

GODHEAD

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GRINETY

**TRINITY**

# Godhead or Trinity?

There has been a noticeable shift from a past preference for the word Godhead to the more modern usage of the term Trinity within the parlance of the Seventh-day Adventist community.

Godhead is now considered by many as an alternate term for Trinity. A timely example of this can be seen in the current issue of Adventist World NAD edition for June, 2012 on page 22, "Number 2: Distinct—but Indivisible" by Daniel K. Bediako. He writes, "At the center of this doctrine is the concept of **the Trinity, or the Godhead**, by which is meant that God is one in essence but three in person."


Mario Petrovalle, moderator and site supervisor for the E-ventist LinkedIn professional networking community, invited Dr. Gary Hullquist, an Informatics researcher and third generation Adventist in Atlanta, Georgia, to investigate how our original usage of Godhead was changed to that of Trinity. This was brought to Mario's attention by the obvious change in wording of the Fundamental Belief titles between the 27 and 28 Fundamental Beliefs now prominent on the official world church website at [www.adventist.org](http://www.adventist.org).

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

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## Fundamental Beliefs





Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church's understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word.

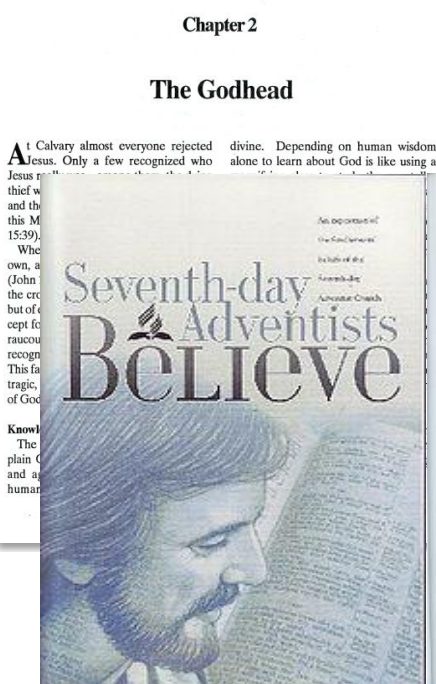
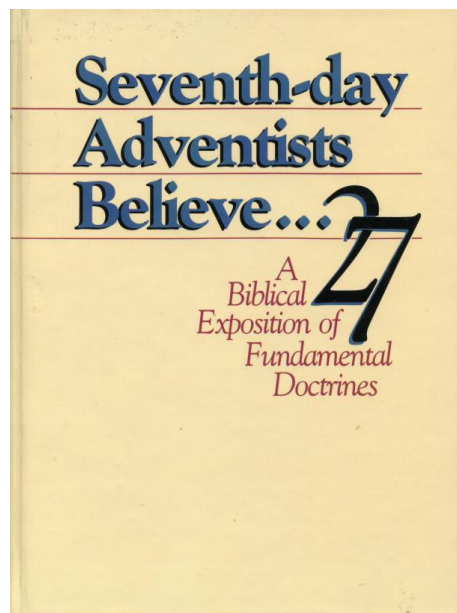
### 1. Holy Scriptures:

The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history. (2 Peter 1:20, 21; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 4:12.)

### 2. Trinity:

There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons. God is immortal, all-

Why does the current title on the website read, "Trinity" when the 1988 and 2005 editions of the book, "Seventh-day Adventists Believe..." published by the Ministerial Department of the General Conference, print Fundamental Belief No. 2 as "The Godhead" ?



The question is whether this is simply a technical lapse which could be easily corrected by editing the website or whether it is an intentional decision to redirect the language of the Fundamentals without official authorization.

The acceptance of either term actually had its beginning 100 years ago just two years before the death of Ellen White, who amazingly never used the term "Trinity" in any of the 25 million words which she generated. Of equal interest is the fact that she also never used the terms "triune," "co-equal," "co-eternal," "God the Son," nor "God the Holy Spirit." For over forty years—until 1914—the church maintained the same position on the doctrine of God in its Fundamental "Principles."

### 1872/1874 Fundamental Principles

Credited to both Uriah Smith (1872 pamphlet "Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by Seventh-day Adventists") and James White (*Signs of the Times* June 4, 1874) the original 25 Principles were based on 1Corinthians 8:6 and contained neither term, Godhead nor Trinity.



1. 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.
2. 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

1Cor 8:6 "There is one God the Father of whom are all things... and one Lord Jesus Christ by whom are all things..."

## FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS.

As elsewhere stated, Seventh-day Adventists have no creed but the Bible; but they hold to certain well-defined points of faith, for which they feel prepared to give a reason "to every man that asketh" them. The following propositions may be taken as a summary of the principal features of their religious faith, upon which there is, so far as we know, entire unanimity throughout the body. They believe, —

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 he 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, through the merits of his shed blood, he secures the pardon and forgiveness of the sins of all those who penitently come to him; and as the closing portion of his work as priest, before he takes his throne as king, he will make the great atonement for the sins of all such, and their sins will then be blotted out (Acts 3:19) and borne away from the sanctuary, as shown in the service of the Levitical priesthood, which foreshadowed and prefigured the ministry of our Lord in heaven. See Lev. 16; Heb. 8:4, 5; 9:6, 7; etc.\*



The August 22, 1912 issue of the *Review and Herald* again reprinted the original Principles on page 4 with the first two unchanged—"one God" and "one Lord."

For forty years the Principles had remained unchanged.

"The past fifty years have not dimmed one jot or principle of our faith as we received...Not a word is changed or denied," Ellen White wrote in Letter 326, Dec. 4, 1905; *The Upward Look* p. 352.4. But that was about to change.

1889, 1905-1914 SDA Yearbook

The Fundamental Principles were revised to 28 sections leaving the first two on the doctrine of God unchanged as shown here in its appearance in the 1889 Year Book.

It remained unchanged during its reprinting from 1905-1914.

### Fundamental Principles of Seventh-Day Adventists

BY THE LATE URIAH SMITH

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS have no creed but the Bible; but they hold to certain well-defined points of faith, for which they feel prepared to give a reason "to every man that asketh" them. The following propositions may be taken as a summary of the principal features of their religious faith, upon which there is, so far as is known, entire unanimity throughout the body. They believe,—

1. 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.

2. That there is one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Eternal Father, the one by whom he 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 ex-



name is their watchword, their badge of distinction, their bond of union, the authority for their course of action, and the source of their success. Nothing that does not bear his superscription is to be recognized in his kingdom.

The first disciples went forth preaching the word. They revealed Christ in their lives; and the Lord worked with them, "confirming the word with signs following." These disciples prepared themselves for their work. Before the day of Pentecost they met together, and put away all differences. They were of one accord. They believed Christ's promise that the blessing would be given, and they prayed in faith. They did not ask for a blessing for themselves merely; they were weighted with the burden for the salvation of souls. The gospel was to be carried to the uttermost parts of the earth, and they claimed the endowment of power that Christ had promised. Then it was that the Holy Spirit was poured out, and thousands were converted in a day.

The Saviour longs to manifest his grace and stamp his character on the whole world. It is his purchased possession, and he desires to make men free, and pure, and holy. Though Satan works to hinder this purpose, yet through the blood shed for the world there are triumphs to be achieved that will bring glory to God and the Lamb. Christ will not be satisfied till the victory is complete, and "he shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied."

MRS. E. G. WHITE.

### The Message for Today

THE Christian church has passed through many crises in its history. Through the ages it has stood as the conservator of the

We have reached a period in the history of the church and of the world when, according to the prophecies of the Scripture, the time has come for another great religious awakening. Another message is due the church and the world,—the message of the second coming of the Lord and Saviour to this earth.

This earth's history is soon to close. Fulfilling prophecy and signs—conditions existing in the social, political, industrial, and religious worlds—plainly indicate that a time has been reached when events of a significant, startling, and most stupendous character are about to take place; that the long reign of sin is soon to be cut short; and that the generation now living will witness the appearing of Christ in the clouds of heaven. The message based upon these fulfilling prophecies and signs is now being proclaimed. To the advocacy of this message the people represented by this movement have devoted their lives and their fortunes.

For the benefit of those who may desire to know more particularly the cardinal features of the faith held by this denomination, we shall state that Seventh-day Adventists believe,—

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

2. That the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by the inspiration of God, and contain a full

the recreative agency of the Holy Spirit.

7. That the will of God for his children is comprehended in the law of the ten commandments, and that these are great moral, unchangeable precepts binding upon the children of God in every age of the church.

8. That through the new covenant relationship the Spirit of Christ writes this law upon the heart, and in this way only can its precepts find expression in the life in sincere, faithful obedience.

9. That the fourth commandment of this unchangeable law requires the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, an institution which was established and ordained in the garden of Eden before man sinned, embodied in the great law of moral precepts spoken from Mt. Sinai, observed by prophet and priest throughout the old dispensation, kept by Christ and his apostles in the Christian dispensation, and given to mankind in every age to keep alive in their hearts the knowledge of its Author, the Creator of all things.

10. That Christian temperance embraces the proper use of that which is good, and total abstinence from all that is bad. That the liquor traffic, being only evil, should be prohibited by appropriate legislation.

11. That the church and the state occupy different spheres of operation, the former dealing with questions of a religious character, the sphere of the latter pertaining alone to questions of a civil character. The church and the state should therefore be kept forever separate.

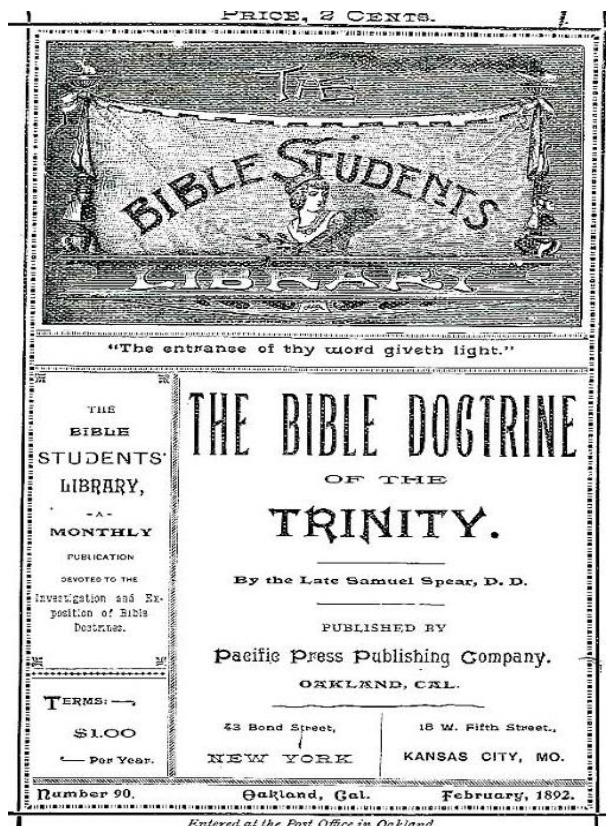
12. That the Scriptural means for the support of Christian evangelical work in the earth is by the payment of one tenth of the regular income, and by free-will offerings from the thankful, grateful children of God.

13. That man possesses a nature inherently sinful and dying; that eternal life and immortality come only through

Though frequently overlooked, Dr. Hullquist (as have others) found the first replacement to the Fundamental Principles in this 1913 issue of the *Review and Herald*. Review Editor Francis McClellan Wilcox slipped in his own personal revision in an article entitled, "The Message for Today." It focuses on the message that is to "go to the world" which, he writes, is "the message of the second coming of the Lord and Saviour to this earth." He then suddenly introduces ("for the benefit of those who may desire to know more particularly the cardinal features of the faith held by this denomination") his own version of the Fundamentals now totaling only 15 in number.

Wilcox begins by stating that Seventh-day Adventists believe in "the divine Trinity" which "consists of the eternal Father", "the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the eternal Father" and "the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead" which set the stage for making the Godhead (a term exclusively used by Ellen White) equivalent with Wilcox's "divine Trinity," a word which (as we already noted) was never employed by the Messenger of the Lord nor the Bible.

The term Trinity had been used in print twice before in a positive way. In 1891 the *Signs of the Times* reprinted Presbyterian minister Samuel Spear's article from the NY *Independent*, originally entitled "The Subordination of Christ" over two issues in December of that year and the following year incorporated it into the *Bible Student's Library* as tract no. 90 under the title, "The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity."



## The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity.\*

BY THE LATE SAMUEL T. SPEAR, D. D.

THE Bible, while not giving a metaphysical definition of the spiritual *unity* of God, teaches His essential *oneness* in opposition to all forms of polytheism, and also assumes man's capacity to apprehend the idea sufficiently for all the purposes of worship and obedience. John 17:3; 1 Cor. 8:6. The same Bible as clearly teaches that the adorable Person therein known as Jesus Christ, when considered in his *whole* nature, is truly divine and truly God in the most absolute sense. John 1:1-18; 1 John 5:20; Rom. 1:3, 4; 9:5; Titus 2:13.

There is, however, a sense in which the Christ of the Bible, while essentially divine, is, nevertheless, in some respects *distinct* from and *subordinate* to God the Father. He is spoken of, and frequently speaks of Himself, as the Son of God, as the only-begotten of the Father, as being sent by God the Father into this world, and as doing the will of the Father. He is never con-

\*From the N. Y. *Independent* of November 14, 1889, by permission of the publishers.

(3)

In recent years this tract has been popularized as an example of Adventism's acceptance of the Trinity. "...a Trinitarian article..." Erwin Gane, 1963. "Thus the truth of the Trinity was set forth in tract form..." LeRoy Froom, 1971. "...pioneering Adventism first endorsed basic Trinitarianism in 1892 by publishing Dr. Samuel Spear's Trinitarian article..." Derrick Gillespie, 2010.

An honest examination of Spear's writing will reveal that he begins with John 17:3 and 1 Cor 8:6 against which all other texts must be harmonized including the Bible truth that, while Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten of the Father, though "essentially divine, is nevertheless, in some respects distinct from and subordinate to God the Father." Spear includes such texts as 1 Cor. 3:23 "Christ is God's" and 1 Cor. 11:3 "the head of Christ is God." This he recognizes as the true Godhead.

The second time that the term Trinity was used in a positive sense, was in the December 26, 1892 issue of the *Signs*. Elder William Covert's article, "Union of the Believer with Christ," noted that the prayer of Christ in John 17 featured "a triple union, or Christian trinity" in which "Christ forms the link which unites the believer to the Father." Jesus said to his Father, "I in them, and Thou in me...that the love wherewith Thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." John 17:23,26.



### Triple Union or Christian Trinity

So, why did the *Review* editor feel compelled in 1913 to associate the word "Trinity" for the first time with a more formalized listing of "the cardinal features" of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs? There is compelling evidence that Dudley Canright played a part in motivating Francis Wilcox.

Francis' brother, M.C. Wilcox wrote an article in the April 8 issue of *Signs of the Times* denouncing Canright's apostasy and claims against the church he once upheld.

But the real impetus was a book published that year by Moody Institute's James Gray.

# BIBLE PROBLEMS EXPLAINED

By JAMES M. GRAY, D.D.  
DEAN OF THE MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

Author of "How to Master the English Bible," "Synthetic Bible Studies," "Primers of the Faith," "The Antidote to Christian Science," "Satan and the Saint," "Great Epochs of Sacred History," "Salvation from Start to Finish," "Progress in the Life to Come," etc.

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THE BIBLE INSTITUTE COLPORTAGE ASSOCIATION  
of Chicago

**Please summarize the doctrine of Seventh-Day Adventism, especially concerning Christ, the resurrection, and the judgment.**

The Seventh-Day Adventists believe in the Bible, in conversion, in purity of life, and in other good things common to all churches, but they reject the doctrine of the Trinity, which involves the Deity of Christ, though this is not stated. They believe that the end of the world

Interestingly, that same summer Canright met with Adventist leaders. What was discussed is not known but what transpired following is a matter of history.



MOUNTAIN VIEW, CALIFORNIA, APRIL 8, 1913

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## Garbled Statements of Facts

He perhaps tells us truly what he believed once, but he does not rightly represent the denomination. For instance, he declares that among the chief doctrinal points of Seventh-day Adventists are "rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity; materiality of all things; that the Bible must be interpreted to harmonize with the writings of

James Gray was the Walter Martin of his time, exposing the unorthodox and identifying the non-Christian sects. Until 1913 he included Seventh-day Adventists on his list of theological misfits.

On page 81 Gray echoed Canright's claim that Adventists denied the Trinity which he tied to the divinity of Christ.

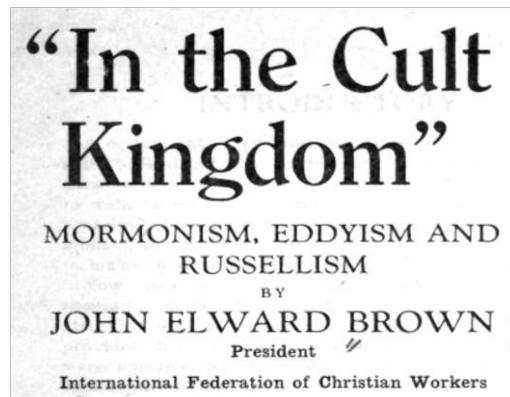
Wilcox, like LeRoy Froom 40 years later, responded by intentionally including the word "Trinity" in his October 9 article.

Canright met with church leaders during the summer of 1913. In a letter to J.H. Morrison, dated June 25, 1913, he wrote, "I have just spent two weeks in Battle Creek, attending all their meetings and having long visits with ministers, brethren and sisters."

Carrie Shasky-Johnson, *I Was Canright's Secretary* p. 104.



Canright removed his reference to the Trinity in the following year's edition of his book, "Adventism Renounced." Four years later, another pre-Walter Martin cult buster, John Elward Brown, recognized Seventh-day Adventism among the community of Evangelicals in good and regular standing. His book's title is eerily similar to Martin's "Kingdom of the Cults."



On all the cardinal doctrines of the Bible—the Miraculous Conception, and the Virgin Birth, the Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension, the Deity of Christ, the Atonement of Christ, and the Second Coming, the Personality of the Holy Spirit, and the Infallible Bible, the Seventh-Day Adventist rings as true as steel.

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A generation later Froom, Anderson, Unruh and Reed also would bend under the pressure of Evangelical disapproval. Meanwhile, Wilcox and church statistician Edson Rogers decided it was time to put once again in print a "more suitable" statement of beliefs. (Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, 1971 p. 418)

1931 SDA Yearbook p. 377

## FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

Seventh-day Adventists hold certain fundamental beliefs, the principal features of which, together with a portion of the scriptural references upon which they are based, may be summarized as follows:

1. That the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God, contain an all-sufficient revelation of His will to men, and are the only unerring rule of faith and practice. 2 Tim. 3:15-17.

2. 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.

3. That Jesus Christ is very God, being of the same nature and essence as the Eternal Father. While retaining His divine nature He took upon Himself the nature of the human family, lived on the earth as a man, exemplified in His life as our Example the principles of righteousness, attested His relationship to God by many mighty miracles, died for our sins on the cross, was raised from the dead, and ascended to the Father, where He ever lives to make intercession for us. John 1:1, 14; Heb. 2:9-18; 8:1, 2; 4:14-16; 7:25.



Wilcox's 1913 version, now described as 22 "Fundamental Beliefs," was placed into the 1931 yearbook, as shown above, on page 377 with the first two beliefs virtually unchanged. With a little rearranging the second point now speaks of the "Godhead, or Trinity" thus blurring the distinction even further.

Then in the 1883 *Review & Herald* (November 20 issue), G. I. Butler announced...

## THE REVIEW AND HERALD.

that it would not be advisable to have a Church Manual. We consider it unnecessary because we have already surmounted the greatest difficulties connected with church organization without one; and perfect harmony exists among us on this subject. It would seem to many like a step toward the formation of a creed, or a discipline, other than the Bible, something we have always been opposed to as a denomination. If we had one, we fear many, especially those commencing to preach, would study it to obtain guidance in religious matters, rather than to seek for it in the Bible, and from the leadings of the Spirit of God, which would tend to their hindrance in genuine religious experience and in knowledge of the

Butler ended his report by confidently laying the issue of a church manual to rest.

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vails throughout the body. The difficulties before us, so far as organization is concerned, are far less than those we have had in the past. We have preserved simplicity, and have prospered in so doing. It is best to let well enough alone. For these and other reasons, the church manual was rejected. It is probable it will never be brought forward again. GEO. I. BUTLER.

But, despite Butler's prediction, in 1932 the church did produce its first Church Manual.

### 1932 Church Manual

On page 180 the Fundamental Beliefs from the 1931 Yearbook appeared for the first time in what appeared to be an official church authorized document. But no vote had been made, no committee action had occurred.

## Section XI—Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS hold certain fundamental beliefs, the principal features of which, together with a portion of the Scriptural references upon which they are based, may be summarized as follows:

1. That the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God, contain an all-sufficient revelation of His will to men, and are the only unerring rule of faith and practice. 2 Tim. 3: 15-17.

2. 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.

"realizing that the General Conference Committee—or any other church body — would **never accept the document in the form in which it was written**, Elder Wilcox, with full knowledge of the group, [Wilcox, Rogers, M.E. Kern, E.R. Palmer] handed the Statement **directly** to Edson Rogers, the General Conference statistician, who published it in the 1931 edition." Gottfried Oosterwal, "The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Mission: 1919-1979" quoted by Lawrence Geraty, "A New Statement of Fundamental Beliefs," *Spectrum* 11/1 (July 1980).

## 1936 Sabbath School Lessons

Lesson 4 for October 24 that year featured both terms.

### The Trinity

**3. What three powers wrought in the work of creation? Eph. 3:9; John 1:3; Gen. 1:2.**

**NOTE.**—These scriptures make it plain that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit wrought together in creation. God “created all things by Jesus Christ,” and “the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters” in bringing order out of chaos.

### Unity of the Godhead

**12. How is the work of the Son related to that of the Father? John 8:28; 5:19; 14:31.**

**NOTE.**—Here it is twice stated that the Son can do nothing of Himself, but that He speaks what the Father gives Him to speak, does what the Father does, and obeys the Father’s commands.

When addressing the Deity and Pre-existence of Christ, the lesson makes the following interesting observations:

**7. What testimony concerning His deity did Christ Himself give? John 16:27, 28; 8:58.**

**NOTE.**—The direct statement of Jesus, “I came forth from the Father,” reads literally, “I came out of the Father.” Putting with this, His testimony in John 10:38, “The Father is in Me, and I in Him,” we have His personal witness that He truly was “begotten of the Father,” as John says in 1:14.

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**NOTE.**—Cumulative evidence that the Son existed with the Father before creation is abundant in the Scriptures. In the few passages we have studied here, we find that Christ was with the Father “before the world was,” “from the days of eternity,” “before the foundation of the world,” “before all things.” He was therefore no part of creation, but was “begotten of the Father” in the days of eternity, and was very God Himself.

The church was still subscribing to the belief that Christ was in His pre-existence the literal Son of God, begotten of the Father, and thus by inheritance “very God Himself” in nature.

## 1942 Church Manual

A Summary of Fundamental Beliefs was approved by the General Conference Annual Council October, 1941 for inclusion in the 1942 Church Manual along with a revised Baptismal Vow.

October 27, 1941

Summary of Fundamental Beliefs

The following is a brief summary of the fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists, together with some of the Scriptural references upon which they are based:

1. The true and living God, the First Person of the Godhead, is our heavenly Father, and by His Son, Christ Jesus, created all things. Matt. 28:18,19; 1 Cor. 8:5,6; Eph. 3:9; Jer. 10:10-12; Heb. 1:1-3; Acts 17:22-29; Col. 1:16-18.
2. Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Godhead, and the eternal Son of God, is the only Saviour from sin; and man's salvation is by grace through faith in Him. Matt. 28:18,19; John 3:16; Micah 5:2; cf. Matt. 1:21; 2:5,6; Acts 4:12; 1 John 5:11,12; Eph. 1:9-15; 2:4-8; Rom. 3:23-26.
3. The Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Godhead, is Christ's representative on earth, and leads sinners to repentance and to obedience of all God's requirements. Matt. 28:18,19; John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-16; Rom. 8:1-10; Eph. 4:30.

This "Summary" appeared on pages 80-86 buried in the section on Church Membership.

*Church Membership*

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day Adventists, together with some of the Scriptural references upon which they are based:

1. The true and living God, the first person of the Godhead, is our heavenly Father, and He, by His Son, Christ Jesus, created all things. Matt. 28:18, 19; 1 Cor. 8:5, 6; Eph. 3:9; Jer. 10:10-12; Heb. 1:1-3; Acts 17:22-29; Col. 1:16-18.
2. Jesus Christ, the second person of the Godhead, and the eternal Son of God, is the only Saviour from sin; and man's salvation is by grace through faith in Him. Matt. 28:18, 19; John 3:16; Micah 5:2. Cf. Matt. 1:21; 2:5, 6; Acts 4:12; 1 John 5:11, 12; Eph. 1:9-15; 2:4-8; Rom. 3:23-26.

This new summary was quite different from Wilcox's Fundamentals. It used "Godhead" and did not mention the word "Trinity." While the Wilcox listing offered but few supporting texts, the summary provided an abundance including important ones like 1Cor 8:6, Heb 1:1-3, Micah 5:2 which were frequently quoted by Adventist pioneers.

This was immediately followed by the approved Baptismal Vow on page 86.

*Baptismal Vow.*—The following questions should be answered in the affirmative before the church by candidates for baptism:

1. Do you believe in God the Father, in His Son Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit?



## Section XI—Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS hold certain fundamental beliefs, the principal features of which, together with a portion of the Scriptural references upon which they are based, may be summarized as follows:

1. That the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God, contain an all-sufficient revelation of His will to men, and are the only unerring rule of faith and practice. 2 Tim. 3:15-17.

2. 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.

3. That Jesus Christ is very God, being of the same nature and essence as the Eternal Father. While retaining His divine nature, He took upon Himself the nature of the human family, lived on the earth as a man, exemplified in His life as our example the principles of righteousness, attested His relationship to God by many mighty miracles, died for our sins on the cross, was raised from the dead, and ascended to the Father, where He ever lives to make intercession for us. John 1:1, 14; Heb. 2:9-18; 8:1, 2; 4:14-16; 7:25.

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However, on pages 192-196 the original 1931 Fundamental Beliefs was also published in the back of the book.

So, we see that in 1942 there were three versions of a belief in God, ranging from the heavenly Father described as simply "God the Father" to the "true and living God, the first person of the Godhead" with supporting scriptures including 1 Corinthians 8:6, to "the Eternal Father," a constituent of "the Godhead, or Trinity."

It would appear that the newly added "Summary" was an attempt by someone or some group to express the Doctrine of God only in terms of "the Godhead." But support for "the Trinity" was such that a compromise was reached in which both were published in the Church Manual.

### 1946 General Conference session

On June 13, 1946, at a General Conference session, the following action was taken:

That the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs now found in Section XI [of the *Church Manual*], be placed at the beginning of the *Manual* as Section I.

That no revision of this Statement of Fundamental Beliefs, as it now appears in the *Manual*, shall be made at any time except at a General Conference session.

This vote provided the legal basis for the formal action of the General Conference when it accepted the new statement in 1980.

### 1957 Questions on Doctrine

The Wilcox Fundamentals were perpetuated in this widely distributed and controversial publication.

"2. That the Godhead, the Trinity, comprises God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit."

## 1980 General Conference session

27 Fundamental Beliefs officially voted by the World church in session.

A preview of the proposed beliefs appeared in the Feb 21 issue of the Adventist Review on page 8.

### Fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists

#### About this statement on doctrines

The Statement of Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists as published in the Church Manual and the Yearbook is an endeavor to set forth in perspective the doctrines that the Seventh-day Adventist Church holds. It is not intended as a creed, but, as the introduction to the statement affirms, as a way in which the church's beliefs may be summarized.

For a number of years there has been a growing feeling among church members and leaders that these beliefs should be restated so that they may be expressed more clearly and that certain points of faith not now covered should be included. For more than a year a group appointed by the General Conference has worked on this matter. Its members have taken wide counsel within the church and have been assisted by a group of scholars at the SDA Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

The statement of beliefs drawn up was pre-

sented to the 1979 Annual Council, which voted that the revision statement be recommended to the General Conference session in Dallas in April, 1980. The statement as adopted by the Annual Council appears below. We urgently invite church members to consider it carefully and to send comments or suggestions, if they have any, to W. Duncan Box 9840 Eastern Avenue NW, Washington, D.C. 20012.

In the meantime, to assure that delegates to the General Conference session at Dallas are informed, copies of the recommended statement incorporating suggestions received from the world field thus far will be mailed to delegates at least six weeks before the session convenes.

In harmony with the accepted practice of the church and as required by the Church Manual, changes in the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs must be adopted by the General Conference in session.—Editors.

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#### 6. Creation

That God, through Christ and by the power of His Spirit, is creator of all things, and has revealed in Scripture the only authentic account of His creative activity. In six days the Lord made "the heavens and the earth" and all living things upon the earth, and rested on the seventh day of that first week. Thus He established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of His completed creative work. The first man and woman were made in the image of God as the crowning work of creation, given dominion over the world, and charged with responsibility to care for it. When the world was finished it was "very good," declaring the glory of God. (Gen. 1-3; Ex. 20:8-11; Ps. 19:1-6; 33:6-9; John 1:1-3; Col. 1:16, 17.)

#### 7. The Nature of Man

That man and woman were made in the image of God and endowed with powers akin to those of their Creator. Created for the glory of God, they are called to love Him and one another, and to care for their environment. Though created free beings, they are dependent upon God for life and breath and all else. When our first parents denied their creatureliness and disobeyed, they fell from their high position under God, causing all of us to be born in sin. The image of God was distorted, affecting our whole being and existence and making us subjects of death. But God as Christ has reconciled us to Himself and by His Spirit is restoring in us the image of our Maker. (Gen. 1:26-28; Ps. 4:4-8; Acts 17:24-28; Gen. 3; Rom. 5:12-17.)

#### 8. The Great Controversy

That all things involved in a great controversy between God and Satan regarding the character of God's sovereignty over the universe. This conflict originated in heaven when in self-exaltation God's adversary, himself a created being, led into rebellion many of the angels whom God had created. He introduced the spirit of rebellion into the world when he led Adam and Eve into sin by deceiving them in the Garden of Eden. This human sin resulted in the distortion of the image of God in man, the disordering of the created world, and its eventual desecration at the time of the Flood. Grieved by the whole creation, this world became the arena of the universal conflict, in which the love of God will ultimately be vindicated. As a help to us in this controversy, God sends the angels who remained loyal to Him to guide, protect, and sustain us in the way of salvation. (Rev. 12:4-9; Gen. 3:6-8; 2 Pet. 3:6; Rom. 1:19-32; 5:12-21; 22:20.)

#### 9. God the Holy Spirit

That God the eternal Spirit was active with the Father and the Son in creation, incarnation, and redemption. He in-

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Seventh-day Adventists hold certain doctrines to be the evident teaching of the Holy Scriptures. Affirming that the Bible sets forth a coherent body of truth, we believe:

#### 1. The Holy Scriptures

That the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through "holy men of God" who spoke and wrote as they were "moved by the Holy Spirit." These Scriptures are the all-sufficient, authoritative, and effective revelation of His gracious purpose and will. They are the source of all true doctrine and the only unerring standard of faith and practice. (2 Pet. 1:20, 21; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 10:35; 1 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 4:12.)

#### 2. The Trinity

That there is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a self-existing Unity in Trinity. God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, transcendent and immanent, the absolute Reality whose infinite and personal being is a mystery forever beyond human comprehension. (Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Pet. 1:2; 1 Tim. 1:17; Rev. 14:6, 7.)

#### 3. God the Father

That God the eternal Father is the Creator, the ultimate Source, Sustainer, and Sovereign of all that is. He is infinite (192)

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That the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through "holy men of God" who spoke and wrote as they were "moved by the Holy Spirit." These Scriptures are the all-sufficient, authoritative, and effective revelation of His gracious purpose and will. They are the source of all true doctrine and the only unerring standard of faith and practice. (2 Pet. 1:20, 21; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 10:35; 1 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 4:12.)

#### 2. The Trinity

That there is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a self-existing Unity in Trinity. God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, transcendent and immanent, the absolute Reality whose infinite and personal being is a mystery forever beyond human comprehension. (Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Pet. 1:2; 1 Tim. 1:17; Rev. 14:6, 7.)

#### 3. God the Father

That God the eternal Father is the Creator, the ultimate Source, Sustainer, and Sovereign of all that is. He is infinite (192)

NEAL C. WILSON: For some time we have been considering a refinement of our Statement on Fundamental Beliefs. I think you have that document in your hands. No doubt you have done both some studying and some praying.

We have heard a variety of interesting rumors. Some, it is said, understand that the church leaders want to destroy completely the foundations of the church and set the church on a course that would be un-Biblical, contrary to the tradition of the past and to historical Adventism. My fellow delegates, there is nothing that is further from the truth.

We have also heard that any time we touch the Statement on Fundamental Beliefs we would be introducing the Omega, the final confusion of theological and doctrinal positions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I suggest to you that this is also a very unfortunate statement.

I can understand how individuals far removed from where some of these things are being studied, and who may not themselves have been asked to participate in a restudy or refinement of wording, might feel that there is something very sinister, mysterious, and secret going on that they suddenly confront us, and that it may contribute to the ultimate detriment and demise of the Seventh-day Adventist

ADVENTIST REVIEW, APRIL 23, 1980

Church. My fellow delegates, I assure you that no one who has been struggling with some of these matters has any such intention.

# Fifteenth business meeting

Fifty-third General Conference session  
April 25, 1980, 1:30 P.M.

## Session proceedings

W. C. SCALES: We welcome each of you to the afternoon business session. The opening prayer will be offered by L. Litchfield, pastor of the Southampton, England, church. The benediction will be offered by Ray Glen, a student at Weimar Institute.

L. LITCHFIELD: [Offered the opening prayer.]

W. C. SCALES: At this time, we will turn the service over to our beloved president of the General Conference, Elder Neal C. Wilson.

NEAL C. WILSON: Let us come back to our Statement of Fundamental Beliefs. I hope you remember that we are not really seeking what wording you would prefer, but rather a consensus

I would now like to know how close together we are. I ask you again: In your judgment, does this ring true to the gospel in the setting of the three angels' messages, and does it represent the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as you know and believe them?

This is *not* a vote—Will those who do feel that it fairly represents the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church please express that by raising your hands? [Many hands were raised.]

Thank you very much.

Those of you who feel that you cannot accept this as an expression of the fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists, may we see your hands? [Very few hands were raised.]

The response is overwhelmingly favorable, with the exception of maybe a half-dozen pre-

sonally believe that Christ did begin the first-apartment phase of His ministry in heaven when He ascended. But great care must be taken in this wording, because Ellen White does say very clearly that when Christ ascended to heaven He did go also into the Most Holy Place, as well as the holy place. A careful study of these concepts, and particularly of Hebrews 9, reveals that it is talking there about the dedication, among other things, of the heavenly sanctuary. When Hebrews uses the example of the sprinkling of the different pieces of furniture in the earthly sanctuary and applies it to the heavenly, it is not referring only to a first-apartment ministry but to the whole heavenly sanctuary. Our committee noted those statements, and the very illuminatory statements of Ellen White. We have worded this article very carefully so that it does not exclude either or any of those concepts that, we understand, happened when Christ ascended to heaven. I hesitate to see us tie this down to just one aspect. And I wish we could keep the wording that we have here.

NEAL C. WILSON: May I see the hands of those who would rather see the word *believing* instead of *baptized*? [Many hands.] Let me see the hands of those who would rather have the word *baptized*. [A few hands.] I accept this show of hands as an indication of the preference of this body. There is no point in discussing it or debating it further at this time.

HAROLD E. METCALF: Brother Chairman, I have another observation about Article 23, "Christ's Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary." Here again the committee has done a tremendous job. However, this is one of our fundamental beliefs that ought not to be tampered with. I suggest an addition to the third sentence, which reads, "He was inaugurated as our great High Priest and began His intercessory ministry at the time of His ascension," of the following words, "which had been pre-

sonally believe that Christ did begin the first-apartment phase of His ministry in heaven when He ascended. But great care must be taken in this wording, because Ellen White does say very clearly that when Christ ascended to heaven He did go also into the Most Holy Place, as well as the holy place. A careful study of these concepts, and particularly of Hebrews 9, reveals that it is talking there about the dedication, among other things, of the heavenly sanctuary. When Hebrews uses the example of the sprinkling of the different pieces of furniture in the earthly sanctuary and applies it to the heavenly, it is not referring only to a first-apartment ministry but to the whole heavenly sanctuary. Our committee noted those statements, and the very illuminatory statements of Ellen White. We have worded this article very carefully so that it does not exclude either or any of those concepts that, we understand, happened when Christ ascended to heaven. I hesitate to see us tie this down to just one aspect. And I wish we could keep the wording that we have here.

NEAL C. WILSON: We will

On April 25, 1980 in the 15<sup>th</sup> Business Session a discussion over the choice of words, "Godhead" or "Trinity" arose. (Adventist Review, May 1, 1980 p. 20)

CHARLES UPSHAW: I have a question on Article 2, "The Trinity." I believe when we first studied the document the term was Godhead. My objection to the use of the word *Trinity* is the fact that in many Christian congregations it refers to one God and also means one person. Yet in our explanation we refer to three co-eternal persons, and in Article 13 we refer to a triune God. I would like to suggest that we either change the title to "The Godhead" or "The Triune Godhead."

W. DUNCAN EVA: We discussed this back and forth. We had both, and we did not like that. Now we have used one of them and this isn't popular. We had "Godhead" in the old *Manual* and we didn't like that. I think it would be better just to ask the folk to express what they would prefer. *Trinity* to me seems to be a perfectly good

word, even though we don't like some of its connotations. Many other words have connotations we are not happy with either.

RICHARD HAMMILL: We used the word *Godhead* here earlier because it was a Biblical term. When we really checked it in the Greek New Testament, we found it was not an accurate translation. The word that appears in the King James Version as *Godhead* is really *Deity*. Because it was not a Biblical term, we felt we should leave this word that is Biblical, as it is better understood in the Christian world at large.

Hammill's last sentence is startling. "Because it was not a Biblical term..." Godhead is not really a collective noun, but rather an attribute of Deity: divinity. "...we felt we should leave this word [Trinity] that is Biblical [but does not appear in Scripture], as it [Trinity] is better understood in the Christian world at large." The choice to express our belief in God was made on the basis of popular opinion.

NEAL C. WILSON:

[Requested an expression. No change was indicated.]



After further comments on Creation and the Three Angels messages it was time to end debate.

NEAL C. WILSON: Now I am going to do something that I dislike to do, but I feel I must in view of the fact some of our brethren have been charged with the responsibility of getting the equipment set up in the Grand Hall for tonight. **I will ask whether you feel you want to vote now, or discuss this longer. [The opinion expressed was to vote.]**

We had a motion, seconded by several, that we accept this as the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. May I suggest that we prayerfully study these great truths so that they will become very much a part of our lives, our homes, and our institutions.

**I will call for the vote. [The motion carried overwhelmingly.]** *ibid p. 22.*

The alternate “Summary” version for baptismal candidates could still be found in the 17<sup>th</sup> edition of the Church Manual (2005) on page 219.

#### APPENDIX

### Summary of Doctrinal Beliefs

This summary of doctrinal beliefs is especially prepared for the instruction of candidates for baptism. (See pp. 31-35.)

1. The true and living God, the first person of the Godhead, is our heavenly Father, and He, by His Son, Christ Jesus, created all things. (Matt. 28:18, 19; 1 Cor. 8:5, 6; Eph. 3:9; Jer. 10:10-12; Heb. 1:1-3; Acts 17:22-29; Col. 1:16-18.)

2. Jesus Christ, the second person of the Godhead, and the eternal Son of God, is the only Saviour from sin; and man’s salvation is by grace through faith in Him. (Matt. 28:18, 19; John 3:16; Micah 5:2; Matt. 1:21; 2:5, 6; Acts 4:12; 1 John 5:11, 12; Eph. 1:9-15; 2:4-8; Rom. 3:23-26.)

3. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, is Christ’s representative on earth, and leads sinners to repentance and to obedience of all God’s requirements. (Matt. 28:18, 19; John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-15; Rom. 8:1-10; Eph. 4:30.)

This “Summary” is not, in fact, a summary of the Fundamental Beliefs presented in chapter 3 of the manual on pages 9-19 (shown below).

Here, the Father is “the true and living God” (Jer 10:10; 1Thes 1:9) who “by” His Son (see 1Cor 8:5,6; Eph 3:9) made “all things” because the Father is the Source of all things. “Trinity” does not appear at all. Why is it called a Summary?

#### CHAPTER 3

### Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists

#### 2. *Trinity*

There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three coeternal Persons. God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. He is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation. (Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2; 1 Tim. 1:17; Rev. 14:7.)

#### 3. *Father*

God the eternal Father is the Creator, Source, Sustainer, and Sovereign of all creation. He is just and holy, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. The qualities

In the 17<sup>th</sup> Edition starting on page 9 the Fundamentals are also presented. With a focus on the use of Trinity and Godhead we begin our examination with belief No. 2.

The Father is not the “one true God” John 17:3, nor the “true and living God” but one of three who together are spoken of as “He.”

Let’s pay special attention to the differences between the supporting texts used in each set of beliefs.

and powers exhibited in the Son and the Holy Spirit are also revelations of the Father. (Gen. 1:1; Rev. 4:11; 1 Cor. 15:28; John 3:16; 1 John 4:8; 1 Tim. 1:17; Ex. 34:6, 7; John 14:9.)

#### 4. *Son*

God the eternal Son became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Through Him all things were created, the character of God is revealed, the salvation of humanity is accomplished, and the world is judged. Forever truly God, He became also truly man, Jesus the Christ. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived and experienced temptation as a human being, but perfectly exemplified the righteousness and love of God. By His miracles He manifested God's power and was attested as God's promised Messiah. He suffered and died voluntarily on the cross for our sins and in our place, was raised from the dead, and ascended to minister in the heavenly sanctuary in our behalf. He will come again in glory for the final deliverance of His people and the restoration of all things. (John 1:1-3, 14; Col. 1:15-19; John 10:30; 14:9; Rom. 6:23; 2 Cor. 5:17-19; John 5:22; Luke 1:35; Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 2:9-18; 1 Cor. 15:3, 4; Heb. 8:1, 2; John 14:1-3.)

#### 5. *Holy Spirit*

God the eternal Spirit was active with the Father and the Son in Creation, incarnation, and redemption. He inspired the writers of Scripture. He filled Christ's life with power. He draws and convicts human beings; and those who respond He renews and transforms into the image of God. Sent by the Father and the Son to be always with His children, He extends spiritual gifts to the church, empowers it to bear witness to Christ, and in harmony with the Scriptures leads it into all truth. (Gen. 1:1, 2; Luke 1:35; 4:18; Acts 10:38; 2 Peter 1:21; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:11, 12; Acts 1:8; John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26, 27; 16:7-13.)

#### Summary for the Father

Matt. 28:18,19	x
1 Cor. 8:5,6	x
Eph. 3:9	x
Jer. 10:10-12	x
Heb. 1:1-3	x
Acts 17:22-29	x
Col. 1:16-18	<b>FB 4</b>

#### Summary for the Son

Matt. 28:18,19	x
John 3:16	<b>FB 3</b>
Micah 5:2	x
Matt. 1:21; 2:5,6	x
Acts 4:13	x
1John 5:11,12	x
Eph. 1:9-15; 2:4-8	x
Rom. 3:23-26	x

#### Summary for the Holy Spirit

Matt. 28:18,19	x
John 14:26	<b>FB 5</b>
John 15:26	<b>FB 5</b>
John 16:7-15	<b>FB 5</b>
Rom. 8:1-10	x
Eph. 4:30	x

Only 5 of the 21 texts were in common between the two sets.

The Summary of Doctrinal Beliefs had served the purpose of reassuring the laity that the beliefs of historic Adventism were still being promoted by the church. With the formal acceptance of the new 27 Fundamental Beliefs at the 1980 General Conference, the nearly 70 year old Summary was now seen as incompatible. A motion was thus made early in the GC Session to amend the Summary in the *Church Manual before* any discussion had begun on the proposed Fundamental Statements.

**GOTTFRIED OOSTERWAL:** It might be a point of order, but I would like to phrase it in a form of a question. Point number 15, as well as all the other points, deal with fundamental beliefs of the Adventist Church. Does this discussion preclude the one on fundamental beliefs at a **later** session?

**G.R. THOMPSON:** No, the present *Church Manual* includes our fundamental beliefs. It also includes **doctrinal instruction for baptismal candidates**, and it lists things for which one can be disfellowshipped. These are all separate, so this discussion does not preclude the one to follow on fundamental beliefs.

**GOTTFRIED OOSTERWAL:** Then I would like to make a suggestion that at this session we bring these **three into harmony** with one another. The statement of fundamental beliefs, which includes a statement on marriage, differs radically from this statement. We have **three dissimilar statements**, leading to the confusion. I wish that we could **harmonize all** into one fundamental statement of beliefs.

Adventist Review, April 22, 1980 p. 22

As a result the General Conference formed a "Harmonization Committee" which by the Annual Council of 1984 reported to the GC its recommendations.

GCC Annual Council, Evening

84-437  
October 15, 1984

it the Twenty-seven Fundamental Beliefs as a basis for the teaching guide. Each point should be expanded as necessary, but should follow the same sequence and numbering as the Fundamental Beliefs. Suggestions submitted by the divisions will be considered by BRICOM before giving final approval of the teaching guide and the Baptismal Certificate by 85 AC. This proposed baptismal teaching guide, "In His Steps," will be the official adult baptismal teaching guide for the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Bib/GCO/GCDO83AC/205-83G/GCO/GCDOUP84AC/G84AC to FWW-85GCS

129-84Gb OUTLINE OF DOCTRINAL BELIEFS - CHURCH MANUAL REVISION  
(Fundamental Beliefs and Baptismal Certificate Harmonization  
Committee Report)

RECOMMENDED, To accept the report of the Fundamental Beliefs and Baptismal Certificate Harmonization Committee as follows: To delete Church Manual (chapter 18 Appendix) Outline of Doctrinal Beliefs.

The solution to the disharmony, confusion, and incompatibility was to simply delete the original Summary added into the Church Manual at the Annual Council of 1941.

At the 2010 General Conference in Atlanta, a new extensively revised Church Manual was introduced. Record of recommended edits and changes have not been preserved as in previous Manual updates. The SDA Archives suspended the availability of General Conference Committee Minutes in 2004 and the General Conference Session Bulletins in 2005.

The only publically available record of how the manual was changed can be found here:  
<http://www.adventistreview.org/article/3510/archives/issue-2010-1520/church-manual-discussion>  
the proceedings of the Fifth Business Session of the 59<sup>th</sup> General Conference on June 27, 2010 at 2:00 p.m. Armando Mirada provided some background. "As we all know, the Church Manual is the most important document for the administration and operation of the local church." (Surely, it does not supersede the Bible!) "Then in October 2008 the Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee took the following action during its meetings in Manila, Philippines:

"VOTED, That the General Conference appoint a small study group to look at the Church Manual to determine whether it would be beneficial to write a new Church Manual."

The task was assigned to "The General Conference Church Manual Subcommittee" which was composed of "seasoned administrators, editors, a pastor, and two women." Their mission was "to carefully reorganize, re-edit, update the language, shorten sentences and paragraphs...without changing the actual content of the manual." But the content was changed.



A comparison with the previous 17<sup>th</sup> Edition reveals that the latest 18<sup>th</sup> Edition no longer contains the “Summary of Beliefs” which was the last vestige of any declaration of the Godhead. The church has now severed all ties to the Godhead and is fully committed to the Trinity as the official description of its belief in God, His Son, and His Spirit. The Church Manual was introduced and voted on.

The Summary of Beliefs which had been in the Church Manual since 1942 was removed 68 years later without comment or explanation. Ellen White foresaw this when she wrote in 1904,

“The enemy of souls has sought to bring in the supposition that a great reformation was to take place among Seventh-day Adventists, and that this reformation would consist in giving up the doctrines which stand as the pillars of our faith, and engaging in a process of reorganization. Were this reformation to take place, what would result? The principles of truth that God in His wisdom has given to the remnant church, would be discarded. Our religion would be changed. **The fundamental principles that have sustained the work for the last fifty years would be accounted as error.** A new organization would be established. Books of a new order would be written. A system of intellectual philosophy would be introduced.” *Testimonies for the Church Containing Letters to Physicians and Ministers Instructions to Seventh-day Adventists* (SpTB02) Chapter 10 ‘The Foundation of Our Faith’ p. 54.3

## Scriptural usage of the word Godhead

How does Scripture use this term? It only occurs three times and all in the New Testament.

Rom 1:20 For the invisible things of **him** from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even **his eternal power and Godhead**; so that they are without excuse:

The previous verses identify “Him” as God the Father.

Rom 1:7 To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from **God our Father**, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, verse 20 is referring to the Father’s Godhead. Godhead is thus an attribute, characteristic or quality possessed by God the Father.

Ellen White quoted this text in her book “Ministry of Healing”:

"The invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even **His everlasting power and divinity**." Romans 1:20, A.R.V." (Ellen White Ministry of Healing, p. 410).

Choosing the American Revised Version, she preferred, at least in this case, the rendering of *theotes* as “divinity.” This is the obvious meaning in Acts 17:

"Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that **the Godhead** is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device" Acts 17:22-29

Here Godhead is used as a characteristic, a description of the divine nature which is not physical but spiritual. This is so because, as Jesus told the woman of Samaria, "God is a Spirit." John 4:24.

Another text translated as "Godhead" is Colossians 2:9

Col 2:9 For in him (Jesus) dwelleth all the **fulness of the Godhead** bodily.

Again, the immediate context indicates that it is the Father from whom this Godhead quality or divine nature comes.

Col 1:19 For it pleased **the Father** that in him should **all fulness** dwell;

Ellen White also treated this term as divinity in *Acts of the Apostles*:

"As in humility they (the 120 at Pentecost) submitted to the molding influence of the Holy Spirit, they received of the fullness of **the Godhead** and were fashioned in the likeness of **the divine**." {AA 49.3}

"The greatness of God cannot be measured or comprehended. And that doctrine that denies **the absolute Godhead of Jesus Christ**, denies also **the Godhead of the Father**; for no man knoweth the Son but the Father. The mightiest created intelligence cannot grasp **divinity**." ST, June 27, 1895

"And with clearness and power Christ set forth **the attributes of God**...Our Redeemer is a perfect **revelation of the Godhead**;" ST May 16, 1900

If we deny the divinity of Jesus then we also deny the divinity of the Father. Why? Because, as Jesus said, he proceeded and came forth from the Father (John 8:42; 16:27,28; 17:8).

She also used the term Godhead in contrast to humanity as one of Christ's two natures.

"Through being partakers of the divine nature we may stand pure and holy and undefiled. The **Godhead** was not made **human**, and the human was not **deified** by the blending together of the **two natures**. Christ did not possess the same sinful, corrupt, fallen disloyalty we possess, for then He could not be a perfect offering." Manuscript 94, 1893 (Manuscript Releases, vol. 6, pp. 110-112).

"How wide is the contrast between **the divinity** of Christ and the **helpless infant** in Bethlehem's manger! How can we span the distance between the mighty God and a helpless child? And yet the Creator of worlds, He in whom was the fullness of **the Godhead** bodily, was manifest in the **helpless babe** in the manger." The Faith I Live By p. 48.5; 18MR p. 331.4

“Christ unites in His person the fullness and perfection of the **Godhead** and the fullness and perfection of sinless **humanity**.” The Faith I Live By p. 219.3

“Behold the perfection of Christ, who possessed all the **attributes of the Godhead** and all the perfections and excellencies of **humanity**.” 14MR p. 81.2

“Though Christ humbled Himself to become **man**, the **Godhead** was still His own. His **deity** could not be lost while He stood faithful and true to His loyalty.” 5BC p. 1129.3 ST May 10, 1899

In each of these examples, “the Godhead” can be replaced with “divinity” and make perfect sense as it contrasts logically with humanity.

Scripture also uses Godhead in the meaning of God as the head of Christ.

1Cor 11:3 “**The head of Christ is God.**”

Eph 1:17 “The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory”

In the following she parallels “the fullness of the Godhead” with “the glory of the Father:”

“Christ Himself is the pearl of great price. In Him is gathered all the **glory of the Father**, the **fullness of the Godhead**. He is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person. The glory of the attributes of God is expressed in His character.” COL p. 115.1

“In Christ Jesus is a **revelation of the glory of the Godhead**. All that the human agent can know of God to the saving of the soul, is the measure of the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, to which he can attain; for Christ is he who **represents the Father**.” ST Dec 12, 1895

But Ellen White also employed the term Godhead as a collective description of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

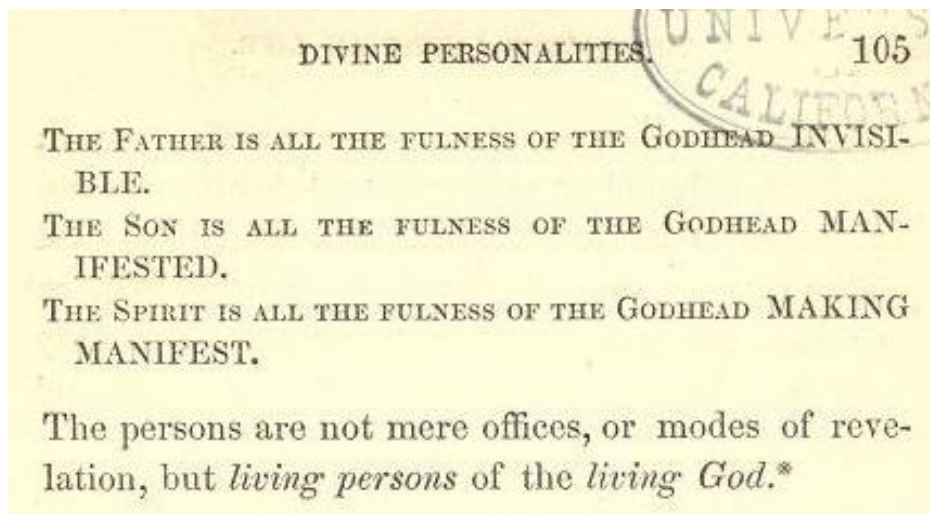
“The **Godhead was stirred with pity** for the race, and the **Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit** gave themselves to the working out of the plan of redemption.” 7ABC p. 442.1; Councils on Health p. 222; AUCR April 1, 1901; Review & Herald May 2, 1912

“The **three powers of the Godhead, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit**, are pledged to be their strength and their efficiency in their new life in Christ Jesus.” {AUCR, October 7, 1907 par. 9

She also identified the Godhead as consisting of only the Father and Son.

“By Christ the work upon which the fulfillment of God's purpose rests was accomplished. This was the agreement in **the councils of the Godhead**. The **Father** purposed in **counsel with His Son**” 21MR p. 54.3

However, in her correction of William E. Boardman's triune descriptions in his 1858 classic, “The Higher Christian Life”, Ellen treated differently the Father, Son (whom she described similarly) and the Spirit.

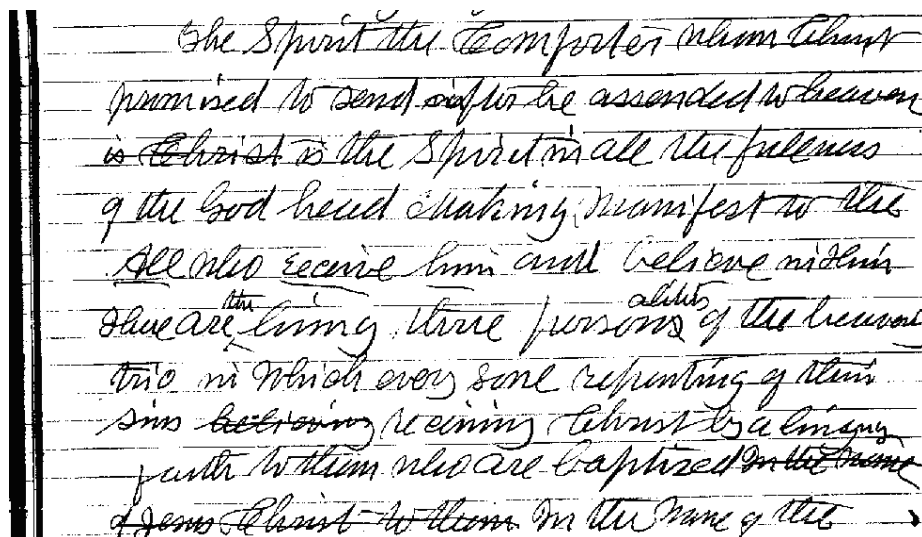


Boardman uses the same construction for each:

The Father is all...  
The Son is all...  
The Spirit is all...

Living persons  
of the living God

However, as can be readily seen in this photocopy of Ellen White's original handwritten manuscript, she avoided Boardman's three-in-one language and instead described the three as "living personalities."



alities  
living three persons

She initially repeated Boardman's wording and then modified it from persons to personalities. But when the manuscript was sent to press it appeared in its final form as "persons."

Notice also that in restating Boardman's words, she significantly changed them, correcting them.



This excerpt begins with:

“The Spirit the Comforter whom Christ promised to send after he ascended to heaven ~~is Christ...~~”

Here she crossed out her first thought in order to make it more parallel with Boardman’s ...”is the Spirit in all the fullness of the God head...” Rather than the Spirit *is* the fullness, she states, “the Spirit *in* all the fullness” making a distinction between how she described the Father and Son.

It is of interest that she never used the phrase “members of the Godhead” but endorsed the 1888 presentations made by Jones and Waggoner which described the literal, divine Son of God begotten of the Father who was the Source of all things including the Son, brought forth from the days of eternity.

“Messages bearing the divine credentials have been sent to God's people; the glory, the majesty, the righteousness of Christ, full of goodness and truth, have been presented; the fullness of **the Godhead in Jesus Christ** has been set forth among us with beauty and loveliness” Review & Herald May 27, 1890

This was consistent with her usage of Godhead as divinity.

## Historical Origins of the English Word Godhead

As Richard Hammill noted, the correct translation of the Greek is “divinity.”

Verse	Greek	Type	Translation
<a href="#">Acts 17:29</a>	θεῖον <i>theion</i>	adjective	"divinity, deity"
<a href="#">Romans 1:20</a>	θειότης <i>theiotēs</i>	noun	"divinity, divine nature"
<a href="#">Colossians 2:9</a>	θεότης <i>theotēs</i>	noun	"deity"

The fullness of divinity was in Christ bodily.

And who is the fullness of divinity? “The Father is in me and I am in the Father.”

We can trace the origin of the word Godhead in the English language back to the Middle English of Wycliffe in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

**Middle English Dictionary** Part G.2 Vol. 8 by Hans Kurath, University of Michigan Press, 1963 3rd printing 1983, provides many examples of the word Godhead which had as its primary definition “the nature of God, divinity.” Beginning on p. 209:

**godhēde** n.(l) Also **godded**, **goddehed**, **goodhed**, **godhead**, **-hid**, **-hiede**, **-hod(e)**, **-hoþ**. [From god n (l); also cp. OE **godhād**.]

1. (a) The nature of God, divinity; (b) the divinity characterizing a pagan god.

(a) cl230(?al200) \***Ancr.** 30b: Des godes flesch. eauer wes iliche cwic of þet cwike goddhead [Nero: godhod] þe wunede þrinne. **Ibid** 105b: His scheld þe wreah his goddhead [**Recl.**: **godhede**] wes his leoue licome. cl300 **SLeg.** **Kath.** (Ld) 105: God hadde euere, and euere he schal, mid him is god-hede cl325 **Harrow.H.** (Hrl) 39: In godhed toke he þen way þat to helle gates lay. cl330(?cl300) **Spec.Guy** 371: Many anoper him iselþ But noht alone in his **godhede**, Ac i-meind wið þe **manhede**. (al333) **Shoreham Poems** 122/216: Ine ryzte soþe hyt moste sitte Ðet god-hoþ wel hyt kedde.

godhede used by Wycliff in the 1300's Middle English had as its primary meaning

1. Godhood (divinity) as compared to manhood (humanity).

This dictionary provides citations of usage arranged in chronological order.

Eg, c1330: But not alone in his **godhood**, as in mind with the **manhood**.

## Conclusion

History reveals the slow methodical change in Adventist usage of the terms Godhead and Trinity, from words used in opposition to an ultimate acceptance of them as equivalent synonyms. Introduction and slow acceptance of the word Trinity within our publications suggests it was carefully controlled and timed from the first use as an alternative replacement for "Godhead" in 1913 until its final displacement in 2010. The Church has steadily moved from a decidedly non-trinitarian denomination which prevailed for over 60 years during the lifetime of Ellen White to its present avowedly Trinitarian position through the assistance of many committee decisions. This paper has collected the evidence of this change so that all may clearly see the history behind the progression.

# Godhead or Trinity?

**Which do you prefer?**

**Does it make a difference?**

**Are they both the same?**

It appears there is a difference and an effort to prefer one over the other, if not to remove the word “Godhead” altogether, has been made to accomplish just that.

Here, then, is the evidence of that change. The original source material from which we can trace the slow, methodical, move from one to the other over a transition period spanning many decades.