by our leading Adventist scholars. It is unfortunate that much valuable research of interest to Adventists with an inquiring mind, is largely unknown. For example, there is a raging controversy in our Adventist church over the question of the Trinity. Some of our members have emailed me lengthy messages arguing that the doctrine of the Trinity is a Catholic heresy and that our church we should return to be belief of our early pioneers, mostly of whom were anti-Trinitarian. They espoused the Arian heresy that Christ was created by God and consequently not coeternal with the Father

Unfortunately, those who oppose the doctrine of the Trinity, ignore the timely symposium, *The Trinity: Its Implications for Life and Thought* (Review and Herald, 2002), authored by three leading Adventist scholars. Had they had the opportunity to read the historical survey of the Adventist Trinity debate by Prof. Jerry Moon, they would have understood why some of our pioneers like Uriah Smith did not believe in the divinity of Christ. Moreover they would have appreciated the prophetic role of Ellen White in leading our church to accept the doctrine of the Trinity. In fact on the next newsletter, I will post part 2 of Prof. Jerry Moon study, dealing specifically with the role of Ellen White in leading the Adventist church to accept the doctrine of the Trinity.

A word of caution is in order when attempting to define the mystery of the Trinity. Humility is imperative, because we are dealing with a reality which has no human analogies. Isaiah aptly asks: “To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?” (Is 40:18). All the terms we use to describe God must be seen as human attempts to grasp a reality that transcends our human comprehension.

The classical definition of the Trinity, first proposed by Tertullian (about A. D. 200), has been *tria personae unia substantia* — three persons and one substance. Such a definition satisfied ancient metaphysical thinkers who attempted to prove the oneness of the Trinity by arguing that the three Persons shared the same substance. Today, we would question such a definition, because being made of the same substance-stuff, does not guarantee the same thought process.

In fact, even the description of the Godhead as consisting of three **Persons**, can be misleading, if not properly qualified. The reason is that a “Person” implies a unique personality, individuality, and character. But the Godhead does not consist of three different personalities, each with a different character. They consist of three Beings with the same mind set. In my Bible classes I proposed the definition of *Three Beings sharing the same center of consciousness*. The problem with such a definition is that there are no human analogies to help us understand it. Let us accept the fact that we worship a triune God who is so great that escapes our comprehension.

Prof. Jerry Moon, Ph. D., is currently serving as the chairman of the Church History Department at Andrews University and as editor of *Andrews University Seminary Studies*. He has served as a pastor and earned a Ph. D. in Adventist Studies in 1993. His specialty is the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the development of Adventist theology. He has written several books and articles. He co-authored the book on *The Trinity: Its Implications for Life and Thought* (Review and Herald, 2002).

His essay on “The Adventist Trinity Debate,” is excerpted from the book on *The Trinity*. This essay offers a well structured, brief, but most informative survey of the Trinity controversy in the Adventist church. Isn’t marvellous that now you can enjoy in few moments what took Prof. Moon months of dedicated research to discover? If you wish to express your gratitude to Prof Moon, feel free to email him your note or comments at <jmoon@andrews.edu>

“The Adventist Trinity Debate”

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A Brief Overview of the Recent Debate

In 1963 Erwin R. Gane broke new ground with his M. A. thesis arguing that most of the leaders among early Seventh-day Adventists held an antitrinitarian view of the Godhead, but that Ellen G. White was an exception. In Gane’s words, she was “a trinitarian monotheist.” Gane did not attempt to trace the history of the change from rejection to acceptance of trinitarianism, nor did he address in detail the role of Ellen White’s role in that change, but he set the stage for other investigators to further his work.

Several others have since taken up aspects of those two major issues. Russell Holt in 1969 added further evidence regarding James White, J. N. Andrews, A. C. Bourdeau, D. T. Bourdeau, R. F. Cottrell, A. T. Jones, W. W. Prescott, J. Edson White, and M. L. Andreasen. Holt concluded that until 1890, the “field was dominated by” antitrinitarians; from 1890 to 1900, “the course of the denomination was decided by statements from Ellen

G. White,” and during the period from 1900 to 1930, most of the leading antitrinitarians died, so that by 1931 trinitarianism “had triumphed and become the standard denominational position.” Thus Holt approximated the general outline of the present research, though the size of his paper did not permit in-depth treatment.

In 1971, two years after Holt’s paper, L. E. Froom in *Movement of Destiny* tried to prove that E. J. Waggoner had become essentially trinitarian, or at least “anti-Arian,” as early as 1888, but only by “special pleading” could he sustain that hypothesis. Nevertheless, *Movement of Destiny* offers a more detailed examination of the primary sources on trinitarianism and antitrinitarianism in Adventism than could previously be found in any one place. For sheer bulk, his work makes a major contribution to the history of the Adventist theology of the Godhead.

Merlin Burt, in 1996, contributed much-needed depth and detail to the history of the development of the Trinity doctrine among Adventists in the first half of the twentieth century. Woodrow Whidden broadened the systematic theological discussion by linking the advances in soteriology and the new openness to trinitarianism during the decade of 1888-1898. Not until the publication of *The Trinity: Understanding God’s Love, His Plan of Salvation, and Christian Relationships*, by Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, and John Reeve (Review and Herald, 2002), did a single volume combine the biblical and historical evidence for an Adventist view of the Trinity. That book has also been published in Portuguese by the Brazil Publishing House.

All these contributions have basically supported Gane’s original thesis. As a result, his contention that most of the leading SDA pioneers were antitrinitarian in their theology has become accepted Adventist history. However, the meaning of that history for belief and practice is still hotly debated. On one hand, some Adventists explain the historical process of change as the product of an ecumenical conspiracy theory, claiming that Adventist leaders sold out the original “truth” for the sake of public relations, as a means of shedding the denomination’s sectarian image. On the other hand, the question of whether belief in God as a Trinity is really biblical receives additional force from the fact that some contemporary theologians in the wider Christian community are taking up anew the historic questioning of traditional trinitarianism.

Objectives and Outline of this Study

The purpose of this essay is to examine the process of change in the Adventist view of the Trinity in order to discover what motivated the changes, and whether they resulted from a growing biblical understanding or were driven by a desire to be seen as orthodox by the wider Christian community.

The development of the doctrine of the Godhead in Seventh-day Adventism may be divided into six periods: (1) Antitrinitarian Dominance, 1846-1888; (2) Dissatisfaction with Antitrinitarianism, 1888-1898; (3) Paradigm Shift, 1898-1913; (4) Decline of Antitrinitarianism, 1913-1946; (5) Trinitarian Dominance, 1946-1980; and (6) Renewed Tensions, 1980 to the Present. The first three periods have been treated by Gane, Holt, and Froom, and the 1888-1957 era by Merlin Burt, but only Froom addresses the trinitarian issues of the Kellogg crisis and no one has dealt extensively with the period from 1980 to the present.

ANTITRINITARIAN DOMINANCE: 1846-1888

From about 1846 to 1888, most of the of leading Adventist writers rejected the concept of the Trinity, although the literature contains occasional references to members who held trinitarian views. Ambrose C. Spicer, the father of General Conference President William Ambrose Spicer, had been a Seventh Day Baptist minister before his conversion to Adventism in 1874. He evidently remained trinitarian, because W. A. Spicer recounted to A. W. Spalding that his father “grew so offended at the anti-trinitarian atmosphere in Battle Creek that he ceased preaching.” S. B. Whitney had been trinitarian, but in the course of his indoctrination as an Adventist in 1861, became a convinced antitrinitarian. Whitney’s experience would seem to indicate that at least some Adventist ministers taught antitrinitarianism as part of their instruction of new converts. R. F. Cottrell, on the other hand, wrote in the *Review* that while he disbelieved in the Trinity, he had never “preached against it” or previously written about it. A third bit of evidence that not all were agreed on antitrinitarianism was the remark of D. T. Bourdeau in 1890: “Although we claim to be believers in, and worshipers of, only one God, I have thought that there are as many gods among us as there are conceptions of the Deity.”

It must not be misunderstood that those who rejected the traditional Trinity doctrine of the Christian creeds were nevertheless devout believers in the eternity of God the Father, the deity of Jesus Christ “as Creator, Redeemer and Mediator,” and the “importance” of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. They held, however, that unlike the Father, the Son had a beginning, though by 1888 it was widely accepted that the Son had preexisted from “so far back in the days of eternity that to finite comprehension” he was “practically without beginning.” Moreover, they initially believed that the Holy Spirit was an expression for the divine presence, power, or influence, but not an individual divine Personality.

No Biblical Evidences for Three Persons

The early Adventists set forth at least six reasons for their rejection of the term “Trinity.” The first was that they did not initially see biblical evidence for three persons in one Godhead. This was not a new objection. In its simplest form, the concept of Trinity is the result of affirming, on the authority of Scripture, both the “oneness” and the “threeness” of God, despite human inability to fully understand the personal, divine Reality those terms point to. How this can be explained has been the subject of much thought and speculation over the centuries. The influence of Greek philosophy on the doctrinal developments of early and medieval Christian history is well known.

Trinity Makes the Father and the Son Identical

A second reason the early Adventists gave for rejecting the Trinity was the misconception that it made the Father and the Son identical. The first of the three recognized cofounders of Sabbatarian Adventism, Joseph Bates, wrote that: “Respecting the trinity, I concluded that it was an impossible for me to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, was also the Almighty God, the Father, one and the same being.” At the time of his conversion to Christianity in 1827, Bates told his father, “If you can convince me that we are one in this sense, that you are my father, and I your son; and also that I am your father, and you my son, then I can believe in the trinity.” Because of this belief, and that of baptism by immersion, the younger Bates joined the Christian Connection rather than the Congregational church of his parents. D. W. Hull, J. N. Loughborough, S. B. Whitney, and D. M. Canright shared this view.

But biblical trinitarians do not teach that Christ and the Father are one person. The point of the term “three persons” is that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not held to be “one and the same” person. The concept that the Father and Son are identical approximates an ancient heresy called Modalist Monarchianism, or Sabellianism (after Sabellius, one of its third-century proponents). Modalists “held that in the Godhead the only differentiation was a mere succession of modes or operations.” Modalists denied the threeness of God and asserted that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not separate personalities.

In view of this history, it is tempting to dismiss the view of Bates and others as simple ignorance of the meaning of Trinity, but in their defense, it must be admitted that there have been in history and still are today, a variety of views claiming the term Trinity. R. F. Cottrell observed in 1869 that there were “a multitude of views” on the Trinity, “all of them orthodox, I suppose, as long as they nominally assent to the doctrine.” In the second part of this study I will present some fundamental differences between the biblical view of the Trinity and the traditional trinitarianism derived from Greek philosophy.

The Trinity Presupposes the Existence of Three Gods

A third and opposite early Adventist objection to the Trinity doctrine was based on the misconception that it teaches the existence of three Gods. “If Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are each God, it would be three Gods,” wrote Loughborough in 1861. But Loughborough clearly misunderstood the meaning of the term Trinity. Biblical trinitarians do not believe in three Gods. The whole point of the word Trinity is to maintain the biblical truth that there is only one God, without denying what the Bible also teaches, that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three individual persons.

The Trinity Diminishes the Value of the Atonement

A fourth view was that belief in the Trinity would diminish the value of the atonement. Since the “everliving, self-existent God” cannot die, then if Christ had self-existence as God, he couldn’t have died on Calvary, they reasoned. If only his humanity died, then his sacrifice was only a human one, inadequate for redemption. Thus, in order to protect the reality

of his death on the cross, the early Adventists felt they had to deny that Christ in his preexistence possessed divine immortality.

However logical that reasoning may have seemed to some, its basic premises were flatly rejected by Ellen White in 1897. She stated positively that when Jesus died on the cross, “Deity did not die. Humanity died.” Her influence on Adventist readers, and their confidence in the source of her information was such that the implications of such a pronouncement could not be ignored, giving Adventist scholars one more reason to reassess their basic paradigm regarding the Godhead.

Being the Son of God, Christ had a More Recent Origin

Fifth, the fact that Christ is called “Son of God” and “the beginning of the creation of God” (Rev 3:14) was thought to prove that he must be of more recent origin than God the Father. Of course, these texts are no longer understood in this way. Ellen White insisted on the eternal preexistence of the Son, and the “beginning of the creation of God” (Rev 3:14) is no longer understood to refer to the first being created, but to the being who was the Source, the Initiator, the Beginner of all the creation of God (cf. John 1:1-3).

Expression Suggesting that the Holy Spirit is a Power

Sixth, it was argued that “there are various expressions concerning the Holy Spirit which would indicate that it [sic] couldn’t properly be considered as a person, such as its being ‘shed abroad’ in the heart [Rom. 5:5], and ‘poured out upon all flesh’ [Joel 2:28].” These arguments, however, depended on giving a very literal interpretation to expressions that could also be seen as figures of speech. These arguments made sense within an overall antitrinitarian paradigm, but when that paradigm was called into question, these points were recognized as being capable of fitting either interpretation.

None of these is a valid objection to the basic trinitarian concept of one God in three Persons. Yet all of them were based on biblical texts. Adventists eventually changed their view of the Godhead because they came to a different understanding of the biblical texts.

DISSATISFACTION WITH ANTITRINITARIANISM: 1888-1898

The focus of the 1888 General Conference session on “Christ our righteousness” and the consequent exaltation of the cross of Christ called into serious question whether a subordinate, derived divinity could adequately account for the saving power of Christ. E. J. Waggoner urged the necessity of “set[ting] forth Christ’s rightful position of equality with the Father, in order that His power to redeem may be the better appreciated.”

While by 1890 Waggoner had not yet fully grasped Christ’s infinitely eternal preexistence, he argued convincingly that Christ was not created, that “He has ‘life in Himself’ [John 10:17]; He possesses immortality in His own right.” Waggoner insisted on “the Divine unity of the Father and the Son” and averred that Christ is “by nature of the very substance of God, and having life in Himself, He is properly called Jehovah, the self-existent One” (Jer 23:56), “who is on an equality with God” (Phil 2:6, ARV), “having all the attributes of God.”

Waggoner was not yet trinitarian, but he saw clearly that a more exalted conception of Christ’s work of redemption demanded a higher conception of his being as Deity. “The fact that Christ is a part of the Godhead, possessing all the attributes of Divinity, being the equal of the Father in all respects, as Creator and Lawgiver, is the only force there is in the atonement. . . . Christ died ‘that He might bring us to God’ (1 Peter 3:18); but if He lacked one iota of being equal to God, He could not bring us to Him.” The force of this logic leads inevitably to the recognition of Christ’s full equality in preexistence as well.

Thus, the dynamic of righteousness by faith and its consequences for the doctrine of God provide the historical context for the provocative comment of D. T. Bourdeau that “although we claim to be believers in, and worshipers of, only one God, I have thought that there are as many gods among us as there are conceptions of the Deity.” Such a comment from a highly respected evangelist and missionary seems to indicate that the collective confidence in the antitrinitarian paradigm was showing some cracks.

Further evidence that this was so appeared two years later in 1892, when Pacific Press published a pamphlet titled “The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity,” by Samuel T. Spear. The pamphlet corrected two prevailing misconceptions of the Trinity doctrine, showing that it “is not a system of tri-theism, or the doctrine of three Gods, but it is the doctrine of one God subsisting and acting in three persons, with the qualification that the term ‘person’ . . . is not, when used in this relation, to be understood in any sense that would make it inconsistent with the unity of the Godhead.”

In 1898, Uriah Smith prepared *Looking Unto Jesus*, the most comprehensive and carefully nuanced exposition of the nontrinitarian view among Adventists. Smith emphatically repudiated his earlier view that Christ had been created, but still held that “God [the Father] alone is without beginning. At the earliest epoch when a beginning could be,—a period so remote that to finite minds it is essentially eternity,—appeared the Word.” Through some means not clearly revealed in Scripture, Christ had been “brought forth,” “begotten,” or “by some divine impulse or process, not creation,” Christ had been given existence by the Father. In one paragraph Smith comes surprisingly close to a trinitarian statement: “This union between the Father and the Son does not detract from either, but strengthens both. Through it, in connection with the Holy Spirit, we have all of Deity.” But this slow struggle toward a fuller understanding was eclipsed by the bold declarations of *The Desire of Ages*, published in the same year. *Desire of Ages* produced a paradigm shift in Adventists’ perceptions of the Godhead.

PARADIGM SHIFT: 1898-1913

The period from 1898 to 1913 saw an almost complete reversal of Adventist thinking about the Trinity. I say “almost” because this paradigm shift did not lead to unanimity on the topic. As Merlin Burt has documented, a few thought leaders who tended toward the “old view” remained vocal, but with declining influence, for many years.

Nevertheless, the publication of Ellen White’s *Desire of Ages* in 1898 became the continental divide for the Adventist understanding of the Trinity. Beginning with the first paragraph of the book, she called into question the dominant view of early Adventists regarding the relationship of Christ to the Father. Her third sentence in chapter 1 declared, “*From the days of*

eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father” (emphasis supplied). Yet even this was not sufficiently unequivocal to clarify her position regarding the deity of Jesus, for as we have seen, others had used similar language without believing in Christ’s infinitely eternal preexistence.

Later in the book, writing on the resurrection of Lazarus, she quoted the claim of Christ, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25) and followed it with a seven-word comment that would begin to turn the tide of antitrinitarian theology among Adventists: “*In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived*” (emphasis supplied). “Life, original” means Christ possessed life at the point of the origin of all life—no one had life before Him. “Unborrowed” means that life was intrinsically His own; He did not owe His life to any Other; His preexistence life was not dependent on any other.

Finally, “underived” adds the third layer of White’s redundant insistence that Christ did not ultimately derive his divine life from the Father. (Of course, in the incarnation, Christ voluntarily “humbled Himself” (Phil 2:6-8), became dependent (John 5:19, 30), and subordinated his will to the Father (John 5:30) in order to live as humans must, but that was not His position from eternity). Even as a man, He retained the power to lay down his life and take it up again (John 10:18). Thus with reference to Christ’s resurrection, Ellen White again asserted his full deity and equality with the Father, declaring “The Saviour came forth from the grave by the life that was in Himself.”

These statements came as a shock to the theological leadership of the church. M. L. Andreasen, who had become an Adventist just four years earlier at the age of eighteen, and who would eventually teach at the church’s North American seminary, claimed that the new concept was so different from the previous understanding that some prominent leaders doubted whether Ellen White had really written it.

After Andreasen entered the ministry in 1902, he made a special trip to Ellen White’s California home to investigate the issue for himself. Ellen White welcomed him and gave him “access to the manuscripts.” He had brought with him “a number of quotations,” to “see if they were in the original in her own handwriting.” He recalled: “I was sure Sister White

had never written, ‘In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived.’ But now I found it in her own handwriting just as it had been published. It was so with other statements. As I checked up, I found that they were Sister White’s own expressions.”

Desire of Ages contained equally uncompromising statements regarding the deity of the Holy Spirit. Repeatedly, *Desire of Ages* employed the personal pronoun “he” in referring to the Holy Spirit, climaxing with the impressive statement, “The Spirit was to be given as a regenerating agent, and without this, the sacrifice of Christ would have been of no avail. . . . Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the *Third Person of the Godhead*, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power” (emphasis supplied).

These and similar statements drove some to a fresh examination of the biblical evidence about the Godhead. Others, disbelieving that they could have been wrong for so many years, studied to bolster the old arguments. Ellen White’s testimony, however, by calling attention to Scriptures whose significance had been overlooked, created a paradigm shift that could not be reversed. As Adventists returned to the Scriptures to see “whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11), they eventually came to a growing consensus that the basic concept of the Trinity was a biblical truth to be accepted and embraced.

While *Desire of Ages* set in motion a paradigm shift regarding the Adventist understanding of the Godhead, it was not Ellen White’s last word on the subject. Later, during the Kellogg crisis of 1902-1907, she repeatedly used expressions such as “three living persons of the heavenly trio,” while continuing to maintain the essential unity of the Godhead. Thus she affirmed the plurality and the unity, the threeness and the oneness, the foundational elements of a simple, biblical understanding of the Trinity.

Evidence that at least a portion of church leadership recognized the *Desire of Ages* statements as removing the objections to a biblical doctrine of the Trinity is a summary of Adventist beliefs that F. M. Wilcox published in the *Review and Herald* in 1913, during Ellen White’s lifetime, and on the same page with an article by Ellen White, where she would surely

have been aware of it. The editor of the denomination's most influential periodical, Wilcox wrote that "Seventh-day Adventists believe, — 1. In the divine Trinity. This Trinity consists of the eternal Father, . . . the Lord Jesus Christ, . . . [and] the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead."

DECLINE OF ANTITRINITARIANISM: 1913-1946

Despite Wilcox's declaration in the *Review*, (or perhaps because of it), the debate over the Trinity intensified in the early decades of the twentieth century. At the 1919 Bible Conference, Christ's eternity and his relation to the Father were major and unresolved subjects of debate. Curiously, in view of Ellen White's *Desire of Ages* statement that Christ's life was "underived," even W. W. Prescott, the foremost proponent of a trinitarian view at the conference, held that Christ's existence was in some way "derived" from the Father. This may constitute evidence that the leadership were not content to simply accept White's pronouncement without seeing it for themselves in Scripture. Or perhaps, it shows Prescott's conscious or unconscious reflection of classical trinitarian sources.

The polarization of American Christianity between modernism and fundamentalism in the first two decades of the twentieth century tended to push Adventists closer to a trinitarian position, since in so many other areas — such as belief in creationism, Christ's virgin birth, miracles, and literal resurrection — Adventists were in opposition to modernists and in sympathy with fundamentalists.

In 1930, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists received a request from its African Division that "a statement of what Adventists believe be printed in the Year Book" to "help government officials and others to a better understanding of our work." In response, the General Conference Committee appointed a subcommittee (comprised of M. E. Kern, associate secretary of the General Conference; F. M. Wilcox, editor of the *Review and Herald*; E. R. Palmer, manager of the Review and Herald Publishing Association; and C. H. Watson, General Conference president) to prepare a statement of Adventist beliefs.

Wilcox, as the leading writer among them, drafted a 22-point statement that was subsequently published in the SDA Year Book of 1931. The second point spoke of the "Godhead, or Trinity," and the third af-

firmed “that Jesus Christ is very God,” an echo of the Nicene creed. Lest anyone think that Adventists intended to make a creed, “no formal or official approval” was sought for the statement. Fifteen years later, when the statement had gained general acceptance, the General Conference session of 1946 made it official, voting that “no revision of this Statement of Fundamental Beliefs, as it now appears in the [Church] Manual, shall be made at any time except at a General Conference session.” This marked the first official endorsement of a trinitarian view by the church, although “the last of the well known expositors” continued to “uphold the ‘old’ view” until his death in 1968.

TRINITARIAN DOMINANCE: 1946 to 1980

From the retirement of F. M. Wilcox in 1944 to the publication of *Movement of Destiny* in 1971, L. E. Froom was the most visible champion of trinitarianism among Seventh-day Adventists. His book, *The Coming of the Comforter* was unprecedented among Adventists (except for a few passages in Ellen White) in its systematic exposition of the personhood of the Holy Spirit and the trinitarian nature of the Godhead. Froom’s leading role in the preparation of the 1957 work, *Questions on Doctrine*, has been amply documented elsewhere. *Questions on Doctrine* evoked a storm of controversy for certain statements on christology and the atonement, but its clear affirmation of “the heavenly Trinity” went virtually unchallenged—perhaps because M. L. Andreasen, the book’s chief critic in other areas, was a convinced trinitarian. Froom’s final word was his 700-page *Movement of Destiny*, published in 1971. Despite “instances of special pleading” and problems of bias that “somewhat diminish the work as dependable history,” it nevertheless thoroughly documents the movement of Adventist theology toward a biblical trinitarian consensus.

The climax of this phase of doctrinal development was a new statement of fundamental beliefs, voted by the 1980 General Conference session in Dallas. The new statement of twenty-seven “Fundamental Beliefs,” like the 1931 statement, explicitly affirmed belief in the Trinity. The affirmation came in the second article of the statement (following a preamble and a first article on the inspiration and authority of Scripture). “2. The Trinity[.] There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons.” Article 4 affirms that “God the eternal Son became

incarnate in Christ Jesus. . . . Forever truly God, He became also truly man.” Article 5 declares that “God the eternal Spirit was active with the Father and the Son in Creation, incarnation, and redemption,” and was “sent by the Father and the Son to be always with His children.” At several points, the statement echoes the terminology of the classical trinitarian creeds, even including the Filioque clause with reference to the Holy Spirit.

A brief recapitulation of Adventist belief statements may clarify the significance of the 1980 action. The first Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by Seventh-day Adventists (1872) was the work of Uriah Smith. Its first two articles deal with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

— I —

That there is one God, a personal, spiritual being, the creator of all things, omnipotent, omniscient, and eternal, infinite in wisdom, holiness, justice, goodness, truth, and mercy; unchangeable, and everywhere present by his representative, the Holy Spirit. Ps. 139.7.

— II —

That there is one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Eternal Father, the one by whom God created all things, and by whom they do consist; that he took on him the nature of the seed of Abraham for the redemption of our fallen race; that he dwelt among men full of grace and truth, lived our example, died our sacrifice, was raised for our justification, ascended on high to be our only mediator in the sanctuary in heaven, where, with his own blood he makes atonement for our sins.

It is notable that while there is no reference to the term Trinity, neither is there any overt polemic against a trinitarian position. Smith was clearly striving to adhere as closely as possible to biblical language. The statement represented a consensus at the time, but in harmony with its preamble’s explicit disclaimer of any creedal statement it was never given the status of official approval.

The second statement of “Fundamental Principles” (1889), also by Uriah Smith, is likewise a consensus statement that avoids pressing

any points of disagreement. As with the 1872 statement, the preamble maintains “no creed but the Bible,” and further claims that “the following propositions may be taken as a summary of the principal features of their [Seventh-day Adventists’] religious faith, upon which there is, so far as we know, entire unanimity throughout the body” (emphasis supplied).

Apparently, Smith did not consider the fine points of the doctrine of the Godhead as ranking among the “principal features” of the SDA faith at that time, because he could hardly have been unaware that there were certain minor disagreements related to the Trinity. Article I from 1872 (quoted above), was reproduced without change in the 1889 statement. Article II in the 1889 statement has some modifications in the language about the work of Christ, but no material change in its reference to the person of Christ. Because these articles adhere closely to biblical terminology, they were capable of being interpreted favorably by either nontrinitarians or trinitarians.

The third statement of “Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists” was prepared under the direction of a committee, but it was actually written by F. M. Wilcox, editor of the *Review and Herald*. Fifteen years later, in 1946, it became the first such statement to be officially endorsed by a General Conference session. Article 2 declares,

“That the Godhead, or Trinity, consists of the Eternal Father, a personal, spiritual Being, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, infinite in wisdom and love; 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 great regenerating power in the work of redemption. Matt. 28:19.”

Thus, the statement voted at Dallas in 1980 was the fourth fundamental beliefs statement of Seventh-day Adventists, but only the second to be officially voted by a General Conference session. The official adoption of the explicitly trinitarian Dallas statement might have been expected to bring closure to the century-old debate, but it proved to be a precursor of renewed tensions.

RENEWED TENSIONS AND CONTINUING DEBATE: 1980 TO THE PRESENT

The period from 1980 to the present has been characterized by renewed debate along a spectrum of ideas from the reactionary to the contemporary. Soon after the Dallas statement—and perhaps in reaction to it—voices from the “edges” of the church began to advocate that the pioneers earliest views were correct, that Ellen White’s apparently trinitarian statements had been misinterpreted, and that the Dallas statement represented apostasy from the biblical beliefs of the pioneers.

Some, in apparent ignorance of the 1946 action, believed that the Dallas statement was the first ever officially voted statement of Adventist belief, and hence, that its very existence was an aberration from the historical pattern. Citations from the primary sources, extracted from their historical context and repackaged in plausible conspiracy theories, proved quite convincing to many.

A more substantial development was the continued quest to articulate a biblical doctrine of the Trinity, clearly differentiated from the Greek philosophical presuppositions that undergirded the traditional creedal statements. Raoul Dederen had set forth in 1972 a brief exposition of the Godhead from the OT and NT. He rejected the “Trinity of speculative thought” that created philosophical “distinctions within the Deity for which there is no definable basis within the revealed knowledge of God.” Instead, he advocated the example of the apostles: “Rejecting the terms of Greek mythology or metaphysics, they expressed their convictions in an unpretending trinitarian confession of faith, the doctrine of one God subsisting and acting in three persons.”

Building on this line of thought, Fernando Canale, Dederen’s student, set forth in 1983 a radical critique of the Greek philosophical presuppositions underlying what Dederen had referred to as “speculative thought.” Canale’s dissertation, *A Criticism of Theological Reason*, argued that Roman Catholic and classical Protestant theology took its most basic presuppositions about the nature of God, time, and existence, from a “framework” provided by Aristotelian philosophy. Canale maintained that for Christian

theology to become truly biblical, it must derive its “primordial presupposition” from Scripture, not from Greek philosophy.

In the more recent *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (2000), edited by Dederen, Canale authored a magisterial article on the findings from his continuing work on the doctrine of God. Again, Canale explicitly differentiates between a doctrine of God based on Greek philosophical presuppositions and one based on biblical presuppositions, making a strong case for his view that only through a willingness to “depart from the philosophical conception of God as timeless” and to “embrace the historical conception of God as presented in the Bible,” can one discover a truly biblical view of the Trinity.

A third line of thought seeks to locate Adventist trinitarianism in the context of contemporary systematic theology. Seconding Canale’s discontent with classical theology, but taking the critique in a different direction, was Richard Rice’s *Reign of God* (1985). Rice argued that the Trinity was implied, though not explicit, in Scripture. Fritz Guy, in *Thinking Theologically* (1999), agrees that “the traditional formulations” of the Trinity doctrine “are not entirely satisfactory.” He warns against a perceived tendency toward tritheism and favors updating the language to make it more “functional and gender-neutral.” Guy’s book, however, is not a systematic exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity, and how his suggestions will ultimately affect the discussion remains to be seen.

CONCLUSION

The long process of change from early Adventists’ initial rejection of creedal trinitarianism to their eventual acceptance of a doctrine of the Trinity could rightly be called a search for a biblical Trinity. The early Adventists were not so much prejudiced against traditional formulas as they were determined to hew their doctrine as closely as possible to the teaching of Scripture. In order to base their beliefs on Scripture alone, and to disallow tradition from having any theological authority, they found it methodologically essential to reject every doctrine not clearly grounded in Scripture alone. Since the traditional doctrine of the Trinity clearly contained unscriptural elements, they rejected it. Eventually, however, they

became convinced that the basic concept of one God in three persons was indeed found in Scripture. In the second part of this study will consider in more detail the role of Ellen White in that process.

ANNOUNCEMENTS OF SERVICES AND PRODUCTS

UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the upcoming seminars for the month of June 2006. I wish to extend my personal, warm invitation to all who are able to attend one of the followings rallies.

JUNE 2-3: LONDON- BRIXTON SDA CHURCH

Location: Santley Street, Clapham, London SW4 7QG, England
For information call Pastor Hamilton Williams at 020 8670 5255

JUNE 9-10: NEW YORK CITY - PATCHOGUE SDA CHURCH

Location: 184 North Ocean Avenue, Patchogue, NY 11772
For information call Pastor Daniel Zabaleta at (914) 681 1842.

JUNE 16-17: LOS ANGELES - TEMPLE CITY SDA CHURCH

Location: 9664 East Broadway, Temple City, CA 91780.
For information call Pastor Benjamin Del Pozo at (626) 374-9984 or (626) 292-1305.

JUNE 30-JULY 1: NEW YORK - GETHSEMANE SDA CHURCH

Location: 357 Empire Boulevard, Brooklyn, NY 11225
For information call Pastor Charles Jean Marie at (718) 444-2125.

NEWLY RELEASED BOOK *MORE THAN A PROPHET* AND CD ALBUM BY PROF. GRAEME BRADFORD

Prof. Graeme Bradford has served the Seventh-day Adventist church with distinction as a pastor, evangelist and professor in the theology department of Avondale College. He has conducted seminars in many parts of the world, helping thousands to better understand and experience biblical truths.

He has written numerous articles, prepared a Bible Course for Global Mission, and edited three magazine on *Archeology and the Bible*. At the request of the South Pacific Division he is preparing a *Revelation Seminar* course together with Prof. Jon Paulien. He has authored several books. His latest book *More than a Prophet*, is explained and offered below.

Prof. Bradford earned a B. A. Degree in theology from Pacific Union College; a M. A. Degree in Religion from Andrews University and a D. Min. Degree from Trinity International Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. Though he is currently retired, his ministry of writing, lecturing, and reclaiming former Adventists continues full time with passion for truth and for people.

THE BOOK *MORE THAN A PROPHET*

The book *More than a Prophet* was born out of the raging controversy over the credibility of Ellen White as an inspired writer. Books, videos, and thousands of websites are attempting to destroy the credibility of the gift of prophecy manifested in the ministry and writings of Ellen White. Surprisingly, most of the material attacking Ellen White, has been produced by former Adventists, some of whom were church pastors.

In *More than a Prophet*, Prof. Bradford defends the true nature of Ellen White's ministry, by showing how her ministry was perceived by herself, her son "Willie," and church leaders who worked closely with her. These leaders, including the General Conference President A. G. Daniells, who assisted Ellen White for many years, expressed their fears at the 1919 Bible Conference, that the Church was heading in a wrong direction in its understanding and use of her writings. A few ultra-conservative leaders wanted to glorify Ellen White as an infallible authority on everything that she wrote and said.

Unfortunately, the worst fears expressed at the 1919 Bible Conference were realized as cultural pressures were brought upon the Church which caused an unrealistic and inaccurate understanding of her ministry. This

has resulted in the perception prevailing among many Adventists that Ellen White's writings are like "fax messages" she received directly from God.

Fortunately, this misconception is slowly being corrected today, as numerous studies produced during the past 25 years, have shown the human aspects of Ellen White's life and writings. Adventism is gradually returning a full circle by coming back to a more biblical understanding of her gift, that recognizes her human limitations. This intriguing story is revealed in Bradford's *More than a Prophet*.

The book has been favorably evaluated by respected Adventist church leaders, scholars, and some officers of the E. G. White Estate. The favorable endorsements ought to facilitate the acceptance and circulation of *More than a Prophet*— a book that is urgently needed to restore confidence in the validity of the gift of prophecy manifested in the writings, preaching, and teachings of Ellen White.

This book has been long overdue and will do much to restore confidence in the validity of the gift of prophecy manifested in the writings, preaching, and teachings of Ellen White – a woman who has left such a rich legacy not only for the Seventh-day Adventist Church but for the world at large

SPECIAL PRE-PUBLICATION OFFER!!!

More than a Prophet (288 pages) is scheduled to be released on June 30, 2006. The retail price of the book is \$25.00 per copy, but the special pre-publication price until July 31, 2006, is as follows:

1 copy of *More than a Prophet* \$20.00, plus \$5.00 for mailing in the USA or \$10.00 for airmailing overseas.

2 copies of *More than a Prophet* \$30.00, plus \$5 for mailing in the USA or \$10.00 for airmailing overseas.

10 copies of *More than a Prophet* \$100.00, plus \$5 for mailing in the USA or \$20.00 for airmailing overseas.

You can order *MORE THAN A PROPHET!* in 4 different ways:

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PROF. BRADFORD'S CD ALBUM WITH HIS WRITINGS

This CD album offers a searchable data base of most of Prof. Graeme Bradford published and unpublished writings. It includes also the latest book *More than a Prophet!* During the past 30 years, he has written books and articles on a wide variety of subjects such as occultism, near death experiences, Israel in Prophecy, expository preaching, kids and drugs, the Bible and Archeology, and endtime prophecies. His articles always offer a refreshing biblical perspective on current issues.

Until now Prof. Bradford's books and articles were available only in a printed form, often unavailable at local ABC stores. In view of my indebtedness to Prof. Bradford scholarship, I have offered to help him to place all of his books and articles on a CD album. This makes it possible with the ACROBAT global search, to locate immediately what he has written on biblical texts or current topics.

You will find in this collection a priceless resource to enrich your understanding and experience of biblical truths. You will especially appreciate his latest book *More than a Prophet*—a book that has been long overdue and will do much to restore confidence in the validity of Ellen White's prophetic ministry.

SPECIAL INTRODUCTORY OFFER!!!

The special introductory offer until July 31 on the newly released CD album with Prof. Bradford's books and articles, is **ONLY \$35.00**, instead of the regular retail price of \$50.00. The price includes the mailing to any overseas destination.

Package offer for CD ALBUM and *MORE THAN A PROPHET*

The special package offer for both **PROF. BRADFORD'S CD ALBUM** and the book *MORE THAN A PROPHET*, is **ONLY \$50.00**, instead of the regular retail price of \$75.00. The price includes the mailing to any overseas destination.

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NEWLY RELEASED (MAY 1, 2006) CD-ROM WITH ALL OF PROF. JON PAULIEN PUBLICATIONS.

Prof. Jon Paulien is one of the most respected Adventist scholars. Besides serving as the chairman of the New Testament at Andrews University Theological Seminary, he writes and lectures extensively in many parts of the world.

Until now Prof. Paulien books and articles were available only in a printed form, often unavailable at local ABC stores. In view of my indebtedness to Prof. Paulien's scholarship, I have offered to help him to place all of his books and articles on a CD disk. This makes it possible with the ACROBAT global search, to locate immediately what he has written on biblical texts or current topics.

The new CD-ROM, released on May 1, 2006, contains more than a dozen of books and scores of articles written by Prof. Paulien during the past 20 years of research. You will find in this collection a priceless resource to enrich your understanding and experience of biblical truths. Prof. Paulien examines fundamental biblical beliefs in a profound and yet popular way. He is a recognized expert on the book of Revelation. Several of his books will help you to unlock the secrets of Revelation.

The special introductory offer of the newly released CD-ROM ALBUM with all of Prof. Paulien books and articles is only \$35.00 instead of the regular price of \$50.00. The price includes the airmailing expenses to any overseas destination.

To order the newly released CD ALBUM with all of Prof. Paulien books and articles, simply click here: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/PaulienAD/>

If you have a problem ordering online, email us your order at [<sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com>](mailto:sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com), giving us your address, credit card number, and expiration date. You can also order by phone, calling us at (269) 471-2915. We will take your order by phone.

SPECIAL OFFER ON THE NEW DVD ALBUM ON THE MARK AND NUMBER OF THE BEAST

The DVD album consists of two disks which contain the live recording that was done at the Andrews University Towers Auditorium on Wednesday, February 1, 2006. The marathon lecture lasted over two hours and was delivered with the help of 175 powerpoint slides. The lecture was introduced by Prof. Jon Paulien and Prof. Ranko Stefanovich, two foremost Adventist experts on the book of Revelation.

You will be thrilled by this passionate lecture that will help you understand what the mark and number of the beast are all about. This prophecy is not about external markings, barcodes, biochips, or pope's titles, but rather about the internal control of the mind of every human being. It is a battle over who will people worship: the true God or Satan. This visual presentation will help you to see the role of the Sabbath in the battle over worship in the endtime showdown.

At the end of the second DVD disk, there is a separate powerpoint file with all the 195 slides and accompanying script. This should prove to be a valuable resource for evangelists, pastors, and anyone engaged in sharing the prophetic message of Revelation. They can use some of the stunning pictures for their own presentation.

How to Order the DVD Album

The special offer on the DVD Album on *The Mark and Number of the Beast*, is only \$35.00, instead of \$100.00. The airmailing expenses to any foreign country are included in the special price. This special offer is only for the month of May.

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(3) Email: By emailing your order to <sbacchicchi@biblicalperspectives.com>. Be sure to provide your postal address, credit card number, and expiration date.

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SPECIAL OFFER ON THE 5 ALBUMS CONTAINING ALL OF DR. BACCHIOCCHI'S PUBLICATIONS AND RECORDINGS

In occasion of the release of the new DVD album on *The Mark and Number of the Beast*, I am pleased to offer you **the complete package of all my DVD and CD recordings, consisting of 5 Albums for only \$100.00**, instead of the regular price of \$500.00. This is a one-time incredible offer.

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SPECIAL OFFER ON PROF. JON PAULIEN'S 5 CD-ROM ALBUMS, called The Bible Explorer Series on Revelation.

The book of Revelation has both delighted and frustrated readers ever since it was written. Sensational but senseless interpretations of the book abound. In this unique package consisting of 120 lectures professionally recorded in 60 CD disks, Prof. Jon Paulien guides you through a verse by verse study of the intriguing messages of Revelation.

Prof. Paulien is rightly regarded inside and outside the Adventist community, as a foremost authority in Johannine literature, especially the book of Revelation. Students have told me that listening to his lectures, is a mind-opening experience. Personally I esteem Prof. Paulien as the leading Adventist authority on the prophetic books of the Bible.

If you wish that you could go back to school and seat in Prof. Paulien classes, I have good news for you. You do not need to worry about your age or your financial limitations. You do not even need to enroll at Andrews University and spend thousands of dollars of tuition to benefit from Prof. Paulien's instruction.

All what you need to do is simply to order his 120 lectures which have been professionally recorded and packaged in **FIVE ALBUMS, EACH CONTAINING 12 CD-ROMs, for a total of 60 CD-ROMs.** The set is called *The Bible Explorer Series on Revelation* and takes you verse by verse through the whole book of Revelation. These lectures are the equivalent of four Seminary courses (about \$2000.00 of tuition), yet they are presented in a way that lay people can understand. Each lecture concludes with spiritual lessons for everyday life.

To express my appreciation for the contribution that Prof. Paulien has made to the understanding of Revelation, I am promoting and distributing his *The Bible Explorer Series on Revelation* consisting of 5 albums with a total of 60 CD-ROMs, as **a free service without any commission.** I have offered my service to facilitate the purchase of this timely set of 120 lectures through the shopping cart at my website: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/paulien/>

Your special offer for the complete *The Bible Explorer Series on Revelation* consisting of 5 albums with a total of 60 CD disks, is only \$175.00, airmailing expenses included to any domestic or oversea destination. You can order the package in four ways:

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