



Munich Personal RePEc Archive

The Doctrinal Peculiarity of 19th Century Adventism: Teaching About The Trinity

Kozirog, Bernard

2013

Online at <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/54382/>
MPRA Paper No. 54382, posted 14 Mar 2014 15:46 UTC



International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Review

ISSN 2330-1201

International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Review

Volume 1, No.:1, 2013 Winter

Pages: 32 - 49

The Doctrinal Peculiarity of 19th Century Adventism: Teaching About The Trinity

Professor Bernard Kozirog, PhD¹

This article presents an approach to the Seventh-day Adventist doctrine of the Trinity. In the Adventist's philosophy this view evolved from antitrinitarianism to trinitarianism. In the nineteenth century, Seventh-day Adventists modeled on other religious denominations, thus the article includes statements of Methodists, Baptists, Unitarians, Deists and Christians from the Christian Connexion movement. The precursor of Adventism was the movement of William Miller, which made a great mark on the Seventh Day Adventists. Its views on the Trinity were varied, depending on the previous church affiliation of its members. In the years 1846-1888 the majority of Adventists rejected the doctrine of the Trinity. All leading Adventist writers were antitrinitarians, although there were those who advocated trinitarianism. The year 1888 is a landmark in Adventist movement, after which many theologians abandoned antitrinitarianism. Ten years later, the paradigm was completely changed. The turning point was the publication of Ellen White's book 'The Desire of Ages' was. In this book, the author expressed a different view from the views of many of the pioneers of Adventism, especially when it comes to the preexisting of Christ. The same book comprised also a clear statement about the divinity of the Holy Spirit. However, only after 1915, we can talk about the disappearance of antitrinitarians in Adventism. When in 1930 a set of Adventist principles of faith were being prepared, it was clear that the only force is the

¹ Polish College of Theology and Humanities, E-mail: bernardkozirog@gmail.com

view of the Trinity.

Keywords: Seventh-day Adventists, Trinitarianism, Antitrinitarianism , Baptists, Methodists, Deists, Unitarians, William Miller, Ellen White.

Introduction

In the 19th century, the American religious scene was very diversified. Among other things, this resulted from the fact that within only a few years the Church was exempted from paying taxes, which practically meant the end of the state control over the Church. Churches that were ‘recognized’ by the governments of European countries, that is, they were tax exempted, ‘heretics’, meaning without rights and ‘sectarian’ meaning tolerated in North American were all treated as ‘denominations’ – equal in the eyes of the law and independent of the government financially as well as operationally.

This led to the flourishing of those churches, among whom were the Lutherans, Calvinists, Anabaptists, Unitarians, Roman Catholics, Huguenots, Moravian Brothers, Presbyterians, Mennonites, Baptists, Methodists and many others (Olmstead, 1960). Other religious groups in the United States such as Seventh-day Adventists, Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses and Christian Scientists did not exist at the beginning of the 19th century.

While shaping their doctrines, including the fundamental belief on the topic of the Trinity, Adventists drew particularly from the doctrines of Methodists, Baptists, Christians from Christian Connexion (popular Connexionists), and Millerites. It is also worth mentioning Deists and Unitarians.

1. Methodists and Baptists

Methodists and Baptists, who were known as *Democratic Protestants*, influenced Adventists in several ways. Above all, they had many common doctrinal and organizational bases with the rising Adventist church. Both Churches had roots in the English Reformation. Furthermore, they were both under the influence of 16th century Anabaptists – the Methodists after the Moravian Brothers and the Baptists after the English Baptists. Like the Methodists, the Baptists preferred laity leadership, believing in the election of the priesthood of believers.

In the mid-19th century, the Methodists were the most numerous and the Baptists were second as it pertained to denomination size in America. The majority of churches decided to educate the clergy by sending their clergymen to European theological institutions. That led to great financial straits which made it impossible for the quick expansion of the gospel to the American west. However, Methodists and Baptists were able to increase the numbers of pastors in a short time and keep pace of the growing population in the western part of the country. The Methodists had the so-called *Circuits*, covering the largest number of churches which were under the care of one pastor. Pastors were called *circuit riders* because they travelled on horses from church to church. In each place they preached sermons, organized Bible classes, conducted weddings and baptisms, et cetera. When a church was set up in a new settlement, the circuit rider closest to that place would include it in its circuit. Whilst the circuit riders were full-time pastors, a significant number of churches functioned through the services of the laity preachers.

Methodists were well-known for their laity preachers, class leaders and other church workers who led the church between circuit pastors visits. Josiah Litch, Levi Stockman and Ellen Harmon (later White) belonged to Methodists actively involved in the Millerite movement. Harmon's father, Robert Harmon, was a Methodist class leader and 'harbinger'. His function was to make flaming appeals after sermons (White, 1968).

Baptists operated somewhat differently. Their pastors were self-sufficient, usually from farming. Much was expected from them. Apart from supporting themselves financially, they had to be deeply spiritual and had to possess above-average leadership skills as well as be diligent students of the Bible. They were not required to have formal theological qualifications. The Baptist church won quite an attractive number of such pastors each year. One of those Baptists preacher-farmer was William Miller, who became the most prominent leader of the second advent movement known as the Millerite movement.

Both forms of this type of evangelical-pastoral activity – as Nathan Hatch called them – contributed to the quick numerical growth of churches and gave laity the possibility to fill important leadership functions which lead to the democratization of American Christianity (Hatch, 1889).

One effect of depending on laity leadership was the assumption that traditional theology through education did not have too strong an effect in churches. Due to the efforts to keep away from dependence on any kind of external authorities, civil or religious, those conditions supported church growth, built only on simple, direct understanding of the Bible. It was for these reasons that Methodists and Baptists became the largest denominations in America in 1855. Methodists had 1.5 million believers, Baptists 1.1 million (Hatch, 1889).

Like Methodists, Baptists believed that God is co-eternal, Father, creator, source, provider and ruler of the whole creation. He is righteous and holy, merciful and kind, slow to anger and abundant in steadfast love and faithfulness. God eternal, Son, embodied in the person of Jesus Christ. Through Him everything was created, revealing the character of God the Father, salvation of humankind was effected and the world was judged. Forever the true God also became true man, Jesus Christ. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary. He lived and experienced every temptation as a human being; however, he gave a perfect example of God's righteousness and love. Through miracles he showed the power of God and proved that he is the promised Messiah from God. He suffered and willingly died on the cross for the sins of man as their substitute. He rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, from where he will return in glory to perform the final salvation of his before and make everything new again. God eternal, the Holy Spirit, work together with the Father and Son in the work of creation, incarnation and redemption. It was He who inspired Bible writers. He filled the life of Jesus with power. Sent by Father and Son to always be with His children, He gives the Church her spiritual gifts and bestows upon her the power of the testimony of Christ (Schaff, 1913). So too believed many Adventist, though not everyone. An example is prominent adventist leader Joseph Bates. He wrote: 'While respecting the teaching of the trinity, I concluded that it was impossible for me to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, was also the Almighty God, the Father, one and the same being' (Bates, 1868).

2. American Rationalists – Deists and Unitarians

Deists and Unitarians were the opposite of Orthodox American denominations. Whereas Methodists and Baptists based their claims on the authority of the Bible and the working of the Holy Spirit as it pertained to inspired writers, the words of the Holy Scriptures,

and the final enlightenment of readers and preachers by the Holy Spirit, Deists placed human reason and natural religion above faith and revelation. The majority of Deists viewed the teaching of the divinity of Christ and the Trinity as ‘clearly (...) not conforming with natural religion’ (Olson, 1999).

Among prominent Deists could be found people such as Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and Joseph Piertley from England. William Miller was also declared a Deist, although he attended a Baptist church. This he did because of his family. Several other Deists behaved similarly, especially where there were not enough groups to form their own church. In other cases, they formed Unitarian churches. By the end of the 18th century many Congregationalist churches developed into Unitarians, accepting the theology of the strongly influential Deists.

As it concerns the doctrine of the Trinity, Unitarians were of the opinion that God the Father is the only God, Jesus Christ is only a human and the Holy Spirit is God’s power and not God as a being (White 1877).

3. Christian Connexion

Christians from the group Christian Connexion were also known as Restorationists. At the beginning of its existence, the church was made up of secessions from Methodists, Presbyterians and Baptists denominations, under the leadership of Alexander Stone around 1810.

Joshua V. Himes, one of the leading pastors of Christian Connexion and who later became second to William Miller, the leader of the Millerite movement, concluded in 1833 the main aim of the members of the Christian Connexion was to closely follow the simplicity of the apostles and first Christians. Barton Stone did not acknowledge the Trinity, but never forced his fellow believers to specify their beliefs as a condition for membership into the denomination. A few members along with some pastors had a different outlook on the issue. There is evidence that Stone did not propagate his belief.

Christian Connexion followers were fully Evangelicals and hardly differed from Free Baptists with whom they joined a hundred years later Conkin, 1997). However, in 1832, Alexander Campbell, founder of Disciples of Christ, took Christian Connexion to court

because he was a furious enemy of anti-Trinitarians. He also proposed that every Christian Connexion believer who believed in the Trinity should join Disciples of Christ. This led to division among Christian Connexion. Those who remained with the group were only anti-Trinitarians (Himes, 1838).

All evidence seems to confirm that the reason some followers of the Millerite movement were recruited from Christian Connexion was due to their specific principle that every believer has the right to their own version of the Holy Bible and divergent beliefs must not be the cause for disunity in the Church.

Of the three main founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, two – Joseph Bates and James White, were members of Christian Connexion. There is nothing strange then that the majority of first Adventists agreed with Himes' claim that 'there is one living and true God, the Father Almighty (...) that Christ the Son of God (...) and the Holy Spirit is God's power and energy, holy influence from God, through which (...), evildoers are born again, repent and returned to a virtuous and holy life' (Himes, 1838).

4. The William Miller Movement

The William Miller movement united many Methodists, Baptists and Connexionists. The adventist revival wave spread throughout America in the 30s and 40s of the 19th century. As mentioned earlier, William Miller was a Baptist lay preacher and simultaneously quite a rich farmer. His personal 15-year Bible study formed the basis for the beginning of the movement in 1831 at which time he gave the first in a series of presentations on the topic of Christ's second coming. Due to the time of its appearance as well as its theological roots, the William Miller movement became the culmination of a great evangelistic revival which swept over the United States of America in the late 20s of the 19th century.

After rejecting the deistic principles, William Miller held the traditional view on the topic of the Trinity: 'I believe in one, living and true God and also in the existence of the Three Persons of the Godhead – just as man is made of a body, soul, and spirit. If someone asks me how it is possible, I can only say that three-person triune God are closely connected' (White, 1875). As can be observed from this quote, anti-Trinitarian tendencies did not come from W. Miller.

In 1994 Everett N. Dick drew up a list of 174 preachers from the Millerite movement whose denominational affiliation was known in the 19th century. 44,3% of them were Methodists, 27% Baptists, 9% Congregationalists, 8% Connexionists, 7% Presbyterians, 2% Episcopal, 1.5% Dutch Calvinists, 0.6% Lutherans and 0.6% others (Dick, 1994). Although Christian Connexion believers were a relatively small group in the advent movement, in the years between 1845 and 1850, when the group was formed, among three of the founding members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church - James White and Joseph Bates – were earlier active workers of Christian Connexion. Bates chose that group instead of the Congregationalist Church, to which his parents belonged, because he agreed with the Connexionists with respect to the baptism of adults through immersion and because he was also opposed to the doctrine of the Trinity. However, Ellen Harmon, later White, was a Methodist and, like other Methodists, believed in the Trinity.

5. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

Many present-day Seventh-day Adventists are surprised by the fact that the Adventist pioneers were anti-Trinitarians. Several of them changed their beliefs following Bible study. However, others never did. The history of the doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist Church can be divided into five periods: (a) the period of anti-Trinitarian domination: 1846-1888, (b) the period of dissatisfaction with anti-Trinitarianism: 1888-1898, (c) the period of paradigm changes: 1898-1915, (d) the period of the disappearance of anti-Trinitarianism: 1915-1939.

5.1. The period of anti-Trinitarian domination (1846-1888)

In the years 1846-1888 the majority of Adventists rejected the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. All leading Adventist writers were anti-Trinitarians. However, in their articles and books, references can be found stating that there were also Adventists who believed in the Trinity. An example of such writers is Ambrose C. Spicer, father of president of the General Church Council of the Seventh-day Adventist Church William A. Spicer, who became Adventist in 1874. He was a former pastor of the Seventh-day Baptist Church. He was a distinct Trinitarian, which is evidenced by a quote from his son to A. W. Spalding who said his father “felt so hurt by the anti-Trinitarian atmosphere at Battle Creek, that he stopped

delivering sermons” (Burt, 1996). Likewise, Seymour B. Whitney was a Trinitarian but in 1861, as a result of Adventist indoctrination, he became convinced about antitrinitarianism. This situation shows that at least a few Adventist pastors taught antitrinitarianism as an essential element of instruction for newly-won believers (Whitney, 1862).

In the *Review and Herald*, R. F. Cottrell wrote that although he did not believe in the doctrine of the Trinity, he never preached against it (1856). However, D. T. Bourdeau had a different point of view: ‘Although we claim to believe in one God and worship only one God, it seems to me that there are as many gods among us as are concepts of the Godhead’ (1890). Many anti-Trinitarians also taught about the eternal existence of God the Father, the divinity of Jesus Christ ‘as Creator, Redeemer and Intercessor’ as well as “exceptional meaning of the Holy Spirit’ (Gane, 1963). They believed that Jesus existed from such distant eternity that for our limited reason He is practically without beginning (Waggoner, 1890).

Adventist pioneers gave at least several reasons to reject the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. First of all, they did not see any biblical evidence of the existence of three beings as one God. Secondly, they erroneously assumed that the doctrine of the trinity teaches about the identity of the Father with the Son. This is evident in the statements of Joseph Bates: ‘While respecting the teaching of the trinity, I concluded that it was impossible for me to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, was also the Almighty God, the Father, one and the same being’ (Bates, 1868). Other Adventist leaders such as Hull, Loughborough, Whitney and Canright held similar views. Thirdly, it was incorrectly assumed that followers of the fundamental belief concerning the Trinity taught about three gods. Here is an example: „If God was also Father, Son and Holy Spirit, then we would have three Gods – wrote John Loughborough (1861).

The fourth argument the anti-Trinitarians assumed was that belief in the Trinity diminished the value of redemption. They convinced others that God cannot die and so ‘if Christ had self-existed as God, then He wouldn’t have died on Golgotha. If only His humanity died, then His sacrifice would only be human and not sufficient for redemption’ (Waggoner, 1884). Therefore, in order to protect the reality of His death on Golgotha, they acknowledged that they must deny the pre-existence of Christ and His divine immortality.

Moreover, they gave two more arguments against the Holy Trinity. Adventists believed that the fact that the Bible called Christ the Son of God and ‘the beginning of God’s creation’ (Rev 3:14), proves that He must have had His origins later than God the Father (Smith, 1882). They also claimed that ‘there exists various expressions concerning the Holy Spirit, which show that He cannot be considered as a person, because a person cannot shed abroad in our hearts (Rom 5:5) and pour out (...) spirit upon all flesh (Joel 2:28)’ (Smith, 1897).

5.2. The beginnings of dissatisfaction with antitrinitarianism (1888-1898)

In 1888, a very important General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist was held in Minneapolis, in the state of Minnesota, which led to an open theological conflict. This impinged on a later Church post in the matter of soteriology, especially as it concerned righteousness issues.

A speech by Ellet Waggoner on the subject of salvation by faith in the righteousness of Christ became groundbreaking as it was a teaching which was lacking in Adventist sermons. Several Adventists came from other Christian churches and acceptance of Christ was a natural thing for them. Adventist pastors taught more about the law and Sabbath keeping than about Christ. They became skilful distributors in Sabbath issues and virtually boasted about their ability to present arguments against those who kept Sunday. Waggoner’s sermons were different; he spoke about Christ’s divinity, humanity and righteousness, which He offers to everyone as a gift. He focused on the necessity to ‘determine the correct position of Christ as equal to the Father so that His power of redemption could be fully appreciated’ (1884). And although in 1890 Ellet Waggoner still had not fully accepted the infinitely eternal pre-existence of Christ, he was, however, convinced that the Son of God was not created, has life in Himself, possesses immortality on the power of the law of ownership, and is God Himself, and possesses all the properties of God. Moreover, he wrote: ‘Christ is a part of the Godhead, possesses all divine properties, is equal to the Father in all points, as Creator and Lawgiver He is the only power of redemption. (...) Christ died in order to bring us to God (1 Peter 3: 18), but if He was not even in one iota equal to God, He would not be able to bring us to Him’ (1884).

Another Adventist theologian who started to move away from the anti-Trinitarian position was Samuel Spear. In 1892, he published a brochure titled *The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity*. The brochure corrected two widely accepted incorrect ideas on the doctrine of the Trinity showing that ‘it is not a system of tritheism or a doctrine about three Gods, but a doctrine about one God existing and working in Three Persons; however, the word person (...) used in that context should not be understood as disagreeing with the unity of the Godhead’.

Certain changes in the doctrine of the Trinity can also be seen in Uriah Smith’s writings. In *Looking Unto Jesus* he rejected his earlier view of Christ as Creator but still held that ‘Only God the Father is without beginning. In the most former times where the beginning could have taken place – a period so far back that for our limited minds it seems like eternity – the Word appeared. Somehow not clearly revealed in the Holy Scriptures, Christ was begotten. Through some Godly impulse or process, not through creation, the Father called the Son into existence. (...) The tie between the Father and Son does not take from either, but strengthens both. Through it, in connection with the Holy Spirit, exists the full Godhead’ (Smith, 1889).

5.3. Paradigm shift (1898-1915)

The turning point in Adventist understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity was the publication of Ellen White’s book, *The Desire of Ages*, in 1898. In that book, the author presents views which clearly differ from the views of many pioneer Adventists, particularly in the matter of the pre-existence of Christ. Some examples: ‘Always Jesus, Christ the Lord, was also one with the Father’. ‘In Christ is the true life, not borrowed or inherited’. ‘The Saviour rose from the grave thanks to the power of life which was in Him’. These quotes about the eternal self-existence of Christ seemed shocking to the leading theologians of the Church, for example M. L. Andreasen, who only four years earlier had become an Adventist. When he became pastor in 1902, he decided to visit the home of Ellen White in California in order to examine the matter personally. Many did not believe that Ellen White could write such words. After his visit, he wrote: I was certain that Mrs White never wrote: *In Christ is the true life, not borrowed or inherited*. However, I was convinced that in her handwriting

that quotation was written down as it was published. It was similar with other statements. I checked and became convinced that it was the original statements of Mrs. White' (1948).

In *The Desire of Ages* Ellen White also made unequivocal claims on the subject of the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Writing about the Holy Spirit, she systematically used the personal pronoun *He*. About the Holy Spirit, she wrote: 'His presence among people became a factor in their revival, for it kept the effect of Christ's sacrifice (...) It will be possible to resist and have victory over sin only through the intercession of *the third person of the Godhead*, who came to earth, not with another power, but in full Godly power' (1898).

In 1913, the editor of the *Review and Herald*, pastor F.M. Wilcox supported Ellen White's statements. Whilst publishing a summary of the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist church, he wrote: 'Seventh-day Adventists believe in the divinity of the Trinity. This Trinity consists of eternal Father (...) The Lord Jesus Christ (...) and Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead'.

5.4. Period of disappearance of antitrinitarianism (1915-1939)

Wilcox's article provoked a discussion in the Adventist theological circles and whose apogee was attained in 1919 during the General Conference in Boston where the most important part of the theological debate was Christ's eternity and His relationship with the Father. While the clear majority were of Trinitarian views, there were those who were on the side of the anti-Trinitarians. There were also those who Trinitarians, like W.W. Prescott, who held that the existence of Christ was in a certain sense 'borrowed' from the Father, showing that not everyone held the similar position.

In the first two decades of the 20th century, the division of American Christianity into a modernistic and fundamental one brought Adventists closer to Trinitarian position. In many other areas, like evolutionism, belief in the supernatural and miracles, resurrection, birth of Christ of a virgin, et cetera, Adventists were opposed to modernists and had views similar to fundamentalists.

In 1930 a special committee was formed to prepare the Adventist church's fundamental beliefs. The committee members were: C. H. Watson – General Conference

president, M. E. Kern – deputy secretary of the General Conference, E. R. Palmer – publishing director *Review and Herald* and E. M. Wilcox – editor-in-chief of the publishing house. The preliminary project was to be prepared by the latter. Wilcox prepared a 22-point project, which was later published in the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* in 1931. The second point was dedicated to the Holy Trinity whilst the third claimed that Jesus Christ is the true God. However, it was after fifteen years that the Adventist church's fundamental beliefs became officially recognized by the highest Church authority, that is by the General Conference.

6. Ellen White's position on the Trinity

Seventh-day Adventists believe that the life and work of Ellen Gould White, co-founder of the Adventist Church, manifests prophetic charisma. The Adventist Church gives Ellen White and her writings great respect. However, this is far from any kind of worship or apostasy. Her writings are not done in a canonical form, they do not substitute the Bible, are not above the Word of God nor are they a second source of God's revelation. This is why her position on the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be overlooked. However, before we take a closer look, we must answer the question whether on the other fundamental beliefs she always had a definite position or whether she changed her views. If yes, what does that mean?

When Ellen White pronounced in 1849 that Adventists were right, she was referring to a strict fundamental belief, differentiating the Adventist Church from other denominations. It mainly concerned the so-called three angels message from Revelation, that is the matter of the everlasting gospel, the ten commandments and faith in Jesus as well as the second coming of Christ, the ministry in the heavenly sanctuary and the death of the ungodly. Ellen White claimed that there were more Biblical truths to discover. When she discovered them, she accepted those Biblical principles and changed her point of view.

Here are a few examples of those changes. For instance, along with others she believed that probation was closed in 1844 and that no one else could be saved. For several years after 1844 she kept Sunday instead of Saturday holy. And then when, along with other Adventists, she started keeping the Sabbath, she did so from 6 pm on Friday until 6 pm on Saturday. It was not until 1855 that John Andrews discovered in the Bible that the Sabbath

should be kept from evening (sundown) on Friday till evening (sundown) on Saturday. It took Ellen White some time to accept this.

It was the same thing with health issues. Until 1863, Ellen and James White, as well as other Adventists, fed mainly on pork, raised pigs and other animals for slaughter. Adventists also smoked tobacco. They stopped doing so due to Ellen White's vision. In light of these and similar examples of doctrinal development, it is not particularly surprising that in Ellen White's writings there are clear developments and certain changes also in the matter of the Trinity.

In 1850 she wrote that 'Christ and the Father are personal beings having a visible form'. In 1869 she claimed that Christ is equal with God. In 1872 we noted this finding: 'Christ was not created'. Six years later she wrote: 'Christ is the eternal Son'.

In later years other conclusions appeared:

1887 – Christ existed with the Father from the eternity.

1888 – If people do not acknowledge the inspired testimony of the Holy Scriptures concerning the divinity of Christ, there is no sense discussing with them on this topic because even the clearest evidence will not convince them.

1888 – Christ was in unity with the Great Father – unity in nature, character and goal, with the Father He was the highest in heaven in power and authority; however, concerning the person, Christ was distinct from the Father. The Lord Jesus Christ existed from eternity as a distinct person, being one with the Father.

1890 – Christ is self-existing. His divinity is not taken from the father.

1897 – The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead.

1901 – Three eternal heavenly majesties, three highest heavenly powers, three living persons of the heavenly trio – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – are one in nature, character and goals, but not in person.

We can notice Ellen White's progress from simplicity to complexity in the doctrine of the Trinity. That progress is similar to that of the New Testament. In the gospels, the first challenge was to convince the disciples that Christ is one with God. When the disciples understanding broadened to the acceptance of one God in two divine persons it was quite easy to lead them to acknowledge the Holy Spirit as the third divine person.

Ellen White's clear stand on the matter of the Trinity was very helpful to the Seventh-day Adventist Church when John Harvey Kellogg left the Church due to his pantheistic views.

7. The crisis caused by John Kellogg

John Harvey Kellogg, director of the Battle Creek sanatorium, was not only an administrator of an Adventist medical centre but also a prominent, learned doctor and theologian. During his studies he became convinced that the life of every being is a real manifestation of the presence of God in that being, whether it be a plant, animal or human. Signs of those viewpoints appeared in his public speeches and writings as well as among his closest co-workers as early as in the 90s. However, the crisis connected with those viewpoints erupted in 1902 when, on the 18th of February, fire destroyed the Battle Creek sanatorium and J. Kellogg proposed a collection of funds to finance its rebuilding. He offered to donate the manuscript of his new book on health to the publishing house *Review and Herald*. If the publishers paid the printing costs and the seven hundred and three thousand Adventist members, that is all the Adventists at that time, decided to work at selling five hundred thousand copies of the book at one dollar each, then the income would have been enough to rebuild the sanatorium. The Church authorities approved the plan.

Kellogg's book *The Living Temple* was above all a text book on physiology, nutrition, preventative medicine and home remedies for treating common illnesses. The motto placed on the cover was a Bible text from 1 Cor 6:19 and it spoke about the fact that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. The book also contained theological views of the author.

In spite of strong critical reviews, Kellogg was not prepared to make any changes at all. Despite negative review, the publishers agreed to print the books. On December 20, 1902, when the *Review and Herald* was half way through printing the first publication, the publishing house burnt down. The matrix and incomplete copies were also destroyed.

Kellogg immediately passed on the manuscript to another printery and ordered three thousand copies at his own personal cost.

When the books finally reached the hands of the readers, it turned out that Kellogg had flagrantly moved away from Adventist theology, particularly in matters concerning God. Among other things, he wrote: ‘God is the explanation of nature – He is not God aside from nature, but in nature, revealed through and in every object, action and variety of phenomena of the universe. (...) The concept of a personal God is in principle an invented construction for the needs of the simple minds, which need such extremely unrealistic adaptation to their intellectual limits’ (1902).

Criticisms of the book were so harsh that before its second publication, Kellogg edited a few pages. The publisher even deleted a few pages of books from the first publication that remained unsold and glued substitute pages in their place.

In the Church, discussions flared up and lasted several years. After the initial criticism, Kellogg’s viewpoint attracted some adherents in the autumn of 1903. On top of everything, Kellogg quoted Ellen White saying that his views were in agreement with hers. Since that was not the case, Ellen White was forced to publicly respond. She then announced: ‘God forbid that this opinion should triumph. We do not need any mysticism as shown in this book. Its author is heading the wrong way. He has lost sight of specific truths for this time. He does not know where he is heading. The path of truth lies close to the path of error, so that they may seem the same, for those whose minds are not lit by the Holy Spirit and who cannot differentiate between truth and error. The Lord Jesus did not present God as permeating nature, but as a personal being. Christians should remember that God has personality just as real as Christ’ (1903).

When the conflict continued into 1906, Ellen White wrote another article in which she used very strong words about Kellogg. She called his views spiritualistic, satanic, imperfect and untrue. She once again emphasised that God is three persons: the Father, God the Son and the Holy Spirit. The conflict lasted till 1907 when Kellogg and his followers left the Church.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the existence of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the majority of its members rejected the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Until 1888, antitrinitarianism clearly dominated. The first person who was clearly against this was Ellet Waggoner. Others followed him.

The turning point in Adventist thinking about the Trinity took place after the publication of Ellen White's book *The Desire of Ages*, in 1898, in which she distinctly evidenced the divinity of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

When the Adventist fundamental beliefs were formed in 1930, it was conspicuously highlighted that the Seventh-day Adventist Church teaches about God in three Persons. Simultaneously, pantheistic viewpoints presented by John Kellogg were rejected.

References

- Andreasen, M. L. (1948) 'The Spirit of Prophecy', speech given at church in Loma Linda, California, 30 November.
- Bates, J. (1868) *The Autobiography of Elder Joseph Bates*, Battle Creek.
- Bourdeau, D.T. (1890) 'We May Partake of the Fullness of the Father and the Son', *Review and Herald*, 18 November.
- Burt, M. (1996) *Demise of Semi-Arianism and Anti-Trinitarianism in Adventist Theology, 1888-1957*, Berrien Springs.
- Conkin, P.K. (1997) *American Originals: Homemade Varieties of Christianity*, Chapel Hill.
- Dick, E.N. (1994) *William Miller and the Advent Crisis, 1831-1844*, Berrien Springs.
- Gane, E.R. (1963) *The Arian or Anti-Trinitarian Views Presented in Seventh-day Adventist Literature and Ellen G. White Answer*, Berrien Springs.
- Hatch, N. (1889) *The Democratization of American Christianity*, New Haven.

Himes, J. (1838) 'Christian Connexion', *Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (edit. J. Brown), Brattleboro, p. 363.

Jemison, T.H. (1959) *Christian Beliefs*, Mountain View.

Kellog, J.H. (1903) *The Living Temple*, Battle Creek.

Laughborough, J. (1861) 'Adventists and Trinity', *Rewiew and Herald*, 20 September.

Olmstead, C.E. (1960) *History of Religion in the United States*, Englewood Cliffs.

Olson, R.E. (1999) *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform*, Downers Grove.

Rice, R. (1985) *The Reign of God*, Berrien Springs.

Schaff, P. (1913) *The Person of Christ*, New York.

Smith, U. (1882) *Thoughts on the Book of Daniel and the Revelation*, Battle Creek.

Smith, U. (1889) *Looking Unto Jesus*, Battle Creek.

Smith, U. (1897) 'In the Question Chair', *Rewiew and Herald*, 23 March.

Spear, S.T. (1892) *The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity*, Mountain View

Waggoner, E.J. (1890) *Christ and His Righteousness*, Oakland.

Wallenkampf, A.V. (1978) *New by the Spirit*, Mountain View.

White, A. (1981) *Ellen G. White*, Vol. I, Washington DC.

White, E.G. (1915) *Life Sketches*, Mountain View.

White, J. (1875) *Sketches of the Christian Life and Public Labors of William Miller*, Battle Creek.

White, J. (1877) 'Christ Equal With God', *Rewiew and Herald*, 29 November 1877.



Whitney, S.B. (1862) 'Both Sides', *Rewiew and Herald*, 25 February and 4 March.

Wilcox, F.M. (1913) 'The Message for Today', *Rewiew and Herald*, 9 October.