

## ADDITIONAL LETTERS FROM JOHN WITCOMBE

October 28, 2022

Ken Norton, Montana Conference President  
Montana Conference of Seventh-day Adventists  
175 Canyon View Road  
Bozeman, MT 59715

Dear Elder Norton,

You may be wondering how it is that I could (from your point of view) go against church authority by urging a return to our pre-1980 statements regarding the doctrine of God. The statement from *Acts of the Apostles* pages 163 and 164 seems to plainly and directly condemn those who do not believe that the Trinity doctrine should be a part of our official Fundamental Beliefs.

Here is the statement from Acts of the Apostles:

God has made His church on the earth a channel of light, and through it He communicates His purposes and His will. He does not give to one of His servants an experience independent of and contrary to the experience of the church itself. Neither does He give one man a knowledge of His will for the entire church while the church—Christ's body—is left in darkness. In His providence He places His servants in close connection with His church in order that they may have less confidence in themselves and greater confidence in others whom He is leading out to advance His work.<sup>1</sup>

Let me share with you my understanding of this statement. I see this statement clearly applying to individuals who bring to the church what they might consider new light—such as feast keeping or perhaps knowledge regarding the reapplication of time prophecies. But when it comes to the doctrine of God, it cannot be considered advanced knowledge if what is being presented is a position that the church held for 130 years. I simply believe in the understanding of the doctrine of God as the church held it up until 1980. I chose to not accept the new light of the Trinity doctrine because it did not meet the required standard that is stipulated in GC 595. There is not a plain or explicit “Thus saith the Lord” to support this new doctrine. For the past forty-two years, no one has yet been able to bring forth a plain statement from the Bible or the Spirit of Prophecy that declares that the one God of the Bible is a composite of three Persons.

At the very beginning of this movement, God gave His church an understanding of the doctrine of God. The Spirit of Prophecy affirmed this understanding—which the church then unitedly presented before the world. Although there were changes in wording over time, our presentation of the doctrine of God remained non-Trinitarian up to 1980. Yes, in 1931, we inserted the word “Trinity,” but it was simply a synonym for the word “Godhead.”

Continuing with AA 163:

There have ever been in the church those who are constantly inclined toward individual independence. They seem unable to realize that independence of spirit is liable to lead the

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1. Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 163.

human agent to have too much confidence in himself and to trust in his own judgment rather than to respect the counsel and highly esteem the judgment of his brethren, especially of those in the offices that God has appointed for the leadership of His people. God has invested His church with special authority and power which no one can be justified in disregarding and despising, for he who does this despises the voice of God.<sup>2</sup>

The voice of God spoke at the very inception of our movement. Our pillar doctrines were established at the beginning of this movement. According to Ellen White, the personality of God was one of the pillars.<sup>3</sup> To undermine or change this pillar would demonstrate a failure to “respect the counsel and highly esteem the judgment of his brethren, especially of those in the offices that God has appointed for the leadership of His people.” Those who brought in the Trinity doctrine disregarded a pillar doctrine that was given to us by God. Those who did this “despised the voice of God.” They chose to introduce a new teaching on the personality of God—a teaching that replaced a view held by the church for over a century.

Here is the rest of this important statement:

Those who are inclined to regard their individual judgment as supreme are in grave peril. It is Satan’s studied effort to separate such ones from those who are channels of light, through whom God has wrought to build up and extend His work in the earth. To neglect or despise those whom God has appointed to bear the responsibilities of leadership in connection with the advancement of the truth, is to reject the means that He has ordained for the help, encouragement, and strength of His people. For any worker in the Lord’s cause to pass these by, and to think that his light must come through no other channel than directly from God, is to place himself in a position where he is liable to be deceived by the enemy and overthrown. The Lord in His wisdom has arranged that by means of the close relationship that should be maintained by all believers, Christian shall be united to Christian and church to church. Thus the human instrumentality will be enabled to co-operate with the divine. Every agency will be subordinate to the Holy Spirit, and all the believers will be united in an organized and well-directed effort to give to the world the glad tidings of the grace of God.<sup>4</sup>

Over time, a teaching on the doctrine of God that did not meet the litmus test of GC 595 was inserted into our Fundamental Beliefs as FB#2. The doctrine of God that we held before 1980 met the test of GC 595. In other words, the Bible verses that were associated with this fundamental belief clearly supported the concepts that were presented in the statements. This is no longer the case.

Because the new view—which is based upon theological reasoning—is being exalted above the old view—which was based upon God’s Holy Word— “divisions and dissension” have erupted in our church just as Ellen White said would happen:

In the professedly Christian world many turn away from the plain teachings of the Bible and build up a creed from human speculation.... If the professed followers of Christ would accept God’s standard, it would bring them into unity; but **so long as human wisdom is exalted above His Holy Word, there will be divisions and dissension.**<sup>5</sup>

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2. Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 163, 164.

3. Ellen G. White, MR 760 9.5.

4. Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 164.

5. Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 124.

Unity in God's church will never be achieved by forcing people to accept FB#2 through coercion, threats of punishment, or mandates. Firing pastors and disfellowshipping members will not bring unity. Only by returning to beliefs that are supported by a plain "Thus saith the Lord" can true unity be achieved.

The Trinity doctrine has spawned some fantastic speculations. You may have seen this popular illustration of how we should understand God: The one God of the Bible is like an egg, we are told. They say that the Father is like the yolk, the Son is like the egg white, and the Holy Spirit is like the eggshell (<https://youtu.be/IsxNZjABa38>). This video clip was presented for some time on the official website of our church. No one has been able to show from the Bible clear support for the teaching that God is like an egg. Teaching that the God of the Bible can be compared to a chicken egg would qualify as "new light" because there is nothing in the Bible that even comes close to this novel concept. Ellen White comments on illustrating God in this way:

"The Father is like the dew, **invisible vapor**; the Son is like the dew gathered in beauteous form; the Spirit is like the dew fallen to the seat of life." Another representation: "The Father is like the **invisible vapor**; the Son is like the leaden cloud; the Spirit is rain fallen and working in refreshing power." **All these spiritualistic representations are simply nothingness.** They are imperfect, untrue. They weaken and diminish the Majesty which no earthly likeness can be compared to. **God cannot be compared with the things His hands have made.**<sup>6</sup>

Comparing God to water in its various forms is an untrue spiritualistic representation. You will find a video entitled, "Who is God?"<sup>7</sup> on the official YouTube Channel of the Seventh-day Adventist World Church. In this video, Ted Wilson compares God to water. He says that just as water has three forms—liquid, ice, and vapor—so the one God of the Bible is three different Persons. These false ideas about God arise from the new Trinity doctrine that was introduced into our church in 1980. The Trinity doctrine teaches us that God is no longer a Person; rather, He is one divine Trinitarian being composed of three Persons. This is true whether it be a Catholic, Protestant, or Seventh-day Adventist version of the Trinity.

*Acts of the Apostles* pages 163 and 164 provides essential counsel to ensure that all believers work together in "an organized and well-directed effort" to fulfill the task God has given us. And that very principle of gospel order recognizes that the Word of God is above all church legislation:

We are to recognize human government as an ordinance of divine appointment, and teach obedience to it as a sacred duty, **within its legitimate sphere.** But when its claims conflict with the claims of God, we must obey God rather than men. God's word must be recognized as above all human legislation. A "**Thus saith the Lord**" is not to be set aside for a "**Thus saith the church**" or a "Thus saith the state."<sup>8</sup>

If a doctrine or precept does not pass the GC 595 litmus test, it is not to be accepted. When the church officially voted in the Trinity doctrine, it was, in that instance, working outside its legitimate sphere of action because our foundational pillar doctrines were given to this church through divine intervention at the very beginning of this movement and not a pin is to be removed:

The truths that have been substantiated by the manifest working of God are to stand fast. **Let no one presume to move a pin or foundation-stone from the structure.** Those who attempt

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6. Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 614.

7. <https://youtu.be/Lq8c8INv8HI>

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

to undermine the pillars of our faith are among those of whom the Bible says that “in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.”<sup>9</sup>

Let not any man enter upon the work of tearing down the foundations of the truth that has made us what we are. God has led His people forward step by step, though there were pitfalls of error on every side. **Under the wonderful guidance of a plain “Thus saith the Lord,” a truth has been established that has stood the test of trial.**<sup>10</sup>

The church has no authority to add to or subtract from—by majority vote—the foundational pillar doctrines of God’s church. Those who feel compelled to promote the Trinity doctrine in our churches should first reconcile this doctrine with GC 595:

**Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain “Thus saith the Lord” in its support.**<sup>11</sup>

No one in leadership should ignore this statement. Reframing the issue as to why Pastor LeBrun and Pastor Witcombe were terminated with the accusation that we are condemned by AA 163, 164 will not silence the witness of GC 595.

The great error of the Romish Church is found in the fact that the Bible is interpreted in the light of the opinions of the “fathers.” Their opinions are regarded as infallible, and the dignitaries of the church assume that it is their prerogative to make others believe as they do, and to **use force to compel the conscience.** Those who do not agree with them are pronounced heretics. **But the word of God is not thus to be interpreted. It is to stand on its own eternal merits, to be read as the word of God, to be obeyed as the voice of God, which declares his will to the people. The will and voice of finite man are not to be interpreted as the voice of God.**<sup>12</sup>

According to the writings of Ellen White, the voice of the church being the voice of God is only related to operational and missional issues in connection with the advancement of the truth. I like how Ken LeBrun says this in his book, *Not A Mystery*, page 60:

The General Conference is responsible for making decisions as to how the work is to be carried forward. Its quinquennial Session is the voice of God in regard to the execution of our mission. It establishes the policies that direct our united efforts. But I haven’t found a single inspired statement that says the church is authorized to formulate doctrine. That job belongs only to God. **“He Himself has taught us what is truth.”**<sup>13</sup> He has plainly told us everything we need to know about Him. Our task is simply to read and believe what He has said.<sup>14</sup>

The General Conference in session has never been authorized by God to change—by majority vote—any of the pillar doctrines that God Himself established in this church at its very inception. Because of these facts, the vote of the majority for the Trinity doctrine in 1980 had nothing to do with the voice of God. Those who do not accept this doctrine are not in violation of the principles of unity brought out in *Acts of the Apostles* pages 163, 164.

I believe that I have made a very good case for the right of any Seventh-day Adventist pastor or

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9. Ellen G. White, *Bible Training School*, March 1, 1915, par. 4.

10. Ellen G. White, Ms62-1905.12.

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

12. Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, September 11, 1894.

13. Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, Book One, p. 161.

14. *Not a Mystery*, p. 60.

member to affirm the official pre-1980 statements on the doctrine of God and remain in good standing in our church. As of yet, you have not provided a rational case for insisting that I affirm a doctrine that does not have a plain “Thus saith the Lord” in its support. You have yet to show me from the Bible or the Spirit of Prophecy wherein I err from Bible truth. To be fired is a very serious consequence that should be reserved for those who *clearly apostatize from Bible truth*. Where is it stated in the NAD Working Policy that a pastor must blindly parrot the scholars’ assumption that one God is three Persons and is disallowed from affirming the biblically-based pre-1980 official statements on the doctrine of God? So that I and the many members from around the world who are looking on can have clarification, please provide a clear explanation from the NAD Working Policy and from Inspiration that justifies the action you have taken regarding my employment. Until I have written evidence supporting the idea that I have apostatized from biblical truth, I can only conclude that I was terminated without just cause.

Trusting that you will prayerfully consider these thoughts,

John Witcombe

P.S. Attached is a document entitled “The Trinity Doctrine and the National Sunday Law” that explains why this issue of the Trinity is so vital to God’s church today (see *One God, One Church*, Appendix G).

cc: Elder Ted Wilson, General Conference President  
Elder Ramon Canals, GC Ministerial Director  
Elder César De León, NPUC Ministerial Director  
Elder Ivan Williams, NAD Ministerial Director

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November 9, 2022

Ramon Canals, General Conference Ministerial Director  
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists  
12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904

Dear Ramon,

The following is a final appeal that I would like to submit to the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA Church). I am going to first point out several facts, and then draw a conclusion.

The SDA Church does not have an official creed other than the Bible. But we do have an official listing of 28 Fundamental Beliefs that an employee of the church is expected to affirm as a condition of employment.

Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church’s

understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture.<sup>15</sup>

It is a fact that the SDA Church officially recognizes the authority of the prophetic ministry of Ellen White and has made this recognition a part of the 28 Fundamental Beliefs.

### **BELIEF 18: THE GIFT OF PROPHECY**

The Scriptures testify that one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and we believe it was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. **Her writings speak with prophetic authority and provide comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction to the church.** They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. (Num. 12:6; 2 Chron. 20:20; Amos 3:7; Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14-21; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 12:17; 19:10; 22:8, 9.)<sup>16</sup>

While keeping the foregoing fact in mind, I want to now present another fact. From 1872 through 1979, in the official, published documents of the SDA Church, we presented a position on the doctrine of God that was simply and plainly worded and biblically based. Here is how we stated this doctrine in 1872:

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

II – That there is one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Eternal Father, the one by whom God created all things, and by whom they do consist....<sup>17</sup>

In 1980, the SDA Church modified its position on the doctrine of God by introducing a complicated and mysterious concept—*one God is three Persons*, with this unity of three Persons being identified with singular pronouns “**He**” and “**His**,” rather than plural pronouns “**They**” and “**Their**.”

### **BELIEF 2: THE TRINITY**

**There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three coeternal Persons.** God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. **He** [referring to this one God who is in some mysterious way all three Persons] is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through **His** self-revelation. God, who is love, is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation. (Gen. 1:26; Deut. 6:4; Isa. 6:8; Matt. 28:19; John 3:16 2 Cor. 1:21, 22; 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2.)<sup>18</sup>

The use of “**He**” and “**His**” in FB#2 goes contrary to the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, which always use plural pronouns when referring to more than one member of the heavenly trio. Moreover, Ellen White **plainly** tells us that God is a singular person, not a plurality of persons as FB#2 presents.

From my girlhood I have been given **plain** instruction that **God is a person**, and that Christ is “the express image of **His person**.” [Hebrews 1:3.]<sup>19</sup>

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15. [adventist.org/beliefs](http://adventist.org/beliefs)

16. [adventist.org/gift-of-prophecy](http://adventist.org/gift-of-prophecy) (emphases supplied in all quotations).

17. <https://tinyurl.com/mrxu3yvj>

18. [adventist.org/trinity](http://adventist.org/trinity) (bracketed words supplied).

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



In addition, the use of personal singular pronouns (He and His) in FB#2 to refer collectively to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit would logically and grammatically make the heavenly trio **one in person**, which is also out of harmony with the Spirit of Prophecy.

The unity that exists between Christ and His disciples does not destroy the personality of either. **They are one in purpose, in mind, in character, but not in person. It is thus that God and Christ are one.**<sup>20</sup>

When the SDA Church voted in this new position on the doctrine of God (*one God is three Persons* who is identified as a “He” and “His”), they introduced significant internal dissonance into this official document—the 28 Fundamental Beliefs. Employees are required to affirm the fundamental beliefs of the SDA Church which are expressed in the 28 Fundamental Beliefs. But it was logically impossible for me, as an employee of the church, to affirm both Belief #18 and Belief #2, which are at odds with each other. These 28 Fundamental Beliefs function as a part of the written personnel policy for employees. But by introducing this new Fundamental Belief (FB#2), the SDA Church materially violated an express provision of its own written personnel policy that had previously required adherence to belief in the prophetic authority and instruction of Ellen White’s writings. It was impossible for me to affirm both of these Fundamental Beliefs at the same time. Let me explain.

FB#18 requires me to accept the instruction written by Ellen White, which is given with prophetic authority. In the book *The Great Controversy*, a book that the SDA Church widely distributes and believes was inspired by God, Ellen White wrote:

**Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain “Thus saith the Lord” in its support.**<sup>21</sup>

Compliance with FB#18 requires me to heed the prophetic authority and instruction of Ellen White, whose authoritative instruction in GC 595 requires me to not accept any doctrine or precept that does not have a plain or explicit “Thus saith the Lord” in its support. The current wording of FB#2 presents a doctrine that, according to our own SDA Church scholars, has no plain or explicit “Thus saith the Lord” in its support.

Conscientious pastors and members alike, who accept the prophetic authority of Ellen White and are committed to obeying the written instruction found in GC 595, are not able to accept a doctrine or precept that is founded upon assumptions rather than a plain “Thus saith the Lord.”

This significant internal dissonance—this material violation in the provision of the employer’s own written personnel policy (of which the 28 Fundamental Beliefs are a part) placed me, as an employee of the SDA Church, in an impossible situation. If I affirmed the present wording of FB#2, I would have to deny FB#18. For the past 30 years of employment in the SDA Church, I have chosen to affirm FB#18, which required me to not affirm the wording of FB#2. Instead of affirming the wording of FB#2, I, instead, affirmed all the official statements on the doctrine of God that the SDA Church published from 1872 up through 1979. No employee of the SDA Church, prior to 1980, had ever been accused of apostasy or significant dissidence for affirming these official statements, so I believed that I would be safe from being terminated from employment for choosing FB#18 over FB#2.

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20. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 269.

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

But on October 5, 2022, I was terminated (effective immediately) from employment, after 30 years and 9 days of serving the SDA Church, for failing to affirm the specific wording of FB#2. Here is the Montana SDA Conference's probable justification for my termination (as of yet, I have received nothing in writing, stating exactly why I was fired):

### **NAD Working Policy**

**L 60 20 Reasons for Discipline of Ministers**—Discipline shall be administered to an ordained/licensed/commissioned minister in the following circumstances:

**2. Apostasy**—In the case of apostasy whereby the minister falls away to the world, or identifies with, or gives continuing support to, any activity subversive to the denomination, and/or persistently refuses to recognize properly constituted church authority or to submit to the order and discipline of the Church, he/she has, by such disloyalty, proven unworthy of a place or part in the gospel ministry of this Church.

**3. Dissidence**—**Discipline may also be administered in the case of a minister who openly expresses significant dissidence regarding the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.** Continued and unrepentant dissidence may eventually be seen by the Church to be apostasy and identified as such by the minister's administrative organization after counseling with the next larger organization.

Incidentally, the SDA Church has been inconsistent in its application of L 60 20—Reasons for Discipline of Ministers. I know of pastors today who do not affirm FB#24 (Heavenly Sanctuary) and yet they have not been terminated. I have heard of professors in our universities who don't fully affirm FB#6 (Creation) and yet, they, too, have not been terminated.

I conclude from the above facts that I was unjustly terminated by the Montana Conference. I would like to request that the denomination reverse the decision to terminate my employment and expunge the fact that I was fired from my service record. I would like for all conscientious employees and members alike to be considered in good standing if they are convicted that GC 595 prevents them from affirming the assumption contained in FB#2 that states that *one God is three Persons*. No employee or church member should ever be punished for obeying the voice of God to their conscience that required them to choose FB#18 over FB#2. If employees and church members can affirm any of the official statements on the doctrine of God published before 1980, that affirmation should be acceptable to the church.

John Witcombe

cc: Elder Ted Wilson, General Conference President  
Elder Ken Norton, Montana Conference President  
Elder César De León, NPUC Ministerial Director  
Elder Ivan Williams, NAD Ministerial Director