



BUGEMA

UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES

COURSE MODULE: A self-instructional undergraduate course module

RELT 3109 SDA DOCTRINES

Course Writer: Biddawo Edward, MA

Course Editor: Dr Mwita

COURSE INFORMATION

Course Code:	RELT 3109:
Course Title:	SDA DOCTRINES
Credit Unit:	3 (45 Hrs)
Semester:	One
Course Duration:	8 weeks (One hour each day for five days, 2 hours for presentation of portfolio, and 3 hours for final examination = 45 Hrs)
Start:	September 1

Opening Devotional — 2 Timothy 3:16

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

As we begin this course on Seventh-day Adventist Doctrines, I pray that the same Spirit who breathed life into the Scriptures breathes the same life in our class and enables us to comprehend. In humility, let us be reproofed, corrected, and instructed in all truth. Let's pray (the student prays for himself).

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the class RELT 3109 SDA Doctrines. This course has been developed as a self-instructional module for learners preparing to serve in teaching ministry. It follows the academic-module pattern of the School of Theology and Religious Studies into a coherent undergraduate course. The primary focus of SDA Doctrines is to provide the current, in-depth understanding of major biblical topics as treated by those who exercise the teaching ministry in the church. This module presents this course not merely as a list of beliefs to memorize; it is a course that shapes how we think, live, and relate to God. Outcomes should shape teaching ministry. The SDA Church's doctrines is rooted in Scripture, and our interpretation of biblical passages is guided by Scripture itself, rather than by tradition, philosophy, or extra-biblical sources.¹ Scripture is the source and standard of all true doctrine, from where truth finds its authority.

COURSE DESCRIPTION, RATIONALE AND COMPETENCIES

Course Description

This course provides a detailed and critical examination of the fundamental beliefs and theology of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as expressed in its doctrines. It is a detailed explanation of the basic doctrines of the SDA church. The studies of this course will provide a current, in-depth understanding of major biblical topics as treated by those who exercise the teaching ministry in the church.

Course Rationale

As frontline participants in the church's life, teaching ministry and mission, Pastors and Leaders need an understanding of theological diversity. This course equips learners with Adventist theological interpretation and understanding of major biblical doctrines for integration into pastoral ministry.

¹ Denis Kaiser, PhD, is associate professor of church history at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan (USA).

Course Competencies

1. Biblical and theological interpretation of SDA doctrines.
2. Skills in integration of theology and doctrine into ministry.
3. Analysis of identifiable doctrinal and theological issues
4. Knowledge of Theological development of SDA doctrines

Course Objectives:

This course is designed to provide the student with

1. A detailed explanation of the basic doctrines of the SDA church.
2. An examination of debatable theological issues in the theology of the SDA Church
3. Skills to interpret biblical theology within the context of the SDA Church.
4. Foundation for further theological studies

Expected Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Examine, articulate, and explain theological issues in the theology of the SDA Church
2. Demonstrate ability to know the Adventist stand on debatable theological issues
3. Ability to apply theology in the practical Christian experience
4. Skillfully integrate theology and doctrine in pastoral ministry

Learning Process

To complete this course, engage diligently with the study units, reference materials. Each unit contains deliverables designed to test your understanding. Each deliverable assignment from each unit must be compiled into a portfolio file for formative assessment. The final examination will be done face-to-face on the main Campus. This 8-week course demands dedication and active involvement to harness the knowledge and skills presented fully.

Learning Schedule

The Learning schedule provided outlines for the completion of assignments and theological research paper. Adhering to this schedule is crucial to ensure that you participate in the learning, do the assignments, and complete the research assignment. Proactive planning and consistent effort will prevent any lag in your progress.

Assessment

The assessment comprises assignments, practical evaluation, and final examination. The assessments require a student to apply the knowledge and skills acquired throughout the course. Your engagement and submissions must align with deadlines stated in the Presentation Schedule. The practical assignment plays a pivotal role in your final assessment, emphasizing the importance of your contribution to the church's theological and doctrinal studies.

Deliverables, Assignments and Final Examination

There are Deliverables Assignments (DA) and one research report in this course. You will submit all the assignments. You are encouraged to work on all the questions thoroughly. The DAs constitute 30% of the final score, and one research report constitutes 20% of the final score of the course. You will be able to complete your assignments from the information and materials contained in your set books, reading and study units. However, you should demonstrate that you have read and researched more widely than the required minimum.

You should use other references to have a broad viewpoint of the subject and also to give you a deeper understanding of the subject. When you have completed each assignment, write a cover page showing the unit addressed and the date completed, then file it in the portfolio. If, for any reason, you cannot complete your work on time, write a note explaining why it was not done on time and how you will compensate for the time. The portfolio will be presented face-to-face at the main Campus (Bugema University) one week before the final examination. Examination will be granted only after presentation of the portfolio is successfully presented.

Assessment Plan

Assessment is designed to test knowledge, practical skills, and reflective integration. All assignments completed during the semester are compiled in a continuous assessment portfolio worth 50% of the course grade. The end-of-semester examination or capstone assignment is worth the remaining 50%.

Component	Description	Weight
Continuous Assessment Portfolio	Module deliverables, including module-end assessment and study questions, completed throughout the semester	50%
End-of-Semester Examination	Integrated application of the biblical, theological, and doctrinal knowledge acquired across the semester	50%
Total		100%

University Grading System

Score Range	Letter Grade	Performance Description	Quality Points
80-100%	A	Excellent	5.00
75% – 79.99%	B+	Very Good	4.50
70% – 74.99%	B	Good	4.00

65% – 69.99%	C+	Above Average	3.50
60% - 64.99%	C		3.00
55% – 59.99%	D+	Average	2.50
50% - 54.99%	D	Below Average	2.00
0% - 49.99%	F	Failure	1.00

How to Use the Module

The following is a practical strategy for working through the course. If you run into any trouble, consult your lecturer. Remember that your lecturer's job is to help you understand the procedures and content. If you need help, don't hesitate to call and ask your lecturer.

In self-distance learning, the study units replace the university lecturer. This is one of the great advantages of distance learning; you can read and work through specially designed study materials at your own pace and at a time and place that suits you best. Think of it as reading the lecture instead of listening to a lecturer. In the same way that a lecturer might set you some reading to do, the study units tell you when to read your books or other material, and when to embark on assignments. Just as a lecturer might give you an in-class exercise, your study units provide exercises for you to do at appropriate points. Each of the study units follows a common format.

The first item is an introduction or overview to the subject matter of the unit and how a particular unit is integrated with the other units and the course as a whole. Next is a set of learning objectives. These objectives let you know what you should be able to do by the time you have completed the unit. You should use these objectives to guide your study. When you have finished the unit, you must go back and check whether you have achieved the objectives. If you make a habit of doing this, you will significantly improve your chances of passing the course and getting the best grade. The main body or content of the unit guides you through the required reading from other sources. This will usually be either from your set books or from a reading section.

Biblical integration, and a learning activity, help you move from information to practice. At the end of each module, integrated deliverables and assessment or study questions cover the content of all units in that module. Module assessment criteria provide feedback, while the weighted portfolio and end-of-semester rubrics appear in the appendices. A Turabian/Chicago-style bibliography is provided at the end of each module.

1. Read the unit overview, objectives, and learning outcomes before studying the main content.
2. Keep a learning journal. Record questions, observations, biblical insights, and applications.
3. Complete guided activities as you encounter them. Do not postpone all work to the end.
4. At the end of each module, answer the integrated assessment or study questions before consulting the module answer and feedback guide.
6. Consult your lecturer, whenever a task exceeds your competence.
7. Retain the module deliverables, guided activities selected by the lecturer, and reflective work in one continuous assessment portfolio. The portfolio contributes 50% of the course grade.

Read this Course Guide Thoroughly

1. Organize a study schedule. Refer to the 'Course overview' for more details. Note the time you are expected to spend on each unit and how the assignments relate to the units. Important information, e.g., details of your lecturer and the date of the first day of the semester. You need to gather together all this information in one place, such as your diary or a wall calendar. Whatever method you choose to use, you should decide on and write in your own dates for the working breach unit.
2. Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything you can to stick to it. The major reason that students fail is that they get behind with their coursework. If you get into difficulties with your schedule, please let your lecturer know before it is too late for help.
3. Turn to Unit 1 and read the introduction and the objectives for the unit.
4. Assemble the study materials. Information about what you need for a unit is given in the 'Overview' at the beginning of each unit. You will also need both the study unit you are working on and one of your set books on your desk at the same time.
5. Work through the unit. The content of the unit itself has been arranged to provide a sequence for you to follow. As you work through the unit, you will be instructed to read sections from your set books or other articles. Use the unit to guide your reading.
6. Work before the relevant due date (about 4 weeks before the due dates), and get the Assignment File for the next required assignment. Keep in mind that you will learn a lot by doing the assignments carefully. They have been designed to help you meet the objectives of the course and, therefore, will help you pass the exam. Submit all assignments no later than the due date.
7. Review the objectives for each study unit to confirm that you have achieved them. If you feel unsure about any of the objectives, review the study material or consult your lecturer.
8. When you are confident that you have achieved a unit's objectives, you can then start on the next unit. Proceed unit by unit through the course and try to pace your study so that you keep yourself on schedule.
9. After completing the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Check that you have achieved the unit objectives (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the course objectives (listed in this Course Guide), and arrange your portfolio beginning with the DA of the first unit to the last.

COURSE ORGANIZATION

This course is organized in three modules of six units and one research paper. The modules should be studied carefully and diligently to acquire a complete understanding of the course.

STUDY UNITS

MODULE ONE: SDA DOCTRINES

UNIT 1 INTRODUCTION

UNIT 2 BRIEF HISTORY OF SDA DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT

MODULE TWO: REVELATION AND INSPIRATION

UNIT 3 REVELATION

UNIT 4 INSPIRATION

MODULE THREE: DOCTRINE OF GOD

UNIT 5 THE REALITY OF GOD

UNIT 6 THE TRINITY

References

- Burt, Merlin D. *Development of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*. Center for Adventist Research, Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 2019.
- Dederen, Raoul, ed. *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000.
- Dederen, Raoul. *Reflections on the Doctrine of the Trinity*. Reprinted from: Andrews University Seminary Studies. Volume 8, 1970, No. 1. Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan 49104, U.S.A.
- Denis Kaiser. "Seventh-day Adventist doctrinal statements about God." In *Revisiting the Trinity: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Reflections*, ed. Alberto R. Timm, 215-249. Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2025.
- Gerhard, Pfandl. *The Doctrine of the Trinity Among Adventists*. Biblical Research Institute Silver Spring, MD June 1999.
- Michael w. Campbell, ed. et al. *The Oxford Handbook of Seventh-day Adventism*, Madison Avenue, NY: Oxford University Press, 2024.
- Ministerial Association, General Conference of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. *Seventh-Day Adventist Church Believe: A Biblical Exposition of the Fundamental Doctrines*. Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2005

MODULE 1: SDA DOCTRINES

UNIT 1: INTRODUCTION (3 hrs)

- 1.1 Unit Overview
 - 1.1.1 Introduction
 - 1.1.2 Unit objectives
 - 1.1.3 Learning Outcomes
- 1.2 Definition of key terms
 - 1.2.1 What is theology?
 - 1.2.2 What is doctrine?
 - 1.2.3 What is a creed?
 - 1.2.4 SDA fundamental beliefs
- 1.3 Theological doctrinal integration into ministry
 - 1.3.1 Preaching and teaching
 - 1.3.2 Pastoral Care and Counselling
 - 1.3.3 Leadership and Community engagement
- 1.4 Unit summary
- 1.5 Learning Activities
- 1.6 Deliverable Assignment
- 1.7 Reference

1.1 Unit Overview

1.1.1 Introduction

Welcome to the first unit of Module One of this course. This unit is an introduction to the course RELT 3109 SDA Doctrines. The unit explains the course vocabulary and key theological and doctrinal terms, as applied in the SDA theological studies.

In this unit, we'll dive into the meaning of doctrines and other related concepts, such as creed, theology, fundamental beliefs, etc. It will explain what each of these terms means. This unit builds a foundation for other complex units that follow. It intends to provide a relevant definition of doctrines that resonates with the course, providing a solid foundation to understand theological doctrinal issues.

1.1.2 Unit Objectives

- 1 To provide a general overview of the module
- 2 To define the key terms
- 3 To differentiate between creed and doctrine

- 4 To explore the significance of the integration of theological doctrine into ministry

4.1.1 Learning Outcomes (LOs)

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- 1 Define the general concept of theology and doctrine.
- 2 Distinguish between doctrine and creed
- 3 Distinguish between doctrine and fundamental beliefs
- 4 Skillfully integrate theology and doctrine into pastoral ministry

4.1 Definition of key terms

SDA scholars employ specific theological terms somewhat differently than academics from other religious backgrounds. To communicate effectively, Adventist scholars should be aware of these differences when engaging with both non-Adventist academics and members of their own faith tradition. A preliminary discussion and clarification of terminology is crucial to avoid misunderstandings. Adventists often have their own interpretations of these terms. Therefore, it is necessary to examine how these terms are defined and used within both academic and Adventist contexts.

4.1.1 What is theology?

The term “theology” is perceived differently among Adventists. Some, often more conservative Adventists and ordinary church members, may associate it with academic theology, which they see as disconnected from the life, faith, and experience of everyday believers. Others do not have any particular negative feelings toward the term, viewing it as an umbrella term similar to the academic use of “doctrine” described above. Consequently, “theology” may be the most suitable term for an Adventist audience if it is understood in this broader sense. It is important to note that until the 1960s, Adventists had relatively few academically trained theologians and scholars. Most pastors, teachers, editors, administrators, and other church employees—whose writings appeared in denominational periodicals, pamphlets, and books—were largely self-taught. Thus, there was not a wide educational or intellectual gap between them and regular church members. In this context, the term “theology” carried fewer academic connotations, at least during the first century of the church’s existence.²

There are four disciplines of academic theology.

1. **Historical theology** traces the historical development of the various disciplines of academic theology.
2. **Biblical theology** that traces the development of theological themes, concepts, and teachings from Genesis to Revelation.

² Book: 2024 *The History of Adventist Doctrine_ Development, Diversity, Homogeneity*. Pages. 8-9 text pages; pages 4-5 pdf window.

3. **Systematic theology** aims to articulate coherent and consistent doctrine based on the entirety of Scripture, organizing theological topics thematically and integrating them with all areas of life, the broader Adventist/Christian tradition, and philosophical reflection.
4. **Practical theology** addresses how theology is lived out and applied in the lives of believers, including aspects such as preaching, pastoral care, worship, music, spiritual growth, and social justice.³

Whereas the four disciplines have Scripture as their primary source text, foundation and basis for their interpretations and formulations, Historical theology relies on the writings of adherents of the Adventist faith tradition. For this reason, it cannot serve as an authority or norm in matters of doctrine or biblical interpretation.⁴

4.1.2 What is doctrine?

Seventh-day Adventists generally understand and use the term “doctrine” in reference to the official beliefs of the church as formally stated in the Fundamental Beliefs. Therefore, within Adventist circles, “doctrine” has a much narrower meaning than it does in the academic discipline of historical theology. While this term may be helpful when discussing the Fundamental Beliefs with an Adventist audience, it is less useful when addressing the broader spectrum of Adventist thought, including denominational guidelines, the writings of theologians, scholars, pastors, administrators, and ordinary church members.⁵ Doctrine is a product of biblical interpretation.

4.1.3 What is a creed?

Due to their Restorationist roots, Seventh-day Adventists generally hold an aversion to unchangeable creeds. Creeds, which are official codifications of church doctrines, often serve as the definitive formulations of biblical doctrine and are used to distinguish adherents of a particular faith from others. For this reason, the term “dogma” is not well-received among Adventists. In the classic Protestant tradition, Adventists typically resist anything that might prevent believers from studying Scripture for themselves, discovering new biblical truths, and refining their understanding of these truths. As a result, the term “history of dogma” is unlikely to resonate positively with an Adventist audience. Although the Seventh-day Adventist Church has officially affirmed a specific set of doctrines—the 28 Fundamental Beliefs—for much of Adventist history, this affirmation was more descriptive than prescriptive. In fact, the Fundamental Beliefs were, for a long time, simply drafted by the editor of the church’s flagship periodical, the *Review and Herald*.² Although the more recent formulations of the Fundamental Beliefs, established in 1980 and revised in 2005, have a more official status due to being formally voted on by delegates at General Conference sessions, they still include a preamble that encourages humility and openness to continued growth

³ Book: 2024_The History of Adventist Doctrine_Development, Diversity, Homogeneity. Pages. 16-17 text pages; pages 12-13 pdf window.

⁴ Book: 2024_The History of Adventist Doctrine_Development, Diversity, Homogeneity. Pages. 16-17 text pages; pages 12-13 pdf window.

⁵ Book: 2024_The History of Adventist Doctrine_Development, Diversity, Homogeneity. Pages. 9 text pages; pages 5 pdf window.

in biblical understanding.³ This preamble reflects the Adventist opposition to unchangeable human formulations of doctrine (dogma).⁶

4.1.4 SDA Fundamental beliefs

The SDA Church affirms a specific set of doctrines—the 28 Fundamental Beliefs—which have a more official status due to being formally voted on by delegates at General Conference sessions; however, they encourage openness to continued growth in biblical understanding.

The Fundamental Principles/Beliefs were historically more descriptive than prescriptive. However, Adventist beliefs encompass more than just the Fundamental Principles/Beliefs. They include a range of doctrines (typically those clearly taught in Scripture), teachings (applications of biblical principles), majority and minority views (without unanimous agreement on certain subjects), as well as personal convictions, interpretations, and “hobby horses.” These beliefs have evolved and may be emphasized differently across regions. Research may focus on specific levels of Adventist belief—whether among ordinary church members, church employees, or in official statements of belief—but a comprehensive history of Adventist theology should consider all these levels, as Adventists perceive the church not just as a top-down organization but as a body of believers.⁷ It is indisputable that the Fundamental Beliefs of the SDA Church should be doctrines clearly rooted in Scripture. Likewise, our interpretation of biblical passages should be guided by Scripture itself, rather than by tradition, philosophy, or extra-biblical sources.⁸

4.2 Theological doctrinal integration into ministry

Theological seminary students can integrate theology and doctrine in their pastoral ministry by connecting their classroom studies to real-world church experience. They do this through preaching and teaching Bible-based sermons instead of just good stories. They help people understand theological themes and address their doctrinal questions using Bible-based argument. Teach church members basic theology, explaining the spiritual, theological, and doctrinal significance of church ceremonies, feasts and practices. Explain the theological significance of church ceremonies and ordinances such as holy communion, baptism, child dedication, etc.

4.3 Unit Summary

- We should avoid treating theology and doctrine as mere theory; a set of mental knowledge of truths to be “delivered” to passive congregations. We should turn theological knowledge into a living experience rather than a theoretical expertise. There is a need for a practical integration of theology and doctrine in ministry. After a hospital visit, a sermon, or a counselling session, ask: What was at stake theologically? How does Scripture address this? If your theology only lives in

⁶ Book: 2024 *The History of Adventist Doctrine_ Development, Diversity, Homogeneity*. Pages. 8 text pages; pages 4 pdf window.

⁷ Book: 2024 *The History of Adventist Doctrine_ Development, Diversity, Homogeneity*. Pages. 10 text pages; pages 6 pdf window.

⁸ Book: 2024 *The History of Adventist Doctrine_ Development, Diversity, Homogeneity*. Pages. 6 text pages; pages 2 pdf window.

academic discussion, it is not relevant to the realities of ministry. Whereas pastors ought to preach theologically and biblically, every sermon should carry a moral impact and relevance in the real-life experience of the believers. The goal isn't to make ministry more academic—it's to make pastoral ministry more meaningful or relevant to people's situations.

4.4 Learning Activities

1. **Read the book:** 2024 *The History of Adventist Doctrine: Development, Diversity, Homogeneity*. The section “HISTORICAL-THEOLOGICAL TERMINOLOGY,” pages 7-10 of the text pages; pages 3-6 of the PDF window.
 - a. Differentiate between a creed and a doctrine
 - b. Explain the Adventist understanding of theology
 - c. Describe the various disciplines of academic theology
2. **Read the book:** Dederen, Raoul, ed. *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000. The section “THE ORDINANCES: BAPTISM, FOOT WASHING, AND LORD'S SUPPER.” And explain the theological significance and practical impact of the selected church ceremonies and ordinances
 - a. Pages of the PDF window 601 “Baptism in Pauline Writings.”
 - b. Pages of the PDF window 603 “The Impact of Baptism on Christian Experience.”
 - c. Pages of the PDF window 609 “Significance of Foot Washing.” “The Impact of Foot Washing on Christian Experience.”
 - d. Pages of the PDF window 613 “The Theological Meaning of the Lord's Supper.”

4.5 Deliverable Assessment

A reading report submission on the selected subjects. File your Reading Report in the portfolio. Put a cover page to distinguish it from other deliverables.

4.6 References

The article: *The History of Adventist Doctrine: Development, Diversity, Homogeneity*, by Denis Kaiser.

Dederen, Raoul, ed. *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000.

UNIT 2: BRIEF HISTORY OF SDA DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT (3 hrs)

2.1 Unit Overview

2.1.1 Introduction

2.1.2 Unit objectives

2.1.3 Learning Outcomes

2.2 Main Content

2.2.1 Theological Developments

2.2.2 The role of the gift of prophecy in doctrinal development

2.2.3 Early Seventh-day Adventist Teachings

2.3 Unit Summary

2.4 Learning Activities

2.5 Deliverable Assignment

2.6 References

2.1 Unit Overview

2.1.1 Introduction

Welcome to Unit 2. The unit introduces students to a brief history of the SDA theological and doctrinal development. This unit traces the roots of the development of the Adventist theology and doctrine from the SDA pioneer to the present. The role of the gift of prophecy in doctrinal development. Early Seventh-day Adventist Teachings. The students will examine the statements of doctrine as voted at the successive General Conference sessions.

2.1.2 Unit objectives

- 1 To provide a brief survey of the SDA church's theological development
- 2 To explore the role of the gift of prophecy in doctrinal development
- 3 To provide a brief survey of the Early Seventh-day Adventist Teachings

2.1.3 Learning Outcomes (LOs)

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- 1 Analyze the biblical and theological foundations of the SDA Church doctrine as presented in both the Old and New Testaments.

- 2 Analyze the role of the gift of prophecy through the ministry of EGW in the doctrinal development.
- 3 Examine theologically debatable issues in the history of the church's theology and doctrine
- 4 Demonstrate the ability to analyze and defend the church's position on selected doctrinal issues.

2.2 Main Content

2.2.1 Theological Developments⁹

The church has grappled with different theological viewpoints, both in the past and the present. However, the church remains open to new illumination and further understanding of the Bible. Seventh-day Adventist pioneers, adhering to the Bible as the only basis for faith and doctrine, avoided doctrinal statements or creeds. Uriah Smith wrote a doctrinal statement in 1872, but in the controversy that followed the 1888 Minneapolis messages on the centrality of Christ, the document was to some extent forgotten. The Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook was published without any doctrinal statement. Questions regarding Seventh-day Adventist beliefs became numerous as the church grew. In 1930, the General Conference requested a committee of four to draw up a statement. They did their work; the next Yearbook included the "Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists."

This statement reflected a clearer understanding of the Trinity, the person and work of Christ, and the relation between law and grace than had Smith's statements. It was not accepted as official, however, until 1946, when it was voted as unchangeable except by the General Conference in session. The first official statement of doctrines was voted at the 1980 General Conference session. These 27 fundamental beliefs now appear regularly in the Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook.

The church has grappled with different theological viewpoints, both in the past and the present. The 1888 conflict over righteousness by faith spilled over into the twentieth century. In the early 1900s, the relation of Kellogg to the church caused disputes over ecclesiology. Bible conferences were held in 1919, 1952, and 1974 to discuss beliefs and come to unity. In the 1980s, controversy over the Adventist understanding of the heavenly sanctuary brought painful dissension to the church. In the 1990s, differing views on hermeneutics and worship styles have caused polarization among laypersons as well as clergy in some parts of the world church.

Based on their acceptance of biblical prophecy, Seventh-day Adventists see themselves as spiritual heirs of ancient Israel and the apostolic church, with the blessings and obligations of that heritage. Within the broader confines of biblical prophecy, the ministry of Ellen White has functioned as a modern extension of the prophetic impetus of the Bible.

The mission of Seventh-day Adventists is to proclaim the gospel of the whole Bible to the ends of the earth (Matt. 28:19, 20), and to carry the message of the three angels (Rev. 14:6-12) to all peoples. The observance of the seventh-day Sabbath reminds Adventists of a six-day creation of the earth (Gen. 1:1-25; Ex. 20:11), the joy of being God's people (Eze. 20:20), and the hope of

⁹ Dederen handbook of SDA theology, pdf pages 32

eternal rest (Heb. 4:9-11). The conviction that sanctification must accompany justification provides a basis for the Seventh-day Adventist emphasis on a wholesome lifestyle in which there is wholeness-mental, physical, spiritual, and social.

The preamble of the most recent doctrinal statement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (1980) clearly affirms that the church remains open to new illumination and further understanding of the Bible. The studies that follow in this volume represent the current, in-depth understanding of major biblical topics as treated by those who exercise the teaching ministry in the church. Each chapter of this volume presents a brief history of the development of the Seventh-day Adventist position under consideration. Further information on theological development will be found there.

2.2.2 The role of the gift of prophecy in doctrinal development¹⁰

The acceptance of Ellen G. White's modern-day prophetic gift naturally raises questions about the relationship between her writings and the biblical writings. If the same divine source generated both sets of writings, one may legitimately ask for the authority and finality of Ellen White's comments on biblical passages. In their history, Seventh-day Adventists have answered that question variously, and those answers are paradigmatic for the divide that continues to exist in the Church to this day. Some ascribe to her comments a normative and final authority in biblical interpretation, whereas others deny them any privilege in that regard. Still others try to find some middle ground. The crucial issue is which approach is more loyal and truthful to Ellen White and her divine inspiration.

This article surveys the history of Adventist views on the role of Ellen White's writings in biblical interpretation from 1845 to 1930. While she evidentially played a major role in the development of the publishing work, the organization of the church, health institutions, educational institutions, mission work, lifestyle principles, spirituality, and more, this article focuses specifically on the role and authority Adventists ascribed to her in the interpretation of the Bible.

Spiritual, Non-Normative Role (1845–1885)

Early Sabbatarian Adventists believed in the divine origin and authority of Ellen White's visions and writings, yet they felt their function and scope differed from those of the Bible. They believed that Scripture as the "only rule of faith and practice" was authoritative for all Christians throughout the Christian dispensation. Ellen White's revelations, however, were subject to the scrutiny of the Bible (1 Thess 5:19–20) and therefore derived their authority from Scripture. As a genuine manifestation of the modern-day gift of prophecy, her visions and writings addressed only a particular group of people at the time of the end (Rev 12:17; 19:10).

In the late 1840s, Sabbatarian Adventists gained new insights through the study of the Bible on such matters as the heavenly sanctuary, the seventh-day Sabbath, the third angel's message, the sealing, etc. During that period, Ellen White was usually unable to comprehend the arguments on the subject under discussion,³ yet her visions helped in that process in two distinct ways. First, they confirmed those insights of Bible study, strengthening the faith of the believers in God's

¹⁰ Book (article): Ellen G. White's Role in Biblical Interpretation: A Survey of Early Seventh-day Adventist Perceptions by Denis Kaiser (biblical research institute, reflection: theological focus) Reflections 60, October 2017

leading. Second, when those involved in the study discussed conflicting views reaching a deadlock because both sides had apparently exhausted their arguments from Scripture, the visions pointed to relevant biblical passages not yet considered and thus brought about unity.

To maintain appreciation for that divine guidance and the belief in the foundational role of Scripture was not always easy, however. The belief in Ellen White's divine revelations attracted criticism, incurring the charge of making them, rather than Scripture, the rule of faith. To avoid criticism and prejudice, James White and other leaders chose to refrain from publishing her visions in the columns of the *Review and Herald* in the early 1850s. Sensing that they had nevertheless inhibited the prophetic gift, they affirmed their belief in her visions at a conference in November 1855. They stated that it would be inconsistent to argue that these messages were irrelevant and not binding to those who believe in their divine origin.⁵ While they subsequently printed articles about the prophetic gift and material from Ellen White in the *Review*,⁶ they did not employ her writings to bolster points of biblical interpretation or theological belief.

Adventists were further aware that Ellen White's revelations offered partial rather than comprehensive insights into the truth. The discovery of the time to commence the Sabbath is a profound example. When, in 1847, several people debated about the proper starting time of the Sabbath, Ellen White received a vision that stressed that the Sabbath runs "from even unto even" (Lev 23:32). Instead of accepting this clue as a starting point to study the biblical meaning of "even," Joseph Bates mistakenly interpreted "even" to confirm his 6 p.m. position, and everyone else accepted his interpretation. Seven years later, James White recommended a biblical study of that particular aspect as it had been settled by "experience" rather than Bible study. At the above-mentioned conference in November 1855, J. N. Andrews demonstrated that "even" refers to sunset. Everyone accepted his conclusions except Bates and Ellen White, who struggled with that experience. A few days later, she had a vision. Using the opportunity, she asked the angel when the Sabbath begins, to which the angel replied, "Take the word of God, read it, understand, and ye cannot err. Read carefully, and ye shall there find what even is, and when it is." As Andrews' study was sufficiently clear, this problem was solved. Another question arose how ever. Ellen White wondered if God's "frown" was upon them as their Sabbath practice was not completely correct for almost nine years. The angel explained that God is only displeased when people consciously reject revealed light. They had accepted the message as they had understood it. God waited for a more opportune time to give them a better understanding through the Bible.⁷ Thus, He did not use Ellen White's visions to supersede Scripture but He used them to point Adventists to the Bible.

From the late 1850s to the 1880s, Ellen White wrote several sets of books and multiple articles that commented on biblical and Christian history.⁸ When, in the early 1880s, the Sabbath School quarterly dealt with Christ's life and the Book of Acts, church members were recommended to consult, among others, her books *Spirit of Prophecy*, volumes 2 and 3, and *Sketches from the Life of Paul*.⁹ Thus far, her publications primarily addressed members of the denomination. Nevertheless, Adventist writers consistently based their biblical interpretations and doctrinal views on pertinent Bible texts. They occasionally utilized other sources such as newspaper reports, historians, and other theologians in case they confirmed their interpretations. They refrained from using her writings to support their views, a custom that was not so much a sign of lacking trust in her prophetic ministry—quite the opposite was true—but of deep commitment to the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice.

Final, Normative Arbiter (1885–1903)

Several early leaders of the church, such as James White and J. N. Andrews who had participated in discovering the Adventist doctrines, passed away in the early 1880s. Afterwards a new generation of ministers and church leaders felt that Ellen White's writings could, or in some cases should, be utilized to determine the correctness of a given interpretation. Such a use of her writings became more prevalent in North America by the second half of the 1890s.

In 1886, readers of the *Review and Herald* could observe a unique change in the articles of one author. Unlike other Adventist writers, D. M. Canright began to frequently quote Ellen White's writings in support of matters of practice, implying that her writings were equal to Scripture.¹⁰ Shortly afterwards, he separated from the church and accused Adventists of employing her writings exactly in that manner, a claim that Uriah Smith vehemently denied.¹¹ Both Smith and George I. Butler continued to uphold that Ellen White's visions were not on par with or above Scripture.¹² She herself wrote in the preface to the *Great Controversy* that the gifts of the Spirit do not supersede the Bible but were subject to the Bible, the standard and test for all teaching and experience.¹³ The discussion between Butler and E. J. Waggoner on the nature of the law in *Galatians 3* (the ceremonial law vs. the moral law) tempted Butler, however, to look for a statement from Ellen White in support of his position—a request she denied him.¹⁴ Years later, she would suggest a complementary view that combined the apparent contradictory positions, showing the depth of thought in that passage.¹⁵ Meanwhile, when she lent her support to Waggoner and A. T. Jones in the wake of the Minneapolis Conference in 1888, both Smith and Butler questioned her and singled out allegedly unreliable statements from her writings as they seemed to conflict with their perception of the controversy.¹⁶ They fell somewhat into disgrace when they opposed the reform efforts of those younger ministers who, in turn, came to be viewed as loyal to Ellen White.

During her stay in Australia (1891–1900) and Waggoner's missionary work in England (1892–1903), Jones became perhaps "Adventism's most influential preacher," and spokesperson for Ellen White in North America.¹⁷ At the General Conference Session in 1893, he stressed the verbal inspiration and absolute clarity of inspired writings, suggesting that Scripture's meaning is clear and beyond the need of interpretation. Attempting to interpret or explain a given biblical text is a usurpation of Christ's place because He is the author of Scripture and He alone through His Spirit can explain its meaning. Jones argued that "the Spirit of Prophecy," the testimony of Jesus, is "the means through which Christ himself gives the true understanding and right interpretation of his word." As Christ possesses infallibility, His interpretation is "infallible" and "absolutely sure." Thus, Ellen White's writings are the final infallible interpreter of Scripture. Subjecting Scripture to her writings, Jones wrote, "the right use of the Testimonies . . . [is] to study the Bible through them, so that the things brought forth in them [the Testimonies] we shall see and know for ourselves are in the Bible."¹⁸ Similarly, W. W. Prescott stated that Jesus through the Spirit of Prophecy gave an infallible interpretation of Scripture.¹⁹ By 1896, the Sabbath School quarterly began to contain statements from Ellen White's writings as comments on particular biblical passages. Interestingly, it was Prescott who had written that quarterly.²⁰ As influential Adventist writers led by example, others adopted the practice of using Ellen White's writings in interpreting the Bible.

Divided Positions (1903–1920s)

Ellen White's return to the United States in 1900 brought American church leaders once again in direct contact with her and with the dynamics of her inspiration. Those dynamics conflicted with the assumptions that A. T. Jones and John Harvey Kellogg had concerning her inspiration and,

as a result, they rejected her inspiration and ministry altogether. Subsequently, some turned the acceptance of Ellen White's role as a final arbiter in matters of biblical interpretation into a test of orthodoxy, much to the chagrin of those who had worked closely with her during her Australian years, such as her son W. C. White and A. G. Daniells.

Relations between Kellogg and church leaders became increasingly strained by 1903, a circumstance that drove Jones closer to Kellogg and further away from Ellen White, Daniells, and others. Jones maintained his belief in verbal inspiration but he eventually questioned Ellen White's divine inspiration and claimed that he had "never . . . put them [her writings] in the place of the Bible,"²¹ although evidence from the 1890s suggests otherwise. Jones' open rejection of Ellen White and his separation from the church naturally generated fears whenever someone would express similar ideas. Meanwhile, W. W. Prescott, who had previously shared Jones' conviction that Ellen White's writings were an infallible commentary of Scripture, had come to the conclusion that her writings were not to be used to settle exegetical discussions.²² Later, he explained that it was through particular experiences with her writings—his editorial work with her articles for the *Review*, and his assistance on historical matters for the *Great Controversy* (1911) and *Prophets and Kings* (1917)—that he came to the conclusion that they could serve as a guide or pointer in study but that it was necessary to "develop directly from Scripture the full meaning" of a passage. Scripture itself was to be the central study.²³ He was impressed by Ellen White's guidance in the early history of the church and her masterful advice during the Kellogg crisis, circumstances that strengthened his trust in "the reliability of the Spirit of Prophecy."²⁴ However, Prescott's refusal to grant Ellen White the role of a final interpretative arbiter seemed to resemble the position that Jones had adopted. Anyone who refused her that authority was subsequently in danger of being associated with Jones's apostasy.

The dispute, starting around 1908, over the interpretation of *hatāmîd* (the daily, continual, regular) in Dan 8:11–13 laid bare the divergent preferences and presuppositions concerning the use of Ellen White's writings in biblical interpretation. S. N. Haskell, J. N. Loughborough, J. S. Washburn, and others, who held the traditional view of *hatāmîd* (pagan Rome), felt her remarks in *Early Writings*²⁵ strongly endorsed their particular definition of the term. Prescott, Daniells, and others who advocated a new view (the heavenly ministration of Christ) nevertheless preferred to factor in the Old Testament use of the term and refused to employ her writings as the final word.²⁶ Those who held the traditional view interpreted that refusal to utilize Ellen White's writings as the final, infallible arbiter as a clear rejection of the divine inspiration and authority of her writings.²⁷ Ellen White herself repeatedly urged individuals involved in the dispute to stop using her writings because she had not seen anything on the particular point under discussion.²⁸ W. C. White concluded that God desired to have this matter settled through "a thorough study . . . of the Bible and history" rather than "by a revelation."²⁹ Public discussions on the *tāmîd* eventually ceased, yet the differences, prejudices, and recriminations continued in private.

In the next two decades, those who had been involved in the conflict continued to express their convictions on the role of Ellen White's role in biblical interpretation. Haskell stated, "A living prophet is an inspired commentary upon what God has previously spoken. He develops and applies the words inspired before."³⁰ "The living prophet, therefore, becomes an infallible guide to the correct conclusion of what the dead prophet has said."³¹ As Ellen White was a "living prophet," this interpretative authority applied particularly to her.³² Haskell thought that her refusal to place her writings on par with Scripture resulted from her fear to be lumped together

with false prophetic claim ants. For Seventh-day Adventists, her writings had the same authority as the biblical writings, he argued, yet when sharing their beliefs with non-Adventists, they were to prove everything from Scripture.³³ Similarly, J. S. Washburn viewed her writings as a final, infallible interpreter of Scripture; interpretations that seemingly contradicted statements from Ellen White were to be disregarded and rejected. To say that her writings were not on par with Scripture because they had to be tested by Scripture was, in his view, “simple Higher Criticism.”

At the 1919 Bible Conference, Daniells had made several significant remarks on that subject. He felt that Ellen White’s explanations of biblical passages were “dependable,” although in a few cases “there may be some difficulties.”³⁵ Scripture was to be interpreted “primarily” through Scripture.³⁶ To argue, however, that her writings were “the only safe interpreter of the Bible” was “a false doctrine, a false view.”³⁷ He rejected the assumption that her writings were to Adventists “the only infallible oracle” as Joseph Smith had been to the Mormons.³⁸ Prescott stressed that her writings were not to substitute serious Bible study.³⁹ He appreciated the spiritual and practical value of her writings and although he felt that she had been mistaken on some matters of biblical interpretation, he disliked the practice of some to contrast her writings with Scripture in public.

In the 1920s, F. M. Wilcox, W. C. White, and a few others sought to bridge the gap by outlining the purpose and scope of Ellen White’s writings. In W. C. White’s view, the quoting of his mother’s writings in sermons was not necessarily a problem. Yet when some people felt it was easier to make particular matters clear by use of the Testimonies rather than the Bible, he felt that they were putting her writings before the Bible. He said, “These things have grieved mother, and she has often advised our ministers to use the Bible first in presenting truths that were of a character to call for decided reforms, then to read the Testimonies as another witness to the same truths.”⁴¹ Wilcox stressed the role of Scripture as “the rule of faith and practice”⁴² and “the great test book, or standard, of every claim in doctrine and in revelation.”⁴³ Thus, Ellen White’s writings had to be tested by Scripture, and as they were in harmony with the Bible and exalted it “as the one rule of faith,” they were to be accepted as coming from God.⁴⁴ Referring to Ellen White’s own view on the role and function of her writings, Wilcox emphasized that they were “in no sense . . . to take the place of the Bible”⁴⁵ and were not “an addition to the canon of the Bible”⁴⁶ or on “a parity with the Bible.”⁴⁷ Instead of viewing her writings as the final authority in matters of interpretation, he portrayed them as “a spiritual commentary” on the Bible and the plan of redemption because they helped to comprehend the “great principles” of the Bible. They provided practical spiritual guidance in a believer’s life.⁴⁸ Some scholars perceive Wilcox as “the personification of Adventism” and the “great mediator” in the 1920s because he tried to formulate positions that all parties in the church could accept.⁴⁹ His long-running editorial work for the Review (1909–1944) had a huge impact on the church, yet he was apparently unable to bridge the gap between the different positions on the role of Ellen White’s writings in the interpretation of the Bible as tensions continued to exist along these lines.

Summary

From the beginning, Seventh-day Adventists generally adhered to the position that Scripture interprets itself, while maintaining that Ellen White’s writings contained beneficial spiritual advice and inspired insights. By the 1890s, some leading ministers introduced the idea that Jesus had given the visions and writings of Ellen White to function as a final, infallible interpreter of Scripture. Both assumptions continued to coexist and compete with one another. Some considered the exalting of Ellen White’s writings to the position of an infallible commentary as a

functional abandonment of the principle of sola scriptura while others felt a refusal to ascribe to her writings that role was a practical denial of her divine inspiration and authority. Inner-denominational theological controversies gave rise to hypersensitivity, keeping watch for giving Ellen White either too much or too little authority. The result was a rift in matters of biblical interpretation that continues within Adventism to this day.

Toward a Holistic View

The different perceptions of the role of Ellen White's writings in biblical interpretation uncover varying assumptions concerning the relationship between and the functions of canonical and post-canonical revelation. However, a prevalent underlying assumption seems to be the unwitting idea that the final meaning of a text can be deduced either from a surface reading or from the commentary of an inspired writer. That assumption does not seem to factor in the following realities. The biblical text contains (divine) thoughts of eternal depth and their meaning is probably deeper than a surface reading might suggest. The text may contain different nuances and aspects that only come into view through deep study. Ellen White used different biblical passages in various ways. Scholars have detected in her writings exegetical, theological, typological, parenthetical, and other uses of Scripture.⁵⁰ In her effort to instruct, admonish, and encourage individuals, Ellen White occasionally applied biblical principles to particular circumstances without intending to establish a universal rule for all and every situation. Sometimes she used one particular passage in different ways at different points in her life. In other cases, she saw the complementarity of seemingly contradictory interpretations (e.g., on the law in Galatians). There are further many biblical passages she never used, leaving them unexplained. We believe that divine revelation presents us with truth, yet revelation is evidently also progressive and partial because it never presents all there is to know. Thus, Ellen White may have commented on a particular aspect in a given passage without exhausting the depth of its meaning. We may value the beneficial insights and spiritual truths brought out in her comments on Scripture without limiting the meaning of Scripture and the discovery of biblical truth by making her the final word and thus functionally a part of the canon. We should consider how we use her writings in our sermons and research without giving the impression that we read Scripture only through the lens of her writings or that we think little of them and can virtually ignore them. Resolving the dilemma of the proper use of Ellen White's writings in that way allows Bible students to appreciate her comments, to discover for themselves the richness of Scripture, and to yearn continually for growth in understanding the deep things of God.

2.2.3 Early Seventh-day Adventist Teachings¹¹

Already before 1844, the continuing validity of the seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday) as the day of worship was a concern for certain Millerites. At the same time, Rachel Oakes Preston, a Seventh Day Baptist, shared some of her church's publications with Christians in Washington, New Hampshire, who were expecting "their redemption" along with other Adventists. Their preacher, Frederick Wheeler, soon began to observe the Sabbath and sometime late in 1844, that congregation became the first group of Adventist Sabbath keepers. The Sabbath, along with the heavenly sanctuary, became "present truth" for these believers.

¹¹ Dederen handbook of SDA theology, pdf pages 16

Although most Millerites believed in the conscious state of the dead, a number espoused the teaching that the dead are unconscious and know nothing. In 1842, after studying what the Bible says about the condition of the dead, George Stows, a former Methodist preacher, wrote a book popularly known as Stows' Six Sermons. In it he affirmed that the Bible teaches that the dead—good or bad—know nothing and figuratively sleep until the resurrection. William Miller and other leaders opposed this teaching but were unable to convince their followers that their own view was correct. Unable to agree in 1845 on the state of the dead or the eternal punishment of the wicked, the Millerites in attendance at the 1845 Albany Conference limited themselves to stating that the righteous receive their reward at the time of the Second Coming. Meanwhile, early Adventist leaders such as Joseph Bates, Ellen Harmon, and James White accepted—in consonance with their belief in the soon-coming resurrection—the biblical teaching of conditional immortality and death sleep.

Beginning in 1845, the early Adventists published their views in pamphlets, in their own periodicals, and in friendly newspapers. Tracts and broadsides proclaiming the new understanding of the heavenly sanctuary and the Sabbath flowed from the pen of Adventist leaders. The first issue of *Present Truth* appeared in 1849.

From 1848 through 1850, "Sabbath Conferences" were held in different places in New England. These meetings clarified the Sabbath teaching and served to unite "the brethren on the great truths connected with the message of the third angel" (J. White 5). In these conferences, believers studied Scripture and prayed for a clear understanding of correct doctrine. During these years, representatives of several religious groups came to a unified understanding of the pillars of Adventist faith, such as the Sabbath, the Second Coming, and the state of the dead. Their common theology formed the basis for the later development of the church.

2.2.4 Unit summary

The church has grappled with different theological viewpoints, both in the past and the present. However, the church remains open to new illumination and further understanding of the Bible.

2.2.5 Learning activities

Read the book: Book (article): Ellen G. White's Role in Biblical Interpretation: A Survey of Early Seventh-day Adventist Perceptions by Denis Kaiser (Biblical Research Institute, reflection: theological focus) Reflections 60, October 2017.

And analyze the role of the gift of prophecy through the ministry of EGW in the doctrinal development.

2.2.6 Derivable assignments

An analysis of Ellen G. White's Role in Biblical Interpretation and theological development in the SDA church

2.2.7 References

- 1 Dederen, Raoul, ed. *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000.
- 2 Book (article): Ellen G. White's Role in Biblical Interpretation: A Survey of Early Seventh-day Adventist Perceptions by Denis Kaiser (biblical research institute, reflection: theological focus) Reflections 60, October 2017
- 3 2024_The History of Adventist Doctrine_ Development, Diversity, Homogeneity. Pages. 10 text pages; pages 6 pdf window

MODULE 2: REVELATION AND INSPIRATION

UNIT 3: REVELATION

3.1 Unit Overview

3.1.1 Introduction

3.1.2 Unit objectives

3.1.3 Learning Outcomes

3.2 Definition of key terms

3.2.1 Revelation

3.2.2 General revelation

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3.1 Unit Overview

3.1.1 Introduction

That the living God has revealed Himself and continues to reveal Himself to the human family is foundational to Christian faith. The Scriptures, both OT and NT, present a record of the way God manifested Himself in human history-especially the history of Israel, and supremely in the person of Jesus Christ. Without this divine revelation, humanity would perish, ignorant of God's true character and will and estranged from Him through sin and guilt.

In Scripture the creation of the world and the majesty, beauty, and bounteous provisions of nature are perceived as manifestations of God's glory, wisdom, and loving care for His creatures. Such manifestations are referred to in theology as general revelation. However, the present condition of humanity and this world, filled with sin, disruption, disaster, and death, raises serious questions about the possibility of a true knowledge of God through the natural world or through human experience. Scriptural evidence suggests that such wisdom and knowledge as can be gained from these sources by themselves is inadequate to give us a true understanding of God's character of love and His intention to save us from sin and death.

God has met this predicament by making Himself known to human beings on a personal level. In theological language this is called special revelation, particularly as it is revealed and recorded in the Scriptures. Fully aware of the various criticisms of the Bible-ethical, historical, linguistic, scientific, philosophical, and theological-we have chosen to focus on the claims made by the biblical writers regarding their own and each other's writings, and especially on Jesus' attitude toward and use of the Scriptures. The prophets, apostles, and supremely Jesus Himself accepted the Scriptures as the trustworthy and authoritative Word of God, given by the Holy Spirit in human language. Revelation and inspiration are ultimately acknowledged as divine mysteries; however, even our limited human understanding of these subjects is of crucial importance for a mature, intelligent Christian faith.

3.1.2 Unit Objectives

- 1 To provide a general overview of the module
- 2 To define the key terms
- 3 To differentiate special and general revelation
- 4 To establish the role of scripture in revelation and inspiration

3.1.3 Learning Outcomes (LOs)

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- 1 Define the general concept of revelation and inspiration.
- 2 Distinguish between special and general revelation
- 3 Appreciate the role of scripture in revelation and inspiration

3.2 Definition of key terms

3.2.1 Revelation

The noun "revelation" and the verb "to reveal" are used in theological as well as in secular language. The basic meaning of the verb, which is derived from the Latin *revelare*, is to take away a covering, to uncover or unveil something that is hidden; therefore, to make known what is secret or unknown. The noun can refer to the act of revealing but also to that which has been revealed. In common language many other words-such as 'tell,' "make known," "bring out into the open," "bring to light"-are used to express the same idea.

In reference to God's act of revealing Himself and His will and purpose for the human family, these words acquire a new depth of meaning. The essence of divine revelation can be summed up by saying that God reveals Himself in words and acts, through many different channels, but most

fully in the person of Jesus Christ. God's explicit intention is that through this revelation human beings may come to know Him and enter into a saving relationship, which will result in eternal fellowship with Him (John 17:3).

Biblical Terminology

A study of all the revelatory expressions in the Bible shows the conviction of the biblical writers that they were the recipients and messengers of divine revelation.

OT

English translations of the Bible use the words "reveal" and "revelation," but not as frequently as one might expect. In the RSV the verb "reveal" occurs 65 times, of which 28 are in the OT as a translation of the Hebrew or Aramaic verb *galah* (except in Genesis 41:25, where it is translated from the Hebrew verb *nagad*). The verb *galah*, like the Latin *revelare*, expresses the idea of uncovering something that was covered or hidden. It occurs frequently with a merely secular meaning (Ruth uncovers the feet of Boaz, Ruth 3:4), as well as in reference to divine revelations (God reveals Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2:19). The noun "revelation" occurs twice in the RSV OT as a translation of forms of the verbs *yarah* and *galah* (Hab. 2:19; 2 Sam. 7:27).

Other words and phrases are used in the OT to describe divine revelations. Some expressions focus on their auditory aspect: "The word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah" (Jer. 47:1); "And the Lord said to Moses" (Lev. 19:1); or the oft-repeated "Thus says the Lord" (Amos 1:3). Such phrases occur hundreds of times and highlight the auditive aspect of revelation.

The visual also is essential in the process of God's self-revelation. Verbs such as *ra'ah* (see, be seen, appear, cause to see, show) and *hazah* (see, see in vision or dream, behold), and the nouns *ro'eh* (seer), *mar'eh* (sight, appearance, vision), *hozeh* (seer), *hazon* (vision) are also used. Other more general cognitive words used are *hawah* (to make known, to inform), *yada'* (to know, to make known, to publish), and *nagad* (to make known, to report, to tell). This list is by no means exhaustive but shows the variety of words used to describe the different ways in which God communicates with people on earth.

Frequent OT references to prophets, visions, dreams, signs, and wonders provide evidence of the persistent desire of God to reveal Himself through channels of His choice. The personal manifestations of God to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses-so-called theophanies, or appearances of God-and His cloud-concealed presence during the Exodus were intended to show His loving purpose to enter into a special covenant relationship with Abraham and his descendants, so that through Israel God might make Himself, His will, His salvation, and His gracious character known to all peoples (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:15-18; 26:1-5; 28:10-15; Ex. 19:1-6).

In the letter to the Hebrews the entire process of divine revelation in the OT is summed up in these words: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets" (Heb. 1:1). This statement stresses the preeminence of God's speaking through the prophets. It does not, however, limit the divine revelation to the prophetic witness.

The role of scripture in revelation

The word of the Lord written down by Moses and the prophets became a prominent means by which God revealed Himself and His purposes for Israel and the nations. It was the divine intention that these books should be read and heard by future generations so that the people might know God as their Saviour and King. By obeying His word they would experience His

blessings (Deut. 4:5-8; Josh. 1:8; Ps. 1:1-3) and be warned of the terrible consequences of turning away from God (Dent. 31:26-29; Isa. 30:8-14).

Long after the dynamic voice of the prophets had fallen silent, the living voice of God still spoke through their writings. Undoubtedly to these writings could be applied the words written earlier: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Dent. 29:29; see also Spiritual Gifts IV).

The Scriptures play an essential role in divine self-disclosure: Christ is revealed in and through the Scriptures. The dynamic voice of the apostles, like that of the ancient prophets may fall silent, but the Holy Spirit will still speak through their writings and unfold the mystery of Jesus Christ to all nations and all generations until He comes again.

The Scriptures as the record of special revelation have become an essential factor in the process of divine revelation. While an equation of special revelation with the Scriptures fails to do justice to the complexity of the process of revelation, the Scriptures do fulfill a crucial role in that process. According to the biblical writers the Scriptures come to us as the word of God. That was the conviction of prophets and apostles and of the Lord Jesus Himself (see Dan. 9:2; Matt. 4:4; Mark 7:13; Heb. 4:12). The knowledge of the only true God as revealed in Jesus Christ is conveyed through the Scriptures, under the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

NT

The NT also uses various words to convey the idea of divine revelation. The verb *apokalypso* (to reveal) and the noun *apokalypsis* are the most prevalent. These words are generally used in a religious context and refer to such revelations as that of the righteousness and wrath of God (Rom. 1:17, 18), the second coming of Jesus (1 Cor. 1:7; 1 Peter 1:13), the coming of antichrist (2 Thess. 2:3), the knowledge of human thoughts (Luke 12:2), or the Revelation of Jesus to John (Rev. 1:1). The word *phaneroo*, "to disclose or reveal," is also used (Rom. 16:26). Other words used in the context of divine revelation are *gnorizo* (to make known, Eph. 1:9), *deiknymi* to point out, John 5:20), *epiphaino* (to appear, show itself, Luke 1:79), and *chrematizo* (to impart a revelation, Matt. 2:12, 22).

Christ in revelation

The revelational terminology of the NT focuses on Jesus Christ. John the Baptist testified, "I came baptizing with water, that he [the Christ] might be revealed to Israel" (John 1:31). John the apostle presents Jesus as "the Word," the only Son from the Father, who "became flesh," and who "has made him known" (John 1:1, 14, 18). Matthew tells us that "no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matt. 11:27). The revelation of God in theophanies, visions, dreams, and prophetic utterances has now found its culmination and fulfillment in the incarnation of the Son. For this reason the Epistle to the Hebrews begins with a majestic summary: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days He has spoken to us by a Son He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature" (Heb. 1:1-3). Christ is God revealed in human form; thus He could say in words that would fit no other human lips: "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

Paul also uses a wide range of revelational terms and he, perhaps more than any other, presents Christ as the fullest revelation of God. Paul received the gospel which he preaches not from man

but "through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:12). The crucified and risen Lord appeared to him on the road to Damascus while he was persecuting the Christians (Acts 9:1-9). The mystery of Christ was made known to him by revelation; this mystery "was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (Eph. 3:5). The role of the Holy Spirit is crucial to the revelation of Jesus Christ; in this Paul is in full agreement with the rest of the NT (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13, 14; 1 Peter 1:10-12).

3.2.2 General revelation

Revelational language is mostly used in connection with people. But the Bible also uses such language in regard to phenomena of the natural world. Phrases such as "the heavens are telling the glory of God" (Ps. 19:1) show that God reveals Himself through His created works. Different terms have been used to refer to this concept; however, "general revelation" is probably the most common.

Not only does the Bible speak about a revelation in nature (Ps. 19:1-4; Rom. 1:19-23), but it points to an inner awareness of God in the human consciousness. The author of Ecclesiastes asserts that God "has put eternity into man's mind" (Eccl. 3:11), while the apostle Paul speaks of Gentiles who "show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness" (Rom. 2:15). The moral responsibility, the universal awareness of a distinction between good and evil, right and wrong, has been seen as a manifestation of God in the human consciousness.

General revelation can be defined as that revelation of God that is universal, accessible to all human beings everywhere, by which God is known as Creator, Sustainer, and Lord of the entire universe. As far as humanity is concerned, this general revelation is both external and internal; it is also inescapable. No matter where we turn we are confronted with God's handiwork and ultimately with the presence of God, for as Paul proclaimed to the Athenian philosophers, "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

Various questions have been raised in regard to general revelation. A crucial issue is whether general revelation provides the necessary elements for a rational knowledge of God, a natural theology. What concept of God will be deduced from the pervasive presence of evil, suffering, deterioration, destruction, and death? Another vital question, especially in the context of an increasingly articulate religious pluralism, is whether general revelation provides a saving knowledge of God. Is God known by followers of any or all religions or worldviews apart from the Judaeo-Christian tradition and, if so, are Christian missions necessary? Has God revealed Himself universally, so that every religion leads to a saving knowledge of God?

In order to address these questions, one must recognize the situation in which the human family finds itself. According to the Bible, at the end of Creation, "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). This "very good" included the first human pair, whom God had created in His own image and likeness. In them was no imperfection-spiritual, moral, mental, or physical. In the words of Ecclesiastes 7:29, "God made man upright." This perfection, unfortunately, did not last long. According to Genesis 3, Adam and Eve distrusted and disobeyed. The consequences were radical. Shame and fear replaced love and respect. Guilt-ridden, the pair hid at the approach of the Creator. Since then, evil, suffering, and death among human beings are stark realities that cannot be denied or escaped. The world is no longer "very good." According to Paul, "the whole creation has been groaning" (Rom. 8:22). Human beings are "subject to lifelong bondage" (Heb. 2:15). In their alienation from God, human beings find it

difficult to receive and interpret God's revelation. They find it even harder to respond in love and faith to that revelation. (See Sin III. B. 1-3; Man II. A, B.)

3.2.3 Special revelation

Turning away from God has always brought tragic consequences. Human beings, estranged from God by sin, guilt, shame, and fear have distorted and suppressed the knowledge of God as manifested in nature and in human consciousness. The whole earth, and especially all living beings-plants, animals, and humans-have become subject to decay, disease, and finally death. In this condition, humanity desperately needed a new revelation of God, a revelation that would not only restore the broken relationship between God and humanity but would ultimately bring the entire universe back into harmony with God. Christians hold that God has given such a revelation, that "he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ" (Eph. 1:9, 10).

This revelation is often referred to as special revelation in contrast with general revelation. Whereas general revelation is universal, accessible to all human beings everywhere, special revelation is addressed to specific human beings and is not immediately accessible to all. Whereas through general revelation God is known as Creator, Sustainer, and Lord of the universe, in special revelation He reveals Himself in a personal way to redeem humanity from sin and reconcile the world to Himself.

The center and substance of special revelation is the person of Jesus Christ, God in human flesh (1 Tim. 3:16; John 1:14, 18). In His manifestation in human form on earth, the Son of God submitted Himself to the limitations of human nature: He was "born of woman, born under the law" (Gal. 4:4). He became flesh, Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth, a Jew who lived for about thirty-three years in Palestine, who died on a cross outside Jerusalem under the governor Pontius Pilate, and who rose from the tomb and ascended to His Father.

God never intended that this revelation would come to humanity as a thunderbolt from a blue sky. On the contrary, from the moment that our first ancestors fell into sin God began to reveal His purpose to save us through a promised seed or descendant of the woman. For thousands of years God revealed Himself through channels of His choice, especially through patriarchs and prophets, to prepare the human family for the supreme revelation, the incarnation of the Son of God. The entire history of preparatory revelations belongs to the realm of special revelation. (See Christ I-III)

Special revelation is the entire process by which God has revealed Himself and His redemptive purpose for the human race to and through Israel, the prophets, apostles, but supremely in Jesus Christ. It is also the means by which He continues to reveal Himself through the Scriptures under the illuminating and convicting power of the Holy Spirit, and through the proclamation of the church to all nations on earth. At the heart of this process is the great redemptive act of the incarnation of the Son of God, who through His life, death, resurrection, and intercession, redeems from sin all who believe in Him and restores in them the true knowledge of God.

Theophany

In revealing Himself to humanity God chose specific persons to whom and through whom to make known His character and His will. He chose Abraham and made a covenant with him, promising him descendants and blessings (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:15-18). The covenant promise began

to be fulfilled with the birth of Isaac. To him and to Jacob, his son, the initial promise was repeated and confirmed by God (Gen. 26:1-5; 28:12-15).

God appeared to these patriarchs in so-called theophanies. We learn from the Genesis narratives that "the Lord appeared to Abram" (Gen. 12:7; 17:1) and to his descendants (Gen. 26:2; 35:9). God also revealed Himself to them in visions and dreams (see Gen. 15:1; 28:12; 31:10, 11; 46:2). In a very special theophany, Jacob, the father of the 12 tribes, struggled with God and received the divine blessing (Gen. 32:24-28).

In Genesis the account of Creation week goes on to describe the seventh day. The psalm has something similar. On the Sabbath we recognize that God is our Creator; we honor Him in the commemoration of Creation. That is the first thing mentioned in Psalm 104:31. When God finished His creation, He said that it was "very good." In Psalm 104 He rejoices in His works (verse 31). But something more happens: He "looks on the earth and it trembles," He "touches the mountains and they smoke" (verse 32). This is the picture of a theophany, the manifestation of God's personal presence. This is what happens on the Sabbath when the Lord draws near to His people and makes Himself known. Struck with reverential awe, they render Him worship.

The personal manifestations of God to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses—so-called theophanies, or appearances of God—and His cloud-concealed presence during the Exodus were intended to show His loving purpose to enter into a special covenant relationship with Abraham and his descendants, so that through Israel God might make Himself, His will, His salvation, and His gracious character known to all peoples (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:15-18; 26:1-5; 28:10-15; Ex. 19:1-6).

The revelation of God in theophanies, visions, dreams, and prophetic utterances has now found its culmination and fulfillment in the incarnation of the Son.

theophany (manifestation of God)

3.3 Learning Activities

3. Read the book: **Read the book:** Dederen, Raoul, ed. *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000. The section "REVELATION AND INSPIRATION." And explain:
 - a. The modalities of general revelation: Pages of the PDF window 40-42.
 - b. Natural Theology and the Salvation of the Gentiles: Pages of the PDF window 42.
 - c. The characteristics of special revelation: Pages of the PDF window 44-46.

3.4 Deliverable Assignment

3.5 References

Dederen, Raoul, ed. *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000.

UNIT 4: INSPIRATION

4.1 Unit Overview

4.1.1 Introduction

4.1.2 Unit objectives

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4.2 Main content

4.2.1 Definition of Inspiration

4.2.2 Mode of Inspiration

4.2.3 Locus of Inspiration

4.2.4 Extent of Inspiration

4.3 Scripture and Inspiration

4.3.1 The Human Shape of Scripture

4.3.2 The God-breathed Character of Scripture

4.3.3 Practical Applications

4.4 Unit Summary

4.5 Learning Activities

4.6 Deliverable Assignment

4.7 References

4.1 Unit Overview

4.1.1 Introduction

Christians commonly refer to the Bible as an inspired Book, a holy Book, a divine Book, or simply as Scripture. Jesus often appealed to or quoted from the Scriptures, and there can be no question that He considered the Hebrew Scriptures as carrying divine authority (Matt. 4:4; John 10:35). The apostle Paul, likewise, accepted the Scriptures as being of divine origin (2 Tim. 3:16). He referred to them as "the holy scriptures" (Rom. 1:2), "the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:2), and "the sacred writings" (2 Tim. 3:15).

Belief that the Hebrew Scriptures came into being as the result of divine inspiration has been widespread and persistent among Jews and Christians. However, there is no agreement as to exactly what "inspiration" means. Concepts on biblical inspiration range from verbal dictation by the Holy Spirit to merely human inspiration. Some think the concept of inspiration should be discarded altogether.

Several factors have contributed to the diversity of opinions concerning biblical inspiration. While the concept is biblical, the word "inspiration" is not. In addition, those who study the issue of inspiration do not all start from the same presuppositions. Finally, no biblical author presents a detailed discussion of the topic. Because of these factors, a detailed study of the biblical evidence for inspiration is necessary.

4.1.2 Unit Objectives

- 1 To define the term inspiration
- 2 To explain the concept of inspiration
- 3 Explain the significance of scripture to Christian experience

4.1.3 Learning Outcomes (LOs)

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- 1 Define the concept of inspiration.
- 2 Skillfully integrate theology and doctrine into pastoral ministry

4.2 Main content

4.2.1 Definition of Inspiration

The words "inspiration" and "inspired" do not appear as such in the original languages of the Bible. They are derived from the Latin and appeared in the Vulgate translation of 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21. Their basic meaning is to "breathe in."

In 2 Timothy 3:16 Paul affirms that all Scripture is theopneustos, or "breathed by God." Benjamin Warfield concludes that "Scripture is called theopneustos in order to designate it as 'God-breathed,' the product of divine inspiration"; thus "the Scriptures owe their origin to an activity of God the Holy Ghost and are in the highest and truest sense His creation" (296).

Peter points out that "men . . . spoke from God," *pheromenoi* (carried, blown, or impulsed) "by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). Following the Vulgate, some translations have used the word "inspired" here, but most have used the phrase "moved by the Holy Spirit." In any case, the sense of the text is that biblical prophecy has its origin in the Holy Spirit.

Thus, while the word "inspiration" is not a precise translation of any Greek word used in the Bible to describe the process by which Scripture comes to the human mind, it may be appropriately used to represent a process in which the Holy Spirit works on selected human beings, to move them to proclaim messages received from God. Some spoke the word; some wrote it. The written form constitutes the God-breathed Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16). "Inspiration" refers to the Holy Spirit's work on these messengers or prophets, whether they spoke or wrote. Because these people were "inspired" or "moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21), their utterances and writings may be considered inspired as well (2 Tim. 3:16).

While the word "inspiration" focuses primarily on the activity of the Holy Spirit, a careful study of the biblical data makes it clear that both human and divine activity are involved in the process by which the Scriptures came to be written.

4.2.2 Mode of Inspiration

While recognizing the fact of inspiration, we must examine the mode in which it occurs. This entails studying the process by which biblical authors received revelations and wrote them down.

Biblical authors agree on the crucial role of the Holy Spirit in moving them to write. The initiative is wholly with the Spirit: He calls, gives revelations, moves, or inspires. Peter states it succinctly: "No prophecy ever came by the impulse of man" (2 Peter 1:21). Even the unwilling prophet Balaam could utter only what the Lord allowed him to say (Num. 24:29,13).

God commonly revealed Himself to prophets in visions and dreams (Num. 12:6). They then wrote down what they had seen and heard, either immediately or later. We ask, Did the prophets do the writing of themselves, or was it always under God's guidance? This question must be answered indirectly, for the prophets say little about the matter.

Jeremiah's experience helps answer our question. The Lord tells the prophet, "Take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel and Judah and all the nations" (Jer. 36:2). It is hard to believe that Jeremiah, unaided by the Spirit of God, could have remembered and written down what God had revealed to him over a period of many years. The story continues: Jeremiah called Baruch, who "wrote upon a scroll at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the Lord which he had spoken to him" (verse 4). Then "Baruch read the words of Jeremiah from the scroll" (verse 10), but these words were "the words of the Lord" (verses 8, 11).

This identification of the words of the prophet as the words of the Lord suggests strongly that the prophet was inspired, i.e., was moved and directed by the Spirit of God, in putting the words of the Lord in written form. Likewise, when the prophet Micah, contrasting his message with that of false prophets, exclaimed, "But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, . . . to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin" (Micah 3:8), he included written as well as spoken words.

When King Jehoiakim defiantly burned the scroll, "Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to Baruch the scribe who wrote on it at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the scroll

which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire; and many similar words were added to them" (Jer. 36:32). This was a second, enlarged edition of the book of Jeremiah.

The experience of Jeremiah indicates that the prophets did not write their books as if they were mere copyists. They were fully involved, while moved and guided by the Spirit, in their writing. The same can be said of biblical writers who are not specifically referred to as prophets.

Solomon, the author of many proverbs and songs, tells us that he "taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging proverbs with great care." He also "sought to find pleasing words, and uprightly he wrote words of truth" (Eccl. 12:9, 10). Luke, author of the Gospel and of Acts, tells us that it seemed good to him, "having followed all things closely [or accurately] for some time past, to write an orderly account" (Luke 1:3). Thus, careful historical research and literary assessment were important to the composition of the books written by Solomon and Luke. There is good reason to believe that a similar process was involved in the composition of other biblical books, even when that fact is not explicitly stated.

Whether the human messengers in the process of speaking or writing were always conscious of the moving of the Holy Spirit is not entirely clear. However, indications of such consciousness are found frequently in connection with the names of prophets and apostles. A careful study of the biblical data suggests that both the inspired persons themselves as well as others who heard them or read their writings recognized this special moving of the divine Spirit in their communications (Moses, Num. 12:7, 8; Joshua, Dent. 34:9; Samuel, I Sam. 3:19; David, 2 Sam. 23:2; Ezekiel, Eze. 2:2; Daniel, Dan. 9:22; 10:9-11; Micah, Micah 3:8; Peter, Acts 11:12; Paul, 1 Cor. 7:40; John, Rev. 1:10).

Remarks by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 have led some to conclude that Paul distinguishes between things he said under inspiration and other things which were merely his personal opinion. He writes in verse 10, "To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord"; in verse 12 he adds, "To the rest I say, not the Lord." Again in verse 25 he states, "Now concerning the unmarried, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy." These texts do not, in fact, deal with the issue of inspiration. The contrast Paul draws in verses 10 and 12 is that in one case he can refer to an explicit command of the Lord (Matt. 5:32; 19:1-6), whereas in the other he cannot. Yet the advice in verse 12 and elsewhere is given under inspiration, for Paul concludes this discourse on questions regarding marriage with the emphatic assertion, "I think that I have the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 7:40). The Bible may not explain distinctly the process by which the Holy Spirit moved and guided the writers of the different books of Scripture, but one fact is clear: These writers functioned fully as human beings with the involvement of their total personality.

4.2.3 Locus of Inspiration

The locus of inspiration concerns the question Who or what is inspired? Does inspiration pertain to specific individuals chosen by God, such as prophets and apostles, or to the messages they delivered in oral or written form-particularly to the Scriptures, or to the community of faith in which the Scriptures originated? The first two options have long been a matter of debate; the third option has especially come to the fore in recent years.

The biblical evidence presented earlier in this article points to specific individuals, chosen by God, as the primary locus of the working of the Holy Spirit. Scripture says "Men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21); "The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me, his word is

upon my tongue" (2 Sam. 23:2); "As for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord" (Micah 3:8).

Whether inspiration should be attributed to the inspired writers or to the Scriptures written by them is to a large extent a needless dilemma. It is clear that the primary locus of inspiration is in people. The Holy Spirit moved upon people to speak or write; yet what they spoke or wrote was the inspired word of God. In the words of Paul to Timothy, "All Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16, NIV). Peter recognized the letters of Paul as part of the Scriptures, written according to "the wisdom that God gave him" (2 Peter 3:15, NIV). In writing his Epistles, Paul was inspired or moved by the Holy Spirit, and the letters he produced became part of the God-breathed Scriptures.

Inspiration worked on Paul, and under inspiration Paul wrote inspired letters. The primary locus of inspiration is the apostle; the result of that inspiration is Holy Scriptures.

The third option for the locus of inspiration, the community of faith where Scripture had its origin, hardly deserves mention as a viable alternative. The concept is based, to a great extent, on a specific method of Bible study. By a literary-historico-critical study of the Bible, scholars have come to the conclusion that many biblical books are the end product of a long process, in which unknown writers, editors, and redactors were involved. On the basis of such phenomena, the understanding that books of the Bible had specific authors-who lived in well-defined historical contexts, and wrote under inspiration-is denied. Instead of these authors being inspired, the community among which the writing reached its final form is inspired to recognize the validity and authority of the Bible message. (See Interpretation IV. F, G.)

While there is evidence of redaction and editing, much of this can be attributed to the inspired authors themselves, to their immediate associates, or possibly even to later inspired writers. Joshua, for instance, may well have-under divine inspiration-edited the books of Moses and made additions to them, such as, for example, the last verses of Deuteronomy. In any case, given the absence of evidence for the locus of inspiration in a community rather than in a biblical author, the statements of Scripture must stand. The locus of inspiration is in the inspired author.

4.2.4 Extent of Inspiration

The "extent of inspiration" refers to the matter of how much of the Bible is inspired. Are the words of the Bible themselves inspired? Or are only the thoughts behind the words inspired? Are some parts of the Bible more inspired than others? Are some parts not inspired at all? Is the Bible inspired in its totality or is it inspired only in degrees?

From discussion of special revelation and inspiration (III. B and IV. B) it is evident that the revelation-inspiration process has many aspects and that available information does not answer all our questions. However, there is little doubt that thoughts as well as words are involved in this process. In visions and dreams or by impressions of the Holy Spirit, inspired persons received thoughts in visual or verbal form. These they then conveyed faithfully and truthfully as they had received. At times they seem to express their messages in precisely the words given to them by the Spirit.

Regardless of the way the thoughts were received, the biblical writers emphasize that their words are words from God. Moses quotes God as saying that He will put His words in the mouth of the prophets (Dent. 18:18; cf. Jer. 1:9). Referring to Scripture, Jesus declared, quoting from

Deuteronomy 8:3, that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4).

The words written by the biblical authors are distinctly human words. For that reason they can introduce their books with such expressions as "the words of Jeremiah" (Jer. 1:1) or "the proverbs of Solomon" (Prov. 1:1). The thoughts, and at times the words, are given by revelation of God to be expressed by the human authors in words familiar to them and their immediate readers.

Truly the Scriptures are fully human and fully divine. Any idea that some parts of the Bible are merely human while other parts are divinely inspired contradicts the way the biblical writers present the matter. Paul's words, that "all Scripture is God-breathed," do not allow for any concept of partial inspiration. Neither are there any hints in Scripture suggesting degrees of inspiration. Some portions of Scripture may be more important than other portions (Jesus speaks in Matthew 23:23 about "the weightier matters of the law"), but that does not mean that they are more inspired. Every Christian would do well to receive the words of Holy Scripture in the manner in which the believers in Thessalonica accepted the words of Paul. "not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God" (1 Thess. 2:13).

4.3 Scripture and Inspiration

What does inspiration accomplish? What are the effects of the special influence exercised by the Holy Spirit on the inspired writers? Does the moving of the Spirit give to their writings qualities that make the Bible different from any other book in the world?

The primary purpose here is to consider four qualities of Scripture: Scripture is the living voice of God, the authority of Scripture. The truthfulness of Scripture, and the sufficiency of Scripture. While it is appropriate to look at each of these effects of inspiration separately, qualities of Scripture should never be seen in isolation from each other. They constitute the different hues of a spectrum of colors formed by the bright light of the Word of God.

4.3.1 The Human Shape of Scripture

At face value the Scripture is a human book, or rather a collection of human books. Many of these have a human name attached to them; all bear the marks of human authorship. This authorship shows in their opening words: "the words of Jeremiah" (Jer. 1:1), "the proverbs of Solomon" (Prov. 1:1), "the elder to the beloved Gaius" (3 John 1), "Paul . . . and our brother Sosthenes, to the church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:1, 2). The first five books of the OT are attributed to Moses, many of the Psalms to David and Asaph. The prophetic books each bear the name of a prophet, the Gospels the name of an apostle or of a close associate of the apostles. Thirteen letters explicitly mention Paul as their author, and the book of Revelation was written by John, traditionally understood to be the apostle John.

Authors frequently refer to themselves with personal pronouns; they also record their own experiences (Ezra 8:15-30; Neh. 1:1-11; Isa. 6:18; Jer. 1:1-19; Dan. 7:1-28; Gal. 1:12-2:10; Rev. 1:9-19). Peculiar characteristics of style and language point to the distinct individuality of each writer.

Numerous historical references and literary forms link the biblical writings with their times and backgrounds. Many of the laws of Moses show remarkable parallels with other ancient laws, such as those of Hammurabi. Patriarchal customs and social conditions in Genesis reflect in a notable way the conditions in Mesopotamia and Egypt in the second millennium B.C. Significant

parallels exist between some psalms and Canaanite religious literature, and between some biblical proverbs and their contemporary Egyptian proverbs.

These and other parallels between biblical and nonbiblical literature give the Bible a very human face. Some books of the Bible belong to the world's classics, as expressions of the deepest human emotions. Human drama is portrayed in Job and in Ruth, passionate yet delicate love in the Song of Solomon, gripping suspense in Esther, and supreme distress in Lamentations. And one cannot remain untouched by Paul's plea for a wayward slave in the Epistle to Philemon.

The historical books of the Bible provide evidence of historical research (Luke 1:1-4). The apostle Paul quotes pagan authors (Acts 17:28; 1 Cor. 15:32, 33; Titus 1:12). Jude cites the pseudepigraphical book of Enoch (Jude 14, 15).

The human shape of Scripture is unmistakable. Human authors—using human language, quoting human sources, operating in specific human contexts, describing human emotions—are subject to all the weaknesses and failures of humanity. Prophets and apostles were not free from sin. They doubted, they were afraid, at times they succumbed to temptation (Ex. 4:10-14; Num. 20:10-12; 2 Sam. 11:1-7; 1 Kings 19:1-3; Luke 22:54-62). Neither were they free from pride and prejudice, as is quite evident from Jonah and the Gospel narratives (Matt. 20:20-28).

One may well wonder how some forty writers from divergent historical and cultural backgrounds, who differed widely in status and occupation, as well as in intellectual and spiritual endowments, produced a collection of books that manifests a remarkable unity and that from beginning to end reveals one God, Creator of heaven and earth, whose love embraces all things. Beyond this, one may wonder how such writers portrayed a person like Jesus of Nazareth, so truly human and, yet so completely free from all the weakness and imperfection of the biblical writers themselves. The answer to these questions, as Christians through the ages have believed, has in the fact that the Scriptures have not merely a distinct human character but also a divine origin.

4.3.2 The God-breathed Character of Scripture

Read the pages 48-50 of the Handbook of SDA theology by Dederen Raoul, for a more understanding about the divine nature of scripture

4.4 Learning Activities

In a two-page paper describe the state of the person under inspiration. Consider the argument about the consciousness and unconsciousness of the person under inspiration.

4.5 Deliverable Assignment

In a two-page paper describe the state of the person under inspiration

4.6 References

MODULE 3: DOCTRINE OF GOD

UNIT 5: THE REALITY OF GOD

- 5.1 Unit Overview
 - 5.1.1 Introduction
 - 5.1.2 Unit objectives
 - 5.1.3 Learning Outcomes
- 5.2 Main content
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 - 5.2.3 Divine Attributes
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- 5.3 Oneness of God
 - 5.3.1 OT
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- 5.4 Unit Summary
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- 5.7 References

5.1 Overview

This unit discusses the doctrine of God.

5.1.1 Introduction

The doctrine of God is foundational to Christian theology, since God relates to everything and everything is related to Him. The doctrine determines the way theologians understand and formulate the entire corpus of Christian beliefs. Philosophical ideas have commonly framed the Christian concept of God. Biblical statements have hardly shaped such formulations. Consequently, classical, modern, and postmodern interpretations of the Christian doctrine of God have been created under the influence of human philosophical concepts. Aware of this situation, careful students of the Scriptures pursue their search for understanding, determined to submit to the Bible all forms of human reasoning. Because human philosophy is called to be subject to the Bible, and since divine philosophy is already available in the Scriptures, our understanding of God must stand free from human speculations. What we can know about God must be revealed from the Scriptures.

5.1.2 Unit objectives

- 1 To analyze the sources for the knowledge of God
- 2 To explore the evidence for the existence of God
- 3 Address the theological questions about the oneness of God

5.1.3 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- 1 Theologically argue the existence of God
- 2 Exhibit knowledge of the reality of God
- 3 Ably address the theological questions about the oneness of God

5.2 Main content

5.2.1 Sources for the Knowledge of God

A. The Bible

The Christian doctrine of God has been interpreted in various ways. One reason for divergence in approach and content is found in the various sources from which a knowledge of God has been sought. According to the Bible, however, the source of data for the doctrine of God is His own personal revelation (Heb. 1:1-3) as faithfully recorded in Scriptures (Rom. 16:26). Nature, in its various forms, has also been considered as a source for the doctrine of God. Theology has traditionally identified the biblical teaching regarding God's revelation through nature (Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:19, 20) with the human philosophical interpretation of God built on the sole basis of natural data. The doctrines of God that result from the study of nature are philosophical interpretations of God, known in theological circles as natural theology.

A study of the biblical teaching on general revelation suggests that the fact of God's general revelation should not be used to construct a natural theology. Nevertheless, the allegedly minor results produced by philosophical speculations on the being of God are utilized as presuppositions for the understanding not only of the Christian doctrine of God but also of the whole theological enterprise. However, a correct understanding of nature requires as its necessary presupposition the knowledge of God provided by revelation and not vice versa. In short, true knowledge about God can be attained only on the basis of biblical revelation. Since the Christian doctrine of God has generally been developed by assuming the speculative conclusions of natural theology as a working presupposition, the enterprise of searching for an understanding of God on the basis of the Bible alone is bound to challenge traditional ideas and render a different view of God.

B. General Revelation

According to Scripture, God's creation, even after the entrance of sin in the world, was an objective tool that God utilized to reveal Himself to men and women. In order to distinguish this means from the "special revelation" of Scripture, the designation "general revelation" is broadly utilized. Paul, addressing the men of Athens on the Areopagus, clearly referred to this when he explained that God "gives to all men life and breath and everything," "that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him" (Acts 17:25, 26). The passage is not explicit on how this takes place but seems to suggest that general revelation has salvific intentions.

Psalm 19 presents God's creation as an objective instrument that God employs to reveal Himself to all people (cf. Ps. 65:6-13). This passage plainly states that "the heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork" (Ps. 19:1), thus singling out the different aspects of the created physical world through which the glory of God can be revealed universally

to all human beings throughout history (cf. Ex. 33:18, 19; 34:6, 7). The following verses explain the cognitive mode of these instruments of revelation. They share knowledge (Ps. 19:2) without words or audible voice (verse 3). In this way a foundational difference between special revelation (Scripture) and general revelation in Creation is explicitly drawn. In special revelation the cognitive content is given through human words, while in general revelation the cognitive content is given through the mode of divine works or historical events accessible to all. In special revelation God talks by way of human words; in general revelation the same God speaks by way of physical and historical facts. Finally David states the universal reach of these means of divine revelation as he underlines that "their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world" (verse 4).

In Romans 1:18-21, Paul takes over the OT concept of general revelation, clarifying and further developing it. In so doing, he broadens the concept in three very important areas: the role of God, its content, and its final goal. Regarding the role of God in general revelation, Paul underlines that what can be known about God is plain to human beings "because God has shown it to them" (verse 19). In general revelation, as well as in special revelation, God is personally involved in the actual process of revelation. In the introduction to his Gospel, John explains that the second person of the Trinity, the Word, is "the true light that enlightens every man" (1:9). General revelation is the good news that God manages to reach not only those who have access to the Scripture but also the full range of humankind. Paul identifies the content of general revelation as "the things that have been made (tois poie masin)" (Rom. 1:20). This expression seems to point to the fact that the contents of general revelation include not only Creation (our physical world) but also God's providence, which embraces the whole range of historical events (cf. Acts 14:17).

God's invisible qualities, His personal power and divine nature, adds Paul, have been clearly visible (Rom. 1:19, 20). Although imperfect because of the darkening effects of sin, this acquired knowledge is not insignificant. Yet sinful humans consistently repudiate and pervert it (verses 18, 21-23). Hence in His mercy, God broke into man's sin-darkened existence by means of a special, supernatural revelation culminating in Christ Jesus (Heb. 1:2). (See Revelation/Inspiration II.)

5.2.2 The Reality of God

A. The Existence of God

The discussion of the rational proofs of God's existence has become a classical locus in the Christian doctrine of God. Since God does not reveal Himself continually directly and visibly, the question logically arises about whether there is in reality a Being that corresponds to our word "God." The biblical record does not address the issue of the existence of God by developing or suggesting rational proofs. Instead Scripture holds that "whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists" (Heb. 11:6).

Knowledge about God is necessary for faith to arise in human minds and hearts (Rom. 10:17). It is from the combined reception of God's self-revelation in history, as recorded in the Bible, and the promptings of the Holy Spirit in the mind that faith as conviction of God's existence becomes a fact in the experience of the Christian. Rational proofs of God's existence given to us in nature do not produce such a radical conviction. The conviction of the existence of God is not produced by rational arguments but by a personal relationship with God. This relationship is initiated by

God, who through the personal action of the Holy Spirit uses Scripture, nature, and history to reveal Himself to the minds and hearts of human beings. We are aware of the existence of God, then, on the basis of His personal revelation in Scripture rather than on the basis of rational arguments (cf. Matt. 16:15-17). Within this context the existence of God is usually perceived as mystery.

B. God as Mystery

Another basic aspect of the doctrine of God relates to His nature. In this regard, the biblical record submits an almost overwhelming amount of information. However, before we consider some basic aspects of the manifold revelation of God being presented in the Bible, we must recognize that as we approach the study of God we enter "holy ground," on which silence is golden. In other words, we should recognize the limitations of human thinking processes when dealing with the understanding of God's self-revelation. The deficiency of our thinking process as it relates to God as subject matter of study manifests itself not only when we discover that it is impossible for us to know God by ourselves apart from His self-revelation (Job 11:7), but also when we realize the limitations in our understanding of that which is revealed. Such limitations are due not only to our sinful natures but mainly to the very nature of God, whose "greatness is unsearchable" (Ps. 145:3). We cannot fully understand the reality of God within the range of our human, finite, and limited reason. Even when grounded in biblical ideas, any human claim to perfect understanding of God tends to correspond, in the final analysis, not to the living, infinite God but rather to a god created by our own imagination. The biblical revelation about God falls within the category of mystery, understood not in its traditional meaning but rather in its biblical sense.

In its traditional sense a mystery is something that, by its very nature, cannot be known or put into words. On the contrary, the Bible closely associates mystery with revelation (Dan. 2:30, 47; Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 15:51; Eph. 1:9; Col. 2:2). A mystery is something that, even when hidden from human knowledge, can be made known through revelation. Furthermore, even when the mystery involves a direct revelation accessible to human knowledge, it surpasses its own revealed aspects so as to avoid any possible identification of the revealed reality with the mystery itself. Thus Paul can pray that the Ephesians may "know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge" (Eph. 3:19). This love-surpassing knowledge belongs to the category of mystery manifest in the manifold ways in which God has chosen to reveal Himself as recorded in the Bible. Care must be taken to avoid crossing the limit between the revealed and hidden (Deut. 29:29) facets of the mystery, particularly in discussing issues like the Trinity, foreknowledge, and eternity.

5.2.3 Divine Attributes¹²

Understand more of God's attributes by reading the following pages in the Handbook of SDA theology (pages 124-129)

- A. Eternity
- B. Immutability
- C. Love and Wrath

¹² Pdf window pages 124-129, Handbook of SDA theology by Dederen)

D. Transcendence

5.2.4 Divine Activities¹³

Understand more of God's activities by reading the following pages in the Handbook of SDA theology (pages 129-135)

- A. Foreknowledge
- B. Predestination
- C. Creation
- D. Historical Presence
- E. Providence

5.3 Oneness of God

5.3.1 OT

There is no specific place where the Bible discusses the whole doctrine of God. The biblical doctrine of God is developed in following the historical account of God's personal interventions and revelations in the sacred text. The doctrine of the Trinity, at the very center of the doctrine of God in particular and of Christian theology in general, is no exception. When God revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, however, a knowledge of the Trinitarian nature of God became necessary for the Christian church. The incarnation of Jesus Christ involved more than the dwelling of God with humanity; it brought with it knowledge about the Father and the Holy Spirit as a necessary context for a proper understanding of Jesus Christ's incarnation, cross, resurrection, and heavenly ministry. That the Trinitarian nature of the Godhead became known through the Incarnation does not mean that it had not existed before or was not directly involved in the work of salvation. Since God is eternal and immutable, His Trinitarian nature has never changed or come into being. We shall now turn our attention to the biblical teaching about the Trinity. Theological theories and doctrines about the Trinity generated by the fateful combination of biblical data and philosophical ideas will be considered in the historical section. Before the specific data revealed with the Incarnation are examined, it is necessary to consider the biblical concept of the oneness of God and OT hints regarding plurality in the divine being (see VI).

A. Evidence from the OT

The "oneness" of God refers to the singleness of His being. In other words, the "oneness" of God refers to the fact that according to the Bible there is only one God, as opposed to more than one. The classical OT statement about the oneness of God, which is also followed by some in the NT, pronounces God to be one: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord" (Dent. 6:4). Moses, however, had already explained that "the Lord is God" and that "there is no other" (Dent. 4:39). As David heard God's covenant promise renewed to Him, he praised God and recognized that "there is no God besides thee" (2 Sam. 7:22; 1 Chron. 17:20). Through the prophet Isaiah,

¹³ Pdf window pages 129-135, Handbook of SDA theology by Dederen)

Yahweh Himself called Israel to recognize that "I am He. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me" (Isa. 43:10; cf. 42:8). From these texts it clearly follows that according to the OT there is only one absolute God for Israel as well as for the whole Creation. These statements say nothing, however, about the inner nature of the one absolute God.

5.3.2 NT

B. Evidence from the NT

In spite of the fact that God revealed the inner complexity of His being in a surprising way through Jesus Christ, the basic understanding of the oneness of God, already expressed in Old Testament times, is maintained throughout the NT. Jesus Himself, when asked which commandment was the first answered by referring to Deut. 6:4: "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one'" (Mark 12:29). Discussing the function of the law in his letter to the Galatians, Paul categorically stated that "God is one" (Gal. 3:20). Finally, James also stated that "God is one" (James 2:19). The OT idea of God's oneness remains unchanged in the NT. Yahweh, the God of Israel, is the God of Christianity. He is the only God. There is no other. At times "oneness" can involve the meaning of unity (i.e., John 10:30; 17:21, 23). However, if the "oneness" expressed in these texts is conceived only as a gathering of independent "onenesses" that come together in order to form a unity, the specific singleness characteristic of the one Godhead to which they testify is dissolved into a plurality of gods. The oneness of God plays a decisive, systematic role in determining the referent for the biblical revelations about God. In other words, since the God of the Bible is one and not many, all the various revelations about Him presented throughout the Bible refer to the same, one divine reality and not to a plurality of divine beings.

5.4 Unit Summary

This unit has discussed the reality of God.

5.5 Learning Activities

From the notes above and from your other reading, in a two-page paper, discuss what it means that God is a mystery

5.6 Deliverable Assignment

A discussion paper about what it means that God is a mystery.

5.7 References

UNIT 6: THE TRINITY (3 hrs)

6.1 Unit Overview

6.1.1 Introduction

6.1.2 Unit objectives

- 6.1.3 Learning Outcomes
- 6.2 The Godhead/Biblical Trinity
 - 6.2.1 OT
 - 6.2.2 NT
 - 6.2.2.1 God the Son
 - 6.2.2.2 God the father
 - 6.2.2.3 God the Holy Spirit
 - 6.2.3 The divinity of Christ
- 5.1 Unit Summary
- 5.2 Learning Activities
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- 5.4 References

6.1 Unit Overview

This unit discusses the subject of the godhead/trinity. The significance of the expression “the angel of the Lord” in the theology of the godhead both in the new and old testament, and the divinity of Christ.

6.1.1 Introduction

In the Bible the radical affirmation of God's oneness does not settle the content of His nature. By associating the oneness of God with the timeless interpretation of His eternity, classical theology concluded that God's nature must be simple; that is, one cannot think of God as having parts or components. Simplicity would rule out any form of plurality or composition. On the basis of its strong affirmations of the oneness of God, however, biblical thinking conceives His nature not in terms of simplicity but rather in terms of complex plurality. The personal complexity of the one divine being that is clearly articulated in the NT is already expressed by the OT in a less specific way. Let us consider some of the OT hints regarding the personal plurality of the one Godhead that receive further and definitive expression in the NT.

6.1.2 Unit objectives

To address the theological questions surrounding the subject of the Trinity, the expression “the angel of the Lord” and clarify the divinity of Christ.

6.1.3 Learning Outcomes

By the end of the study in this unit the student will be able to address the questions surrounding the divinity of Christ and the mystery of the godhead.

6.2 The Godhead/Biblical Trinity

A. The Plural of Fullness and the Godhead

In the Creation Account God refers to Himself in the plural form. "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'" (Gen. 1:26). Other instances occur elsewhere in Genesis: "Behold, the man has become like one of us" (Gen. 3:22); "Come, let us go down and there confuse their language" (Gen. 11:7). Finally, "the Lord sitting upon a throne, highland lifted up" (Isa. 6:1) in the heavenly temple (verses 1-4), revealed Himself to Isaiah and disclosed His mission by asking, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" (verse 8). Though other interpretations have been suggested, when these references to God's actions in the plural are understood as "plural of fullness," it is possible to see that "a distinction in the divine Being with regard to a plurality of persons is here represented as a germinal idea" (Hasel 65). Of itself, then, the usage of the plural form in relation to God points to a concept of the divinity in which the simplicity adopted by classical theology is replaced by a concept of the one Godhead that involves plurality and complexity.

6.2.1 OT

B. The OT Angel of Yahweh

A most interesting line of evidence that moves toward clarifying the OT concept of plurality in relation to God's essence is found in several passages that deal with the Angel of the Lord. The concept of mal'ak YHWH integrates the mission-oriented role of angels with God's capability to reveal Himself in a personal, direct, visible way by adopting a created form. For instance, He took on the form of a man when He revealed Himself to Abraham (Gen. 18:1-5) and Jacob (Gen. 32:24-30). Throughout the Bible, angels are created beings, not to be worshiped (Col. 2:18; Rev. 19:10). Angelic beings have the specific task of carrying out God's specific purposes relating to human history (Heb. 1:14).

The designation "angel of the Lord" or "Angel of God" is frequently used in relation to angelic beings (cf. 2 Sam. 14:17; 24:16; 1 Kings 19:7; 2 Kings 1:3, 15; 1 Chron. 21:12, 15, 16). On some specific occasions, however, the Angel of the Lord is identified with Yahweh. In Judges 2:1-5 the Angel of the Lord appears as the One who brought Israel out of Egypt and entered into covenant with their fathers, while other texts identify Yahweh as the agent of these very events (Ex. 6:6; 13:3; Deut. 5:12; 7:19; Joshua 2:10; 1 Kings 8:9). In the burning bush God appeared personally to Moses. In this momentous theophany (Ex. 3:2-15) the Angel of the Lord appeared to Moses "in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush" (verse 2), but immediately Yahweh is the One revealing Himself to Moses (verses 4, 6). The same direct identification of the Angel of the Lord with Yahweh occurs elsewhere (Gen. 16:7-14; 22:9-18; Judges 6:11-24). When the specific identification of the Angel of the Lord with Yahweh is understood on the basis of the biblical concepts of eternity (see III. A), immutability (see III. B), and historical presence (see IV. D), God's ability to present Himself and act directly within the realm of the temporal order of human history is underlined. Even though the identification of the Angel of the Lord with Yahweh does not prove the plurality of God's essence, in an indirect way it sets the necessary stage for discerning the dual revelation of Yahweh.

C. The Dual Revelation of Yahweh

In Genesis 16 the Angel of the Lord is not only identified by Hagar as Yahweh (verse 13) but the same Angel of the Lord, who is Yahweh, is presented as referring to Yahweh in the third person (verse 11), thus hinting the existence of a possible difference between the Angel of the Lord that

is Yahweh, and Yahweh. In Exodus 23 Yahweh promises the Israelites to "send an angel before" them (verse 20). The relation of Israel with this angel is very special. Israel is required to obey the Angel of the Lord, who is portrayed not as an intermediary between Yahweh and the people but rather as the originator of revelation and forgiveness (verse 21). Finally, Yahweh declares that His "name is in him" (verse 21). The "name" refers to the nature of God, which is connected directly with His covenant name Yahweh (Ex. 3:14, 15). It is possible to see that in this passage Yahweh speaks of another Yahweh, who is the Angel sent by the Lord.

Speaking about the Messiah's dominion, in Psalm 110:1 David presents Yahweh as addressing the Messiah as "my Lord." Jesus, trying to lead the Pharisees to the OT evidence of the divine origin of the Messiah, quoted from this passage, referring to the Lord addressing the Messiah as "my Lord" (Matt. 22:44). It seems, then, that Psalm 110 not only hints the divine nature of the Messiah, but in so doing also discloses the existence of a duality of "Lords." This duality is developed further years later when Zechariah, in a vision of the Lord, sees "Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him" (tech. 3:1). Next, the Angel of the Lord identified with the "Lord," addresses Satan: "The Lord rebuke you, O Satan!" (verse 2). Thus the text seems to suggest the existence of two personal Yahwehs, one identified with the angel of the Lord who carries on specific redemptive activities in relation to the people (see IV. D), the other identified with the transcendent God (see III. D). The plurality regarding God-suggested by the plural form of the OT word for God (Elohim), as well as the specific idea of a personal duality between the Angel of the Lord who is Yahweh and Yahweh-does not dissolve the concept of God's oneness into polytheism. On the contrary, the incipient revelation of the presence of plurality in the biblical idea of God is to be understood on the foundation provided by the idea of oneness.

From the very outset biblical thinking does not agree with the Greek identification of oneness with simplicity as required by the timeless interpretation of God's being. On the basis of the historical interpretation of immanence (see IV. D) as personal communion, OT thinking is able to understand God's oneness as not contradictory to, but rather compatible with, a dynamic personal plurality in the Godhead.

In the OT the Trinitarian nature of God is not expressly revealed in the specificity and depth that are present in the NT record. From the vantage point gained from the NT revelation of God in Christ, it is possible to interpret the overlapping concepts of oneness and plurality as OT hints of the Trinitarian doctrine of God. In any case, the two lines of revelation, that which discloses the oneness of God and that which discloses plurality as related to God's oneness, do not cancel out each other but rather provide the appropriate background for the surprising revelation regarding God brought by the Incarnation.

6.2.2 NT

God's self-revelation in Jesus as concrete, historical reality brought new light for understanding God. The revelation of God in Jesus Christ did not modify the basic OT approach to the understanding of the Godhead, which includes both the idea of oneness (see V) and of personal distinctions (see VI), but simply assumed it. On the contrary, the NT deepens the dynamic concept of divine plurality already present in the OT while at the same time affirming the oneness of God. The result is the revelation of God as Trinity. The NT assumes the idea of God's oneness without further elaborating on it, while at the same time expanding the area of God's plurality. The concrete revelation of the eternal person of God the Son in Jesus Christ opened the

door for a more specific revelation of a divine "Other." Christ's ascension to heaven prompted an explanation of the continuation of God's historical, personal presence, continuously manifested through the OT sanctuary and the NT Incarnation. The specific revelation and sending of the eternal person of God the Holy Spirit was necessary in order to explain the historical continuity of God's personal, historical immanence.

6.2.2.1 Son

Jesus Christ was a man born of Mary (Matt. 1:16). Those who knew Him as a child and a young adult found it difficult to accept Jesus even as a prophet (Mark 6:3-5). According to the NT, however, Jesus the man was the most direct and clear revelation of God given to humankind (John 1:18; 14:8, 9; Heb. 1:2, 3). He is God incarnate. In a very real sense, our understanding of God's Trinity arises out of Christology. When the divinity of the person of Christ is seen within the context of the OT revelation about God's plurality in oneness, the stage is set for the further revelation about the person of the Father and the person of the Holy Spirit. Without the OT background and the specific historical revelation of the eternal Son in Jesus Christ as presented by the NT writers, talk about the Father and the Holy Spirit would not have been enough to reveal the inner Trinitarian being of God. These two steps were necessary if human beings were to be introduced to a deeper understanding of God's being.

6.2.2.2 Father

If "the whole fullness of deity" dwelt "bodily" in Jesus Christ (Col. 2:9), what are we to think about the Father? Is He God? What is His relationship with God the Son?

1. The Fatherhood of God in the OT

The idea of God as Father is not alien to the OT. When God is called Father in the OT, His tender care toward His chosen people is emphasized. In the wilderness God bore Israel "as a man bears his son" (Deut. 1:31). Moses called Israel's attention to God's tender providential care by asking, "Is not he your father, who created you, who made you and established you?" (Deut. 32:6). As a father, God pities (Ps. 103:13) and disciplines (Prov. 3:12) His children. God Himself uncovered His deep personal involvement by addressing Israel as "my son" (Hosea 11:1, 8). In turn, the people recognized Yahweh as their Father (Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Mal. 2:10). Yahweh is said to be the Father of the King (2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:7); the close relationship between God-the source of strength, wisdom, and authority-and the King, His representative, is underlined. Even though glimpses of the plural nature of the one God are present in the OT, the presence of specific persons is not as obvious. In the OT, therefore, the Father appellation is not used to designate a person of the divine Trinity. Such distinctive usage is proper to the NT revelation in Christ.

6.2.2.3 Holy Spirit

The Trinitarian nature of the one biblical God is not complete without God the Holy Spirit. That the revelation of the Holy Spirit as the third divine person of the Godhead comes after the revelation of the Son and the Father does not mean that He is either less important or that He has been involved in salvific activities only since the time of His revelation. A proper understanding of the one Christian God and His personal plurality requires, therefore, a careful consideration of the biblical witness to God the Holy Spirit.

b. The Spirit of God in the OT. The fact that the Holy Spirit is not explicitly revealed as a divine person in the OT (Gen. 1:2) does not mean that He did not exist or act as a person before His historical introduction at Pentecost. The revelation of the Holy Spirit as a person of the Godhead became possible and necessary after the historical revelation of Jesus Christ as God the Son. The OT, consequently, does not refer to the Holy Spirit as a person different from other divine persons. However, at times it is possible to understand some OT references to the rather general designation "Spirit of God" as allusions to divine activities that properly belong to the Holy Spirit. The giving of spiritual gifts to special individuals for the execution of definite tasks is the activity most commonly associated in the OT with the Spirit of God (Ex. 31:3; 35:31; Num. 11:25, 29; 24:2; 27:18; Judges 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6,19; 15:14; 1 Sam. 10:6, 10; 16:13; 19:20, 23; 2 Chron. 15:1; 20:14; 24:20). The Spirit of God is not so frequently presented as indwelling the heart of the believer, although the idea is, nonetheless, present in the OT. According to the Sinaitic covenant, religion was to be a deep experience of love to God: "And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to hear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul?" (Deut. 10:12). Thus Paul can describe a "real Jew" as one who is so, not by adhering to external rituals, but rather, according to Deuteronomy 10:16, he who has the real circumcision of the heart (Rom. 2:28, 29). David knew that the inner change of the heart amounts to a new creation that can be accomplished only by God Himself (Ps. 51:10). Saul not only received gifts from the Spirit, but the Spirit of the Lord changed him into another man (1 Sam. 10:6, 9). Israel in exile anticipated a spiritual revival as a result of God's putting His Spirit in them (Eze. 36:26, 27; 37:1-14).

2. Divinity

The divinity of the Holy Spirit is attested in various contexts. The Holy Spirit is described as possessing divine characteristics; He is called "Holy" (Matt. 1:20), "the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11), and "Spirit of Jesus" (Acts 16:7). When confronting Ananias and Sapphira, Peter pointed to the divinity and personality of the Spirit. Ananias had lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3) and at the same time to God. Jesus introduced the Spirit to the disciples as "another Counselor" (John 14:16). Since the Greek *allos* means "another of the same kind," it follows that the Holy Spirit was of the same kind as Christ, namely, a divine person.

The divinity of the Holy Spirit as third person of the Trinity is further affirmed as He is described as possessing other divine attributes: omniscience (1 Cor. 2:10, 11), truth (1 John 5:7), life (Rom. 8:2), wisdom (1 Cor. 2:11), power (Luke 1:35; Rom. 15:19), and eternity (Heb. 9:14). The NT underlines the divinity of the Holy Spirit by referring to Him as performing specific divine actions, such as speaking to the fathers through the prophets (Acts 28:25), inspiration of Scriptures (2 Peter 1:21; cf. VII. C. 5. a), illumination (John 15:26; cf. VII. C. 5. b), regeneration (John 3:7, 8; Rom. 8:11; Titus 3:5), and sanctification (2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2). Furthermore, the divinity of the Holy Spirit is strongly affirmed as He is identified with the OT Yahweh as is Christ. Acts 28:25-27 and Hebrews 3:7-9 attribute to the direct activity of the Holy Spirit statements that in the OT are explicitly reported as Yahweh's utterances (Isa. 6:8-10 and Ps. 95:7-11; cf. Ex. 16:1-8; Deut. 1:34-36). In the NT Paul affirms the same identification: "The Lord is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:17). There seems to be no doubt that the NT writers understood the Holy Spirit to be God.

6.2.3 The divinity of Christ

1. Divinity

Several NT passages refer to Christ as God (John 1:1, 18; 20:28; Heb. 1:8, 9; 2 Peter 1:1; 1 John 5:20). John not only teaches the preexistence of Christ (John 17:5), but also expresses it in an absolute way that belongs only to God (John 1:1, 2; 8:58; cf. Col. 1:17). Divine characteristics are attributed to Christ: eternity (Heb. 1:11, 12), possession of underived life in Himself (John 1:4; 14:6), and the divine power to create (John 1:3; Heb. 1:2, 10; Col. 1:16). The introduction to the letter to the Hebrews states that the Son "reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature" (Heb. 1:3). Paul describes Christ as being "in the form of God" (Phil. 2:6).

The "I AM" statements appear to be another way Christ Himself pointed out His divine nature. By claiming for Himself the "I AM" designation, Christ used the same name that Yahweh, revealing Himself to Moses in a theophany, declared to be His own personal name: "I AM WHO I AM" ('ehyeh 'aser 'ehyeh) (Ex. 3:14). This usage applies to pronouncements that underline divine attributes, such as omnipotence (John 6:20, 21), eternity (John 8:58), foreknowledge (John 13:19), the manifestation of divine glory and power (John 18:5, 6, 8), and Jesus as the source of salvation (John 8:24). Finally, the NT affirms Christ's divinity by identifying Him with the OT Yahweh. The song of praise that heaven sings to Yahweh for His redemption (Isa. 44:23) is applied to the worship of Christ in Philippians 2:10. The statement about Yahweh's creative power and eternity recorded in Psalm 102:25-27 is quoted in Hebrews 1:10-12, where it is applied to Christ. To reinforce this line of argument, Hebrews 1:8, 9 identifies Christ with God ('elohim) by quoting from Psalm 45:6, 7.

Paul summarizes the NT testimony to Christ's divinity by plainly stating the mystery of God's incarnation in Jesus Christ: "In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Col. 2:9). From the starting point, "God with us" (Matt. 1:23; cf. Isa. 7:14) as Jesus of Nazareth (John 1:14), the incipient OT conception of divine plurality grows in specificity and complexity, unfolding the Trinitarian nature of God's being.

5.5 Learning Activities

Read the following articles and write a 2-page paper about the SDA church position on the Trinity and divinity of Christ.

5.6 Deliverable Assignment

1. A two-page paper about the SDA church position on the trinity
2. A two-page paper about the divinity of Christ

5.7 References

- 1 Gerhard, Pfandl. *The Doctrine of the Trinity Among Adventists*. Biblical Research Institute Silver Spring, MD June 1999.
- 2 Dederen, Raoul. *Reflections on the Doctrine of the Trinity*. Reprinted from: Andrews University Seminary Studies. Volume 8, 1970, No. 1. Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan 49104, U.S.A.