

THE *NORTHWEST ADVENTISTS* ARTICLE

John Witcombe

On December 20, 2022, Eric Brown, the Upper Columbia Conference ministerial director, wrote an article in *Northwest Adventists*, the weekly e-newsletter of the North Pacific Union Conference.¹

Ken LeBrun and I both wrote to Eric, showing him where he was misrepresenting us. He made some corrections and it was reposted on February 22, 2023. I will paste his corrected article below. My interlineated responses were actually from his first article which I sent to him, but they apply just as well to his corrected article because he did not make all the corrections needed to accurately reflect what we believe. Brown's article will be the sans serif, indented text.

Facing Trinitarian Challenges with Love In the Deep End of the Pool

By Eric Brown, December 20, 2022

Author's Note: After this article was originally posted, Ken LeBrun and John Witcombe both wrote to point out some editorial errors and concerns they had. I have corrected the spelling errors in their names and apologized for that oversight. I also inaccurately stated they do not believe the name "God" should be used for Jesus or the Spirit. I also inaccurately attributed Ken's concern over the wording in FB#2 to similarities with the Nicæan Creed; a point he denies in his book. These errors have been corrected in a desire to be fair and accurate in my representation of their views.

In the Deep End of the Pool

Discussing the doctrine of the Trinity is a lot like two humanities majors trying to have an in-depth discussion of particle physics. What we don't know about God is a massively longer list than what we do know. Everyone has their own journey in how we try to express who God is and we know that journey isn't just for individual Christians. The Christian church has been struggling with this since the 3rd century A.D.

It's an open secret that the Seventh-day Adventist church itself has a rather checkered history with the doctrine of the Trinity. More than a few of our spiritual parents were concerned enough about the influence of the Catholic church in our understanding of the Bible that they rejected the classical Nicene formulation of the concept. To this day, we have our own take on how the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit works. Early on, a number of our leaders went so far as to take the view that Jesus was a created being. As the Son of God, He came into existence in deep eternity past. Quite a few seemed to have many questions about the nature of the Holy Spirit and whether he should be considered a person at all.

The assumptions and suppositions of this "number of our leaders" ought to mean little to us. What saith the Lord through His prophets is what we, as a church, must hold to as being the truth on the doctrine of God.

1. <https://nwadventists.com/news/2022/12/facing-trinitarian-challenges-love-deep-end-pool>

Over time, the Seventh-day Adventist church has adjusted their understanding of the nature and role of each member of the Godhead as well as how we can also then claim to have only one God while have [sic] three different beings identified as such in scripture. Merlin Bert wrote a great article on the development of this doctrine with the Adventist Church that you can find on the Biblical Research Institute's (BRI) website.

Over time, the truth regarding the doctrine of God that the Lord, through His messenger, Ellen White, gave to our church remained consistent. Ellen White believed and taught throughout her lifetime the truth that there is only one God even while teaching that there is a divine heavenly trio composed of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And she taught this truth that there is only one God without employing the doctrine of the Trinity that teaches that this one God is three Persons. God gave to His remnant church an understanding of the doctrine of God which was clearly stated in the first two Fundamental Principles in 1872. In these two statements you will not find the suppositions of *some* of our pioneers that Eric Brown mentioned above. Here is how our church officially stated our belief in the one God of the Bible:

I – That there is one God, a personal, spiritual being, the creator of all things, omnipotent, omniscient, and eternal, infinite in wisdom, holiness, justice, goodness, truth, and mercy; unchangeable, and everywhere present by his representative, the Holy Spirit. Ps. 139:7.

II – That there is one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Eternal Father, the one by whom God created all things, and by whom they do consist...

There are no assumptions regarding the beginnings of the Son of God recorded in these two statements. In fact, we find the phrase *Eternal Father*, which requires that there be an **Eternal Son**. If there is no son, there is no father. From early on, Ellen White always taught that the Son of God was eternal:

The unworthiness, weakness, and inefficiency of their own efforts in contrast with those of the eternal Son of God....²

The Word existed as a divine being, even as the eternal Son of God, in union and oneness with his Father.³

A Strange Journey

Of course, with each step in our theological growth, there have been members who struggled with that progression.

The doctrinal pillars of our movement were firmly laid down at the beginning of our movement. Ellen White said that not a pin was to be moved. The pillar teaching on the doctrine of God was established under the guidance of God's prophetess and was not something that evolved over many decades, guided by our theologians. Many members struggle with the changes that modern theologians brought to our well-established doctrine of God. These members do not see this as progress and theological growth, but rather an erosion of the doctrine that God gave to our church.

Throughout the years, we've seen a number of various anti-trinitarian ideas move through the church.

2. Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, August 8, 1878.

3. Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, April 5, 1906.

For 130 years, we, as a movement, were non-Trinitarian. We did not officially teach the doctrine that one God is three Persons until 1980. Throughout those 130 years various Trinitarian ideas moved through the church. For the last 43 years, various members have objected to this change that has come into our church.

Another wave seems to be cresting again in the Upper Columbia Conference with materials published by Jean Handwerk and videos by Michael McCaffrey. These are classically non-trinitarian teachings that diminish the nature of the Son and the Spirit in various ways.

As already mentioned, we, as a movement, were non-Trinitarian for 130 years. Were we, in our official statements, diminishing the nature of the Son and the Spirit in various ways? Did Ellen White, who was clearly non-Trinitarian in her writings, diminish the nature of the Son and the Spirit in various ways?

However, a new variant has entered the scene with Ken LeBrun's book, *Not a Mystery* and John Witcombe's upcoming book, *One God, One Church*. The byline on John's advertised book boldly claims to provide, "a new approach to fortify membership against the Anti-Trinitarian movement." Both men believe that they are defending the church against anti-trinitarianism while calling the church at large to return to what they believe is a more Biblical, pre-1980 stance on the doctrine of the Godhead.

Our understanding is not a "new variant" but rather it is the teaching that we held for 130 years. There is not a shade of difference between what I believe and teach and what Ellen White taught on this doctrine. Now, there is a big difference between what I teach and what our scholars have brought into our current doctrinal statement on the one God of the Bible. The Bible and Ellen White teach that the one God is one Person—the Father, and the scholars teach that the one God is three Persons. That's a big difference.

Those holding this view believe that the 1980 formulation of our doctrine of God as, "One God, a unity of three co-eternal persons" is unbiblical in part because the explanatory phrase, "a unity of three co-eternal persons" does not appear in scripture or the writings of Ellen White. They believe the previous ways the church expressed the relationship between the members of the "heavenly trio" is more Biblically accurate.

They will be quick to tell you they are not Anti-Trinitarian:

- They believe that there are three members of the heavenly trio.
- They believe Jesus is from eternity with life, "unborrowed and underived."
- They believe that the Holy Spirit is a separate person with its own being.
- They believe all three heavenly beings possess the attributes of God.

What is the problem then? If one can affirm all the various aspects of the Trinity, doesn't that make one a Trinitarian. They would say "No!"

Trinitarianism teaches that the one God is three Persons, which is a mysterious concept, whereas those who are not Trinitarians believe that the Bible teaches that the one God is one Person (1 Cor. 8:6) who is a personal Father. God is not a mysterious concept but rather He is a Person. "From my girlhood I have been given **plain** instruction that **God is a person**, and that Christ is 'the express image of **His person**.' [Hebrews 1:3.]"⁴

4. Ellen G. White, Ms 137, 1903, par. 3.

Issues with the Trinity

There are several specific issues that those holding this view raise about the doctrine of the Trinity. Because this is a summary of the collective thought from several different people, each individual may feel that specific points don't accurately describe their particular point of view. However, the following six points broadly capture their line of thought:

1. They believe that all doctrine must be founded on a firm "Thus saith the Lord," by which they mean exact wording found specifically in the pages of scripture or in the writings of Ellen White. Any formulation using "human reasoning," which are words or phrases not found in inspired writings, are the doctrines of men and do not need to be followed. The Church has no right to make any doctrine based on human reasoning a test of fellowship.
2. When the Bible says, "One God" it is only referring to the Father. They believe that while Jesus and the Spirit are divine and eternal, Jesus should be referred to as the Son of God and the Spirit as the Spirit of God. The title "One God" should be reserved only for the Father.

The Son of God bears the title God because He is "God in infinity" and all the names that apply to the Father apply to His Son ("The mighty God, The everlasting Father" Isaiah 9:6). "The Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of the Father, is truly **God in infinity**, but **not in personality**."⁵

3. Jesus and the Spirit are divine because they have a shared life with the Father.
4. They believe that the 1980 statement departs significantly from what Seventh-day Adventists used to believe and teach on the subject of the Trinity.
5. They believe that their view is essentially what the Seventh-day Adventist church used to teach on the subject and that they are calling Seventh-day Adventists back to a more Biblical view of the Godhead.
6. They believe that Christ's mediatorial ministry is a function of his eternal role in the Godhead. They believe the doctrine of the Trinity minimize or "takes away" that mediatorial role and thus adopting the doctrine of the Trinity is, in effect, taking away the daily (Daniel 12:11). Thus, the adoption of Trinitarian language in our 1980 statement of belief united us with the actions of the Catholic church and leaves us open to other deceptions such as Sunday sacredness.

What then do we say to these concerns? While this will hardly be an exhaustive response, here are few thoughts to get your [sic] started with each of these primary objections.

1. This view is a particular type of verbalism. Requiring exact scriptural wording smacks of Fundamentalism and creates a whole host of problems with many other doctrines of the church. And including the writings of Ellen White as a basis for establishing doctrine goes against her own counsel on the matter (*Evangelism*, p. 256). On a much broader level, a verbalist approach misses the mark in how Inspiration functions (see the introduction to *The Great Controversy* for Ellen White's description of how the human and the divine interact to produce inspired writings).

5. Ellen G. White, Ms116-1905.15, 19.

Exact wording is not required. But the exact thought must be conveyed by whatever choice of words that we may use. This accusation of verbalism cannot be substantiated by anything we have ever said or written.

2. While this view makes much of the passages that speak of “one God”, it tends to minimize or dismiss other passages where the name “God” is applied to the Son and the Holy Spirit. The problem with this argument is not in what it affirms but in the evidence it excludes. A number of the Bible texts that Ken insists refer only to the Father, actually assume a plurality in the “oneness” of God. Further, there is little weight given to the significance of the divine name for God being applied in any way to Jesus or the Spirit in the first century context.

Please provide the Bible verse that assumes a plurality in the “oneness” of God. The primary verse that the BRI uses is Genesis 1:26. However, Ellen White tells us that the word God in this verse is referring only to the Father. He is speaking to His Son saying, “Let us make man in our image.” There is no plurality in the “oneness” of God in this verse:

But when **God said to His Son**, “Let **us** make man in **our** image,” Satan was jealous of Jesus. He wished to be consulted concerning the formation of man, and because he was not, he was filled with envy, jealousy, and hatred. He desired to receive the highest honors in heaven next to God.⁶

And now **God said to His Son**, “Let **us** make man in **our** image.” As Adam came forth from the hand of his Creator he was of noble height and of beautiful symmetry.⁷

Ellen White knows this fact because the Bible teaches us that God the Father is the mighty Creator of the worlds who does all His creating through His Son:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by **his** Son, whom **he** hath appointed heir of all things, **by whom** also **he** [**God the Father**] **made the worlds**. (Hebrews 1:1, 2)

And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in **God, who created all things by Jesus Christ**. (Ephesians 3:9)

But to us there is but one God, the Father, **of whom** are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, **by whom** are all things, and we by him. (I Corinthians 8:6)

Through Jesus Christ, God—not a perfume, not something intangible, but a **personal God**—**created man** and endowed him with intelligence and power.⁸

Through Christ the Word, a personal God created man and endowed him with intelligence and power.⁹

3. In attempting to avoid the dangers of speculation he sees in the doctrine of the Trinity, Ken LeBrun provides some alternative speculation in the form of a “shared life.” Several Adventist scholars have done an excellent job of explaining the differences between Fundamental belief #2 the [sic] various other versions of the concept that have been put forward through the centuries. In the simplest terms, the language of FB#2 in

6. Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 145.1.

7. Ellen G. White, *Lift Him Up*, p. 47.3.

8. Ellen G. White, Ms117-1898.10.

9. Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 415.

no way assumes the formulations of “one substance” from classical theology, nor does it suggest three separate Gods (Tri-theism). It simply attempts to capture the Biblical dichotomy of “one God” and three beings with divine attributes without attempting to explain the unique relationship between them other than with the word, “unity.”

The phrase “shared life” is simply another way of saying “one life” which is the phrase Ellen White uses in the following statement:

There is but one Way, one Truth, and **one Life**.¹⁰

God [the Father] has sent his [the Father’s] Son to communicate his [the Father’s] own life to humanity. Christ declares, “I live by the Father,” **my life and his** [the Father’s] **being one**.¹¹

All things come of God. From the smallest benefits up to the largest blessing, all flow through the one Channel—a superhuman mediation sprinkled with the blood that is of value beyond estimate because it was the life of God in His Son.¹²

Verbalism would require a person to only employ the phrase “one life” and forbid the use of a synonym such as “shared life.”

4. There have been a number of papers written on the progression of Adventist doctrine in regard to the Trinity. The 1980 statement was an incremental step in a much longer process as the church has continued to grow in its understanding of the Godhead and to combat extremes on all sides of the issue.

The 1980 statement was not an incremental step but rather it was a paradigm shift from our denomination’s long-standing non-Trinitarian position to a Trinitarian position.

5. Neither the idea of the “one God” as a unique name exclusive to the Father nor the idea of a “shared life” as the way in which the three members of the Godhead are bound together are positions held by the Seventh-day Adventist church prior to 1980.

Eric Brown is wrong on both accounts. *One God*, whenever that phrase was used in our official statement on the doctrine of God, always referred exclusively to the Father. *One God*, in the inspired writings, always and only refers to the Father. The concept of the one life (shared life) was clearly taught by Ellen White.

6. The mediatorial role of Christ is fundamental to Seventh-day Adventist doctrine. The error in Ken LeBrun’s position is in what he believes Fundamental belief #2 to be saying. Our current doctrinal statement in no way diminishes the mediatorial role of Christ. In fact, there have been excellent arguments made for how our understanding of the nature of Christ and the Godhead actually enhance the mediatorial function of Christ on our behalf. Unfortunately, Ken establishes a “straw man” in ascribing things to FB#2 that it does not say and then forms a theology against that false assumption.

There is obviously much more that could be said on any one of the points raised. The Biblical Research Institute has a broad collection of papers on various aspects of this subject included on their website that provide excellent references for further study.

10. Ellen G. White, 5LtMs, Ms 32, 1887, par. 10.

11. Ellen G. White, *The Home Missionary*, June 1, 1897, bracketed clarification added.

12. Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 22.

A Loving Response

How then should we respond to those who have decided they don't like the way the Seventh-day Adventist Church has articulated its belief about the Godhead? Dialoguing with anti-trinitarians has its own unique challenges because we're all swimming in the deep end of the pool. And this particular development is so very near to what the Seventh-day Adventist church does believe, it can be hard to even know where to begin in discussing the subject. If you encounter this particular idea within your church, here are a few practical ideas to help you engage with love.

Here would be a good place to begin. It's really pretty simple. Historically, our denomination's definition of *one God* was one person—the Father. The 1980 Fundamental Belief #2 position now teaches us that *one God* is three Persons. This view, according to the scholars, is simply an assumption according to their own written statements. Let us keep all human assumptions out of our doctrinal statements of belief. Let us stay with the Bible's own definition of *one God*.

1. Approach the discussion with humility. None of us has complete knowledge on the full nature of God.
2. Allow for diversity of thought. Seventh-day Adventists do not have a creed! We don't all have to agree on how to express our beliefs. People can be members of the Seventh-day Adventist church and have a different approach to any number of our doctrines than our particular perspective.
3. Protect Your Church Leadership. Elected leaders, Sabbath School teachers, and employees of the church have an obligation to be settled in what the church believes and to send a clear and unified voice affirming those teachings. The view expressed by Ken LeBrun and John Witcombe is not in harmony with how the church understands scripture on this topic and it is not appropriate for leaders to be promoting it.
4. Focus on the Mission. The Seventh-day Adventist church was not called into existence to settle the finer points of our theology about God, or diet, or Sabbath-keeping for that matter. We exist to share the eternal Gospel in the context of the Three Angels' Messages to tell the world of a soon-coming Savior. Spend your time on that and not on the more speculative matters of theology.

If we have no creed other than the Bible, then if the Bible says that *one God* is the Father (1 Cor. 8:6) and the church says that *one God* is three Persons, every member must decide if they will follow a "Thus saith the church" or follow a "Thus saith the Lord."

A "Thus saith the Lord" is not to be set aside for a "Thus saith the church."¹³

And according to *The Great Controversy*, page 595, we must demand of our church a plain "Thus saith the Lord" for their doctrine that teaches us that one God is three Persons.

The following letter from Ken LeBrun was sent to Eric Brown before he republished his article as presented above. Eric corrected the misspelling of our names but left unchanged many of the significant misrepresentations of our view.

13. Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 69.

January 13, 2023

Eric Brown, Ministerial Director
Upper Columbia Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
3715 S. Grove Road
Spokane, WA 99224

Dear Eric,

Today someone forwarded to me a link to your article in *Northwest Adventists* entitled, “Facing Trinitarian Challenges with Love In the Deep End of the Pool,” dated December 20, 2022. I would like to respond to that article.

The incorrect spelling and capitalization of the names Witcombe and LeBrun, though minor in themselves, may indicate something about the level of carefulness that was put into the preparation of the article. I wish those typos were the only errors in it.

If you or anyone else wishes to disagree with any of the points in my book, you are perfectly free to do so. And to explain why you disagree would be perfectly fine. So an article along those lines would not have been out of place. That is, as long as you correctly represent my views. But your article contains a number of instances in which my views are misrepresented. Let me point out a few examples:

1. The charge of verbalism. A person reading your article will most likely conclude that I believe no one can ever express a doctrinal position without using the exact phrases found in the inspired writings. And your reference to the Introduction to *The Great Controversy* gives the impression that I believe in verbal inspiration and disagree with what Ellen White says there. The fact is that I fully agree that human and divine elements work together in the process of inspiration. We don't believe in inspiration by dictation. Furthermore, I myself often explain doctrines in my own words. One evidence is my use of the phrase “shared life,” an expression that to my knowledge is not found in any inspired writing. You have borne false witness to me on this point.

Let me clarify my position. The problem with the wording of Fundamental Belief #2 is not that the language used is not found in the Bible. Most of our fundamental beliefs are expressed in the words of the scholars who wrote them. While it is always safer to use biblical wording, that is not the main problem here. The real problem is that the *concept* expressed in Fundamental Belief #2 is not found in any inspired writing. In fact it even contradicts the plain statements of the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy. But even that problem would be tolerable were it not for the second problem, which is the authority the church has vested in the statement. When church members are required, as a condition for holding office or membership, to affirm a theological statement that scholars acknowledge is not articulated in the Bible, you have elevated that statement above the plain word of God. It is not the mere *expression* of a doctrine in human language that is wrong, but rather the *enforcement* of that human language, that we are concerned about. When I emphasize God's directive to demand a plain “Thus saith the Lord,” I am saying that if God Himself has never expressed in *any* language a particular doctrinal concept, we dare not attempt to enforce what He Himself has never required.

2. Your letter accuses me of going against Ellen White's counsel in *Evangelism* p. 256. Please read the statements compiled there in their original context. I am not in violation of anything she

says there. Her injunction, “Let all prove their positions from the Scriptures,”¹⁴ I have followed. By the way, this is the very EGW letter in which she says just five paragraphs earlier, “The very last deception of Satan will be to make of none effect the testimony of the Spirit of God.... Satan will work ingeniously, in different ways and through different agencies, to unsettle the confidence of God’s remnant people in the true testimony.”¹⁵ Please notice that her warning against prejudicing others “against our denomination”¹⁶ provides the context for the excerpt in *Evangelism* p. 256. But if one thinks that the counsel given by God through His last-day messenger is not profitable to ourselves for doctrine, he is falling into Satan’s last deception for God’s remnant people. Of course we do not want “to bring in the testimonies ahead of the Bible.”¹⁷ That would not be proper. But in the very next paragraph of that cited manuscript the prophet says, “If the divine credentials do not attend the testimonies now, then it is time my work stopped.”¹⁸ Either her writings bear the divine credentials, and they are profitable for doctrine, or else they do not. Yes, they perform a different function than does the Bible. But your comment almost implies that the Spirit of Prophecy writings cannot be used for helping us to understand doctrine. If you are criticizing me for my confidence in the doctrinal dependability of the Spirit of Prophecy, then I am guilty as charged. But if you are accusing me of violating Ellen White’s counsel regarding the use of her writings, your accusation is false.

3. You accused us of believing that “the title God should be reserved only for the Father.” This is flatly false. Thomas called Jesus “God” in John 20:28. The Father Himself called Jesus “God” in Hebrews 1:8. Both of these verses are referenced in my book. This I have always believed and taught. [Note: Eric subsequently corrected this misrepresentation.]

What we *have* pointed out is that, whenever the Bible speaks of “one God,” and identifies whom that “one God” is, it is always the Father. That is indisputable. The designation is not once applied to a unity of divine Persons. That is the made up concept that scholars admit is absent from the prophetic writings. Yet the church requires it. Somebody needs to raise an objection.

You made reference to the BRI letter, saying that it “shows that a number of” Bible texts “actually assume a plurality in the ‘oneness’ of God.” Your use of the word “assume” acknowledges that this interpretation is in fact merely an assumption. This assumption has been imposed upon our members, and disciplinary action has been invoked upon those who challenge it.

In my reply to the BRI letter that I gave you on September 18, I pointed out some of the flaws in the reasoning of the BRI on this point. For example, how can they insist that the word “God” in Genesis 1:26 denotes a plurality of Persons when the messenger of the Lord makes it clear that the Speaker in that verse, designated there as “God,” is the Father?¹⁹ The church has made huge efforts to project its theological reasoning onto the biblical text. And that is what the BRI letter really “shows.”

4. [Here was originally listed another misrepresentation which, upon receipt of this letter, was corrected.]

14. Ellen G. White, Letter 12, 1890, paragraph 50, cited in *Evangelism*, p. 256.

15. *Ibid.*, paragraph 45.

16. *Ibid.*, paragraph 48.

17. Ellen G. White, Manuscript 7, 1894, paragraph 2, cited in *Evangelism*, p. 256.

18. *Ibid.*, paragraph 3.

19. Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption*, pp. 20, 21.

In addition to misrepresenting my views, you have demonstrated that you are uninformed on at least a couple of points:

1. In regard to the “one God” referring exclusively to the Father, you deny that this was a position held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church prior to 1980.

The 1872 “Fundamental Principles” states, “There is one God, a personal, spiritual being.” They were describing the Father, an individual divine Person with a single, physical body, who is “everywhere present by His representative, the Holy Spirit.” The “one God” of the 1980 Fundamental Beliefs, on the other hand, is not a Person. It is a “unity.” The 1931 Fundamental Beliefs provides additional clarification to the 1872 document, stating that this same “personal, spiritual Being” is “the eternal Father.” You are excused for not understanding this, but the Seventh-day Adventist Church never officially taught that the “one God” was a unity of Persons prior to 1980. On the inside of my 1971 baptismal certificate it says, “The true and living God, the first person of the Godhead, is our heavenly Father, and He, by His Son, Christ Jesus, created all things.” And it lists 1 Corinthians 8:6 as a supporting scripture, which tells us, “there is but one God, the Father.” To deny that the 1980 statement introduced a new official position on the “one God” is to overlook the documented facts.

2. You refer to the shared life principle as “speculation.” I understand if this is a new concept to you. But before you publicly denounce it as speculation you really owe it to yourself to search the scriptures to see whether these things are so. I am sending you a separate paper showing that this is the clear teaching of the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy.²⁰ As you will see, I have made nothing up.

I’d like to address just two more points:

1. The charge of establishing a straw man. You say that I have ascribed to the second fundamental belief things that it does not say—specifically, that the doctrine “diminishes the mediatorial role of Christ.” Let’s look at that. 1 Timothy 2:5 says, “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” Allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture, we find that the “one God” referred to here is the Father (1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 4:6). And this all makes sense. Jesus is the one mediator between the Father and men. “We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). But Fundamental Belief #2 confuses this arrangement by redefining the “one God” as a unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This completely throws off the formula of 1 Timothy 2:5. It removes from Christ any intrinsic identity as the Mediator. Recognizing this, our scholars, attempting to defend the theological position of the church, are obliged to use a bit of imaginative reasoning to explain it:

Is it possible that, perhaps in a council between the members of the Godhead before creation, it was decided that the One we now call the Second Person of the Godhead would at the commencement of creation condescend to partially empty himself (cf. the kenosis of Phil 2), to step down (perhaps taking the form of an angel?) to become the Mediator between the infinite God and finite creatures? And that Prov 8 is referring to this installation—this “begetting” of the Son of God—into the office of Mediator between the transcendent God and finite created beings? And that Prov 8 describes the mediatorial role of Wisdom—the pre-incarnate Christ?²¹

20. That document may be found here: tinyurl.com/mpad3vbw

21. Richard Davidson, “Proverbs 8 and the Place of Christ in the Trinity,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 17/1 (Spring 2006), p. 53.

I suggest that according to Prov 8, at the beginning of creation, we find a situation of equal members of the Godhead as Co-creators. There is no reference to a time before which One of the Members of the Godhead did not exist, nor a reference to the eternal subordination of One Member of the Godhead to Another Member. Rather, there is described a time, before the creation of the universe, when, presumably by mutual consent, one Person of the Godhead is “installed” (nsk III) in a role of Mediator. While the Person we call the Father continued to represent the transcendent nature of the Godhead, the Person we know as the Son condescended in divine kenosis to represent the immanent aspect of divinity, coming close to His creation, mediating between infinity and finitude, even before sin. This is not a subordination of the Son to the Father, but a voluntary condescension to be installed into a mediatorial role, representing the divine love in an immanent way to His inhabited universe.²²

There is no way to get around it. The theological definition of “one God” as set forth in Fundamental Belief #2 requires the rejection of 1 Timothy 2:5 as a description of Christ’s inherent mediatorial identity “from everlasting.”²³ This is not a straw man.

2. The Classification of Anti-Trinitarian. Labels are boxes that we put people in. Some labels are positive. Some are intentionally derogatory. For example, during the time of the barbarian invasions of the Roman Empire, “Arian” was a polemical epithet designed to stigmatize any groups who rejected the doctrine of the Trinity, even though they had no connection to Arius or his beliefs. “Anti-Trinitarian” is just such a label today. It is a box generally believed to hold all those who deny the deity of Christ, who “don’t believe in the Holy Spirit,” and whose mission is assumed to be at cross purposes with the church. Let me ask you a direct question: Was Ellen White an Anti-Trinitarian? Yes or No? I have no beliefs on this subject that differ from anything she ever taught.

In conclusion, your published article bears false witness by incorrectly representing my position. By charging me with promoting error you have used your influence in a way that discredits my book and me. Yet the error is only in the sentiments that you have falsely attributed to me.

You have asked your readers to investigate the BRI’s response to my book. Fairness and objectivity would have encouraged them also to read my response to the BRI letter, and then to decide for themselves from the weight of evidence.

When one publicly misspeaks, particularly when it affects another person, does he, upon learning of his mistake, have any obligation to publicly make it right?

These are some of the things to think about when “Facing Trinitarian Challenges with Love.”

Sincerely,
Ken LeBrun

The following letter was sent to Eric Brown after I read his revised article and before it was actually republished, so he could have corrected his misrepresentations of our views before it was republished.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

23. Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, Book One, p. 247.

February 16, 2023

Dear Elder Brown,

I read your revised *Northwest Adventists* article that you sent to Ken LeBrun. Most concerning is your continuing failure to accurately portray our position. I am okay with you criticizing what we actually believe.

As you indicated, most of what we believe regarding the doctrine of God is in harmony with what you believe. Our major difference is very simple. We believe that the biblical identity of the *one God* is one Person—the Father (1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 4:6). You believe that the biblical identity of the *one God* is three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This simple difference should be the focus of your critical analyses. If you could show our church members why our definition of *one God* is contrary to the inspired writings, you would be able to protect our denomination from our “heretical” view.

You wrote: “Those holding this view believe that the 1980 formulation of our doctrine of God as, ‘One God, a unity of three co-eternal persons’ is unbiblical in part **because the explanatory phrase**, ‘a unity of three co-eternal persons’ does not appear in scripture or the writings of Ellen White.”

It is not necessary that an exact phrase be found in the inspired writings. What is necessary is for **the concept** to be plainly presented. The concept that one God is three persons is not plainly presented in the Word of God. What is plainly presented is that one God is one person—the Father.

You wrote: “What is the problem then? If one can affirm all the various aspects of the Trinity, doesn’t that make one a Trinitarian? They would say ‘No!’”

The problem is that you failed to mention the main aspect of the Trinity which is the assumption that one God is three Persons. This is the primary teaching of the Trinity doctrine.

You wrote: “They believe that all doctrine must be founded on a firm ‘Thus saith the Lord,’ by which they mean exact wording found specifically in the pages of scripture or in the writings of Ellen White.”

We have repeatedly said that exact wording is not required. What is required is that the doctrine must be plainly taught in the inspired writings. A plain “Thus saith the Lord’ is not referring to exact wording but rather to the exact concept. The exact wording is fine but not required. It is fine to say millennium rather than the exact biblical word, one thousand years.

You wrote: “Any formulation using ‘human reasoning,’ which are words or phrases not found in inspired writings, are the doctrines of men and do not need to be followed.”

Any formulation using “human reasoning,” which are **concepts and ideas** that are not found in the inspired writings, are doctrines of men. *One God* is three Persons is a formulation that is actually contradicted in the inspired writings. The Bible consistently teaches that *one God* is one Person—the Father.

You wrote: “1. This view is a particular type of verbalism. Requiring exact scriptural wording smacks of Fundamentalism and creates a whole host of problems with many other doctrines of

the church. And including the writings of Ellen White as a basis for establishing doctrine goes against her own counsel on the matter (*Evangelism*, p. 256). On a much broader level, a verbalist approach misses the mark in how Inspiration functions (see the introduction to *The Great Controversy* for Ellen White's description of how the human and the divine interact to produce inspired writings)."

This is a straw man. You have no evidence that we do anything such as you have accused us of in number 1 of your primary objections.

You wrote: "2. While this view makes much of the passages that speak of 'one God,' it tends to minimize or dismiss other passages where the name 'God' is applied to the Son and the Holy Spirit."

You have two different issues here. We make much of the passages that have the phrase "one God" because we are defining from the Bible to whom this particular phrase is referring. We do not minimize or dismiss passages where the name "God" is applied to the Son and the Holy Spirit. But we do not use these passages to define the phrase "one God," because that is not the context of those references. We will use those passages when we are showing that Jesus is God or the Holy Spirit is God, but not when we are showing that the Father is the "one God" according to the inspired writings.

Thank you for making these additional corrections to your article.

John Witcombe