THE BIBLICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE EVALUATION

At the request of _____ Conference President _____, the five directors of the Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Research Institute held a Zoom conference on September 7, 2022 with Pastor Ken LeBrun for 90 minutes, and then with Val Ramos for 90 minutes. The purpose of these meetings was to evaluate Pastor LeBrun's new book, *Not a Mystery*, and to assess Brother Ramos' understanding of the doctrine of God. Both gentlemen were invited to submit written material in advance of the meeting. And then, upon receipt of the BRI's written evaluation, they were each asked to write a response for the _____ Conference records. The documents collected below include Val's preliminary correspondence, the official BRI report, and the written responses.

Invitation from the Biblical Research Institute

9/4/2022

Dear Brother Ramos,

Thanks for agreeing to meet with us at the BRI so we can understand and interact with you about your views on SDA Fundamental Beliefs related to the Trinity. I would kindly ask you to prepare a summary of your ideas and present it in 20 minutes, after which we'll ask the questions pertinent to your presentation. If you have any documents you would like us to see in advance, feel free to send them to us.

Blessings,
Elias, BRI

Val's Reply

September 4, 2022

Dear Dr. Brasil de Souza,

I am looking forward to speaking with you this coming Wednesday. My brother-in-law, Pastor John Witcombe, shared with you the following note at the CALLED Convention:

> A few weeks ago, my brother-in-law, Val Ramos, sent a question to the BRI. Just this last week (June 15, 2022.), Dr. Denis Kaiser and Dr. Jiří Moskala traveled from Andrews University to the State of _____ to meet with him to discuss the issues raised by his question. Dr. Frank Hasel, from the BRI, was also scheduled to be there but he was unable to come. The president of Val's conference, who joined him in this meeting, called Pavel Goia and the General Conference Prayer Team to ask them to be in prayer during this meeting. Given this level of attention, the issues surrounding Val's question must be important. I would like to know how the BRI might answer this question. Here was his question:

Given the fact that our church has no creed other than the Bible, does a Seventh-day Adventist elder or pastor have the liberty to follow his conscience and reject the assumption embedded in Fundamental Belief #2, that one God is three persons, and instead, affirm all nine of the Bible references attached to FB#2 along with all of the biblically-sound statements on the doctrine of God that were written in our official publications before the year 1980 and remain an elder or pastor of the church in good standing?

The answer to that question should be so obvious that it shouldn't even need to be asked. So I will withdraw that question.

Instead I would like to make this statement:

The position that I hold (the pre-1980 official Seventh-day Adventist position on the doctrine of God) is what I would guess might be the understanding of a great portion of Seventh-day Adventist members around the world. A lay member who studies the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, and does not read the opinions of present-day SDA authors, might claim to believe in the Trinity. But when they use that word Trinity, they use it in the same way as Francis Wilcox used it when he inserted this word into our Fundamental Belief back in 1931:

> That the Godhead, or Trinity, consists of the Eternal Father, a personal, spiritual Being, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, infinite in wisdom and love; the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Eternal Father, through whom all things were created and through whom salvation of the redeemed hosts will be accomplished; the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, the great regenerating power in the work of redemption.

Trinity, for most Seventh-day Adventists, simply means that there are three divine Persons who make up the heavenly trio, and so of course they would claim to be Trinitarians. They do not know that the Trinity doctrine, as now spelled out in Fundamental Belief #2, teaches that there is a mysterious "one divine Trinitarian being"[1] known as the one God who is a unity of three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The use of the personal pronouns *He* and *His* in this Fundamental Belief indicates that this one God has been given singular being status.

Unless someone tells them to believe this, they would not naturally come up with this understanding of God from reading the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy. From these two sources, our members understand the doctrine of God as I believe it and as our church taught it from its inception up until 1980.

No church member, including you, is under any obligation to affirm any doctrine or precept that is not plainly stated in the inspired writings. Even if the voice of the majority at a General Conference Session declares that the Trinity doctrine is truth, if that doctrine is not plainly stated in the inspired writings, then we are not to accept it. I want to be a part of that group of people brought to view in this most relevant statement:

> But God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. **The opinions of learned men**, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, **the voice of the majority**—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. **Before**

1. Kwabena Donkor, Biblical Research Institute Release—9, *God in 3 Persons—in Theology*, May 2015, p. 22.

> **accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain "Thus saith the Lord" in its support.**[2]

As one of the "learned men" in our church, you are certainly aware of the many statements from the scholars, both within and without our church, who acknowledge that the Trinity doctrine does not have a plain "Thus saith the Lord" in its support. We are to demand a plainly worded, inspired statement in support of the Trinity doctrine before we accept it. No one has been able to find such a statement. Yes, there are many books and articles that present deep theological reasoning in support of the Trinitarian assumption, but that does not meet the standard that we are to demand before accepting this doctrine.

From what I gather from GC 595, I would draw the conclusion that any church member who accepts and promotes a precept or a doctrine that does not have a plain "Thus saith the Lord" in its support should be disqualified from serving in any leadership capacity in this denomination.

Our local conference leadership is looking to the BRI to give either a thumbs up or a thumbs down on the position regarding the right of a member to hold a leadership position while affirming our denomination's official pre-1980 understanding of God which, incidentally, **did** have a plain "Thus saith the Lord" for its support.

I have a statement for you to read regarding my view of Fundamental Belief #2. See attached document entitled, "What I Can and Cannot Affirm in Fundamental Belief #2."

I want you to know that I am not in harmony with the separatist anti-Trinitarian movement, nor am I in agreement with the current Trinitarian doctrine. I find myself in complete harmony with what Ellen White taught on the doctrine of God. You will not find a shade of difference between what I believe and what Ellen White taught throughout her entire ministry.

I believe that there is room in our church for the multitude of church members and pastors who hold to the official Seventh-day Adventist denomination's pre-1980 view of God.

Val Ramos

What I Can and Cannot Affirm in Fundamental Belief #2
by Val Ramos

> **2. The Trinity**
>
> There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three coeternal Persons. God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever-present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. God, who is love, is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation. (Gen. 1:26; Deut. 6:4; Isa. 6:8; Matt. 28:19; John 3:16; 2 Cor. 1:21, 22; 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2.)

What I Can Affirm

- I can affirm the nine Bible verses that are associated with this belief.

2. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 595.

- I can affirm that there is **one God**, as one of the nine Bible references teaches:

  > There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, **One God and Father** of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.[3]

- I can affirm that there are three living Persons in the Heavenly Trio: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit:

  > There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit…[4]

- I can affirm that the three Persons are eternal:

  > That which the **eternal Father** Himself had pronounced…[5]

  > The Word existed as a divine being, even as the **eternal Son of God**…[6]

  > How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the **eternal Spirit** offered himself without spot to God…[7]

- I can affirm that the Father, His Son, and the Holy Spirit are infinite and beyond human comprehension.

- I can affirm that God is love:

  > In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.[8]

- I can affirm that the Heavenly Trio is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation.

- I can affirm that the Heavenly Trio is immortal, all-powerful, and all-knowing.

- I can affirm that God is above all:

  > **One God and Father** of all, who is **above all**, and through all, and in you all.[9]

- I can affirm that the Father and His Son are ever-present by the third Person of the Godhead—the Holy Spirit:

  > By His Spirit He is everywhere present.[10]

What I Cannot Affirm

- I cannot affirm the use of the two singular pronouns *He* and *His* in referencing the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Plural pronouns are grammatically required when speaking of two or more

3. Ephesians 4:4-6
4. Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 615.
5. Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 340.
6. Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 615.
7. Hebrews 9:14
8. 1 John 4:9
9. Ephesians 4:6
10. Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 417.

members of the Heavenly Trio. The first Bible reference listed in support of Fundamental Belief #2 is Genesis 1:26. This reference is used to prove that the one God is a plurality of Persons:

> In Hebrew, the fact that there is more than one Person in the one God is conveyed by God's use of the plural cohortative 'let us:' (1) 'Then God said [singular], "Let us [plural] make mankind in our image" (Gen 1:26a)…. When God said 'let us'…He indicated that more than one Person is in the Godhead, even though He told Israel that their God was one. While focusing on one God to keep them from many gods, He allowed them a glimpse of the reality that this one God was more than one Person.[11]

And then, contrary to their own reasoning, the scholars, as they wrote Fundamental Belief #2, used *singular* personal pronouns to refer to this one God whom they are wanting us to believe is a *plurality* of Persons. Why would they use *singular* pronouns when their "biblical evidence" (Gen. 1:26)—for God being a plurality of Persons—illustrates that *plural* pronouns are to be used when the word God is indicating a plurality of Persons as they believe that it does in this text?

Contrary to what Norman Gulley writes in his book, the biblical truth is **God is *not* a plurality of Persons**. The word God mentioned in Genesis 1:26 does not refer to a plurality of Persons. God is only and always a singular Person; and this Person, in Genesis 1:26, is the Father Himself:

> After the earth was created, and the beasts upon it, **the Father and Son** carried out their purpose, which was designed before the fall of Satan, to make man in their own image **They** had wrought together in the creation of the earth and every living thing upon it. And now **God says to his Son**, "Let **us** make man in **our** image."[12]

There is no example in the Bible or the Spirit of Prophecy where singular personal pronouns are ever used when more than one member of the Heavenly Trio is being referenced. Furthermore, whenever the name God is used in the inspired writings, it always refers to only one Person at a time, whether that is the Father, or His Son, or the Holy Spirit—never to a plurality of Persons.

> Again and again during my experience in the Lord's work, I have been called upon to meet these erroneous sentiments. In every case, clear, powerful light has been given that **God is the eternal**, **self-existent One**. 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.][13]

- I cannot affirm the definition of the phrase "one God" as given in Fundamental Belief #2, which is that one God is a unity of three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Bible and Spirit of Prophecy alone have the authority to define this biblical phrase, and they define "one God" as being the Father:

> 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.[14]
>
> For there is **one God**, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.[15]
>
> **One God and Father** of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.[16]

11. Norman Gulley, *Systematic Theology: God as Trinity*, p. 25.
12. Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, Jan. 9, 1879.
13. Ellen G. White, Ms 137, 1903.
14. 1 Corinthians 8:6
15. 1 Timothy 2:5
16. Ephesians 4:6

Because the Seventh-day Adventist Church has no creed other than the Bible, members and employees of the church are to be tested for orthodoxy by the inspired writings alone and not by the scholars' assumptions of what they think the Bible is teaching. The concept that the one God of the Bible is a plurality of Persons, as Fundamental Belief #2 teaches, is only an assumption arrived at by our scholars through theological reasoning:

> The concept of the Trinity, namely the idea that the three are one [God], is **not explicitly stated** but only **assumed**.[17]

For those of us who were baptized before 1980, the vote to include FB#2 does not remove our right to adhere to the vows that we made when we joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Every church member has a right to believe or to disbelieve this **new doctrine** (new to the SDA Church) of the Trinity that FB#2 established in our church. Every church member has a right to teach our historic Adventist foundational pillars of truth that God established in this church through those twenty-two Sabbath Conferences held between April, 1848, and December, 1850. What they do not have a right to do is to interfere with another member's religious liberty to believe and teach as their conscience so dictates as long as that teaching does not tear down the foundation that God established in those formative years of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

> Beware of those who would tear down the foundation, upon which we have been building for the last fifty years, to **establish a new doctrine**.[18]

> Let the Scriptures be read in simple faith, and **let each one form his conceptions of God from His inspired Word**.[19]

Val's Summary Statement

September 7, 2022

The following is a summary of my position.

I affirm the pre-1980 teachings on the doctrine of God as stated in the official publications of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I fully believe in the Heavenly Trio—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I believe that the eternal Son of God is God in the highest sense and is without beginning. I also affirm the truth that the Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Godhead. I believe nothing new or different from what our denomination held during the days of Ellen White.

I reject a major assumption of the anti-Trinitarian movement. They assume that the Son of God had a beginning. That assumption contradicts this plain "Thus saith the Lord":

> The Word existed as a divine being, even as the eternal Son of God, in union and oneness with His Father.[20]

17. Fernando L. Canale, *The Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology, Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, vol. 12, p. 138, "Doctrine of God."
18. Ellen G. White, Ms137-1903.
19. Ellen G. White, Lt214-1903.
20. Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 615.

We are instructed:

> **Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain "Thus saith the Lord" in its support.**[21]

The anti-Trinitarians are not alone in failing to follow this instruction. The Trinitarians also violate this counsel found in GC 595. They assume that the one God is three Persons. This assumption contradicts this plain "Thus saith the Lord":

> But to us there is but **one God**, the Father…[22]

The statement in GC 595 prevents me from accepting the precept that the one God is a unity of three Persons as Fundamental Belief #2 states.

The reason that we do not accept the doctrine of Sunday sacredness is because there is no plain "Thus saith the Lord" that supports this doctrine. The united testimony of the scholars is that the Trinity doctrine also does not have a plain "Thus saith the Lord" in its support. Our demand for plainly stated inspired support for these two doctrines cannot be met; therefore, we, as a church, must reject both doctrines.

> **No text of Scripture specifically says that God is three Persons**: but **theological reasoning** on the basis of biblical principles leads to that conclusion.[23]

Theological reasoning has its place. We could not come to the conclusion that the mark of the beast was enforced Sunday worship if we did not apply theological reasoning to the scriptures. There is not a plain "Thus saith the Lord" in the Bible that plainly identifies just what the mark of the beast is. But for those of us who believe that the writings of Ellen White are inspired, we accept her statements as a "Thus saith the Lord." And she plainly states that enforced Sunday worship is the mark of the beast.

But when neither the Bible nor the Spirit of Prophecy plainly declare that the one God is a Trinitarian being, then we must not accept that teaching as a doctrine of our church.

> Do not try to explain in regard to the personality of God. **You cannot give any further explanation than the Bible has given. Human theories regarding Him are good for nothing.**[24]

Human theories on the doctrine of God, arrived at by theological reasoning, are good for nothing. We must stay with explanations that are plainly stated in the inspired writings.

Our fundamental belief on God, established at the beginning of our movement, is the truth that God gave His church for us to give to the world. The personality of God is a **foundational pillar** of this movement and not a pin is to be moved from the foundation that God established:

> Those who seek to **remove the old landmarks** are not holding fast; they are not remembering how they have received and heard. 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**

21. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 595.
22. 1 Corinthians 8:6
23. Kwabena Donkor, Biblical Research Institute Release—9, *God in 3 Persons—in Theology*, May 2015, p. 20.
24. Ellen G. White, Lt179-1904.4.

> **Christ**, are working as blind men. They are seeking to bring in uncertainties and to set the people of God adrift, without an anchor.[25]
>
> We are God's commandment-keeping people. For the last fifty years every phase of heresy has been brought to bear upon us, to **tear down the foundation principles of our faith**. Messages of every order and kind have been urged upon Seventh-day Adventists to take the place of the truth which point by point has been testified to by the miracle-working power of the Lord. But the waymarks which have made us what we are are to be **preserved**, and they will be preserved, as God has signified through His Word and the testimony of His Spirit. From the great system of truth as it has been presented by God's messengers, **not a pin is to be removed**.[26]

In 1980, a foundational pillar regarding the personality of God was removed from the structure of truth by the insertion of the Trinity doctrine into our Fundamental Beliefs. Fundamental Belief #2 needs to be rewritten so that every concept taught in this belief has a plain, "Thus saith the Lord" in its support.

Val

Val's Follow-up Letter

September 8, 2022

Dear Dr. Brasil de Souza,

Thank you for the time you took with me and for the many questions that were asked in an attempt to understand just what I believe. Please allow me to enlarge on my response to two of the Bible verses that were presented as evidence for the Trinity doctrine: Isaiah 6:8 and Matthew 28:19.

1. Isaiah 6:8, "Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me."

It is thought that this verse indicates that God is a plurality of divine Persons. However, the plain reading of this verse would tell the common person that God the Father is speaking to His Son just as He was in Genesis 1:26. Let me remind you of Ellen White's statement on this verse:

> After the earth was created, and the beasts upon it, **the <u>Father</u> and Son** carried out their purpose, which was designed before the fall of Satan, to make man in their own image. **They** had wrought together in the creation of the earth and every living thing upon it. And now **<u>God</u> says to his Son**, "Let **us** make man in **our** image."[27]

Isaiah 6:8 is similar to Genesis 1:26. God the Father is speaking to His Son:

> When **God** asked, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for **Us**?' Christ alone of the angelic host could reply, 'Here am I; send Me.' [Isaiah 6:8.][28]

25. Ellen G. White, Ms62-1905.14.
26. Ellen G. White, Lt232-1903.42.
27. Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, Jan. 9, 1879.
28. Ellen G. White, Ms101-1897.28.

The singular "I" *(Whom shall I send)* is clearly God the Father. God is asking the question and Christ is replying. Ellen White capitalizes the word Us indicating that the Us is speaking of **God and Christ**. "Before man was created, **God and Christ** entered into a covenant that if he fell from his allegiance, Christ would bear the penalty of transgression."[29] Now, I clearly understand that Isaiah, not Christ, is the one who answers in the context of Isaiah 6:8. But Ellen White is telling us that God asked this same question to Christ. So the verse has a dual application. Ellen White's statement makes it clear who "the Lord" in Isaiah 6:8 is that asks the question. She tells us it is God the Father.

Isaiah 6:8 is no different from Genesis 1:26. Neither one of these verses is plainly teaching us that the one God is a plurality of Persons. Any scholar who continues using these two references to prove that there is a divine Trinitarian being (one God) who is composed of three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is not allowing the Spirit of Prophecy to function in its role to correct those who err from Bible truth:

> I recommend to you, dear reader, the Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice. By that Word we are to be judged. God has, in that Word, promised to give **visions in the** "**last days**"; not for a new rule of faith, but for the comfort of His people, and **to correct those who err from Bible truth**.[30]

2. Matthew 28:19, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the **name** of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.…"

It was suggested that since *name* is a singular word that is referring to three Persons; therefore, God must be a plurality of three Persons.

Let me see if I can simplify this with an illustration. If my family and I were in a team competition and the organizers wanted to know the name of our team, I would tell them that the name of this family team is Ramos. This name *Ramos* refers to me, it refers to my wife, and it refers to my son, or it can refer to all three of us—the Ramos family. There is no mystery here. This singular name, which can refer to one or more persons, is not a name that identifies some mysterious human being who is composed of three persons. No, it is just a name that can refer to three different people.

Regarding the name of the Father, we are told that His Son has His name:

> Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: **for my name is in him**.[31]

The Son carries the names and titles of His Father:

> For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and **his name** shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, **The mighty God**, **The everlasting Father**, The Prince of Peace.[32]

The word name in Matthew 28:19 is just that—it is a name. A name identifies a person; it does not in and of itself possess personhood. And this name in this verse is shared alike by each member of the heavenly trio. But this does not make this name a mysterious divine Trinitarian being.

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29. Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, December 25, 1901.
30. Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 78.
31. Exodus 23:20-21
32. Isaiah 9:6

And just what is this threefold sacred name?

> Before the disciples shall compass the threshold, there is to be the **imprint of the sacred name**, baptizing the believers **in the name of the threefold powers in the heavenly world**.[33]
>
> Before man can find a home in the church, before passing the threshold of God's spiritual kingdom, he is to receive the impress of **the divine name**, "**The Lord our Righteousness**." Jeremiah 23:6 Those who are baptized in **the threefold name** of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, at the very entrance of their Christian life declare publicly that they have forsaken the service of Satan and have become members of the royal family, children of the heavenly King.[34]
>
> Of the church of Christ it is written "This is the name wherewith she shall be called, **The Lord our righteousness**." Jeremiah 33:16. **This name is put upon every follower of Christ**.[35]

This sacred, threefold name, *The Lord our Righteousness*, is put upon every person who is baptized. This name does not indicate the existence of a mysterious divine Trinitarian being.

Our scholars read into the Bible references noted above (Gen. 1:26; Isa. 6:8; Matt. 28:19) a Trinitarian doctrine that simply is not there.[36]

In Fundamental Belief #2, the phrase one God is given personhood by using singular personal pronouns to reference this one God. It turns this one God into a new divine Trinitarian being. This one God does not have a Son because He is the Son while at the same time He is also the Father and the Holy Spirit. There is no such being described in any of the inspired writings.

One of the questions asked by Dr. Hasel was: What would I do if the church does not change the wording of Fundamental Belief #2?

Let me provide a more thorough answer to this important question. I have disagreed with the wording for the past 38 years. My disagreement has not affected my work as an elder or a Sabbath School teacher. Because that wording is not a creedal statement that I must agree with in order to be a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the wording is not as important as are the Bible verses that are attached to that Fundamental Belief. Because the Bible is our only creed, I must be in full agreement with what those nine Bible verses are plainly teaching. And I am. It would certainly be helpful if the language of this Fundamental was plainly supported by those Bible verses. Unfortunately, as it is currently worded, not one Bible verse plainly supports the assumption that there is one divine Trinitarian being who is composed of three Persons.

The following question was asked in the meeting: How can we avoid polytheism if we don't accept the Trinity doctrine? It should be noted that Ellen White was not a polytheist and yet she never employed the Trinity doctrine in her teachings on God. Should we not teach the truth on the doctrine of God just as she taught it?

Please pass these comments on to all who were present in our meeting.

Val

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33. Ellen G. White, *The Upward Look*, p. 148.
34. Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, p. 145.
35. Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, p. 41.
36. "Some who are teaching present truth…sin against God. They mangle the scripture, and *make the Bible say things that are not written therein.*" (2T 342, emphasis supplied.)

Letter From the Conference President

9/15/2022

Hi Val,

Thank you for your email messages regarding your dialogue with Elder Elias Brazil de Souza and the members of the BRI - Biblical Research Institute.

I appreciate your sincere willingness to dialogue with them and to share your views regarding the wording of Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Belief #2.

I'm happy to share with you that we received a letter of response from the BRI on Tuesday afternoon September 13, 2022 and I am forwarding it to you today.

My request is that you please review this letter and share your written response with me by noon on Monday, September 19, 2022.

I would also be happy to visit with you in person early next week to further discuss this matter.

As you may know, I'm going to be in _____ on Wednesday evening September 21, 2022 and it would be great to have your written response and to visit with you before then.

Yours in Christ,

Elder _____,

Conference President

The Official Response of the Biblical Research Institute

Silver Springs [sic], MD
September 13, 2022

Dear Elder _____,

As you requested, on Wednesday, September 7, the BRI scholars met with Elder Ken LeBrun and brother Val Ramos to discuss their views on the SDA Fundamental Belief no. 2 and other matters related to the Godhead. Though we had separate meetings with these brethren, we noted that they hold virtually the same views on the matters discussed. Therefore, one document shall suffice to report our discussion. Subsequently, a communication from Elder John Witcombe, an employee of the _____ Conference, was forwarded to us that expressed essentially the same views and suggests that all three men are working together with a common aim.

Pastor LeBrun and brother Ramos, in separate interviews, affirmed their belief in the personality, divinity, and eternality of each of the three coeternal persons of the Godhead.

But they deny the statement that the three coeternal persons should be designated "one God" as stated in FB no. 2: "There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three coeternal Persons. God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever-present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. God, who is love, is forever

worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation. (Gen. I:26; Deut. 6:4; Isa. 6:8; Matt. 28:19; John 3:16; 2 Cor. 1:21, 22; 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2.)."

Our brethren do not seem to have a problem with each individual person being fully divine and eternal. In this respect, they differ from some antitrinitarians who hold more divergent views. However, as already stated, they do not accept that the three persons should be designated "one God." They instead contend the designation one God must apply only to the Father. The main argument seems to be that such wording is not found in the Bible nor in the writings of Ellen G. White. To make such a case, Pastor LeBrun wrote a book analyzing each of the biblical passages listed in FB no. 2, and he concluded that "Of the nine Bible references listed, none were found to supply our voted definition" (*Not a Mystery*: *Understanding God*, 21). But despite such a strong claim, a close examination of his study shows exegetical weakness. For the sake of space, we note his views on four passages.

In examining Genesis 1:26, Pastor LeBrun contends that "The verse does not explicitly *declare* that there is one God, so we will wait to find that *declaration* elsewhere" (*Not a Mystery*, 10, italics his). Although the author recognizes that the plural conveys that God is speaking to the Son, he fails to draw the implications of the summarizing statement, "So God created man in His *own* image" (v. 27). If in the statement: "let us make man in our image," God is speaking to His Son, as the author recognizes, then the clause "God created man in His *own* image" must include both the Father and the Son (unless one would make the heretical claim that the image of God refers only to that of the Father). Contrary to the views espoused by our brethren and stated in the said book, Genesis 1:26 strongly supports the language of FB no. 2 that the term one God may designate the Godhead as a whole and is not necessarily restricted to the person of the Father.

As for Deuteronomy 6:4, although the author dismisses the significance of the passage for the matter under discussion, the passage is indeed foundational for biblical monotheism. In context, Deuteronomy 6:4 affirms that, unlike the nations with different gods, Israel has only one God, YHWH. The passage deals primarily not with God's nature but with the fact that Israel must devote its loyalty only to the one true God (see vv. 13—15). Subsequently, the Bible reveals more clearly that the one God exists in three persons, as in Matt. 28:19 (another significant passage for the present matter that the book cavalierly dismisses).

Isaiah 6:8 is another passage that does not receive fair treatment in the book, and its full implications are therefore ignored. Strangely, the author takes the phrase "who will go for us?" to refer to the "Lord addressing some other heavenly being" (*Not a Mystery*, 14). The question that arises is: what other heavenly being could the Lord address in this way? Could it not be that this is a dialogue within the Godhead or the Father addressing the Son, as the author admits in Genesis 1:26, noted above? Since God does not take counsel from another (Isa 40:14), it seems that the conversation indicated in Isaiah 6:8 is not between God and another heavenly being but a deliberation that takes place between the persons of the Godhead. This, in fact, seems to be the position of Val Ramos as indicated in his letter of September 8, 2022, that we received.

Coming back to Matthew 28:19, it seems clear that our brethren also miss an essential point in the passage (see *Not a Mystery*, 15). Not only does the passage convey a trinitarian view of the Godhead, but the expression "in the name of' appears in the singular and only once in reference to the three divine persons and points to the three persons as one God. This verse directs us away from thinking of three separate divine beings, a position that would seem to be indistinguishable from tritheism.

Space constraints do not allow an exhaustive discussion of every passage discussed in our conversation with the two brethren and the book that conveys their views. But we need to assess some theological statements shared more clearly in the book:

"Divine oneness is spelled out in the Bible, not as a plurality of Persons whose 'unity' lies merely in the mutual harmony and love that they enjoy, but far more meaningfully as the sharing of a single divine Life" (*Not a Mystery*, 45).

"The Trinitarian argument contends that if only one member of the Trinity was the Source, the other two would be inferior to Him. The Shared Life view, on the other hand, suggests that divine equality does not consist merely in parity or in the possession of similar attributes, but in the actuality of a single divine life that can never be made superior or inferior to itself" *(Not a Mystery*, 46).

"Because Christ's divine life is viewed as distinct from that of the Father, the Adventist position **requires us to distinguish between Christ's divine life and His human life**. Bible verses such as John 5:26 that don't fit into our conception of His divine life, are for that reason consigned to His human life. The interpretation of 'original, unborrowed, underived,' so often applied to His divine life, notably excludes His human life" (*Not a Mystery*, 84, emphasis his).

"As mentioned in the previous point, the doctrine of the Trinity **leads to the conclusion that Jesus did not completely die**" (*Not a Mystery*, 84, emphasis his).

"The Trinitarian view of the atonement **makes the Father's participation only indirect and vicarious**. He looked on, and then turned His back, as His partner was tortured to death; but He Himself did not personally bear our punishment, because His life is distinct from Christ's. Ellen White, however, presents Christ's sacrifice as the Father giving *Himself.* That point is lost in the prevailing model where each Person of the Trinity has His own independent life" (*Not a Mystery*, 85).

The above statements allow the following considerations:

1. In a telling statement, the author asserts: "What we never find Paul teaching is the doctrine of the Trinity" (*Not a Mystery*, 25). Also, elsewhere in the book, the phrases: "Trinitarian argument" and, later, "the doctrine of the Trinity," and "Trinitarian view" in their respective contexts tend to be used in a negative way, which appears to contradict their affirmations that they are not antitrinitarians.

2. Throughout the book, we have the impression that the author quotes certain perceptions and opinions of Seventh-day Adventist scholars as if such a particular position or nuance were the official view voted by the church.

3. The alleged dichotomy between Christ's human life and His divine life ascribed to the SDA view seems a straw-man argument. lt is precisely the doctrine of the Trinity—that is, One God in three persons—that makes God the Father deeply involved in the atonement along with the Son.

4. They argued that we should use only expressions from inspired writings. This being the case, where does the Bible or the writings of Ellen G. White use the expression "one shared divine life"? This expression (which is opposed to the Trinity, *Not a Mystery*, 42), along with the criticism of the Trinity, as shown above, can easily pave the way to modalism (or another Christological heresy such

as Arianism). If the expression "one God" only refers to the Father, passages that refer to Jesus as God might indicate that Christ is one manifestation of the Father.

5. The views expressed by our brothers totter on a fine line between biblical orthodoxy and speculative reasoning. We are concerned that the views expressed in the book and in our meetings may be only the tip of an iceberg and indicative of a deeper problem based on our interactions with them and examination of the book.

6. We appealed to our brothers to reexamine their views on the matter. Since FB no. 2 represents the consensus of the world church on the doctrine of God, those who disagree should not occupy leadership positions while attacking our beliefs or promoting views that undermine it. And depending on the situation, they may even forfeit their rights to membership in the church.

7. In such discussions, people may appeal to religious freedom, that each is free to believe whatever doctrine they choose. This argument, however, misunderstands the concept of religious liberty and shows confusion between church and state. A nation may grant religious freedom to its citizens in recognition that they usually do not have a choice of their nationality. The church, however, is a free association. Any voluntary organization that embraces mutually contradictory teachings, views, or doctrines, risks dividing and thereby undermining itself. And religious freedom does not require the church to accept pluralism. Those who join the church do so because they believe its message; otherwise, they should leave.

8. The basic issue is whether these men can affirm, as FB no. 2 attempts to do, "one God" in three Persons without falling into the problem of tritheism on the one hand or modalism on the other. We are not convinced that their position avoids these extremes. Clearly, it is not in harmony with FB no. 2.

9. Our brethren have asserted that their views are the same as those taught by the church prior to 1980. We are not aware of any prior established church position on the Trinity that teaches the idea of "sharing a single divine life" (*Not a Mystery*, 45). This view seems derived from the assumption that previous statements of belief (such as the 1889 Statement of Fundamental Principles) were attempting to define "one God" when they were, in fact, more concerned with addressing the individual qualities of the three persons of the Godhead than in explaining their "oneness."

10. The Bible compels us to be of one mind (Phil 2:2), as Paul instructed us: "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:9).

Unfortunately, based on previous interactions and in our dialogue and study of the content of the book, it is clear that further discussions would not serve any useful purpose. It seems this is not an attempt to clarify doubts or find answers but is already a settled position in their minds that has been held for many years and is not an open question anymore.

Elias Brasil de Souza
BRI Director

P.S.: This document was prepared in collaboration with my associate directors: Daniel Bediako, Frank Hasel, Alberto Timm, Clinton Wahlen.

A Response by Ken LeBrun to the
September 13, 2022 Letter of BRI Director
Dr. Elias Brasil de Souza
to _____ President Elder _____

I am thankful that the Biblical Research Institute consented to prepare a brief written evaluation of my book, *Not a Mystery*. As requested by the _____ Conference office, I am responding to that letter of evaluation. I will address each point.

Genesis 1:26. The problem that the BRI found in my comment on this verse is that I did not include verse 27 in my discussion of verse 26. Let me remind you that my stated objective in this chapter was "to briefly examine *each of the listed Bible references*, specifically looking for a declaration of one God, a definition of the one God, and a description of the one God that matches our doctrinal statement" (p. 10). It was outside the scope of my stated task to discuss verses that were not listed in Fundamental Belief #2. Does the BRI feel that combining verse 27 with verse 26 makes my assessment incorrect that the word "God" in verse 26 is a specific reference to the Father? I would not think so, because their letter seems to acknowledge that the Father was speaking to the Son in that verse.

Their questioning on this point seems to center around (1) Who created man, and (2) In whose image man was created. The Bible is clear that God the Father created man by His Son. "God… hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son…*by* whom also *he* made the worlds." Hebrews 1:1, 2. The pronoun "he" in verse 2 refers to the Father who, by His Son, made the worlds. Revelation 4:11 is addressing the Father when it says, "for *thou* hast created all things." The "God that made the worlds" (Acts 17:24) is, when we read the full context, the Father, "because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead" (verse 31). How did God create the worlds? He did it *by* His Son. As for the Son, the Bible says, "For *by* him were all things created" (Colossians 1:16). "All things were made *by* him" (John 1:3). The Bible is consistent. God the Father is the Creator. And He created all things *by* His Son. Genesis 1:27 must be understood in that light when it tells us that God created man in His *own* image. "In the beginning God created" (Genesis 1:1). And we know from the rest of the Bible that He did it *by* His Son. That is how the Father could say to His Son, "Let *us* make man."

In whose image, then, was man created? Genesis 1:26 says "*our* image" (a reference to the Father and the Son). Verse 27 says, "*his* image" (a reference to the Father, to be consistent with the inspired identification of "God" in verse 26). Is it possible that *their* image is in fact the *Father's* image? Of course it is. Jesus, "who *is* the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4), is "the express image of his person" (Hebrews 1:3). So we see that Jesus is the image of the very God who, by His Son, made man in His own image. Therefore the Father could rightly say in Genesis 1:26, "*our* image."

The discussion of Genesis 1:26 in the book is fully consistent with the plain reading of Scripture, both in its immediate context and also when compared with the rest of the Bible.

Deuteronomy 6:4. The BRI letter claims that the book dismisses the significance of this passage for biblical monotheism. How can they say that when in my comments (pp. 12, 13) as well as in the second table (page 19) I present this passage as a verse that actually *does* make the declaration that there is one God? It is therefore the most significant OT verse listed.

Matthew 28:19. The BRI letter claims that this verse clearly reveals "that the one God exists in three persons." Upon what textual evidence is that statement based? Critically missing in the verse is the key word "God." What kind of scholarship is it that reads into a verse a definition of a term that nowhere appears in the passage? The nearest occurrences of the term are four verses in the previous chapter, each of which denotes the Father. What clues do we have, then, as to where God fits into this verse? The exact language of Matthew 28:19 is used in *Evangelism*, p. 617. "We are to co-operate with the three highest powers in heaven,—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." Those same three powers are identified on the previous page as "The eternal heavenly dignitaries—God, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit" (Ev 616). By a comparison of the two references, the word "God" in the latter quotation is employed as an equivalent for "the Father," not for the entire group.

Yes, the word "God" is at times applied to Jesus, and sometimes to the Holy Spirit. But by far the majority of NT occurrences of the word, where identifiable indicators are present, are references to the Father. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." John 3:16. The word "God" may be applied to Jesus for two reasons: 1. As an acknowledgment of His divinity. He is God by nature. 2. As He explained, "I am come in my Father's name" John 5:43. All the appellations of the Father are applicable to the Son (See, for example, Isaiah 9:6). Not as a second God, but because "the name of God, given to Moses to express the idea of the eternal presence, had been claimed as His own by this Galilean Rabbi." (DA 469, 470). By virtue of His oneness with His Father, He in some way shares the Father's identity. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." John 14:9. "I and my Father are one." John 10:30. That is why "the expression 'in the name of' appears in the singular and only once in reference to the three divine persons" (BRI Letter, p. 2). As correctly stated, this directs us away from tritheism.

Isaiah 6:8. The BRI letter tries to make an issue out of my reference to "some other heavenly being": "The question that arises is: what other heavenly being could the Lord address in this way?" I think the answer is unmistakable. God was speaking to His Son. On page 13 I described it as "the same situation that we found in Genesis 1:26."

I will now address the numbered items in the letter.

1. Is it possible to disavow the Trinitarian formula without being anti-Trinitarian? I do not espouse Presbyterian theology, yet no one would call me anti-Presbyterian. Ellen White was not an anti-Trinitarian. Yet she never employed the Trinitarian equation that defines "one God" as three Persons. Each of her references to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are expressed in non-Trinitarian language. And a number of her expressions are incompatible with the Trinitarian definition of "one God." For example, who must we understand to be the "one God" in the following quotation? "Let the missionaries of the cross proclaim that there is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, who is the Jesus Christ the Son of the Infinite God. This needs to be proclaimed throughout every church in our land. Christians need to know this" (1888 886). The "one God" identified there is clearly the Father, for Jesus is His Son. This statement must honestly be classed as non-Trinitarian. But let's not derogatorily label Sister White, or those who completely agree with her, anti-Trinitarian. Let's just say that she was non-Trinitarian. And she tells us that this truth needs to be understood by Christians throughout every church in our land.

2. Do not misemploy my citation of Adventist scholars. I understand that the only view officially voted by the church is what is expressed in the Fundamental Belief statement. That's why in the "Synopsis of the Book" document that I presented to the BRI I made a clear distinction between

"Principal Matters at Issue in Our Fundamental Beliefs" and "Secondary Points of Discussion." But is the BRI here attempting to discredit our theologians' explanations that are published by the Seventh-day Adventist Church? If not, I would be negligent if I did not make reference to relevant Adventist literature.

3. If the BRI is here agreeing with me that Jesus only ever had one life, I would be delighted to hear that. If they are acknowledging that this one life is the life that the Father has "given to the Son to have" (John 5:26), then we are in agreement. And if they are affirming that when "through continual communion He received life from God" (DA 363), that life was "original, unborrowed, underived," then they are in harmony with my position and I have needlessly erected a straw man. But if they do in fact feel the need to differentiate between the life Jesus received from His Father and His own innate divine life, then the "alleged dichotomy between Christ's human life and His divine life" in their position has been correctly detected and my observation is not a straw-man argument.

   I am not saying that the doctrine of the Trinity denies that the Father was "deeply involved in the atonement." But it is only as we grasp the fact that "it was the life of God in His Son" (FW 22) that we can properly appreciate "the astonishing truth that God the Father gave Himself in His Son" (17MR 214). If the divine oneness "is not conceived by Adventists as being determined by the oneness of essence," but only "by the oneness of the historical task of redemption" (*Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, p. 150), then the Father's personal investment in the sacrifice is to that extent lessened.

4. The BRI letter asks us to defend the expression "one shared divine life" by finding it in the writings of Ellen White. Calling into question our consistency in accepting no doctrine for which we have no "Thus saith the Lord," we are challenged to provide such a reference for this expression. Unfortunately, the expression we have been asked to defend is not one that we have used. So we see no point in defending it. But who can deny the truth of what I do say on this point in my book in light of the following inspired references?

   > "God has sent his Son to communicate his own life to humanity. Christ declares, 'I live by the Father,' *my life and his being one*." HM June 1, 1897
   >
   > "There is but one Way, one Truth, and *one Life*." 2MR 124
   >
   > "God hath given to us eternal life, and *this* life is in His Son." 1 John 5:11
   >
   > "Through the beloved Son, *the Father's life* flows out to all; through the Son it returns, in praise and joyous service, a tide of love, to the great Source of all." DA 21
   >
   > "I and my Father are one." John 10:30

   The BRI cautions that this view "can easily pave the way to modalism." Ellen White flatly refutes that charge when she says, "The scriptures clearly indicate the relation between God and Christ, and they bring to view as clearly *the personality and individuality of each.*" 8T 268. "There are *three living persons* of the heavenly trio." Ev 615. Ellen White saw no conflict between oneness of life and individuality of personality. "Every child lives by the life of his father." MB 78. But that doesn't make them the same person. So Christ says of Himself, "I live by the Father." John 6:57. That doesn't make Him the person of the Father, but rather "the express image of His person." Hebrews 1:3.

Although Jesus is not an alternate manifestation of the Father in a modalistic sense, He did come as "the outshining of the Father's glory." COL 126. Deeply profound are His words to His Father, "I have manifested thy name." John 17:6. "What speech is to thought, so is Christ to the invisible Father. He is the manifestation of the Father, and is called the Word of God." TMK 38. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." John 1:18. "This work only one Being in all the universe could do." DA 22. Jesus alone could do it, because He was "the only Being who was one with God." TMK 363.

5. The BRI letter expresses concern that our view borders on "speculative reasoning." Certainly they cannot demonstrate that our affirmation of "one God, the Father" (1 Corinthians 8:6) is speculative reasoning. Yet we are being called to task for challenging the assertion that the "one God" of the Bible is three Persons, a doctrine for which scholars within and without the church freely admit that there is no clear statement in God's word (See *Not a Mystery*, pp. 37-39).

6. Here the BRI says that those who "disagree" with, "attack" [this is a pretty extreme word, implying fierce opposition or aggressive force—not our methods], or who simply "promote views that undermine" the consensus of the world church on the doctrine of God "should not occupy leadership positions." In making this statement, the BRI is making void the assurance given by Elder Neal C. Wilson to the delegates of the 1980 GC Session when this doctrine was first adopted:

> "Some academicians, theologians, and others have expressed the fear that this statement was being developed so that the church could confront them with a checklist to determine whether they should be disqualified from teaching in one of our institutions of higher education. It is very, very tragic when these kinds of rumors begin to develop." *Adventist Review*, April 23, 1980, p. 9.

But more serious than this, the BRI's expressed intolerance for conscientious dissenters demonstrates a direct disregard of the Lord's clear counsel against establishing man-made tests:

> "Very many will get up some test that is not given in the word of God. We have our test in the Bible,—the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ." GCB April 16, 1901.
>
> "The Lord does not require that any tests of human inventions shall be brought in to divert the minds of the people or create controversy in any line." 3SM 252.
>
> "Do not present theories or tests that Christ has never mentioned and that have no foundation in the Bible. We have grand, solemn truths to present. 'It is written' is the test that must be brought home to every soul." 8T 300.
>
> "Do not try to explain in regard to the personality of God. You cannot give any further explanation than the Bible has given. Human theories regarding Him are good for nothing." CW 94.
>
> "Human teaching is shut out. There is no place for tradition, for man's theories and conclusions, or for church legislation. No laws ordained by ecclesiastical authority are included in the commission. None of these are Christ's servants to teach." DA 826.
>
> "Though the Reformation gave the Scriptures to all, yet the selfsame principle which was maintained by Rome prevents multitudes in Protestant churches from searching the Bible for

themselves. They are taught to accept its teachings *as interpreted by the church*; and there are thousands who dare receive nothing, however plainly revealed in Scripture, that is contrary to their creed or the established teaching of their church." GC 596 (emphasis hers).

"But God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain 'Thus saith the Lord' in its support." GC 595.

"But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Matthew 15:9.

7. The book does not address this subject.

8. The biblical position presented in my book is clearly distinguished from both tritheism and modalism.

9. On the question of shared life, I have never claimed that our church has ever articulated those concepts as I have done in my book. They are drawn entirely from the inspired statements of Jesus, the apostles, and Sister White, as cited under point number 4 above. This is not a matter of interpretation, but a simple accepting of the inspired explanation.

   The BRI letter makes the point that previous statements of belief did not attempt to define "one God." The 1980 statement, on the other hand, does. And it does so using a formula that was not present in any previous formal statement made by the church. If the 1872 *Declaration of Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by the Seventh-day Adventists* did not attempt to define "one God," it certainly explained Him in a way that is incompatible with our current Fundamental Belief #2. The "one God" as described in the 1872 statement is "a personal, spiritual being." But the "one God" of Fundamental Belief #2 is neither a person nor a being. If He is, then the *28 Fundamental Beliefs* present *four* Gods: the "one God" of FB#2, "God the eternal Father" (FB#3), "God the eternal Son" (FB#4), and "God the eternal Spirit" (FB#5). The only way to bring the number back to three is to deny the personality of the one God of FB#2. So even if our pioneers were merely "addressing the individual qualities of the three persons of the Godhead," and not providing a definition, the qualities of the Person they designated as the "one God" clearly identify Him as the Father, rather than as the god described in our current Fundamental Belief #2.

   The church came close to defining the one God, if not actually doing it, in its *Summary of Doctrinal Beliefs* "prepared especially for the instruction of candidates for baptism," published in the *Seventh-Day Adventist Church Manual* up until the year 2010. There we read, "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." (*Church Manual*, 17th Edition, Revised 2005, p. 219.) That same statement, with its clear identification of the true and living God as being the Father, is printed on the inside of my own pre-1980 baptismal certificate.

   The point the BRI is trying to make against us here is that our claim (to be in agreement with the earlier statements of belief) is somehow invalided by a false assumption that those earlier

statements represented an attempt to define the one God. But regardless of what those early statements were or were not attempting to do, we are in complete agreement with what they actually say.

10. As pointed out in my book, God has clearly identified the cause of doctrinal dissension:

> "In the professedly Christian world many turn away from the plain teachings of the Bible and build up a creed from human speculation…. If the professed followers of Christ would accept God's standard, it would bring them into unity; but so long as human wisdom is exalted above His Holy Word, there will be divisions and dissension." PP 124.
>
> "Differences of belief thrive when explanations are urged that are not found in the inspired writings. But if we will hold to what God, through His prophets, has clearly stated, we will find agreement." *Not a Mystery*, p. 69.

My appeal to the church is that we *stop insisting that our members and church leaders affirm a doctrinal formulation that God Himself has never required*. When we accept the truth in the simplicity that God's Word presents it, we will then have the ability to be of one mind.

Ken LeBrun
September 18, 2022

Item	BRI Charges	Ken's Answer
Gen. 1:26	The book fails to take verse 27 into consideration.	This chapter was discussing the verses listed in FB#2. But even the addition of verse 27 does not change the fact that the word "God" in the passage denotes the Father.
Deut. 6:4	The book dismisses the significance of this verse.	To the contrary, the book gives recognition to this verse as a true expression of biblical monotheism.
Isa. 6:8	The book proposes that God was here speaking to "some other heavenly being."	That "other heavenly being" was His Son, just as we saw in Genesis 1:26.
Matt. 28:19	The book denies that this verse reveals that the one God is three persons.	If the verse means that, why doesn't it say it?
#1	The book is antitrinitarian.	This label is intentionally derogatory. Would you call Ellen White an anti-Trinitarian, since her writings do not support the assumptions in FB#2? My book fully agrees with everything she wrote.
#2	The book characterizes the church's position by the statements of its scholars.	How is it wrong to assume that when the Seventh-day Adventist Church publishes something, it agrees with what it publishes? To fail to make reference to Adventist literature would be negligent on my part.
#3	The book falsely characterizes the Adventist position as distinguishing between Christ's human life and His divine life, and of obscuring, with its theory of multiple divine lives, the full extent of the Father's own sacrifice.	If the BRI is actually agreeing with the inspired documentation in support of one divine life, then I apologize for giving credence to any denominationally published statements to the contrary.
#4	The concept of one divine life, upheld by the book, is not stated in the Bible or writings of Ellen White, and it can pave the way to modalism.	The book supplies a number of references from the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy plainly stating that the Father's life is in the Son, that their life is one, and yet they are distinct persons.
#5	The book borders on speculative reasoning.	How is an insistence on accepting the truth just as Inspiration describes it, more speculative than the doctrine of the Trinity, which scholars describe as "theological reasoning" and "an artificial construct"?

Item	BRI Charges	Ken's Answer
#6	The book disagrees with the consensus of the world church. Therefore the author should not occupy a leadership position.	In creating a doctrinal test that is not required in the Word of God, the church is in violation of God's clear prohibition of the practice.
#7	Freedom of belief must exist in the state, but not in the church.	The book does not address this subject.
#8	Being out of harmony with FB#2, the book may not avoid the extremes of tritheism or modalism.	The simple reading of the Bible that I promote is clearly distinguished from both tritheism and modalism in my book.
#9	The claim to be in harmony with the pre-1980 Adventist view is incorrect because previous statements of belief did not attempt to define "one God."	Regardless of what those previous statements were or were not attempting to do, I fully agree with what they actually say.
#10	You are preventing the church from being of one mind.	Ellen White makes it clear that disunity is not caused by calling people back to the Bible's explanations. Rather, controversy is the result of turning away from the plain teachings of the Bible and enforcing tests of human inventions.

Val's Response to the BRI Letter

September 19, 2022

Dear Elder _____,

Thank you for asking me to respond to the BRI's letter that they sent to you.

The BRI wrote:

> Those who join the church do so because they believe its message; otherwise, they should leave.

I still believe in the doctrine of God that our church taught when I joined this church back in the early 70s. When I joined the church, it taught, on the topic of God, fundamentally what it had been teaching since its inception. Inside my baptismal certificate there was a summary of the doctorial beliefs that I affirmed:

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

In 1980, when the church changed what I had been taught, I did not change. I have chosen to maintain my commitment to my baptismal vows because, unlike the current wording, these statements of belief are clearly supported by the associated Bible verses. Should I now leave the

church because I don't see any biblical support for the Trinity doctrine that was introduced after my baptism? Must I believe in the exact wording of Fundamental Belief #2 to continue to be a member in good standing?

Dr. Jon Paulien, a Seventh-day Adventist scholar, wrote the following on his blog:

> Ideally, the fundamental beliefs are not a "creed," they are descriptive rather than prescriptive. "Here is what Seventh-day Adventists generally believe. We invite you to consider these and decide whether you'd like to join us." That is a description of how most SDAs look at things. But these days more and more people seem to be treating the Fundamentals as prescriptive, telling us exactly what we **must** believe. And threatening consequences should we differ in as much as a word.
>
> Such a perspective on the fundamental beliefs goes directly contrary to the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, who would say things like, "We have no creed but the Bible," and "The Bible is our only rule of faith and practice," and "let us not think that all our expositions of Scripture are without error." How could an Adventist ever change and grow in the understanding of Scripture unless someone, somewhere, questions something in one of the Fundamentals? To reduce the Bible to a set of propositions that cannot be reconsidered seems the height of apostasy to me.
>
> An early Adventist pioneer, John Loughborough, agreed. In a General Conference session he opined as follows: "The first step of apostasy is to get up a creed, telling us what we shall believe. The second is to make that creed a test of fellowship. The third is to try members by that creed. The fourth to denounce as heretics those who do not believe that creed. And, fifth, to commence persecution against such."
>
> In the spirit of Loughborough, the 28 Fundamentals of the Seventh-day Adventist Church begin with a Preamble as follows: "Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church's understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference Session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word."[37]

The BRI wrote:

> Since FB no. 2 represents the consensus of the world church on the doctrine of God, those who disagree should not occupy leadership positions while attacking our beliefs or promoting views that undermine it. And depending on the situation, they may even forfeit their rights to membership in the church.

Throughout this two-year process, leadership repeatedly asked me to explain my views. This I have been willing to do. I would not describe my response to leadership as "attacking our beliefs." As Dr. Paulien stated, "How could an Adventist ever change and grow in the understanding of Scripture unless someone, somewhere, questions something in one of the Fundamentals?" What is disappointing is the response to this sincere questioning—threatening consequences for differing in as much as a word. This feels like FB#2 has taken on creedal status. To assign consequences for any dissent on this Fundamental Belief is to descend down Loughborough's steps of apostasy.

37. Jon Paulien's Blog, tinyurl.com/3dukyr8p.

Inspiration is clear about whom it is that should not occupy leadership positions.

> I am instructed to say that those who would tear down the foundation **that God has laid** are not to be accepted as the teachers and leaders of His people. We are to hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.[38]

Our modern scholars thought to make improvements to the foundation that God laid down at the beginning of this movement. A growing number of members around the world reject these "improvements" to the doctrine of God and are committed to staying on the old paths.

If FB#2 constituted a creedal statement, then the BRI is right, I should not occupy a leadership position and might even need to be disfellowshipped. Thankfully, our church has no creed other than the Bible. No church member is required to affirm the scholar's assumptions regarding the doctrine of God even if those assumptions have been voted on by the world church (GC 595). When I asked you in a text on the 14th of July if you agreed that the Bible alone is to be our test of orthodoxy, you responded with a yes.

The BRI wrote:

> If in the statement: "let us make man in our image," God is speaking to His Son, as the author recognizes, then the clause "God created man in His *own* image" must include both the Father and the Son.

In the English language, a plural pronoun refers to a plurality of persons while a singular pronoun refers to a single person. The Bible says that man is created in the image of both the Father and the Son. That is what the word "our" indicates. In the clause, "God created man in His *own* image," the singular pronoun "His" indicates that a singular Person is being referenced. That Person is God. And yes, man was made in His image.

> **God** is a spirit; yet **He is a personal being**, for man was made in **His image**. As a personal being, God has revealed **Himself** in **His** Son.[39]

But man was also made in the image of the Son as the word "our" indicates.

> After the earth was created, and the beasts upon it, **the Father and Son** carried out **their** purpose, which was designed before the fall of Satan, to make man in **their own image**.[40]
>
> We take not the fallacies of man but the Word of God that man was created after **the image of God and Christ**….[41]

Nothing in Genesis 1:26, 27 plainly tells us that one God is a trinity of beings. Nowhere in Ellen White's writings does she use these verses to teach the idea of a triune God. On the contrary, these verses clearly reveal a personal God who created man through His Son in Their own image.

> **Through Jesus Christ a personal God created man** and endowed him with intelligence and power.[42]

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38. Ellen G. White, Lt242-1903.18.
39. Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 131, paragraph 5.
40. Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, January 9, 1879, Art. B, par. 13.
41. Ellen G. White, Ms236-1902.4.
42. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 264, par. 1.

The BRI wrote:

> Subsequently, the Bible reveals more clearly that the one God exists in three persons, as in Matt. 28:19 (another significant passage for the present matter that the book cavalierly dismisses).

In my last letter to the BRI, I dealt with Matthew 28:19. I showed what that one name is—The Lord our Righteousness—and that this "three-fold name" (FLB 145) is just that: it is a name. It is not a three-fold person. It does not indicate that there is a Trinitarian being named God.

Note: The word cavalierly is defined as *1. In a proud and domineering manner. 2. haughty, disdainful, or supercilious. 3. Showing arrogant or offhand disregard; dismissive.* Anyone who knows Pastor Ken LeBrun knows that his character reveals the very opposite of these negative characteristics. And, by the way, Pastor Ken LeBrun and I have never discussed this topic together. The reason why we sound alike is because we both use the same source materials—the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy.

The BRI wrote:

> The views expressed by our brothers totter on a fine line between biblical orthodoxy and speculative reasoning. We are concerned that the views expressed in the book and in our meetings may be only the tip of an iceberg and indicative of a deeper problem based on our interactions with them and examination of the book.

The BRI had an hour and a half with each one of us. It was a five-on-one for each meeting. What do we believe that is out of harmony with the Bible or the Spirit of Prophecy? Yes, we are out of harmony with the scholar's assumption that *one God* is a divine Trinitarian being composed of three Persons. Speculative reasoning? We demand of ourselves a plain "Thus saith the Lord" for every position we hold. This is the standard that GC 595 requires us to hold. Is our view of God (the official pre-1980 view) really just the tip of a deeper problem? The BRI had three hours to ferret out this iceberg in our Zoom meetings. They sent two scholars from the Seminary to spend an afternoon with me. And what was their discovery? There may be an iceberg here. Just what is this iceberg? What is this deeper problem? The BRI, through innuendo, is telling you, our conference president, that we represent a threat to the church. We represent a dangerous iceberg that our church might strike and be damaged. Shouldn't they get to the bottom of this iceberg by continued dialogue? But it doesn't seem like they want to do this. They ended their letter with this statement: "Unfortunately, based on previous interactions and in our dialogue and study of the content of the book, it is clear that further discussions would not serve any useful purpose." We are certainly open to further dialogue and if you could encourage that, please do so.

The BRI wrote:

> They argued that we should use only expressions from inspired writings. This being the case, where does the Bible or the writings of Ellen G. White use the expression "one shared divine life"? This expression (which is opposed to the Trinity, *Not a Mystery*, 42), along with the criticism of the Trinity, as shown above, can easily pave the way to modalism (or another Christological heresy such as Arianism). If the expression "one God" only refers to the Father, passages that refer to Jesus as God might indicate that Christ is one manifestation of the Father.

It is perfectly acceptable to restate, in our own words, ideas and concepts that are plainly declared in the inspired writings. The BRI takes issue with the phrase, "one shared divine life" because that exact phrase was not written by an inspired writer. Incidentally, this phrase is not found in the book,

Not a Mystery. However, the concept expressed by this phrase, is plainly revealed in the following statements:

> **God** has sent his Son to communicate **his own life** to humanity. Christ declares, "I live by the Father," **my life and his being one**.[43]
>
> Christ came to communicate **the life of God** to humanity. He declared, "I live by the Father," **my life and his being one**.[44]
>
> There is but one Way, one Truth, and **one Life**.[45]
>
> 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**.[46]
>
> Christ came to the world to reveal the character of the Father, and to redeem the fallen race. The world's Redeemer was equal with God. His authority was as the authority of God. He declared that he had **no existence separate from the Father**. The authority by which he spoke, and wrought miracles, was expressly his own, yet he assures us that he and the Father are one.[47]

The BRI wrote:

> In a telling statement, the author asserts: "What we never find Paul teaching is the doctrine of the Trinity" (*Not a Mystery*, 25). Also, elsewhere in the book, the phrases: "Trinitarian argument" and, later, "the doctrine of the Trinity," and "Trinitarian view" in their respective contexts tend to be used in a negative way, which appears to contradict their affirmations that they are not antitrinitarians.

I cannot affirm the assumptions of the Trinitarians or the assumptions of the anti-Trinitarians, so I do not identify myself with either group.

The BRI wrote:

> The alleged dichotomy between Christ's human life and His divine life ascribed to the SDA view seems a straw-man argument. It is precisely **the doctrine of the Trinity—that is**, **One God in three persons**—that makes God the Father deeply involved in the atonement along with the Son.

Though it is commonly used to teach the Trinity doctrine, there is a sense in which the phrase, "God in three Persons" can be used to present biblical truth. The word God is both a title that is often used as a proper name and a term that refers to the infinite, divine nature and attributes of deity. This is somewhat like the word Adam which is both a proper name of an individual and a word that refers to the finite, human nature of mankind.

Genesis 5:2 "Male and female created he them; and blessed them, **and called their name Adam**, in the day when they were created." Eve was Adam in finite nature but not in personality. Her husband alone was Adam in personality. Jesus was God in infinity but not in personality. God the Father

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43. Ellen G. White, Ms25-1897.14.
44. Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, July 15, 1897, par. 2.
45. Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 2, p. 124.
46. Ellen G. White, Ms36-1890.13.
47. Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, January 7, 1890, par. 1.

alone is God in personality: "The Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of the Father, **is truly God in infinity**, **but not in personality**."[48]

The finite, human Adamic nature was in Adam, and in Eve, and in Cain. And this finite, human nature is termed *Adam*. So we could say, "Adam in three persons."

The infinite, divine nature is in the Father and in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit. And this infinite, divine nature is termed God. So we could say, "God in three Persons."

However, when the word "one" is placed before the word God, the resulting phrase—one God—refers to a singular personality. "But to us there is but **one God**, the Father…" 1 Cor. 8:6. "…**one God is our Father**, and we can come to Him, and ask for the things that we need."[49] The biblical definition of the phrase *One God* is always only one Person and that one Person is always the Father. So, it is **not** biblically correct to say, "**One God** in three Persons."

Fundamental Belief #2 does not say, "One God **in** three Persons" as the BRI stated it above. FB#2 says, "There **is** one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three coeternal Persons." In other words, it is saying (by the use of a colon) that One God **is** three Persons. This is the doctrine of the Trinity. This is what the 2021 BRI poster states: GOD **IS** THREE. **HE** IS THE TRIUNE GOD, A TRINITY OF FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT.[50] Personal pronouns *He* and *His* are used in FB#2 to refer to this one God thus indicating that this *one God* is a personality. But the Bible clearly teaches us that the *one God* is one Person, not three Persons. So, when the word *God* is defined as infinite, divine nature, I can accept the phrase, "God in three Persons." However, I cannot accept the phrase, "*One God* in three Persons" or the phrase "God **is** three Persons."

The BRI wrote:

> The basic issue is whether these men can affirm, as FB no. 2 attempts to do, "one God" in three Persons without falling into the problem of tritheism on the one hand or modalism on the other. We are not convinced that their position avoids these extremes. Clearly, it is not in harmony with FB no. 2.

Our position is identical in every detail to Ellen White's position on the doctrine of God.

> "You desire to hear what Sister White believes," I said. "She believes that Jesus Christ is a personal Saviour, just as she has ever believed.… Our heavenly Father is the God of the universe, and Christ is the divine Son, the One equal with the Father. And now here are the books I have written, in which is contained the light given me."[51]

Throughout her lifetime the writings of Ellen White presented a consistent testimony regarding the doctrine of God.

> But I have ever had the same testimony to bear which I now bear regarding the personality of God.[52]

48. Ellen G. White, *The Upward Look*, p. 367, par. 4.
49. Ellen G. White, Ms49-1894.
50. "Core Tenets of the Trinity," tinyurl.com/yc57shx8.
51. Ellen G. White, Ms49-1906.26.
52. Ellen G. White, Lt253-1903.9.

> Again and again during my experience in the Lord's work, I have been called upon to meet these erroneous sentiments. In every case, clear, powerful light has been given that God is the eternal, self-existent One. From my girlhood I have been given plain instruction that God is a person, and that Christ is "the express image of His person."[53]

Ellen White wrote nothing that can be clearly shown to be in harmony with the assumption that one God is three Persons as FB#2 teaches. Therefore, we too would not be in harmony with this assumption. To bring us over to the position taught in FB#2, all the BRI would have to do is produce one clear statement from the Spirit of Prophecy that plainly teaches that the one God is three Persons.

In 1871, James White, who was well acquainted with his wife's writings, posted an article in the *Review and Herald*. Notice what it said:

> We invite all to compare the testimonies of the Holy Spirit through Mrs. W., with the word of God. And in this we do not invite you to compare them with your creed. That is quite another thing. The trinitarian may compare them with his creed, and because they do not agree with it, condemn them. The observer of Sunday, or the man who holds eternal torment an important truth, and the minister that sprinkles infants, may each condemn the testimonies of Mrs. W. because they do not agree with their peculiar views.[54]

The writings of Ellen White do not agree with the trinitarian view. She did not fall into the error of tritheism or modalism, and thus; neither do we. God gave this church a distinctive message on the doctrine of God that did not contain the errors espoused by the fallen daughters of Babylon from which they were called out. Point by point was sought out by prayerful study and testified to by the miracle-working power of the Lord. Concerning these foundational truths, Ellen White warns:

> 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. They are seeking to bring in uncertainties and to set the people of God adrift, without an anchor.[55]

Because there is not a shade of difference between what I believe on the doctrine of God and what God, through His prophet, Ellen White, established as truth, when the BRI criticizes my understanding on the personality of God, they are not just criticizing me.

As you have said, many eyes are watching what is taking place here in our local church. May the Lord give you and your leadership team wisdom in guiding our conference.

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53. Ellen G. White, Ms137-1903.3.
54. James Whiter, *Review and Herald* for 1871, Vol. 37, No. 26, June 13, 1871.
55. Ellen G. White, Ms62-1905.14.