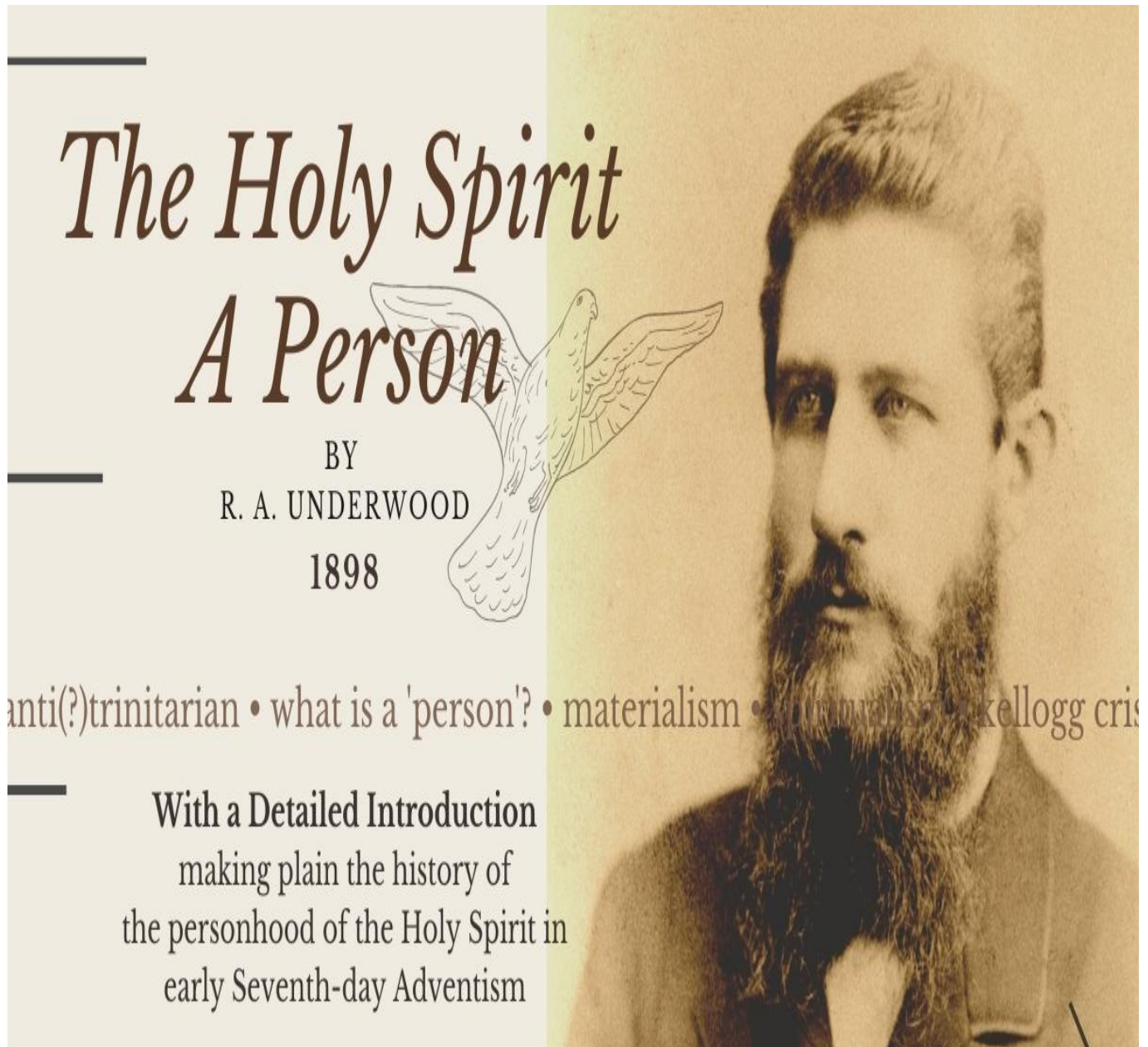


The Holy Spirit A Person by R. A. Underwood

Description



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Introduction

(by [Trent Wilde](#))

This series of articles by Rufus Underwood represents one of the earliest SDA expositions in favor of the doctrine that the Holy Spirit is a person. As such, it serves as an important window into the meaning of this doctrine to those in the church who first espoused it. We are all prone to interpret the past through the lens of our current perspectives and in the light of our current controversies. But doing so can easily mislead us. The fact is, it has been well over 100 years since the time this series was written and a lot has changed, both in the church and in the world. In order that you might more fully understand Underwood's articles and the reality of the early SDA ideas regarding the Holy Spirit, it will be helpful to consider three major ways in which the current SDA discussion over whether or not the Holy Spirit is a person is different from the discussion about the same question within early Seventh-day Adventism.¹ We also have a number of blog posts/podcasts on this subject. You can read/listen to the first one [HERE](#) and follow links from there to the rest.

Difference #1 – The Nature of the Question

Today, many Seventh-day Adventists assume that the question of whether or not the Holy Spirit is a person is inherently related to the question of whether or not trinitarianism is true. If someone affirms the personhood of the Holy Spirit, it is assumed that they are trinitarian. Likewise, if someone is anti-trinitarian, it is assumed that they deny the personhood of the Holy Spirit. It may, therefore, come as a surprise to learn that none of these assumptions were shared by early SDAs. They regarded the question of whether the Holy Spirit is a person to be distinct from the question of whether trinitarianism is true. If this seems strange, it may be helpful to know that it really isn't strange in view of the history of Christian theology. Historically, the question of whether the Holy Spirit is a person has, in fact, been distinct from the question over the trinity. This is true both in the sense that there have been non-trinitarian theologies that affirm the personhood of the Holy Spirit and also in the sense that trinitarianism consists of much more than the affirmation that the Holy Spirit is a person. Considering the Holy Spirit to be a person has never been among the distinctive aspects of trinitarianism.

The Distinctive Features of Trinitarianism

The traditional doctrine of the trinity is not simply a belief in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; instead, it is a specific collection of views regarding the nature of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and of the relationship between Them. These distinctive features of trinitarianism are famously expressed in [the Athanasian Creed](#) as follows:

...we worship one God in trinity and the trinity in unity,
neither blending their persons
nor dividing their essence.

For the person of the Father is a distinct person,
the person of the Son is another,
and that of the Holy Spirit still another.

But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one,
Their glory equal, their majesty coeternal.

What quality the Father has, the Son has, and the Holy Spirit has.

The Father is uncreated,
the Son is uncreated,
the Holy Spirit is uncreated.

The Father is immeasurable,
the Son is immeasurable,
the Holy Spirit is immeasurable.

The Father is eternal,
the Son is eternal,
the Holy Spirit is eternal.

And yet they are not three eternal beings;
there is but one eternal being.

So too they are not three uncreated or immeasurable beings;

there is but one uncreated and immeasurable being.

Similarly, the Father is almighty,

the Son is almighty,

the Holy Spirit is almighty.

Yet there are not three almighty beings;

there is but one almighty being.

Thus the Father is God,

the Son is God,

the Holy Spirit is God.

Yet there are not three gods;

there is but one God.

Thus the Father is Lord,

the Son is Lord,

the Holy Spirit is Lord.

Yet there are not three lords;

there is but one Lord.

....

Nothing in this trinity is before or after,

nothing is greater or smaller;

in their entirety the three persons

are coeternal and coequal with each other.

As you can see, the classical doctrine of the Trinity is much more than belief in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It affirms that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three persons, yet one being; that each divine person is God individually, yet They exist as but one God; that each is Lord individually, yet They exist as but one Lord. It affirms that each Divine Person is uncreated, immeasurable, eternal, and almighty; together, They are co-equal and co-eternal. So, while trinitarianism certainly affirms that the Holy Spirit is a person, much more than this affirmation is required in order to amount to the doctrine of the trinity.

Later trinitarian creeds further specify claims regarding the nature of the Divine Persons. For example, [the Methodist Articles of Religion](#) says,

“There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body or parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and good; the maker and preserver of all things, both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there are three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity – the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost.”

As you can see, this says much more about the nature of the Godhead beyond affirming that there is a Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Non-Trinitarian Views that Affirm the Personhood of the Holy Spirit

Non-trinitarian theologies that affirm the Holy Spirit is a person include the following:

Sabellianism and Patripassianism (both forms of Modalism) affirm that the Holy Spirit is a person; they just hold that the Holy Spirit is the same person as the Father and the Son.

Christian Tritheism also affirms that the Holy Spirit is a person; but instead of regarding the Holy Spirit as being the same God as the Father, and regarding them as being the same God as the Son, it holds that all three are distinct beings – three distinct Gods who are only “one” in the sense of acting as a united group – being united in purpose.

Arianism embraces the personhood of the Holy Spirit, but holds that he is not the eternal God; but instead, a created being inferior to the Father and the Son.

Still others who affirm the personhood of the Holy Spirit have thought of him as an angel.

Early SDAs were generally quite knowledgeable of the history of Christian theology and their writings show awareness of the above ideas. In light of this, it isn't at all surprising that they understood the question of the personhood of the Holy Spirit to be distinct from the question of trinitarianism. Again, the personhood of the Holy Spirit is not even among the distinctive features of trinitarianism.

Early-SDA Reasons For Rejecting Trinitarianism

Another important factor for understanding the fact that early SDAs regarded the question of whether the Holy Spirit is a person to be distinct from whether trinitarianism is true is that their primary reasons for rejecting the doctrine of the trinity had nothing to do with whether the Holy Spirit is a person. Instead, their focus was on the truly distinctive features of trinitarianism – its portrayal of the nature of the divine persons and the relationship between them. Joseph Bates explained his rejection of trinitarianism as follows:

“Respecting the trinity, I concluded that it was an impossibility 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. I said to my 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 the trinity.’” – [*The Autobiography of Joseph Bates, p. 204*](#)

Notice, his focus was on the relationship between the Father and the Son – not on whether the Holy Spirit is a person.

As another example, consider this Q&A in [the Review and Herald, April 17, 1883](#). The answer was written by W. H. Littlejohn:

“Will you please favor me with those scriptures which plainly say that Christ is a created being? J. C.

ANS. You are mistaken in supposing that S. D. Adventists teach that Christ was ever created. They believe, on the contrary, that he was ‘begotten’ of the Father, and that he can properly be called God and worshipped as such. They believe, also, that the worlds, and everything which is, was created by Christ in conjunction with the Father. They believe, however, that somewhere in the eternal ages of the past there was a point at which Christ came into existence. They think that it is necessary that God should have antedated Christ in his being, in order that Christ could have been begotten of him, and sustain to him the relation of son. They hold to the distinct personality of the Father and Son, rejecting as absurd that feature of Trinitarianism which insists that God, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit are three persons, and yet but one person. S. D. Adventists hold that God and Christ are one in the sense that Christ prayed that his disciples might be one; *i. e.*, one in spirit, purpose, and labor.”

Once again, this objects to the distinctive features of trinitarianism, rather than objecting to the personhood of the Holy Spirit. In fact, it is striking that after disapprovingly explaining the trinitarian view of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, it relates the SDA view of the Father and Son without so much as even mentioning what SDAs thought about the Holy Spirit. This absence of voicing a view regarding the personality of the Holy Spirit was typical of early SDA objections to trinitarianism. Here are a few more examples of early SDA statements against trinitarianism. Notice that they focus on the trinitarian portrayal of the nature of the Divine Persons and the relation between Them without objecting to the personhood of the Holy Spirit.

J.N. Andrews

“The doctrine of the Trinity which was established in the church by the council of Nice, A. D. 325. This doctrine destroys the personality of God, and his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” – [*The Three Angels of Revelation 14:6-12, p. 54*](#)

Sarah Haselton

“The doctrine called the trinity, claiming that God is without form or parts; that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, the three are one person, is another [false doctrine]. Could God be without form or parts when he ‘spoke unto Moses face to face as a man speaketh unto a friend?’ (Exodus 33:11) or when the Lord said unto him, Thou canst not see my face; for there shall no man see me and live? And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by; and I will take away my hand and thou shalt see my back parts; but my face shall not be seen. Exodus 33:20, 22, 23. Christ is the express image of his Father’s person.” [*The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald July 18, 1856, p. 87.27*](#) (brackets added)

D. M. Canright

“It would be a hard matter to explain the mystery of the trinity as held by Trinitarians, because the doctrine is contrary to common sense and the Bible. It teaches that god has no body, parts, or passions, that he is in no place in particular, but is universally diffused throughout the universe, a mere essence, without form or shape. See the Methodist Discipline, the Episcopal Articles of Faith, and others. Who could worship such a God? Who would pray to such a Being? How is this to be reconciled with the Bible, which distinctly says that God has a form, Phil. 2:6; that he has a person, Heb. 1:3; that he has a face, feet, and hands, Ex. 33:20-23; that he sits upon a throne in Heaven, Rev. 4; and so on? When Christ ascended up into Heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Father, did he go nowhere in particular? Was he simply dispersed throughout the universe?

Again, the creeds claim that there are three Gods in one, and only one God; that the Son is as old as the Father, and that the Father is no older than the Son.” – [*The Review and Herald, Nov. 1, 1877*](#)

Once again, these statements are typical of early SDA objections to trinitarianism. While there are a number of specific objections, they can be placed into two main categories: 1) objections to the trinitarian portrayal of the nature of the Divine Persons, and 2) objections to the trinitarian portrayal of the relationship between the Divine Persons. From the earliest days of Seventh-day Adventism, the pioneers wrote articles on the nature of the Father and the Son and the relationship between them. They taught the early SDA view of these subjects as follows:

- 1.

As to their nature, the Father and the Son are both literal beings, who are inherently bodily and whose shape is revealed in the human form.

2. As to the relationship between the Father and the Son – they are both Divine, the Son sharing the same nature as his Father. Yet, the Father antedated the Son in time. The Son is in some ways subservient to the Father, yet the Father has granted to the Son equality with Himself.

It was inevitable that the promulgation of these doctrines would be met with the popular notions on the same questions; namely, the trinitarian notions. Thus, the early SDAs not only had to explain why their views were right but also why the trinitarian views were wrong. And they did this freely in their writings. In spite of regularly teaching against trinitarianism, early SDAs had remarkably little to say about the question of whether the Holy Spirit is a person.

Early-SDA Silence on the Personhood of the Holy Spirit

In fact, this lack of engagement by early SDAs on the question of the personhood of the Holy Spirit was explicitly described by J. H. Waggoner. He said,

“There is one question which has been much controverted in the theological world upon which we have never presumed to enter. It is that of the personality of the Spirit of God. Prevailing ideas of *person* are very diverse, often crude, and the word is differently understood; so that unity of opinion on this point cannot be expected until all shall be able to define precisely what they mean by the word, or until all shall agree upon one particular sense in which the word shall be used.”

This statement was first published in [the Signs of the Times](#) in 1875 and then a little later that same year in [the Review and Herald](#), though it is best known from his 1877 book [The Spirit of God](#). One thing that is so significant about this statement is that it is clear evidence that early SDAs dealt with the question of whether the Holy Spirit is a person as distinct from the question of whether trinitarianism is true. There is no denying that they entered upon the subject of trinitarianism. Yet, as this statement points out, they didn't enter upon the subject of whether the Holy Spirit is a person. And the evidence shows that Waggoner's statement is true. A thorough search of early SDA writings up to this point reveals almost nothing dealing with the question of whether the Holy Spirit is a person.

The Earliest SDA Engagement on Whether the Holy Spirit is a Person (Late

1870s)

Interestingly, soon after Waggoner made the above statement, a few SDAs voiced opinions as to whether the Holy Spirit is a person. As we'll see, only *very few* had anything to say on the subject, and moreover, they didn't agree. The first instance was in 1878 when James White answered a question in the Signs of the Times that included asking "what the Holy Ghost is?" To this, James replied,

"The Father is a person, the Son is a person; but the Holy Ghost is the same as the Holy Spirit. It is a divine influence emanating from the Father and the Son, and probably is never manifested to the children of men only in connection with the ministration of holy angels, when these come forth from the world of glory to minister unto the children of men, these are enveloped with the light and glory which surrounds the throne of God." – [*The Signs of the Times, April 25, 1878.*](#)

The contrast between the Father and Son as persons on one hand, and the Holy Spirit as an influence on the other hand, makes plain that James thought the Holy Spirit was not a person. It is interesting to note that he takes this as a distinct question on its own and doesn't connect it with the question of trinitarianism.

The next person to voice an opinion was D. M. Canright in two articles of the Signs of the Times, also in 1878 (one on [July 25](#) and the next on [August 8](#)). To my knowledge, these two articles represent the only dedicated treatment against the idea that the Holy Spirit is a person from early Seventh-day Adventism. Unlike James White, Canright dealt with the personhood of the Holy Spirit in connection with trinitarianism. Yet, even then, he doesn't portray the two questions as *inherently* related. His use of trinitarianism in the article comes across mostly as a means of introducing the subject – sort of like saying, "Trinitarians say the Holy Spirit is a person. Well...is it?" and then he deals with the question, arguing that the Holy Spirit isn't a person. It makes sense to link these subjects in this limited way simply because trinitarianism was by far the most prominent theology espousing the personhood of the Holy Spirit. To illustrate this limited linking, here is how he opens his first article:

"All trinitarian creeds make the Holy Ghost a person, equal in substance, power, eternity, and glory with the Father and Son. Thus they claim three persons in the trinity, each one equal with both the others. If this be so, then the Holy Spirit is just as truly an individual intelligent person as is the Father or the Son. But this we cannot believe. The Holy Spirit is not a person."

Canright then proceeds to give his reasons for thinking the Holy Spirit is not a person.

While he mentions trinitarianism a few more times in the first article, he only mentions it once in passing in the second article (the sentence reads, “Was one person of the trinity anointed with another person of the trinity?”). But when you look at his actual arguments against the personhood of the Holy Spirit, it’s clear that he’s dealing with the question as its own issue. For example, one of his arguments was that nobody conceives of the Holy Spirit as having a body. Other arguments were arguments from absence. He says, in effect, there is an absence of scripture calling the Holy Spirit a person, or saying we should love the Holy Spirit, or describing love between the Holy Spirit and the Father and Son. Another class of arguments he offers claims that the scriptural illustrations of the Holy Spirit are “inconsistent with the idea of its being a person.” The sorts of illustrations he refers to are statements such as that the Holy Spirit will be “poured out” and he says that since persons can’t be “poured out” the Holy Spirit must not be a person (which is a strange objection considering Paul likened himself to a drink offering being poured out, Phil. 2:17, and he was certainly a person). Canright also argues that the pronouns for Spirit in Greek are neuter and he says, “If the Holy Spirit is a person, the pronouns referring to it would be in the masculine, which they never are.” Interestingly, none of these arguments are trinitarianism-specific. In other words, they just deal with the question of whether or not the Holy Spirit is a person as its own issue. The arguments apply just as much to any theology that affirms the personhood of the Holy Spirit, whether trinitarianism, sabellianism, tritheism, Arianism, or holy-spirit-is-an-angel-ism. The way in which Canright connects the personhood of the Holy Spirit with trinitarianism seems to be limited to two aspects: 1) trinitarianism was the most prominent view espousing the personhood of the Holy Spirit, making it an attractive choice for introducing the subject from an authorial perspective, and 2) trinitarianism entails belief in the personhood of the Holy Spirit, which would, of course, imply that if the Holy Spirit is not a person, trinitarianism (along with every other system that affirms the personhood of the Holy Spirit) must be false. Yet, Canright never indicates that he thinks the reverse is true. In other words, he nowhere implies that the falsity of trinitarianism implies that the Holy Spirit isn’t a person. If he believed this to be so, he might have argued against the personhood of the Holy Spirit on the basis that trinitarianism is false. But this is something he doesn’t do. Likewise, he nowhere implies that to accept the personhood of the Holy Spirit would make someone a trinitarian. Thus, Canright only connects the personhood of the Holy Spirit with trinitarianism in a very limited way – in a way that doesn’t make the assumptions so often made in the modern SDA context.

About a year later, J. H. Waggoner wrote a letter to James White in which he expressed disagreement with Canright's treatment of the subject and expressed that he thought it probable that the Holy Spirit actually is a person. Here is what he said,

"I have thought considerable about the matter you wrote of, though I have been too busy to apply my mind to it. But there is one query which will arise in my mind. It is on the question of the personality of the Holy Spirit. The more I think of it the more I am inclined to believe that the generally received view is correct. I will not stop to criticise the language of the Testament. We know that the word SPIRIT in Greek is in the neuter gender, and in the Hebrew, feminine. The Hebrew has no neuter gender. But it is generally conceded that the Authorized Version is correct in using masculine pronouns when referring to the Holy Spirit. Instance. John 14:16, 17, 26. We ordinarily use it instead of he – perhaps it is allowable. But, to it are ascribed attributes of personality, as power, intelligence, emotions; – it instructs, guides, moves to speak or do, is grieved, etc. But most of all, we are baptized into the name of the Holy Spirit.

I was not at all satisfied with Eld. Canright's articles in the Signs about a year ago, on that subject. I consider the style entirely faulty; many of his arguments, especially his illustrations, were highly irreverent, to my view. It is the most solemn subject upon which we can speak, according to Matt. 12." – J. H. Waggoner to James White, July 28, 1879 (underlining in original)

Plainly, Waggoner thought the Holy Spirit was probably a person. It is equally plain that Waggoner was thoroughly anti-trinitarian (as is clear in his writings from both before and after this letter). The reason he could think the Holy Spirit is probably a person while being anti-trinitarian is simply that he understood the two issues to be distinct.

To summarize some of these main points so far. For the first 30 years of Seventh-day Adventism, SDAs didn't engage the question of whether the Holy Spirit is a person. During this same period, they regularly engaged the question of whether trinitarianism is true, unanimously siding against it. Their reasons for rejecting trinitarianism had nothing to do with the personhood of the Holy Spirit, but instead focused on the trinitarian view of the nature of divine persons, and the relationship between them. SDAs were generally familiar with the history of Christian theology, and understood that the personhood of the Holy Spirit is not intrinsically related to trinitarianism. Toward the end of the 1870s, a few SDAs (only three we are aware of) voiced opinions as to whether the Holy Spirit was a person. Two said the Holy Spirit isn't a person; one said the Holy Spirit probably is a person. White and Waggoner didn't connect the question with trinitarianism at all, while Canright connected the two subjects, but only in a limited way that didn't imply that the falsity of trinitarianism entails an impersonal Holy Spirit, nor did it imply that accepting the personhood of the Holy Spirit amounted to embracing trinitarianism.

There is one additional point related to Canright worth mentioning before moving on. Within days of the publication of Canright's second article (Aug. 8, 1878), Canright met with James and Ellen White and they spent the next few weeks together helping each other with writing projects. Among the projects James and Ellen helped Canright with was "his articles on the Personality of God, the Divinity of Christ, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." James White reported this in [The Review and Herald of August 22](#), and [the very next issue](#) saw the first of a series of articles by Canright on these very issues called [The Personality of God](#). The first article of the series focuses directly on the problems with trinitarianism, but without opposing the personhood of the Holy Spirit. Canright's arguments in this article focus on problems with the trinitarian portrayal of the nature of the divine persons, and the relationship between them – as was typical of SDA anti-trinitarianism. Given that both James and Canright had just recently expressed disbelief in the personhood of the Holy Spirit, one would think they would have included this point in a full article against trinitarianism. But they didn't. Even though they thought the Holy Spirit wasn't a person, they evidently didn't think this point was essential in refuting trinitarianism. When Ellen, James, and Canright worked together to explain the SDA views regarding the Personality of God, the Divinity of Christ, and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the results certainly included rejecting the trinitarian explanation of these subjects, but it didn't include asserting that the Holy Spirit isn't a person. This illustrates, once again, that to early SDAs, the personhood of the Holy Spirit was not a question inherently trinitarian in nature. Additionally, since both James and Canright had recently expressed their belief that the Holy Spirit is not a person, it is unlikely that the absence of this point in the article was due to either one of their influences. Since Ellen White was the only other person involved, it raises the question of whether it was her influence that resulted in leaving out any opposition to the personhood of the Holy Spirit. We'll come back to this.

The Question Revives (1890s)

While SDAs continued to write in opposition to trinitarianism throughout the 1880s, we aren't aware of any discussion of the personhood of the Holy Spirit during that decade. Yet, the question certainly arose again in the 1890s, and this time, with much more involvement. As we'll see, SDAs continued to regard the question of whether the Holy Spirit is a person to be distinct from the question of trinitarianism.

In [the Oct. 28 issue](#) of the *Review and Herald*, Uriah Smith answered the question "Is the Holy Ghost A Person?" He answered that it is not and his reasons mirror Canright's, but he does so without so much as even mentioning trinitarianism.

A couple of weeks earlier, the Australian periodical *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times* published an article by an SDA named Charles L. Boyd called "[The Trinity](#)." Far from being an embrace of trinitarian doctrine, it counters the distinctive features of trinitarianism regarding the nature of divine persons and the relationship between them as SDAs had always done. What is different about this article, however, is that while rejecting the trinitarian distinctives, it affirms the personhood of the Holy Spirit. The article is structured as a series of questions with the answers coming from various biblical passages. Here are the most relevant portions:

"2. Who was with God in the creation?

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . All things were made by him.' John 1:1, 3

3. Who was this Word?

'And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.'

'And I saw, and bear record that this is the Son of God.' John 1:14, 34

4. What relation does Christ sustain to God?

'Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God.' Rom. 1:3, 4

...

6. After whose form, or image, was Christ created?

'Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.'

'Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person.' Phil. 2:6; Heb. 1:3

...

8. What words were addressed to Christ at the beginning of his existence?

'The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.' Ps. 2:7

...

11. Where was the Father when the Son was on earth?

‘Our Father which art in heaven.’ Matt. 6:9

12. When his work was done on earth, to whom was he to return?

‘I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God.’ ‘So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.’ John 20:17; Mark 16:19.

...

18. From whence does the Holy Spirit come?

‘But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you, from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.’ John 14:26; 15:26

...

21. Then as the church on earth is working by the direct command and agency of three distinct personages in heaven for the increase of the heavenly family, in whose name shall we adopt them into this family?

‘In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.’ Matt. 28:19”

Notice how Boyd counters the distinctive features of trinitarian doctrine. He emphasizes that Jesus is the Son of God and he clearly means this literally as did other early SDAs since he refers specifically to “the beginning of his existence.” He even refers to Jesus as having been “created” which is a very unusual thing for an early SDA to say, as we saw earlier. He may have used this terms simply to more directly counter trinitarian creeds. In any case, his view doesn’t seem all that different from other early SDAs on this point since he also says Christ was begotten and he refers to Christ as the one through whom all things were made. Boyd’s explanation of the relationship between the Father and the Son is clearly anti-trinitarian and is instead in perfect harmony with early Seventh-day Adventism. The same is true regarding what he says of the nature of the Father and Son. Unlike the trinitarian affirmation that God (including the Father and Son) are immeasurable and without body and parts, Boyd refers to both as having a distinct form and as existing in distinct locations rather than being immeasurable and diffused throughout the universe. He makes these points using proof-texts commonly used by other early SDAs in making the same points. In light of this, it becomes clear that even his statement that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are “three distinct personages in heaven” is part of his rebuttal of trinitarianism. It was common for SDAs to emphasize the distinct personality of the Father and Son in opposition to trinitarianism. As an example, think back to the Q&A from [the Review and Herald of April 17, 1883](#) that we quoted earlier. It said,

“They [Seventh-day Adventists] hold to the distinct personality of the Father and Son, rejecting as absurd that feature of Trinitarianism which insists that God, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit are three persons, and yet but one person.”

Boyd is in essence now saying that he holds to the distinct personality of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, rejecting as absurd that feature of Trinitarianism which insists that God, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit are three persons, and yet but one person. Clearly, he didn’t think affirming the personhood of the Holy Spirit was an affirmation of trinitarianism. He regarded these two subjects as distinct.

We're now brought to a somewhat unusual case, but one that is a little more well-known in contemporary Adventism – the “Chapman Letter.” In June 1891, Ellen White received a letter from one “Bro. Chapman.” In this letter, he expressed a couple of his idiosyncratic views that he regarded as new light, one of which was the idea that the Holy Ghost is not the Spirit of God but is instead the angel Gabriel. This in itself is quite interesting since it is yet another instance of an early SDA who was clearly anti-trinitarian and who yet believed the Holy Spirit to be a person, albeit not a divine person. This is just one more piece of evidence among many others that show that early SDAs regarded the question of the personhood of the Holy Spirit to be distinct from trinitarianism. Ellen White's response was likewise illuminating. She did not rebuke him by saying, “Don't you know that trinitarianism is false and that thus the Holy Spirit can't be a person?” Nor did she tell him that the Holy Spirit isn't an angel, but is instead a Divine Person and that trinitarianism is therefore true. Instead, she said,

“Your ideas of the two subjects you mention do not harmonize with the light God has given me. The nature of the Holy Spirit is a mystery; it is not clearly revealed, and you will never be able to explain it to others, because the Lord has not revealed it to you.” – [*Letter 7, 1891, par. 13*](#)

This response is fascinating for a number of reasons. First of all, it reveals that Ellen White, like all other early SDAs, did not conflate the question of the nature of the Holy Spirit with the question of trinitarianism. Ellen White's views regarding the nature of the Father and the Son were clearly anti-trinitarian, as were her views regarding the relationship between them. Like Joseph Bates, she said, “The man Christ Jesus was not the Lord God Almighty,” ([*Ms 140, 1903, par. 28*](#)) and [*she clearly regarded both the Father and the Son as two bodily beings*](#). What this means is that to her, like to all other early SDAs, the character of trinitarianism was no mystery; both she and they regarded it's distinctive claims as contrary to revealed truth. Yet, this was not so for the nature of the Holy Spirit – this subject was a mystery; which clearly differentiates the one issue from the other. But what is equally interesting is that it also reveals that she wasn't persuaded by the views earlier expressed by Canright and her husband. If she thought the Holy Spirit was indeed an influence and not a person, she wouldn't have said the nature of the Holy Spirit is a mystery. She would have said the truth had been known for more than a decade and she would have been able to point Chapman to what Canright and her husband had written on the subject. Yet, the fact that even in 1891, she regarded the matter as unknown and unrevealed shows that she wasn't persuaded. This makes it all the more likely that it was probably her influence that led Canright to not oppose the personhood of the Holy Spirit while rebutting trinitarianism in [*The Personality of God*](#).

Before we go on, please note that while Ellen White made it plain that the nature of the Holy Spirit had not been revealed in 1891, she didn't say that God would not reveal more light on the subject as time went on.

From the surviving evidence, it appears that 1890-1891 saw a renewed interest in the personhood of the Holy Spirit. All regarded it as a distinct question from trinitarianism, but some thought the Holy Spirit was a person, others thought the Holy Spirit wasn't a person, and Ellen White said it wasn't yet revealed. This brings us to [*The Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, April 1, 1892](#). There is an interesting section near the end of the issue where the editor, George C. Tenney, responded to a criticism regarding a statement found in a previous issue. Here is the section in full:

"A Criticism Considered.

An esteemed subscriber has been furnished with a criticism upon an answer to a query upon the nature of the Trinity which appeared in our Dec. 15, 1891, number. The objectionable paragraph reads as follows: 'We understand the Trinity, as applied to the Godhead, to consist of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The two former to be personal, spiritual beings, eternal and infinite in all their ways and attributes. The Son is of the Father, equal in glory and honor, but in some measure subject in authority. The Holy Spirit is the representative of the Deity in all parts of the universe. These supreme Beings we cannot comprehend or measure.'

Our critic animadverts upon the danger of the subscriber being led to embrace per force some fatal heresy while accepting more obvious truths associated together. These words are a revelation to him; now he can see our dark designs in the position here taken relative to the personality of the Holy Spirit. He invites comparison of the position here taken with our Saviour's discourse in the latter chapters of John. There may be others situated as this person is, so we refer to the matter in this place.

Our reply is that we did not consciously reveal any definite position in regard to the Holy Spirit's personality. There is certainly nothing incongruous in the idea of the Spirit being a *personal representative*, hence saying that the Spirit is the representative of the Father and Son does not deny his personality as our friend would make out. He occupies in our minds an exalted place with Deity; and the paragraph in question speaks of him as a supreme Being. In reference to the subject of his personality our minds are well expressed by J. H. Waggoner in his little work entitled 'The Spirit of God,' as follows: –

‘There is one question which has been much controverted in the theological world upon which we have never presumed to enter. It is that of the personality of the Spirit of God. Prevailing ideas of *person* are very diverse, often crude, and the word is differently understood; so that unity of opinion on this point cannot be expected until all shall be able to define precisely what they mean by the word, or until all shall agree upon one particular sense in which the word shall be used. But as this agreement does not exist, it seems that a discussion on the subject cannot be profitable, especially as it is not a question of direct revelation. We have a right to be positive in our faith and our statements only when the words of Scripture are so direct as to bring the subject within the range of positive proof.

We are not only willing but anxious to leave it just where the Word of God leaves it. From it we learn that the Spirit of God is that awful and mysterious power which proceeds from the throne of the universe, and which is the efficient actor in the work of creation and of redemption.”’

The first thing to make sure we don't misunderstand is this statement's use of the term "Trinity." As tempting as it might be to assume it here means "the trinitarian God," this clearly isn't the case. If this was the meaning of "Trinity" here, there would be no need to add the qualification "as applied to the Godhead" since that would already be conveyed by the term "Trinity" itself. The writer, in this instance, is using the term "Trinity" with its broader meaning; that is, any group of three. This broader meaning is well attested in early SDA usage. In fact, [Ellen White's only use of the term "trinity"](#) is with this broader meaning. Obviously, this writer is using the term "Trinity" to refer to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but just as the group of Three that make up the Godhead, not as the trinitarian ["three-one God."](#) This is confirmed by several facts: (1) The statement refers to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as "Beings" (in the plural) – a statement that is explicitly contrary to trinitarianism which emphasizes that They are not three Beings, but one Being. (2) While referring to the Holy Spirit as a "being" and expressing satisfaction with the potential of his being a person, it emphasizes uncertainty. In other words, the author leaned toward thinking the Holy Spirit is a person (a being) but wasn't sure. A trinitarian would not have this uncertainty, for trinitarianism expresses in no uncertain terms that the Holy Spirit is a person. And last, (3) this same author elsewhere expresses his rejection of classical trinitarianism, as we will see later.

While this statement uses the term "Trinity" to refer to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, it clearly doesn't advocate any of the distinctive features of trinitarianism, nor does it express certainty as to whether the Holy Spirit is a person. Let's make a few additional observations to make sure we understand the significance of this quote. One might think that the reason this statement from Dec. 15 (the statement that had been criticized) would be controversial in early Seventh-day Adventism is that it refers to the Holy Spirit as a "Being." But as it turns out, this wasn't the criticism. It was criticized for supposedly implying that the Holy Spirit isn't a person since it refers to "the two former" (referring to the Father and Son) as personal beings. But George Tenney assures the reader that the intention of the statement was not to deny the personality of the Holy Spirit. He points out that the statement calls the Holy Spirit a "supreme Being" and says that there is nothing incongruous in the idea that the Holy Spirit is a person. Yet, in the final analysis, he says that the statement didn't intentionally take any definite position on the personhood of the Holy Spirit, and then he quotes J. H. Waggoner's statement that we quoted earlier.

George Tenney clearly didn't take issue with the idea that the Holy Spirit is a person, and his statement certainly leans toward that conclusion since he restated that the Holy Spirit is a "being." Yet, he ultimately sided with Ellen White's stance at the time, which was that it just wasn't known for sure one way or the other.

Several years later, in 1896, George Tenney was co-editor of the *Review and Herald* with Uriah Smith and, in [the June 9 issue](#), he answered a question of relevance to our subject:

“Please explain 1 John 5:8. (1) Is the word ‘spirit’ synonymous with Holy Ghost of verse 7? (2) What is the Holy Ghost? How do we receive it, through God, or through angels? (3) Is the Comforter of John 16:7, 8 the Holy Ghost? If so, how can it be alluded to as ‘him’ and ‘he’? C. W. W.

(1) We might dispose of the first question by saying that the last portion of verse seven and the first portion of verse eight is an interpolation, and has no place in the sacred Scriptures. It is not in the Revised Version, and it is well understood by Biblical scholars that those words were inserted by some one who desired to render more prominent an erroneous idea of the dogma of the Trinity. The text should read like this, ‘For there are three that bear record, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.’ From the fact that ‘spirit’ is not capitalized in the eighth verse, we would infer that the interpolator did not have reference to the Holy Ghost in the contrast which he was drawing between the heavenly witnesses and the earthly witnesses. (2) We cannot tell. We cannot describe the Holy Spirit. From the figures which are brought out in Revelation, Ezekiel, and other Scriptures, and from the language which is used in reference to the Holy Spirit, we are led to believe he is something more than an emanation from the mind of God. He is spoken of as a personality, and treated as such. He is included in the apostolic benedictions, and is spoken of by our Lord as acting in an independent and personal capacity, as teacher, guide, and comforter. He is an object of veneration, and is a heavenly intelligence, everywhere present, and always present. But as limited beings, we cannot understand the problems which the contemplation of the Deity presents to our minds. (3) Undoubtedly the Comforter is the Holy Ghost. It is so declared in John 14:26: ‘But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name.’ He does not come to us through the agency of angels; he is sent direct from the Father by the Son. And for reasons noted above, he is spoken of with the personal pronoun as an intelligent, independent existence. G. C. T.”

For reasons we'll come to later, Tenney was able to speak a bit more definitively here regarding the personhood of the Holy Spirit. And exactly what he means by calling the Holy Spirit a "personality" is illuminated by another statement by Uriah Smith on the very same page of the *Review*. This too, we'll come back to later. The primary point for the present point, however, is that Tenney, in this one short answer, expressed a belief in the personhood of the Holy Spirit while also expressing opposition to classical trinitarianism, calling it "an erroneous idea of the dogma of the Trinity."

To summarize, one major difference between the current discussion in the SDA church over whether the Holy Spirit is a person and the discussion about the same question in early Seventh-day Adventism is this: In the current discussion, the question of whether or not the Holy Spirit is a person is assumed to be trinitarian in nature. In other words, it is assumed to be intrinsically related to trinitarianism so that if someone denies trinitarianism, it is assumed they deny the personhood of the Holy Spirit whereas if someone affirms the personhood of the Holy Spirit, it is assumed that they are trinitarian. In early Seventh-day Adventism, on the other hand, none of these assumptions apply. They regarded the personhood of the Holy Spirit as a separate question from trinitarianism. For the first 30 years, they pretty much avoided the former topic while regularly engaging the latter. When they eventually entered upon the question of the personality of the Holy Spirit, some denied it, while others affirmed it, yet they all remained non-trinitarian in their views of the nature of the Divine Persons and the relationship between them.

This brings us to

Difference #2 – The Nature of Personhood

As we read from J. H. Waggoner earlier, unity of opinion on the personality of the Holy Spirit cannot be expected until we are able to define what we mean by “person.” This should be obvious. How can we even understand the question, “Is the Holy Spirit a person?” if we don’t have a clear idea of what it means to be a person? Unfortunately, this is an area where the current discussion regarding the personhood of the Holy Spirit has fallen short. Often, people don’t even think to define what is meant by “person” and instead engage in quote battles. In spite of the lack of concise explanation on this point in the current debate, it is still possible to understand some characteristics of what people mean, and don’t mean, by the word. In early Seventh-day Adventism, the situation was quite different. As we’ve seen, they generally had very little to say on the topic of the personhood of the Holy Spirit. Yet, they had a whole lot to say about the nature of personhood. In fact, this was a point of great importance to early Seventh-day Adventists. They wrote on the topic extensively and have very clear and definite views – views upon which they were in united agreement.

To summarize the situation, early SDAs regarded personhood as strictly and necessarily material, while modern SDAs regard personhood as NOT strictly and necessarily material. What does this mean? In the most basic sense, to be material means to be made of matter – physical stuff. To say that personhood is strictly material is to say that persons are composed of matter and only matter – there being no non-physical element. To say that personhood is necessarily material is to say that the only possible type of person is a material person. Putting these two points together amounts to saying that it is impossible for there to be a person that is not completely and solely material. As we’ll see, this was the position held by early SDAs.

Modern SDAs, on the other hand, don’t tend to view personhood in this way. While there are certainly more than a few SDAs who understand that human nature is material – that we are not dual-natured beings, but rather are unitary beings – there are also many SDAs that think we have a non-physical part of us – that our thoughts and feelings don’t reduce to physical stuff. Those who think this still hold that we’ll be unconscious after death, but not because we don’t have non-physical souls; rather, because our non-physical souls are asleep – unconscious until God reunites the soul with the body at the resurrection. In any case, even those modern SDAs who have a non-dualist understanding of human nature tend to think that personhood itself is not necessarily and strictly material, especially when it comes to God. And this is the case both for trinitarians and anti-trinitarians.

Modern SDAs on Personhood

As an example of a modern SDA trinitarian understanding of personhood, consider this Q&A answered by Ted Wilson (I'm only quoting the most relevant portion):

“Q: The Introduction to the first quarter 2017 Sabbath School lesson, ‘The Holy Spirit and Spirituality,’ quotes from Fundamental Belief Number 5, ‘God, the Holy Spirit.’ In part, it reads, ‘God the eternal Spirit ... is as much a person as are the Father and the Son.’ Does this mean that the Holy Spirit has a physical body and is visible as Christ was on Earth? – Williams, from Denmark

A: Williams, I'm glad that you are studying the Sabbath School lessons on the Holy Spirit and Spirituality and hope that you are finding them to be a blessing!

Personhood – at least for God – doesn't depend upon having a physical form, as it does for human beings. While the Bible speaks about both the Father and the Son having a physical form (Exodus 31:18; 33:20-23; Joshua 5:13-6:2), it refers to the third member of the Godhead as the Holy Spirit. The idea of Him being a “spirit” indicates that He is without physical form.” – Ted Wilson, [Does the Holy Spirit have a physical body? January 27, 2017](#)

Clearly, according to Ted Wilson, at least for God, personhood doesn't require having a physical body. And he says the Holy Spirit is just such a non-physical person.

As an example of a modern SDA anti-trinitarian understanding of personhood, let's consider a popular booklet put out by [Smyrna Gospel Ministries](#) entitled [Who is Telling The Truth About God?](#) By David Clayton. In the section *What Does the Bible Say?*, we read,

“Who is the Holy Spirit?

1. When we speak of a person's spirit, we mean the inward part of the person; the part of the person which is different from the body.

...

2. God's Spirit is related to God in the same way as man's spirit is related to man.

...

4. The Spirit is the actual presence of the Father and the Son in mind and power, but not in bodily form.”

The same sentiment is expressed elsewhere in the literature of this ministry, for example, in their article [*The God of the Bible*](#). Here is the most pertinent part:

“Does man have a spirit?

Yes. The Bible says that man has a spirit. When a man dies the body perishes, but the spirit returns to God and remains in an unconscious state until the resurrection when God will give it a new body.

... [quoting now from a little earlier]

Does God have a spirit?

Yes. God’s spirit is His personality or His mind which is present in every place. God’s bodily presence sits on a throne in heaven, but His mind or spirit is everywhere.”

So, according to this view, humans have a non-bodily part of themselves and so does God. God has a bodily form, but his non-bodily part of himself extends beyond his body and is present in every place. This disembodied mind of God is considered to be his spirit – and it is precisely this bodiless spirit that is the Holy Spirit.

As you can see, the trinitarian and anti-trinitarian views share the idea that personhood is neither strictly nor necessarily material, or bodily. Regarding the Holy Spirit, they agree that it is a non-physical, bodiless mind; they only disagree as to whether this mind is a separate individual from the Father and the Son or if it is the mind of God the Father transcending his bodily form.

Early SDAs on Personhood

As we'll see, the early SDA notion of personhood was radically different from the modern SDA notion. It will be helpful to briefly consider it from the perspective of its historical development. From the beginning of the Millerite movement, Adventists proclaimed the "Personal" advent of Christ. This was set in contrast to the idea of a "Spiritual" advent. In Millerite writings, they repeatedly and plainly explained that by saying Jesus would return "personally" they mean that Jesus is not a bodiless spirit; instead, he is a real, physical being whose return would consist of his literal return to earth bodily for all to see. They used the words "person," "personal," and "personality" to emphasize the physicality of Jesus and of his return.

A few Millerites took this emphasis on Jesus' physicality and extended it to human nature, even going so far as denying that humans have any non-physical aspect. While this view was not widely accepted among the Millerites, it was universally accepted among those who went on to found the Seventh-day Adventist denomination after the Great disappointment. Early Seventh-day Adventists completely rejected the idea that humans have a non-physical part of themselves, typically called a "soul." Instead, they understood that the word translated "soul" from the Hebrew scriptures actually refers to the physical being – the body. As one example among many that could be given, [The Signs of the Times of November 2, 1882](#) has an article called "Scriptural Meaning of the Word Soul." It says,

"The idea of selfhood or physical personality is presented with certainty in all those passages which speak of the soul as desiring food, eating, or being satisfied."

The article then goes on to quote many passages saying just that. After the quotations and some additional explanation, the article says,

"All these are decisive as proof that *the soul* is the *person*, or physical being."

Note the use of the terms "personality" and "person" in both statements. The statements are plain: personhood, to early SDAs consisted of the "physical being." This understanding is the foundation upon which the SDA doctrine of the state of the dead rests. Since we don't have a non-physical element, when the body dies, the whole person dies for the very reason that the person is nothing but the body – a material organism through and through.

What is striking is that early SDAs not only applied this meaning of "person" to humans and to Jesus, but also to angels (good and bad), to Satan, and even to God himself. For an example of their application of this notion of personhood to angels and Satan, see [Angels: Their Nature and Ministry](#)

[by D. M. Canright](#) (revised by J. H. Waggoner). We've produced a lot of material elsewhere showing that early SDAs regarded God as a "person" in precisely this material/physical sense. For further information on the earliest developments of the Millerite?SDA notion of personhood, see *What Happened on Oct. 22, 1844 is Not Immaterial*. And also be sure to explore our [Personality of God Tag](#). For your convenience, however, we'll explain some of the most relevant aspects of the doctrine here.

Early SDAs had a very distinct notion of the "personality of God." In fact, their understanding of God as a physical person was a pillar doctrine of the SDA faith.² You can watch a series of video presentations on this subject [HERE](#). Ellen referred to it thus:

"Those who try to bring in theories that would remove the pillars of our faith concerning the sanctuary, or concerning the personality of God or of Christ, are working as blind men." – [Ms62-1905 par. 14](#)

In addition to informing us that the early SDA understanding of the personality of God is a pillar of the faith, this statement also let's us know that in the early 1900s, some were bringing in theories that would remove this pillar. This was most prominent in the ideas of J. H. Kellogg as published in his book *The Living Temple*. Kellogg advocated the idea that God, while having a body, also transcends that localized body and pervades all nature. Ellen said regarding this book:

"I am authorized by the Lord to say, The sentiments contained in Living Temple in regard to the personality of God are opposed to the truth that God has given us." – [Letter232-1903, par. 40](#)

And to Kellogg, she wrote,

"You are not definitely clear on the personality of God, which is everything to us as a people." – [Letter300-1903, par. 7](#)

From the above statements, it is clear that the personality of God was a truth given to the SDA people by God as one of the pillar doctrines of the faith and also that it was understood by the early SDAs as a people. There is another illuminating statement where she specifies one particular pioneer as one who understood the subject, and she said others understood it as well.

“We are on the very same foundation; we have the same evidence, and we worked on it day and night, to know in regard to the sanctuary question, and in regard to the personality of God, and of Christ, and of all these subjects.

...

You have listened to Elder Loughborough. He was with us from almost the first of our work, and he knows and he understands these things, and others understand them.” – [Ms138-1906, pars. 40, 44](#)

To illustrate the plainness of this pillar of our faith regarding the personality of God, we quote from an article by J. N. Loughborough published in the Review and Herald in 1855 called [Is God A Person?](#) We quote only selections but recommend the whole article.

“Whatever may be the truth in this matter, it certainly cannot be wrong for us to examine what the Word says respecting it. Many there are that would refrain from the investigation of unpopular truths because the cry of heresy is raised against them. ... The Bible certainly contains testimony upon this point, and we again repeat, ‘The things which are revealed belong to us.’ We inquire then, what saith the Scripture?

The very testimony we have been examining in regard to man’s being formed of the dust in the image of God, proves conclusively that God has a form, although the sentiment is contrary to what we have been taught, while children, from the catechism....

There is at least *one* impassable difficulty in the way of those who believe God is immaterial, and heaven is not a literal, located place: they are obliged to admit that Jesus is there bodily, a literal person; the same Jesus that was crucified, died, and buried, was raised from the dead, ascended up to heaven, and is now at the right hand of God. Jesus was possessed of flesh and bones after his resurrection.... If Jesus is there in heaven with a literal body of flesh and bones, may not heaven after all be a literal place, a habitation for a literal God, a literal Saviour, literal angels, and resurrected immortal saints? Oh no, says one, ‘God is a Spirit.’ So Christ said to the woman of Samaria at the well. It does not necessarily follow because God is a Spirit, that he has no body.... David says, [Psalm 114:4,] ‘Who maketh his angels spirits;’ yet angels have bodies. Angels appeared to both Abraham and Lot, and ate with them. We see the idea that angels are spirits, does not prove that they are not literal beings.

...

If the Scripture states in positive terms that God is a person, it will not answer for us to draw an inference from a text which says 'God is a Spirit,' that he has no body.

We will now present a few texts which prove that God is a person. Exodus 33:18, 23. 'And he (Moses) said, I beseech thee shew me thy glory.' Verse 20.... 'And the Lord said, Behold there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: and it shall come to pass while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock; and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by; and I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see *my back parts*; but *my face* shall not be seen.' If God is an immaterial Spirit, then Moses could not see him; for we are told a spirit cannot be seen by natural eyes. There would then be no propriety for God to say he would put his hand over Moses' face while he passed by, (seemingly to prevent him from seeing his face,) for he could not see him. Neither do we conceive how an immaterial hand could obstruct the rays of light from passing to Moses' eyes. But if the position be true that God is immaterial, and cannot be seen by the natural eye, the text above is all superfluous. What sense is there in saying God put his hand over Moses' face, to prevent him from seeing that which could not be seen.

Says one, I see we cannot harmonize the matter any other way, than that there was a literal body seen by Moses; but that it was not God's own body, it was a body he took that he might show himself to Moses. Moses could form no just conceptions of God unless he assumed a form. So God took a body. This throws a worse coloring on the matter than the first position; for it charges God with deception; telling Moses he should see *him*, when in fact Moses according to this testimony did not see God, but another body. A person must be given to doubt almost beyond recovery, that would attempt thus to mystify, and do away the force of this testimony.

...

We now see the Scriptures clearly teach, that God is a person with a body and form."

This testimony is plain enough that we shouldn't need to quote any more on the point. Yet, we will briefly quote two other statements. The first is something we mentioned earlier. It is a statement by Uriah Smith that occurs on the same page of an issue of the *Review* as a statement by George Tenney that simultaneously rejected trinitarianism while also calling the Holy Spirit a person. Given that Tenney and Smith co-edited the *Review* at the time, we mentioned that Smith's statement is illuminating for understanding just what Tenney meant. Smith's statement is in answer to a question regarding whether man was made in the physical or moral image of God. Here is part of his answer:

“We understand that both the physical and the moral image are referred to in the declaration, in the image and after the likeness, of God. The same expression is used in Gen. 5:3. Of Jesus we read that he was the brightness of his Father's glory, and ‘the express image of his person.’ Heb. 1:3. And from all the revelations we have of the person of God, we are led to conclude that he has the form in which man was created. See ‘Patriarchs and Prophets,’ page 45.” – [*Review and Herald, June 9, 1896*](#)

The last statement we'll quote on the subject is from D. M. Canright in his series [*The Personality of God*](#) which, as we mentioned earlier, is a series he wrote with the personal assistance of James and Ellen White. Here are a couple of important extracts:

“Now what is the meaning of the word *person*? It seems that on so simple a word as this there could be no mistake. It does not and cannot mean an immaterial, intangible, shapeless, formless essence. It always means an intelligent being, having a body, shape, and form.

...

Now the Bible, after using the word *person* hundreds of times in the sense indicated above, says that God is a person. We believe it, and are willing to leave it there.”

This states the early SDA view regarding personhood directly. Persons are strictly and necessarily physical – material – corporeal. Since they believed that this is the inherent nature of personhood, this is the view of personhood they brought to the question of the personhood of the Holy Spirit. From the early SDA perspective, the Holy Spirit is either a corporeal person or not a person at all. This is why those who believed the Holy Spirit wasn't a person argued their case on the basis of the idea that the Holy Spirit isn't a bodily entity (see Canright and Smith above). If the Spirit has no body, the Spirit could have none of the attributes of personality, for according to their view of personhood, all the attributes of personhood are a result of the body. On the flip side, those who argued that the Holy Spirit is a person also used this materialistic understanding of personhood. This is true of Bro. Chapman (even though he was wrong in his identification of the Holy Spirit as Gabriel), it was true of Tenney, and it was true of R. A. Underwood, as you'll see in the articles below. To early SDAs, the idea of a non-physical person or a disembodied mind wasn't even an option. The Spirit was either a distinct material person with body and parts or not a person in any sense.

To summarize this point: While modern SDAs tend to view personhood as not necessarily requiring a physical body, early SDAs believed that persons were necessarily and strictly physical. They applied this not only to humans but to all persons, including God, and their view of God as a material person was regarded by them (including Ellen White) as a pillar of the faith.

It should be obvious from what we have already quoted from the early SDAs that their view of the personality of God was not only based on direct evidence regarding the nature of God's person, it was also grounded on principle. To put this another way, the fact that all the persons they believed to exist were corporeal wasn't mere happenstance – it wasn't that they thought there might be other types of persons but all the persons they knew about happened to be physical. On the contrary, they held that personhood, in principle, is a physical phenomenon and can't exist in any other way than corporeally (bodily). This brings us to the third major difference between the modern SDA and early SDA discussions over the personhood of the Holy Spirit:

Difference #3 – The Nature of Reality

By the fact that modern SDAs, both trinitarian and anti-trinitarian, tend to view the Holy Spirit as a non-physical entity, it is apparent that they think that the nature of reality is such as to allow such an entity. In other words, when considering the totality of what exists, they believe that there are both physical and non-physical realities. This view of the nature of reality is known as Substance Dualism. Early SDAs rejected substance dualism and instead held to a different view of the nature of reality: Materialism. Materialism is the philosophical position that existence consists solely of matter – physical stuff. To state this same view in the negative, nothing immaterial (or, non-physical) exists. That this was indeed the early SDA view is not a matter of speculation or after-the-fact characterization. They overtly promoted materialism even by the name “materialism” and they accepted the designation “materialists.”

For the bulk of the evidence, we’ll point you to further resources, but we’ll give you a little taste of early-SDA materialism here. A great introduction to the subject is found in [the Review and Herald of April 19, 1860](#) in an article by B. F. Robbins that is aptly called, “Materialism.” Here is the first paragraph:

“There is scarcely a subject in the range of Bible investigation more unpopular, and which excites more opposition in the professed Christian world, than the subject at the head of this article [Materialism]. It is called infidelity and atheism, while its believers are looked upon with suspicion and contempt. A minister of my acquaintance who a few months ago was favorable and publicly committed himself to the Scripture view of death and subsequent unconsciousness, retracted upon the ground that such doctrines avowed must of course lead to materialism. This we of course admit, and the other conclusion which he also avowed we admit, that materialism is opposed and subversive of the faith of the professed Christian world, because that faith is based upon immateriality or nothing.”

Notice the points made here. He mentions that materialism is essentially the most unpopular and opposed of biblical subjects. This is certainly true. The few Christians prior to Seventh-day Adventism who openly advocated materialism were met with vehement opposition (as examples, [Joseph Priestley](#) and [Thomas Cooper](#)). Robbins then says that materialism “is called infidelity and atheism, while its believers are looked upon with suspicion and contempt.” This is one of the accusations commonly brought against early SDAs. Today, we can easily understand that they were called “Judaizers” for promoting the Sabbath, and a “cult” due to having a prophet, but they were also called atheists and infidels due to promoting materialism. Here are just a few examples of early SDAs reporting this sort of accusation.

“I can say with the rest of the brethren and sisters, we meet with great opposition here from professed christians. They go so far as to call us infidels, scoffers and materialists, because we take the Bible as it reads, and believe in a material God, a material heaven, and that material saints will dwell with him there.” – Eldad Inman, [The Review and Herald, Nov. 25, 1858](#)

“In the *Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter* of Oct. 1865 is the following, ...

‘I found the community all in a ferment with the leaven of the Millerites or Second Adventists....they are materialists of the grossest kind; for they think that the image of God in which man is created is the figure of the body.’” – quote from Presbyterian periodical sent to James White from John McMillan, [Review and Herald, Dec. 19, 1865](#)

“The following our correspondent gives us among the speaker’s ‘most pithy sentences,’ copied from his notes: –

‘The Christ of Adventism is not the Christ of the Bible, . . . and has neither Godhead nor humanity.’ ‘That whole book [the Bible] says there is one God, . . . and no other. . . . Adventism rejects that God.’ ‘Adventism teaches that the material of which the persons of angels and of God is composed, is blood, flesh, and bones.’ ‘Adventism is the grossest system of atheism and materialism.’ ‘Adventism cannot distinguish between the human race and the lower orders of the brute creation; such as the horse, dog, or mosquito.’ ‘Adventism is the lowest system of atheism that can be conceived of.’ ‘In the vocabulary of Adventism, spirit is nothing but wind.’” – an SDA brother reporting the words of a Methodist by the name of Levington against Seventh-day Adventists, [Review and Herald, Dec. 2, 1880](#)

In face of this opposition, early SDAs still professed materialism. Take note again of what Robbins said in his opening paragraph. He mentions a minister who had publicly committed himself to the Scripture view that the dead know not anything, but then he retracted when he realized that this view must lead to materialism. Robbins doesn't respond contradicting this connection; he does just the reverse. He said, "This we of course admit." And then he goes further to also admit that "materialism is opposed and subversive of the faith of the professed Christian world," and he says this is true simply because "that faith is based upon immateriality or nothing." Clear as crystal, Robbins was saying that the professed Christian world had a faith based on nothing, and that "nothing" is "immateriality." It is important to remember that early SDAs held that the professed Christian world (Catholic and Protestant) was Babylon, so they did not shy away from stating that it was entirely wrong in its foundational doctrines. While nearly the whole Christian world claimed that reality is composed of two basic types of stuff, the material and the immaterial, early SDAs said there is only one type of stuff – matter.

A year after Robbin's article was published in *The Review*, James White published a pamphlet called [*Personality of God*](#) that included an article entitled "Immateriality." It's worth quoting in full:

"Immateriality.

This is but another name for nonentity. It is the negative of all things and beings – of all existence. There is not one particle of proof to be advanced to establish its existence. It has no way to manifest itself to any intelligence in heaven or on earth. Neither God, angels, nor men could possibly conceive of such a substance, being, or thing. It possesses no property or power by which to make itself manifest to any intelligent being in the universe. Reason and analogy never scan it, or even conceive of it. Revelation never reveals it, nor do any of our senses witness its existence. It cannot be seen, felt, heard, tasted, or smelled, even by the strongest organs, or by the most acute sensibilities. It is neither liquid nor solid, soft nor hard – it can neither extend nor contract. In short, it can exert no influence whatever – it can neither act nor be acted upon. And even if it does exist, it can be of no possible use. It possesses no one, desirable property, faculty, or use, yet, strange to say, immateriality is the modern Christian's God, his anticipated heaven, his immortal self – his all!

O sectarianism! O atheism!! O annihilation!!! who can perceive the nice shades of difference between the one and the other? They seem alike, all but in name. The atheist has no God. The sectarian has a God without body or parts. Who can define the difference? For our part we do not perceive a difference of a single hair; they both claim to be the negative of all things which exist – and both are equally powerless and unknown.

The atheist has no after life, or conscious existence beyond the grave. The sectarian has one, but it is immaterial, like his God; and without body or parts. Here again both are negative, and both arrive at the same point. Their faith and hope amount to the same; only it is expressed by different terms.

Again, the atheist has no heaven in eternity. The sectarian has one, but it is immaterial in all its properties, and is therefore the negative of all riches and substances. Here again they are equal, and arrive at the same point.

As we do not envy them the possession of all they claim, we will now leave them in the quiet and undisturbed enjoyment of the same, and proceed to examine the portion still left for the despised materialist to enjoy.

What is God? He is material, organized intelligence, possessing both body and parts. Man is in his image.

What is Jesus Christ? He is the Son of God, and is like his Father, being “the brightness of his Father’s glory, and the express image of his person.” He is a material intelligence, with body, parts, and passions; possessing immortal flesh and immortal bones.

What are men? They are the offspring of Adam. They are capable of receiving intelligence and exaltation to such a degree as to be raised from the dead with a body like that of Jesus Christ, and to possess immortal flesh and bones. Thus perfected, they will possess the material universe, that is, the earth, as their “everlasting inheritance.” With these hopes and prospects before us, we say to the Christian world who hold to immateriality, that they are welcome to their God – their life – their heaven, and their all. They claim nothing but that which we throw away; and we claim nothing but that which they throw away. Therefore, there is no ground for quarrel or contention between us.

We choose all substance – what remains

The mystical sectarian gains;
All that each claims, each shall possess,
Nor grudge each other's happiness.
An immaterial God they choose,
For such a God we have no use;
An immaterial heaven and hell,
In such a heaven we cannot dwell.
We claim the earth, the air, and sky,
And all the starry worlds on high;
Gold, silver, ore, and precious stones,
And bodies made of flesh and bones.
Such is our hope, our heaven, our all,
When once redeemed from Adam's fall;
All things are ours, and we shall be,
The Lord's to all eternity."

What a plain declaration in favor of materialism! These same sentiments were expressed by early SDAs [time](#) and [time again](#). And it isn't going too far to say that this doctrine of materialism formed the basis – the foundation – upon which all the pillars of Seventh-day Adventism rested. Early SDAs regarded Spiritualism as the great lie, but to them spiritualism was not merely attempts to contact the dead, or overt occult practices. Yes, these are forms of spiritualism, but early SDAs understood spiritualism more broadly as the philosophical view of the nature of reality opposite materialism. This more basic philosophical meaning of spiritualism is defined by the [Encyclopedia Britannica](#) as “a characteristic of any system of thought that affirms the existence of immaterial reality imperceptible to the senses.” As should be apparent from the above quotations, early SDAs completely rejected the existence of immateriality and insisted that reality is purely material. On this point we'll quote one more publication. In 1882, the Review and Herald published a booklet by D. M. Canright called [Matter and Spirit](#). In its opening pages, the publisher's note endorses the booklet in the following words:

“The subject treated in this work is intimately connected with many of the problems that are becoming freely discussed in the religious world at the present day. The publishers believe that the plain and logical method with which the author has dealt with the question will greatly assist the reader in the solution of these problems, and divest them of many of their intricacies by establishing correct premises upon which to base conclusions. Commending it to the careful consideration of the candid reader, they send it forth on its mission, asking the blessing of Heaven on its perusal.”

The booklet covers many subjects including the nature of matter, how the organization of matter produces a vast range of qualities that accounts for all phenomena, the materiality of life, thought as a result of the organization and operation of material brains, and the absurdity of disembodied spirits and of all forms of immaterialism. In his last paragraph, Canright says,

“But here I leave this very interesting question, having only glanced at a few of the innumerable proofs in favor of the materiality of all things.”

Similarly, we here have only glanced at a few of the many writings produced by early Seventh-day Adventists in favor of materialism. To read more of what they had to say on this subject, please see our compilation [Materialism: Our Forgotten Foundation](#).

Without understanding that early SDAs were materialists, modern SDAs will be prone to misinterpret the early-SDA discussion regarding the personhood of the Holy Spirit. Modern SDAs tend to think of the Holy Spirit as non-physical, either as the non-physical independent Intelligence promoted by modern trinitarian SDAs or as the disembodied mind of God promoted by many non-trinitarian SDAs. It is important to realize that neither option was considered a possibility to early Seventh-day Adventists. They reject wholesale the idea that anything non-physical could exist, whether persons or not. Their materialism formed the foundation for their notion of personhood. Persons must be physical, corporeal beings. To them, this was literally the only option.

In order to ensure that we understand the lesson here as fully as possible, let's briefly recap the three major differences between the modern SDA discussion on the personhood of the Holy Spirit and the early SDA discussion on the same subject.

1st Major Difference: Modern SDAs tend to assume that the question of whether or not the Holy Spirit is a person is inherently related to the question of trinitarianism. If one denies trinitarianism, it is assumed that they don't regard the Holy Spirit as a distinct person. Likewise, if one accepts the personhood of the Holy Spirit, they are assumed to be trinitarian. Early SDAs shared none of these assumptions. While they, of course, knew that trinitarians affirmed the personhood of the Holy Spirit, they knew that there were several non-trinitarian theologies that made the same affirmation. Furthermore, they knew that the truly distinctive features of trinitarianism had more to do with the nature of the divine persons and the relationship between them. Early SDAs had a lot to say about trinitarianism and rejected it on the basis of the falsity of its distinctive features. At the same time, they had very little to say about whether or not the Holy Spirit is a person. When some did voice their opinions, some thought the Holy Spirit is not a person while others thought the Holy Spirit is a person. Those who said the Holy Spirit isn't a person did not argue that the falsity of trinitarianism implies the falsity of the personhood of the Holy Spirit nor did they argue that accepting the personhood of the Holy Spirit would in any way amount to accepting trinitarianism. Those who accepted the personhood of the Holy Spirit continued to be anti-trinitarian, rejecting the trinitarian portrayal of the nature of the Divine Persons and the relationship between them.

2nd Major Difference: Modern SDAs tend to assume the basic nature of personhood does not necessarily require a physical body. While humans might have to have bodies, many seem to think that humans are more than their bodies, but even those who don't have a dualistic view of humans tend to think that God transcends matter (this is especially so for the Holy Spirit). Modern trinitarian SDAs regard the Holy Spirit as a person, but one without a body. Modern anti-trinitarian SDAs don't regard the Holy Spirit as a distinct person but regard God as having a part of himself (his mind) that extends beyond his body and this disembodied mind is the Holy Spirit. Thus, God, as a person, is not strictly physical in this view. Early SDAs had a very definite view of personhood. Persons, in their view, were necessarily and strictly physical, corporeal beings. This applied to humans, angels, Satan, and even God Himself. Since they didn't believe there could be persons of any other kind, this is the definition of person they had in mind when engaging the question, "Is the Holy Spirit a person?" Those who said, "No" argued for their conclusion on the basis that the Holy Spirit has no body (an argument that would make no sense if they considered bodiless persons as an option). Those who said, "Yes" regarded the Holy Spirit as a literal being with a physical body, though most were careful to not speculate about unknown facts regarding this body.

3rd Major Difference: Modern SDAs tend to assume that reality includes both physical and non-physical components. With such a view, a non-physical Holy Spirit is a possibility. Early SDAs were explicitly materialists. They regarded reality as solely material/physical. From their perspective, a non-physical Holy Spirit (whether as a person or not) simply isn't possible.

More Holy Spirit History Leading Up To R. A. Underwood's 1898 Series

While we've covered a lot of relevant history already, there are a few more facts that are important to consider in order to fully understand the context for R. A. Underwood's series.

The most recent statement we quoted from Ellen White regarding the Holy Spirit was from her letter to Brother Chapman in 1891 where she stated plainly that the nature of the Holy Spirit had not been revealed.

Amazingly, only two years later, that began to change. In a manuscript in 1893, Ellen White took a stand for the first time as to whether or not the Holy Spirit is a person. Here is what she said,

“The individual Christian will grow in grace just in proportion as he depends not on his or her smartness and supposed natural and acquired capabilities, but on the teachings and leadings of the Holy Spirit, and trains his mind and habituates himself to turning in contemplation and earnest prayer to his heavenly Father for guidance and instruction in righteousness. Every church member will be vigorous and fruitful in proportion as he honors the Father, who is not to be regarded as an essence but as a personal God who made man in His own image and likeness. {par. 6}

The Son of God, who is the express image of the Father’s person, became man’s Advocate and Redeemer. He humbled Himself in taking the nature of man in his fallen condition, but He did not take the taint of sin. As the second Adam He must pass over the ground where Adam fell, meet the wily foe who caused Adam’s and Eve’s fall, and be tempted in all points as man will be tempted, and overcome every temptation in behalf of man. To Him should man look—to Him who endured the ‘contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.’ Hebrews 12:3. While every human being is to be loved for Christ’s sake, not one is to be looked to as supreme in counsel and unerring in wisdom. {par. 7}

The Holy Spirit is the Comforter, in Christ’s name. He personifies Christ, yet is a distinct personality. We may have the Holy Spirit if we ask for it and make it [a] habit to turn to and trust in God rather than in any finite human agent who may make mistakes. {par. 8}” [Ms 93, 1893, pars. 6-8](#)

It is striking that in this first affirmation of the personhood of the Holy Spirit, Ellen White starts by affirming the personhood of the Father and the Son. Paragraph 6 affirms the personhood of the Father, paragraph 7 affirms the personhood of the Son, and paragraph 8 affirms the personhood of the Holy Spirit.

Her expressions make plain that her view of personhood is the same materialistic view that had been advocated by Seventh-day Adventists since their beginnings. She says that the Father is “not to be regarded as an essence but as a personal God who made man in His own image and likeness.” Clearly, contrasting a “personal God” with an essence is designed to convey that a personal God is a corporeal God. This is made yet more plain by her words “who made man in His own image and likeness.” In other words, for the Father to be a personal God means that he is a real corporeal person whose form is revealed in the form of humans. Her reference to Jesus as “the express image of the Father’s person” references Heb. 1:3, a common early-SDA proof-text in favor of the personality of God. Furthermore, it hearkens back to her own early visions where Jesus used these same words to indicate to her that both He and His Father were persons – corporeal beings with forms like humans. Finally, she says that the Holy Spirit “personifies Christ, yet is a distinct personality.” If her notion of personhood was plain in the preceding paragraphs, it should be equally plain here.

As mentioned before, this statement comes from a manuscript, so while it tells us that Ellen had come to understand the Holy Spirit as a distinct person, it doesn’t tell us whether others knew that she had this view. Her first published statement on the personhood of the Holy Spirit was in a letter she wrote from Australia “To my brethren in America” in 1896. Here is what she said,

“The great office work of the Holy Spirit is thus distinctly specified by our Saviour, ‘And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin. [John 16:8]...

Evil had been accumulating for centuries, and could only be restrained and resisted by the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fulness of divine power.” – [Letter 8, 1896, pars. 1-2](#)

This statement received broader circulation when it was republished in 1897 in *Special Testimonies for Ministers and Workers No. 10*, along with another statement referring to the Holy Spirit as a person:

“The prince of the power of evil can only be held in check by the power of God in the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit.” – [Special Testimonies for Ministers and Workers No. 10, p. 37.1](#)

These statements didn't go by unnoticed, at least not by Rufus Underwood. As you'll see in his series, he refers to these statements along with other of Ellen's statements in addition to many passages from the Bible. And he argues that the Holy Spirit is a person (in the early-SDA notion of personhood).

Before getting to his articles, there is one other aspect of the history we must understand. While the personhood of the Holy Spirit was being brought to light through the Spirit of Prophecy in the 1890s, there was a work of an entirely different character developing as well. Earlier, we briefly explained a little regarding Kellogg's views in *The Living Temple* and Ellen White's response. As a reminder, Ellen said that his views regarding God as an essence pervading nature were opposed to the truths God had revealed concerning the personality of God. His theories, if accepted, would topple the pillars and erode the foundation of Seventh-day Adventism. While the controversy burst to the surface with the publication of *The Living Temple* in 1903, Kellogg had already been promoting his theories for years. The first major public promotion of his theories was in 1897 during the General Conference meetings. Kellogg wasn't alone in promoting these theories. Ellett J. Waggoner (J. H. Waggoner's son) advocated the same ideas. Most relevant for our present interest is a series of statements Ellett Waggoner made regarding the Spirit of God at the 1897 General Conference. His statements don't clearly indicate whether or not he regarded the Spirit as a person, but regardless, they imply something far from the materialistic views that were so foundational to the first-generation pioneers. Here's what he said,

[In his talk on Feb. 15:]

"Where did you get the air you breathe? It is God's air; it is the breath of God. God put his own breath into man's nostrils, in order that he might live. This is the way we continue to breathe. It is the breath of god that keeps us alive, the Spirit of God in our nostrils." – [*General Conference Daily Bulletin, Feb. 18, 1897, p. 71.6*](#)

[Then, on Feb. 18:]

"What was that breath of life, what do we breathe?

(A voice) Air.

What is air, then? – It is God’s breath. If we knew this not only physically, but spiritually, we should be much more alive than we are....

The life that God breathed into man was God, and so long as man continued to acknowledge that his life, his breath, came from God, he remained good.” – [General Conference Daily Bulletin, Feb. 26, p. 158.2-4,8](#)

What is the impression left by these statements? It isn’t altogether clear since on one hand, it seems to distinguish between “breath” and “God” by saying that the breath “came from God;” yet, different aspects of these statements phrase things in such a way so as to equate the literal air we breathe • with God’s own breath • with the Spirit of God • with life • with God himself! What are we to make of this? With everything else that Waggoner and Kellogg said during these very same meetings, it’s clear that Waggoner meant it quite literally. The writings of both Kellogg and Waggoner, both before and after this GC Session, testify that they were already entertaining pantheistic ideas. Here is an example of the sorts of things Kellogg said,

“The question may arise in the mind of some one, How do we know that God is in us? We are perhaps too prone to think of God as in heaven, or in some definite place, and only omnipresent in an accommodated or figurative sense.” – [General Conference Daily Bulletin, Feb. 18, 1897, p. 78](#)

“We have here the evidence of a universal presence, an intelligent presence, an all-wise presence, an all-powerful presence, a presence by the aid of which every atom of the universe is kept in touch with every other atom. This force that holds all things together, that is everywhere present, that thrills throughout the whole universe, that acts instantaneously through boundless space, can be nothing else than God himself. What a wonderful thought that this same God is in us and in everything.” – [General Conference Daily Bulletin, Feb. 19, 1897, p. 83](#)

As should be obvious, these sentiments contradict the whole tenor of the early SDA teaching of the personality of God, which is only to say what Ellen White herself said in no less clear terms, as we quoted earlier. Given that prior to this development in the 1890s, Seventh-day Adventist views on personhood were unanimously materialistic, while after this period (especially after the passing of all the first-generation pioneers) SDA views on personhood increasingly shifted away from strict materialism (especially for God and even more especially for the Holy Spirit), it would be exceedingly difficult to not see these very ideas promoted by Kellogg and Waggoner as the beginning of the shift from the early SDA view to the modern SDA view. As we have seen, the modern SDA view and the early SDA view are worlds apart. So, there certainly was a shift. And it should be startling how dramatic this shift has been, even to the point where most SDAs today aren't even aware that there is such a pillar doctrine as the personality of God, and even fewer have any clear idea as to what it is or know that early Seventh-day Adventism explicitly avowed materialism!

There is one more character worth mentioning as a player in the beginning stages of this shift. His name is Herbert Camden Lacey. A quick overview of his early life will be relevant here, as you'll soon see. He was born in England in 1871; his family moved to Australia when he was 11; when he was 18, he moved to America, first to California in 1889 where he studied at Healdsburg College and then to Battle Creek in 1892 where he furthered his studies. In 1895, he returned to Australia. That's it for the overview. In 1936, Lacey wrote [a letter](#) to W. C. White relating certain things he taught in Cooranbong, Australia in 1895-1896. More specifically, his claim to Willie White was that he "taught the Truth of the Personality of the Holy Spirit before it appeared in the Testimonies" and his letter implies that Ellen may have ultimately got the teaching from him, possibly through the channel of Marian Davis. But he makes it a point to say, "but I do not hold that it is anything against the Spirit of Prophecy to discover that Sr. White did not originate any prominent point of the Present Truth." Of course, we know Ellen White actually didn't get the idea from him since she had already written plainly that the Holy Spirit is a distinct personality in 1893 whereas Lacey only claims to have developed his series on the personality of the Holy Spirit in 1895-1896. Moreover, his understanding of the personhood of the Holy Spirit was not rooted in the early-SDA notion of personhood as was the case with Ellen's understanding. Here is what he said:

“I conducted the early morning Bible studies for workers after the Armidale Campmeeting, and at the Institute at Cooranbong (1895 and 1896) during which I developed a series on ‘The Personality and Work of the Holy Spirit.’ I tried to harmonize the position apparently taken in the Testimonies up to that date, that the Holy Spirit is an Influence (the pronoun ‘it’ being generally used when referring to the Spirit) with the position obviously taken in the Bible, and the New Testament particularly, that the Holy Ghost is a Person, as Jesus always spoke of Him in that way, using the pronoun ‘He’ which in the Greek is very emphatic. I said that the Holy Spirit, or Holy Ghost is a distinct ‘Person’ in the Godhead having as the Bible shows all the attributes of ‘personality’ namely Intellect, Sensibility, Will, Self-Consciousness, Power to Direct others, etc. But without any corporeal ‘body’ or frame, as the Scriptures reveal the Father and the Son to possess. And so the ‘Spirit’ can be everywhere and is everywhere, since He is without ‘bodily’ restrictions. And I distinctly remember saying that the best way to harmonize all these teachings is to say that ‘The Holy Spirit is an Influence, having all the attributes of personality, so that ‘He’ knows, and feels, and chooses, and speaks, and directs others, etc. He is a definite ‘person’ in the Godhead, but we must never imagine ‘him as having a definite ‘form’ whatever, as of course we do imag[in]e the Son and the Father to have.” – [Herbert C. Lacey to W. C. White, July 27, 1936](#)

One may well wonder whether Lacey really taught these ideas back in 1895-1896; after all, this letter was written 40 years after the fact. Yet, there are a couple of factors that make his recollection not improbable. First, we know that ideas of this same character were being introduced into the ranks of Seventh-day Adventists at this very time. While Kellogg didn’t specify that it was the Holy Spirit who is the conscious intellect that exists everywhere without a distinct bodily form, he said essentially this same thing about “God.” In what we quoted from him above he said that we are too prone to think of God as in a definite place and he said that God is “a universal presence, an intelligent presence,... a presence by the aid of which every atom of the universe is kept in touch with every other atom. This force that holds all things together, that is everywhere present, that thrills throughout the whole universe, that acts instantaneously through boundless space, can be nothing else than God himself.” This plainly portrays God as not being a strictly material person, but as instead a disembodied mind pervading the universe. This is exactly what Ellen White objected to regarding Kellogg’s views. She said,

“It leads to the nonentity of Christ, to the nonentity of God, his personality, and brings in, – what shall I call it? – a sort of manufactured theory of God and Christ.” – [Ms 70a, 1905, par. 11](#)

Again she said,

“The new theories in regard to God and Christ, as brought out in *The Living Temple*, are not in harmony with the teaching of Christ. The Lord Jesus came to this world to present the Father. He did not represent God as an essence pervading nature, but as a personal Being. Christians should bear in mind that God has a personality as verily as has Christ.” [Letter 212, 1903, par. 23](#)

Lacey’s explanation of the Holy Spirit as “an Influence, having all the attributes of personality” “but without any corporeal ‘body’ or frame” that “can be everywhere and is everywhere, since He is without ‘bodily’ restrictions’ and without ‘any definite ‘form’ whatever,” is nakedly the same theory in principle. It presents the Holy Spirit as an essence pervading nature just as verily as Kellogg described God in the same way.

So, we know that such views existed at the time Lacey said he presented them. In addition, we know that Lacey had just come to Australia from the very place where Kellogg was exerting the greatest influence – Battle Creek. If it is the case that Lacey really did present these views in 1895 and 1896 (and it is not improbable that he did) we have every reason to believe Ellen White did not share them. First of all, as we’ve seen, Lacey’s portrayal of the Holy Spirit is essentially the same as Kellogg’s portrayal of God, which Ellen White opposed from point of principle as a spiritualistic deception. Furthermore, in 1897, Lacey was appointed as the principal of Avondale College in Cooranbong (the same place Lacey taught his views about the Holy Spirit). Ellen White was evidently opposed to the appointment and had the board reverse the decision and appoint someone else instead. Here is how she reported the circumstance in a letter to her son Willie:

“The board, a very incapable and ignorant one, elected Brother Herbert Lacey as principal without counselling with me. This brought me to the front to speak. Brother Hughes is principal, and he will, I think do well in this position. He has had experience in managing. I think there will be no trouble. But I have had to speak plainly, and keep out the breezes coming from Battle Creek.” – [Letter 140, 1897, par. 11](#)

Notice that she referred to her prevention of Lacey from becoming principal as “keep[ing] out the breezes coming from Battle Creek.” Evidently, she knew Lacey had been influenced by ideas from Battle Creek and was spreading the same winds of doctrine in Avondale. This adds some helpful context to an interesting and important statement Ellen White made regarding the Holy Spirit in this very same place – again, the very place Lacey said he taught his views of a bodiless Holy Spirit and where Ellen prevented him from becoming principal. Here is the statement:

“We have been brought together as a school, and we need to realize that the Holy Spirit, who is as much a person as God is a person, is walking through these grounds, unseen by human eyes...” – [Ms 66, 1899, par. 11](#) (from a discourse Ellen delivered in Avondale on March 25, 1899)

Notice, when Kellogg portrayed God as an essence pervading nature, Ellen said, “God has a personality as verily as has Christ.” So too, when Lacey portrayed the Holy Spirit as an essence pervading nature, Ellen said, “the Holy Spirit, who is as much a person as God is a person, is walking through these grounds...” It is hard to imagine a plainer statement that the Holy Spirit is a person as fully as is God! And her statements describing what it means for God to be a person are explicit that he has a real form in the likeness of which humans were made. This, then, is precisely what she meant by calling the Holy Spirit a person.

The case is made stronger still by the fact that Kellogg, after publishing the Living Temple adjusted his views to be even more precisely aligned with the views of Lacey. We know this from a letter A. G. Daniells wrote to Willie White on Oct. 29, 1903. Here’s the relevant portion:

“Ever since the council closed I have felt that I should write you confidentially regarding Dr. Kellogg’s plans for revising and republishing ‘The Living Temple.’ But I have allowed the pressure of work to prevent me from doing so. Last evening we received a letter from the Doctor which makes me feel that I must not delay any longer to write you about this matter.

In one of the Doctor's statements made to the brethren while in council, he referred to 'The Living Temple,' and gave us to understand that it would be entirely withdrawn from the market, and its career brought to an end; at least this was the idea I received from what he said. But the day the council closed, I had a long conversation with him about the book. He then told me that he did not think that after all there was a very great difference of opinion between us regarding the subject dealt with. He said that some days before coming to the council, he had been thinking the matter over, and began to see that he had made a slight mistake in expressing his views. He said that all the way along he had been troubled to know how to state the character of God and his relation to his created works. He felt sure that he believed just what the Testimonies teach, and what Dr. Waggoner and Elder Jones have taught for years; but he had come to believe that none of them had expressed the matter in correct form. He then stated that his former views regarding the trinity had stood in his way of making a clear and absolutely correct statement; but that within a short time he had come to believe in the trinity, and could now see pretty clearly where all the difficulty was, and believed that he could clear the matter up satisfactorily. He told me that he now believed in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost; and his view was that it was God the Holy Ghost, and not God the Father, that filled all space, and every living thing. He said that if he had believed this before writing the book, he could have expressed his views without giving the wrong impression." – [A. G. Daniells to Willie White, Oct. 29, 1903](#)

That Ellen White did not think shifting from an all-pervading bodiless God to an all-pervading bodiless Holy Spirit would fix anything is made clear by her response to Kellogg's plans to revise his book. She said,

"It will be said that *Living Temple* has been revised. But the Lord has shown me that Dr. Kellogg has not changed, and there can be no unity between him and the ministers of the gospel while he continues to cherish his present sentiments." – [Letter 277, 1904, par. 21](#)

Since Ellen objected to Kellogg's theories just as much when he applied them to the Holy Spirit as when he applied them to "God," it is clear that she objected in principle. She stood on the foundation that had been established from the beginning of the SDA movement (materialism) and she clung to the pillars (such as the personality of God and the sanctuary). It should also be plain from the above history that the falsehood that characterized *The Living Temple* was not trinitarianism, nor was it belief in the personhood of the Holy Spirit. As we just read, Kellogg didn't come to accept the trinity or that the Holy Spirit was a person until after *The Living Temple* was published and Ellen White had raised her voice against it. It was only in the period leading up to his revision of the book that he came to believe in the trinity and he then applied his theory of a bodiless intelligence not to God the Father, but to the Holy Spirit. This theory of an all-pervading bodiless mind is the real falsehood of Kellogg's views. And Ellen White objected to this theory at each stage no matter who said it and no matter to whom it was applied, whether to Jesus, to God, or to the Holy Spirit. As we already mentioned, this shift in Kellogg's thinking made his theory remarkably close to what Lacey had taught in Avondale. Lacey's views are worth repeating again. He said the Holy Spirit is "an Influence, having all the attributes of personality" "but without any corporeal 'body' or frame" that "can be everywhere and is everywhere, since He is without 'bodily' restrictions' and without 'any definite 'form' whatever.'" The degree to which Lacey's views resemble both Kellogg's views and the modern SDA views should be alarming!

In light of the above, we learn that in the 1890s, two views of the Holy Spirit were emerging. One was that the Holy Spirit is a real material being – a person like the Father and the Son. This was the view of J. H. Waggoner (as of the late 1870s), Brother Chapman, Charles Boyd, George Tenney, Ellen White, and, as we'll see, Rufus Underwood. The other view was that the Holy Spirit is a bodiless mind. Variations of this view were advocated by E. J. Waggoner, Herbert Lacey, and later, J. H. Kellogg.

In [the issue](#) of the Review and Herald immediately preceding the first of Underwood's articles, there is a column about the Holy Spirit that portrays the Spirit according to the spiritualistic view – as an all-pervading essence. Here is what it says:

"It is as easy to 'live in the Spirit' as it is to live at all, because it is impossible to find a place where the Spirit is not an all-pervading presence.

If any one does not live in the Spirit, it is not because the Spirit is not where he is; but solely because he will not receive the Spirit, he will not choose the way of the Spirit, he will not believe.

We cannot find a place to live where the Spirit is not. Then as we must live anyhow, why not live in the Spirit? Why not live the right way, instead of the wrong way?

Come, then, every soul; let us live in the Spirit.

Then, upon this, the exhortation is, ‘If we live in the Spirit, *let us also walk in the Spirit.*’

The Spirit being everywhere, it being impossible to flee from his presence, surely it is just as easy to walk in the Spirit as it is to walk at all.

We cannot find any place to walk where the Spirit is not. Then as we must walk anyhow, why not walk in the Spirit? Why not walk the right way, instead of the wrong way?

And, indeed, this is even the promise of God. Read it: ‘Walk in the Spirit, and *ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.*’ What a joyful promise!

Blessed be God for the unspeakable gift of his Spirit in such measure as to reach and surround every soul wherever he may be!

Praise the Lord that he ever longingly woos us by his gentle Spirit, to live in the Spirit, that we may walk in the Spirit, that we *shall not* fulfil the lusts of the flesh!

‘Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God.’

‘Receive ye the Holy Ghost.’

R. A. Underwood’s series is evidently intended to respond to this short write-up and the ideas it represents. His first article is titled *Have Ye Received the Holy Ghost Since Ye Believed?* as if to respond to the last line of this write-up. Here are some of his words from the opening paragraphs:

“We hear much at the present time about the baptism of the Holy Spirit....

In all ages when God has had a specific word to be done in the earth, a counterfeit has been introduced, by which many have been deceived. Now that God is about to bestow upon his waiting, trusting people the greatest of all spiritual blessings, we are in danger of being led to accept the spurious.”

Clearly, he was concerned that people might accept Satan’s counterfeit Spirit, in place of the true Spirit. In the third article, entitled *The Holy Spirit A Person*, he directly addresses the personality of the Holy Spirit and Satan’s attempt to undermine it. He says,

“Satan’s scheme is to destroy all faith in the personality of the Godhead, – the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost...”

He then goes on to describe how he previously did not believe that the Holy Spirit is a person, but now his difficulties had been removed. He explains this process in such a way that one could travel the same ground and encounter the same evidence and reason that persuaded him. The reasons and evidence he provides make it evident that he regarded the Holy Spirit, not as an all-pervading bodiless mind, but as a real person as verily as are the Father and the Son.

(Everything below is R. A. Underwood's series. You can look at scans of the original periodicals by clicking the links in the bracketed notes at the start of each article.)

“HAVE YE RECEIVED THE HOLY GHOST SINCE YE BELIEVED?”

R. A. UNDERWOOD

(Mesopotamia, Ohio.)

[originally published in [*The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 26, 1898](#)]

If not, why not? God's word is a living, *present* truth to every one who believes. That there are aggressive and progressive steps in the Christian life, no one with the open Bible before him can deny, even if his own experience has not verified this truth. How often we have heard the statement, "I desire a deeper work of grace in my soul." Thousands have longed for more power, to be kept from sin, and to rescue men and women from death. It is good that we have such a desire; but will God create the desire and not supply the demand? — To do so is not like our Father, who, the promise is, "shall supply *all* your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

We hear much at the present time about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. That we have reached the time when the "latter rain," "the refreshing," "the outpouring of the Spirit," "the baptism of the Holy Ghost," should be experienced by the people of God, is a plainly revealed truth of the Bible.

In all ages when God has had a specific word to be done in the earth, a counterfeit has been introduced, by which many have been deceived. Now that God is about to bestow upon his waiting, trusting people the greatest of all spiritual blessings, we are in danger of being led to accept the spurious. In view of this, every child of God should, with humility of soul, *study* the Word with earnest prayer for light upon this subject.

We must understand and accept the *conditions* upon which God has promised the baptism of the Spirit. If we do not, we may be led to accept the false. Before entering upon the study of this most important subject, I will quote the following from the pen of Mrs. E.G. White, on pages 126 and 127 of "Gospel Workers:"—

The Lord often works where we least expect him; he surprises us by revealing his power through instruments of his own choice, while he passes by the men to whom we have looked as those through whom light should come. God desires us to receive the truth upon its own merits,— because it is truth.

No one should claim that he has all the light there is for God's people. The Lord will not tolerate this. He has said, "I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it." Even if all our leading men should refuse light and truth, that door will still remain open. The Lord will raise up men who will give the people the message for this time. . . .

The spirit in which you come to the investigation of the Scriptures will determine the character of the assistant at your side. Angels from the world of light will be with those who, in humility of heart, seek for divine guidance. But if the Bible is opened with irreverence, with a feeling of self-sufficiency, if the heart is filled with prejudice, *Satan is beside you*, and he will set the plain statements of God's word in a perverted light.

These extracts need no comment. Reader, pause and lift your heart to God in earnest prayer to be kept by his power from those things that invite Satan to stand by your side, and that you may receive only truth and light.

THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

R. A. UNDERWOOD

(Mesopotamia, Ohio.)

[originally published in [*The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 3, 1898](#)]

THE conditions upon which God has promised to baptize his people with the Holy Spirit and with power are overlooked by many who expect this wonderful blessing. They wait, and wonder why it does not come, in some cases accepting the counterfeit. We are asked to receive the Holy Spirit, but the way is not clear to many how this blessing is to come. Before we can *receive* the Holy Ghost, we must *know that he is*. We cannot receive him for *what* he is, unless we know something about *who* he is, and *what* he is. We must also feel the *need* of him, and make the necessary *preparation* on our part, in order to receive him.

Many overlook the work that must first be done for us before the Lord can *trust* us with the power that comes with the baptism of the Holy spirit. "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." Acts 1:8. The disciples were commanded to wait for the promise, and to tarry in the city of Jerusalem, until they should be "endued with power from on high."

Those days of waiting and tarrying were not days of idle expectancy. No, no! they were days of earnest work, self-examination, *consecration*, and a coming into the *unity* of the Spirit, so that when the day of Pentecost had come, the disciples were *all* of “*one accord* .” This is one of the conditions of receiving the Spirit. See 2 Chron. 5:13, 14.

PROGRESSIVE WORK.

The divine order of the progressive work for the child of God is: (1) Justification, or the new birth; (2) consecration; (3) sanctification. There is much confusion in the minds of many concerning these terms and their meaning. By some they are supposed to mean about the same thing. In this they are mistaken. I can only briefly notice each point, but hope to make clear the distinctive work of grace embraced in each step.

The first step, the new birth, is the beginning of the new life. “As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” This is received by confession and faith. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.” This, then, is the first step in the onward march of the child of God, but we must not stop simply with being born. “As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.”

No one can advance far in the “new and *living way*, which he [Christ] hath consecrated for us” (Heb. 10:20), unless he takes the second step, which is to *consecrate himself* fully to God. This is essential; yea, it is the point upon which all progress in the spiritual life and power turns. Without consecration, the new-born child dies, and is a Christian only in name.

Consecration is *our* part of the work, and means much more than many suppose. “For Moses had said, *Consecrate yourselves* to-day to the Lord, even every man upon his son, and upon his brother; that he may bestow upon you a blessing this day.” Ex. 32:29.

This means that we are to devote, set apart, dedicate, *all* our powers to the service of God. That leaves no room for a person to have “his own way,” or to choose his own work, or where he shall go. The consecrated person has turned that over to God, and God has already “*consecrated the way*” for him. The *will* is on the altar of consecration. This is the secret that opens joy, peace, and the fruits of the Spirit to the child of God. Through consecration we are enabled to be so surrendered to God and to one another that the *unity* and *oneness* born of heaven are ours.

“And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.” John 17:22, 23. Those who have not done this, or who are unwilling to do it, need not expect the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The consecrated man has given up his will, his life, his honor, his glory, his time, his *all*, to seek the glory of God only. Such a one can *believe* for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Says Christ, “How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?” “He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him.”

Some are praying for the baptism of the Holy Spirit who know nothing of what it means to be consecrated, or to be sanctified by the truth. Those who simply have been justified, and know nothing of consecration, cannot exercise intelligent faith in praying for the baptism of the Spirit. Let us begin at the right place, and we shall not be deceived nor disappointed.

SANCTIFICATION

It is our part to do the consecrating, and it is God’s part to do the sanctifying. God cannot sanctify a person who is not consecrated. Should the Lord baptize an unconsecrated person with the Holy Spirit and with power, it would be simply confirming that soul in sin and death.

In every successive step of sanctification, which *is a life-work of cleansing us from all sin, known and unknown* by us, the Lord will bring us to a *test* of our consecration. When Christ brings his word to us by whom he will, revealing some unknown sin, the consecrated soul will say, I have given up *my way* to walk in your *living, consecrated way*, and I accept the light. And thus he will walk out into new revelations of truth. “If we walk in the light [that means to accept every ray of light God sends], as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son *cleanseth us from all sin.*” 1 John 1:7.

Thus the work of sanctification is carried on by God for every one who will consecrate himself to God. “Who then is willing to consecrate his his service this day unto the Lord?” 1 Chron. 29:5

WILL YOU RECEIVE HIM?

R. A. UNDERWOOD.
(*Mesopotamia, Ohio.*)

[originally published in [*The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 10, 1898](#)]

MANY who are looking for, and desiring, the baptism of the Holy Spirit are in the position occupied by the Jews who were looking for the first advent of Christ. “He came unto his own, and his own received him not.”

Why did they not receive him?—*Their ideas* of the coming of the Messiah were so different from the true manifestation of the Son of God that they “knew him not” (Acts 13:27); therefore they “received him not.” It is true that they were without excuse, because they had the Scriptures that were very plain as to the *way* Christ would come, and these they read every Sabbath day. But they put their own interpretation upon these Scriptures, so when Christ came in a way different from what they expected him, they would not receive him. Christ says of the Holy Spirit, “If I depart, I *will send him* unto you.” “Receive ye the Holy Ghost.”

Should the Holy Spirit come to you *as he is*, — the representative of Christ, the prime minister of God's kingdom of grace, the "third person of the Godhead,"— would you know him? If you do not know him, how can you receive him? He *has come*; *he is by your side*, asking you to *receive* him; but how can you, while you do not know him?

A short time ago I attended a general meeting, and a dear brother, whom I had not seen for several years, met me at the station. He stood on the platform, not six feet from where I stepped from the train. He was *looking* for me. I knew him, and stepped close to his side, and looked right in his face, to see if he would recognize me. But no; he was looking for some one who would appear different from what I did. Finally I called him by name, and asked him of his welfare. "This is not Elder Underwood!" he exclaimed. I said, "Yes."

He continued, "I was looking for a different man."

When he *knew me*, he *received* me most heartily. He saw me, he might have heard of me and seen my work, but *he could not receive* me until he *knew* I was the man he was looking for. And until he had evidence that I was the one he desired to meet, he paid no attention to me, no matter how near I was to him, nor how long I waited to be received.

DO YOU KNOW HIM?

We may be affected by the influence of the Spirit, and yet not know him *as he is*, and hence not receive him. When we enter upon the field of inquiry concerning the Spirit, that we *may know him* so that we *may receive him*, we tread upon hallowed ground; yet with humility we may follow on to know what the Spirit has revealed concerning himself and the wonderful plan of salvation.

THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT.

The office and work of the Spirit is a subject of all-absorbing interest. A study now on this topic will aid us in learning, later on, what he is, as well as who he is.

First, he reprove and convinces of sin. “When he is come, he will reprove [margin, “convince”] the world of sin.” John 16:8.

Secondly, the Spirit makes the change in conversion. We read concerning Saul: “The Spirit of the Lord will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and *shalt be turned into another man.*” 1 Sam. 10:6. “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived. . . . And such were some of you: but ye are washed; but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified *in the name* of the Lord Jesus, and *by the Spirit* of our God.” 1 Cor. 6:9-11.

Thirdly, the Spirit makes intercession for the saints. “And in like manner the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity: for we know not how to pray as we ought; but the *Spirit himself maketh intercession* for us with groanings which can not be uttered.” Rom. 8:26, R.V.

Fourthly, the Spirit seals the saints for an endless life of glory. “In whom [Christ] also after that ye believed, ye were *sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.*” “Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, *whereby ye are sealed* unto the day of redemption.” Eph. 1:13; 4:30.

Fifthly, the Spirit receives the light from Christ, and gives it to the world, through prophets or otherwise. Christ says: “He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you.” John. 16:14, 15. “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” Rev. 3:13. “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.” 1 Tim. 4:1. When they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost.” Mark 13:11. While “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard,” of the things that God hath prepared for those that love him, yet “God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit. . . . Now we have received, . . . the Spirit which is of God; *that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.*” 1 Cor. 2:9-12.

Sixthly, the prophet of God is simply the visible mouthpiece (Ex. 4:15, 16), through whom the Holy Ghost speaks. "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God *spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*" 2 Peter 1:21. The sweet psalmist of Israel said, "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue." 2 Sam. 23:2. Again, we read, "This Scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas," etc. Acts 1:16. "And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, *Well spake the Holy Ghost* by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers," etc. Acts 28:25.

Seventhly, the Spirit does not speak of himself, but he glorifies Christ. "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me." John 16:13, 14.

Eighthly, the Spirit delivers the saints and directs their work. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Zech. 4:6. The case of Philip and the eunuch illustrates this. "The Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot." And when his work was done for the eunuch, "the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip." Acts 8:29-39. Again: "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being *sent forth by the Holy Ghost*, departed unto Seleucia," etc. Acts 13:2-4. Being sent by the Holy Spirit, they would be under his direction; hence we read: "Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden by the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, after they were come to Mysia, they essayed to go into Bithynia: but *the Spirit suffered them not.*" Acts 16:6, 7.

Ninthly, the Spirit raised Christ from the dead. "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit." 1 Peter 3:18; see also Rom. 8:11.

What shall we say more? I can do no better, in closing, than to quote the following from the pen of Mrs. E. G. White, in the REVIEW AND HERALD Of Oct. 26 and Nov. 30, 1897:—

Wherever we are, wherever we may go, he is always there, *one given in Christ's place, to act in his stead*. He is always at our right hand, to speak soothing, gentle words; to support, sustain, uphold, and cheer.

The Holy Spirit ever abides with him who is seeking for perfection of Christian character. The Holy Spirit furnishes the pure motive, the living, active principle, that sustains striving, wrestling, believing souls in every emergency and under every temptation. The Holy Spirit sustains the believer amid the world's hatred, amid the unfriendliness of relatives, amid disappointment, amid the realization of imperfection, and amid the mistakes of life.

Why should we not know the Holy Spirit, and receive him in his fulness? Who can not see that the Holy Ghost is the prime minister of Christ's kingdom of grace in the work of the salvation of a lost world?

THE HOLY SPIRIT A PERSON

R. A. UNDERWOOD

(*Mesopotamia, Ohio.*)

[originally published in [*The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 17, 1898](#)]

Is THE work that has been noticed in these articles done by an influence?—There is an influence and a power, it is true; but we should not make the mistake of believing in an influence simply, when we so much need *the One who carries the influence and power*. The Holy Spirit is Christ's personal representative in the field; and he is charged with the work of meeting Satan, and defeating this personal enemy of God and his government.

It seems strange to me, now, that I ever believed that the Holy Spirit was *only* an influence, in view of the work he does. But we want the truth because it is truth, and we reject error because it is error, regardless of any views we may formerly have held, or any difficulty we may have had, or may now have, when we view the Holy Spirit as a person. Light is sown for the righteous.

Satan's scheme is to destroy all faith in the personality of the Godhead,—the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,—also in his own personality; and when this is done, he would have men deify the state, and set that up as a personal god, to be worshiped and obeyed.

Dr. Adler, as quoted in *Harper's Weekly* of Nov. 27, 1897, voiced a growing sentiment when he said that “men are gradually passing from the belief in a personal God,” and that “religion based on that belief is losing its vitality.” He further said: “*In the state* let us find the *personal deity* which is passing out of men's lives. *Let the state be the object of our worship.* Let us make it sacred; and *when we have done so, the state will have taken the place of the personification.* Let the state be that personification.” Satan knows that he can control the state, and use it to oppress the servants of God, as he always has done. Let us beware lest Satan shall lead us to take the *first* step in destroying our faith in the personality of this person of the Godhead,—the Holy Ghost.

FORMER DIFFICULTIES.

It was once hard for me to see how a spirit could be a person; but when I saw “that God is a spirit ” (John 4: 24), and that he is no less a person; when I saw that the last Adam (Christ) “was made a quickening spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45), and that he is a person; when I saw that the angels are “spirits” (Heb. 1:7, 14), and even that the fallen angels, called “devils,” are said to be “unclean spirits” (Luke 8:26, 29; Acts 19:15, 16); and knowing that all these are persons, I could understand better how the Holy Spirit can be a person.

Another question perplexed me; namely, If the Holy Spirit is a person, how can he be omnipresent? While we “see through a glass, darkly,” and should always bear in mind that “if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know,” and that we know nothing at all only as God has revealed it to us by his Spirit, yet let us look at the other spirit for a moment, and we may see something that will help us to understand this question. “Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, *the spirit* that now worketh in the children of disobedience.” Eph. 2:2. Here the prince of the power of the air, in other places called the “prince of this world,” or Satan, is called the *spirit* (singular number) “that now worketh in the children of disobedience.”

That Satan is the spirit referred to in this scripture, and that *he is omnipresent*, working for the destruction of the human family, is plain from this and many other scriptures. See Zech. 3:1, 2; 1 Peter 5:8. If, then, Satan, who was Lucifer, a shining seraph, “who, next to Christ, had been most honored of God, and who stood highest in power and glory among the inhabitants of heaven” (“Great Controversy,” page 493), is a person, and yet omnipresent, I can see that Christ would clothe his *personal representative*, the Holy Ghost, who now stands next to Christ, with at least no less power than Satan has.

But how is Satan omnipresent? Can he be personally everywhere?—No and yes. He can be, and *is, everywhere present* in this world by his representatives,—the fallen angels, who “kept not their first estate,” and who have given themselves up to carry out Satan’s plans, and execute his work against Christ and his loyal subjects.” Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not. . . . And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.” Rev. 12:7-9.

That this warfare is still going on, and will continue to the end of this world, is clear from verse 17 of this same chapter. Christ has put into the field, as his personal representative, the Holy Ghost, who is in charge of all the forces of God’s kingdom to overthrow Satan and his angels; and the Holy Ghost is the *only one* to whom is delegated this authority from God. “The prince of the power of evil can be held in check *only* by the power of God in the *third person of the Godhead*, the Holy Spirit.”—“*Special Testimony*,” No. 10, page 37. God and Christ have placed all the angels and the power of the throne of omnipotence under him, to overthrow the rebellion against God’s government.

The prophet Ezekiel had a wonderful view of the workings of God’s throne. “The wheel-like complications that appeared to the prophet to be involved in such confusion, were under the guidance of an infinite hand. *The Spirit of God, revealed to him as moving and directing these wheels*, brought harmony out of confusion; *so the whole world was under his control. Myriads of glorified beings were ready at his word to overrule the power and policy of evil men, and bring good to his faithful ones.*”—“*Testimony*,” No. 33, page 280 . Hence we see that the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, has at his disposal “myriads,” or “an innumerable company,” of holy angels, who *go*, at his command, to the rescue and to the aid of every child of God. “Whithersoever *the Spirit* was to go, they went.” Eze. 1: 20.

In my former difficulties there was one more point to be settled; and when that was made clear, I *saw*, as I had never seen before, the wonderful workings of God's kingdom. It was this: Is it a settled principle, laid down in the Bible, that when one in authority and power delegates to another a work, with power to execute the same, and the work is accomplished by the one entrusted with it, the work is accredited to the one directing and delegating such power?—Yes; this is a principle recognized by God, and accepted by all civilized nations.

Let us look at this principle. Christ was *delegated* with authority by the Father to *represent* the Father. Hence Christ says: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Why?—Because he was the authorized representative of the Father in creating and redeeming the world. Christ acted under the authority received from the Father; and the work committed to the Son, and accomplished by the Son, is accredited to the Father. See John 1:10; Heb. 1:1,3; John 5:26, 30; 6:57. The Holy Ghost being Christ's representative, and Christ being the Father's representative, the Holy Ghost represents both the Son and the Father; and the work done by the Holy Spirit is accredited to those whom he represents, for he is their agent.

Again: the Holy Spirit being in charge of all the holy angels, *whatever is done by them* under the authority of the Holy Spirit, is accredited to the work of the Holy Spirit. And this should be so; for the authority comes from the one directing the work: therefore whatever the angels of God do by the command of the Holy Spirit, and acting as his representative, *the Spirit is the one that does the work*. It is *through these* angels that the Holy Spirit does his work and manifests the power of God. "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with the angels of his power." 2 Thess. 1:7, margin.

The following extracts from the pen of Mrs. E. G. White are comprehensive, covering the whole field: "By the holy beings surrounding his throne, the Lord keeps up a constant communication with the inhabitants of the earth. "—REVIEW AND HERALD, *July 20, 1897* . "All the miracles of Christ performed for the afflicted and suffering were, by the power of God, through the ministration of angels." "All the blessings from God to man are through the ministration of holy angels."—"Spirit of Prophecy," Vol. II, pages 67, 68 . "Are they not all ministering spirits?"

THE HOLY GHOST AND HIS WORK

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THE sentence quoted from the Testimonies in our last article — “All the blessings from God to man are through the ministration of holy angels”—is a wonderful statement. At first thought, we can hardly grasp this truth; but upon careful *study*, we find that the Bible teaches this wonderful truth.

As we review the work of the Holy Spirit, we shall see that *all* the work done by the Spirit *is done by the angels, under the direction of the Holy Spirit*, the angels simply being the agents of the Holy Ghost, carrying out the plans and purposes which the Spirit has received from Christ.

The Spirit accomplishes the change in a man, when he is converted. John 16:8; 1 Sam. 10:6; 1 Cor. 6:9-11. Notice that this is done *through* the angels: “And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. . . . And the angel of the Lord stood by.” Zech. 3:1-5. Again: “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips. . . . Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.” Isa. 6:5-7. Commenting upon this text in “Testimony for the Church,” No. 33, page 278, the writer says: “But a seraph came to him [Isaiah], *to fit him* for his great mission.”

The Spirit makes intercession for the saints. See Rom. 8:26. This is done through the angels: "And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God *out of the angel's hand.*" Rev. 8:3, 4.

A comment by Mrs. E. G. White on this text is as follows:—

Let the individual Christians, the families, and the churches bear in mind that they are closely allied to heaven. The Lord has a special interest in his church militant here below. The angels who offer the smoke of the fragrant incense are ministering for the praying saints. Then let the evening prayers in every family rise steadily to heaven in the sunset hour, while these divine ministers are *speaking before God, in our behalf*, of the merits of the blood of a crucified and risen Saviour. The blood alone is efficacious. It alone can make propitiation for our sins. It is the blood of the only begotten Son of God, that is of value for us, enabling us to draw nigh unto God; his blood alone that taketh away the sin of the world. Morning and evening the heavenly universe beholds every household that prays; and *the angel with the incense, representing the blood of the atonement, finds access to God.*—"Week of Prayer Readings," Dec. 23, 1897, page 5.

The Spirit seals the saints. Eph. 1:13; 4:30. The Spirit does this also *through* the angels. "And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till *we have sealed* the servants of God in their foreheads." Rev. 7:2, 3; see Eze. 9:3-5.

The Spirit receives the light from Christ, and gives it to his people, through prophets or otherwise. John 16:14, 15; Rev. 2:29; 2 Peter 2:1-21; etc. Notice again the one through whom this light comes to the church.: "I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which showed me these things." "*I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches.*" Rev. 22:8, 16.

The Spirit directs the work of the saints, and delivers them from evil. See Zech. 4:6; Acts 8:29, 39; 13:2-4; 16:6, 7. Here, again, we see that this work is done by the angels: "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and *delivereth them.*" Ps. 34:7. "He shall give his angels *charge over thee, to keep thee* in all thy ways." Ps. 91:11; see Dan. 6:22; Acts 12:11; etc.

So we might continue to show that the work done by the Spirit is always done *by and through* the angels of God. We are much like the servant of Elisha: we can see the visible forces that come against us, but we can not see the spiritual. Should we ask our Master the same questions he asked his master, the reply would come: "Fear not: for *they* [the angels of God] that *be with us* are more than they [the angels of Satan] that *be with them.*" When the Lord had opened the eyes of the servant of the prophet, in answer to the prayer of Elisha, *he saw* the mountains *full* of the angels of God "round about Elisha." 2 Kings 6:15-17; Ps. 68:17. Would to God that our eyes might be opened, that *we* might see the *two great spiritual forces* at work in this world.

All the world is destined to be marshaled under one or the other of these spirits; and unless we know, by a living experience, the ministrations of the Spirit of God, we shall be captured by the opposite spirit.

In a recent Testimony these words occur:—

There are two parties in this world. The angels of heaven co-operate with every unselfish worker; but the angels of Satan will confuse judgment, by using elements that put stumbling-blocks in the way of those whom God would bring to an understanding of the truth. Let the heavenly messengers empty themselves of the golden oil into the golden tubes that flow into the golden bowls. Every church needs this golden oil; for their lamps are going out. If ever the anointed ones that stand by the Lord of the whole earth were needed, *they are needed now.*

TWO GREAT SPIRITUAL FORCES

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I HAVE called attention to the fact that there are only two great spiritual forces at work in this world,— Christ and his angels, with the Holy Ghost in command, and Satan and his angels. Man is the one to be captured, deceived, and led into death by Satan; while the mission of Christ is to set at liberty the captives, and give them life eternal.

DANGER OF BEING DECEIVED

Both are spirits. John 16:13; Eph. 2:2.

Both are powerful. Acts 1:8; 2 Thess. 2:9.

Both work miracles. Mark 16:17, 18; Heb. 2:4; 2 Thess. 2:9-13; Rev. 16:13, 14.

Both appear as angels of light. Matt. 28:2, 3; Acts 10:30; 2 Cor. 11:13-15.

If both these spirits appear in shining light, if both are powerful and both work miracles, how can we detect the one from the other?

Thank God we may *know*: God's word has made *clear* the work of each. "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but *try* the spirits whether they are of God." 1 John 4:1. "When they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? . . . To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Isa. 8:19, 20.

Lucifer, once a shining seraph, is still a mighty being. He would have the world believe (he has succeeded with many) that he has no personality, the same as he would have us believe that God, Christ, and the Holy Ghost have no personality.

THE DIFFERENCE

The Holy Spirit. John 14:26.

"The Prince of this World." John 14:30.

Christ says: “He shall glorify me.” John 16:13, 14. “He that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him.” John 7:18.

“He shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: . . . for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you.” John 16:13, 14.

He is the Spirit of truth, and sanctifies by the truth. John 17:17.

The Holy Spirit puts into the mind a *love* of truth, and *writes* the law in the heart. “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.” Jer. 31:33. Written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.” 2 Cor. 3:3; see Isa. 8:20.

“How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! . . . for thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: . . . I will be like the Most High.” Isa. 14:12-14; see also Eze: 28:12-17.

“He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory.” John 7:18:

Satan “abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.” John 8:44.

Satan fills the heart with the spirit of carnality. “The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” Rom. 8:7. Satan has no love for truth. See 2 Thess. 2:10-12.

The Holy Spirit always leads the seeker for truth in the paths of obedience and peace. “Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.” Ps. 119:165. “Seeing ye have purified your souls in *obeying the truth through the Spirit.*” 1 Peter 1:22.

Satan always leads to disobedience of the law of God. “Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.” Eph. 2:2.

One Spirit is the power and spirit of love; the other, the power of force and hate. One Spirit gives liberty; the other is the spirit of bondage. One is the Spirit of light, and is as open as the day; the other is the spirit of darkness, and works under cover. One Spirit is the spirit of meekness; the other spirit is that of arrogance and pride. One is the Spirit of peace and rest; the other is the spirit of unrest and turmoil. One is the Spirit of life; the other is the spirit of death.

Notwithstanding the contrast is so great, and the two spirits are so opposite in all their workings, still many will be snared and taken by the artful deceptions of Satan.

The last great struggle for the mastery deepens as it draws to its close. “Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all *power* and *signs* and *lying wonders*, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.” 2 Thess. 2:9, 10. “There shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.” Matt. 24:24. “I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God almighty.” Rev. 16:13, 14.

Arrayed on one side is the infinite God, with all the loyal subjects of his throne; on the other side are Satan, fallen angels, and deceived, fallen men and women. Reader, on which side of these battle lines will you stand? Ah, on which side do you *now* stand? The bugle notes are calling for all to have on the whole armor, and to quit themselves like men.

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. . . . For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness [“wicked spirits,” margin] in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the *sword* of the *Spirit*, which is the word of God.” Eph. 6:10-17.

Could our spiritual vision be quickened, we should see souls bowed under oppression, and burdened with grief, pressed as a cart beneath sheaves, and ready to die in discouragement. We should also see angels flying swiftly to aid these tempted ones, who are standing as on the brink of a precipice. The angels from heaven force back the hosts of evil that encompass these souls, and guide them to plant their feet on the sure foundation. The battles raging between the two armies are as real as those fought by the armies of this world, and on the issue of the spiritual conflict, eternal destinies depend.—“*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*,” pages 164, 165.

Not simply is this world interested in this struggle, but the whole universe of unfallen worlds is watching the daily conflicts between the spirit forces. *O that our eyes might be opened to see that “they that be with us are more than they that be with them,”* — yea, that we might catch one glimpse of the eternal crown of rejoicing that awaits the faithful soldiers of Jesus Christ! Loyal angels, charged with the work of ministering to us, would gladly take our place; for the redeemed will sing a song, and share in the glory of Christ in a manner, that even the subjects of unfallen worlds and the loyal angels will not be permitted to enjoy in the same fulness.

“Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord;” “for his mercy endureth forever.”
“Praise ye the Lord.”

- 1
We also have a number of blog posts/podcasts on this subject. You can read/listen to the first one [HERE](#) and follow links from there to the rest.
- 2
You can watch a series of video presentations on this subject [HERE](#).