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Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

UNION WITH CHRIST IN THE WRITINGS OF ELLEN G. WHITE

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

By
Katrina B. Blue
December 2015

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ABSTRACT

UNION WITH CHRIST IN THE WRITINGS OF ELLEN G. WHITE

by

Katrina B. Blue

Advisor: Denis Fortin

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: UNION WITH CHRIST IN THE WRITINGS OF ELLEN G. WHITE

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Building on the work of nineteenth-century theologian Augustus Strong, five historical approaches to union with Christ identified by Bruce Demarest in the late twentieth century include: an ontological union, a sacramental union, a covenantal union, a moral or filial union and an experiential union. Given the identification of multiple approaches to union with Christ, my dissertation attempts to clarify Ellen G. White's concept of union with Christ using Demarest's categories as an evaluation tool. I traced the development of her writings on union with Christ from 1860 to 1898 to ask whether White's approach is best described as an ontological, sacramental, covenantal, moral or filial or experiential union. While elements of some of the approaches Demarest identified are evident in White's writings, such as the need for believers to experience Christ for themselves, no one category fits White's approach exclusively.

White's approach can best be described using her own language. Union with Christ is a spiritual, vital, heart, mystical, indissoluble, moral union that connects repentant sinners to Christ and other believers. Her key metaphors used to describe the nature of this relationship are the vine and the branches, the mystic ladder and the golden chain. The vine and the branches explain how believers are intimately connected to Christ, receiving moral and spiritual power through the Holy Spirit who makes Christ present within. The mystic ladder illustrates Christ's incarnation that makes union with Him possible. White also used the mystic ladder to describe the progressive nature of sanctification, ascending the ladder by faith and perseverance. The golden chain illustrates the love of the Father poured into the hearts of believers. For White, Christ metaphorically is the true vine, the mystic ladder and the golden chain. Believers partake of the divine nature and by exercising faith in Christ, become one with God.

In my conclusion, I answered the following additional questions in relation to White's writings: What is union with Christ? What is the nature of union with Christ? How is it formed? How is it maintained? What are its consequences? In brief, union with Christ is a believer's free will, spiritual relationship with Christ. It is formed by repentance and faith and is maintained by living, active faith. Engaging in spiritual disciplines, may strengthen a believer's union with Christ through prayer and Scripture reading, the daily surrender of the will, engaging with others and faith in Christ. Its consequences are multiple resulting in a transformed life and character. They include justification, sanctification, obedience and participation in the mission of Christ to redeem humanity. Christ's goal is to reunite the inhabitants of heaven and earth by an indissoluble tie through a vital, spiritual relationship with Himself and the Godhead.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Problem

Union with Christ is an important idea in the history of Christianity. Various Christian authors and theologians have been writing about union with Christ since the period of the early church. It was Gregory of Nazianzus, who first coined the phrase *unio cum Christo* in the fourth century.¹ Yet the idea was expressed earlier in the writings of the Church Fathers who wrestled with what it means to become one with God, based on the words of Jesus in John 17, “that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us.”² In the New Testament epistles the idea of a union between God and humans was expressed in Paul’s *in Christ* motif and its

¹ Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov, eds., *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, vol. 1 (*Princeton Theological Monographs*) (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2006), 1. The Latin word *unio* means one. The phrase *union cum Christo* simply means ‘one with Christ.’ The phrase *unio cum Christo* is translated into English as ‘union with Christ.’ Gregory Nazianzus wrote, “Let us become like Christ, since Christ became like us. Let us become God’s for His sake, since He for ours became Man.” *Orations of Gregory of Nazianzus: On Easter and His Reluctance*, trans. Charles E. Browne and James E. Swallow vol. 7, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1894), Sec. V.

² John 17:21a. The goal of the divine-human relationship is to become one with Christ, to live in a love relationship with the Trinitarian God according to Donald Fairbairn. Salvation is more than the individual’s forgiveness of sins made possible through Christ’s death, resurrection and atonement. It includes being united to Christ by the Holy Spirit to share in the love relationship that Christ has with the Father and the Spirit. Donald Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity: An Introduction to Theology with the Help of the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 185, 193.

counterpart, *Christ in you*,³ while Peter explained that believers become partakers of the divine nature.⁴

What does it mean to be in union with Christ? As the early church grappled with Christology, they also explored what it means for believers to partake of the divine nature. This was linked closely to the incarnation and the nature of Christ. Several early church writers adopted the language of deification (Greek, *theosis*) to describe this

³ Emphasis supplied. The topic of union with Christ in Paul's writings rose to prominence in the twentieth century. Constantine Campbell has identified sixteen scholars that have made a major contribution to the discussion about union with Christ in Pauline scholarship. Adolf Deissmann first brought 'in Christ' to centre stage in twentieth century New Testament Scholarship describing union with Christ as *Christ mysticism* which he interpreted to mean fellowship and intimacy with Christ. Adolf Deissmann, *Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History* (2nd ed.; trans. William E. Wilson; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1926). While this work is not going to discuss the contributions of twentieth century New Testament Pauline scholarship on the topic of union with Christ; it is worth noting the following significant works identified by Campbell: Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus* (trans. John E. Steely; Nashville: Abingdon, 1970); Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (trans. William Montgomery; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (trans. Kendrick Grobel; London: SCM, 1952); John Murray, *Redemption—Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955); Alfred Wikenhauser, *Pauline Mysticism: Christ in the Mystical Teaching of St. Paul* (trans. Joseph Cuninghame; Freiburg: Herder and Herder, 1960); Fritz Neugebauer, 'Das paulinische "in Christo,"' *New Testament Studies* 4 (1957-58): 124-38; Michel Bouttier, *Christianity According to Paul* (trans. F. Clarke; London: SCM, 1966); Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/3.2: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* (ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance; trans. G. W. Bromiley; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1962); Robert C. Tannehill, *Dying and Rising with Christ: A Study in Pauline Theology* (1967; rep. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006); W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (3rd ed.; London: SPCK, 1970); E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977); Richard B. Gaffin, *The Centrality of the Resurrection: A Study in Paul's Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978); James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007); Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009). See Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

⁴ See 2 Peter 1:4.

process of partaking of the nature of Christ.⁵ Athanasius described the deification of believers through Christ the Word who “was made man so that we might be made God.”⁶ Irenaeus of Lyons expressed it in this manner, “following the only true and steadfast Teacher, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself.”⁷ Clement of Alexandria believed humans would not merely become like Christ, they would become a ‘god’ while still in the flesh.⁸ Becoming partakers of the divine nature meant becoming in some literal sense divine.⁹

⁵ For example, Cyril of Alexandria wrote “we who are deemed worthy to participate in Christ through faith are made ‘partakers of the divine nature’ (2 Pet. 1:4) and are said to be born of God. We are therefore called gods, not simply by grace because we are winging our way towards the glory that transcends us, but because we already have God dwelling and abiding within us, in accordance with the prophetic text ‘I will live in them and move among them’.” Norman Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria, The Early Church Fathers* (London: Routledge, 2000), 103.

⁶ Athanasius (*De Inc* 54.3). “If, by a partakability of the Spirit we shall become partakers of the divine nature, . . . also those who are in him are made divine. But then if he makes man divine, it is not dubious to say his nature is of God.” (*Ad Serap* 1.24).

⁷ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book V, Preface. Irenaeus also wrote, “For we cast blame upon [God], because we have not been made gods from the beginning, but at first merely men, then at length gods; although God has adopted this course out of His pure benevolence, that no one may impute to Him invidiousness or grudgingness he declares, “I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are sons of the Most High.” Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4.38.

⁸ Clement of Alexandria wrote, “If a man shall know himself, he shall know God, and knowing God shall be made like to him. . . . The man with whom the Logos dwells. . . is made like to God. . . and that man *becomes* God, for God wishes it.” [*Pad.* iii, 1, 1, and 5] Clement further wrote that this action of becoming god happens even in this present human life. “As Homer makes men poets, Crobylus cooks, and Plato philosophers; “so he who obeys the Lord and follows the prophecy given through him, is fully perfected after the likeness of his Teacher, and thus becomes a god while still moving about in the flesh.” T. R. Glover, *Conflict of the Religions in the Early Roman Empire* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2003), 302.

⁹ Clement of Alexandria (150-215) wrote, “that man with whom the Word dwells does not alter himself, does not get himself up: he has the form which is of the Word; he is made like to God; he is beautiful; he does not ornament himself: his is beauty, the true beauty, for it is God; and that man becomes God, since God so wills. Heraclitus, then, rightly said, “Men are gods, and gods are men.” For the Word Himself is the manifest mystery: God in man, and man God.” Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, Book III, Chapter 1.

The language of how believers become one with God expanded over the centuries and the concept of union with Christ developed into several streams of thought. In Roman Catholicism, the way to union with Christ was through participation in the sacraments with baptism being the primary means by which an infant became joined to the body of Christ and continued through participation in the Eucharist.¹⁰ In the mystical tradition, union with Christ was considered the highest experience between the soul and God. Direct contact was made through the use of spiritual disciplines, in particular, the practice of contemplative or centering prayer.¹¹ While the Eastern Orthodox defined union with God as *theosis* or divinization based on participation in God's energies, but not His person *per se*.¹²

In the Western theological tradition beginning with Augustine (354-430), union with Christ was tied to the church, in particular the sacraments. Believers join the body of

¹⁰ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, part 1, section 2, chapter 2, article 3, paragraph 1, 460, states, "The Word became flesh to make us 'partakers of the divine nature': For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God." "For the Son of God became man so that we might become God." "The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods." (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Opusc.* 57, 1-4.)

¹¹ According to Andrew Louth the roots of the Christian mystical tradition formed in the Patristic period have their source in the Platonic worldview. Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1. See also Sandra M. Schneiders, "Approaches to the Study of Christian Spirituality," in Arthur Holder, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 23.

¹² Dionysius defined *theosis* as "the attaining of likeness to God and union with Him so far as possible. (*EH*, 1.3, 376A)." Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition (Oxford Early Christian Studies)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 261. This dissertation will not discuss the doctrine of *theosis* nor trace its development in Eastern Orthodox Christianity but will limit this brief overview to its development in the Western theological tradition as a background to discussing the writings of Ellen White on union with Christ.

Christ in baptism and partake of His body and blood through the Eucharist to become one with Christ through His body, the church, presided over by a priest.¹³ Central to Roman Catholic worship and spirituality was the performance of the sacraments as a means of grace infused into the soul of the recipient making spiritual life possible.¹⁴ Partaking of the divine nature was viewed as an act of God's grace. Thomas Aquinas wrote, "It is impossible that any creature should cause grace. For it is as necessary that God alone should deify, bestowing a partaking of the Divine Nature by a participated likeness."¹⁵ Becoming one with Christ and partaking of His divine nature was conceived as an act of God caused by grace toward those who participate in the sacraments.

The mystical tradition that emerged within Roman Catholicism in the form of monasticism emphasized union with God as the goal of spiritual life through the exercise of strict ascetic practices—sometimes known as the counsels of perfection. Union with Christ, it was believed, is granted by God to few people as attested by the great mystic figures, which included women as well as men.¹⁶ An example of the approach to union

¹³ Augustine, *Sermon 227*: "I had promised those of you who have just been baptized a sermon to explain the sacrament of the Lord's table, which you can see right now, and which you shared in last night. You ought to know what you have received, what you are about to receive, what you ought to receive every day. This bread which you see on the altar, sanctified by the word of God, is the Body of Christ. The cup, or rather its contents sanctified by God's word, is the Blood of Christ. If you have received them in a worthy state, you are what you have received. You see, the apostle says, *We, being many, are one loaf, one body* (1 Cor 10:17). That's how he explained the sacrament of the Lord's table; one loaf, one body, is what we all are, many though we be."

¹⁴ Pierre-Marie Gy, "Liturgy and Spirituality ii: Sacraments and Liturgy in Latin Christianity," trans. Craig McKee in Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff, eds. *Christian Spirituality I: Origins to the Twelfth Century*. Vol. 16 of *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest* (London; Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), 370.

¹⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Part I-II.112.1 (Oxford: Benedictine Classics, 2012).

¹⁶ Mystic figures include such persons as Hildegard of Bingen, Catherine of Siena,

with Christ in the mystical tradition is Albert the Great's *On Union with God*,¹⁷ produced in the thirteenth century.¹⁸ Union with God required going into oneself, into darkness to connect to God within.¹⁹

Thy soul will enter into the darkness of the spirit, and will advance further and penetrate more deeply into itself. Thou wilt by this means attain more speedily unto the beholding in a dark manner of the Trinity in Unity, and Unity in Trinity, in Christ Jesus, in proportion as thy effort is more inward; and the greater is thy charity, the more precious the fruit thou wilt reap. For the highest, in spiritual things, is ever that which is most interior. Grow not weary, therefore, and rest not from thy efforts until thou hast received some earnest or foretaste of the fullness of joy that awaits thee, and has obtained some first-fruits of the Divine sweetness and delights. Cease not in thy pursuit till thou shalt behold "the God of gods in Sion."²⁰

Attaining union with God required a full detachment from self and worldly things. It also involved a separation of the soul from the flesh, where the body was regarded as something alien to the soul, which becomes lost in God.²¹

Historically, some Christian mystics claimed to experience a direct unmediated connection with God. This union takes place in the soul, which was believed to be immortal, through prayer practices. These persons claimed to enter a three-stage journey starting with purification or purgation (the way of beginners); followed by illumination (the way of proficients); to mystical union and becoming one with God (the way of

Mechthild of Magdeburg, Angela of Foligno, Bernard of Clairvaux, Meister Eckhart and Johannes Tauler.

¹⁷ Albert the Great, *On Union with God* (1911; repr., Fernham, Farringdon, Oxon: Llanerch Press, 1991). The original date of this work is unknown and its authorship has been contested.

¹⁸ Albert draws from the *De Spiritu et Anima*, a work from the middle ages of uncertain authorship.

¹⁹ Albert the Great, *On Union with God*, 45, 47-49.

²⁰ Albert the Great, *On Union with God*, 47-49.

²¹ Albert the Great, *On Union with God*, 68.

perfection).²² Denying matter as redeemable in a body-soul dualism, mystics sought to achieve union with God through absorption of their immortal souls into the divine by spiritual exercises.²³ This method of attaining union with Christ bypasses the church, the priesthood and its sacraments as an alternate path to God.

In the late medieval period popular spirituality developed in parallel to the practices of the Roman Catholic Church.²⁴ The privatization of religion and the practice of mysticism were regarded with suspicion by the Church as they bypassed the sacraments.²⁵ In this environment of suspicion, mystics were often accused of heresy.

²² Three stages to mystical union were named by Pseudo-Dionysius in the fifth century. The three-fold way of the mystic referred to a detailed system of various forms of prayer involving meditation and contemplation. Purgation begins once a person is converted and requires ascetic practices to overcome the world, the self/flesh, and the devil. The breaking of the human will and complete surrender to God are the goals of purgation involving detachment from the world, self and mortification, or the putting to death of anything that would hinder the believer from following Jesus. Illumination continues the purification by changing perceptions about God and the world and replacing these with an increasing awareness of God's presence. It also involves the spiritual disciplines, including meditation and contemplation. The third stage of union leads believers into the habitual sense of God's presence and is sometimes called 'spiritual marriage' or 'mystical marriage'. It is also considered the highest communion with God, or communion with God the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. During this stage believers may experience rapture, ecstasy and other non-bodily, non-mental experiences. Tom Schwanda, "Threefold Way," in Glen Scorgie, gen. ed., *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 798, 799.

²³ E. J. Tinsley, "Mysticism and Ethics," in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, James F. Childress and John Macquarrie, eds. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 409, 410. Christian mysticism follows Greek mysticism in many ways including the idea that only the soul can see God and become one with God. Two distinct interpretations within Roman Catholicism are identified by Tom Schwanda: the first is the school of Bonaventura who understand the stages of purification to be different but simultaneous parts of sanctification; the later approach, most notably expounded by Teresa of Avila, views the stages toward union as distinct and progressive with union with Christ as the final stage. See Schwanda, "Threefold Way," 799.

²⁴ González noted that mystical piety reached a high toward the end of the Middle Ages as an alternative path to union with God. Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity: The Reformation to the Present Day*, Vol. 2 (New York: HarperCollins, 1985), 17.

²⁵ Adriaan H. Bredero, *Christendom and Christianity in the Middle Ages: The Relations Between Religion, Church, and Society*, trans. Reinder Bruinsma (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans,

The French Beguine Marguerite Porete (1250-1310), author of *The Mirror of Simple Souls* was condemned by the Church for spreading her teachings about the simple soul who is in union with God and seeks to do His will only.²⁶ One of the accusations leveled against Porete was that she wrote in Old French rather than Latin making it accessible to educated lay people. Though her work won the approval of three Church theologians she was imprisoned, tried, and burned at the stake in Paris in 1310.²⁷ The fourteenth century became referred to as the century of “popular mysticism” as educated laity eagerly read the works of the mystics in the vernacular.²⁸

During the Protestant Reformation union with Christ received renewed attention. Martin Luther’s (1483-1596) break with Rome included a break with Roman Catholic piety.²⁹ Rejecting the idea that mysticism as practiced in monasticism is a way for believers to experience salvation, Luther, argued that the will is in bondage to sin and cannot fulfill the law or perform good works unless Christ is received by faith.³⁰

1994), 42.

²⁶ The date of publication is unknown but sometime between 1296 and 1306 her writings were publically burned. She is noted to have had a great influence on Meister Eckhart and their works show a great affinity. See Maria Lichtmann, “Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart: The Mirror for Simple Souls Mirrored,” unpublished paper, accessed December 1, 2014, http://www.academia.edu/862355/Marguerite_Porete_and_Meister_Eckhardt_The_Mirror_for_Simple_Souls_Mirrored.

²⁷ Porete challenged the view that the soul is dependent on fastings, prayer, Masses and sermons to achieve union with God. Such views bind God to the sacraments. Individuals can find God outside of churches and monasteries through union with the Divine will. Lichtmann, “Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart: The Mirror for Simple Souls Mirrored,” 17.

²⁸ Bredero, *Christendom and Christianity*, 45. Representatives of this popular mysticism include Jan van Ruysbroeck, Beatrice of Nazareth, Hadewijch and Jan van Leeuwen.

²⁹ R. Ward Holder, *Crisis and Renewal: The Era of the Reformations* (Westminster History of Christian Thought) (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 86.

³⁰ Tuomo Mannermaa pointed out that Luther believed Christ is ontologically present to the believer through faith. Participation in God called “divinization” or deification in the early

Following Augustine, he believed the sinner has a total inability to do God's will.³¹ In *The Freedom of a Christian*, Luther expressed the idea that no works a person can do, including contemplation and mysticism, can help with salvation; only one thing is necessary, and that is the Word of God received into the heart by faith.³² All spiritual blessings come to the inner man by the presence of God's word in the soul. Faith is a power, a gift from God which leads to the union of the soul with Christ and results in freedom from sin, security against eternal death, righteousness, life and salvation.³³

Luther did not reject mysticism entirely. German mysticism, particularly the writings of Johann Tauler and a book by an anonymous author Luther had published in 1516 and 1518 as *Theologia Deutsch* influenced his spirituality.³⁴ Luther warned that one

church and in the Orthodox Church, has been misunderstood by Protestants. Mannermaa developed the idea that Luther's concept of justification by faith is analogous to the notion of divinization and provides a point of theological contact between the Orthodox faith and the Lutheran church. The Lutheran Formula of Concord rejected the idea that God in godself, that is, His essence does not dwell in Christians in addition to His gifts. According to Mannermaa, Luther did not separate the person of Christ from his work in us. "*Christ himself*, both his person and his work, *is* the Christian righteousness, that is, the "righteousness of faith." Justification and the real presence of God in faith are present to the believer. "Christ—and therefore also *his entire person and work*—is really and truly present in the faith itself." Furthermore, God is present in faith in the fullness of God's essence while "the Spirit of Christ, whose presence is real and ontological" is "a kind of "other subject," "intercedes" for him or her by "sighing" incessantly to God." See Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 2-5, 8, 9.

³¹ The role of the law for Luther was to condemn, it held no other salvific purpose but to point out the sin in the life of the sinner who was led by Christ to receive salvation by faith. Holder, *Crisis and Renewal*, 86.

³² Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," in *Three Treatises* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 279, 281.

³³ Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," 284-286.

³⁴ Luther wrote in the preface, "next to the Bible and St. Augustine, no book has ever come into my hands, where I have learnt, or would wish to learn more of what God, and Christ, and man and all things are..." Susanna Winkworth, *Theologia Germanica: Modern English Edition* (Mesa, AZ: Scriptoria Books, 2010), xix, xx. See also Frank C. Senn, *Protestant Spiritual Traditions* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 18.

should read the mystics with discernment, but he declared that he preferred the writings of the mystics and the Bible to the scholastics as they were rooted in doctrines of piety and not academic or theoretical speculation.³⁵ According to German mysticism, the goal of life is union with God through dying to self so that God can work out His will in humans.³⁶ If believers are united to Christ, Luther argued, then they have the right to instruct each other in the things of God and to pray for one another to God.³⁷ In this manner, Luther declared all Christians are priests, proposing a lay spirituality.³⁸ However he did not attempt to deny or bypass the important role of the church. “Who wishes to find Christ, must first find the church...the gathering of people believing in Christ. We must hold to this and see how those who believe in Christ live and teach. They certainly have Christ with them, because outside the church of Christ there is no truth, no Christ, no salvation.”³⁹ For Luther, the church still functioned as the center of spirituality and faith through the preaching of the Word of God and the proper administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

Luther’s espousal of the relation between faith, the church, and union with Christ paved the way for John Calvin (1509-1564), drawing upon Augustine, to develop his

³⁵ Bengt R. Hoffman, *Theology of the Heart: The Role of Mysticism in the Theology of Martin Luther* (Minneapolis, MN: Kirk House, 1998), 106.

³⁶ Senn, *Protestant Spiritual Traditions*, 18.

³⁷ Marc Lienhard, “Luther and the Beginnings of the Reformation,” in *Christian Spirituality II: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, eds. Jill Raitt and John Meyendorff, World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest, vol. 2 (New York: The Crossroad, 1987), 277.

³⁸ Lienhard, “Luther and the Beginnings of the Reformation,” 277.

³⁹ Lienhard, “Luther and the Beginnings of the Reformation,” 278.

thought on union with Christ as a spiritual union based on God's foreordained election.⁴⁰ Calvin also reacted to the Roman Catholic Church's teachings and practices over a wide range of issues and his famous *Institutes of the Christian Religion*⁴¹ included union with Christ as an important theme. "I attribute the highest importance to the connection between the head and the members; to the inhabitation of Christ in our hearts; in a word, to the mystical union by which we enjoy Him, so that, being made ours, He makes us partakers of the blessings with which He is furnished."⁴² Calvin believed that God gives us food and good things in life so that we might enjoy them, and he eschewed the ascetic practices of much of Western mystical spirituality.⁴³

A central feature of spiritual life for Calvin was the believer's personal union with Christ and how this spiritual relation affects salvation. "For how does true faith justify unless by uniting us to Christ, so that being made one with him, we may be admitted to a participation in his righteousness."⁴⁴ Calvin expressed it in the following way. He

⁴⁰ Luther wrote, "By faith thou art so glued to Christ that of thee and him there becomes as it were one person, so that with confidence thou canst say: 'I am Christ, — that is, Christ's righteousness, victory, etc., are mine; and Christ in turn can say: 'I am that sinner, — that is, his sins, his death, etc., are mine, because he clings to me and I to him, for we have been joined through faith into one flesh and bone.'" Quoted in Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Union with Christ; A Chapter of Systematic Theology* (1913; repr., Charleston, SC: Nabu Press, 2010), 81.

⁴¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008).

⁴² *Institutes*, Book iii.x.

⁴³ William Bouwsma, "The Spirituality of John Calvin," in J. Raitt, ed., *Christian Spirituality II: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, 320.

⁴⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.17.11, 535. Calvin argued, against the view of Andreas Osiander who had declared that God dwelled within him essentially, that God only dwells in believers spiritually. See *Institutes*, 2.12.6. Calvin argued that union with Christ did not make believers into fourth members of the Godhead rather it is Christ through the power and grace of the Spirit that brings participation in the Godhead. See J. Todd Billings, "John Calvin: United to God through Christ," in *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the*

believed that Christ was to be “grasped and possessed by us in faith” so that believers are reconciled to God and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.⁴⁵ Like Luther, who believed that union with Christ brought spiritual benefits to the believer, Calvin taught that union with Christ brought believers a double grace which he described as a twofold grace that brings with it all the other saving benefits of being in union with Christ.⁴⁶ Put simply, “there is no sanctification without union with Christ.”⁴⁷ Calvin held that it is by faith that the sinner comes into possession of salvation, receives forgiveness of sins, is justified and renewed by the Spirit of God and relies, not on his or her own works, but on the righteousness of Christ which is received by faith.⁴⁸ According to Calvin, believers are joined to Christ “by an indissoluble tie.”⁴⁹

Though central to Calvin’s thinking, union with Christ suffered from neglect with the rise of scholasticism.⁵⁰ While the doctrine of *theosis* has remained central to Eastern

Christian Traditions, ed. Michael J. Christensen and Jeffrey A. Wittung (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 205.

⁴⁵ Richard B. Gaffin, “Justification and Union with Christ (3.11-18),” in *A Theological Guide to Calvin’s Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, ed. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2008), 252.

⁴⁶ Gaffin, “Justification,” 253.

⁴⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.14.4, 505.

⁴⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.11.16.

⁴⁹ Calvin writes, “The heavenly Father has connected his elect with each other, and bound them to himself by an indissoluble tie... in the members of Christ there is a far more excellent display of grace, because those engrafted into him as their head never fail to obtain salvation.” *Institutes*, 3.21.7.

⁵⁰ From the middle of the seventeenth century on union with Christ began its demise in American Reformed theology. William Evans noted that it was Jonathan Edwards and Charles Hodge who were responsible for this division in American Reformed theology, a position that was contrary to Calvin who held the two aspects of union with Christ together: due to the separation of two elements: impartation, an external work of grace versus inner transformation through the work of the Spirit. William B. Evans, *Imputation and Impartation: Union with Christ in American Reformed Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 2. Debates over the nature

Orthodoxy since the Patristic era,⁵¹ attention to union with Christ has waxed and waned in Western theology since the time of the Reformation. According to Robert Letham, from the middle of the seventeenth century on, “This great jewel in the crown of God’s grace has gone into eclipse.”⁵² Yet it has not been entirely ignored. Pietism became a force for personal spirituality. Seventeenth-century English Puritan, Rowland Stedman (ca. 1630?-1673), affirmed the centrality of union with Christ to salvation in his treatise stating, “No union with Jesus, and no communication of life and salvation from Jesus.”⁵³ John Wesley’s (1703-1791) emphasis on entire sanctification received by grace through “faith filled with the energy of love,”⁵⁴ impacted the Keswick movement, beginning in 1875, where union with Christ was viewed as integral to experiential sanctification and

and meaning of union with Christ amongst Reformed theologians have continued in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Robert Letham, *Union with Christ in Scripture, History, and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2011), 2. See also Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 118-39.

⁵¹ This dissertation will not be addressing the doctrine of *theosis*, a major theme in Patristic thought and the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Although Christian writers have drawn upon common themes and texts of Scripture to describe union with Christ and *theosis* respectively, particularly the idea of partaking of the divine nature in 2 Peter 1:4. Being transformed into God-likeness or ‘gods’ or the divine image is not the same as union with Christ. Kharlamov identified deification as a theme, which “intimately touches on human identity and actualization of humanity’s ultimate purpose. It is predominantly an anthropological and soteriological expression of Christian theology.” See Vladimir Kharlamov, *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, ed. Vladimir Kharlamov (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2011), 1.

⁵² Today, union with Christ is hardly mentioned in the pulpit, and until recently, little has been written about it. Letham, *Union with Christ in Scripture, History, and Theology*, 2.

⁵³ Rowland Stedman quoted in Letham, *Union with Christ in Scripture, History, and Theology*, 3. See Stedman, *The Mystical Union of Believers with Christ, or A Treatise Wherein That Great Mystery and Privilege of the Saints Union with the Son of God is Opened* (London: W. R. for Thomas Parkhurst, at the Golden-Bible on London-Bridge, under the gate, 1668), Wing/335:13.

⁵⁴ John Wesley, *Sermon 39-Catholic Spirit*, in *The Wesley Center Online*, accessed June 30, 2014, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-39-catholic-spirit/>.

identification with the risen Christ who indwells believers by faith.⁵⁵ Wesley preferred the language of the “indwelling Christ” living in the heart by faith over union with Christ, which he did not specifically mention in his writings. Yet as Letham has noted, while theologians from various theological traditions have written about union with Christ, there is general silence when it comes to explaining the nature of this relationship.⁵⁶ What is union with Christ? How and when is it formed and maintained?

In the nineteenth century Augustus Strong (1836-1921), a Baptist theologian and contemporary of Ellen White, set forth a doctrine of union with Christ in his *Lectures on Theology* (1876)⁵⁷ and *Systematic Theology* (1886)⁵⁸ under the category of soteriology. Strong was concerned that union with Christ was suffering from neglect in the major theological treatises of his time. Defining it as a union of the soul with Christ, Strong conceived of union with Christ as “a union of life, in which the human spirit, while then most truly possessing its own individuality and personal distinctness, is interpenetrated and energized by the Spirit of Christ, is made inscrutably and indissolubly one with him, and so becomes a member and partaker of that regenerated, believing and justified humanity of which he is the head.”⁵⁹ Strong sought to rescue the doctrine from a false

⁵⁵ See Arthur T. Pierson, *The Keswick Movement in Precept and Practise* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1903).

⁵⁶ Letham, *Union with Christ in Scripture, History, and Theology*, 1.

⁵⁷ Augustus H. Strong, *Lectures on Theology* (Rochester: Press of E. R. Andrews, 1876).

⁵⁸ Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology: A Compendium and Commonplace Book Designed for the Use of Theological Students* (1886) (Rochester: Press of E. R. Andrews, 1886). All references to Strong’s *Systematic Theology* in this dissertation will be based on the 1886 edition unless noted otherwise. Strong’s *Lectures on Theology* are expanded to include notes in his first edition of *Systematic Theology*.

⁵⁹ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 438.

mysticism, which he believed turned many away from understanding its biblical basis. He outlined the scriptural basis of union with Christ, describing its nature and consequences. In addition, Strong mentioned four approaches to union with Christ in the history of Christian thought. First, union with Christ has been conceived as a natural union; second, a moral union; third; a mystical union; and lastly, a sacramental union. According to Strong, these are inadequate. Instead, he employed five figures of speech to describe union with Christ as an organic, vital, spiritual, indissoluble and inscrutable union.⁶⁰

In the twentieth century, theologians in the Reformed tradition, namely Karl Barth, James Buswell, Louis Berkhof, James Boice, Robert Reymond, and Wayne Grudem included a section on the doctrine of union with Christ in their systematic theologies.⁶¹ Following Calvin, Reformed theologians presented union with Christ as part of the federal union God made with the elect in the mind of God according to God's decree in eternity past.⁶² This raises a basic issue. That is, whether union with Christ is based on predestination or free will. Aside from the doctrine of *theosis* in Eastern

⁶⁰ Strong, *Lectures on Theology*, 215, 216.

⁶¹ See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics the Doctrine of Reconciliation: Jesus Christ, the True Witness in Church Dogmatics*, vol. 2 (London: T & T Clark International, 2004); James Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1962), 221. Buswell has a section entitled, 'The Mystical Union'; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978); James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive and Readable Theology* (Master Reference Collection), 2 Sub ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1986); Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of The Christian Faith*, 2d. ed. – rev. and updated (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998); Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Zondervan, 1994).

⁶² Grudem expressed the idea that the elect's fellowship with God in this life all occurred in union with Christ. While Grudem maintained that Christ really and personally indwells the Christian he agreed with Barth that in union with Christ we become "perfectly *like* Christ, but *we do not become Christ*, and we are not absorbed into Christ or lost forever as individuals. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 840, 846.

theology and biblical scholarship on the writings of Paul, Reformed theology has one of the most developed doctrines of union with Christ in Western theology alongside the mystical tradition in Roman Catholicism.⁶³

In the late twentieth century, Baptist theologian, Bruce Demarest in *The Cross and Salvation* (1997) also identified various approaches to the doctrine of union with Christ.⁶⁴ Demarest identified five historical approaches to union with Christ in the history of Christianity. These include union with Christ as: an ontological union, a sacramental union, a covenantal union, a moral or filial union, and an experiential union.⁶⁵ Of the approaches Demarest described, he pointed to experiential union as being the most biblically based, including Strong and Calvin as proponents of this view.⁶⁶ Unique to the work of Strong and Demarest is their attempt to clarify previous approaches to union with Christ in the history of Christianity.

In an era of deep interest in personal spirituality at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Demarest rejects metaphysical mysticism, which he defined as ontological union. He connected the idea of the ontological indwelling of God with the idea that in the mystical tradition the individual is allegedly absorbed into the divine in union with

⁶³ This is perhaps, due to the influence of Calvin's writing on union with Christ as a spiritual union established by God in eternity past. God decided with whom He would form a union with Christ. Humans exercise free will, but they do not exercise the choice to be in union with Christ, which is necessary to salvation.

⁶⁴ Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation (Foundations of Evangelical Theology)* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1997), 313-344. Demarest bases his theological approach to union with Christ on Gal 2:20, "Christ lives in me."

⁶⁵ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 314.

⁶⁶ Demarest argued for a legitimate use of the term *Mystik* where the Christian experiences both communion and communication with God as a practical outcome of union with Christ. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 341-344.

Christ,⁶⁷ a position which Strong also rejected.⁶⁸ Demarest has argued in favor of an authentic Christian mysticism, which he refers to as biblical mysticism as a corrective to what he views as the metaphysical mysticism that can be found in the tradition of the mystics. A narrow view of mysticism has been challenged by Bernard McGinn.⁶⁹ He has

⁶⁷ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 340, 341. Demarest presented the argument that Christians should seek a vital and deep communion with Christ that is based on a relational mysticism with God. He argued for a moral mysticism, based on holiness of life and ethical conduct in union with Christ. He also presented a case for an epistemological mysticism, where believers gain increasing knowledge of God and His truth.

⁶⁸ Some writers have associated “mystical” with the pietist and charismatic traditions. John P. Baker has identified ‘spiritual’ or ‘mystical’ union as being stressed by the mystical, pietist and charismatic traditions in Christianity. He has called spiritual union with Christ a mystical union based on the mystery of the encounter between the spirit of man and the Spirit of Christ. He explained, “It originates in a new birth brought about within a person by the Holy Spirit, and centres thereafter on the hidden life of prayer, meditation (based especially on God’s word from Scripture), contemplation and worship. The object of such spiritual disciplines is to deepen one’s knowledge of the Lord, love-relationship with him and submission of the whole life to him in trust and obedience, knowing that such a submission of love in response to love is the route to true wholeness of spirit and being. Although the Holy Spirit grants various illuminations and experiences on occasion, the Christian must not seek any particular mystical experience for its own sake, nor any special experiences apart from the over-all goals of knowing and delighting in the Lord with his whole being, and of moral conformity to God’s will. The ultimate Christian goal of complete union with the Lord, the unclouded vision of God, has no necessarily ‘ecstatic’ content in the pagan or occult sense at all, although it will totally satisfy the soul; and it does not involve the loss of individual personal identity in any Buddhist-type absorption into the infinite reality or universal consciousness. Those fully renewed in God’s image will enjoy unfettered and unclouded fellowship with him, freed from every delusion of independence which would block the free flow of pure love, truth, trust, co-operative obedience and delight between themselves, their creator and the other creatures.” John P. Baker, “Union with Christ,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer, The Master Reference Collection (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 699-701.

⁶⁹ See Bernard McGinn, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991). McGinn has argued that mysticism needs to be understood contextually as rooted in mystical texts and traditions, not merely experiences, as the primary objects for the study of mysticism. He discussed mysticism in three ways: as an element of religion; as a process or way of life; and, “as an attempt to express a direct consciousness of the presence of God.” Christian mysticism was first expressed by Origen in the third century and was institutionalized in the fourth century with monasticism. The understanding of mysticism as an encounter with God with the absorption of identity where individual personality is lost, he suggests, is too limited. According to this definition of mysticism there are so few mystics in the history of Christianity that he wonders why the term ‘mystical’ was employed so often. He proposed expanding the notion of union with the thought that there are many understandings of

argued that the understanding of mysticism where individual personality is lost in a direct encounter with God is too limited. He has further argued that there needs to be a broader definition and understanding of the meaning of the word “mysticism” or “mystical” that is not limited to union with God and the experiences of the mystics. For Demarest, union with Christ is mystical in the sense that believers experience God based on a loving relationship where both are actively present and communicate with one another.⁷⁰ His argument for an alternative use of the term *Mystik* and his calling for an approach to union with Christ that is biblically based, reveals that there are multiple understandings of the term mysticism.⁷¹

Within the mystical tradition of Roman Catholicism the idea that there are two

union with God held by Christians over the centuries. He also suggested that union with God is not the most central category for understanding mysticism, as union is only one of a host of models or metaphors that mystics have used in their accounts of their experiences. He includes in this category such terms as: contemplation, vision of God, deification, birth of the Word in the soul, ecstasy, radical obedience to the present divine will. He preferred to define the varieties of Christian mysticism by the term “presence.” Therefore, “the mystical element in Christianity is that part of its belief and practices that concerns the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the reaction to what can be described as the immediate or direct presence of God.” There are multiple ways in which encounters with God can be understood. He pointed out that while mystics affirm that their mode of access to God is “radically different from that found in ordinary consciousness” including the usual activities such as prayer, sacraments and other rituals. They believe that God becomes present as they perform these religious activities but not in any direct or immediate fashion. Bernard McGinn, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), xv-xvii.

⁷⁰ A broader issue that is raised here is how Demarest understands the ontology of God, that is, the nature of God’s being. How is God ontologically present to the believer and in the world? While Demarest has called for a legitimate use of the term *Mystik*, is it correct to label one type of mysticism identified by the mystic writers where the self is lost in God, as McGinn has pointed out, as the only way to understand God’s presence? In other words, is Demarest’s definition of ontology too narrow? Although this dissertation is not directly concerned with the question of the ontology of God and how God is present to the believer and in the world, these issues require further exploration and clarification.

⁷¹ Demarest’s interpretation of biblical versus metaphysical mysticism, which he calls ontological union will be presented in chapter 2.

paths to union with Christ has been affirmed throughout its history. According to Dom Cuthbert Butler, it is incorrect to equate union with Christ with the esoteric experiences of the mystics as the idea of contemplation involving the active union of the will with God's will has been recognized in the mystical tradition as a non-mystic way to union with Christ.⁷² This involves the conscious, active prayer of faith leading to union with Christ based upon a complete surrender of the will, and is compatible with the duties of a busy life.⁷³ Passive contemplation, on the other hand, refers to the supernatural, ecstatic, rapture type experiences of the mystics where their intellects and souls are suspended or absorbed into God. The former is open to all Christians according to God's grace, while the latter is extremely rare.⁷⁴

Today, many Christians read the classic works of the mystical tradition in order to gain insight into and help for the practice of personal spirituality.⁷⁵ There has been a growing popular interest in developing one's own personal relationship with God in

⁷² Dom Cuthbert Butler, *Western Mysticism: The Teaching of Augustine, Gregory and Bernard on Contemplation and the Contemplative Life*, 2d edition with Afterthoughts (New York: Harper & Row, 1926).

⁷³ See Butler's reading of Teresa of Avila in regards to the two ways to reach union with Christ: mystic and non-mystic, xlvi. He also used the example of Pope Gregory showing that it is possible to attain "the highest perfection and sanctity, in any path or condition of life," even though one may not give oneself to mystical prayer practices inside a monastery, xlv.

⁷⁴ Butler, *Western Mysticism*, xli-xlvii.

⁷⁵ Gordon Wakefield, commenting on the spirituality of the late twentieth century, points out that ecumenism has resulted in the free flow of spiritual life and traditions and transformed prayer practices across denominations. See Gordon S. Wakefield, *Groundwork of Christian Spirituality* (Peterborough, England: Epworth, 2001), 102. Some works by modern authors that synthesize the writings of the mystics including Avila, are Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1978); Tony Jones, *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices For Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan/Youth Specialties, 2005); Oliver Davies, *God Within: The Mystical Tradition of Northern Europe* (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2006).

Christianity, and in spirituality, in society in general. The writings of the mystical tradition have become an important resource for contemporary spirituality, which has been a concern to a number of Seventh-day Adventists. The teaching of spirituality, believed by some to be in accordance with the teachings and practices of the mystical tradition has fueled fears. Some have asserted that the teaching of spirituality is based on the practice of contemplative prayer and the search for God within, identifying it as part of the mystical tradition. This has resulted in questions raised about Seventh-day Adventist institutions of higher education that have been concerned to teach their students how to have a closer relationship with Christ and to develop their spiritual life.⁷⁶ Should Seventh-day Adventists be concerned about union with Christ?

By way of background, Seventh-day Adventism arose on a prophetic platform in nineteenth-century America as part of the Millerite movement that anticipated the Second Coming of Christ. As a denomination of some 17 million worldwide adherents at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it has been concerned with biblical teachings regarding salvation and presents its doctrines as *Twenty-Eight Fundamental Beliefs*. Seventh-day Adventists could benefit from understanding different approaches to union with Christ as well as clarifying what Ellen White (1827-1915), regarded by the church as a prophet and co-founder of the denomination, taught her readers about union with Christ. White wrote a significant amount of material on union with Christ from the 1860s to the 1890s. Over a span of forty years and more, she taught union with Christ to her

⁷⁶ For a response to such concerns see, "A Statement on Biblical Spirituality," voted by the faculty of Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, accessed December 1, 2014, http://www.andrews.edu/sem/sdats_bibspir.pdf.

readers. Should union with Christ, an important idea in the history of Christianity and the Bible, be regarded with suspicion? Are there positive insights to learn about union with Christ from Ellen White? Given the multiplicity of approaches to union with Christ in the history of Christianity, what was White's concept of union with Christ?

In his PhD dissertation titled, "Holistic Spirituality in the Thinking of Ellen G. White," Harri Kuhalampi has argued that White understood union with Christ as an ontological union: "An inner transformation which changes a person ontologically," so that "the person may obtain divine attributes."⁷⁷ He also presented the idea that White viewed union with Christ as an interactive relationship between Christ and the human spirit, which requires a human response and participation to maintain.⁷⁸ In other words, union with Christ for White is part of a free will relationship where God and the believer communicate with one another. Kuhalampi indicated that White followed basic orthodox Christianity consistent with Protestantism in a limited sense,⁷⁹ based on the incarnation of Christ and faith.⁸⁰ But what does Kuhalampi mean when he refers to White's approach to union with Christ as an ontological union? According to Kuhalampi, "The abiding

⁷⁷ Harri Kuhalampi, "Holistic Spirituality in the Thinking of Ellen G. White," unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Helsinki, 2010, 161.

⁷⁸ White's writings indicate "that the believer's union with Christ is in any case fundamentally ontological in nature. Without this characteristic as its foundation, the interactive elements and features would not be feasible nor could a union even exist." Kuhalampi, "Holistic Spirituality," 158.

⁷⁹ Kuhalampi wrote, "It thus appears that White is using one of the central concepts through which the Christian gospel has been explained within Protestantism. However, her use of the term is limited to description of only certain aspects of spirituality." Kuhalampi, "Holistic Spirituality," fn. 39, 156.

⁸⁰ Kuhalampi, "Holistic Spirituality," 164.

presence of Christ means that he reigns in the soul.”⁸¹ Union with Christ “is composed of a person’s awaking to the actual divine presence and a willingness to open up the private inner realm to its constant transforming and empowering activity.”⁸² To achieve this Kuhalampi wrote that, “Instead of logical reasoning, White suggests contemplation as the course of action to take in order to perceive and identify divine activity.”⁸³

Is White’s approach to union with Christ best defined as an ontological union?⁸⁴

Demarest identified ontological union as the approach to union with Christ of Neoplatonists and many mystics. Given the range of approaches to union with Christ in the history of Christianity, there is a need to explore different approaches to union with Christ to see which approach may or may not fit White’s concept. This dissertation is necessary to understand the basic differences between the various approaches identified by Demarest, in the history of Christianity, to discover whether ontological union is the best way to describe White’s concept of union with Christ.

This dissertation is pertinent to Seventh-day Adventists to help clarify Ellen

⁸¹ Kuhalampi also argued that White viewed Christ’s presence as “a present reality everywhere,” and that White “sees nature as an especially important means through which Christ makes His presence real and perceivable.” Kuhalampi, “Holistic Spirituality,” 161, 162.

⁸² Kuhalampi, “Holistic Spirituality,” 156.

⁸³ Kuhalampi quoted White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 125 to support the conclusion: “As we contemplate the beauty of nature, as we study its lessons in the cultivation of the soil, in the growth of the trees, in all the wonders of earth and sea and sky, there will come to us a new perception of truth. And the mysteries connected with God’s dealings with men, the depths of His wisdom and judgment as seen in human life—these are found to be a storehouse rich in treasure.” See Kuhalampi, footnote 15, 171.

⁸⁴ According to *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ontology, as a branch of metaphysics, “is the science of being in general, embracing such issues as the nature of existence and the categorical structure of reality.” E. Jonathan Lowe, “Ontology,” in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 2nd ed., ed. Ted Honderich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 670-71.

White's teachings regarding union with Christ using the historical approaches to union with Christ outlined by Demarest. It is also necessary to explore the concept of union with Christ in White's writings, as she was a significant American female author and Christian thinker of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries⁸⁵ whose voice continues to be influential for Seventh-day Adventists and the broader Christian world. White offered both theological and practical insights for understanding union with Christ. This dissertation could help shed light on the nature of union with Christ, not only for Seventh-day Adventists, but also for the broader Christian church for whom, the topic of spirituality is of general interest. What is union with Christ? How is it formed and maintained, and what, if anything, did Ellen White have to say about it?

Statement of the Problem

There are conflicting approaches to Christian spirituality, in part because there are conflicting interpretations of union with Christ. The concept of union with Christ is therefore in need of further investigation and clarification.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the concept of union with Christ in the writings of Ellen White and to evaluate her approach using Bruce Demarest's five approaches for interpreting union with Christ in the history of Christianity.

⁸⁵ Ellen White has been named one of the top one hundred most influential Americans. See Tom Frail, "Meet the 100 Most Significant Americans of All Time," *Smithsonian Magazine*, November 17, 2014.

Delimitations and Methodology

A stated purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the concept of union with Christ in Ellen White's writings. However it is not possible to investigate or present every statement that White wrote on union with Christ in this study. Statements that are repeated or do not add new or significant information to the study are not included. Also, there is simply too much information to review every statement, paragraph, article or letter in which White mentions or expounds upon union with Christ. Portions of her work are selected for review on the basis of their relevance to constructing a total picture of her teaching of union with Christ to her readers.

Where this study traces the development of her ideas on union with Christ, it cannot be assumed that earlier statements represent her partial or even total views on the subject. Even if White possessed such views she chose not to present them to her readers at that time. It is assumed that her writings point to her understanding of union with Christ, but they do not define it. Rather they point to what she believed was important for her readers to know and understand about this topic at any given time. In addition, given the multi-faceted nature of her writing over the span of forty years, it is not possible to trace each and every nuance of idea that White presented on union with Christ. The terms White used to define union with Christ will not be discussed according to their frequency of use. This is not a quantitative study of her use of terms related to union with Christ.

This study will limit its investigation of union with Christ to both the complete phrase "union with Christ" and to places in White's writings where the words "union," "with" and "Christ" occur in the same paragraph, or sentence. The parameters of this

study will be limited to investigating materials dating from the 1860s up to and including her book, *The Desire of Ages* (1898). Another delimitation is the fact that at the time of the research and writing of this study, the unpublished writings of Ellen White were unavailable for public electronic searching. Therefore, this study will not investigate White's unpublished writings on union with Christ.

No exegesis of biblical passages on union with Christ or that White included in her writings on union with Christ will be offered. Neither does this dissertation compare the writings of White to Scripture or to other authors, theologians, approaches or models with the manifest intent to compare whether they are biblical or non-biblical. This dissertation is not a Bible study on union with Christ. White's writings or those of other writers on union with Christ will not be compared with the Bible. White is believed to be an inspired writer in the Seventh-day Adventist tradition and her writings are regarded as prophetic and non-canonical. Her statements on union with Christ will not be analyzed according to a critical method of investigation that seeks to deconstruct or diminish her writings in any shape or form. This dissertation is a careful investigation of her writings, not a critical study *per se* that questions her authenticity as a Christian writer or thinker.

This dissertation does not purport to present a rigorous historical overview of approaches to union with Christ. The study is limited to select authors in the history of Christianity that represent differing views to provide a broad background of approaches to union with Christ. I will not compare the background information on union with Christ presented in this chapter with Bruce Demarest's categories for defining five different approaches to union with Christ in the history of Christianity. It is recognized that other approaches to union with Christ may exist aside from what Demarest presented in his

work. The major themes of each approach in Demarest's work will be used to evaluate White's approach in terms of its broad themes, and not the intricacies and nuances of the approaches of each and every author Demarest points out in the five approaches.

The particular historical *milieu* in which White wrote will not be investigated in depth, neither will her ideas related to other specific beliefs. These include her theology of God, ontology, anthropology (with the exception of White's view of the soul in which I draw some tentative conclusions on this extensive topic), salvation, the church, faith and Christian perfection, growth and spiritual maturity or dying to self. Union with Christ is connected to many Christian doctrines and teachings and it is not possible to cover the connections to each and every one. While it is recognized that these are important, they are not the focus of this investigation, which is to shed light on her concept of union with Christ. Further studies will be needed to establish such ideas and their meanings.

This dissertation is a textual, theological analysis of White's writings. The following chapter 2 outlines the approaches to union with Christ of Augustus Strong and Bruce Demarest. Chapter 3 will attempt to ascertain White's approach to union with Christ in the 1860s and 1870s. This will be followed in chapter 4 with White's approach to union with Christ in the 1880s, and her approach to union with Christ in the 1890s in chapter 5. Chapter 6 will provide an evaluation of White's writings using the approaches identified by Bruce Demarest in the history of Christianity in order to help clarify her approach to union with Christ and the conclusion.

CHAPTER 2

APPROACHES TO UNION WITH CHRIST IN THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY: AUGUSTUS STRONG AND BRUCE DEMAREST

Introduction

The concept of union with Christ has had a varied history in Christian thought. The tide of interest in this subject has ebbed and flowed over the centuries leaving unresolved questions as to the nature of union with Christ, how it is formed and maintained, and its consequences. Various streams of thought point to the basic idea that humans form a union or oneness with Christ and with God in order to be saved. “The union of man with God,” wrote Samuel Seabury, “the avowed and constant object of all religion, is also the great mystery of the Christian faith. The Gospel reveals this union, but does not explain it; it teaches us what is required toward it on the part of man, but not the manner in which it is accomplished by God.”¹ Is union with Christ to remain a great

¹ Samuel Seabury, “The Union of the Church with Christ, Natural or Essential, Rather than Moral or Political,” in *Churchman*, February 8, 1840; and in *Discourses Illustrative of the Office and Work of the Holy Spirit* (New York: 1874). Seabury believed that the union of the Son of God and the man Jesus so as to make one Christ is the foundation for human union with God. Christ held His own personal human nature in unity with the divine and triumphed in his human nature over sin because it was “in perfect union with God.” Seabury explained union with Christ in the following: “The union of believers with Christ is not personal; still it is more than moral; it is natural or essential. The union of our souls and bodies is personal; it is not the body alone which is myself, nor yet the soul alone which is myself, it is in the union of soul and body that I myself exist and will and act; and this union of the rational soul with the sensitive body constitutes me a person. The union of a company or family of men actuated by common sentiments is a moral union. The strongest example of moral union is to be found in husband and

mystery as Seabury suggested? Why do various approaches to union with Christ exist and what are their basic similarities and differences?

The task of identifying different approaches to union with Christ in the history of Christianity is enormous and yet has to a certain extent been done. Baptist theologian Augustus Strong identified, by way of contrast, four approaches to union with Christ in his *Lectures on Theology* (1876), compendium on *Systematic Theology* (1886-1909) and *Union with Christ; A Chapter of Systematic Theology* (1913). In identifying these four approaches: a natural union, a moral union, a mystical union and a sacramental union, Strong labeled them as at best inadequate and at worst, pernicious and false. Bruce Demarest writing almost a century later in his book *The Cross and Salvation* (1997) utilized similar categories to those outlined by Strong. He appeared to base his approach on Strong's earlier work and outlined the main characteristics of each approach, giving examples of each of their proponents.²

This chapter will present Strong's doctrine of union with Christ and the approaches he mentioned in his chapter on union with Christ.³ This will be followed by

wife; we say that they are one, not one in person, but one in affections. The union of the living body is a natural or essential union; all its members partake of the same life or nature; so that if a limb is cut off from the body, it loses its life, and becomes putrid. Now, the personal union between God and man exists only in Christ; but the union between Christ and His Church is more than a moral, it is a natural or essential, union." See the above-mentioned Discourse for his full treatment of the subject.

² Demarest argued that while the approach of metaphysical mysticism described as ontological union, is unbiblical based on the syncretism of Christianity and Neoplatonism, Strong's approach as well of that of other evangelicals, which Demarest labeled "experiential union," is the closest to the Scripture teaching on union with Christ.

³ The purpose of this dissertation is to evaluate White's writings regarding her approach to union with Christ, using Demarest's categories of approaches to union with Christ in the history of Christianity. Because, however, Demarest's work was preceded by that of Strong, I will outline Strong's comparison of different approaches to union with Christ first.

Demarest's description of the major approaches to union with Christ in the history of Christianity. Demarest's description will provide a basis for evaluating Ellen White's approach to union with Christ in chapter 6.

Augustus Strong's Doctrine of Union with Christ

Augustus Hopkins Strong was one of the foremost theologians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴ An important thinker and voice of his time he was described as "one of the most visible churchmen in the United States" by the turn of the century.⁵ His lecture notes, which contain his doctrine on union with Christ, were first published in 1876 as *Lectures on Theology*. This became the basis for the first edition of Strong's *Systematic Theology*, published in 1886. This work was reissued in seven more editions, finally expanding to become a three-volume work with a thousand pages of text in 1907-1909.⁶ His statements on union with Christ were considered so important that he was asked to reprint the section of his *Systematic Theology* on union with Christ as a book of its own to make it accessible to a wider circle of readers.⁷

⁴ As president and professor of systematic theology at Rochester Theological Seminary for over forty years in addition to his previous career as a well-known preacher, Strong was one of the most influential Calvinist theologians in nineteenth century America. Crerar Douglas, ed., "Preface," in *Autobiography of Augustus Hopkins Strong* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1981), 11.

⁵ Grant Wacker, *Augustus H. Strong and the Dilemma of Historical Consciousness* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 5.

⁶ This became a widely used textbook in theological seminaries throughout much of the twentieth century. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*. 3 vols. (8th ed., rev. and enl.; Philadelphia: Griffith and Rowland, 1907-09).

⁷ Augustus H. Strong, "Preface" in *Union with Christ: A Chapter of Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1913), 7.

Strong's writing on union with Christ is divided into three main parts: 1) union with Christ; 2) the nature of this union; and 3) the consequences of this union with respect to the believer, under the general heading, "The Application of Christ's Redemption in its Actual Beginning."⁸ Strong begins by addressing the question of where union with Christ fits into the order of salvation. When does union with Christ begin? According to Strong, the moment a believer is in union with Christ is the same moment as regeneration and justification. Regeneration is the divine side, and conversion the human side, of the same event. For Strong, the order is logical, not chronological.⁹

⁸ Strong viewed union with Christ as the subjective application of Christ's atoning redemption. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 436-447. It is important to mention that Strong changed his views over time to a position described as "ethical monism." In his *Autobiography*, he wrote about the changes he made to his *Systematic Theology* after the revision and enlargement of its 8th edition in 1909. "During the twenty years since its first publication in 1886, I have collected much new material. My philosophical and critical point of view has somewhat changed. While I still hold to the old doctrines, I interpret them differently because I seem to myself to have reached a fundamental truth which throws new light upon them all... That Christ is the one and only Revealer of God in nature as well as in Scripture is in my judgment the key to theology. This view implies a monistic and idealistic conception of the world, together with an evolutionary idea of its origin and progress. But it is the very antidote of pantheism in that it recognizes evolution as only the method of the transcendent and personal Christ, who fills all in all and who makes the universe teleological and moral from its center to its circumference and from its beginning until now." Strong, *Autobiography*, 338, 339. Although Strong held this new evolutionary idea he claimed: "I have not apostatized from the faith, nor have I ceased to teach the unity and sufficiency of Scripture, righteousness as the fundamental attribute of God, the fall of man and original sin, the deity, preexistence, virgin birth, and physical resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, his omnipresence in nature, in humanity, in history, and in the hearts of his people, the regenerating work of his Holy Spirit, and his future Second Coming to judge the world and to reward the faithful. I believe that the teaching of these truths has won for me the confidence of the churches and the favor of God. Let others teach as they will, I propose to walk in the old paths and to hand down to my successors, the old gospel." Strong, *Autobiography*, 338.

⁹ See Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 436. In other words, theologians present an order of salvation, which makes sense logically when discussing these ideas, when in fact, these events may occur simultaneously.

Union with Christ for Strong is based wholly on God's election and calling and is the result of God's initiative and purpose.¹⁰ From this Reformed perspective, God elects, calls, regenerates and justifies. Yet regeneration, according to Strong, is also the result of the soul's union with Christ.¹¹ God continues the regenerative process in the believer. For Strong, union with Christ encompasses the whole spectrum of salvation both in its objective and subjective aspects. The following statement sums up his view: "Union with Christ, in view of which God elects and to which God calls the sinner, is begun in regeneration, completed in conversion, declared in justification, and proved in sanctification and perseverance."¹² Though Strong did not specifically mention "predestination" in his discussion of when union with Christ takes place, his position is nonetheless, Reformed in orientation. "Man turns only as God turns him."¹³

What is Union with Christ?

Strong defined union with Christ as a union of life, a union of the soul with Christ. Part of the following was quoted in chapter 1, yet it is worth repeating in full.

The Scriptures declare that, through the operation of God, there is constituted a union of the soul with Christ different in kind from God's natural and providential concursus with all spirits, as well as from all unions of mere association or sympathy,

¹⁰ The order of salvation for Strong is logical but not chronological. In other words, the moment of a believer's union with Christ is also the moment when they are regenerated and justified. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 437.

¹¹ Strong believed that God first acts upon the human soul, which is passive to change the governing disposition. It is an instantaneous change in the heart, in the inmost principle of life, in the moral relations of the soul, is secret and made by God alone. Strong describes this in the section following union with Christ on "Regeneration," *Systematic Theology*, 447-460.

¹² Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 437.

¹³ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 437.

moral likeness, or moral influence, a union of life, in which the human spirit, while then most truly possessing its own individuality and personal distinctness, is interpenetrated and energized by the Spirit of Christ, is made inscrutably but indissolubly one with him, and so becomes a member and partaker of that regenerated, believing, and justified humanity of which he is the head.¹⁴

Rejecting union with Christ as merely a natural or moral union of sympathy and fellowship, Strong identified the Spirit of Christ as interpenetrating and energizing the human spirit while keeping the recipient's own distinct individuality and personality. He presented this in contrast to what he called a false mysticism, which he understood to be the mystical tradition where personal individuality is lost in union with Christ. Strong was concerned to rescue the doctrine of union with Christ from neglect based on what he understood to be the reaction to "false mysticism." Because union with Christ was connected to mysticism in the experience of the mystics where the self is absorbed into God, Strong believed that this misunderstanding of mystical had led to a widespread rejection of the doctrine of union with Christ in his day. To discover the biblical basis of the doctrine required a total reliance on Scripture.¹⁵ Strong was therefore concerned to rescue the doctrine of union with Christ from false and inadequate approaches, while he attempted to identify and demonstrate its true basis in Scripture.

To demonstrate the biblical basis of union with Christ, Strong presented five Scripture representations of this teaching. In Scripture, union with Christ is written about

¹⁴ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 438.

¹⁵ Strong complained that, "The majority of printed systems of doctrine, however, contain no chapter or section on Union with Christ, and the majority of Christians much more frequently think of Christ as a Savior outside of them, than as a Savior who dwells within. This comparative neglect of the doctrine is doubtless a reaction from the exaggerations of a false mysticism. But there is great need of rescuing the doctrine from neglect. For this we rely wholly upon Scripture." See Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 438; Strong, *Union with Christ; A Chapter of Systematic Theology*, 18.

figuratively: by the union of a building and its foundation;¹⁶ the union between a husband and wife;¹⁷ the vine and the branches;¹⁸ the union between the parts of the body and the head;¹⁹ and lastly, the union of the race with the source of its life in Adam.²⁰ He also pointed out that Scripture contains direct statements regarding union with Christ. First, the believer is said to be in Christ.²¹ Strong interprets Paul's "in Christ" phrase as always meaning "in union with Christ," and the key to his epistles and to the whole New

¹⁶ Believers are living stones built upon and permanently connected to Christ. Strong included the following Scripture texts: Eph 2:20-22; Col 2:7; 1 Pet 2:4, 5; Ps 118:22; Isa 28:16. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 438.

¹⁷ The husband and wife are held to be indissolubly bonded and become legally and organically one in marriage. The bride and the bridegroom portray the relationship that exists between Christ and the church. Strong included the following Scripture texts: Rom 7:4; 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:31, 32; Rev 19:7; 22:17; Isa 54:5; Jer 3:20; Hos 2:2-5. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 439.

¹⁸ The vine and the branches illustrate several important teachings on union with Christ. "God's natural life is in the vine, that it may give life to its natural branches, so God's spiritual life is in the vine, Christ, that he may give life to his spiritual branches." The connection between the natural and the spiritual is linked to the root of the vine, which is planted in heaven in Jesus Christ, not on earth. Believers are not merely grounded in Christ, but "thrusting down roots into him as the deep, rich, all-sustaining soil." This union is consistent with the preservation of individuality according to Strong. As the grafted branch is modified by its attachment to the tree, yet it brings forth fruit after its kind. Thus the believer united to Christ possesses their own individuality yet are molded by their relationship with the Savior and bear the kind of fruit that only God can bestow through the common connection. Strong included the following Scripture texts: John 15:1-10; Rom 6:5; 11:24; Col 2:6, 7. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 439.

¹⁹ This figuratively illustrates that all believers are members of the invisible body of Christ. Strong included the following Scripture texts: 1 Cor 6:15, 19; 12:12; Eph 1:22, 23; Eph 4:15, 16; 5:29, 30. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 439.

²⁰ The union between the human race and Adam points to the idea of the fall affecting all of humanity being born with a sinful nature; whereas in Christ, a new race of believers are restored, justified and purified by Christ who is the second Adam. Strong included the following Scripture texts: Rom 5:12, 21; 1 Cor 15:22, 45, 49; Gen 2:23; Isa 9:6; 53:10. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 439, 440.

²¹ Strong believed that this refers to the atmosphere surrounding the believer with a perpetual presence and constitutes his vital breath. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 440.

Testament.²² Second, Christ is said to be in the believer.²³ Third, the Father and the Son dwell in the believer.²⁴ Fourth, the believer has life by partaking of Christ as Christ has life by partaking of the Father.²⁵ Fifth, all believers are one in Christ (John 17:21-23). Sixth, the believer is made a partaker of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4) “not by having the essence of your humanity changed into the essence of divinity, but by having Christ the divine Savior continually dwelling within, and indissolubly joined to, your human souls.”²⁶ Seventh, the believer is made one spirit with the Lord (1 Cor 6:17, 19; Romans 8:26). Human nature is energized by the divine nature so that the two move and act as one.²⁷ Both the figurative illustrations and the direct statements from Scripture support the doctrine of union with Christ according to Strong, and provide an important basis for understanding its nature and consequences.

The Nature of Union with Christ

Strong recognized that there is a sense in which all descriptions of union with Christ are inadequate.²⁸ As previously mentioned, he identified four approaches to union with Christ in the history of Christianity that he believed were inadequate at best, while

²² Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 440.

²³ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 440.

²⁴ If the union between Christ and the believer is only one of mere moral influence then based on John 14:10 the relation between the Father and the Son must likewise be one of mere moral influence. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 440.

²⁵ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 440.

²⁶ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 441.

²⁷ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 441.

²⁸ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 441.

some he called false or pernicious.²⁹ The first approach that Strong identified was that of Rationalists who believed union with Christ is a natural union that God holds with everyone.³⁰ Each human, it was believed, is connected to God through nature. God is thus inextricably linked to human life itself. Strong argued that union with Christ is not merely a natural union it is the life of God who is personal. “This life of God in the soul is the life of Christ.”³¹ God is at work personally in the believer who is united to Christ and beyond this, Christ is in union with God.³² While there is a natural union between all of life and God because God is the Creator and sustainer of His creation, this does not amount to union with Christ. According to Strong, Rationalists have provided an inadequate approach to understanding the nature of union with Christ.

The second approach that Strong identified was that held by Socinians and Arminians.³³ In this view union with Christ is understood as a moral union, or a union of love or sympathy such as the fellowship that exists between friends. While the Bible includes examples of a friendship type union between souls such as David and Jonathan in 1 Samuel 18:1 who share a deep brotherly love and the fellowship attributed to the early Christians in Acts 4:32, these examples are not of the same type of union that exists

²⁹ I am not claiming that Strong is the first to present these types, or approaches to union with Christ. As of yet, I have been unable to locate an antecedent to his work in this area. Although Seabury, writing in 1840 mentions union with Christ as natural or essential, rather than moral or political, I believe he was touching on some perennial questions regarding the nature of union with Christ, but he did not, at least in this discourse, link these ideas to different approaches in the history of Christianity. See footnote 1.

³⁰ The Rationalist approach to union with Christ held the view that God is a force who is united with all human spirits. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 441.

³¹ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 441.

³² Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 441.

³³ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 441.

between the Father and the Son and hence cannot fully represent the union that exists between Christ and His followers. Strong pointed to John 17:21, 26 where Jesus described the type of union He and the Father are to have with believers which is deeper than moral association and friendship. In His last recorded prayer, Jesus wanted to make clear to His disciples that without Him they could do nothing. According to Strong, Jesus prayed that His disciples “might be vitally joined to himself” involving the interpenetration of one by the other.³⁴ Therefore, union with Christ cannot merely be a union of love or sympathy or fellowship.

The third approach Strong identified in the history of Christianity was that of mysticism. Many of these persons, he claimed, believed union with Christ involves a union of essence. He identified mystics such as Schwenkfeld, Weigel and Sebastian Frank, who hold to an essential union between Christ and the believer to the extent that the distinct personality and subsistence of the believer and Christ are absorbed into one another in this relationship. Rather, Strong argued that believers in union with Christ will never lose their unique personality. “We are ever to remember that the indwelling of Christ only puts the believer more completely in possession of himself, and makes him more conscious of his own personality and power.”³⁵ He gave the warning: “Union with Christ must be taken in connection with the other truth of the personality and activity of the Christian; otherwise it tends to pantheism.”³⁶ Strong believed the approach of many mystics, which destroys the distinctness of either Christ or the human spirit, is false and

³⁴ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 442.

³⁵ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 442.

³⁶ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 442.

has been the reason many have rejected the doctrine of union with Christ as unbiblical. He was concerned therefore to demonstrate the biblical basis of this teaching.

The fourth approach identified by Strong was that of a sacramental union held by Roman Catholics, Lutherans and High-Church Episcopalians. This approach viewed union with Christ as a function of the church whereby union with Christ is mediated and conditioned by participation in baptism, the Mass or communion. For Strong union with Christ cannot be mediated by the sacraments as this approach presupposes union with Christ to already exist. Baptism and the Lord's Supper, he pointed out, are only for believers.³⁷ "Perhaps the most pernicious misrepresentation of the nature of this union is that which conceives of it as a physical and material one, and which rears upon this basis the fabric of a sacramental and external Christianity."³⁸ When and how does union with Christ begin? Faith only "receives and retains Christ; and faith is the act of the soul grasping what is purely invisible and supersensible; not the act of the body, submitting to baptism or partaking of the Supper."³⁹ Strong rejected the sacramental approach to union with Christ because it depended on physical and material outward practices rather than the act of faith.

What is the nature of union with Christ conceived positively for Strong? Although descriptions are inadequate, union with Christ was characterized in the following respects. First, it is an organic union in which believers become members of Christ and partake of his humanity. The members of Christ's body live for Christ the head, and

³⁷ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 442.

³⁸ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 442.

³⁹ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 442.

Christ lives for the church. “No man ever hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as Christ also the church; because we are members of His body” (Eph 5:29, 30). Because the body is described as an organism where each part lives for the benefit of the other parts of the body, Christ’s body the church is organically connected to Him and vice versa. In this union of relationship and interconnectedness, Christ loves and nourishes the church.

Second, union with Christ was described as a vital union. What this means for Strong was that Christ’s life becomes the dominating principle within the believer. “This union is a vital one, in distinction from any union of mere juxtaposition or external influence. Christ does not work upon us from without, as one separated from us, but from within as the very heart from which the life-blood of our spirits flows.”⁴⁰ Strong quotes Galatians 2:20: “It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me; and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me,” and Colossians 3:3, 4: “For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with him be manifested in glory.” This vital union between the believer and Christ does not corrupt Christ, as His life is like a ray of light shedding its beams upon the dirt that when it comes in contact does not blacken or defile it.⁴¹

Third, Strong described union with Christ positively as a spiritual union, whose source and author is the Holy Spirit.⁴² It is a spiritual union, not one of literal bodies

⁴⁰ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 443.

⁴¹ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 443.

⁴² Strong quoted Rom 8:9, 10; Eph 3:16, 17 to support the idea that it is the Holy Spirit

joined between the believer and Christ. This involves the continual exercise of efficient power in the life of the believer through faith.⁴³ Using the text of Ephesians 3:16, 17 “strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inward man” followed by “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” was the basis for Strong’s belief that union with Christ is a spiritual rather than a physical union.⁴⁴

Fourth, union with Christ was presented as an indissoluble union. In other words, union is based on the promise of Christ and His grace, which cannot be dissolved.

Christ’s omnipresence makes it possible for him to be united to, and to be present in, each believer, as perfectly and fully as if that believer were the only one to receive Christ’s fullness. As Christ’s omnipresence makes the whole Christ present in every place, each believer has the whole Christ with him, as his source of strength, purity, life; so that each may say: Christ gives all his time and wisdom and care to me. Such a union as this lacks every element of instability. Once formed, the union is indissoluble. Since there is now an unchangeable and divine element in us, our salvation depends no longer upon our unstable wills, but upon Christ’s purpose and power. By temporary declension from duty, or by our causeless unbelief, we may banish Christ to the barest and most remote room of the soul’s house; but he does not suffer us wholly to exclude him; and when we are willing to unbar the doors, he is still there, ready to fill the whole mansion with his light and love.⁴⁵

To support the idea of the indissoluble nature of union with Christ, Strong employed the following Bible texts: Jesus promised that He is with us always, even to the end of the age (Matt 28:20); Jesus promised that no one can snatch us out of His hand (John 10:28); Paul declared that nothing can separate us from the love of God (Rom 8:35; 39); and those who have fallen asleep in Christ will come with Him at His second coming (1 Thess 4:14, 17). According to Strong, the divine element in believers is unchangeable; an

who effects union with Christ. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 443.

⁴³ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 443.

⁴⁴ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 443.

idea, which echoes the Reformed view, that union with Christ is based on God's decree in eternity past to predestine some to salvation and others to condemnation. The elect may ignore Christ or push Him into another room, as Strong wrote, but they cannot banish His indwelling, the divine element in those predestined to salvation.

Fifth, union with Christ was described as an inscrutable union. Inscrutable meant that union with Christ could not be fully described or represented by earthly analogies. It surpasses any other type of union humans can know. Likewise, union with Christ can only be described as mystical to the extent that, in its level of intimacy and value, it surpasses any other union. While Strong firmly denied mysticism's approach to union with Christ in terms of it being an unintelligible experience for the Christian, union with Christ is intelligible in his teaching, and not beyond the reach of human experience and sensibility. He quoted Paul in Ephesians 5:32 to describe union, in a limited sense, as a mystical union: "This mystery is great: but I speak of Christ and of the church," and Colossians 1:27, "the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."⁴⁶ Therefore while union with Christ has a mysterious or mystical aspect, it is not completely unintelligible for the Christian.

Strong wrote, however that the experience of union with Christ is not sporadic, nor based on individual personal conviction or awareness of this union. Rather it is a connection with Christ who is the head of the believer. Believers live by virtue of the

⁴⁵ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 443.

⁴⁶ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 444.

Spirit of Christ who works in them.⁴⁷ In his article in the *Examiner* (1880) he explained the idea, that believers may not be conscious of their union with Christ.

Such is the nature of union with Christ—such I mean, is the nature of every believer’s union with Christ. For, whether he knows it or not, every Christian has entered into just such a partnership as this. It is this and this only which constitutes him a Christian, and which makes possible a Christian church. We may, indeed, be thus united to Christ, without being fully conscious of the real nature of our relation to him. We may actually possess the kernel, while as yet we have regard only to the shell; we may seem to ourselves to be united to Christ only by an external bond, while after all it is an inward and spiritual bond that makes us his. God often reveals to the Christian the mystery of the gospel, which is Christ *in* him the hope of glory, at the very time that he is seeking only some nearer access to a Redeemer outside of him. Trying to find a union of cooperation or of sympathy, he is amazed to learn that there is already established a union with Christ more glorious and blessed, namely, a union of life; and so, like the miners in the Rocky Mountains, while he is looking only for silver, he finds gold. Christ and the believer have the same life. They are not separate persons linked together by some temporary bond of friendship—they are united by a tie as close and indissoluble as if the same blood ran in their veins. Yet the Christian may never have suspected how intimate a union he has with his Savior; and the first understanding of this truth may be the gateway through which he passes into a holier and happier stage of the Christian life.⁴⁸

While believers may not be aware of their union with Christ, for Strong it is a union of life, which although hidden, has important practical implications. These five characteristics portray for Strong the biblical meaning of the nature of union with Christ: organic, vital, spiritual, indissoluble and inscrutable. These characteristics are important to mention as Bruce Demarest adopted these ideas in part to also describe his position on union with Christ. Before I present Demarest’s survey of approaches to union with Christ I will briefly outline Strong’s view of the consequences of union with Christ.

⁴⁷ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 444.

Consequences of Union with Christ for the Believer

The third and final section of Strong's chapter on union with Christ is about the consequences of union with Christ for the believer. This section helps the reader to understand the theological basis of union with Christ and what Christ has accomplished for those He united Himself with and for humanity at large. These consequences flow from the incarnation when Christ united with humanity. This act "involved him in all the legal liabilities of the race to which he united himself."⁴⁹ In becoming man, Christ united Himself to humanity to pave the way for the reconciliation of believers back to God. Christ did this by assuming the penalty for sin and paid the satisfaction for divine justice. He henceforth removed all external obstacles for humanity to return to God except for the following internal obstacles in humanity at large: the evil affections, the will, and the guilt of the individual soul.

Strong taught that Christ overcame these internal obstacles in His people (the elect) by uniting Himself to them more closely and perfectly than He is united to humanity at large.⁵⁰ Thus Christ's union with the human race at the incarnation secured the objective reconciliation of the race to God.⁵¹ Christ united with humanity at large in an objective reconciliation through His incarnation and payment of the penalty for sin,

⁴⁸ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 444.

⁴⁹ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 444.

⁵⁰ The "incarnation, involved him [Christ] in all the legal liabilities of the race to which he united himself, and enabled him so to assume the penalty of its sin as to make for all men a full satisfaction to the divine justice." Though Christ has removed all the external obstacles for humans to return to God He only removes the internal obstacles (the evil affections and will and consequent guilt) from those he elects to salvation and unites with them closer than what He is united with humanity at large. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 444.

⁵¹ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 444.

but He reconciled Himself subjectively to His people, according to Strong, by His organic, vital, spiritual, indissoluble and inscrutable union with believers. This for Strong is the basis for the consequences of union with Christ, those whom God has elected for salvation and union with Him.

The consequences of union with Christ are manifested in the following five ways. First, union with Christ involves a change of heart, a change that Strong described as the dominant affection of the heart whereby the ruling disposition becomes holy. God regenerates the human soul by uniting it to Christ. Second, repentance and faith are manifested in a new exercise of the soul's powers. "Faith," wrote Strong, "is the act of the soul by which, under the operation of God, Christ is received."⁵² This process he called conversion. Third, because Christ's union with elected humans involves His sacrificial atonement, the union of the believer with Christ involves justification. "Union with Christ gives to the believer the legal standing and rights of Christ."⁵³ Through this legal standing, all the spiritual benefits of being united to Christ are available to the believer as a consequence. Fourth, union with Christ gives to the elect the "continuously transforming, assimilating power of Christ's life, first for the soul; secondly, for the body consecrating it in the present, and in the future raising it up in the likeness of Christ's glorified body."⁵⁴ This power is the sanctification of the elect and is the same power that will raise them up at Christ's return. Lastly, union with Christ brings fellowship with

⁵² Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 445.

⁵³ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 445.

⁵⁴ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 445.

Christ and all believers and is the basis for the spiritual unity of Christ's people on earth.

Union with Christ is an indispensable preparation for both ecclesiology and eschatology.⁵⁵

Bruce Demarest on Union with Christ

Bruce Demarest, professor of Christian theology and spiritual formation at Denver Theological Seminary since 1975, wrote on the topic of salvation in the evangelical series on systematic theology called *The Cross and Salvation*. In chapter 8 he begins his discussion of the doctrine of union with Christ in the chapter titled, "Christ Lives in Me, Galatians 2:20: The Doctrine of Union with Christ."⁵⁶ Demarest noted in his introduction that in the history of Christianity union with Christ has been described as a "mystical union" based in part on the language of Ephesians 5:30-32 as well as the New Testament imagery that described Christ in the believer and the believer in Christ.⁵⁷ An important issue for Demarest was to identify different approaches to union with Christ.⁵⁸ In this chapter, he described five historical interpretations of union with Christ by highlighting the most significant characteristic of each: union with Christ conceived as an ontological union; a sacramental union; a covenantal union; a moral or filial union and an

⁵⁵ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 446.

⁵⁶ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 313-344.

⁵⁷ According to Demarest, outside the Reformed tradition union with Christ has been undervalued. However, union with Christ is not undervalued in Scripture as Demarest noted that the Bible writers present the imagery of union with Christ in addition to the words of Jesus, in Paul's writings 216 times and twenty-six times in John's writings. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 313.

⁵⁸ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 314. Demarest raised the following questions about union with Christ: How does God abide in a sinful human being? Is union with Christ a legal relationship or an experiential one? Is the Christian's selfhood absorbed by the Deity? Did union with Christ occur in eternity past or is it initiated in the present? Is union with Christ an

experiential union. The last approach, Demarest believed to be the closest to a biblical approach. I will present a summary of each of the approaches Demarest described in his chapter on union with Christ.

Historical Approaches to Union with Christ Explained by Demarest

Union with Christ as an Ontological Union

The approach labeled “ontological union” is a position held primarily by Neoplatonists and mystical theologians, according to Demarest, with roots in the mysticism of the Eastern Church. It came about as a result of the synthesis of Christianity and Neoplatonism in the early church.⁵⁹ Christians that hold this view believed that the soul becomes absorbed into the divine life in union with Christ. Based on the writings of Dionysius (500) who encouraged his followers to earnestly seek mystical contemplation, the goal is to go beyond being and knowledge and become “lost” in the divine, beyond all sensation and intellectual activity.⁶⁰ Only the most disciplined practitioners of apophatic prayer could achieve such a soul union with Christ. Ontological union with Christ is said to involve the suspension of all human faculties, reaching a state of ecstasy and rapture and by so doing entering into a new order of life in “deification.” According to Demarest, the ideas and practices of the leading mystics threaten to collapse the Christian

individual or a corporate reality?

⁵⁹ This experience of union with Christ is said to involve deification whereby the faculties become suspended and the believer experiences ecstasy and rapture through entrance into a higher order of life. Alexandrian Neoplatonists insisted that souls become fused with God. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 315.

⁶⁰ Mystical contemplation involved the threefold way of purification, illumination and union with God. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 315.

worldview into pantheism. This approach concurs with Strong's identification of union with Christ described as a union of essence as held by many mystics, an approach which he and Demarest reject.

Demarest described this understanding of union with Christ as an ontological union. This was promoted by the Western mystic Meister Eckhart (d. 1327), a German Dominican monk and Neoplatonist theologian who believed that all things will one day return to God, their Source whereby "the soul is completely dissolved in God and God in it."⁶¹ Similar views were promoted by John Tauler, a German Dominican preacher who believed that man's spirit becomes lost in the abyss of God and loses consciousness of all creature-distinctions, which he possessed prior to his emanation from God. Union with Christ is thereby a temporal way to re-establish the connection of each human to God prior to their creation in time.⁶²

The fourteenth century work *The Cloud of Unknowing* also reflects the mystical theology of Dionysius and represents an ontological approach to union with Christ according to Demarest. Through the act of contemplation the Christian enters the cloud and becomes lost in God through the suspension of all mental and bodily activities. Demarest viewed the approaches of these mystics, as well as that of others as one of syncretism with Greek philosophy. They combined a Neoplatonist view of the divine with Scripture texts such as Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." The quest to become one with God coupled with a

⁶¹ Quoted in Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 315.

⁶² Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 316.

desire to experience an exalted consciousness gave way historically to the idea of deification and being absorbed into God in the approach of the mystics.

Union with Christ as a Sacramental Union

The second approach to union with Christ Demarest identified in the history of Christianity is that of a sacramental union, which he ascribed to Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Anglo-Catholic Christians. These hold to the view that persons are united to Christ substantially by participation in the sacraments, especially the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist. Because Roman Catholics recognize the Christian church as a sacrament with the Pope at its head, the church is a continuation of the incarnation of Christ and becomes an instrument through which the mystical body of Christ, “the divine-human life of Jesus is channeled to the world.”⁶³ Union with Christ is achieved through infant baptism, which attaches the infant to Christ and becomes a member of Christ’s spiritual body *ex opere operato*. According to Roman Catholicism, through the Eucharist believers participate most intimately with Christ and the members of His church by eating Jesus’ flesh and drinking His blood in a literal feeding during the Mass.

To illustrate these beliefs by way of example, Demarest cites Roman Catholic theologian Karl Adam who discussed the impact of the sacrament of baptism on the believer. Adam asserted that the blood of Christ flows to the soul of the infant and purifies it from original sin, permeating it with strength. Likewise, the sacrament of the Eucharist involves eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Christ. As a result, Jesus

⁶³ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 317.

who loves His community “enters into a real union of flesh and blood with it, and binds it to His being even as the branch is bound to the vine.”⁶⁴ Demarest also cites Roman Catholic theologian Anthony Wilhelm who viewed the celebration of the Eucharist as perfectly uniting the participant with God “into an indescribable union with divinity.”⁶⁵

Other theologians Demarest described as holding to a sacramental view, include controversial Lutheran pastor Andreas Osiander who taught that union with Christ is an essential union. This union he believed to take place during the Eucharist resulting in a union of essence so that Christ indwells the Christian essentially and not just spiritually. Osiander’s views were refuted by John Calvin and later opposed by the Lutheran Formula of Concord in 1876/84.⁶⁶ The fact that Demarest used Osiander in addition to other noted theologians as examples of this historical approach to union with Christ may indicate that such types, in his view, are broad categories rather than tight descriptions of approaches to union with Christ. Such broad descriptions appear to transcend other important denominational differences that exist between Roman Catholics, Lutherans and Anglo-Catholics for Demarest.⁶⁷

Demarest also cited Anglo-Catholic theologian E. L. Mascall as an example of someone who believed union with Christ is a sacramental union. Mascall argued that an ontological change takes place in the believer as they participate in the Eucharist, namely,

⁶⁴ Karl Adam, *The Spirit of Catholicism* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 22 quoted in Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 317.

⁶⁵ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 318.

⁶⁶ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 318.

⁶⁷ This point also applies to Strong who categorized different denominational approaches together in his broad identification of different approaches to union with Christ.

a ‘supernaturalization’ of the soul whereby he or she is incorporated into Christ and receives a share in the life of the Trinity, in God Himself. In this view however, believers do not become God, they retain their individual personality and identity but participate ontologically in His glorified human nature. This is entered into initially through baptism. Union with Christ is maintained and strengthened through partaking of the Eucharist; and thereby the church is progressively knit together. Sacraments therefore make, preserve and extend the body of Christ on earth physically and spiritually.⁶⁸

It appears from Demarest’s presentation of these two views so far, union with Christ as an ontological union and as a sacramental union that the two approaches do bear something in common: they both appear to involve an ontological change in the believer. In the former, ontological union is described by Demarest as an absorption into the divine that is mediated by the individual’s return to God with an accompanied loss of personal distinctness. The latter approach maintains the individuality of persons and yet, would also view union as ontological, mediated through the official church structure and its sacraments performed by a priest to the body, which is the church. While Demarest did not reject the sacramental approach to union with Christ in his description of it, he did not regard it as biblical. Because, as mentioned previously, Demarest did identify which approach he thinks is the closest to Scripture, that of experiential union.

Union with Christ as a Covenantal Union

⁶⁸ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 318, 319.

Demarest identified Reformed theologians as proponents of the view that union with Christ is a covenantal union. These theologians interpret union with Christ as a comprehensive idea that embraces salvation from eternity past in the federal election of God beginning in the covenant of redemption, and extending to eternity future when union with Christ will be consummated by the bodily resurrection of the saints and their glorification with Christ in heaven. Under the old covenant of works all of humanity is united to Adam who is the head of the human race. The elect are united to Christ from the time the covenant was formed under the new covenant of grace.

In this view union with Christ is a legal or forensic reality, which determines the elects standing with God. It is also an experiential reality “involving Christ’s indwelling the life through his Spirit, transforming personal character and relationships.”⁶⁹ It is also called a mystical union as it transcends all human understanding. Proponents of this view argued that the elect are predestined in Christ; called in Christ; regenerated in Christ, justified in Christ; sanctified in Christ and glorified in Christ. Therefore, union with Christ is not a discrete step in the *ordo salutis*; rather it embraces the entirety of the doctrine of salvation. Union with Christ was described as beginning in the thoughts of God and comes to subjective realization in the experience of the believer through the Holy Spirit who regenerates them. The saving power of Christ’s grace and life become operative in the believer.⁷⁰ Union with Christ in the covenantal approach is

⁶⁹ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 320.

⁷⁰ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 320.

comprehensive in scope, embracing all aspects of salvation from election to Christ's redemptive work on the cross to the resurrection of believers in Christ.⁷¹

Examples of proponents of this view according to Demarest include John Murray (d. 1975) who places the beginning of union with Christ in the election of God and ends with the glorification of the elect. In the past, according to Murray, the elect were chosen in Christ, in the present they experience fellowship with Christ and in the future, they experience the resurrection and glorification with Christ.⁷²

Another theologian Demarest cited as agreeing with Murray is Anthony Hoekema (d. 1988), who argued that union with Christ is not a temporal aspect of redemption but a comprehensive one embracing all of salvation. "Union with Christ has its *roots* in divine election, its *basis* in Christ's redemptive work, its *establishment* with believers in time, and its *consummation* in heaven."⁷³ Union with Christ in Hoekema's view was part of God's plan before the world was made. It was also based on Christ's redeeming work for a limited group of people that He has chosen to save, people already in union with Him. However, this union is not established experientially until they are born and it takes effect in their lives. In his view, the elect are united to Christ by God's regeneration and they

⁷¹ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 321.

⁷² Murray's view of union with Christ incorporates every aspect of salvation, past, present, and future. According to Murray, the elect were chosen in Christ. "There was no election of the Father in eternity apart from Christ. And that means that those who will be saved were not even contemplated by the Father in the ultimate counsel of his predestining love apart from union with Christ—they were *chosen* in Christ." John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 165 quoted in Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 320.

⁷³ Demarest quoting Hoekema in *The Cross and Salvation*, 321. Emphasis supplied. This belief is based in part on Ephesians 1:3-4 which states: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him." (RSV)

live out this union by faith. They are justified by this union, attain righteousness and sanctification, and persevere throughout their lives in union with Christ. Finally, this union is consummated after death in the life to come. They are raised with Christ and will experience glorification with Him forever.⁷⁴

Union with Christ as a Moral or Filial Union

Demarest cites Socinians, Rationalists and Liberals as emphasizing the view that union with Christ is a moral or filial union rather than a supernatural one. Proponents of this view favored a naturalistic explanation of union with Christ and spurned supernatural and mysterious definitions. They hold to a number of various interpretations to describe the relationship between Christ and the individual morally. Union with Christ in this view is similar to the friendship and trust that existed between Christ and the Father on earth (John 17:21-26); the brotherly fellowship between believers (Acts 4:32); sentimental friendship (1 Sam 18:1) and God's natural presence in all human spirits (Acts 17:27-28).⁷⁵ Demarest in labeling this approach joined two approaches to union with Christ formerly identified by Strong. That is, union with Christ as a natural union and union with Christ as a moral, filial or sympathetic union based on love.

Examples of adherents to this view according to Demarest include Congregationalist minister, Lyman Abbott (d. 1922) who regarded himself as a Christian evolutionist. For Abbott all people are children of the Father, bear His image and are saved by His love. His approach to union with Christ is “not as the river is united with the

⁷⁴ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 321.

sea, losing its personality therein, but as the child is united with the father or the wife with the husband, the personality and individuality of man strengthened and increased by the union.”⁷⁶ He viewed union with Christ as the restored companionship of God with humans who work together to build a new social order. Because humans have wandered away from God they must be restored through the forces of moral and spiritual evolution. To achieve this union, “the immanent God, who indwelt the man Jesus, now enters into human consciousness, filling lives with himself.”⁷⁷ Through the divine spirit, people’s animal and earthly nature is increasingly subjugated and their spiritual nature grows stronger. Abbott believed the essential natures of God and humans are the same. In the future, humans will be faultless and filled with the divine indwelling.

Another proponent of this view is Adolf von Harnack (d. 1930) who argued that the religion of Jesus and the early church involved the actual experience of living in union with God. However, this changed in the second century with the Hellenization of Christianity when union with Christ became dogma. What was a simple ethical relation was elevated into a mysterious and supernatural union. What the early church experienced according to Harnack was a Spirit energized religious life and feelings based on the disciples’ reverence and devotion to Jesus. Today however, this union is a simple life relation or ethical relation, which has been falsely elevated to become a mysterious union between believers and the Christ of the Trinity.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 321.

⁷⁶ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 322.

⁷⁷ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 322.

⁷⁸ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 322.

Shailer Matthews (d. 1941) who regarded himself as a modernist was noted by Demarest to be another proponent of this view. Matthews believed God was active in Jesus. In contemporary times God is active through nature and social evolution. Union with God in his view is a renewing and vitalizing union. He portrayed union with Christ as a voluntary personal union. The benefits of union with Christ are primarily psychological for Matthews. This union transforms and ennoble the human personality. It is both individual and social in nature leading humans to live in accordance with God's will and the mind and values of Jesus Christ.⁷⁹ Union with Christ is a life lived in fellowship with God.⁸⁰

Union with Christ as an Experiential Union

The last approach that Demarest identified in the history of Christianity is union with Christ conceived of as an experiential union. According to Demarest, many evangelicals ascribe to this view. He includes theologians John Calvin, William Shedd, Robert L. Dabney and Augustus Strong. Demarest believed that the experiential approach, alongside Scripture, "most faithfully coheres with the biblical point of view."⁸¹ According to this view, union with Christ is a discrete step in the *ordo salutis*. A supernatural union is the result of the regeneration of the believer by the Holy Spirit. Union with Christ was planned in eternity past, objectively realized by Christ's death and resurrection. But incorporation into Christ does not occur until the actual experience of

⁷⁹ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 321, 322.

⁸⁰ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 323.

⁸¹ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 326.

the sinner being made alive in Christ as a result of the baptizing ministry of the Holy Spirit in their life.⁸²

The emphasis of this approach is that of experiencing Christ and all the saving benefits that come from being in a relationship with Him. This relationship is deeper than friendship and constitutes a spiritual union between Christ and the believer brought about by the Holy Spirit. The sinner responds to the call of God and experiences conversion and union with Christ. The experiential approach “regards the born-again believer’s union with Christ as a profound relation of personal identification and fellowship with the Savior.”⁸³ Union with Christ takes place as an actual experience. From the first moment the believing sinner is made alive in Christ they receive the righteousness of Christ. The proponents of this view deny that believers share in the essence of Christ as held by mystics and pantheists. The Spirit of God, who preserves their individuality, graciously energizes those in union with Christ.⁸⁴ Moreover, the relationship is based on the operation of the Spirit in the believer’s soul.⁸⁵ Proponents of this view reject the idea of a union of essences between God and humans. Christ indwells the believer spiritually.

An example of proponents of this view, include John Calvin. Demarest cites Calvin as believing that union with Christ is an experiential union, the basis of which is being clothed with Christ based on Galatians 3:27. Calvin denied the assimilation of essences between the believer and Christ, but referred to the experience as a spiritual

⁸² Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 324.

⁸³ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 323.

⁸⁴ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 323, 324.

⁸⁵ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 324.

indwelling. This indwelling brings the gifts of God to the human heart. Jesus' obedient life and substitutionary death results in the constant supply of His saving benefits. Believers participate in Jesus' humanity and the benefits He accomplished by His obedient life and death so that believers are able to receive the life of God, which is likened to a fountain that keeps pouring into itself to receive spiritual life from God within.⁸⁶ For Calvin, if Christ remains outside of us and we are separated from Him, all that He has accomplished for the human race is useless and of no value. This experience must also involve fellowship with Christ, participation in His risen life and His blessings. Spiritual union logically follows God's election, calling and conversion and is brought about by the Holy Spirit at baptism.⁸⁷

Southern Presbyterian theologian Robert L. Dabney (d. 1898) who broadly followed Calvin conceived of union with Christ as taking three forms: a legal form (the imputation of Christ's righteousness); a spiritual or mystical form (the believer is sanctified by Christ); and a social form (the communion of the saints).⁸⁸ This experience involves an actual fellowship with Christ, participating in His risen life and sharing in His redemptive blessings. The result of accepting Christ by faith is "justification, spiritual strength, life, resurrection of the body, good works, prayer and praise, sanctification, perseverance, etc."⁸⁹ Several biblical analogies are cited to illustrate this relationship: the

⁸⁶ Calvin wrote that union with Christ is "like a rich and inexhaustible fountain that pours into us the life springing forth from the Godhead into itself." Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.17.9 quoted in Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 324.

⁸⁷ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 324.

⁸⁸ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 325.

⁸⁹ Robert L. Dabney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan, reprint, 1972), 612-613 quoted in Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 325.

vine and its branches, the relationship between a husband and wife, the foundation and cornerstone of a building and the relationship between the Father and the Son. The relationship the believer has with Christ, however does not include the believer's deification, rather, the resemblance between Christ and the believer who is in union with Him has to do with volition, the affections and the grace of Christ and does not include the sharing of substance and nature.⁹⁰ In the experiential approach, the bond of union between Christ and the believer is faith. It is through obedient trust that this relationship is maintained. The Holy Spirit is the indwelling bond that cements the relationship between Christ and His people together, according to Dabney.⁹¹

The final proponent of the experiential approach to union with Christ that Demarest cites is that of Augustus Strong. As I have already covered Strong's approach I will not repeat his position. Demarest noted a distinction between one aspect of Strong's approach to union with Christ and his own. The divine power that enables conversion is the Spirit's effectual calling, according Demarest, rather than His regenerating work in the life of the believer, as argued by Strong. However, it is interesting that the covenantal and experiential approaches to union with Christ described by Demarest bear a lot in common. A difference appears to be one of emphasis as both are based on the elect being predestined to union with Christ and hence salvation by God in eternity past. The covenantal approach by its name focuses on the redemptive work of God in union with Christ and the entirety of salvation while the experiential approach focuses on the

⁹⁰ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 325.

⁹¹ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 325.

subjective, or experiential aspect of salvation that occurs in the life of the individual Christian.

The experiential approach however, also appears to suggest that the relationship is both legal and experiential, yet the covenantal appears to hold the same as well.

Demarest's categories do not clarify whether union with Christ is based on predestination or free will or both. Furthermore, Strong identified the approach of Arminians as that of a moral union with Christ, an interpretation, which Arminians may disagree with. For example, John Wesley's conception of the indwelling Christ in the heart by faith, mentioned in the previous chapter, connotes more than just a moral or friendship-based relationship between Christ and the believer. The lack of a well-defined Wesleyan-Arminian view is just one of a number of problematic issues regarding Demarest's approaches to union with Christ that will be further discussed in chapter 6.

Having explored the five approaches to union with Christ, Demarest described its biblical basis employing illustrations from the New Testament, which I will not cover here due to space constraints and because this dissertation does not purport to provide an exegetical study of union with Christ. Demarest's views on three additional aspects of union with Christ that he based on Scripture will be outlined: the nature of union with Christ, the results of union with Christ, and the practical outcomes of union with Christ. The purpose of presenting these ideas is to better understand Demarest's position.

The Nature of Union with Christ

Demarest's position on the nature of union with Christ has seven elements. Union with Christ is by nature, firstly, a supernatural union. The example of the sanctuary in the

Old Testament was fulfilled in Jesus' words in John 14:23 that, "we will come to him and make our home with him." God dwelt with His people in the Old Testament tabernacle, in Solomon's temple and He promised that this relationship will "find its consummation in the eternal sanctuary in heaven (Rev 21:3); even as Jesus' promised His disciples that He and the Father would indwell believers here and now in a personal and individual manner."⁹² This supernatural union takes place in the believer modeled by God's presence in the Old Testament earthly sanctuary and will find its fulfillment in the sanctuary in heaven.

Second, the nature of union with Christ is a spiritual union as Christ indwells believers by His Holy Spirit based on John 14:16-17: "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you." Christ was to be present through His Holy Spirit. This union is not physical or carnal, but spiritual because it is brought about by the Spirit who indwells both individuals and the corporate church collectively.⁹³ The Spirit is also the seal of the believer for salvation, which occurs first through Spirit baptism. That is, baptism whereby the believer is regenerated, indwelt, and energized by the Holy Spirit and is the point of entry into the Christian church.⁹⁴

Third, Demarest identified the union between the believer and Christ as an organic union. According to Demarest, this "means that it has an organization similar in

⁹² Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 330.

⁹³ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 330, 331.

⁹⁴ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 331.

complexity to that of living things.”⁹⁵ This nature is exemplified in the body of Christ illustrated in Scripture, which described the mutuality of the different members of the body. Each member of Christ belongs to the other members and together they form a unity, which may be called ‘organic’.⁹⁶

Fourth, the nature of union with Christ is a vital union that involves experiencing a new quality of life. Christ is at the center of this new supernatural life, which is not ontological and does not obliterate human personality or fuse itself to God. Demarest argued that Paul maintained his personal identity by referring to himself repeatedly in the text though he also referred to ‘Christ in me’ multiple times.⁹⁷

Fifth, Demarest described union as a comprehensive union whereby the life of the Christian is lived in relation to Christ. The entire life is therefore Christ-centered. He further described the nature of this union in a sixth point as a mysterious union transcending full human understanding.

This side of eternity, where profound spiritual mysteries are anything but clear, we do not fully comprehend how Christ is united to his believing people. The images given by revelation...offer at most helpful insights into the truth of this relation. Paul’s bottom-line assessment of the matter is: “This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.”⁹⁸

Thus the mutual interpenetration of the believer and Christ is a profound mystery, which cannot fully be explained nor understood according to Demarest.

⁹⁵ See Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 6:15; 12:12-27. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 331.

⁹⁶ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 332.

⁹⁷ Paul, according to Demarest, staunchly affirmed his own identity in Phil 3:7-14 with “I” eight times and “me” two times.

⁹⁸ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 333.

Lastly, the nature of union with Christ is based on faith appropriation. “Jesus thus taught the mutual coinherence of himself and the believer by an act of *faith*, not by a sacramental ritual.”⁹⁹ Demarest argued that neither baptism nor the Eucharist regenerate or impart new life. Jesus said that anyone who eats His flesh and drinks His blood signified that faith appropriation is based on Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. The individual therefore must exercise faith in Christ in order to be united to Jesus.¹⁰⁰

Results of Union with Christ

Demarest identified five results of union with Christ. First, the believer is crucified and died with Christ. This union results in a profound ethical relationship. Second, the believer is buried with Christ through baptism, which signifies a personal death to sin. Third, the believer is made alive with Christ, moving from a condition of spiritual death to spiritual life in Christ. Fourth, the believer is raised with Christ signifying a present nearness to Christ and enjoyment of His presence. And finally, believers will be glorified with Christ at His second coming.¹⁰¹

Demarest believed that many other benefits of union with Christ result from this relationship. He included “freedom in Christ from the yoke of the law” citing Galatians 2:4 which described the situation of the Jews in Galatia who sought to bring Paul and others under the law of circumcision. Other benefits are comfort and encouragement,

⁹⁹ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 333.

¹⁰⁰ See John 6:35-58. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 333.

¹⁰¹ See Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 334, 335 for further detail on these various results of being in union with Christ.

peace, strength, wisdom, spiritual victory, hope and safety.¹⁰² He wrote, “It is eminently true that all of God’s goodness is mediated to believers in union with Christ.”¹⁰³ He further described this union is “irrevocable.”¹⁰⁴

Practical Implications for the Doctrine of Union with Christ

Demarest identified three major implications of the doctrine of union with Christ. First, the believer must seek a vital communion with Christ through an awareness of the divine presence in the heart; they must have a heightened sense of dependence on God; an experiential knowledge of the Father’s love, the Son’s grace and Spirit’s consolations; fellowship with the Father and Son through the Spirit; and experience a quickening of the believer’s spiritual faculties.¹⁰⁵ This truth is represented by the message of Christ to the church of Laodicea in Revelation 3:20: “I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will go in and eat with him, and he with me.”¹⁰⁶

Demarest explained that union with Christ is mystical in the sense that “it is a mystery not fully explicable in human language and concepts.”¹⁰⁸ It is also mystical in the sense that “it involves the finite person’s gracious experience of the infinite God in Jesus

¹⁰² Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 336.

¹⁰³ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 336.

¹⁰⁴ Demarest argues that the biblical evidence suggests that this union is irrevocable based on Rom 8:35-39 and 1 Thess 4:14; and that the Father and the Son “relentlessly guard the relationship.” Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 338.

¹⁰⁵ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 340.

¹⁰⁶ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 340.

¹⁰⁸ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 340.

Christ through the Spirit.”¹⁰⁹ Biblical mysticism, according to Demarest has three dimensions. It is a relationship, which involves engaging and communing with God whereby believers enter into the holy of holies to engage and commune with the Father and the Son through the Spirit through prayer. It is expressed morally in the life of the believer where corruption gives way to holiness of life and ethical conduct in union with Christ. It is epistemological in that the believer gains knowledge of God and His truth in fellowship with Christ. There is no such thing as metaphysical mysticism for biblical Christians according to Demarest. It is rather, an intelligent mysticism, as described by John Murray.¹¹⁰ Union with Christ involves the intelligence. “Biblical Christians, however, never posit a *metaphysical* mysticism, where the individual allegedly melts into the Divine as a drop of water is absorbed into the ocean.”¹¹¹ Rather biblical mysticism involves the personal identity of the believer who is able to communicate self-consciously with God. “In authentic Christian mysticism there may be peak experiences of communion and communication, but never absorption into the Divine, loss of personal identity, or deification of the worshipper.”¹¹²

Demarest gave the following examples of deep communion with the Lord from Scripture: Enoch walked with God, Noah also walked and conversed with God, Abraham engaged in intimate personal communion with God, Moses talked with God and experienced a profound sense of the divine presence, Saul experienced Christ on the road

¹⁰⁹ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 340.

¹¹⁰ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 341.

¹¹¹ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 341.

¹¹² Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 341.

to Damascus and John the disciple held deep spiritual communion with Christ at the Lord's Supper and by the Sea of Galilee. All of these biblical examples of deep communion with God are the practice of a true mysticism according to Demarest.¹¹³

Second, believers are to bring forth lasting spiritual fruit in their lives. Believers should also expect a loving God to discipline them in order to bring forth more fruit. Demarest cited the example of Israel who rejected God's law and were reluctantly rejected by God. Bringing forth good fruit cannot be done by human effort unaided. Believers must pray, abide in God and obey His commands. It is the Spirit of God in the life of the believer who brings about good fruit and is the result of an "intimate, loving, and obedient union with Jesus Christ."¹¹⁴ It comes from the infusion of supernatural life through spiritual union with Christ. This is a lifelong challenge and walk with God but it is also the goal of the believer to bear fruit for Christ.¹¹⁵ Therefore believers should expect God to discipline them to increase their fruitfulness.

Finally, believers are to seek togetherness in union. According to the New Testament all believers are spiritually one in Christ. This spiritual unity of believers must result in tangible and practical expressions. Jesus in His high-priestly prayer to the Father prayed for this unity amongst His followers in John 17: 21-23. Christians in the book of Acts lived, worshipped and served in practical, unified action. They lived out their spiritual unity in Christ. Demarest wrote, "Christian believers need to *become* outwardly and practically what they *are* inwardly and spiritually. We need to give loving, tangible

¹¹³ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 340.

¹¹⁴ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 342.

¹¹⁵ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 341, 342.

expression to the spiritual unity that exists among us in the body of Christ.”¹¹⁶ This should be expressed in concrete acts of fellowship, worship and mission. When Christians work together in love and unity the world will truly come to know them by their love for one another. Like an orchestra that has a full range of instruments playing together in harmony producing music of great richness and beauty, Demarest explained, the body of Christ, by their united service, worship, fellowship and mission for Christ can give tangible expression to their inward spiritual unity.¹¹⁷

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to give an overview of the major approaches to union with Christ in the history of Christianity as outlined by Augustus Strong and Bruce Demarest, respectively, in addition to briefly presenting the approaches of Strong and Demarest. This review of approaches to union with Christ in the history of Christianity provides a backdrop to help clarify Ellen White’s concept of union with Christ, which I will begin exploring in chapter 3. Further questions that need to be asked and answered include: does Ellen White’s approach fit into any one of the categories that Strong and Demarest identified in the history of Christianity? In other words, does Ellen White follow or adopt one or more of these approaches or elements within them? Or is her approach more complex? Demarest’s work may be helpful to clarify existing approaches to union with Christ and provide a tool to help clarify Ellen White’s concept of union with Christ in chapter 6. In the following chapter, I shall begin by presenting an overview

¹¹⁶ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 343.

of the development of Ellen White's concept of union with Christ starting with a brief biography of her life as a background to her ideas.

¹¹⁷ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 342-344.

CHAPTER 3

ELLEN WHITE ON UNION WITH CHRIST:

THE 1860s AND 1870s

Introduction

The phrase ‘union with Christ’ can be found throughout the writings of Ellen White.¹ With hundreds of references scattered throughout her published articles, letters, and books, union with Christ is, at the very least, an important theological idea that White sought to communicate to her readers.² While her writing on the topic of union with Christ is at times repetitive, with similar statements appearing in multiple articles and books, there is over time a development in the presentation of her ideas to her reader audience, which was primarily Seventh-day Adventists. What is union with Christ? How is it formed and maintained? What is its nature and importance for salvation, and for the Seventh-day Adventist Church living imminently, as White believed, near the end of time? These are some of the questions White addressed in her writings on union with

¹ The intent is to grasp by reading the text an interpretation of the author’s writing, bearing in mind the divergence that exists in cultural, social and historical backgrounds. While I cannot claim to know what White thought, I can, through reading her writings attempt to grasp, clarify and present this information.

² References to union with Christ are replete in articles that White published in the *Review and Herald* and *The Signs of the Times*. For articles that specifically bear the title “Union with Christ,” see Ellen G. White, “Union with Christ,” *The Review and Herald*, December 13, 1887. Also Ellen G. White, “Union with Christ,” *Signs of the Times*, December 10, 1896; Ellen G. White, “Obedience the Fruit of Union with Christ—No. 1,” *The Review and Herald*, August 27, 1901; Ellen G. White, “Obedience the Fruit of Union with Christ—No. 2,” *The Review and Herald*, September 3, 1901; and Ellen G. White, “In Union with Christ,” *The Review and Herald*,

Christ over a span of more than forty years.³

White's theology developed in the context of the Wesleyan-Arminian tradition as she was raised in the Methodist Church. She held a synergistic view of salvation. That is, salvation depends upon a free will response of the individual, which is itself a response enabled by grace, to the prevenient grace of God and the invitation to exercise faith in Christ and live in loving obedience to His commands. For White, the central theme of the divine-human relationship in her writings is that of union with Christ. At times, White emphasized the human side of the relationship, what the believer must do, how they are to behave and respond to God; and at other times, she emphasized the primacy of the divine role in effecting union with Christ. For White union with Christ has a human and a divine side. It is based on both a human response to God and carried responsibilities on the part of the believer. This is evident in her early writings on union with Christ in the 1860s and 1870s where she focused on what God required of her readers to establish a union with Christ. White also developed ideas and themes in her writings regarding the divine side of union with Christ, which continued with greater clarity and force in the 1880s and 1890s.

White began to write about the divine side of the relationship from the start of her writing on union with Christ. Beginning with the relationship between God, the Father and the Son, White presented to her readers that the relationship existing between the Father and the Son included His followers on earth in this union. From the very

May 30, 1907.

³ White wrote many articles that include the topic of union with Christ. She did not however attempt to answer these questions systematically, hence the need to use statements from multiple sources to piece together her views.

beginning, union with Christ for White involved the eternal Godhead, though the Spirit's work in relation to union with Christ was not explicitly mentioned until 1870. While her earliest statements on union with Christ in the 1860s and 1870s were fragmentary and somewhat brief, they contained important theological ideas that help to clarify her approach, which she wrote about more extensively and pointedly during the 1880s and 1890s.⁴ The breadth of White's interest in union with Christ, however, extended far beyond theological insights to her youth, and to the discovery of a personal relationship with Jesus and the events that shaped her spiritual growth, development and understanding of her relationship to the Triune God.

White was not a trained theologian, but the exhortations she gave her readers on union with Christ are both theological and intensely practical.⁶ Her theology was expressed in a context, in the personalized letters, articles, and sermons she gave, which addressed real people in real life situations. Though White did not write any systematic theology or doctrinal books on union with Christ *per se*, her most widely-known and translated book *Steps to Christ*⁷ is a guide on how to develop a personal union with Jesus.

⁴ Her endorsement of the righteousness by faith teaching in 1888 by A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner, as well as the four works White produced in the 1890s on Christ, his life and teachings: *Steps to Christ* (1892), *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* (1896), *The Desire of Ages* (1898) and *Christ's Object Lessons* (1900) point to a christocentric theological emphasis in her writings.

⁶ Denis Fortin pointed out that although White had no formal theological training she did have theological intentions when she wrote. She used the Bible in six different ways: typology, moral lessons, character sketches, biblical analogies and parallelisms, spiritual warfare and exegesis. See Denis Fortin, "The Theology of Ellen G. White," in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, ed. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2013), 274-276.

⁷ Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1892).

The Desire of Ages,⁸ which White wrote on the life of Christ, is based on the idea that Christ came to bind humanity to Himself and that by studying His life as an example for them to follow, believers can be brought into a vital, personal relationship with Christ.⁹ Through metaphor and example, White arguably and clearly taught her readers about union with Christ in both *Steps to Christ* and *The Desire of Ages*, which represent the culmination of her thought on the subject. It should be noted, that nowhere in her published writings did White refer to her own relationship with Christ (in particular, her prophetic role in the Seventh-day Adventist church and the visions and dreams she received as part of her calling and exercising of her specific spiritual gifts), as the example she wanted her readers to emulate or seek in their union with Christ.

The purpose of this chapter is to clarify White's concept of union with Christ by reviewing her earliest statements on this subject, which she published in the 1860s and 1870s. My focus is on statements I have selected based on their perceived significance to the development of her articulation on union with Christ. The method may appear disordered, jumping from this article to that, but that is a reflection of White's writing on the subject. I do not always give the full context of the article or testimony in which the statements appear other than a brief introduction. This chapter begins with a brief biography of White's life story, focusing on her early formative years in the 1830s and 40s, up to the time of a vision she experienced in 1850 revealing to her Jesus in heaven. This brief sketch of her early years will provide a glimpse into her personal experience,

⁸ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1898).

⁹ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 74, 660.

her struggles, and her desire for others to have a personal relationship with Jesus, as a background to the development of her ideas. I will attempt to paint a picture of her formative early life and relationship with Christ. This will be followed with some general biographical facts about her life.

Brief Biography of Ellen White

Ellen Gould (Harmon) White was born in Topsham, Maine, on November 26, 1827, to Eunice and Robert Harmon, and died July 16, 1915. One of nine children, White was raised in the Methodist Episcopal Church during the American Victorian era.¹⁰ Victorianism marked the dawning of a new age in Christian evangelicalism. While the Second Great Awakening brought emotionalism and loud demonstrations of spiritual fervor, the Victorian era brought order and respectability to the fastest growing mainline churches, such as that of Methodism, in which White and her family were members. The mid to late nineteenth century, the time when White did her greatest work as co-founder of the denomination of Seventh-day Adventists (est. 1863), was also perhaps the most transformative period of the nation's history, an era when Protestantism exerted a most powerful influence on American society at large.¹¹

White thus experienced Christianity as firmly rooted in American culture. She also understood the depravity of human nature. In her theology of the great controversy

¹⁰ Victorianism helped tame the religious impulses of the Second Great Awakening in American society. See Jonathan M. Butler, "A Portrait," in *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet*, ed. Terrie Dopp Aamodt, Gary Land, and Ronald L. Numbers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2.

¹¹ Jonathan M. Butler, "A Portrait," 2.

between Christ and Satan, she expected Seventh-day Adventism to expand nationally, even worldwide, in her time as a prophesied outcome of sharing with the entire world the gospel message in the framework of unique Adventist doctrines. White believed Seventh-day Adventists would hasten the end of the world and usher in the Second Coming of Christ through preaching and teaching, ministry of service, education, holistic medicine, and the perfection of Christian character. A sickly person, White had to overcome personal obstacles of grief, illness, loss and coming under personal attack during her almost eighty-eight years of life.

Of significance in White's childhood and conversion experience is an incident that likely occurred in 1836. While walking home from school at the age of nine, she was hit in the face by a stone thrown by an angry classmate.¹² The traumatic injury caused significant blood loss, and White lay unconscious for weeks. Except for her mother, no one expected her to survive. A long period of convalescence followed by several failed attempts to go back to school, led White to discontinue her formal education after the third grade. This was a painful experience for White, not only physically, but also emotionally, as she was disfigured and suffered deeply as people, especially her father, failed to recognize her new appearance.¹³ A promising child, she was previously appointed reader to her classmates. After the incident, her dreams of higher education

¹² Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2 (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1860), 7.

¹³ White later wrote, "As I began to gain a little strength, my curiosity was aroused by hearing those who came to see me, say, "What a pity! I should not know her," &c. [sic] I asked for a looking-glass, and as I looked into it, I was shocked at the change in my appearance. Every feature of my face seemed changed. The sight was more than I could bear. The bone of my nose proved to be broken. The idea of carrying my misfortune through life was insupportable. I could see no pleasure in my life. I did not wish to live, and I dared not die, for I was not prepared."

were dashed as she could barely hold a pen or concentrate on simple tasks such as reading and writing, in which she had previously excelled. She now expected to remain a lifelong near invalid.¹⁴

The experience of her altered appearance, and the reaction of others to her, affected White's self-reported relationship with God as well. In her stricken state, she repented, fearing she would go to hell as a result of her former pride and indifference toward God prior to the incident. She wrote of this early and desperate time in her young life where she deeply desired to be accepted by God and wanted to make Jesus the center of her life. As she earnestly prayed for the forgiveness of her sins on her sickbed, she recorded that she felt the peace of God fill her heart.¹⁵ This experience of repentance and the filling of her heart with God's peace was the beginning of White's conversion in 1836/37.¹⁶

In 1840, when White was 12 years old, she and her family attended a course of lectures on the Second Coming of Christ held by William Miller, a former Deist farmer turned Baptist preacher. Upon hearing the message of Christ's soon return, White became so terrified about her unreadiness to meet Christ that she was deeply troubled for months. She was filled with fears about praying in public and surrendering to God. During this time, White viewed God as a tyrannical judge. But she kept her pent up feelings to her

Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2, 8.

¹⁴ Arthur White, *Ellen White: Woman of Vision*, 16.

¹⁵ Jack Blanco, "Centrality of Christ," in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, ed. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2013), 689.

¹⁶ See Moon and Kaiser, "For Jesus and Scripture," 22-24.

self, not even sharing them with her mother. The following year at a Methodist camp meeting, she learned that it is only by connecting with Christ through faith that she could be saved. As she knelt to pray at the end of the service she repeated the words, “I am a child of God, His loving care is around me. I will be obedient and in no way displease Him, but will praise His dear name and love Him always.”¹⁷ Still fearful for her salvation and desirous of the Methodist “second blessing” of sanctification, White did not experience peace, following her baptism in 1842, into the Portland Methodist Church.

It was not until White experienced a dream that a new understanding of God began to emerge in her conversion experience. White dreamed she visited Jesus at the top of a very long and narrow staircase. She later wrote that the experience “filled her soul with gladness” when Jesus smiled at her and she felt for the first time accepted by Christ. In her dream, a guide gave her a green cord and told her to keep it near her heart. Whenever she wished to see Jesus she should take the cord out, stretching it as far as it could go, but that she should not let the green cord remain coiled for long, or it would become knotted and she would be unable to straighten it.¹⁸ “I placed the cord near my heart and joyfully descended the narrow stairs, praising the Lord and telling all whom I met where they could find Jesus. This dream gave me hope. The green cord represented faith to my mind, and the beauty and simplicity of trusting in God began to dawn upon my soul.”¹⁹ This dream was an important part of White’s process of changing her paradigm of God from that of a stern judge who takes pleasure in punishing His subjects

¹⁷ Blanco, “Centrality of Christ,” 689.

¹⁸ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, 28, 29.

¹⁹ James White, “Mrs. Ellen G. White—Her Life, Christian Experience, and Labors,” *The*

to a God of love, an extremely important theme concerning the character of God that would later come to dominate her writings.

She confided the content of the dreams to her mother, who sent her to Elder Levi Stockman, a Methodist preacher, who was preaching the Second Coming of Jesus in Portland, Maine.²⁰ He encouraged White to believe in God as a loving Father, assuring her that even though the accident had left her grievously afflicted, she would one day understand her affliction as part of God's wise providence for her life. Stockman reached out and placing his hand on her head, told her that Jesus must be preparing her for some special work.²¹ She later wrote of that experience that for the first time, "I felt the assurance of an indwelling Savior."²² That evening White prayed out loud in public. "As I prayed, the burden and agony of soul that I had so long endured left me, and the blessing of the Lord descended upon me like the gentle dew. I praised God from the depths of my heart. Everything seemed shut out from me but Jesus and His glory, and I lost consciousness of what was passing around me."²³ The dream of seeing Jesus and His approval of her, the conversation with Stockman and his prayer which resulted in the assurance of an indwelling Savior, and her new found freedom to pray in public was an important turning point in White's experience of her relationship with Christ. From then on she wanted to focus on doing only God's will and keeping Jesus constantly in her

Signs of the Times, February 10, 1876.

²⁰ Arthur L. White, *Ellen White: Woman of Vision* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 17.

²¹ Arthur L. White, *Ellen White: Woman of Vision*, 17.

²² James White, "Life Sketches, Chapter V—Continued: Parentage and Early Life," *Signs of the Times*, April 18, 1878.

thoughts.²⁴ Jesus was now an indwelling Savior.

White and her family had become devoted followers of William Miller who predicted that Jesus would return to the earth sometime about 1843. When Christ failed to return that year, Samuel Snow, a follower of Miller, set the exact date of Christ's return as October 22, 1844. In the same manner as Miller, Snow used the 2,300 day prophecy found in Daniel 8:14 to predict Christ's Second Coming, but he set the start date for the beginning of the prophecy in the autumn of 457 B.C. at the decree to rebuild Jerusalem, and ended it at the typical Day of Atonement, which was October 22, 1844, according to the Karaite Jewish calendar.²⁵ The end of 1843 to Autumn 1844 White described as the happiest of her entire life.²⁶ At this time, her entire family had been expelled from the Methodist church in Portland, Maine, in September 1843, with the charge that they had walked contrary to the rules of the Methodist church in spreading the teachings of the Millerites.²⁷ The Methodists had increasingly come to look upon the Millerites as fanatics with their predictions of the Second Coming of Christ, citing the Scripture, warning that no one knows the day or the hour of Christ's return.

Determined to share her testimony of what Jesus had done for her, White decided

²³ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, 31.

²⁴ Arthur L. White, *Ellen White: Woman of Vision*, 17.

²⁵ For White's account of their understanding of the time prophecy in Daniel 8:14, see Ellen G. White, "Mrs. Ellen G. White—Her Life, Christian Experience and Labors," *Signs of the Times*, April 20, 1876. See also Bob Pickle, "Karaite Calender," in *Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, ed. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2013), 913-915.

²⁶ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, 54.

²⁷ Arthur L. White, *Ellen White: Woman of Vision*, 19.

to go from house to house, encouraging Miller's followers.²⁸ She helped set up evening prayer meetings around the city,²⁹ where she often gave her testimony. During those meetings, White later recorded that she felt so overpowered by God at times that she would lose all strength. Yet even among the Millerites, White felt attacked at times by those who had come out of the more formal churches and didn't believe that her fainting spells were from God. She felt they disdained listening to her testimony. White determined for a time to keep silent, but felt she was losing her connection to God.

For six months not a cloud intervened between me and my Saviour. Whenever there was a proper opportunity I bore my testimony, and was greatly blessed. At times the Spirit of the Lord rested upon me with such power that my strength was taken from me. This was a trial to some who had come out from the formal churches, and remarks were often made that grieved me much. Many could not believe that one could be so overpowered by the Spirit of God as to lose all strength. My position was exceedingly painful. I began to reason with myself whether I was not justified in withholding my testimony in meeting, and thus restrain my feelings when there was such an opposition in the hearts of some who were older in years and experience than myself. I reasoned that repressing my testimony would not hinder me from faithfully living out my religion. I adopted this plan of silence for a time. I often felt strongly impressed that it was my duty to speak in meeting, but refrained from doing so, and was sensible of having grieved the Spirit of God. Sometimes I even remained away from meetings that I knew would be attended by those who were annoyed by my testimony. I shrank from offending my brethren; but in this I allowed the fear of men to break up that interrupted communion with God, which had blessed my heart for so many months.³⁰

This tumultuous, yet happy period of White's life was significant for several reasons. It laid a basis for her public speaking that she would take up after the Great Disappointment

²⁸ The giving of personal, public testimonies with emotional content were viewed as paramount to living a life of holiness in the Methodist Church in the nineteenth century America, especially as taught by influential figure Phoebe Palmer. See Burt, "Ellen G. White and Religious Enthusiasm in Early Adventist Experience—Appendix B," 919.

²⁹ James White, "Mrs. Ellen G. White—Her Life, Christian Experience, and Labors," *The Signs of the Times*, March 16, 1876.

³⁰ James White, "Mrs. Ellen G. White—Her Life, Christian Experience, and Labors," *The*

and provided the reason for her passionate ministry, her love of and personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and the strong desire to share this with others. Following the Great Disappointment on October 22, 1844, White, along with a small group of former Millerites, re-interpreted Miller's prediction of Christ's cleansing of the sanctuary to refer to the heavenly sanctuary and not the cleansing of the earth predicted in Daniel 8:14. "We were disappointed but not disheartened. We resolved to submit patiently to the process of purifying that God deemed needful for us."³¹

White continued in the work of ministry in response to a vision she received in December 1844, known as the Midnight Cry. In this vision, White saw a band of Advent people making their way on a narrow pathway to heaven. A great light, which was set up at the beginning of the path, shined its full length so that they would not stumble on their way. White wrote that she was told by an angel that, "If they kept their eyes fixed on Jesus, who was just before them, leading them to the city, they were safe."³² But those who fell off the path because they rejected the light could not be saved.

A second vision, which occurred a week later, called for White to "make known to others what I have revealed to you." Feeling overwhelmed by the commission to begin a public ministry as a sickly young woman who suffered from advanced stages of tuberculosis, which left her faint and barely able to speak, White sought counsel from her parents and others who gathered and prayed for her.

While prayer was offered for me, that the Lord would give me strength and courage

Signs of the Times, March 16, 1876.

³¹ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, 56.

³² Ellen G. White, "Letter from Sister Harmon," December 20, 1845 reprinted in *The Day-Star*, January 24, 1846.

to bear the message, the thick darkness that had encompassed me rolled back, and a sudden light came upon me. Something that seemed to me like a ball of fire struck me right over the heart. My strength was taken away, and I fell to the floor. I seemed to be in the presence of the angels. One of these holy beings again repeated the words, “Make known to others what I have revealed to you.”³³

A few weeks after White accepted the call to become God’s “messenger,” she met a young preacher a fellow Millerite from the Christian Connexion named James Springer White. He became convinced of the authenticity of her visions, and they set out to encourage other Millerites to continue in the faith. In 1846, they married and between 1847 and 1860, White gave birth to four sons, two of whom, would die in childhood.

White experienced visions, particularly during her younger years, with the first occurring in December 1844 in Portland, Maine. A second vision mentioned in the previous quotation, directed her to tell others what she had seen. I will relate here a vision that White received in 1850, as it describes her seeing Jesus in heaven. She wrote this vision out in, “To the ‘Little Flock,’” published in *The Present Truth*, April 1, 1850.

Dear Brethren, The Lord gave me a view, January 26, which I will relate. I saw that some of the people of God were stupid and dormant; and were but half awake, and did not realize the time we were now living in; and that the “man” with the “dirt-brush” had entered, and that some were in danger of being swept away. I begged of Jesus to save them, to spare them a little longer, and let them see their awful danger, that they might get ready before it should be for ever too late.³⁴

In her vision, White was not only viewing the events transpiring before her, but she also engaged in conversation with the angel and even begged Jesus to save those who were lost. After seeing poor souls dying because they lacked present truth, White learned the story of those who were selfishly withholding their means to advance the cause of God

³³ Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1915), 71.

while Jesus was pleading His blood for them in heaven. Telling of the judgments about to fall on the earth, and of a mighty shaking to commence in the church, to shake out those who will not stand for truth, White stopped and described Christ to her readers.

I then beheld the beauty and loveliness of Jesus. His robe was whiter than the whitest white. No language can describe his glory and exalted loveliness. All, all who keep the commandments of God, will enter in through the gates into the City, and have right to the tree of life, and ever be in the presence of the lovely Jesus, whose countenance shines brighter than the sun at noonday.³⁵

White is then directed to a view of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, their fall into sin, the lies told by the serpent regarding their immortal state, and the Second Coming when the righteous dead will be raised to immortal life. Based on what she saw in the vision, White presented a picture of God's cosmic redemption highlighting the beginning with Adam and Eve, White's own time, and the end of the world and future resurrection. She ended her recollection with the words, "In hope of immortality at the appearing of Jesus."³⁶ This gives us an insight into her relationship with Christ. It is not mystical in the sense of being unintelligible; rather, she conversed in full consciousness with other beings, the angel who directs her, and with Christ Himself. In her consciousness and intelligence she was invited to view the heavenly realms and the human story to share a message. That message was the world needed to prepare for a literal return of Christ.

Though White was privileged to receive visions and dreams that she firmly believed to be from God, she continued to suffer from chronic sickness throughout her life and often described herself as "prostrated with sickness," and enduring "head

³⁴ Ellen G. White, "To the 'Little Flock,'" *The Present Truth*, April 1, 1850.

³⁵ White, "To the 'Little Flock.'"

³⁶ White, "To the 'Little Flock.'"

troubles” that limited her activity at times.³⁷ Even so, White continued her ministry as prophetess of the Advent movement, which became the Seventh-day Adventist Church, for almost seventy years. During the remainder of her life, she often suffered from various illnesses, but this did not stop her from becoming a prolific writer with editorial assistants, a public speaker, a preacher and activist supporting the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, and a founder of schools, hospitals, and missionary workers to the far corners of the globe. White became influential, traveling much during her younger years, and speaking in a camp meeting circuit before focusing more on her writings in the latter part of her life. An avid world traveler, White visited Europe and spent nine years in Australia (1891-1900). Together with Joseph Bates, James and Ellen White are considered the co-founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In her lifetime, White produced some 100,000 pages of manuscript and is the most published Christian female writer of all time. She wrote 26 books, 200 tracts and pamphlets, and 5,000 articles, although she is attested to have recycled much of her writing and borrowed from various sources.³⁸ Influenced by early nineteenth-century New England revivalism,³⁹ White engaged her audience at a popular level that connected to the needs of the common people. Her writings bore the mark of pietistic fervor. She

³⁷ Arthur Patrick, “Author,” in *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet*, ed. Terrie Dopp Aamodt, Gary Land, and Ronald L. Numbers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 92. White spent much of her early-married life traveling with James White in the 1850s as they worked to build the Advent people, which institutionally formed the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1863.

³⁸ Patrick wrote that White “borrowed extensively.” Patrick, “Author,” 91.

³⁹ See Merlin D. Burt, “Ellen G. White and Religious Enthusiasm in Early Adventist Experience—Appendix B,” in *The Ellen G. White Letters & Manuscripts with Annotations*, vol. 1, 1845-1859 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2014), 918.

produced testimonies to persuade Adventists to change their attitudes and habits,⁴⁰ as well as presentations on biblical topics. Her writings were generally pastoral and pragmatic, laced with pietistic fervor and straightforward language both denouncing and exhorting others to whom she gave council. Her foundational theological themes are the love of God and the great controversy between Christ and Satan.⁴¹ During and after her years in Australia, White took on fewer public speaking engagements.⁴² She also produced fewer new materials and spent her time revising and enlarging existing materials she had previously written for publication.⁴³

White received numerous prophetic dreams and visions during her life. Although she never held an administrative or elective office in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, she is held to have exerted a greater influence on the development of its institutions than any other single person.⁴⁴ While her early life was marked by physical illness and struggles in her understanding of God, her involvement in the Methodist Church, and in the Millerite movement, provided a context for White to grow in her understanding and relationship with Christ from one of fear to love.⁴⁵ Her prophetic role within the Seventh-

⁴⁰ Graeme Sharrock, “Testimonies,” in *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet*, ed. Terrie Dopp Aamodt, Gary Land, and Ronald L. Numbers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 55.

⁴¹ This occupied much of her writing time from 1858 to 1915. Fortin, “The Theology of Ellen G. White,” 265.

⁴² Moon and Kaiser, “For Jesus and Scripture,” 70.

⁴³ Moon and Kaiser, “For Jesus and Scripture,” 70.

⁴⁴ White’s role as “builder” began to emerge in 1848 beginning with the institution of the movement’s first publishing house. Floyd Greenleaf and Jerry Moon, “Builder,” *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet*, ed. Terrie Dopp Aamodt, Gary Land, and Ronald L. Numbers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 126.

⁴⁵ See Alden L. Thompson, *Escape from the Flames: How Ellen White Grew From Fear to Joy—And Helped Me Do It Too* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2005).

day Adventist Church established her as a leader, influential writer, and spokeswoman who gave spiritual guidance and counsel to thousands, in addition to her assisting in the direction and development of the wider church and its institutions.

White's Earliest Views on Union with Christ

This section begins the study of union with Christ in White's writings. As mentioned already, one of the characteristics of her early writings on union with Christ is that they appear sporadic, fragmentary, and brief.⁴⁶ White's first reference that I note here, is to "union with God," made in 1860. It occurred in the context of a private letter sent to Harriet and Uriah Smith.

I saw that you could have the blessing of God resting upon you, could live in the hearts of the people of God. You must with confidence and courage go forward, have faith in God, draw strength from Jesus. Unitedly you can serve him, unitedly obtain the victory, and unitedly share the reward. I saw that great was your privilege. You can enjoy sweet union with God; with child-like confidence can you rely upon him.⁴⁷

It is worth mentioning this reference here as White linked faith in God and drawing strength from Jesus to encourage this couple to work unitedly for God and as a result, they could experience a sweet union with Him. This demonstrates that White had an early understanding of the role of faith and union with God as part of the Christian experience.

In her first published statement on union with *Christ* in "Power of Example," union is described in terms of Christ's relationship to the Father and how humans

⁴⁶ There are no complete documents, articles or papers written by White on union with Christ until the 1878 publication of "Last Talk with the Disciples."

⁴⁷ Ellen G. White, "Letter to J. N. Andrews and Sister H. N. Smith" (1860), 27.

participate in that relationship by faith, earnest prayer and personal effort.⁴⁸

“Power of Example” (1861)

White’s first published statement on union with Christ was in an article in *The Review and Herald*, June 25, 1861 called the “Power of Example” in which she stated that she feared God’s people were asleep.⁴⁹ The majority of the article concerns dress and the popular women’s fashion of hoop wearing.⁵⁰ Warning readers of the impact of poor dress choices, White pointed them to the example of Christ. When Christ was on earth living in poverty, His appearance did not reveal His true position as the heir of all things. Just as Christ’s riches were not apparent in His simple dress, Christ’s divine character and union with the Father were hidden from the world.⁵¹

The Son of God was the heir of all things, and the dominion and glory of the

⁴⁸ In an earlier statement regarding the role of gospel order in the church, White suggested that ministers of God must be kind and courteous. She encouraged that they should confess their sins to their congregation and that as a result a spirit of confession would be encouraged in the church and “sweet union would be the result.” Ellen G. White, *Supplement to the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White*, 21. White’s earliest idea of union with God was described as a sweet union.

⁴⁹ In 1861 is the first reference to union with the Son and the Father, although not using the exact phrase “union with Christ” but it is implied in her statements. Union here includes union with the Son and the Father and all believers. Ellen G. White, “Power of Example,” *The Review and Herald*, June 25, 1861. This statement is published again in *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4b, 1864, 77; and *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, 1868, 286.

⁵⁰ White counseled female believers to avoid extremes in their appearance, either hoop wearing or disorderly, dirty dress. When believers adopt such extreme views of dress, not following order and neatness White suggested they have virtually left the faith. White, “Power of Example,” 1861. This article is later published again in *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 4b, 1864, 65-77; and *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, 1868, 274-287.

⁵¹ White, “Power of Example,” 1861. Although the general context of this article is the peculiarity of the Adventist people, which White used to answer questions on dress and the rights and wrongs of hoop wearing for women, she makes her theological justification in paragraph one, and more fully at the end of the article where she first developed in written form, her views on union between the Son and the Father and by extension with humanity.

kingdoms of this world were promised to him. Yet when he appeared in this world it was without riches or splendor. The world understood not his union with the Father; and the excellency and glory of his divine character were hid from them. He was therefore “despised and rejected of men,” and “we did not esteem him smitten of God and afflicted.” Even so the members of Christ are as he was in this world. They are the sons of God and joint heirs with Christ; and the kingdom and dominion belong to them. The world understand not their character and holy calling. They perceive not their adoption into the family of God. Their union and fellowship with the Father and the Son are not manifest to the world, and while they behold their humiliation and reproach, it does not appear what they are, or what they shall be. They are strangers. The world knows them not, and appreciate not the motives which actuate them.⁵²

The union between the Father and the Son included the members of Christ in this world.

White explained how parents are to overcome in the hard battle with their children over the evil of following the fashions of the world. This is to be achieved by faith, earnest prayer, and putting forth personal effort in the rugged path of duty.

Yet with faith in God and earnest prayer, believing parents may press on in this rugged path of duty. The way of the cross is an onward, upward way. And as we advance therein, seeking the things that are above, we must leave farther and farther in the distance the things which belong to the earth. While the world and carnal professors are rushing downward to death, those who climb the hill will have to put forth efforts or they will be carried down in the broad road.⁵³

Thus it is through faith, earnest prayer, and effort, that Christ’s followers may fulfill their duty. Though poor, their true state is one of riches. They are in a union and fellowship with the Father and the Son, a union that affects their motives, character and calling. Though they are without riches or splendor, they are sons of God and joint heirs with Christ and have been adopted into the family of God.

The above quote about union with the Father and the Son was copied, with minor changes, from a work by an anonymous female Christian author. The unnamed author,

⁵² White, “Power of Example,” 1861.

⁵³ White, “Power of Example,” 1861.

though suffering from a terminal illness, produced this work between 1843-1850, which was published posthumously in 1852 as *Mirror of the Soul, or Spiritual Things Discerned by a Christian Lady*, edited and with an introduction by Rev. David Holmes (1810-1873), a Methodist preacher.⁵⁴ The book contains the author's personal experience and doctrinal views given, Holmes wrote, in practical terms.⁵⁵ In an entry dated January 1, 1847, the author included a section titled, 'Unity of the Members of Christ'.

He was indeed the Son of God, the only beloved of the Father, the Heir of all things, and the dominion and glory of the kingdoms of this world were given to him. But he appeared not so in the flesh, and when we saw him, we saw no riches or beauty that we should desire him. The world perceived not nor understood his union with the Father, and the supreme excellence and glory of his divine character were concealed within himself and hid from observation. He was therefore "despised and rejected of men," and "we did esteem him smitten of God and afflicted." Even so the members of Christ are as he was in the world. They are indeed the sons of God and joint heirs with Christ, and the kingdom and dominion belong to them, but as yet we see not their divine character and holy calling, but we see them in their humiliation, bearing the cross, and we see no form or comeliness that we should desire them. We see them chastened and humbled on account of their sins, and we perceive not their sonship and adoption into the family of heaven. Their union and fellowship with the Father and the Son are not manifest to the world, and in this time of their humiliation and reproach, it does not appear what they are or shall be. They are strangers among men, and as the world discerned not, nor acknowledged the divinity and sonship of their living Head, so we discern not nor acknowledge his members.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Holmes was a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church and preached in the New York State, Southern Illinois and Northwest Indiana conferences. This book is most likely written by a Methodist woman that Holmes claimed to be "an intelligent, highly respected, and deeply pious female, late a resident of Cortland Co., N.Y." who preferred to remain anonymous but was known personally to a large circle of friends, ministers and Christians "by whom her character was highly appreciated, and whose judgment is, that the work herein referred to should be given to the world in a permanent form." In her work, the author states she was 40 years of age on November 19, 1847. David Holmes, *Mirror of the Soul, or Spiritual Things Discerned by a Christian Lady* (Intro. by D. Holmes; Auburn and Buffalo: John E. Beardsley, 1857), iii, iv, 283.

⁵⁵ "Deep religious experience and practical godliness are the points mainly aimed at by the writer, and the doctrinal views presented are only considered important as they stand related to that which is vital in righteousness and true holiness." D. Holmes, *Mirror of the Soul*, iv.

⁵⁶ D. Holmes, ed., *Mirror of the Soul*, 268, 269.

Although White borrowed her first published statement in an article, a significant point is that she used the material to teach an important message that would stay with her teaching on union with Christ throughout the next three decades.⁵⁷ The concept of Christ as our example would be most fully developed in her book *The Desire of Ages*.⁵⁸

Call to Faith, Unity and a Deeper Experience of Christ

In 1868, White wrote a lengthy testimony to the Church in Battle Creek in which she detailed problems that she had been shown when she was with them on June 12, 1868.⁵⁹ She warned that worldly prosperity, unbelief, pride, covetousness and jealousy had grieved the angels of God and caused them to weep.⁶⁰ The professed people of God had not experienced the presence and power of God but were living in union with the world.⁶¹ Part of the problem was that they did not persevere so that the truth could

⁵⁷ This book was found in White's private library of books at her death. Warren H. Johns, Tim Poirer and Ron Graybill, *A Bibliography of Ellen G. White's Private and Office Libraries*, 3d rev. ed. (Ellen G. White Estate, 1993), 4.

⁵⁸ White does not mention the Holy Spirit in this statement in "Power of Example." The original anonymous author however expressly wrote of the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to union with Christ in her writing and also drew on the metaphor of the vine and the branches to describe the union between God and His church in other parts of her book. "The children of God from the beginning till the end of the Christian dispensation, are as branches growing out of one parent vine; all deriving life, spirit and fruit from one common source, and all possessing the same vital principle of thought and action, being quickened and kept alive by the same invisible, hidden life, and that life the life of Christ in the soul." D. Holmes, ed. *Mirror of the Soul*, 267. The vine and the branches metaphor would later become a favorite metaphor of White for describing union with Christ. Although White does not mention the Holy Spirit at this stage in 1861 to her readers, her statement in "Power of Example" cannot be treated as defining her entire view on union with Christ. As with all the references that are subsequently quoted from the writings of Ellen White on union with Christ, I do not have access to her mind, or to her own private thoughts. I am limited to what she chose to present to her reader audience at that time.

⁵⁹ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Battle Creek Church*, Pamphlet 97, 1868.

⁶⁰ White, *Testimony for the Battle Creek Church*, 1.

⁶¹ White, *Testimony for the Battle Creek Church*, 2.

sanctify their hearts and lives. Their neglect of self-examination and secret prayer enabled Satan to have free access to them.⁶²

Addressing Jotham M. Aldrich, who had taken charge of the publishing work after James White left in 1867, White warned, “These brethren lack a deep and thorough experience in the things of God. This experience cannot be obtained without effort on their part.”⁶³ The kind of work that is needed, according to White is “heart work.”⁶⁴ The work that needs to be done cannot until there is a transformation of the mind, “until all the powers of your body and mind are brought into subjection to God, and sanctified to him.”⁶⁵ White stressed Christ as the example and standard that Aldrich must imitate. Over the issue of diet and dress, White made it clear that God wanted them to unite as a people on these subjects, but Aldrich had kept the people in a state of disunion and great spiritual weakness ensued.⁶⁶ God called those in the publishing work in Battle Creek to be “instruments of righteousness, workmen, living stones, that emit light, that they may encourage the presence of heavenly angels. They are required, as it were, to be channels

⁶² White, *Testimony for the Battle Creek Church*, 2.

⁶³ White, *Testimony for the Battle Creek Church*, 3.

⁶⁴ White, *Testimony for the Battle Creek Church*, 4, 58.

⁶⁵ White, *Testimony for the Battle Creek Church*, 5.

⁶⁶ As a result of Aldrich making fun of the diet and dress question, White wrote that the light of God’s countenance was removed from Aldrich. He, along with others were left to walk in darkness, in the path of their own choosing. “In your house, and in the Office, before the young, it was a subject for you to jest over, and for you to ridicule, the light of God’s countenance was removed from you, and you, with others, were left to take the course of your own choosing. Then followed darkness, yet at the same time some of those in darkness thought their light was never clearer. We have had but a faint sense of the length and breadth of the difficulty existing in B. C.—the prejudice, the jealousy of us, the evil surmisings, the disregard of the visions; Satan had been invited into the church, and had a powerful hold of minds. He was exulting as he saw souls walking right into his net.” White, *Testimony for the Battle Creek Church*, 8.

through which the spirit of truth and righteousness shall flow.”⁶⁷ Because they were not sanctified, they did not realize the oneness that existed between Christ’s followers all over the world.⁶⁸

White also addressed William Gage in her testimony citing that he needed love, the precious plant of heavenly birth. It is “immortal, eternal, watered continually by the dews of Heaven.”⁶⁹ White described love as power, an efficiency to do good. Love is also a heavenly plant that “lives alone and flourishes only where Christ reigns.”⁷⁰ This principle of love within always lead to action.⁷¹ White described the lack of union, jealousy, and suspicion by which those who worked at the Institute treated one another.

Only let the followers of Christ be united in one and they will prevail. Let them be disjoined from their idols, and be separate from the world, and the world shall not separate them from God. Christ is our present, all-sufficient Saviour. In him all fullness dwells. It is the privilege of Christians to know indeed that Christ is in them of a truth. This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.⁷²

What the workers at the publishing houses needed was love, which comes from heaven. They also needed to live by faith in the Son of God, relying on His wisdom and power and to be united in one. Here White explained the human responsibility that believers

⁶⁷ White, *Testimony for the Battle Creek Church*, 14.

⁶⁸ White wrote that, “Those who are most loved of God are those who possess the least self-confidence, and are adorned with a meek and quiet spirit; whose lives are pure and unselfish, and whose hearts are inclined, through the abundant measure of the spirit of Christ, to obedience, justice, purity and true holiness. White, *Testimony for the Battle Creek Church*, 14.

⁶⁹ White, *Testimony for the Battle Creek Church*, 35.

⁷⁰ White, *Testimony for the Battle Creek Church*, 37.

⁷¹ “Love works not for profit nor reward; yet God has ordained that great gain shall be the certain result of every labor of love. It is diffusive in its nature, and quiet in its operation, yet strong and mighty in its purpose to overcome great evils. It is melting and transforming in its influence, and will take hold of the lives of the sinful and affect their hearts when every other means has proved unsuccessful.” White, *Testimony for the Battle Creek Church*, 37.

⁷² White, *Testimony for the Battle Creek Church*, 48.

have toward God to exercise faith and to cut themselves free from their idols so that they may be united in one. She also explained Christ's role was to be in them as a present, all-sufficient Savior.

The synergistic relationship between believers, who must exercise faith, act, and persevere is met with the promise of what Christ will do in them by faith. Faith overcomes the world. According to White, faith penetrates the darkest cloud and brings light and hope to the despondent soul, while Christ will be a never-failing source of strength and help to the believer when they exercise faith and trust. For White, Christ is present and is in the believer, but the followers of Christ must be united by exercising faith and trust in Christ. They must long for the influence of the Spirit of God upon their minds and hearts, and pray to God with "earnest, agonizing prayers to God, for a sound experience."⁷³ They needed to examine themselves closely, to see whether they are sound or rotten at heart, and in the light of God's word to see whether they are renewed in Christ. White explained to the professed believers at Battle Creek that the soul must reach out after God for pardon, peace, righteousness, and true holiness. They must converse with God and the contemplation of the "things above, transforms the soul into the likeness of Christ."⁷⁴

The next published statement on union with Christ appeared in 1868 and is recorded in *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 1.⁷⁵ The context is a letter sent to

⁷³ White, *Testimony for the Battle Creek Church*, 53.

⁷⁴ White, *Testimony for the Battle Creek Church*, 53.

⁷⁵ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, 323-325. By stating that this is the next published statement, I am not including the repeat publication of the first statement in 1864 in *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4b, 77 and in 1868 in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, 286.

Seventh-day Adventists in northern Wisconsin who were facing a crisis. Concerned with a lack of unity and their reaction to fanaticism, White pointed out that they had not read her messages in the *Review*. The believers lacked a correct faith and held erroneous views regarding present truth. She warned those in northern Wisconsin that they needed to regain their spiritual eyesight and discernment. Satan had deceived them into rejecting any spiritual exercises, and they had backslidden into a state of cold formalism.⁷⁶ White encouraged her readers to be like-minded, pointing to the great movement of God to make His people one with Him and draw them into a unity of the faith. To do this, believers must be willing to yield their differences of opinion and submit to present truth.

Christ is leading out a people, and bringing them into the unity of the faith, that they may be one, as He is one with the Father. Differences of opinion must be yielded, that all may come into union with the body, that they may have one mind and one judgment. 1 Corinthians 1:10: "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." Romans 15:5, 6: "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Philippians 2:2: "Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind."⁷⁷

White called for unity among Seventh-day Adventists, pointing to the biblical truth of the body of Christ, that all might be one even as the Son is one with the Father. Her exhortation to be like-minded and to love one another was a practical outcome for White of union with Christ. Differences of opinion were to be yielded. Union leads to union among believers who exercise the same mind and judgment. On matters that create division and difference based on individual opinion, believers were to be like-minded as

⁷⁶ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, 323.

evidence of being in union with Christ.

In a talk given to the Battle Creek church in 1869, reported by Uriah Smith, White mentioned union with Christ in connection to faith and the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart. Quoting 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20, she presented the idea that the believer's body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁸ The talk also covered the need for believers to practice temperance and allow the Holy Spirit to have perfect control over them.⁷⁹ White told them that they belong to Christ and have a responsibility to work in union with Him. "But Christ has bought you, and you are His property. And now it is for you to work in union with Christ, in union with the holy angels that minister unto you. It is for you to keep the body under and bring it into subjection."⁸⁰ Again, White's synergistic understanding of the divine-human relationship that is union with Christ can be viewed in this statement. The Battle Creek Church is God's purchased possession. Their bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. Yet, they too must work in union with Christ, that is, they must respond to God and behave in a manner that reflects this intimate relationship that they have with Christ and the Holy Spirit. They must "work," or behave according to faith and the Holy Spirit on their heart. They are also to be in union with the angels that minister to them.

The work of the Holy Spirit began to receive a greater focus for White in relation to union with Christ. A report of White's visit to camp meetings in the July 19, 1870,

⁷⁷ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, 324.

⁷⁸ Ellen G. White, "Christian Temperance," delivered at the Battle Creek Church in 1869 and reported by U. Smith in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, 354.

⁷⁹ "The Spirit of God should have perfect control of us, influencing us in all our actions. If we have a right hold on Heaven, a right hold of the power that is from above, we shall feel the sanctifying influence of the Spirit of God upon our hearts." White, "Christian Temperance," 356.

⁸⁰ White, "Christian Temperance," 359.

edition of *The Review and Herald* identifies the Spirit of God as the bond of union between brothers and sisters in Christ. The Whites were asked to pray for union at the conclusion of their meetings. White reported, “By request of the church at Monroe we united in prayer with them that the cementing spirit of God might bind the hearts of these believers in bonds of closest union and Christian fellowship.”⁸¹ Union with Christ is explicitly attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit in White’s published writings. It is the Holy Spirit who cements and binds believers together as one.

Writing in *The True Missionary* in 1874, White discussed a reason for spiritual weakness and the lack of spiritual maturity in the church. It was because Seventh-day Adventists were not working in union with Christ, that is, they were not being responsible for their part of the relationship with Christ and hence, suffered spiritually. “One cause of their lack of spiritual strength, and of their not being full-grown men and women in Christ is, they are not workers with Christ. If they would work for Jesus, their sympathies would be brought in close union with Christ.”⁸² As for these persons, “God will hold such accountable for the souls of their fellowmen. They might have done a good work in union with Christ, and they will be called to render an account for the good to souls they could have done and did not.”⁸³ White is here focusing on the human role of being in union with Christ. The Holy Spirit has a role to play as seen in the previous example, and in this example, White addressed what believers must do, emphasizing the human side of the relationship. They must become workers for Christ and then their sympathies, or feelings

⁸¹ Ellen G. White, “Camp Meetings,” *The Review and Herald*, July 19, 1870.

⁸² White, “Other Nations,” *The True Missionary*, January 1, 1874.

⁸³ Ellen G. White, “Other Nations.”

would be brought into a close union with Christ.

That same year, White began to further outline the divine side of the relationship of union with Christ. In an article called “The Temptation of Christ,” White introduced the metaphor of a ladder to describe salvation and the uniting of the human with the divine in Christ in order to reach humanity.⁸⁴ She identified Christ’s mission to link earth and heaven, finite man with Infinite God.

His Father approved the steps he was taking in the plan of salvation as man’s substitute and surety. The opening heavens, and descent of the heavenly dove, were assurances that his Father would unite his power in Heaven with that of his Son upon the earth, to rescue man from the control of Satan, and that God accepted the effort of Christ to link earth to Heaven, and finite man to the Infinite.⁸⁵

The plan of salvation was linked to Jacob’s dream in which he saw a ladder reaching the throne of God. The ladder represented Christ who opened communication between earth

⁸⁴ Ellen G. White, “The Temptation of Christ,” *The Review and Herald*, August 18, 1874. It is published again in *Redemption; or the Temptation of Christ in the Wilderness*, published in 1877. White made reference to “Peter’s ladder of Christian perfection,” in *Appeal to the Battle Creek Church* in 1870 published in *Testimonies to the Church*, Vol. 2, 1871, relating to temperance. The concept of Peter’s ladder is continued in “Camp-meeting in Eagle Lake,” *The Review and Herald*, May 11, 1876, in which White described the problem of over-indulgence of appetite, warning parents and instructing them from Peter’s ladder of sanctification, consisting of eight rounds. She discussed temperance and the importance of parents’ teaching their children self-denial, self-control, guarding the appetite and taste from indulgence at the expense of mental, moral, and physical strength. White’s writing about Peter’s ladder (related to sanctification and in particular temperance, White, “Indiana Camp meeting,” *The Review and Herald*, August 23, 1877) and Jacob’s dream are connected for White although it is in the metaphor of Jacob’s ladder that White described the divine side of union with Christ related to the plan of salvation.

⁸⁵ Recognizing that fallen man cannot overcome Satan in human strength, White discussed Christ’s work in overcoming. “Christ came from the royal courts of Heaven to help him with his human and divine strength combined. Christ knew that Adam in Eden, with his superior advantages might have withstood the temptations of Satan, and conquered him. He also knew that it was not possible for man, out of Eden, separated from the light and love of God since the fall, to resist the temptations of Satan in his own strength. In order to bring hope to man, and save him from complete ruin, he humbled himself to take man’s nature, that, with his divine power combined with the human, he might reach man where he is. He obtains for the fallen sons and daughters of Adam that strength which it is impossible for them to gain for themselves, that in his name that may overcome the temptations of Satan. White, “The Temptation of Christ.”

and heaven. Christ's humiliation was represented by the bottom of the ladder that touched the earth while the top reached into heaven representing Christ's divine power, "who grasps the Infinite, and thus links earth to Heaven, and finite man to the infinite God."⁸⁶

While White does not mention union with Christ *per se* in this article, she does articulate that heaven and earth are connected through Christ as the basis for uniting humanity with God.⁸⁷ This idea will later take on great significance during the 1880s and 1890s in relation to White's explanation of union with Christ to her readers.

In 1875, White wrote on union with Christ in *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 3. She warned believers that they were asleep, not seeking to become one with God and work together; hence they lacked power. What was needed was concentrated action, co-operation with God and effort made to answer the prayer of Christ that they become one.

If all who have influence felt the necessity of co-operation and would seek to answer the prayer of Christ, that they may be one as He is one with the Father, the cause of present truth would be a power upon this coast. But the people of God are asleep, and do not see the wants of the cause for this time. They do not feel the importance of concentrated action. Satan is ever seeking to divide the faith and hearts of God's people. He well knows that union is their strength, and division their weakness.⁸⁸

White commented that she was shown the current state of the people to whom she wrote, whose identities were not mentioned in the text to preserve their anonymity. In a testimony to several individuals, White recounted their lack of love, their selfishness, and their coldness to others. One sister, she wrote, had no experimental religion and failed to

⁸⁶ White, "The Temptation of Christ."

⁸⁷ In the 1880s White developed the idea of the mystic ladder as the way to partake of the divine nature and unite with Christ. It also is a basis for her understanding of the incarnation and nature of Christ as Savior of the world. These ideas culminated in *Steps to Christ* in 1892.

⁸⁸ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3 (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1875), 434.

realize the work that God has for her to do.⁸⁹ She counseled them that union with Christ would lead to the exercise of kindness and sympathy toward others.⁹⁰

Thoughtless Christians manifest by their neglect of others that they are not in union with Christ. It is impossible to be in union with Christ and yet be unkind to others and forgetful of their rights. Many long intensely for friendly sympathy. God has given each of us an identity of our own, which cannot be merged in that of another; but our individual characteristics will be much less prominent if we are indeed Christ's and His will is ours. Our lives should be consecrated to the good and happiness of others, as was our Saviour's.⁹¹

This is important as White declared that one person's identity could not be merged into that of another, which could by extension, also, include God. Individual identity is God-given and unique. Respect for this uniqueness of identity leads to carefulness regarding the rights of others and does not require submerging one's individual identity into another. However, given this truth, White presented the idea that if someone belongs to Christ and seeks to do His will, then each one's individual characteristics become "less prominent." In other words, individuals must not put themselves and their own ideas and opinions first at the expense of others. That would be selfish. Desiring to do the will of Christ the Christian's life will be focused on the good and happiness of others.⁹² Union with Christ results in the exercising of careful respect and kindness toward others.

⁸⁹ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, 535.

⁹⁰ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, 539.

⁹¹ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, 539.

⁹² White reminded her readers, "We have a great work to do." White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, 540. White also makes the connection between works and union with angels in a previous passage of the *Testimonies*: "Those who feel no special pleasure in seeking to be a blessing to others, in working, even at a sacrifice, to do them good, cannot have the spirit of Christ or of heaven; for they have no union with the work of heavenly angels and cannot participate in the bliss that imparts elevated joy to them." *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, 381.

Expanding Terms: Spiritual Union with Christ

In the late 1870s, there is an important development in White's presentation of union with Christ to her readers. In the *Spirit of Prophecy*, volume 2, published in 1877, White described union with Christ for the first time using an adjective. She described it as a "spiritual union with Christ."⁹³ Drawing on the story of Christ who described Himself as the bread come down from heaven Christ taught His disciples about this spiritual union to exist between Himself and His followers.

Jesus used bread as a figure to illustrate the vitalizing power of his Spirit. The one sustains physical life, while the other satisfies the heart, and strengthens the moral powers. Said he, "I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not." Those who experience the spiritual union with Christ never hunger for higher enjoyment. All uncertainty is gone, the weary soul finds continual refreshment in the Saviour. The feverish thirst for wealth and honor is gone. He is in them a well of water springing up into everlasting life.⁹⁴

White for the first time described the power of the Spirit as a "vitalizing power," which satisfies the heart and gives strength to moral powers. This is a new sense in which White began to write about union with Christ. There is a vitalizing power that comes from the Spirit of Christ to the weary soul, to the heart, that is deeply satisfying. Union with Christ, for White, is something that is to be experienced internally.

In a similar vein to the message to the Battle Creek publishing house concerning the metaphor of the plant of heavenly origins that flourishes only where Christ reigns and whose waters fail not,⁹⁵ here the bread of Christ, which was physical nourishment, is a metaphor for the vitalizing power of the Spirit on the human heart. Christ is within them,

⁹³ Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 2, 276.

⁹⁴ White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 2, 276.

in His followers as a well that springs up to eternal life. His followers are never hungry, nor thirsty spiritually, as their heart is fully satisfied with Christ who sends the vitalizing power of His Spirit there to strengthen their moral powers. Here White explained the role of the Holy Spirit's work in the human heart most fully to date, calling it a spiritual union with Christ. For White, union with Christ is not only made possible by the power of the Spirit of God, but it is a continual refreshment, a constant spiritual, vitalizing supply of power from Christ. This has tangible results in the interior life of the believer. Those who experience this spiritual union with Christ don't desire anything above what they receive from Christ who continually refreshes them. White expanded her presentation on union with Christ as she shared her insights with readers, connecting the work of the Holy Spirit to union with Christ that sustains and imparts moral power to His followers.⁹⁶ The Spirit is a vitalizing power in the Christian.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ See footnotes 70 and 71.

⁹⁶ In 1877, White again mentioned the Holy Spirit in connection to union with Christ. "The Comforter, the Spirit of truth, was to abide with them forever, and Christ assured them that the union existing between himself and the Father, now also embraced them." Ellen G. White, *Redemption, or The Resurrection of Christ; and His Ascension. Life of Christ*, No 6. (Battle Creek: Steam Press of the Seventh-Day Adventist Publishing Association, 1877), 56. Also published in Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3 (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1878), 234.

⁹⁷ White's turning point in 1877 comes one year after the publication of Strong's *Lectures on Theology* in which he outlined union with Christ as a union of life energized by the vitalizing power of the Spirit of Christ. White picked up new language in her writing on union with Christ that bears a resemblance to the language used by Strong such as vital, spiritual and later, indissoluble and mystical union. While it is not possible to know whether she had access to this work or not, the point is that her writing expanded on this subject, introducing new words to explain union with Christ. She would later write in the introduction to *The Great Controversy* that she borrowed language from other writers when they gave a better presentation of a subject. "In some cases where a historian has so grouped together events as to afford, in brief, a comprehensive view of the subject, or has summarized details in a convenient manner, his words have been quoted; but in some instances no specific credit has been given, since the quotations are not given for the purpose of citing that writer as authority, but because his statement affords a ready and forcible presentation of the subject." Ellen G. White, "Introduction," in *The Great*

In a significant article White published in 1878, called “Last Talk with the Disciples,” White related the parable of the vine and the branches to union with Christ. White emphasized the divine role in effecting union with Christ, what takes place inside the sinner who repents of their sins, and the results. The grapevine is Christ’s symbol, according to White, for His union with His followers.

When the sinner has repented of his sins, and is united to Christ, as the branch is engrafted on the vine, a deep and earnest love pervades his being which death cannot quench. The nature of the man is changed and he is a partaker of the divine nature. He loves the things which Christ loves, and hates that which He hates. His desires are in harmony with the will of God. He treasures up the words of Christ, and they abide in him. The life-giving principle of the Saviour is communicated to the Christian. Just so the little rod, leafless, and apparently lifeless is engrafted into the living vine, and fiber by fiber, vein by vein, drinks life and strength from it till it becomes a flourishing branch of the parent stalk.⁹⁸

This statement involves a development in the presentation of White’s ideas on union with Christ. White began to describe the nature of union with Christ, that is, how union with Christ brings about a change in the nature of the believer who is united to Christ. This relationship with Christ involves a deep, interior change in the self, which pervades the believer’s entire being with the love of God.

White explained that the life-giving principle of the Savior is communicated to the sinner after they repent. What does she mean by this? Human nature is changed and the sinner becomes a partaker of the divine nature when they are united to Christ. This change could be described as an ontological change in the self as a result of receiving this life-giving principle. From what we have viewed so far, White has described the work of

Controversy (1911), xi.

⁹⁸ Ellen G. White, “Last Talk with His Disciples,” *The Review and Herald*, January 24, 1878.

the Holy Spirit as a vitalizing power in the Christian heart. She further explained that Christ gives the life-giving principle, which communicates life and strength. Just as the branch is connected to the vine, fiber by fiber and vein by vein, so the Christian once united to Christ receives the life-giving principle that communicates spiritual life to them. This enables the Christian to grow, to have desires in harmony with the will of God, and to treasure up the words of Christ, which abide in him or her. White's previous reference to the vitalizing power of the Spirit and the life-giving principle from Christ are consistent, conveying the idea that it is not the being of God in Himself that is communicated to the sinner who is united to Christ, but rather His vitalizing power and His life-giving principle. Thus, White communicated, in her choice of language, the idea that the believer receives power from Christ and is transformed as a result, but does not receive God's essence or divine being. Partaking of the divine nature, the vitalizing power and the life-giving principle give to the believer a living connection to God.

In "Last Talk with the Disciples," keeping the commandments of God was presented as the condition of union with Christ. Without a union with Christ believers cannot overcome sin or temptation; they cannot produce fruit, and they cannot be reconciled to God. Union with Christ thus becomes essential to salvation, living a victorious Christian life and doing good works based on love.

The condition of this union is plainly specified: "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." The commandments of the Father are the commandments of the Son. In this union with Christ, finite man, dependent and worthless, is exalted by a connection with the Infinite, even as the engrafted branch draws nourishment from the vine which results in the production of fruit. The follower of Christ derives from him wisdom, strength and righteousness. Without Christ he cannot be reconciled to God, whose law he has transgressed. Without Christ he is unable to subdue a single sin or overcome the smallest temptation. The soul united to Christ as the branch to the vine is accepted of God through the merits of his Son, and becomes an object of the

Father's special care. Christ says, "I am the true vine, my Father is the husbandman." Man, by his union to the Infinite One through Jesus Christ, will be fruitful of good works.⁹⁹

White explained in this article even further what she means by union with Christ.

Humans must obey God's commandments based on love. Yet, finite man is "exalted" by the connection of the soul with the Infinite and derives from Christ wisdom, strength, and righteousness. Clearly, White viewed this relation not as a merging of being between Infinite God and finite man even as she had already written previously that the nature of the sinner is changed and the love of God pervades the entire being. Union with Christ is clearly explained here to be a connection with God through which God communicates multiple blessings to the sinner. The sinner receives wisdom, strength and righteousness from Christ. Previously White had mentioned the heart in relation to union with Christ. In this article, White related union with Christ to the soul. That is, the soul is connected to the Infinite God and is reconciled to God through the merits of Christ. When this occurs, the follower of Christ becomes an object of the Father's special care.

The same year in the *Spirit of Prophecy*, volume 3, White explained the mystery of spiritual life to her readers. Making a distinction between the natural and the spiritual worlds, she discussed the agency of the Spirit as key in sustaining spiritual life. Doctrine was not enough, as knowledge in itself cannot save. What was needed is the life-giving principle of the Holy Spirit pervading the soul.

A mere intellectual knowledge of religious truth is not enough. There are today many as ignorant as those men of Ephesus of the Holy Spirit's work upon the heart. Yet no truth is more clearly taught in the word of God. Prophets and apostles have dwelt upon this theme. Christ himself calls our attention to the growth of the vegetable

⁹⁹ White, "Last Talk with His Disciples."

world to illustrate the agency of his Spirit in sustaining religious life. The juices of the vine, ascending from the root, are diffused to the branches sustaining growth, and producing blossoms and fruit. So the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit, proceeding from Christ, and imparted to every disciple, pervades the soul, renews the motives and affections, and even the most secret thoughts, and brings forth the precious fruit of holy deeds. The life attests the union with the true and living Vine. The Author of this spiritual life is unseen, and the precise method by which it is imparted and sustained is beyond the power of human philosophy to explain. It is the mystery of godliness. Yet the operations of the Spirit are always in harmony with the written word. As in the natural, so in the spiritual world.¹⁰⁰

White discussed most fully, thus far, the transformation that takes place in the life of believers once they come into union with Christ. Intellectual knowledge is not enough. The Holy Spirit must work upon the heart. The heart appears to be a synonym for soul. The life-giving principle from Christ is here rendered as “the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit, proceeding from Christ, and imparted to every disciple, pervades the soul.” The language appears to refer to the heart, as the word soul is used here in reference to the renewing of motives and affections and secret thoughts.¹⁰¹

Though White has gone further to explain the nature of union with Christ in this article, she stopped after she explained the work of the Holy Spirit pervading the soul. Why? She believed that spiritual life is unseen, and that “the precise method by which it is imparted and sustained is beyond the power of human philosophy to explain. It is the mystery of godliness.” There came a point at which White felt that she could go no further to explain to her readers the operations of God in effecting and sustaining union with Christ. She did point out, however, that even though humans cannot explain this relationship, as it is part of the mystery of godliness, that the operations of the Spirit are

¹⁰⁰ Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, 418.

¹⁰¹ See Appendix A: Excursus: Ellen White’s View of the Soul.

always in harmony with the written word, that is, the Bible.

Even as White explored what God does in the believer, she nevertheless pointed to a work that believers must do to sustain this relationship in addition to keeping the commandments. Believers were to study the character of Christ to come into a full union with Him. There is a danger, she wrote, of merely focusing on the glories of heaven without the need to study, and copy Christ's life on earth. Union with Christ is practical. These ideas were expressed in the remarks she made at the camp meeting at Battle Creek, Michigan, October 2-14, 1878, where White promoted Sabbath school as an important place to learn about God and Christ. "We must study the character of Christ, that we may come into full union with him."¹⁰² This idea was also expressed in *Spirit of Prophecy*, volume 3, where White wrote about the ascension of Christ to heaven as a quiet and solemn event. The disciples were not to lose sight of Christ's life and character on earth, which they were to copy. "They were to keep distinctly before their minds the beauty and majesty of his life, the perfect harmony of all his attributes, and the mysterious union of the divine and human in his nature."¹⁰³ Union with Christ must be central to the life of the believer. Part of their responsibility was to study the life of Christ and His union with the Father in order to come into a full union with Him themselves.

White picked up the theme of the ladder to heaven again in the late 1870s. She

¹⁰² Ellen G. White, "Sabbath-School Work," *The Review and Herald*, December 12, 1878.

¹⁰³ White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, 255. The idea of dwelling on the life and character of Christ is a point that arises again and may be the reason for White's ultimate work on the life of Christ, *The Desire of Ages*.

referred to the apostle Paul as beholding the ladder by faith, which represented Christ.¹⁰⁴

In a series of articles published in *The Review and Herald*, called “The Great Controversy Between Christ and His Angels and Satan and His Angels,” White further articulated the meaning of the ladder.

The meaning of this ladder is explained to us in the words of Christ to Nathanael, “Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.” The atonement of Christ links earth to Heaven, and finite man to the infinite God; for through Christ, the communication that was broken off because of transgression, is resumed with man. Sinners may find pardon and be visited by mercy and grace.¹⁰⁵

Christ is the ladder that enables communication between heaven and earth. White pointed out that God’s presence is not limited to a particular place. The message she gave is that God comes to meet sinners wherever they might be. Christ connects heaven to earth and finite man to Infinite God through this ladder.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the early experiences of White’s life and the development of her relationship with Jesus as a child and teenager as a backdrop to understanding her writings on union with Christ. Her experience of Christ as an indwelling Savior, overcoming her fear of public testimony and prayer, gave her a powerful conversion experience. White’s dream of the staircase to heaven and the green cord taught her a

¹⁰⁴ “He knows that this ladder represents Christ, who has connected earth with Heaven, and finite man with the infinite God.” White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, 440.

¹⁰⁵ Ellen G. White, “The Great Controversy Between Christ and His Angels and Satan and His Angels,” *The Review and Herald*, April 17, 1879. In the same series of articles the ladder seen by Jacob is mentioned again on Jacob’s second visit to Bethel, published in Ellen G. White, “The Great Controversy Between Christ and His Angels and Satan and His Angels,” *The Signs of the Times*, December 4, 1879.

lesson about the necessity of a close, personal connection with Christ near the heart and of exercising faith in Christ. She was taught at the Methodist camp meeting that it is by connection with Christ through faith that we are saved. Her dream reinforced this idea to her personally to practice faith in Christ her Savior, which she interpreted as the beauty and simplicity of trusting in God.

White's earliest statements on union with Christ, though sporadic, contained ideas that White would continue to develop over the next three decades: the union of the Son with the Father, becoming one with Christ resulting in becoming one with others, that is, having the same judgment and mind, the Spirit as the cement bonding believers to Christ, the importance of heart work, faith and behavior, and striving to be in union with Christ as well as with fellow Seventh-day Adventists. By the late 1870s, the power of God was presented as a life-giving principle; this represents a turning point in White's presentation on union with Christ. This life principle is given to believers to help them overcome sin and temptation by becoming partakers of the divine nature. The consequences are that united to Christ they may do their part in their union with Christ.

The shift in emphasis from the behavioral, human side of the relationship that included exercising faith and trust in Christ and doing the works of God, to explanations of the divine role in the internal transformation and change in human nature is a characteristic of White's attempt to develop a full picture of the human and divine roles in salvation. These two emphases continued to be emphasized in subtle and nuanced ways over the next twenty years. The idea of humans uniting with God, based on Jacob's vision of the ladder, is also a developing theme in which White attempted to explain union from the perspective of the nature of Christ, His incarnation, and atonement. It is

also a metaphor for understanding the divine presence. Though God is in heaven, He is present with us through the ladder, which is Christ. In the next chapter, I will continue to investigate White's concept of union with Christ in the 1880s as she further explained what union with Christ means in theological and practical terms, developing new ideas and a series of steps for Seventh-day Adventists to take to form a union with Christ.

CHAPTER 4

UNION WITH CHRIST: THE 1880s

Introduction

During the 1880s White expanded her concept of union with Christ in her writings. Her ideas became, in a sense, more ordered as she repeatedly attempted to explain the importance of this relationship more fully to her readers. She also introduced some new ideas, including her reference to union with Christ as a soul-to-soul union in 1880. In March and May 1882, White wrote two significant letters sent to Battle Creek. The first, called “Important Testimony,”¹ was addressed to Uriah Smith, whom White asked to read the letter to the Battle Creek Church. The second, called “An Appeal,”³ was to be read at camp-meeting, and contained her fullest definition of union with Christ up to that time. In these letters, White set forth what union with Christ is, how it is formed and maintained as well as evidences of union with Christ. Her message is a testimony

¹ “Important Testimony” was written to Uriah Smith and is a personal letter regarding a teacher in Battle Creek, Goodloe Harper Bell who was being unfairly accused by others. White rebuked Smith and a host of others that they were not living in union with Christ. She pointed out that the sins in the lives of the professed Adventists in Battle Creek could not be overcome without tireless, painstaking effort and the formation of a personal union with Christ. Ellen G. White, “Important Testimony,” *Testimony for the Battle Creek Church* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press Publishing House, 1882), also known as Pamphlet 117 in the archives of the Ellen G. White Estate. A shortened version of this testimony is published in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 45-61. The full version of Pamphlet 117 is available at www.egwwritings.org.

³ In an open letter less than two months later she pens “An Appeal” on May 30, 1882 to be read at camp meeting. Ellen G. White, “An Appeal,” *Testimony for the Battle Creek Church* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press Publishing House, 1882), also known as Pamphlet 001 in the archives of the Ellen G. White Estate. This testimony is also published in full in *Testimonies for*

regarding the backslidden state of the church at Battle Creek and its only solution: to form a personal, vital union with Christ or be forever lost.

Another significant idea that White continued to explore in her writings in the 1880s was Christ the mystic ladder, an important antecedent to her compilation *Steps to Christ* in 1892. White used this metaphor to explain God's role in forming a link between heaven and earth through the incarnation and nature of Christ. This metaphor, in addition to the vine and the branches became key to understanding union with Christ in her writings. White related the mystic ladder to the gospel plan of salvation by explaining how Christ bridges heaven and earth forming the connecting link between humanity and God. The steps of the rung in Jacob's dream become the steps to Christ that believers take to form a union and reach Christ who is at the top, in heaven. White continued the theme of Christ's followers as channels of light. She also illustrated the divine work of Christ with the metaphor of the golden chain of love. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the major developments in White's writings on union with Christ during the 1880s. This chapter begins with a brief overview of her life during this time.

Introduction to White's Life in the 1880s

The 1880s marked a significant turning point in Ellen White's life, which was greatly impacted by the death of her husband, James White on August 6, 1881.⁴ James

the Church, vol. 5, 217-235. Pamphlet 001 is also available at www.egwwritings.org.

⁴ In a letter sent to friends in Battle Creek following James White's death, she wrote, "I miss Father more and more. Especially do I feel his loss while here in the mountains. I find it a very different thing being in the mountains with my husband and in the mountains without him. I am fully of the opinion that my life was so entwined or interwoven with my husband's that it is about impossible for me to be of any great account without him." (Letter 17, 1881) in Arthur L.

White had served tirelessly to establish and organize the scattered, disappointed, group of Millerites into a denomination operating publishing houses, a college, and medical sanitariums.⁵ Over the course of his life, James acted as White's editorial assistant and supporter, and writer in his own right.⁶ His major contribution to the Seventh-day Adventist Church was publishing.⁷ James also served as General Conference president. In the year prior to his death, James shared his dream of producing a book outlining the topic of redemption through Christ. He commissioned an engraving based on his understanding of Christ as the center of salvation.⁸ His life was cut short the following

White, *Ellen G. White: Woman of Vision*, 212.

⁵ As James White was previously a preacher in the Christian Connexion, the idea of organization was antithetical to his beliefs, however this changed over time as James saw the need for the movement he, Ellen and Joseph Bates founded to become an organized entity. For a fuller biographical description of the life and influence of James White see Gerald Wheeler, "James Springer White," in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, 556-560.

⁶ Books he published included: James White, *Life Incidents* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1868); *Christ in the Old Testament*, (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1877); *Sermons on the Coming and Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus Christ* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1870); *Sketches of the Christian Life and Public Labors of William Miller* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1875); *The Sounding of the Seven Trumpets of Revelation 8 & 9* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1875); *The Second Coming of Christ, Matthew 24*, (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1876); *Early Life & Experiences of Joseph Bates* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1877); *Biblical Institute* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1878); and *Life Sketches*, (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1880).

⁷ James White also published several pamphlets and papers known as "broadsides" in addition to regular periodicals. After an initial publication of a small pamphlet called *To the Remnant Scattered Abroad* (1846), followed by *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White* (1851) came a regular piece called, *Present Truth* (1849) replaced by *The Review and Herald* and *Signs of the Times* (1853).

⁸ An engraving James had commissioned marks a turning point in the White's theology of salvation from being centered on the law to that of being Christ centered. In comparison to the

year at age sixty due to a stroke and complications from malaria.⁹ Overwhelmed by his death, yet feeling strengthened by God Ellen White reaffirmed her commitment to continue the work they had started together.¹⁰ She later recalled the solemn vows she had made at his bedside “to disappoint the enemy and bear a constant, earnest appeal to my brethren.”¹¹

The closure of the Battle Creek College in 1882 for one year due to a gridlock between the board and faculty followed in the wake of their failure to follow White’s counsel on education and spirituality. In 1883, critics scrutinized her writings and published much to destroy confidence in them.¹² White was invited in 1884 to visit

previous engraving he had commissioned, the new one, which James never saw before his death, has a larger Christ at the center hanging on the cross. Wheeler, “James Springer White,” in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, 560.

⁹ Wheeler, “James Springer White,” in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, 560.

¹⁰ At his funeral, White said to the audience, “When taken from my sickbed to be with my husband in his dying moments, at first the suddenness of the stroke seemed too heavy to bear, and I cried to God to spare him to me—not to take him away, and leave me to labor alone... At times I felt I could not have my husband die. But these words seemed to be impressed on my mind: “Be still and know that I am God... I keenly feel my loss, but I dare not give myself up to useless grief. This would not bring my husband back.” Ellen G. White, *In Memoriam*, pp. 40-55 in Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: Woman of Vision*, 210.

¹¹ “During this severe attack of sickness [experienced in Oakland, California, in 1888] I had vividly brought to my remembrance the experience I passed through when my husband was dying. I prayed with him in my great feebleness on that occasion. I sat by his side with his hand in mine until he fell asleep in Jesus. The solemn vows I there made to stand at my post of duty were deeply impressed upon my mind—vows to disappoint the enemy, to bear a constant, earnest appeal to my brethren of the cruelty of their jealousies and evil surmisings which were leavening the churches. I would appeal to them to love one another, to keep their hearts tender by the remembrance of the love of Jesus exercised toward them, in what He did for them. And He said, “Love one another, as I have loved you” (John 15:12). I never can express with pen or voice the work that I discerned was laid out before me on that occasion when I was beside my dying husband. I have not lost the deep views of my work, as I sat by the bed of my husband with his dying hand in mine.” Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 8, 312.

¹² Arthur L. White, *Ellen White: Woman of Vision*, 220, 221. The school reopened on September 5, 1883. The Battle Creek crisis was followed by her attendance at camp meetings on the east coast to help restore confidence in her writings.

Europe and did so from 1885 to 1887. While she was in Europe, controversy over the meaning of the law in Galatians 3:19, 24, became a point of contention at the Battle Creek General Conference Session in 1886.¹³ Disagreement and disunity ensued in the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference as presentations were made on this subject by Ellet J. Waggoner.¹⁴ A widening negative attitude toward White grew, as Butler, the General Conference president accused White of being in agreement with Waggoner and sent repeated messages to those in attendance to reject the teaching of righteousness by faith.¹⁵ White denied Waggoner's influence on her before this meeting.¹⁶ Her goal was

¹³ It was believed that the views of Elliot Waggoner and A. T. Jones were in conflict with the widely accepted views of others, including G. I. Butler and Uriah Smith. White wrote in a letter: "Elders Smith and Butler are very loath to have anything said upon the law in Galatians, but I cannot see how it can be avoided. We must take the Bible as our standard and we must diligently search its pages for light and evidence of truth." Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: Vol. 3—The Lonely Years: 1876-1891* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1984), 392.

¹⁴ The General Conference president, G. I. Butler who did not attend the conference due to illness sent White a 39-page letter detailing accusations and charges against her, attributing his five-month long illness to the way White had handled the question of the law in Galatians. A spirit of bitterness, hard feelings and accusation was unleashed at the conference which caused much personal anguish to White who said little about the topic under discussion but emphasized the importance of unity: "There are some differences of views on some subjects, but is this a reason for sharp, hard feelings? Shall envy and evil surmisings and imaginings, evil suspicion, hatred, and jealousies become enthroned in the heart? All these things are evil and only evil. Our help is in God alone. Let us spend much time in prayer and in searching the Scriptures with a right spirit, anxious to learn and willing to be corrected or undeceived on any point where we may be in error. If Jesus is in our midst and our hearts are melted into tenderness by His love we shall have one of the best conferences we have ever attended." Ellen G. White, "Chapter 24--Looking Back at Minneapolis," Manuscript 24, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials* (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1987), 209.

¹⁵ See Arthur L. White, *Ellen White: Woman of Vision*, 245-254.

¹⁶ White denied being influenced by Waggoner claiming that she had presented such a message in her writings: "Had not these great and glorious truths, the righteousness of Christ and the entire sacrifice made in behalf of man, been imprinted indelibly on my mind by the Spirit of God? Has not this subject been presented in the testimonies again and again?" See Arthur White, *Ellen White: Woman of Vision*, 256 and White, "Chapter 24—Looking Back at Minneapolis," Manuscript 24, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 217.

unity, and she was convinced that the teaching of righteousness by faith was consistent with what she had taught in the past. White and Jones set out to bring righteousness by faith to Seventh-day Adventists in Battle Creek, Michigan, in a month-long revival meeting with James O. Corliss, in December 1888.¹⁷ White further engaged in preaching, institutes, weeks of prayer, and camp meetings throughout 1889 to share the message of righteousness by faith.¹⁸

Channels of Light and the Golden Chain of Love

A “vital” union was how White described union with Christ in January 1, 1880, in an article titled, “Praise Glorifies God.”¹⁹ Experiencing this vital union with Christ was linked to the idea of becoming a channel for Christ to the world. Complaining of the fact that there is too much formality in the church, White called upon believers to become channels of light connected to Christ, who is the Source of light.²⁰ Believers are to let their light shine to the entire world giving testimony and praise to God, showing they have a vital union with Christ. They can never be sad because Jesus would make them

¹⁷ Arthur White, *Ellen White: Woman of Vision*, 257.

¹⁸ White preached in the Battle Creek Tabernacle straight after the General Conference in Minneapolis ended with Jones and in meetings held in local conferences over the ensuing months. She also taught righteousness by faith at three institutes organized by the General Conference and led a week of prayer in Battle Creek which resulted in a revival at the end of the year. She also preached in Williamsport, Pennsylvania at the camp meeting the following year. See Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: Woman of Vision*, 257-260.

¹⁹ Ellen G. White, “Praise Glorifies God,” *The Review and Herald*, January 1, 1880.

²⁰ “We should be so connected with the Source of all light that we can be channels of light to the world. The Lord would have his ministers who preach the word energized by his Holy Spirit. And the people who hear should not sit in drowsy indifference or stare vacantly about, making no responses to what is being said. The spirit of the world has paralyzed the spirituality of such...” White, “Praise Glorifies God.”

glad by His very own presence.²¹ Union with Christ, for White, not only impacts the soul, which is pervaded with God's love, it also affects the feelings that one experiences: such as gladness and joy. This union also brings the personal presence of Christ to them.

Union with Christ also meant that the believer is a channel of light to the world connected to the Infinite Source of light, Jesus Christ. The mission of the church could then find its fulfillment in the union that existed between the believer and Christ.

The love that the believer experiences in union with Christ was what White came to define by the use of the metaphor of "the golden chain." It was first introduced in an article published January 15, 1880, called, "Christ's Followers the Light of the World."²² Dovetailing with her previous article "Praise Glorifies God," White described in further detail what takes place when the soul is illuminated by Christ's Spirit.

This light, shining upon man, quickens the paralyzed capacities, kindles to a flame the spiritual life. It is the work of Christ to enlighten, to lift up man, darkened and degraded, because the slave of sin, and make him a fit companion of the holy angels in the highest Heavens. He calls men to carry forward his work, not by the words of eloquence and oratory alone, but in letting their light shine forth to others in good works. The love which was exhibited by Christ for fallen man, is the golden chain which binds the believing heart in union with the heart of Christ. Christians connected with him, answer to his claims of willing service to love and labor for the souls for whom he died.²³

White explained that the light coming from Christ turns into a flame spiritual life within. Christ does His work to fit humans for heaven. But he also requires His followers to carry forward His work. The synergistic understanding of union with Christ is explicit once again. White related to her readers that is not just fancy words that Christ wants them to

²¹ White, "Praise Glorifies God."

²² Ellen G. White, "Christ's Followers the Light of the World," *The Signs of the Times*, January 15, 1880.

share He wants them to transmit His light to others through good works. Using another metaphor, that of the golden chain, White explained that it is Christ's love for fallen humans that binds the believing heart in union with the heart of Christ. Thus union with Christ is represented as a union of the heart of Christ with the human heart. Those who are connected to Christ are willing to serve in love and work for the salvation of others.

The idea of union with Christ as a union of the hearts is antecedent to another description by which White came to define union with Christ for a period, the idea that union with Christ is a soul-to-soul union with Christ. Up to this point White has described union with Christ as a spiritual union, a vital union, and a union of the soul with Christ in which the life-giving principle of the Spirit energizes believers making Christ present to them. Their heart is to be in union with the heart of Christ.

Sanctification and Soul-to-Soul Union

In an article called "Sanctification," published April 26, 1881, White used the vine and the branches to illustrate the sanctification that comes about in daily life through living in close union with Christ.²⁴ She reinforced the idea that Christians are called to imitate the life of Christ. Though many struggle against this idea as too great a sacrifice to make, White viewed it as a reciprocal relationship. Union with Christ is connected to character development and the experience of the saving power of Christ.

The more we contemplate the character of Christ, and the more we experience of his saving power, the more keenly shall we realize our own weakness and imperfection, and the more earnestly shall we look to him as our strength and our Redeemer. We

²³ White, "Christ's Followers the Light of the World."

²⁴ Ellen G. White, "Sanctification," *The Review and Herald*, 1881.

have no power in ourselves to cleanse the soul-temple from its defilement; but as we repent of our sins against God, and see pardon through the merits of Christ, he will impart that faith that works by love and purifies the heart. By faith in Christ, and obedience to the law of God, we may be sanctified, and thus obtain a fitness for the society of holy angels and the white-robed redeemed ones in the kingdom of glory. It is not only the privilege but the duty of every Christian to maintain a close union with Christ, and to have a rich experience in the things of God. Then his life will be fruitful of good works.²⁵

For White the act of contemplation is a duty for every Christian to know the character of Christ. The more believers contemplate Christ, the more saving power they will experience in their own life. When a sinner looks to Christ and repents, Christ responds by imparting faith to that person, the kind of faith, she wrote, that works by love and purifies the heart. White described the sequence of forming a union with Christ as both a privilege (gift) and a duty (task). Believers are involved in receiving faith and forgiveness from Christ to form a union. By faith and obedience to God's law, the sinner is sanctified. The result will be having a rich experience in the things of God and bearing visible fruit in a life of service and obedience.²⁶

That same year, in "The True Vine," she detailed further the relationship that is to exist between the believer and Christ. Here White defined union with Christ as a soul-to-soul union between finite man and Infinite God. Prior to this, White described union with Christ as involving the human soul being united to Christ. The previous year, she also presented union with Christ as a union between the heart of the sinner and the heart of Christ, which as already noted, may have functioned as a synonym for soul.

In this vine is all spiritual life. From Christ's fullness alone can we obtain nourishment unto eternal life. The vine stock is unseen; but the branches,—members

²⁵ White, "Sanctification."

²⁶ "Unity is the sure result of Christian perfection." White, "Sanctification."

of his body,—are visible. The scion which was before leafless and apparently lifeless, becomes, when grafted into the vine, a partaker of its life and fatness. Fiber by fiber, and vein by vein, the graft adheres to the parent stock, till the life-giving sap flows to the adopted member, causing it to bud, and blossom, and bear fruit. The scion becomes part of the living vine by forming a perfect union with it. Thus it is with the sinner. By repentance and faith, he becomes connected with Jesus Christ, and lives in him. This connection joins soul-to-soul,—the finite with the infinite. But, contrary to nature, the branch which has been united with the true vine brings forth, not fruit of its own kind, but the fruit of the vine of which it has become a part. The Spirit of Christ, flowing into the hearts of all who are indeed united with him, makes them partakers of the divine nature. They become pure, even as he is pure.²⁷

The vine and the branches became a favorite metaphor for White to describe union with Christ.²⁸ Using this parable, White described the secret or hidden nature of spiritual life. The act of coming into union with Christ in this article is explained. It is by repentance and faith that the sinner becomes connected to Jesus. The action of the Spirit of Christ

²⁷ Ellen G. White, “The True Vine,” *The Review and Herald*, September 20, 1881.

²⁸ White first mentioned the vine and the branches in “Phrenology, Psychology, Mesmerism, and Spiritualism,” *The Review and Herald*, February 18, 1862: “Christ is the source of our strength. He is the vine, we the branches. We must receive nourishment from the living vine.” This theme is also in countless other papers and books. In a vision given to White in 1865 at Rochester, she described the significance of this metaphor to her personally in *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 1, 583: “I was shown a cluster of trees standing near together, forming a circle. Running up over these trees was a vine which covered them at the top and rested upon them, forming an arbor. Soon I saw the trees swaying to and fro, as though moved by a powerful wind. One branch after another of the vine was shaken from its support until the vine was shaken loose from the trees except a few tendrils which were left clinging to the lower branches. A person then came up and severed the remaining clinging tendrils of the vine, and it lay prostrated upon the earth. The distress and anguish of my mind as I saw the vine lying upon the ground was beyond description. Many passed and looked pityingly upon it, and I waited anxiously for a friendly hand to raise it; but no help was offered. I inquired why no hand raised the vine. Presently I saw an angel come to the apparently deserted vine. He spread out his arms and placed them beneath the vine and raised it so that it stood upright, saying: “Stand toward heaven, and let thy tendrils entwine about God. Thou art shaken from human support. Thou canst stand, in the strength of God, and flourish without it. Lean upon God alone, and thou shalt never lean in vain, or be shaken therefrom.” I felt inexpressible relief, amounting to joy, as I saw the neglected vine cared for. I turned to the angel and inquired what these things meant. Said he: “Thou art this vine. All this thou wilt experience, and then, when these things occur, thou shalt fully understand the figure of the vine. God will be to thee a present help in time of trouble.”

flowing into the heart enables the sinner to become a partaker of the divine nature.²⁹

Through this, the soul of Christ's follower becomes intimately connected with the soul of Christ. Yet the sinner does not appear to pollute Christ or merge into His person by this connection. Rather, the connection is made so that Christ by His Spirit may make the sinner a partaker of the divine nature as the Spirit flows into the human heart. The life giving sap flows to the branches, not vice versa. So the Spirit of Christ does not become impure; rather the sinner becomes pure even as Christ is pure.

In these four articles produced in 1880 and 1881, White established some important points on union with Christ for her readers. Spiritual life was an important theme and is made possible only through the working of the Spirit of Christ. For White, the theme of union as a "work" or duty continued, but she emphasized that it is a blessing and a privilege based on love, and faith in Christ. Christ was further portrayed as the one who imparts faith to the sinner in addition to offering pardon for sin. Sanctification is the work of the Spirit of God in the heart, in the soul, while the believer must render full obedience to God's commandments and to the will of God. The believer was also presented as a channel of light for the Source of light, Christ, who is the source of all wisdom, strength, and righteousness. When a sinner exercises faith in Christ and repents, a union is formed resulting in a sanctified life. Faith is a gift imparted to the sinner once they repent. Becoming a partaker of the divine nature and uniting to Christ was now

²⁹ In another article on the vine and the branches, "The Living Vine," *The Review and Herald*, September 11, 1883, Ellen White stated that the Christian lives by virtue of his union with Christ, "The sinful and human is linked to the holy and divine." She further explained that, "When we are united to Christ, his mind is transferred to us. Purity and love shine forth in the character, meekness and truth control the life. The very expression of the countenance is changed. Christ abiding in the soul exerts a transforming power, and the outward aspect bears witness to

described as a soul-to-soul union between the believer and the Infinite One through Christ. In the letter that follows, White related her most detailed description of union with Christ to date, expressing her ideas on how this relationship is formed and maintained as well as evidences of this union.

“Important Testimony” (1882)

A crisis in Battle Creek led White to write a long letter to Uriah Smith on March 28, 1882, in response to one she received from him regarding the treatment of a teacher at Battle Creek College, Goodloe Harper Bell, who left the school after many years of faithful service.³⁰ White expressed sadness that the problems Smith and others had described were a direct result of their spurning her testimonies.³¹ According to White, this crisis affected all the Seventh-day Adventists at Battle Creek, but especially those connected with the school. “I knew that a crisis must come. God has given this people plain and pointed testimonies to prevent this state of things. Had they obeyed the voice of the Holy Spirit in warning, counsel, and entreaty they would now enjoy unity and

the peace and joy that reign within.”

³⁰ White, “Important Testimony,” PH117, 35; this portion removed from *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5. White revealed that once it had been popular to esteem the teacher that, students now disdained. She related a vision in which she saw that meetings were being held where students gave testimonies regarding their grievances against Elder Bell. She stated, “I saw an angel with a ponderous book open in which he wrote every Testimonies given. Opposite each Testimonies were traced the sins, defects, and errors of the one who bore it. Then there was recorded the great benefit which these individuals had received from Brother Bell’s labors.”

³¹ White sent the letter to Smith with the request that it be read in the church at Battle Creek. She wrote again on June 20, 1882 to the brethren and sisters in Battle Creek when she discovered that Smith delayed in sharing the letter with them. “Dear Brethren and Sisters in Battle Creek, I understand that the testimony which I sent to Eld. Smith, with the request that it be read to the church, was withheld from you for several weeks after it was received by him.” Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Battle Creek Church*, 19.

peace.”³² A wide departure from God resulted in the withdrawal of God’s blessing. White was “pained” to find Smith on the wrong side with those who were receiving their impressions from another spirit and not from Christ.³³ She explained to Smith that God uses a number of agencies to effect the salvation of humans: He gives messages to warn, reprove, and instruct the people of God. He does this to enlighten the understanding so that they may see their spiritual want and go to Jesus themselves, repent and receive Christ living in the heart by faith.

White identified the problem of sin in Battle Creek as the reason they have not experienced true conversion, which would have enabled them to be in union with Christ.³⁴ She wrote in a most serious tone of warning. “Everyone who is united to Christ will depart from all iniquity. I tell you in the fear of God, I have been shown that many of you will fail of everlasting life because you are building your hopes of heaven on a false foundation.”³⁵ White explained that it is the responsibility of the individual to choose

³² White, “Important Testimony,” PH117, 20; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 46.

³³ The fault, White revealed has more to do with the parents not teaching their children restraint at home and this teacher, she points out had to bear the weight of correcting the students himself. White wrote that Bell was overworked and overtired and subsequently lost his temper at times causing the students and others to feel slighted by him. Smith sided with the students and had communicated to White the troubles at the school, to which White responded, “I was made sad as I read its contents [of a previous letter].” White, “Important Testimony,” PH117, 19; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 45.

³⁴ “You all need the converting power of God. You need to seek him for yourselves. For your soul’s sake, neglect this work no longer. All your trouble grows out of your separation from God. Your disunion and dissension are the fruit of an unchristian character.” White, “Important Testimony,” PH117, 25; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 51.

³⁵ This rebuke is based in part on the people not reading the Bible or heeding its counsel and their rejection of the testimonies due to holding onto personal sins. The Adventists there are unreconciled to God and cannot be until they crucify self, put away personal sin and Christ lives in their heart by faith. White, “Important Testimony,” PH117, 21; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 49. She added, “I hope I may not be compelled to make public the past course of

Christ by cherishing His Spirit and entering into a personal union with Christ by self-renunciation, faith, and obedience; or to refuse Christ. “Every individual, by his own act, either puts Christ from him by refusing to cherish His spirit and follow His example, or he enters into a personal union with Christ by self-renunciation, faith and obedience. We must, each for himself, choose Christ because He has first chosen us.”³⁶ Christ does not form a personal union with a sinner, until he or she repents and exercises faith in Him.

White described the process of coming into union with Christ as involving a great personal struggle. “This battle must be fought by every heart that is truly converted. We must war against temptations without and within. We must gain victory over self, crucify the affections and lusts; and then begins the union of the soul with Christ.”³⁷ This struggle takes place in the human heart. A war occurs both in the individual and without to overcome self and get rid of its affections and lusts. The struggle also continues after a union with Christ is formed. Both Christ and the sinner have a role to play to maintain this union. “After this union is formed, it can be preserved only by continual, earnest, painstaking effort. Christ exercises His power to preserve and guard this sacred tie, and the dependent, helpless sinner must act his part with untiring energy, or Satan by his cruel, cunning power will separate him from Christ.”³⁸ The believer has work to do; they

students, teachers, ministers and church members, to publish the mistakes and sins of the past and present life of those who sat in judgment upon his case. I wish you all to understand, I here wash my hands of your cruel work.” White, “Important Testimony,” PH117, 29; this portion removed from *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5.

³⁶ White, “Important Testimony,” PH117, 21; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 46.

³⁷ White, “Important Testimony,” PH117, 21; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 47.

³⁸ White, “Important Testimony,” PH117, 21; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5,

must be on guard continually, pray for divine help and resolutely resist the temptation to sin. “By courage, by faith, by persevering toil, he can conquer.”³⁹ The sinner must always remember that victory can only be gained as Christ abides in them and they in Christ. It is the power of Christ that preserves this sacred union.

In “Important Testimony,” White listed a series of evidences to be found in those who are living in union with Christ. The first evidence she related to the church. The union of the individual believer with Christ leads to a union with one another. The problems at Battle Creek, as White saw them, required a solution not only individually but also collectively. “A union of believers with Christ will as a natural result lead to a union with one another, which bond of union is the most enduring on earth. We are one in Christ, as Christ is one with the Father.”⁴⁰

A second evidence of union with Christ is the evidence of the fruit of the Spirit. White taught that the fruit of the Spirit is the result of a personal union with Christ through prayer. “It is only by personal union with Christ, by communion with Him daily, hourly, that we can bear the fruits of the Holy Spirit.”⁴¹

A third evidence of union with Christ is the possession of faith and humility.⁴² “Our growth in grace, our joy, our usefulness, all depend on our union with Christ and

47.

³⁹ White, “Important Testimony,” PH117, 21; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 47.

⁴⁰ White, “Important Testimony,” PH117, 22; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 47.

⁴¹ White, “Important Testimony,” PH117, 22; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 47.

⁴² White, “Important Testimony,” PH117, 22; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 47.

the degree of faith we exercise in Him. Here is the source of our power in the world.”⁴³ This source of power will only come to those who acknowledge themselves as “erring, helpless, condemned sinners.”⁴⁴ White was clear that there is nothing in the individual and nothing in the church that will “form a bond of union between your soul and Christ.”⁴⁵ She thereby declared her rejection of union with Christ as based on participation in the sacraments as the means of forming a union with Christ. White introduced the idea that union with Christ is affected by the degree of faith exercised in Him and is relative to the power the professed believer has to live the Christian life.

A fourth evidence of union with Christ is that there is much prayer in the life of the believer. White plainly told Smith and those in Battle Creek, “You have no communion with God because you are not united to Christ.”⁴⁶ Union with Christ will be evidenced by a strong and vibrant prayer life.

A fifth evidence of union with Christ is that God’s love will be manifested in the life of the believer. The relationship between the individual soul and Christ is centered in love. “Love to Jesus will be manifested in love to His people. It is not fitful, not spasmodic, but calm and deep and strong. The life of the Christian will be divested of all pretense, free from all affectation, artifice, and falsehood. It is earnest, true, sublime.

⁴³ White, “Important Testimony,” PH117, 22; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 48.

⁴⁴ White, “Important Testimony,” PH117, 23; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 48.

⁴⁵ White, “Important Testimony,” PH117, 23; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 48.

⁴⁶ White, “Important Testimony,” PH117, 23; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 49.

Christ speaks in every word. He is seen in every deed. The life is radiant with the light of an indwelling Saviour.” Again the idea of the love of God and being a channel of light is connected to union with Christ.

The overall thrust of “Important Testimony” is one of warning and exhortation. White employed the language of union with Christ that she had been developing in her writings over the previous two decades to teach and warn Smith of his need for union with Christ. It is the answer to the dilemma that Smith and those engaged in the controversy at the Battle Creek College needed to hear. Smith was advised that they first needed to put away sin before union with Christ could begin. In this letter, White wrote that self must be overcome before a personal union with Christ can be formed. She rebuked Smith and other teachers at the College, as well as a host of unnamed students and parents, for their sin against Bell. Yet she also counseled Smith to make right choices and to understand the nature of union with Christ. Because Smith had been in the work for many years, White held him more accountable and perhaps this is a reason that she required him to overcome sin and repent before he could form a union with Christ.

According to White, the following three things are necessary to form a union with Christ: self-renunciation/putting away sin, faith, and obedience. These require a decision and action on the part of the believer. There is a process that the individual needs to go through to let go of self, to believe in Jesus and to obey what He commands. It involves a tremendous struggle and the individual must be prepared to make painstaking effort to maintain this union with Christ. Both parties to the union have a part to play. The overall emphasis of the letter is upon the human aspect of work and the effort needed to form and maintain a union with Christ, which would bear evidence in the life of the believer.

“An Appeal” (1882)

“An Appeal,” composed in May 30, 1882, is an open letter to Battle Creek to be read at camp meetings. As in the previous letter to Smith, White was concerned with the problem of sin in Battle Creek and wished to address all members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church there with this testimony. Although this letter repeated many of the themes found in “Important Testimony,” White further explained how union with Christ is formed. She also repeated the idea that union with Christ cannot be brought about by participation in any external form, but by faith and the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit that brings an indwelling Savior. What those in Battle Creek desperately needed was an experimental religion, to know and experience Christ.

In “An Appeal,” White implored Seventh-day Adventists to receive divine grace upon their hearts and to search for a deeper experience in the things of God. She began her letter with the words, “I am filled with sadness when I think of our condition as a people. The Lord has not closed heaven to us, but our own course of continual backsliding has separated us from God.”⁴⁷ As in the previous letter to Smith, she brought to her readers’ attention that the testimonies had been unread and unappreciated. Many had not experienced true conversion and therefore had only a pretended union with Christ. The salvation of believers in Battle Creek was based upon a false foundation. True conversion must be sought and experienced as many in Battle Creek were not truly converted and were not united to Christ.

⁴⁷ White, “An Appeal,” PH001, 1; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 217.

The problem, as White saw it, was that pride, covetousness, and love for the world characterized their experience. With one foot in the world and the other in the church, they were, “steadily retreating back toward Egypt” and not following Christ.⁴⁸ White appealed to them, “No matter who you are or what your life has been, you can be saved only in God’s appointed way. You must repent; you must fall helpless on the Rock, Jesus Christ. You must feel your need of a physician and of the one only remedy for sin, the blood of Christ. This remedy can be secured only by repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁴⁹ White called them to practice, “experimental religion.”⁵⁰ This went beyond intellectual acceptance of the theory of truth, to an experience from knowledge gained by experiment. The Adventists in Battle Creek must not only know the truth intellectually, they must have a living experience in the truth and come under the control of Christ. Through the renewing and regenerating power of the Holy Spirit they must die to self and be transformed into the divine image.⁵¹

White referred to the experience of the early disciples as an example for them to follow. As the disciples were with Jesus, so those in Battle Creek must be ready to make any sacrifice to secure communion with Jesus.⁵² Repentance and faith are the twin conditions, White related, of forming a union with Christ. Faith that is genuine is

⁴⁸ White, “An Appeal,” PH001, 1; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 217.

⁴⁹ White, “An Appeal,” PH001, 2; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 218.

⁵⁰ White, “An Appeal,” PH001, 5; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 221.

⁵¹ White, “An Appeal,” PH001, 3; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 219.

⁵² White, “An Appeal,” PH001, 7; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 223. This had been the manner in which White had first felt the indwelling Saviour, as a result of her first public prayer. The result of her experience was that she wanted to do God’s will only and keep Jesus in mind always.

followed by love, and love by obedience.⁵³ To this end, they needed converted ministers and teachers who were sanctified in body, soul, and spirit to teach them.⁵⁴

To reinforce these ideas and the practical application of experimental religion, White set forth in detail the manner in which union with Christ is formed using the metaphor of the vine and the branches.

Can we conceive of a closer, more intimate relation to Christ than is set forth in the words: “I am the Vine, ye are the branches”? The fibers of the branch are almost identical with those of the vine. The communication of life, strength, and fruitfulness from the trunk to the branches is unobstructed and constant. The root sends its nourishment through the branch. Such is the true believer’s relation to Christ. He abides in Christ and draws His nourishment from Him. This spiritual relation can be established only by the exercise of personal faith. This faith must express on our part supreme preference, perfect reliance, entire consecration. Our will must be wholly yielded to the divine will, our feelings, desires, interests, and honor identified with the prosperity of Christ’s kingdom and the honor of His cause, we constantly receiving grace from Him, and Christ accepting gratitude from us. When this intimacy of connection and communion is formed, our sins are laid upon Christ; His righteousness is imputed to us.⁵⁵

White explained that the fibers of the branch are almost identical to the fibers of the vine. That is, there is a difference between the believer who is personally united to Christ and Christ, represented by the vine, who communicates life, strength and fruitfulness. This “spiritual relation” is only established by the exercise of personal faith. The believers are responsible for surrendering their will to Christ. The feelings, desires, interests and honor must be identified with Christ’s kingdom and interests. The sinner constantly receives God’s grace and Christ is to receive gratitude from the sinner. Then the connection and

⁵³ White, “An Appeal,” PH001, 3; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 219.

⁵⁴ “The church will rarely take a higher stand than is taken by her ministers. We need a converted ministry and a converted people.” White, “An Appeal,” PH001, 11; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 227.

⁵⁵ White, “An Appeal,” PH001, 13; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 229.

communion is formed, sins are laid upon Christ, and the sinner receives His righteousness.

White suggested that faith is the very condition of union with Christ. “We must cherish a living, active faith. The permanence of our faith is the condition of our union.”⁵⁶ Here union was described as being conditioned by the permanence of faith a person exercises in Christ. It is a living faith according to White. “A union with Christ by living faith is enduring; every other union must perish... But this union costs us something. It is a union of utter dependence, to be entered into by a proud being.”⁵⁷ The sinner must depend totally on Christ. He imparts the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. “Pride, selfishness, vanity, worldliness—sin in all its forms—must be overcome if we would enter into a union with Christ.”⁵⁸ White explained that Christ assists in the work of detachment from the world and attachment to Himself. Christ alone has made union with Himself possible after the fall in that He made provision to connect humans with Himself. “The power of evil is so identified with human nature that no man can overcome, except by union with Christ.”⁵⁹ It is only through union with Christ that believers receive moral and spiritual power to resist temptation and sin.

The idea of union with Christ being entered into by a proud being may have held personal significance for White. Her outlining the process of forming a union with Christ recalls to mind White’s childhood experience of pride and being brought to humility and

⁵⁶ White, “An Appeal,” PH001, 14; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 231

⁵⁷ White, “An Appeal,” PH001, 15; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 231.

⁵⁸ White, “An Appeal,” PH001, 15; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 231.

⁵⁹ White, “An Appeal,” PH001, 14; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 230.

utter dependence through the incident that cost her the education she had dreamed of, her looks and her health. After struggling for a number of years she changed in her understanding of God and experienced the indwelling Christ after which she felt free to pray in public and give her testimony. There is a sense in which White's experience of coming to Christ is a prototype, albeit without the specifics, of the process in which she described how believers are to come to Christ and experience a spiritual relation with Him in their daily lives. She went from pride to utter dependence in her own life, and after struggling and losing everything she became committed to doing God's will. As a result White ended up experiencing Jesus in a personal, intimate level of communion.

White set forth a series of steps on how to form a personal union with Jesus. She outlined the exact steps the sinner must take. First, they must feel the need for the atoning blood of Jesus. Second, they must experience a change of heart. Third, they must submit their will to the will of God. Fourth, they must struggle with internal and external obstacles. Fifth, there must be a painful work of detachment and attachment so that sin in all its forms is overcome if they want to enter into this union.⁶⁰ "Pride, selfishness, vanity, worldliness—sin in all its forms—must be overcome if we would enter into a union with Christ."⁶¹ This union with Christ can only be maintained by earnest prayer and untiring effort on the part of the believer.⁶²

White made an important distinction when she warned her readers of a pretended union versus a real union with Christ. "There is a wide difference," she wrote, "between a

⁶⁰ White, "An Appeal," PH001, 15; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 231.

⁶¹ White, "An Appeal," PH001, 15; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 231.

⁶² White, "An Appeal," PH001, 15; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 231.

pretended union and a real connection with Christ by faith. A profession of the truth places men in the church, but this does not prove that they have a vital connection with the living vine. A rule is given by which the true disciple may be distinguished from those who claim to follow Christ but have not faith in Him. The one class are fruit bearing, the other, fruitless.”⁶³ White gave some practical examples of the difference between those who have a pretended union with Christ and those who have a real or vital union with Him. She pointed out that people who are filled with envy, jealousy, bitterness, and dissension reveal their obedience to Satan and not to Christ. Union with Christ is revealed in the actions of those who have spent time with Jesus. Those who are “proud, vain, frivolous, worldly-minded, avaricious, unkind, censorious, we need not be told with whom they are associating, who is their most intimate friend.”⁶⁴ In blunt terms White argued that such persons reveal, “They are holding communion with an evil spirit.”⁶⁵

In the final paragraph of her letter to Seventh-day Adventists in Battle Creek, White wrote about the nature of Christ as a pattern or prerequisite for union with Christ. “Jesus took upon himself man’s nature, that he might leave a pattern for humanity, complete, perfect. He proposes to make us like himself, true in every purpose, feeling, and thought—true in heart, soul, and life. This is Christianity. Our fallen nature must be purified, ennobled, consecrated by obedience to the truth.”⁶⁶ Christ taking on human

⁶³ White, “An Appeal,” PH001, 12; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 228.

⁶⁴ White, “An Appeal,” PH001, 8; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 224.

⁶⁵ White, “An Appeal,” PH001, 8; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 224.

⁶⁶ White, “An Appeal,” PH001, 20; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 235.

nature became an important theme in her writing as White explored Christ's work in reuniting humanity with God. Having emphasized how union with Christ is formed from the human side of the relationship in "Important Testimony," and "An Appeal," and previous writings, White continued to develop her writing on the role of Christ and the Godhead in forming a union with humanity, the topic of the next section.

The Mystic Ladder

In 1881, White made her first reference to Jacob's vision of a ladder as a mystic ladder.⁶⁷ She described in 1882 that this ladder was extended down to every human being who must make a choice whether to climb the ladder.⁶⁸ This ladder represented Christ whom the sinner must choose. In 1883, White presented the view that it is Christ's work to reunite humans to God. The purpose of Christ in becoming one of us [human] was to lift up fallen man and reunite him to God.⁶⁹ In other words, Christ became human to lift humanity and restore them to union with God. She continued to explore Christ's salvific

⁶⁷ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, 465, 466.

⁶⁸ "Infinite Love has cast up a pathway upon which the ransomed of the Lord may pass from earth to Heaven. That path is the Son of God. Angel guides are sent to direct our erring feet. Heaven's glorious ladder is let down in every man's path, barring his way to vice and folly. He must trample upon a crucified Redeemer ere he can pass onward to a life of sin. Our Heavenly Father's voice is calling us, Come up hither. The tokens of his love are as numerous as the sand upon the sea-shore. The humble, trusting ones are guided and protected in the way of peace. But He who is infinite in wisdom compels none to accept Heaven's most precious gift—compels none to walk in the path which has been cast up at such a cost. Every one is permitted to choose for himself the narrow, shining steep that leads to Heaven, or that broader and easier way which ends in death." Ellen G. White, "Among the Churches," *The Signs of the Times*, January 26, 1882. White repeats Paul's faith in the ladder in *Sketches from the Life of Paul* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1883), 332.

⁶⁹ Ellen G. White, "Unity in Christ," *The Review and Herald*, March 4, 1884. An address to the ministers assembled in the General Conference at Battle Creek, Michigan, in their morning meeting held November 7, 1883.

work in redeeming humans illustrating this through Old Testament imagery, specifically, the dream of Jacob at Bethel of the ladder that extends between heaven and earth. In writing of the mystic ladder, White explained the work of Christ to redeem humanity. In doing so, she painted a broader picture of union with Christ by use of this metaphor.

In June 26, 1884, in a message called, “Palm Tree Christians,” White related two metaphors, the palm tree and the ladder to heaven to explain spiritual life.⁷⁰ The palm tree represents the happy state of the Christian “whose soul is rooted and grounded in Christ.”⁷¹ They are required, nevertheless, to do an agonizing work. “The work of the Spirit of God in the heart will develop true penitence, which will not end with confession, but will work a decided reformation in the daily life. There will be manifested an earnestness, a perseverance, and a determination that can be properly represented by agonizing. Many professed Christians greatly need just this experience.”⁷² White

⁷⁰ Ellen G. White, “Palm Tree Christians,” *The Signs of the Times*, June 26, 1884.

⁷¹ White, “Palm Tree Christians.”

⁷² Though White taught that this work is difficult, the palm tree that flourishes in the desert drawing from the fountains of living water represents the Christian who may “draw rich supplies of grace from the fountain of God’s love, and may guide weary souls... to those waters of which they may drink, and live.” White, “Palm Tree Christians.” In 1886, White employs the idea of the soul as a palm tree that is sustained and nourished by Christ, the living water by those who are partakers of the divine nature. Though she does not mention the phrase “union with Christ” here, White describes faith as the hidden life of the soul that Christ floods with his living water. The palm tree Christian has rootlets, representing faith, through which Christ waters and nourishes the soul. “If you work in this direction with whole-hearted interest as the followers of Christ, discharging every duty, improving every opportunity, your own souls will be gradually settling into the mould of a perfect Christian. The heart will not be sere [sic] and unfeeling. The spiritual life will not be dwarfed. The heart will glow with the impress of the divine image; for it will be in close sympathy with God. The whole life will flow out with cheerful readiness in channels of love and sympathy for humanity. Self will be forgotten, and the ways of this class will be established in God. In watering others, their own souls will be watered. The stream flowing through their souls is from a living spring, and is flowing out to others in good deeds, in earnest, unselfish effort for their salvation. In order to be a fruitful tree, the soul must derive its support and nourishment from the Fountain of life, and must be in harmony with the Creator.” Ellen G. White, “The Christian a Missionary Worker,” *The Signs of the Times*, July 8, 1886. See

suggested that “nothing but a deep personal experience” could enable the Christian to withstand the trials and temptations of the Christian warfare. She counseled, “The soul must be barricaded by prayer and study of the Scriptures.” Good impulses are not enough. The only safety for the Christian is in Christ. Good works will not gain for Christians an entrance to heaven. The only way is by Christ, the ladder.

“Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” Those who enter Heaven will not scale its walls by their own righteousness, nor will the gates be opened to them for costly offerings of gold and silver; but they will gain an entrance to the many mansions of the Father’s house through the merits of the cross of Christ. Jesus is the ladder by which every soul must mount who would climb from earth to Heaven. But there is round after round of painful ascent; for our characters must be brought into harmony with the law of God, and every advance step in this direction requires self-denial.⁷³

For White, the steps to heaven are painful, but the merits of the cross of Christ open the way for each soul to climb to heaven. This ladder is Jesus. The soul is required to mount the ladder while the painful work of climbing is character transforming for the climber.⁷⁴

On July 31, 1884, White published her sermon delivered at the Los Angeles camp meeting on May 10. “The Vision at Bethel,” included a discussion regarding the nature of Christ and personal spiritual development in relation to the mystic ladder. She described the story of Jacob’s dream in which he saw a ladder reaching from heaven to earth and angels ascending and descending upon it.⁷⁵ For White, Jacob’s dream became an emblem

also earlier articles on this metaphor of the Christian life: Ellen G. White, “Address and Appeal, Setting Forth the Importance of Missionary Work,” *The Review and Herald*, January 2, 1879; Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, 567; Ellen G. White, “Christian Courtesy,” *The Review and Herald*, September 1, 1885.

⁷³ White, “Palm Tree Christians.”

⁷⁴ White also mentioned the mystic ladder as opening “to the world the way into the holiest of all.” White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, 18.

⁷⁵ Ellen G. White, “The Vision at Bethel,” *The Signs of the Times*, July 31, 1884.

of spiritual truth regarding the plan of salvation. This dream was the gospel given to Jacob. She explained how the nature of Christ expressed by the ladder metaphor is the key to reuniting humans with God.

He took upon himself our nature, that he might teach us how to live. In the steps which the sinner must take in conversion,—repentance, faith, and baptism,—he led the way. He did not repent for himself, for he was sinless, but in behalf of man. Jesus became “the repairer of the breach, the restorer of paths to dwell in.” He became an exile to earth to bring back the one lost, straying sheep, the one world ruined by sin. In him were combined the earthly and the heavenly, the human and the divine; otherwise, he could not be a Mediator whom the sinful could approach, and through whom they could be reconciled to their Maker. But now he encircles the race in arms of sympathy and love while he grasps the throne of the Infinite, thus uniting man in his weakness and helplessness with the Source of strength and power.⁷⁶

White explained that Christ encircles the entire human race with his arm of sympathy and love while laying hold of heaven’s throne with the other to unite humanity with God. The idea of a ladder implies work for the Christian to do. “It is our life-work to commence at the lowest round of the ladder, and step by step to ascend toward Heaven. There is earnest work in this, but we can gain eternal life in no other way. We must take up our daily duties.”⁷⁷ The way to heaven is to ascend by successive steps. “When we let go of one round, it is to grasp another that is still higher. Thus the hand is constantly reaching upward for successive degrees of grace.”⁷⁸ To do this White told her readers that they must battle self and the powers of darkness, but they can overcome by taking a firm hold on Christ and keep looking up toward heaven with the eye of faith. “In his name we beseech you to plant your feet firmly on the ladder, and climb upward. Forsake your sins, overcome your defects of character and cling with all your powers to Jesus, the way, the

⁷⁶ White, “The Vision at Bethel.”

⁷⁷ White, “The Vision at Bethel.”

truth, and the life. We may everyone of us succeed.”⁷⁹

One of White’s most comprehensive pieces of writing on the topic of the mystic ladder is a manuscript that remained unpublished until 1988 called, “The Ladder to Heaven.”⁸⁰ I will mention its contents here as it sheds light on the development of White’s thought on how the soul unites with the divine nature. Although it remained unpublished in White’s time, this writing brings together an earlier idea White wrote on Peter’s ladder in the discussion of virtues needed to ascend to heaven. Faith was necessary to live a spiritual, Christ-like life and the means to ascend the steps of the ladder. Peter’s ladder, which White wrote about to explain temperance and the progressive nature of sanctification,⁸¹ appears to be replaced by the mystic ladder in Jacob’s vision at Bethel to explain sanctification.⁸² The uniting of the human and the divine nature in people is brought together in White’s teaching on Jacob’s ladder.⁸³ In this work, White described what is the mystic ladder, how to climb it, what each

⁷⁸ White, “The Vision at Bethel.”

⁷⁹ White, “The Vision at Bethel.”

⁸⁰ Ellen G. White, “MR No. 1411—The Ladder to Heaven,” 1884, in *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 19, 338-354.

⁸¹ White quotes Peter as follows: “Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according to His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Peter 1:1-4).” White, “MR No. 1411—The Ladder to Heaven,” 339.

⁸² “Here is made a revelation of Jesus Christ as the only connecting link between God and sinful man, that the repenting sinner may find pardon. Christ spoke words to Nathanael which had reference to this mystic ladder: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man” (John 1:51).” White, “MR No. 1411—The Ladder to Heaven,” 338.

successive step entailed in order to reach the glory of God at the top of the ladder.

White presented the steps to Christ discussing faith, which comes through knowledge of the mediatorial work of Christ and the righteousness of Christ.⁸⁵ She wrote, “The just lives by faith a truly spiritual, Christ-like life. It is through faith that the steps are taken one at a time up the ladder of progress. Faith must be cultivated. It unites the human with the divine nature.”⁸⁶ Gaining knowledge of God is critical to making advances in steps to Christ. “Here is the Source of all spiritual power, and faith must be in constant exercise, for all spiritual life is from Christ. Knowledge of God inspires faith in Him as the only channel to convey Heaven’s blessing to the soul, elevating, ennobling, refining the soul, as –through knowledge of God—it is brought up to the high attainments of glory and virtue.”⁸⁷ Divine help is given to those who comply with the conditions.

The ladder was a progression that must be continuously ascended. If one stops they lose the grace they have received from Christ. They must keep moving forward in order to receive grace.⁸⁸ Continually advancing step by step is a work of holiness for White. It is a directed course. “The way of the believer is marked out by God above the ladder.”⁸⁹ The one ascending must have, according to White a practical knowledge of Christ, which comes through obedience to all of his requirements. Obedience in climbing strengthens the will and the individual becomes more like the mind and character of

⁸³ See White, “MR No. 1411—The Ladder to Heaven,” 352, 353.

⁸⁵ White, “MR No. 1411—The Ladder to Heaven,” 339.

⁸⁶ White, “MR No. 1411—The Ladder to Heaven,” 339.

⁸⁷ White, “MR No. 1411—The Ladder to Heaven,” 339.

⁸⁸ White, “MR No. 1411—The Ladder to Heaven,” 340.

⁸⁹ White, “MR No. 1411—The Ladder to Heaven,” 340.

Christ. “All the faculties of mind and body must be enlisted.”⁹⁰ The graces must be mastered at each rung of the ladder. Faith is the starting point, uniting the human with the divine nature. This must be followed by virtue revealed in works followed by knowledge of the truth of Jesus Christ and the great plan of salvation. It also includes gaining knowledge of God’s Ten Commandments and laws.⁹¹ To this is added temperance. As Adam and Eve lost Eden through intemperate appetite so the Christian must practice habits of strict temperance to have calm nerves and mental acuteness in order to discern good from evil. They will avoid stimulating indulgences, specifically: beer, wine, strong drinks, tea and coffee, opium, tobacco, or any substance that may affect the health of the individual. It includes food, clothing, keeping regular hours and healthful exercise.⁹²

Patience was another important grace following temperance. It required, for White, not showing a bad temper, even when under provocation. It keeps one from saying and doing things that could injure the soul and the soul of others when undergoing trials.⁹³ Progress in patience will lead one to ascend the ladder of progress and add godliness, which White described as the outgrowth of patience. It meant having the spirit and likeness of the character of Christ. She wrote, “To raise us to His divine ideal is the one end of all the dealings of God with us, and of the whole plan of salvation. For this

⁹⁰ “In every step of climbing, the will is obtaining a new spring of action. The moral tone is becoming more like the mind and character of Christ. The progressive Christian has grace and love which passes knowledge, for divine insight into the character of Christ takes a deep hold upon his affections. The glory of God revealed above the ladder can only be appreciate by the progressive climber, who is ever attracted higher, to nobler aims which Christ reveals.” White, “MR No. 1411—The Ladder to Heaven,” 341.

⁹¹ White, “MR No. 1411—The Ladder to Heaven,” 341.

⁹² White, “MR No. 1411—The Ladder to Heaven,” 343.

⁹³ White, “MR No. 1411—The Ladder to Heaven,” 343.

His Spirit strives with us to exalt us to this great purpose.”⁹⁴ This was followed by brotherly kindness. White noted that we must become partakers of the divine nature before we can have the character of Christ and do His works. “The very exercise of brotherly kindness assimilates the soul to Christ and brings him into sympathy with Christ.”⁹⁵ The next Christian grace White described in the ladder to heaven is charity or love. It is the last step in the ladder and constituted the whole duty of man: love to God and to our neighbor.⁹⁶

In the final pages of this manuscript, White drew the readers’ attention to the mystic ladder presented to Jacob in his dream. She wrote that prior to Adam and Eve’s transgression there was a path between them and God “which Deity could traverse.” But this path was broken by sin. The Son of God became the channel through which communion may be restored and lost paradise regained.⁹⁷ The ladder, Christ, is a path; a highway upon which all that are weary and carry heavy burdens may pass on to heaven and find rest.⁹⁸ This is the gospel, according to White. Christ through His divine and human nature, like a ladder stretching from heaven to earth is the medium of

⁹⁴ White, “MR No. 1411—The Ladder to Heaven,” 345. The further one ascends the ladder, the greater will be the attractiveness of heaven. “Higher, holier ambitions take possession of the soul... the eye is steadfastly fixed, with grateful, trembling emotion, upon God above the ladder. Christ is the ladder. We lay hold on Christ, climbing up by Christ, resolving to return, broken, contrite, subdued, to the Father above the ladder.” White, “MR No. 1411—The Ladder to Heaven,” 346.

⁹⁵ White points out here that conversion does not involve a magical, overpowering change, but rather living a humble life earnestly working out our own salvation with fear and trembling. Others are esteemed as precious in the sight of God as self is thought less of. White, “MR No. 1411—The Ladder to Heaven,” 347, 348.

⁹⁶ White, “MR No. 1411—The Ladder to Heaven,” 349.

⁹⁷ White, “MR No. 1411—The Ladder to Heaven,” 353.

⁹⁸ White, “MR No. 1411—The Ladder to Heaven,” 353.

communication between God and man. Humans may enter heaven by becoming a partaker of the divine nature and escaping the corruption of the world. They may enter into the holiest of holies by the blood of Christ and lay hold of the hope of the gospel.

It is by fastening yourself to Christ and straining every nerve to leave the world behind, laboring to diminish by successive steps your distance from God, who is at the top of the ladder. It is by being in Christ and yet led by Christ; by believing and working—trusting in Jesus, yet working upon the plan of addition, holding onto Christ and constantly mounting upward toward God. When the successive steps have all been mounted, when the graces have been added one after another, the crowning grace is the perfect love of God—supreme love to God and love to our fellow men. And then the abundant entrance into the kingdom of God.⁹⁹

By planting the feet upon the ladder and forsaking sin, looking in faith to God and climbing the ladder progressing step by step, believers partake of the divine nature and are prepared to enter the Holy City of God.

Throughout the 1880s White continued to write and publish materials on the metaphor of the ladder, which unites the soul with God.¹⁰⁰ While she did not introduce any major new ideas, the frequency with which she mentioned the ladder metaphor points

⁹⁹ White, “MR No. 1411—The Ladder to Heaven,” 354.

¹⁰⁰ See Ellen G. White, “Striking Examples of Prayer,” *The Signs of the Times*, August 14, 1884; Ellen G. White, “Importance of Education,” *The Review and Herald*, August 19, 1884; Ellen G. White, “Notes of Travel,” *The Review and Herald*, February 17, 1885; Ellen G. White, “Our Lord’s Command to Watch,” *The Review and Herald*, August 18, 1885; Ellen G. White, “Character Building,” *The Signs of the Times*, October 22, 1885; Ellen G. White, “Seek First the Kingdom of God,” *The Review and Herald*, October 27, 1885; Ellen G. White, “The Sabbath Reform,” *The Present Truth (UK)*, November 3, 1885; Ellen . White, “Satan An Accuser of the Brethren,” in *Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of Seventh-day Adventists* (1887); Ellen G. White, “Followers of Christ,” *The Review and Herald*, March 29, 1887; Ellen G. White, “A Sabbath Reform,” *The Signs of the Times*, May 5, 1887; Ellen G. White, “Chapter 1—The Destruction of Jerusalem,” in *The Great Controversy 1888*, 18; Ellen G. White, “Evidences of Genuine Faith,” *The Review and Herald*, March 6, 1888; Ellen G. White, “The Book of Books,” *The Review and Herald*, August 21, 1888; Ellen G. White, “Christ Our Life,” *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, January 15, 1889; Ellen G. White, “There is Help in God,” *The Signs of the Times*, July 29, 1889; Ellen G. White, “Christ’s Burden is Light,” *The Signs of the Times*, September 16, 1889; Ellen G. White, “Christ May Dwell in Your Hearts by Faith,” *The Review and Herald*, October 1, 1889.

toward it being a continued subject of importance for White. In the next section I will briefly summarize White's writings on union with Christ from the mid to late 1880s.

Union with Christ From 1883 to the Late 1880s

White remained greatly concerned about the spiritual condition of Seventh-day Adventists throughout the 1880s. Consistent with her writings on union with Christ in "Important Testimony" and "An Appeal," White continued to present to her readers the importance of living in union with Christ. In 1883 she published two articles, "The Living Vine," and "Walk in the Light."¹⁰¹ In the former, she described her first visit to California where she was surprised to find out that the field she observed was a vineyard, filled with unpromising looking plants. Later that year, the wintry stubs had grown dramatically and were full of rich clusters of fruit. She likened these unpromising plants to Christ on earth, though unattractive to those around Him, was "the vine-stock, the source and sustainer of spiritual life. Still may grace, strength, and salvation be derived from his fullness." Here was a spiritual lesson for Seventh-day Adventists who needed to be encouraged to form a union with Christ.

Grafts may still be united with the Vine. As the severed branch, leafless, and apparently lifeless, is ingrafted into the living stock, and fiber by fiber, and vein by vein, drinks in the life and strength of the vine until it buds and blossoms and bears fruit, even so may the sinner, by repentance and faith, connect himself to Christ, become a partaker of the divine nature, and bring forth in words and deeds the fruit of a holy life.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Ellen G. White, "The Living Vine." Ellen G. White, "Walk in the Light," *The Signs of the Times*, September 27, 1883 (Addressed to those assembled at camp meeting at San Jose, California, and read upon the camp-ground, Friday, September 14).

¹⁰² White, "The Living Vine."

White expressed the idea that the connection between believers and God by faith is so intimate that the believer cannot live or sustain any kind of spiritual life without being in union with Christ. “The Christian lives by virtue of his union with Christ. The sinful and human is linked to the holy and divine. The believing soul abides in Christ, and becomes one with him.”¹⁰³ The fact that White continued to teach the metaphor of the vine and the branches points to its significance for her and the need for Seventh-day Adventists to understand and practice this spiritual union with Christ.

White pointed out other things that take place when a person’s soul is united to Christ. They receive the mind of Christ. “When we are united to Christ, his mind is transferred to us. Purity and love shine forth in the character; meekness and truth control the life. The very expression of the countenance is changed. Christ abiding in the soul exerts a transforming power, and the outward aspect bears witness to the peace and joy that reign within.”¹⁰⁴ Also, everyone who is in union with Christ will be pruned and will go through suffering. Prayers will be answered. Too many of professed Christians, White wrote, have no vital connection with Christ. Therefore, there are thousands of prayers uttered daily that go unanswered. Only those who are in union with Christ, who are abiding in Him, can have the confidence that Christ will hear and answer their prayers.

Not to leave her readers in despair, White closed the article encouraging them to improve “every opportunity to connect yourselves more closely with Christ. It is by believing him, loving him, copying him, and depending wholly upon him, that you are to become one with him; and through you his life and character will be revealed to the

¹⁰³ White, “The Living Vine.”

world.”¹⁰⁵ She recited the idea that when believers throw their soul helpless upon Christ, believing Him, that a union with Him is begun. “It is by opening your heart to the words of Christ that you are to become a partaker of the divine nature.”¹⁰⁶ Christ’s words are to be received in the soul and the efforts put forth to love Him in response will bind the soul more closely to Him.

In “Walk in the Light,” White told readers that she trembled that the professed believers in her time have not appreciated the light they have received. She warned them, “It is no time now for caviling, dissension, and disunion.” She pleaded with them to seek the Lord as never before, renounce their sins, break down pride and cast themselves upon Christ without reservation. This advice is consistent with her approach to forming a union with Christ. “To meet the mind of the Spirit of God, we must exhibit to the world, in character and works, that union with Christ which is in accordance with the light of sacred truth now shining upon us.”¹⁰⁷ White expressed her fear that God will ultimately reject Seventh-day Adventists. Not for a lack of knowledge and understanding but because the light that has illuminated the soul will witness against them if they refuse to be led by it. A deeper heart work needed to be done for them to be saved. “The time has come for us to take advance steps.” Believers are to return the tithe, exercise joy and gratitude, and not go over and over unpleasant past experiences. They must stop complaining, fretting, finding fault, and murmuring. White encouraged them to strive to

¹⁰⁴ White, “The Living Vine.”

¹⁰⁵ White, “The Living Vine.”

¹⁰⁶ White, “The Living Vine.”

¹⁰⁷ White, “Walk in the Light.”

contemplate the better land to make them more spiritually minded.

Modern Revivals: Not in Union with Christ

Aside from the poor spiritual condition of Seventh-day Adventists, White in her writing on the character of modern revivals in *The Spirit of Prophecy*, volume 4, published in 1884, declared that many of the revivals of the previous forty years showed no evidence of the Spirit of God.¹⁰⁸ She denounced popular churches of the day as being ruled by the spirit of the world because they relied on the sensational to appeal to the imagination and excite the emotions. “The power of godliness has well-nigh departed from the churches. Heart union with Christ is a rare thing now. The majority of church-members know no tie but that which joins them to an organized body of professed Christians.”¹⁰⁹ In spite of this, White conceded that God still has “honest children” among them.¹¹⁰ The reason why so many are not joined to Christ is that the law of God is set aside. It is the law that reveals sin, while the gospel provides the remedy. To be forgiven there must be repentance and faith in Christ, in His atoning sacrifice. It appears that the lack of union with Christ in the Seventh-day Adventist Church also characterized the experience of other popular Christian churches that are not, according to White, living in union with Christ.

Another major problem, as White saw it, is the doctrine of sanctification or perfect holiness that is taught in some of the popular churches. This is the teaching of the

¹⁰⁸ Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, 294.

¹⁰⁹ White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, 294.

¹¹⁰ White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, 295.

holiness movement that sanctification is instantaneous. White claimed the Bible teaches that sanctification is progressive and that Christians need to keep up a constant warfare. This is where union with Christ comes in. “Human weakness becomes united to divine strength, and faith exclaims, ‘Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.’”¹¹¹ White brought together the idea of union with Christ with steps to Christ. “The successive steps in the attainment of Bible sanctification are set before us in the words of Peter: “Giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity.”¹¹² White called sanctification a daily work that goes on throughout the person’s entire life.

In a comment regarding perfection of character, White explained how Bible sanctification affects the person. Having referred in many previous articles to union with Christ involving the human soul, White declared that sanctification involves the entire person. “The sanctification set forth in the Scriptures embraces the entire being,—spirit, soul, and body.” As the apostle Paul prayed for believers to be kept blameless, spirit, soul and body, White applied this threefold understanding of the person to the process of sanctification. White concluded her chapter on modern revivals with a warning, reminding her readers of Christ’s invitation to abide in Him. “It is the privilege and duty of every Christian to maintain a close union with Christ, and to have a rich experience in the things of God. Then his life will be fruitful in good works.”¹¹³ The problem with

¹¹¹ White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, 300.

¹¹² White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, 300.

¹¹³ White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, 305.

modern revivals, according to White was that they have set aside the law of God. What they needed was Bible conversion and sanctification, a real conviction of sin, real repentance and an acknowledgement of the claims of God's law. Then new members in churches would be truly converted. They would be in union with Christ.

The Need for Unity and Union with Christ

From 1884 to 1886, White again prepared articles that discussed union with Christ and the means to attain it. She also made the repeated call for unity. "Unity in Christ," published in March 1884, implored ministers and all Seventh-day Adventists to seek the Lord.¹¹⁴ She expounded upon the vine and the branches metaphor, which Jesus used to teach union with Him before His ascension. White's warning to them was that Satan is always trying to attack this union, to bring about disunion and disharmony amongst God's people and that they need to strive against it. Unless Adventists come to abide in Christ they will not be prepared to warn the world about the Second Coming of Christ. The first work, she counseled is to put away sin and to know God's character and requirements. "The Son of the Most High became one of us, sharing the griefs and infirmities of human nature, that he might lift up fallen man and reunite him to God."¹¹⁵ She further wrote, "We are one in Christ." The ties, which bind believers to Christ and to one another, are sacred and enduring. Without the experience of living in union with Christ, the church cannot lead or teach others on how to form this union. In fact, if they

¹¹⁴ Ellen G. White, "Unity in Christ." Address to ministers assembled in General Conference at Battle Creek, Michigan, November 7, 1883.

¹¹⁵ White, "Unity in Christ."

refuse to exercise the faith necessary to form a union, the heart will become hardened in disobedience and will lead them in a wrong course. While White had previously described faith as a gift imparted by Christ, she also pointed to the necessity of the believer continuing to exercise faith in Christ.

In another discourse published in May 1884, White explained in further detail what faith is, the kind of faith that is needed to be in a constant union with Christ.¹¹⁶ It is not based on feeling, but on knowledge of God, which comes from studying the Bible.

We want to know how to exercise faith. Faith “is the gift of God,” but the power to exercise it is ours. If faith lies dormant, it is no advantage to us; but in exercise, it holds all blessings in its grasp. It is the hand by which the soul takes hold of the strength of the Infinite. It is the medium by which human hearts, renewed by the grace of Christ, are made to beat in harmony with the great Heart of love. Faith plants itself on the promises of God, and claims them as surety that he will do just as he said he would.¹¹⁷

For White, faith must be a living, active faith. While faith is the gift of God, humans must exercise this gift. Many who professed to be keeping the commandments of God are self-deceived. They have no living faith and no union with Christ. Their hearts have not been renewed and do not beat in harmony with God’s heart of love. They are uncourteous, selfish and have never made the truth practical. “We shall surely deceive ourselves if we think that because we hold certain Bible doctrines firmly, we actually possess the blessings which these doctrines were designed to bestow. The intellect may accept truth in its noblest form; but if this truth exerts no influence on the life and character, it is of no

¹¹⁶ Ellen G. White, “Faith the Christian’s Victory.” Comments at the morning meeting, Oakland, CA, April 21, 1884 in *The Signs of the Times*, May 22, 1884.

¹¹⁷ White, “Faith the Christian’s Victory.”

practical value.”¹¹⁸ Most Adventists were not in union with Christ, they are not exercising living faith. They frequently mistake faith for a feeling, but they are deluded. They are also deluded if they think that knowing and accepting the noblest truths of Scripture save them. For White, truth is not just intellectual it is practical. She repeated her call to Adventists to reform in this area and form a union with Christ. White ended her discourse by encouraging her listeners to cultivate spirituality, to think of Jesus often, and to keep faith alive.

In an address given in Basle, Switzerland, in September 1885, White spoke on the topic of “Unity Among Laborers.”¹¹⁹ In this address, White explained the impact of union with Christ among believers, declaring that those who are engaged in giving the world the last warning are especially to seek to become one with one another. This included speaking the same things, having the same judgment and seeing eye to eye in all matters of religious belief even though they possess different temperaments and dispositions.¹²⁰ She pointed out that though people are fallible the message is infallible. “The message is to prepare a people to stand in the last great day, and to be united in heaven above.”¹²¹ This reflects her earlier writing on union with Christ as resulting in believers having the same judgment in matters of religion.

White went on to explain the reason they need to be in harmony and oneness is

¹¹⁸ White, “Faith the Christian’s Victory.”

¹¹⁹ Delivered by White to the Swiss Conference and the European Missionary Council. Ellen G. White, “Unity Among Believers,” in *Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of the Seventh-day Adventists Practical Addresses* (Basle: Imprimerie Polyglotte, 1886), 124-126.

¹²⁰ White, “Unity Among Laborers,” 124.

¹²¹ White, “Unity Among Laborers,” 124.

because if they don't learn it here on earth, they shall never be united in heaven. Union as a people on earth is the precedent to union as a people in heaven. "Jesus with His long human arm encircles the fallen race and seeks to connect them with the throne of the Infinite. This is the work that you should be engaged in. Do not disappoint Jesus by your dissensions."¹²² It is union with Christ that brings about union with one another. "Christ in you will unite you to Christ in them, and there will be a sweet spirit of union." This can only happen through the Spirit of Christ. When Christ's Spirit is in each heart, the body of believers will have one mind with Christ. Not only are God's people to be in union with Christ and with one another, White declared that truth is a unit and in unity there is strength.¹²³

The following year, in 1886, White published the "Value of Bible Study," in which she called believers to Bible study in order to grow in their knowledge of Christ and become changed into the image of Christ.¹²⁴ Union with God is evident in those whose life is modeled on Christ's and who talk of Christ daily and display His character. Bible study is important for the Christian as the truths of God's word, when they are "received into the heart, have an animating power."¹²⁵ The study of the Bible is accounted as "the inward adorning of the mind and the culture of the soul." Fathers, mothers, and Christ's professed followers alike are neglecting this duty.

In "The Law in the Christian Age," published in August 1886, White warned of

¹²² White, "Unity Among Laborers," 125.

¹²³ White, "Unity Among Laborers," 125.

¹²⁴ Ellen G. White, "Value of Bible Study," *The Signs of the Times*, June 10, 1886.

¹²⁵ White, "Value of Bible Study."

the special attack of Satan on God's people to tempt them and deceive them.¹²⁶ Faith in Christ is necessary, as the law cannot save. Only a daily living experience in the truth and a union with Christ will keep them from being swept away with the wicked.

White explored Christ's redemptive work in an article titled "Love for the Erring," published in November 1886. Here she expressed the all-important work of Christ to save souls through union with Him. "His mission was to sinners—sinners of every grade, of every tongue and nation. He paid the price for all, to ransom them and bring them into union and sympathy with himself."¹²⁷ White explained to her readers that the reason Christ came to redeem humanity and reunite them with God is love. Union with Christ is expressed in terms of the deep love of God for all of humanity. Union with Christ is not just for believers, God extended this invitation to the whole world when He came to die on the cross. Salvation was presented as Christ's own initiative to unite with humanity and to draw them into union with Himself. His death is the cost of this union revealing the depth of the love of God for humanity.

During the late 1880s, White continued to explain the nature of union with Christ to her readers and what it meant theologically and practically.¹²⁸ In "Christ the True Vine," published in March 1887, White explained the vine and the branches to her readers once again.¹²⁹ This article bears similar ideas to her previous writing on this topic.

¹²⁶ Ellen G. White, "The Law in the Christian Age," *The Signs of the Times*, August 5, 1886.

¹²⁷ Ellen G. White, "Love for the Erring," *Review and Herald*, November 30, 1886.

¹²⁸ I will not present the content of "Union with Christ" here as White repeats by and large what is already contained in "An Appeal."

¹²⁹ Ellen G. White, "Christ the True Vine," *The Signs of the Times*, March 10, 1886.

The scion becomes a part of the vine by forming a perfect union with it. Thus it is with the sinner. The soul, dead in trespasses and sins, must experience a similar process in order to be reconciled to God, and to become a partaker of Christ's life and joy. As the graft receives life when united to the vine, so the sinner partakes of the divine nature when connected with Christ by repentance and faith. This connection joins soul with soul, the finite with the Infinite. When thus united, the words of Christ *abide* in us, and we are not actuated by a spasmodic feeling, but by a living, abiding principle.¹³⁰

It is the Spirit of Christ flowing into the heart of those truly united with Him that makes them partakers of the divine nature. The soul is dead and must be reconciled to God by partaking of the life of Christ by repentance and faith.

In "Abide in Me," published the following year in March 1888, White wrote of the practical knowledge needed of union with Christ, which comes only through the exercise of constant faith. "Faith binds our souls to him, and makes us partakers of the divine nature." The grace of Christ is only supplied through the channel of faith, which opens the communication between the soul and God.

Jesus came into the world to save sinners, not *in* their sins but *from* their sins, and to sanctify them through the truth; and in order that he may become a perfect Saviour to us, we must enter into union with him by a personal act of faith. Christ has chosen us, we have chosen him, and by this choice we become united to him, and are to live from henceforth, not unto ourselves, but unto him who has died for us. But this union can only be preserved by constant watchfulness, lest we fall into temptation, and make a different choice; for we are free always to take another master if we so desire. Union with Christ means an unfailing preference for him in every act and thought of our lives.¹³¹

For White, union with Christ is a choice. She invited her readers to remember that every soul is in the presence of God who is Judge. She called upon them to be open to the workings of the Holy Spirit, His power and influence. "We want to become so sensitive

¹³⁰ White, "Christ the True Vine."

¹³¹ Ellen G. White, "Abide in Me," *The Signs of the Times*, March 23, 1888.

to holy influences, that the lightest whisper of Jesus will move our souls, till he is in us, and we in him, living by the faith of the Son of God.”¹³²

In 1889, the publication of *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 5, and *The Sanctified Life*, contain references to union with Christ, as do numerous articles.¹³³ I will not present the ideas contained there, as they do not add any new or significant material to what has already been discussed in this decade of White’s writings on union with Christ. The continued intensity with which White educated her readers on union with Christ throughout the 1880s and her open rebuke that Seventh-day Adventists were not living in union with Christ explains her urgency to write on this subject repeatedly. During the 1880s, White’s writing on union with Christ remained consistent. Although she did not introduce any major new ideas after 1882, she continued to bring the message of union with Christ to her readers throughout the entire decade.

Conclusion

For White, union with Christ is about our relationship with Christ and how this relationship impacts the lives of believers. She continued to clarify and highlight the role of humans in attaining this union through repentance, faith and perseverance and the role of Christ in effecting this union by expanding her use of metaphors to explain the nature of this relationship. This chapter reviewed several major pieces of writing on union with

¹³² White, “Abide in Me.”

¹³³ See Ellen G. White, “Come Ye, Buy and Eat,” *The Signs of the Times*, March 25, 1889; Ellen G. White, “Looking for That Blessed Hope,” *The Signs of the Times*, June 24, 1889; Ellen G. White, “The Disciples of Christ Are One in Him,” *The Review and Herald*, November 12, 1889; Ellen G. White, “What Was Secured by the Death of Christ,” *The Signs of the Times*, December 30, 1889.

Christ including, “Important Testimony,” “An Appeal” and “The Vision at Bethel” in which White described union with Christ as a series of steps the believer must take to reach heaven. White taught in this decade that union with Christ involves the transfer of the mind of Christ to the sinner and that this relationship is a soul-to-soul union of finite man with Infinite God. Union with Christ also has important practical consequences and evidence of this relationship will be seen in the life of the believer who maintains a close union with Christ including a strong prayer life. Could White’s more explicit and poignant writings on union with Christ in this decade be a response, in part to fulfill her husband’s dream to present a full account of redemption centered on Christ? While this question is not a topic for this dissertation, it does become apparent that White developed her writings on union with Christ more fully in this decade.

The idea of a connection between heaven and earth continued as an important theological idea for White in the 1880s as she explored the nature of union with Christ more fully using various metaphors to explain this union between the believer and Christ. Channels of light, the golden chain, the vine and the branches, the mystic ladder all point to the believer’s intimate relationship with Christ. During the 1890s, White would further solidify her writings on union with Christ to her readers making Christ the center of salvation in the publication of *Steps to Christ* where the idea of the mystic ladder and taking steps toward heaven is again linked with union with Christ. In *The Desire of Ages* White wrote extensively on the life of Christ so that believers by contemplating His life will be formed into the divine image and live in close union with Christ.

CHAPTER 5

UNION WITH CHRIST: THE 1890s

Introduction

Although severely disabled by illness at times, White's writings flourished in the 1890s as she produced a number of books on Christ, two of which summarized and expressed her approach to union with Christ that she had been writing about for the past two or more decades. An important development was that while White had previously written on the various members of the Trinity, her language now became explicitly Trinitarian in relation to union with Christ. White came to express union with Christ as a union with God through Christ, mentioning each member of the Trinity. She also shifted the tone of her discussion of union with Christ in her major books. After years of previously pointing out to Seventh-day Adventists that they were not living in union with Christ, starting with *Steps to Christ* (1892), White emphasized the love of God for all humans and presented the way of salvation in an inviting, attractive manner that had a universal appeal.¹

¹ See Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), 184, 568; Ellen G. White, "God Made Manifest in Christ," *The Signs of the Times*, January 20, 1890; Ellen G. White, "Christ the Way of Life," *The Review and Herald*, November 4, 1890; Ellen G. White, "The Mystic Ladder," *The Review and Herald*, November 11, 1890; Ellen G. White, "Transformation Through Christ," *The Signs of the Times*, December 15, 1890; Ellen G. White: "Sermon at Otsego," *The Review and Herald*, February 10, 1891; Ellen G. White, "The Work of God to Believe in Christ," in *Address to Ministers*, 1892, 13; Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, 1892, 6, 19; Ellen G. White, "The Work of God to Believe in

Union with Christ in the 1890s became an invitation to respond to the love of God and, through this relationship, receive the righteousness of Christ, and vindicate the character of God before the universe. This is evident in *Steps to Christ* and *The Desire of Ages* (1898) as well as in her many articles published in the 1890s on the subject of union with Christ. Given the volume of materials she produced during this time frame, this chapter will focus on a number of articles that contain statements that shed light on her thought. Most attention will be paid to her books, *Steps to Christ* and *The Desire of Ages*.

Introduction to White's Life in the 1890s

In 1890, Ellen White, at 63 years of age received a surprise call from the Foreign Mission Board asking her to move to Australia.² She was in the process of building a new

Christ," *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, April 1, 1892; Ellen G. White, "The Work of God to Believe in Christ," *The Review and Herald*, May 17, 1892; Ellen G. White, "The Privilege of the Follower of Christ," *The Review and Herald*, July 19, 1892; Ellen G. White, "Privilege of Prayer," *The Messenger*, December 15, 1892; Ellen G. White, "The Privilege of Prayer," *The Bible Echo*, February 1, 1893; Ellen G. White, "The Good Shepherd's Estimate of a Lost Sheep," *The Signs of the Times*, November 20, 1893; Ellen G. White, "Truth Revealed to the Humble," *The Signs of the Times*, December 11, 1893; Ellen G. White, "The Book of Books," in *Christian Education*, 1894, 108, 147, 155; Ellen G. White, "Dedication Sermon," *The Bible Echo*, October 8, 1894; Ellen G. White, "Christ's Mission of Love," *The Bible Echo*, November 19, 1894; Ellen G. White, "Revelation of God Through Christ," *The Signs of the Times*, April 11, 1895; Ellen G. White, "What Atmosphere Surrounds the Soul?" *The Signs of the Times*, May 2, 1895; Ellen G. White, "Hungering for Righteousness," *The Signs of the Times*, August 29, 1895; Ellen G. White, "Take These Things Thence," *The Review and Herald*, September 3, 1895; Ellen G. White, "God's Claim Upon Us," *The Review and Herald*, December 8, 1896; Ellen G. White, *There is Help in God*, 105; Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 311; Ellen G. White, "The Way, the Truth, and the Life," *The Signs of the Times*, January 6, 1898; Ellen G. White, "Whole-hearted Service," *The Signs of the Times*, February 1, 1899.

² The idea of Ellen White heading to Australia was first brought to her attention at the General Conference in Battle Creek, Michigan, in March 1891 by Stephen Haskell. This occurred following a presentation by W. W. Prescott who presented a request from Australia to open a school. White, Haskell believed, could bring needed strength and inspiration to believers and promote the school if she went to Australia. The board presented it to her as a recommendation stipulating, if it agreed with her judgment and any light she had from heaven regarding the

home on the shores of Lake Michigan where she could write her long awaited book on the life of Christ. Given her age and circumstances, wanting to rest and write, she did not want to go. But without any word from God to the contrary, White decided she must go. She set sail with her son, William White, and her party and arrived in Sydney on December 8, 1891. In terms of her health, White's time in Australia was extremely difficult. After displaying severe symptoms of malaria within a month of arriving, this led to a prolonged and painful illness. The aftermath of this illness affected her health for the entire length of her stay in Australia.

The years White spent in Australia, however, were marked by progress in many areas of church life including the establishment of Seventh-day Adventist churches, a conference, a school, and medical work. She also continued to produce much writing and focused on bringing together ideas from her previous writing to present her approach to union with Christ. As noted in chapter 3, White did not produce much in the way of new material, or new information in the 1890s. Rather she consolidated the materials she had already been writing about in the previous decades.

Union with Christ and the Trinity

One of the most important developments in the 1890s was that White came to express a fully Trinitarian concept of union with Christ. White had written about union with God in a number of places,³ but her preference is predominantly for the phrase

decision. As White did not receive any light to not go, she went even though she wished to be released from the responsibility. White, *Ellen G. White: Woman of Vision*, 275, 276.

³ See Ellen G. White, "Letter to Sister H. N. Smith," *To Brother J. N. Andrews and Sister H. N. Smith*, June 1860; Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church at Olcott, N.Y.*, 1868; Ellen G.

“union with Christ.” In her statement on union with the Son and the Father in 1861, White did not mention the Holy Spirit. But by 1870, White expressly mentioned the Spirit of God as the bond of union. From the late 1870s, White mentioned the life-giving principle received from Christ and the energizing power of the Spirit. In the 1880s she continued to write on the role of the Holy Spirit as effecting union with Christ. However in the 1890s, White expressed union with Christ as union with the entire Godhead. Union with Christ was now thoroughly and explicitly Trinitarian.

In 1890, White wrote about the soul-temple and union with Christ in an article entitled “The Lord Must Be Our Light,” published January 28, 1890. She tried to encourage her readers, those who were feeling overwhelmed by temptation and trials, to open their hearts to receive the living rays of light coming from the face of Christ. The darkness they were experiencing was not coming from God, she wrote. There is a reason, she suggested, why some may feel destitute of God and of spiritual life. Specifically, it had to do with either allowing envy, hatred, or evil thoughts to run wild in the heart or it was because of something they had done to mar the soul temple.

When we feel destitute of the blessing of God, feel there is no spiritual life in us, and we cannot understand why we are in this condition, we should not doubt the Lord, and blame him for our darkness. It is not from God, for he has promised power and fullness of joy. We should search God’s word, and see if we have not allowed envy, evil surmising, and hatred to run riot in our hearts, or if we have not done something to mar the soul temple. Christ is in the heavenly sanctuary, and he is there to make an atonement for the people. He is there to present his wounded side and pierced hands to his Father. He is there to plead for his Church that is upon the earth. He is

White, “The Life of Christ—No. 9,” *The Youth’s Instructor*, September 1, 1873; Ellen G. White, “Workers in Our College,” *Testimony for the Battle Creek Church*, 1882; Ellen G. White, “Notes of Travel,” *The Review and Herald*, November 20, 1883; Ellen G. White, “Science and Revelation,” *The Signs of the Times*, March 13, 1884; Ellen G. White, “The Value of Bible Study,” *The Signs of the Times*, June 10, 1886; and Ellen G. White, “Union with God,” *The Review and Herald*, July 12, 1887.

cleansing the sanctuary from the sins of the people. What is our work?—It is our work to be in harmony with the work of Christ. By faith we are to work with him, to be in union with him.⁴

A significant point that White made in this article regarding the soul-temple and union with Christ is the affirmation that Christ is in the heavenly sanctuary. He is in heaven doing a work for His church on earth. While Christ is making atonement and cleansing the heavenly sanctuary His followers have a work to do to be in harmony with Christ. It is a work that is done by faith. She counseled those who were discouraged to walk in the light and separate from all sin and darkness, to live a life that will bless others and not just live within the four walls of their dwelling, thinking they are doing all that God requires of them. They are to be in union with Christ. When believers come to the cross, the light from Calvary shines into their hearts, they receive the love of God, and in turn become a blessing to others, sharing the plan of redemption.⁵

In an article published in 1890, called “I Will Keep Thee From the Hour of

⁴ Ellen G. White, “The Lord Must Be Our Light,” *The Review and Herald*, January 28, 1890.

⁵ White again brought up the issue of union with Christ, unity with one another and the soul-temple in a private letter to Captain Clement Eldridge [*sic*] in Battle Creek, Michigan, written from Melbourne Australia. It concerns the issue of articles published at the Review and Herald that pit views against one another, namely A. T. Jones with that of Uriah Smith regarding the issue of the righteousness of Christ presented at the Minneapolis General Conference in 1888. The articles published by the two authors caused great distress to a member of the Prahran church in Melbourne. White writes to Eldridge at the Review office that union with Christ will lead to union with one another, while justice, purity, and truth are to abide in the soul temple. “The cause of divisions or discord in the church is separation from Christ. The secret of unity is union with Christ. Christ is the great center. We shall approach one another just in proportion as we approach the center. United with Christ, we shall surely be united with our brethren in the faith. To be a Christian means a great deal more than is supposed. A Christian is Christ-like. Membership in the church does not make us Christians. Has the light from Christ penetrated the heart? Are justice and purity and truth abiding in the soul temple? We may know; for the fruits will appear.” White counsels that this is not the time for believers to cherish prejudices against one another. “Put not into our enemies’ hands anything that bears the least suggestions of differences among us, even in opinion.” See *The Paulsen Collection of Ellen G. White Letters*, 153.

Temptation,” White described what happened at Pentecost after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. She exhorted her readers to have a living experience in the things of God, just as His disciples did when they experienced persecution and trial because of their relationship to Him. Referring to the patriarchs, prophets, and apostles who suffered at the hand of the authorities, White compared their situation to that of Seventh-day Adventists. “What was the strength of those who in the past have suffered imprisonment and death for Christ’s sake?—It was union with God, union with the Holy Spirit, union with Christ. They had fellowship with God and with his Son, and the multitude that believed were of one mind and one soul.”⁶ This is also significant for White’s teaching on union with Christ for several reasons. Union with Christ for White clearly becomes Trinitarian from this point onwards. It also reflected an ideal for White that she wanted to see evident in Adventists in her time. That is, that they would be of one mind and soul as was the multitude who believed in the experience of the early church.

White also connected the entrance of Christ into the soul and the forming of a union with Him with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The scenario for the people of God, Seventh-day Adventists, was predicated upon doing a work first, that of putting away selfishness, pride, vanity, and evil surmising. If this would take place, “We would become strong in God, and the door of our heart would be open for the entrance of Christ; the baptism of the Holy Ghost would fall upon us, and we should be filled with all the fullness of God.”⁷ This would lead believers to be filled with God’s love and to

⁶ Ellen G. White, “I Will Keep Thee From the Hour of Temptation,” *Review and Herald*, April 22, 1890.

⁷ White, “I Will Keep Thee From the Hour of Temptation.”

experience the mystery of godliness. It is not just Christ, but union with the Godhead, which fills the believer with the fullness of God. She implored her readers, “What we need is a living experience in the things of God. We need the transforming grace of Christ to bring into subjection every thought of the mind, every power of the intellect. The physical, mental, and spiritual powers should be under the control of the God of heaven who gives us life, who gives us food, who gives us every blessing.”⁸

White continued her concern that Seventh-day Adventists had lost their first love and were not in union with Christ. Rather than caring for others many professed Seventh-day Adventists were hardened. Because they were not willing to serve God in practical ways “many are lifted up in pride, and are full of self-esteem and Phariseeism. They are cold, hard, unimpressionable. . . . They wrap the garment of their own righteousness about them, and by their daily life proves themselves destitute of the grace of God.”⁹ It is only through an experiential knowledge of Jesus that believers can be saved and work toward saving others. White contrasted two classes of people: those who know God and those who don’t. The first class is spiritual, the second, natural. The natural person, for White, cannot be in union with Christ.

White charged Satan with preventing humans from understanding and knowing God. Satan painted God as revengeful and harsh. She wrote that those who are influenced by Satan in their evil character would present these characteristics in their own lives. The ones who know God will present the love of the Father and the Son to others. She also pointed out that Seventh-day Adventists are not saved because of their membership or

⁸ White, “I Will Keep Thee From the Hour of Temptation.”

status in the church, they are saved by faith. “We are not saved as a sect; no denominational name has any virtue to bring us into favor with God. We are saved individually as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. And ‘by grace are ye saved through faith.’”¹⁰ She cautioned that many fail to grow up into Christ; they fail to become “a spiritual temple in Christ.” She told her listeners that Christ is the mystic ladder. He has united heaven and earth and linked finite man with Infinite God so that everyone may go to heaven. It is the plan of God for everyone to become a co-laborer with Christ through an experimental knowledge of Him. The churches, however, sit in darkness and have no light because they have no love for others. The chambers of their minds and hearts are not illuminated with the light of Christ.

Although White wrote more extensively on the topic of union with Christ in the 1890s to explain the nature and necessity of this relationship to Seventh-day Adventists, she, nonetheless, believed that it is a great mystery that she simply could not fathom nor explain. In an article published in May 1891, called “The Unsearchable Riches of Christ,”¹¹ White characterized union with Christ as a grand mystery beyond reason or comprehension. This idea of God indwelling humankind,¹² for White, cannot be explained; it can only be embraced by faith, since it is “so far beyond the power of reason

⁹ Ellen G. White, “Sermon at Otsego,” *The Review and Herald*, February 10, 1891.

¹⁰ White, “Sermon at Otsego.”

¹¹ Ellen G. White, “The Unsearchable Riches of Christ,” *The Signs of the Times*, May 18, 1891.

¹² She declared the mystery to be, “God in Christ, and Christ in God, and Christ abiding by faith in man.” White, “The Unsearchable Riches of Christ.”

to explain, that, as we speak of it, we feel our insufficiency.”¹³

In the “Unsearchable Riches of Christ,” White outlined for her readers how union with Christ is formed and maintained, adding that the believer needs to contemplate Christ. She expressed the idea that Jesus left heaven in order to uplift fallen man and make him a partaker of the divine nature. Christ came to reveal the love of the Father to all and to make manifest in His life and character the nature of God. It is through knowledge of Christ by faith that union with Christ is accomplished. This results in the perfection of Christian character.

Through knowledge of Christ we may be brought into union with the Father. Oh, that our dull comprehension might be enlarged, that we might realize what there is in this thought of oneness with Christ! Perfection of character is offered to fallen man through the righteousness of Christ. The repentant sinner may be robed in the robe of righteousness, and God will behold in him only the unspotted purity of his Son. Then we shall be loved by the Father as he loves his Son. Jesus declares that nothing less than oneness with him and his Father will ever satisfy the divine requirement; but when we are united with Christ, our life is hid with Christ in God, and we are represented as members of the body of Christ. Christ may abide in our hearts by faith.¹⁴

This is the unsearchable riches of Christ. She could not explain this; it must simply be embraced by faith through knowledge of Christ. This is why faith is so important to White; it is what allows Christ to dwell in the believer. This union of the believer with Christ is maintained by contemplating the character of Christ. She explained that by taking the righteousness of Christ, the believer also represents the character of Christ and the Father. To be changed into the image of Christ comes by contemplation of Christ.

In August of that same year, White again defined union with Christ as a soul-to-

¹³ White, “The Unsearchable Riches of Christ.”

¹⁴ White, “The Unsearchable Riches of Christ.”

soul union.¹⁵ She told her readers that no human is worthy of the divine presence. This is not a natural union. Only Christ can make this union possible through His seeking humanity to reunite them to God. The union begins when the sinner comes to Christ in faith. She described the process as follows.

The sinner who comes to Christ in faith, is joined soul-to-soul with his Redeemer, united in holy bonds with Jesus. Then he has love and benevolence through his constant union with Christ. And through faith and experience he has confidence that Jesus not only will but does save him to the uttermost. This confidence brings to his soul an abiding trust, a peace, a joy, that passeth understanding. Christ is to him an all-sufficient Saviour; he clings to Christ, receiving of his Spirit, until he works as Christ worked, is compassionate as Christ was compassionate, having an unselfish love, giving disinterested service, not to a few who are most congenial, but to those who most need the help he can give. If Christ had waited for man to make himself worthy of the divine presence and love, not a soul could have been a partaker of the divine nature. All must have perished. But there is hope for our world, for Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost; and this is exactly the work that must be done by every branch of the True Vine.¹⁶

Union with Christ is presented as God's initiative. This soul-to-soul union is described as a 'holy bond' between Christ and the individual.¹⁷ White presents this relationship as a mystery. She does not explain what this bond is other than it is holy. Love and benevolence are transferred to the believer through the Spirit of Christ who communicates love, benevolence, confidence, trust, peace, joy, compassion and the divine nature. Human beings become worthy of the divine presence through Christ.

¹⁵ Ellen G. White, "Genuine Religion," *The Signs of the Times*, August 3, 1891.

¹⁶ White, "Genuine Religion."

¹⁷ In another article White publishes in December, 1891 she explained that the relationship of Christ to His Father has its exact counterpart in the relationship of believers to Himself. White wrote, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." Here again the Lord Jesus presents his relationship to the Father as the exact counterpart of our relationship to himself. Let these lessons, so full of instruction, be carefully considered." Ellen G. White, "If My Words Abide in You," *The Signs of the Times*, December 28, 1891.

It is significant that this article is the last time White used the phrase “soul-to-soul union” to describe the believer’s union with Christ in her published writings. She would use the phrase “soul-to-soul” to refer to the relationship of believers with each other, after 1891, but not to the soul’s union with Christ as far as I could find.¹⁸ The publication of *Steps to Christ* in 1892 would bring into greater focus her ideas on how to form and maintain a union with Christ—more comprehensive than what she had written before. Her overall theme, of course, is taking steps to Christ. White drew upon many of the ideas she had written about previously. The context and theme of her writing was the love of God and her fullest description of what it is to form a union with Him.

Steps to Christ (1892)

The compilation *Steps to Christ* functions as a guide on how to take steps to Christ, the only connecting link between humanity and God.¹⁹ In this book White taught her readers the way of salvation, how to form a personal union with Christ. The steps, it appears, were taken from White’s theme of the mystic ladder, which in her previous writing also functioned as a metaphor for union with Christ in its teaching of the process of sanctification. In *Steps to Christ*, White described in detail the process of conversion. She also described the process by which a believer is justified and sanctified. In this

¹⁸ See Ellen G. White, “A Letter From Sister White,” September 1, 1892, *Special Testimony to Our Ministers*—No. 2, 26 in *Special Testimonies, Series A*; Ellen G. White, Letter dated January 16, 1907. “Chapter 3—Individual Responsibility and Christian Unity,” in *Testimonies to the Church Regarding Individual Responsibility and Christian Unity*, in *Special Testimonies, Series B*. Ellen G. White, “How to Deal with the Erring,” January 26, 1911.

¹⁹ An important antecedent to *Steps to Christ* is *Christ the Mystic Ladder*. Ellen G. White, “MR No. 1411—The Ladder to Heaven,” 1884, in *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 19, 338-354.

book, White effortlessly combined in a clear and inviting narrative the synergistic relationship, that is, a response to God's gracious invitation to form a union with Him.²⁰

This book is a compilation of her previous writings that brings to its readers ideas that White has been presenting for the previous three decades. The tone of the book is an invitation to reunite with a loving God who is actively seeking to save the sinner, to draw them into union and communion with Himself and make them partakers of the divine nature. *Steps to Christ* opens with its first chapter focused on God's love.²¹ It should be noted that this first chapter was only added after the second printing of this book.

Originally, it began with what is now chapter 2, which is "The Sinner's Need of Christ."

While union with Christ is not explicitly mentioned until chapter 8, "Growing Up into Christ," *Steps to Christ* outlines in a positive manner the way of salvation in the following order: God's love for humans (chapter 1); the sinner's need of Christ (chapter 2); repentance (chapter 3); confession (chapter 4); consecration (chapter 5); faith and acceptance (chapter 6); the test of discipleship (chapter 7); growing up into Christ (chapter 8); the work and the life (chapter 9); a knowledge of God (chapter 10); prayer (chapter 11); overcoming doubt (chapter 12); and rejoicing in the Lord (chapter 13).

These chapters point to her understanding of the elements involved in coming to faith in

²⁰ Compared to White's earlier most expansive explanations of union with Christ, *Steps to Christ* lacks the mechanical tone of "An Appeal" in 1882 where White lists the five steps a sinner must take to form a union with Christ. Also missing in *Steps to Christ* is the staircase or steps of virtues that White wrote about extensively in her unpublished paper detailing the mystic ladder and union with Christ in 1884.

²¹ While White does not mention her own personal experience in *Steps to Christ*, the process of coming to Christ appears to resemble her own personal experience. This is interesting as in White's own personal experience, namely, her response to the interview with Levi Stockman who taught her about God's love for her that she was able to finally surrender herself to God when she changed her view of God's character. This is how White presents God to her

Christ and what this entailed.²²

The first chapter is about understanding the character of God. His love is revealed in nature and in revelation. God created humankind as happy and perfectly holy beings, but their fall into sin through the transgression of God's law brought suffering and death that characterize human life on earth. But God chose to reveal Himself in the life of Christ, which was characterized by love, mercy, and compassion. "In all men He saw fallen souls whom it was His mission to save. Such is the character of Christ as revealed in His life. This is the character of God."²³ The problem with sin according to White was that it separates the soul from God. Christ became the medium through which God's love was poured out on the world. White emphasized the love of the Father in sending the Son to die for the human race, to effect their salvation by linking Himself with humanity. "He who was one with God has linked Himself with the children of men by ties that are never to be broken... He is our Sacrifice, our Advocate, our Brother, bearing our human form before the Father's throne, and through eternal ages one with the race He has redeemed—the Son of man."²⁴ Christ is linked with humanity, and the nature of Christ is the key to understanding humans reuniting with God and becoming one with God. It is through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ that sinners may become sons of God. "By assuming human nature Christ elevates humanity. Fallen men are placed where, through connection

readers. He is a God of love who gives evidence of this throughout nature and revelation alike.

²² White did not describe the contexts in which people come to faith in Christ.

²³ White, *Steps to Christ*, 12.

²⁴ White, *Steps to Christ*, 14.

with Christ, they may indeed become worthy of the name ‘sons of God.’”²⁵

White explained in chapter 2 that because of sin there was a change in human nature. Before sin humans held open communion with God, but after the fall of Adam and Eve this bridge was cut, and they were made captives of Satan and sought to hide from the presence of God. This change meant that it was impossible for humans to escape sin themselves. What needed to be changed is the human heart. Only God can work in the heart, through a power from within, that can change the life and character.

Education, culture, the exercise of the will, human effort, all have their proper sphere, but here they are powerless. They may produce an outward correctness of behavior, but they cannot change the heart; they cannot purify the springs of life. There must be a power working from within, a new life from above, before men can be changed from sin to holiness. That power is Christ. His grace alone can quicken the lifeless faculties of the soul, and attract it to God, to holiness.²⁶

The figure White selected to demonstrate this in *Steps to Christ* is, of course, Jacob’s dream of the mystic ladder. She described Jacob feeling lost and discouraged after fleeing his father’s home, fearful that his sin had cut him off from God.

As he slept, a strange light broke upon his vision; and lo, from the plain on which he lay, vast shadowy stairs seemed to lead upward to the very gates of heaven, and upon them angels of God were passing up and down; while from the glory above, the divine voice was heard in a message of comfort and hope. Thus was made known to Jacob that which met the need and longing of his soul—a Saviour. With joy and gratitude he saw revealed a way by which he, a sinner, could be restored to communion with God. The mystic ladder of his dream represented Jesus, the only medium of communication between God and man. This is the same figure to which Christ referred in His conversation with Nathanael, when He said, “Ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.” John 1:51. In the apostasy, man alienated himself from God; earth was cut off from heaven. Across the gulf lay between, there could be no communion. But through

²⁵ White, *Steps to Christ*, 15.

²⁶ White, *Steps to Christ*, 18. White cautions her readers that the idea that humans need to only develop the good that is already in them by nature is a fatal deception. There is no natural union with Christ.

Christ, earth is again linked with heaven. With His own merits, Christ has bridged the gulf which sin has made, so that the ministering angels can hold communion with man. Christ connects fallen man in his weakness and helplessness with the Source of infinite power.²⁷

The mystic ladder is the basis for reuniting with God, for understanding God's design in reconnecting humans with Himself, through Jesus Christ. He is the only link between heaven and earth. *Steps to Christ* is thus about reconnecting with Christ, forming a union with Him. This is intentionally outlined in the beginning of her book, which was originally the first chapter of *Steps to Christ*.

After focusing on what Christ does to effect salvation to reconnect fallen man with the Source of Infinite power, White explained to her readers what they needed to do to avail themselves of this relationship and the power of God. White entreated her readers that God had done so much to save them, "Let us place ourselves in right relation to Him who has loved us with amazing love. Let us avail ourselves of the means provided for us that we may be transformed into His likeness, and be restored to fellowship with the ministering angels, to harmony and communion with the Father and the Son."²⁸ She called readers to contemplate the sacrifice of Christ, His life and death and intercession. God had provided them with the assistance of the ministering angels, the love of the Father working above and through all, the pleading of the Spirit and the unceasing interest of all the heavenly beings who are enlisted on behalf of humanity's redemption.

The subject of chapter 3 is repentance. The sinner does not have to repent before responding to the invitation to come to Christ and form a union with Him. "The Bible

²⁷ White, *Steps to Christ*, 19, 20.

²⁸ White, *Steps to Christ*, 22.

does not teach that the sinner must repent before he can heed the invitation of Christ... It is virtue that goes forth from Christ, that leads to genuine repentance.”²⁹ It is knowledge of the plan of salvation combined with virtue from Christ that leads the sinner to repentance. “The sinner may resist this love, may refuse to be drawn to Christ: but if he does not resist he will be drawn to Jesus; a knowledge of the plan of salvation will lead him to the foot of the cross in repentance for his sins.”³⁰ However, if sinners are bent on evil, persistently choose to engage in sin, and do not desire to be set free, they destroy themselves. Christ never forces the will even though He desires to set everyone free from sin.

White explained how repentance takes place. “Go to Him with your soul all stained as it is.”³¹ She also counseled her readers to study God’s Word prayerfully to discover the principles of holiness in the law of God and the life of Christ.³² The sinner must come to Christ as they are and submit their soul to Christ. She declared the sinner could not repent without the Spirit of Christ awakening the conscience. Christ imparts enmity in the heart against sin and gives the sinner a desire for purity and truth. When the sinner beholds Calvary and the sacrifice God has made on their behalf, the goodness of God leads them to repentance. The love of God impresses the mind and soul. “Whenever they make an effort to reform, from a sincere desire to do right, it is the power of Christ that is drawing them. An influence of which they are unconscious works upon the soul,

²⁹ White, *Steps to Christ*, 26.

³⁰ White, *Steps to Christ*, 27.

³¹ White, *Steps to Christ*, 34.

³² White, *Steps to Christ*, 34.

and the conscience is quickened, and the outward life is amended.”³³ The love of God is contrasted with the enormity of sin. When God’s love is fully comprehended, sin is accepted as the human condition and the heart becomes tender and contrite towards God.

In chapter 4, White described the specific nature of confession and in chapter 5 she discussed what it means to give oneself fully to God in consecration. “When Christ dwells in the heart, the soul will be so filled with His love, with the joy of communion with Him, that it will cleave to Him; and in the contemplation of Him, self will be forgotten. Love to Christ will be the spring of action.”³⁴ This contemplation does not involve the loss of consciousness or the sense or intellect but leads to action, including the awareness of making a conscious decision to respond to God. Surrender involves the surrendering of the will to Christ.³⁵ This is the governing power in human nature. The sinner has to choose to serve Christ for the nature to be brought under the control of the Spirit of Christ. When the will is surrendered to Christ a change occurs in the life of the sinner. The divine and the human agent, work together for the believer to live a life of faith. “By yielding up your will to Christ, you ally yourself with the power that is above all principalities and powers. You will have strength from above to hold you steadfast, and thus through constant surrender to God you will be enabled to live the new life, even the life of faith.”³⁶ The will must be given to God in order to bring about a change in the

³³ White, *Steps to Christ*, 27.

³⁴ White, *Steps to Christ*, 44.

³⁵ This idea bears a resemblance to the point made in chapter 1 by Butler, that of the non-mystic way of attaining union with Christ through the complete surrender of the will to Christ and leading an active life for God. See footnote 72, p. 17.

³⁶ White, *Steps to Christ*, 48.

life. “The true joyous life of the soul is to have Christ formed within.”³⁷

Faith and acceptance is the topic of chapter 6. White acknowledged that sin has separated sinners from God and that they are in bondage to the power of evil. But once sinners have confessed their sins “and in heart put them away,” they may go to Christ and ask Him to wash away their sins and give them a new heart.³⁸ God promises to make the sinner holy and to change their heart and enable them to live a holy life.³⁹ “Through this simple act of believing God, the Holy Spirit has begotten a new life in your heart.”⁴⁰

White wrote, “Jesus loves to have us come to Him just as we are, sinful, helpless, dependent. We may come with all our weakness, our folly, our sinfulness, and fall at His feet in penitence. It is his glory to encircle us in the arms of His love and to bind up our wounds, to cleanse us from all iniquity.”⁴¹ Christ does all of this because He wants to restore His moral image in humans, offering them mercy and forgiveness in response to their confession and repentance.⁴²

In chapter 7, “The Test of Discipleship,” White explained how the Holy Spirit works on the human heart: “That regenerating power, which no human eye can see, begets a new life in the soul; it creates a new being in the image of God. While the work of the Spirit is silent and imperceptible, its effects are manifest. If the heart has been

³⁷ White, *Steps to Christ*, 46.

³⁸ White, *Steps to Christ*, 49.

³⁹ White, *Steps to Christ*, 51.

⁴⁰ White, *Steps to Christ*, 51.

⁴¹ It is ministering angels who bring the strength and grace provided by Christ to every believing soul. White, *Steps to Christ*, 52.

⁴² White, *Steps to Christ*, 55.

renewed by the Spirit of God, the life will bear witness to this fact.”⁴³ What is necessary on the part of the sinner is to exercise faith in Christ. “It is faith and faith only, that makes us partakers of the grace of Christ, which enables us to render obedience.”⁴⁴ Obedience to Christ is the fruit of faith. According to White, this is the condition of salvation—perfect obedience and perfect righteousness, which can only occur in union with Christ whereby Christ imputes His righteousness to the sinner.⁴⁵ “Christ changes the heart. He abides in your heart by faith. You are to maintain this connection with Christ by faith and the continual surrender of your will to Him; and so long as you do this, He will work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure.”⁴⁶ Through union with Christ, the sinner receives the righteousness of Christ by faith, which results in obedience to Christ.

In chapter 8, “Growing Up into Christ,” White draws upon Scripture illustrations from nature to help believers understand the mysterious truths of spiritual life.⁴⁷ She employed the vine and the branches to illustrate the growth that takes place in the believer. “It is only through the life that God Himself has imparted, that either plant or animal can live. So it is only through the life from God that spiritual life is begotten in the hearts of men.”⁴⁸ Humans are completely dependent on God for their spiritual life and growth. The grace God provides to make this happen, according to White, is real and

⁴³ White, *Steps to Christ*, 57.

⁴⁴ White, *Steps to Christ*, 60.

⁴⁵ White, *Steps to Christ*, 62.

⁴⁶ White, *Steps to Christ*, 62.

⁴⁷ White, *Steps to Christ*, 67-75.

⁴⁸ White, *Steps to Christ*, 67.

available to all.⁴⁹ Without God, we cannot live or grow spiritually.

Our growth in grace, our joy, our usefulness,—all depend upon our union with Christ. It is by communion with Him, daily, hourly,—by abiding in Him,—that we are to grow in grace. He is not only the Author but the Finisher of our faith. It is Christ first and last and always. He is to be with us, not only at the beginning and the end of our course, but at every step of the way.⁵⁰

According to White the entire relationship with God, and with Christ is authored and guided by Him at every step. There is not a moment when His followers are not dependent on Christ for spiritual life and growth.

White pointed out that there are two dangers that exist for those who form a union with Christ. First, there is the danger that they will focus on self instead of Christ who is their strength and life. The things that may divert the mind include sorrows and cares, perplexities, focusing on the faults, weaknesses and imperfections of others or ourselves. “We should not make self the center and indulge anxiety and fear as to whether we shall be saved. All this turns the soul away from the Source of our strength. Commit the keeping of your soul to God, and trust in Him. Talk and think of Jesus. Let self be lost in Him.”⁵¹ Second, Satan is always trying to draw the attention away from Christ and

⁴⁹ “In the matchless gift of His Son, God has encircled the whole world with an atmosphere of grace as real as the air which circulates around the globe. All who choose to breathe this life-giving atmosphere will live and grow up to the stature of men and women in Christ Jesus.” White, *Steps to Christ*, 68.

⁵⁰ White, *Steps to Christ*, 69. In chapter 8 there is blended together statements from “Important Testimony” written in a new way. For example, in the “Important Testimony” White had stated, “It is only by personal union with Christ, by communion with Him daily, hourly, that we can bear the fruits of the Holy Spirit,” and “Our growth in grace, our joy, our usefulness, all depend on our union with Christ and the degree of faith we exercise in Him. Here is the source of our power in the world.” White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 48. These statements are combined into the above statement, the first reference in this book to union with Christ.

⁵¹ White, *Steps to Christ*, 71.

“prevent the union and communion of the soul with Christ.”⁵² The tie that Christ formed with humanity, she wrote, can never be broken except by the choice of humans themselves.⁵³ Satan cannot break our union with Christ, but he can divert our attention, if we allow it so that we no longer have union and communion with Him. Union with Christ can be lost by choice.

White answered the question, how am I to abide in Christ? If union with Christ is based on free will, the answer is living by faith. “By faith you became Christ’s, and by faith you are to grow up in Him—by giving and taking, You are to *give* all,—your heart, your will, your service,—give yourself to Him to obey all His requirements; and you must *take* all,—Christ, the fullness of all blessings, to abide in your heart, to be your strength, your righteousness, your everlasting helper,—to give you power to obey.”⁵⁴ In this statement, White is describing, I believe, what she means by the soul’s union with Christ. The believer gives all, the heart, the will, and the service to obey Christ. What do they receive from Christ? The believer receives Christ, that is, the fullness of His blessings, His strength, His righteousness, and His everlasting help to give the believer the power to obey. This is a good indication of what White meant when she referred previously to union with Christ as a soul-to-soul union. The believer does not take the personhood of Christ they take His strength, His power, His character. They partake of His divine nature and their heart is reformed to reflect the image of Christ.

⁵² White, *Steps to Christ*, 71.

⁵³ White would later describe union with Christ, as an “indissoluble union” which I think referred to her view that union with Christ, once formed, is so strong that Satan cannot break it. As she makes clear here, it is only by human choice that the union with Christ, once formed can be broken. God’s purpose is that the union shall not be broken.

What the believer receives through union with Christ it is also brought out in the following statement where White described how believers experience this relationship.

A life in Christ is a life of restfulness. There may be no ecstasy of feeling, but there should be an abiding peaceful trust. Your hope is not in yourself; it is in Christ. Your weakness is united to His strength, your ignorance to His wisdom, your frailty to His enduring might. So you are not to look to yourself, not to let the mind dwell upon self, but look to Christ. Let the mind dwell upon His love, upon the beauty, the perfection, of His character. Christ in His self-denial, Christ in His humiliation, Christ in His purity and holiness, Christ in His matchless love—this is the subject for the soul’s contemplation. It is by loving Him, copying Him, depending wholly upon Him, that you are to be transformed into His likeness.⁵⁵

Being united to Christ may not bring ecstasy of feelings, but it does result in rest, peace and trust. The contemplation of the soul White defined here as the mind dwelling upon the love, beauty and perfection of Christ’s character. In practical terms, White counseled her readers to consecrate their lives to Christ in the morning before doing anything else and to say this prayer, “Take me, O Lord, as wholly Thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today in Thy service. Abide with me, and let all my work be wrought in Thee.”⁵⁶ Constant prayer is presented as a way to maintain union with Christ and to grow in Christian maturity. Everything depends on the believer having a union with Christ that is lasting and this takes daily, hourly communion with Christ.

White also addressed the issue of how Christ is present to the individual believer. She explained that Christ’s presence was closer to His disciples after He ascended, when they experienced Pentecost, than before He returned to heaven. It is through the Comforter, the Holy Spirit that Christ indwells the believer.

⁵⁴ White, *Steps to Christ*, 69.

⁵⁵ White, *Steps to Christ*, 70.

⁵⁶ White, *Steps to Christ*, 70.

Pentecost brought them the presence of the Comforter of whom Christ had said, He “shall be in you.” John 14:17; 16:7. Henceforth through the Spirit, Christ was to abide continually in the hearts of His children. Their union with Him was closer than when He was personally with them. The light, and love, and power of the indwelling Christ shone out through them, so that men, beholding, “marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.” Acts 4:13. All that Christ was to the disciples, He desires to be to His children today; for in that last prayer . . . Jesus prayed for us, and He asked that we might be one with Him, even as He is one with the Father. What a union is this!⁵⁷

White believed that Christ was spiritually present through the Holy Spirit. There is a distinction made between the Holy Spirit or what she referred to as Christ’s Spirit, and Christ Himself who is in heaven. The Spirit of Christ is to abide continually in the hearts of His followers so that they might become one with Him even as Christ is in heaven.

The regenerating power of the Holy Spirit makes possible the union of divinity and humanity in people.⁵⁸ White cited the example of the apostle John who experienced the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit in his heart. “The regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit renewed his heart. The power of the love of Christ wrought a transformation of character. This is the sure result of union with Jesus.”⁵⁹ Union with Christ changes the character and the nature of humans. White explained that “When Christ abides in the heart, the whole nature is transformed. Christ’s Spirit, His love, softens the heart, subdues the soul, and raises the thoughts and desires toward God and heaven.”⁶⁰ White did not

⁵⁷ White, *Steps to Christ*, 74, 75.

⁵⁸ White explained in an article published November 1, 1892 that the work of the Holy Spirit is to make a definite impression upon humans. She described it by using the following metaphor, “As the wax takes the impression of the seal, so the soul is to take the impression of the Spirit of God, and retain the moral image of Christ. We are to become partakers of the divine nature, realizing in our experience the vigor and perfection of spiritual life.” Ellen G. White, “The Necessity of Co-operation with God,” *The Review and Herald*, November 1, 1892.

⁵⁹ White, *Steps to Christ*, 73.

⁶⁰ White, *Steps to Christ*, 73.

mean that humans lose their sinful nature and become sinless. Christ transforms the nature so that it has new impulses but He does not remove sinful human nature.

In “The Work and the Life,” the subject of chapter 9, White explained the results of union with Christ in terms of outward behavior. Those in union with Christ will experience the life of God in their hearts and this life will flow out to others.⁶¹ She gave the example of Philip, when he had found Christ, he could not help but tell others. Likewise, those who experience the saving and sanctifying power of the life of God in the heart will be clothed with the righteousness of Christ and experience the joy of the indwelling Spirit. This is how believers partake of the divine nature and it is the highest honor that God can bestow upon humans. It results in becoming a co-worker with God, Christ, and the angels who minister to humans.

The mission of the believer is not to be exercised in selfishness, according to White. What they receive from Christ is to be shared with others.

The spirit of unselfish labor for others gives depth, stability, and Christ-like loveliness to the character, and brings peace and happiness to its possessor. The aspirations are elevated. There is no room for sloth or selfishness. Those who thus exercise the Christian graces will grow and will become strong to work for God. They will have clear spiritual perceptions, a steady, growing faith, and an increased power in prayer. The Spirit of God, moving upon their spirit, calls forth the sacred harmonies of the soul in answer to the divine touch. Those who thus devote themselves to unselfish effort for the good of others are most surely working out their own salvation.⁶²

Union with Christ results in spiritual growth and maturity, and active, purposeful labor for others. For White this occurs even when Christ’s followers do not believe they are doing anything special for Him. Those in union with Christ will have an unconscious

⁶¹ White, *Steps to Christ*, 77.

⁶² White, *Steps to Christ*, 80.

influence that will result in waves of blessing that deepen, widen and produce lasting results. They are to live a quiet life doing whatever the providence of God assigns.⁶³

In chapter 10, White explained how to receive a knowledge of God citing three ways that God speaks to humans: through nature; through His providential workings and the influence of the Holy Spirit on the heart; and through His Word, the Bible. White encouraged believers to get to know Christ through reading, studying and meditating on Scripture. She likened this to eating His flesh and drinking His blood. Believers are called to meditate and contemplate the life and character of Christ in the Bible so that their whole hearts will be filled with the words of God. “Fill the whole heart with the words of God. They are the living water, quenching your burning thirst. They are the living bread from heaven. Jesus declared, ‘Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you.’”⁶⁴ Bible reading is thus essential to spiritual growth and maturity, to know and contemplate Christ.

After discussing the ways that God speaks to us, White continued in chapter 11 on the ways humans speak to God, called “The Privilege of Prayer.” It is not enough to listen to God; believers must pour their hearts out to God. “In order to have spiritual life and energy, we must have actual intercourse with our heavenly Father.”⁶⁵ Prayer enables the believer to receive God. ⁶⁶ “Unceasing prayer is the unbroken union of the soul with God,

⁶³ White, *Steps to Christ*, 82.

⁶⁴ White, *Steps to Christ*, 88.

⁶⁵ White, *Steps to Christ*, 93.

⁶⁶ However, there are conditions to having our prayers answered by God. He will not hear nor answer prayers made by one who feels no need of Him; or who clings to any known sin; or does not come to Him in faith; or focuses on doubts or fears trying to solve everything themselves; they must have a forgiving spirit toward others; and lastly, they must make every

so that life from God flows into our life; and from our life, purity and holiness flow back to God.”⁶⁷ White believed that the heart must be open to God continually and that we must ask Christ to be a heavenly guest in the soul.⁶⁸

White taught that the soul is lifted into the presence of God through prayer. It is lifted out and upward, according to White and is free from surrounding influences. “By calm, simple faith the soul holds communion with God and gathers to itself rays of divine light to strengthen and sustain it in the conflict with Satan.”⁶⁹ However, White was not advocating a secluded life devoted to prayer.

God does not mean that any of us should become hermits or monks and retire from the world in order to devote ourselves to acts of worship. The life must be like Christ’s life—between the mountain and the multitude. He who does nothing but pray will soon cease to pray, or his prayer will become a formal routine. When men take themselves out of social life, away from the sphere of Christian duty and cross bearing; when they cease to work earnestly for the Master, who worked earnestly for them, they lose the subject matter of prayer and have no incentive to devotion. They cannot pray in regard to the wants of humanity or the upbuilding of Christ’s kingdom, pleading for strength wherewith to work.⁷⁰

White clearly did not advocate the type of mysticism practiced by the mystics in the convents of monasticism.⁷¹ Believers pray but they are also very active in working for Christ. They must live, as Christ did, “between the mountain and the multitude.” That is,

effort to keep communion between God and the soul open at all times. White, *Steps to Christ*, 95-98.

⁶⁷ White, *Steps to Christ*, 97. White encouraged family prayer but also secret, that is private, prayer. “We should pray in the family circle, and above all we must not neglect secret prayer, for this is the life of the soul.”

⁶⁸ “We should have the door of the heart open continually and our invitation going up that Jesus may come and abide as a heavenly guest in the soul.” White, *Steps to Christ*, 99.

⁶⁹ White, *Steps to Christ*, 98.

⁷⁰ White, *Steps to Christ*, 101.

⁷¹ White, *Steps to Christ*, 101.

making personal, private time for devotion to Christ through prayer and Bible reading, but also actively engaging in life to help and bless others in service to God. Believers have to know what is going on in the world, and to be sociable in order to know how to pray specifically for the wants and needs of those around them.⁷²

In chapter 12, White dealt with the issue of doubt concerning mysteries too deep to understand. She included in this list the entrance of sin into the world, the resurrection, the regeneration of believers and “many other subjects,” which she did not mention.⁷³ This is true of salvation according to White, which is simple enough for the uncultured to comprehend. Yet such truths are far beyond the power of human comprehension; they must be accepted simply because God has declared them in His Word. “Thus the plan of redemption is laid open to us, so that every soul may see the steps he is to take in repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, in order to be saved in God’s appointed way.”⁷⁴ Beyond the simple truths of Scripture are deep mysteries, which cannot be understood by human reason. These should inspire the seeker with reverence and faith in God. God intends His truth to be unfolding always. In other words, humans cannot understand how God regenerates believers through union with Christ. It is a mystery too deep to understand. Human reason cannot explain it.

For White, it is the study of the Bible that will strengthen and elevate the mind.⁷⁵

⁷² White, *Steps to Christ*, 101.

⁷³ White, *Steps to Christ*, 106.

⁷⁴ White, *Steps to Christ*, 107.

⁷⁵ “God desires man to exercise his reasoning powers; and the study of the Bible will strengthen and elevate the mind as no other study can. Yet we are to beware of deifying reason, which is subject to the weakness and infirmity of humanity.” When it comes to the Bible, reason must recognize that God, the I AM is superior and the heart and intellect must bow. White, *Steps*

Believers are to follow the light that has already been opened to them. “There is an evidence that is open to all,—the evidence of experience. God invites us to prove for ourselves the reality of His word, the truth of His promises. He bids us “taste and see that the Lord is good.” Psalm 34:8”⁷⁶ For White, the Bible was the voice of God to her soul. That is why she claimed to believe it. The truth about Christ in the Bible, she explained, is in us. “We have the witness in ourselves that the Bible is true, that Christ is the Son of God.”⁷⁷ Writing of the future life, White reflected, “By faith we may look to the hereafter and grasp the pledge of God for a growth of intellect, the human faculties uniting with the divine, and every power of the soul being brought into direct contact with the Source of light.”⁷⁸ Though believers currently experience doubts and perplexities, in the future life things that they could not understand will be made plain and explained to them.⁷⁹

In her final chapter in *Steps to Christ*, White taught her readers to focus on the positives. “Rejoicing in the Lord,” explained that Satan’s goal is to make religious life appear difficult and gloomy. The danger of focusing on negative thoughts is that it shuts out Jesus. “A discouraged soul is filled with darkness, shutting out the light of God from his own soul and casting a shadow upon the pathway of others.”⁸⁰ She warned believers not to express doubt or negative feelings as this impacts others. When meeting with friends, White counseled her readers to let praise be on their lips to God. “All have trials;

to Christ, 109.

⁷⁶ White, *Steps to Christ*, 111.

⁷⁷ White, *Steps to Christ*, 112.

⁷⁸ White, *Steps to Christ*, 112.

⁷⁹ White, *Steps to Christ*, 112.

⁸⁰ White, *Steps to Christ*, 117.

griefs hard to bear, temptations hard to resist. Do not tell your troubles to your fellow mortals, but carry everything to God in prayer.”⁸¹ Taking positive steps toward Christ in this life will bring a deeper experience of His love and the perpetual comfort of His presence and bring believers close to heaven.⁸²

To summarize, in *Steps to Christ*, White explained to her readers the process of conversion and how to form a union with Christ. She described what God has done to effect this intimate relationship with Himself, and the human response needed to form and maintain this union. The metaphor of the book is steps taken on a ladder. The ‘steps’ are all done in Christ who aids the sinner to enter into a relationship with Himself. To enter this relationship, the sinner comes to understand the love of God for humankind through nature and revelation; and exercise faith in Christ’s atoning sacrifice. Sinners must recognize their need of Christ as it is only through Christ they can be brought back into harmony with God. The heart must yield to the influence of the Spirit of God so that through repentance, aided by the Spirit of Christ, and the gift of faith, a union with Christ is formed and the sinner is justified. Confession and complete consecration to Christ are required. The will must be surrendered to the will of Christ. Through prayer and the knowledge of Christ gained through habitual Bible study, the believer is able to grow up into Christ. The regenerating power of the Holy Spirit continuously imparts spiritual life to the soul so that the believer is enabled to live a life of service. The believer receives strength, wisdom, and righteousness from Christ and experiences the fruit of the Spirit for active service and obedience. This is a lifelong process of sanctification.

⁸¹ White, *Steps to Christ*, 119.

Union with Christ: A Mystical, Spiritual Union

In the 1890s, White emphasized that it is the work of the Holy Spirit that brings about the life of Christ in the soul and thereby brings about a union with God through Christ, which includes all members of the Trinity. In 1894, White referred to union with Christ as a mystical union in a private letter to Clement Eldridge. “Union with Christ is an union with God through Christ. There is a life in the soul of everyone who has formed this mystical, spiritual union with Christ that never fades or fails. We need an abiding Christ, yet many comprehend it not.”⁸³ White explained in 1897 that, “The influence of the Holy Spirit is the life of Christ in the soul. We do not now see Christ and speak to him, but his Holy Spirit is just as near us in one place as another. It works in and through every one who receives Christ.”⁸⁴ White thus expressed the idea that there is a mystical element to the believer’s relationship with Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁵

⁸² White, *Steps to Christ*, 125.

⁸³ Ellen G. White to Clement Eldridge, Letter 22, August 12, 1894. Manuscript Release No. 848—A Knowledge of God Through Christ. Published April 27, 1981.

⁸⁴ Ellen G. White, “Ye are the Light of the World,” *The Home Missionary*, July 1, 1897.

⁸⁵ White had three basic approaches in her use of the term ‘mystic’ or ‘mystical’. She used it to describe the believer’s relationship with God and she used it to describe Christ; something that was just difficult to understand; relating to Babylon, evil, or the devil. I will give examples of each. White used the term mystic to describe the cherubim seated above the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies. “Beyond the second veil the sacred ark, with its mystic cherubim, and above it the holy Shekinah, the visible manifestation of Jehovah’s presence.” Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 359. White used the term mystic referring to Jesus Christ as the Mystic Ladder. Commenting on the words Christ spoken to Nathanael, White quoted John 1:51 which described the opening of heaven and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man. “Here Christ associates Himself, as the Son of man, with the mystic ladder.” She wrote, “Christ is the Ladder; the foot on the earth is His human nature, the top in heaven is His divine nature. His human arm encircles the race while His divine arm lays hold upon the Infinite. All the intercourse between heaven and hearth since the fall is by the Ladder.” White, “MR No. 1411—The Ladder to Heaven,” 338. White used the term mystic to describe the

Union with Christ and the Father

Maintaining a strong Trinitarian approach to union with Christ, White explained the unique role that the Father plays in the divine-human relationship in the 1890s. White pointed out that not only is the Father to receive believers into union with Himself, but everything they receive from Christ has its source in the Father. She emphasized that it is the Father who is the source of all love.⁸⁶ Thus the life of Christ in the soul brought about through the Holy Spirit is also a living connection with the Father.

The Lord has instructed us to call God our Father, to regard him as the fountain of paternal affection, the source of the love that has been flowing from century to century through the channel of the human heart. All the pity, compassion, and love which have been manifested in the earth have emanated from the throne of God, and, compared to the love that dwells in his heart, are as a fountain to an ocean. His love is perpetually flowing forth to make the weak strong, to make the faint-hearted firm, and give moral courage to the wavering. God works through Christ, and man may come unto the Father in the name of the Son. Our science and our song is, "Hear what the Lord hath done for my soul."⁸⁷

characters written by the angel of God that could not be interpreted by those present at Belshazzar's feast. Here mystic referred to something that could not be understood. "A bloodless hand is tracing mystic characters on the wall over against him." And, "these men are no more able to interpret the mystic characters traced by the hand of an angel of God than they were able to interpret the dream of Nebuchadnezzar." Ellen G. White, "The Life of Daniel an Illustration of True Sanctification," *The Review and Herald*, February 8, 1881. She also used the term 'mystic characters' to describe the mysterious symbols inscribed by the Ephesians on their wooden images, and the 'mystic symbols of Diana' in manuals of enchantment, that is, magical books, that contained the secret arts of Satanic sorcery. These mystic characters and symbols were "supposed to possess great power. When pronounced, they were said to accomplish wonders." These were part of the practice of the magic arts and the practice of sorcery. Ellen G. White, "Burning of the Magical Books," *The Signs of the Times*, May 18, 1882. She also related the phrase 'mystic voices' to Satan's power. "The mystic voices that spoke at Ekron and Endor are still by their lying words misleading the children of men. The prince of darkness has but appeared under a new guise. The mysteries of heathen worship are replaced by the secret associations and séances, the obscurities and wonders, of the sorcerers of our time." Ellen G. White, "Shall We Consult Spiritualist Physicians?" *The Review and Herald*, June 27, 1882.

⁸⁶ Ellen G. White, "Divinity in Humanity," *The Signs of the Times*, March 5, 1896.

⁸⁷ White, "Divinity in Humanity."

The benefits of union with Christ, His unfailing love and help have their ultimate source in the Father. It is the paternal love of the Father that unites the believing soul to Christ.⁸⁸ The channel of the human heart is the receptacle and medium for God's love to flow to the entire world, which emanates from the throne of God. For White, these benefits are part of the mystery of God who seeks to unite humanity to Himself.

In "Christ the Medium of Blessing," published in June of 1896, White again emphasized the role of the Father.⁸⁹ Writing in first person, as though Christ were making a personal plea, White invited her readers to view themselves as bound in love and obedience to the Father who has thrown open His heart and all of heaven to those who have faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice and return their loyalty to Him.

Your faith in me will lead you to exercise close, filial affection toward me and the Father. I am the golden chain by which your heart and soul are bound in love and obedience to my Father. Express to my Father the fact that my name is dear to you, that you respect and love me, and you may ask what you will. He will pardon your transgressions, and adopt you into his royal family,—make you a child of God, a joint heir with his only begotten Son. Through faith in my name he will impart to you the sanctification and holiness which will fit you for his work in a world of sin, and qualify you for an immortal inheritance in his kingdom.⁹⁰

Believers are bound to the Father through Christ, the golden chain. God the Father receives the prayers of believers through Christ while Christ imparts the Father's blessings to humanity. White affirmed that the goal of sanctification is for the people of God to become one with each other based on their union with Christ to answer Christ's

⁸⁸ Emphasizing the love of God for humans White stated, "He who unites with Christ has his life hid with Christ in God. Christ and the believing soul are joined by the bands of love, and the Lord calls this union "continuing in his love." White, "Divinity in Humanity".

⁸⁹ Ellen G. White, "Christ the Medium of Blessing," *The Signs of the Times*, June 18, 1896.

prayer in John 17 that they may be made one with the Father and the Son.

The Desire of Ages (1898)

White began *The Desire of Ages*, her major work of 835 pages on the life of Christ, with chapter 1, appropriately called “God With Us.” This chapter introduces Jesus Christ—His relationship to the Father, His mission to save lost humanity revealed in the incarnation, His divine-human nature, life and death. The purpose of all this was to bind the inhabitants of earth into an “indissoluble union” with the inhabitants of heaven.⁹¹ The final paragraph of chapter 87, “To My Father, and Your Father,” states, “The family of heaven and the family of earth are one.”⁹² This book is White’s magnum opus on the life of Christ, which in addition to tracing the life of Christ invites the reader to union with Christ. White shared in chapter 1 that Christ’s desire is to make humans familiar with His divine character and life, but more than that, He wants to be present with them. In his divine-human nature Christ is our example. For humans, “In Christ we become more closely united to God than if we had never fallen.”⁹³

In *The Desire of Ages*, White discussed ten ideas or illustrations from the life and teachings of Christ that are related to union with Christ. While these may not directly mention the phrase “union with Christ,” they relate to the divine-human relationship and

⁹⁰ White, “Christ the Medium of Blessing.”

⁹¹ See White, *The Desire of Ages*, 19-26.

⁹² Pointing to Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, she declares, based on Hebrews 7:25 that Christ ascended to the Father making intercession for them. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 835.

⁹³ Christ is linked to humanity forever. God took on human nature. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 25.

help to illustrate the purpose of the book, Christ's desire to redeem humanity and reunite them with Him and the inhabitants of heaven. These illustrations include: Jesus' miracle of turning the water into wine at the marriage feast in Cana; the marriage relation between a husband and wife; new wine in new wineskins; Jesus' calling the disciples to follow Him; Jacob's vision of the ladder to heaven; Christ the bread from heaven; eating Christ's flesh and drinking His blood; the vine and the branches; the golden chain; the name of Christ a bond of union; and the covenant Christ made with the Father prior to the fall, to redeem humanity. I will present the main points of each.

1) In the chapter on the wedding feast at Cana, White described Christ's life as guided step by step, by the Father's will.⁹⁴ The turning of the water into wine, she wrote, has a deeper spiritual meaning than merely supplying refreshments for a wedding feast. The water represents baptism, the wine, the shedding of His blood for the sins of the world. "The water to fill the jars was brought by human hands, but the word of Christ alone could impart to it life-giving virtue. So with the rites which point to the Saviour's death. It is only by the power of Christ, working through faith, that they have efficacy to nourish the soul."⁹⁵ In other words, the life-giving virtue from Christ is what imparts Christ's power to the soul, through faith. Here White implicitly rejects a sacramental view of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Just as the word of Christ at the feast made the miracle, so God's grace is abundant "to blot out the iniquities of men, and to renew and sustain the soul."⁹⁶ She recorded that Christ's attendance at the feast was a step toward

⁹⁴ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 147.

⁹⁵ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 149.

⁹⁶ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 149.

his bringing “men together as children of one family.”⁹⁷

2) The marriage union, according to White, in both the Old and New Testaments “is employed to represent the tender and sacred union that exists between Christ and His people.”⁹⁸ The wedding feast pointed the mind of Christ to the time when He would bring home His bride to the Father’s house with rejoicing.⁹⁹ The union between husband and wife is a sacred tie pointing to union with Christ. The marriage supper of the Lamb described in Rev 19:6, 7, and 9 describes the celebration that will take place when the union between Christ and His people is complete. Christ’s method to reach people is through personal contact as He sought to bring them under the influence of His divine presence.¹⁰⁰ “He linked their interest with His, and they united with Him in the work.”¹⁰¹ Jesus came to set people free from the chains of Satan, relieve the sick and instruct the ignorant. In the same manner, “Wherever we go we are to carry Jesus with us, and to reveal to others the preciousness of our Savior.”¹⁰² “Christ is pleased with His followers when they show that, though human, they are partakers of the divine nature. They are not statues, but living men and women.”¹⁰³ The followers of Christ reflect the light that shines upon them to brighten the path of others.¹⁰⁴ Carrying Jesus with them helps extend the family of God.

⁹⁷ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 150.

⁹⁸ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 151.

⁹⁹ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 151.

¹⁰⁰ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 151.

¹⁰¹ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 152.

¹⁰² White, *The Desire of Ages*, 152.

¹⁰³ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 153.

3) Jesus' teaching on new wine in new wineskins reminds that it is impossible to unite the teachings of Christ with the established religion of the Pharisees. "The faith that works by love and purifies the soul," she wrote, "could find no place for union with the religion of the Pharisees, made up of ceremonies and injunctions of men. The effort to unite the teachings of Jesus with the established religion would be vain. The vital truth of God, like fermenting wine, would burst the old, decaying bottles of Pharisaical tradition."¹⁰⁵ Christ could not use the Pharisees because they regarded themselves as too wise to need His instruction. Rather, Christ found in the common people "the new bottles for the new wine."¹⁰⁶ "If through the grace of Christ His people will become new bottles, He will fill them with new wine."¹⁰⁷ The new wine represents the teachings of Christ. By faith, believers who are purified are enabled to be in union with the teachings of Christ.

White further argued that the legal religion of the Pharisees "can never lead souls to Christ; for it is a loveless, Christ-less religion. Fasting or prayer that is actuated by a self-justifying spirit is an abomination in the sight of God. The solemn assembly for worship, the round of religious ceremonies. . . is all a deception. Our own works can never purchase salvation."¹⁰⁸ Christ's followers cannot unite with a false, legal religion. Fasting or prayer or meeting for worship, do not earn salvation. The type of salvation Jesus was pointing to is faith that works by love and purifies the soul. What were needed were faith, love, and the righteousness of Christ. Believers must be emptied of self so that

¹⁰⁴ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 153.

¹⁰⁵ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 279.

¹⁰⁶ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 279.

¹⁰⁷ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 279.

they may become new creatures just as new wine is poured into a new wineskin. Then, “the love of Christ will animate the believer with new life.”¹⁰⁹ This life of Christ within has no union with dead forms of religion and does not require the performance of works in order to buy salvation. The new wine illustrates the new life of Christ in the soul that comes to those who renounce self so that Christ can form them into a new creature.

4) Jesus’ calling of the disciples to be in a relationship with Him was to prepare them to be His representatives.¹¹⁰ These untrained men, with their faults, weaknesses, diverse in habits and disposition, in Christ were to become one in faith, doctrine, and spirit, and to dwell in the family of God.¹¹¹ Christ took upon Himself humanity to become a channel of communication between God and people. The same is true of His followers. They must have a power from outside of themselves to restore them to the likeness of God. “Humanity lays hold upon divine power, Christ dwells in the heart by faith; and through cooperation with the divine, the power of man becomes efficient for good.”¹¹² Christ’s union of His divinity with humanity in order to save humans repeats White’s understanding of union with Christ as occurring in the heart by faith through the working of divine power. Christ is still calling people today to unite them to Himself. “He is just as willing to manifest His power through us as through the first disciples. However imperfect and sinful we may be, the Lord holds out to us the offer of partnership with Himself, of apprenticeship to Christ. He invites us to come under the

¹⁰⁸ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 280.

¹⁰⁹ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 280.

¹¹⁰ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 291.

¹¹¹ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 296.

divine instruction, that, uniting with Christ, we may work the works of God.”¹¹³

According to White, God calls sinners into a partnership. He unites humans with Himself so that they might be a connecting link enabling others to fasten their faith upon Christ. His calling of the first disciples and their transformations indicate what Christ wants to do in the lives of His followers today.

5) White used Jacob’s ladder to explain the nature of union with Christ. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ wanted to give His hearers a right conception of His character and kingdom and the conditions of entrance. He told them to be perfect even as their heavenly Father is perfect.¹¹⁴ But, White noted, the only fitness for heaven is the righteousness of Christ.¹¹⁵ She explained how this is possible.

His character is to be ours. The Lord says of those who believe in Him, “I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” 2 Cor 6:16. Christ is the ladder that Jacob saw, the base resting on the earth and the topmost round reaching to the gate of heaven, to the very threshold of glory. If that ladder had failed by a single step of reaching the earth, we should have been lost. But Christ reaches us where we are. He took our nature and overcame, that we through taking His nature might overcome. Made “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom 8:3), He lived a sinless life. Now by His divinity He lays hold upon the throne of heaven, while by His humanity He reaches us. He bids us by faith in Him attain to the glory of the character of God. Therefore are we to be perfect, even as our “Father which is in heaven is perfect.”¹¹⁶

Christ came to earth taking human nature, represented by the ladder that touched the earth. He overcame in order that humans might also become partakers of the divine nature and overcome. Humans are reached by Christ’s divinity and His humanity. By

¹¹² White, *The Desire of Ages*, 297.

¹¹³ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 297.

¹¹⁴ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 299.

¹¹⁵ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 300.

exercising faith in Christ they may possess the character of God. “Sinful men can become righteous only as they have faith in God and maintain a vital connection with Him.”¹¹⁷

Practical duties follow this relationship, the upholding of the law, the Ten Commandments, submitting the will to God as well as almsgiving, prayer, and fasting.¹¹⁸ Jacob’s ladder brings to mind what Christ has accomplished for the human race through His nature. Believers may grasp what they might accomplish through the Holy Spirit, who is imparted to every repentant soul to keep them from sinning.¹¹⁹

6) In chapter 41, White recounted the story of the multitude that followed Jesus and witnessed the miracle of the loaves He provided for their physical needs. Jesus pointed them to the life-giving Spirit who is the true manna flowing from God. Through the life-giving power of Jesus, His followers are to be in union with Christ and the Father.

Christ became one flesh with us, in order that we might become one spirit with Him. It is by virtue of this union that we are to come forth from the grave,—not merely as a manifestation of the power of Christ, but because, through faith, His life has become ours. Those who see Christ in His true character, and receive Him into the heart, have everlasting life. It is through the Spirit that Christ dwells in us; and the Spirit of God, received into the heart by faith, is the beginning of the life eternal.¹²⁰

White explained the basis of eternal life, through faith and the receiving of the indwelling Spirit. Thus Christ is not only with us. Through the indwelling Spirit He is also in us. Christ is received into the heart. His life must become ours. He is the bread that will

¹¹⁶ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 311, 312.

¹¹⁷ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 310.

¹¹⁸ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 310-312.

¹¹⁹ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 311.

¹²⁰ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 388.

“nourish the soul unto everlasting life.”¹²¹ This is the beginning of eternal life.

White develops further significant ideas from the illustration of Christ as the bread from heaven. In dying Christ gave His flesh for the life of the world. For sinners to receive Christ they must eat His flesh and drink His blood.¹²²

To eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ is to receive Him as a personal Saviour, believing that He forgives our sins, and that we are complete in Him. It is by beholding His love, by dwelling upon it, by drinking it in, that we are to become partakers of His nature. What food is to the body, Christ must be to the soul. Food cannot benefit us unless we eat it, unless it becomes a part of our being. So Christ is of no value to us if we do not know Him as a personal Saviour. A theoretical knowledge will do us no good. We must feed upon Him, receive Him into the heart, so that His life becomes our life. His love, His grace, must be assimilated.¹²³

This symbol of eating the flesh of the Son of God, with the bread representing His body was also presented in the paschal service of the Old Testament. Jesus’ teaching that He is the bread from heaven that His followers must eat points to the internalization of Christ, of His Spirit, that includes partaking of His nature. White did not mean that in eating the bread we receive Christ literally, but spiritually. It is living by faith, even as Christ lived by faith in the Father. Challenging her readers White exclaimed, “Are you a follower of Christ? Then all that is written concerning spiritual life is for you, and may be attained through uniting yourself to Jesus.”¹²⁴ Eating the flesh and drinking the blood is another metaphor for union with Christ, taking Him into the heart.

The communion service that was instituted by Christ in the washing of His

¹²¹ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 388.

¹²² Jesus described this in John 6:22-71 according to White. See White, *The Desire of Ages*, 389.

¹²³ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 389.

¹²⁴ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 389, 390.

disciple's feet and sharing the bread and the grape juice, was presented by White as an ordinance that was designed to make His disciples humble and teachable, leading to a "union of heart."¹²⁵ By so doing, Christ made them "clean," that is, He cleansed their hearts through the washing of their feet. In the same manner, believers need to come with their sinful, polluted hearts to Christ for Him to wash them clean. This is Christ's appointed preparation for the sacramental service, according to White.¹²⁶ When this takes place and believers humble themselves and confess their sins prior to taking the Lord's Supper, "The subduing grace of Christ comes into the soul, and the love of Christ draws hearts together in a blessed unity."¹²⁷ White explained that when the lesson of humiliation is learned through foot washing, there is a desire for a higher spiritual life to which God responds and the soul is uplifted. "The sunshine of Christ's righteousness will fill the chambers of the mind and the soul temple."¹²⁸ All who follow Christ's example of unselfish ministry will partake of His divine attributes and share His joy.¹²⁹

7) The vine and the branches are, for White, a symbol teaching the nature of spiritual growth and union with Christ.¹³⁰ This symbol teaches spiritual truth about the

¹²⁵ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 646.

¹²⁶ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 650. Though White uses the term 'sacramental service' here she does not regard the Lord's Supper as sacramental in the sense that it confers Christ to the heart.

¹²⁷ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 651.

¹²⁸ White was referring here to the mind and moral character of Christ, as it would be inconsistent to argue that humans take on the personhood of Christ or His attributes such as omniscience and omnipotence, which belong to God alone. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 651.

¹²⁹ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 651.

¹³⁰ See chapter 73, "Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled," in White, *The Desire of Ages*, 674-678.

working of the Holy Spirit.¹³¹ White defined the Holy Spirit, as “Christ’s representative, but divested of the personality of humanity, and independent thereof.”¹³² Through the Holy Spirit, she explained that Christ is accessible to all.

“I am the Vine, ye are the branches,” Christ said to His disciples. Though He was about to be removed from them, their spiritual union with Him was to be unchanged. The connection of the branch with the vine, He said, represents the relation you are to sustain to Me. The scion is grafted into the living vine, and fiber by fiber, vein by vein, it grows into the vine stock. The life of the vine becomes the life of the branch. So the soul dead in trespasses and sins receives life through connection with Christ. By faith in Him as a personal Savior the union is formed. The sinner unites his weakness to Christ’s strength, his emptiness to Christ’s fullness, his frailty to Christ’s enduring might. Then he has the mind of Christ. The humanity of Christ has touched our humanity, and our humanity has touched divinity. Thus through the agency of the Holy Spirit man becomes a partaker of the divine nature. He is accepted in the Beloved.¹³³

This union with Christ, once formed, must be maintained by abiding in Christ. Continual communion with Him preserves the life received from Christ. Believers must constantly receive His Spirit and surrender their lives to His purpose. White explained that Christ communicates “the current of spiritual strength to every believer.”¹³⁴ When the soul is thus united to Christ it will never wither, but will result in the fruits of the Spirit, in the life of the one who lives by faith. Those with a pretended union with Christ, through church membership only, are represented as dead branches.

Abiding in Christ includes the abiding of His Word in us, which White believed

¹³¹ The Spirit does a number of things, making effectual the work of Christ to save humankind; makes the heart pure; makes a sinner a partaker of the divine nature; is a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil; to impress Christ’s character upon the church. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 671.

¹³² White, *The Desire of Ages*, 669.

¹³³ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 675.

¹³⁴ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 676.

was represented by eating His flesh and drinking His blood.¹³⁵ The result will be true love for one another and service. This love binds believers together as one. “Where this oneness exists, it is evidence that the image of God is being restored in humanity, that a new principle of life has been implanted.”¹³⁶ This principle of life is the Spirit of God, who like the vine and the branches is constantly pouring spiritual life and strength into believers. According to White, the oneness among God’s people “shows that there is power in the divine nature to withstand the supernatural agencies of evil, and that the grace of God subdues the selfishness inherent in the natural heart.”¹³⁷ In other words, God’s grace subdues selfishness in the natural heart, but does not permanently remove it.

8) White used another metaphor, that of the golden chain, to describe the love that exists between those who follow Christ. The love which God the Father and the Son has for sinners is likened to a golden chain that is let down from heaven. “With the golden chain of His matchless love Christ has bound them to the throne of God. It is His purpose that the highest influence in the universe, emanating from the source of all power, shall be theirs. They are to have power to resist evil...”¹³⁸ Union with Christ is thus symbolized by this golden chain attached to God’s throne. It represents love but also the

¹³⁵ The metaphor of eating the flesh and drinking the blood applies to communion and it also applies to reading Scripture. “It is through the word that Christ abides in His followers. This is the same vital union that is represented by eating His flesh and drinking His blood. The words of Christ are spirit and life. Receiving them, you receive the life of the Vine. You live ‘by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.’ Matt. 4:4. The life of Christ in you produces the same fruits as in Him. Living in Christ, adhering to Christ, supported by Christ, drawing nourishment from Christ, you bear fruit after the similitude of Christ.” White, *The Desire of Ages*, 677.

¹³⁶ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 678.

¹³⁷ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 678.

¹³⁸ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 679.

power to resist evil and to overcome it. White described the church as the beneficiary of heavenly blessings and the depository of His love to the world. “The church, endowed with the righteousness of Christ, is His depository, in which the riches of His mercy, His grace, and His love, are to appear in full and final display... Christ, the great Center, from whom radiates all glory.”¹³⁹ Believers are bound to God’s throne and have access to the highest influence in the universe. They are able to do more than what they can ask or think, because of what Christ has done for them.

9) In chapter 86, “Go Teach All Nations,” union with Christ is connected to the name of Christ. In speaking of Christ’s servants who are to teach and carry forth the great commission: “Christ’s name is their watchword, their badge of distinction, their bond of union, the authority for their course of action, and the source of their success.”¹⁴⁰ Only by faith can His followers be instruments for His work.¹⁴¹ “If we neglect to link ourselves in divine connection with Christ, the current of life-giving energy cannot flow in rich streams from us to the people.”¹⁴² But those who preach the word of God, put away dissensions, and surrender to Him will receive the latter rain, the outpouring of the Spirit, if they ask for it in faith.

All who consecrate soul, body and spirit to God will be constantly receiving a new endowment of physical and mental power. The inexhaustible supplies of heaven are at their command. Christ gives them the breath of His own spirit, the life of His own life. The Holy Spirit puts forth its highest energies to work in heart and mind. The grace of God enlarges and multiplies their faculties, and every perfection of the divine nature comes to their assistance in the work of saving souls. Through co-operation

¹³⁹ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 680.

¹⁴⁰ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 826.

¹⁴¹ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 825.

¹⁴² White, *The Desire of Ages*, 825.

with Christ they are complete in Him, and in their human weakness they are enabled to do the deeds of Omnipotence. The Saviour longs to manifest His grace and stamp His character on the whole world. It is His purchased possession, and He desires to make men free, and pure, and holy.¹⁴³

This statement, I believe, is where White explains union with Christ the most clearly, forcefully and fully in *The Desire of Ages*, and perhaps in her entire writings. It includes soul, body and spirit where the physical and mental powers receive new power from God. The consecrated receive the breath of God, the life of God. Their faculties are enlarged and multiplied. The perfection of the divine nature comes to their aid to assist in the saving of humankind. They are complete in Christ. They are enabled to do the works of God. They receive His grace and manifest His character.

10) A final metaphor that White related to union with Christ in *The Desire of Ages* is that of the covenant Christ made to redeem humans. It is a brief reference, worth mentioning as it sheds light on White's understanding of redemption as based on a covenant Christ made with the Father before the earth was formed.

Before the foundations of the earth were laid, the Father and the Son had united in a covenant to redeem man if he should be overcome by Satan. They had clasped Their hands in solemn pledge that Christ should become the surety for the human race. This pledge Christ has fulfilled. When upon the cross He cried out, "It is finished," He addressed the Father. The compact had been fully carried out. Now He declares: Father, it is finished. I have done Thy will, O My God. I have completed the work of redemption. If Thy justice is satisfied, "I will that they also, whom Thou hast give Me, be with Me where I am." John 19:30; 17:24.¹⁴⁴

How does this relate to union with Christ? The last sentence of this quote refers to Christ's prayer in John 17 that believers may be one with God. Becoming one with God is linked to the covenant pledge Christ made with the Father to save humanity. This

¹⁴³ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 827.

pledge, White states, is fulfilled.¹⁴⁵ She ends the book describing the praise that ascends to God because His justice is satisfied and Satan is vanquished. “From that scene of heavenly joy, there comes back to us on earth the echo of Christ’s own wonderful words, ‘I ascend unto My Father, and your Father, and to My God, and your God.’ John 20:17. The family of heaven and the family of earth are one.”¹⁴⁶ The covenant pledge is the beginning of Christ’s work for the redemption of humanity, that the family of heaven and the family of earth might become one.

Conclusion

White’s approach to union with Christ is fully Trinitarian by 1890. Spending the majority of this decade in Australia, she produced two significant books, *Steps to Christ* and *The Desire of Ages* that explain the nature of union with Christ in the context of the love of God. During this time period, White also released over one hundred articles that mention union with Christ demonstrating that she really wanted her readers to understand this relationship. She also expressed union with Christ in terms of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. Satan tries to break the union of the believer with Christ, but White maintained that it is an indissoluble union. A significant feature of these two books is that instead of just repeating the idea that union with Christ is a union of the soul with Christ, or vital or spiritual union, as she did in her articles from the period of the late 1870s through to the 1890s, White really tries to explain what is union with Christ. She

¹⁴⁴ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 834.

¹⁴⁵ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 834.

¹⁴⁶ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 835.

brings the plan of redemption into focus based on what God does, and what humans must do; discussing the nature of union with Christ with far greater depth, clarity and force than in her previous writings.

CHAPTER 6

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

This dissertation investigated a selection of White's writings beginning in 1860 and ended with her book on the life of Christ, *The Desire of Ages*, in 1898. This dissertation seeks to answer the question: What was White's concept of union with Christ? I proposed to evaluate White's approach according to the five historical approaches to union with Christ identified by Bruce Demarest in *The Cross and Salvation*. This will be accomplished by asking whether White's approach can be described as an ontological union, a sacramental union, a covenantal union, a moral or filial union or an experiential union. However, the question may also be asked, what is the value of setting White's ideas against a background of approaches that are presented as monolithic types in the history of Christianity? After all, White was not a trained theologian. What is the point of saying White's approach was ontological, moral, filial or naturalistic, covenantal, sacramental or experiential?

Categories or models are limited in the sense that one cannot simply force someone's ideas to fit into a predesigned conceptual box. They are helpful to a certain point and yet are unhelpful when they prohibit further understanding of a particular person's views. Yet there is heuristic value in offering comparisons between different types of approaches. Such comparisons make possible the discussion of basic similarities

and differences between them. If the categories are viewed as broad descriptors, rather than theoretical straightjackets, they may provide insight even as their limitations are recognized. I begin this chapter by summarizing the development of White's concept of union with Christ, bringing together insights from the last three chapters. Then White's approach will then be evaluated using Demarest's categories of approaches to union with Christ. Lastly, I will present in positive terms, White's approach to union with Christ.

Summary of the Development of White's Concept of Union with Christ

After reviewing White's writings on the subject of union with Christ over the period of four decades, some broad comments need to be restated. First, as recognized in chapter 1, White was not a trained theologian. She wrote in the context of giving personal and corporate testimonies to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which included warning, counsel, instruction, and when necessary, rebuke. In the 1860s and 1870s White's statements on union with Christ are brief, sporadic and provide an early glimpse into her explanation as to the nature of union with Christ, how it is formed, maintained, and its consequences. Throughout this time she presented the view that faith, perseverance and obedience were necessary on the part of the sinner to form a union with Christ. She also presented the idea that the three Persons of the Godhead were, in union with one another and that, specifically, the vitalizing power of the Spirit, the life-giving principle received from Christ, was the beginning of spiritual life in the believer. Her early writings on this subject contained seeds of ideas that would be expanded upon in her later writings.

Union with Christ from the beginning was connected to the idea that Christ is our example, a theme that would not receive its fullest expression until the publication of *The*

Desire of Ages. Another common theme in the 1860s in White's writings is her comments about spiritual weakness in the church due to Seventh-day Adventists not being in union with Christ. Believers were often presented as asleep and lacking in spiritual power. She wrote about the need for them to read her testimonies. Her admonition that heart work was needed, included exercising faith in Christ and becoming imitators of Christ. An emphasis on human responsibility manifested in repeated calls to unity and union with Christ was also increasingly counter-balanced with her teaching regarding the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit to effect this union. By 1870, White identified the Holy Spirit as forming the bond of union between believers.

White's emphasis throughout the 1860s and 1870s shifted between the role of believers in union with Christ and the role of God in this union. The basic ideas presented included repentance, faith, trust, perseverance, with the Holy Spirit as the binding agent between the soul and God. Obedience to the will of God and His commandments and a deep desire to serve Him were evidences of spiritual life for White. In 1877, White expanded the language she used to write about union with Christ. The energizing power of the Spirit was presented as a vitalizing power, which comes to abide in humans. This is what she referred to as the life-giving principle that comes from Christ. White also introduced the idea that union with Christ is a spiritual union that involves the heart, or soul. She used the metaphor of the vine and the branches to explain union with Christ. As members of Christ are grafted into the vine stock, which is Christ, they are joined fiber by fiber, vein by vein and receive from Christ spiritual strength. The ladder to heaven was also expounded upon in the 1860s and 1870s as a metaphor for sanctification.

In the 1880s White began to articulate the nature of union with Christ, how is it

formed and maintained, and gave evidences of this union to her readers. She wrote on the metaphor of believers as channels of light whose souls are illuminated by the Source of light, Christ. She introduced the metaphor of the golden chain let down from heaven to connect believers with the love of God, an idea that would come to be associated with the Father, with Christ as the golden chain. In the 1880s, White also came to describe union with Christ as a heart union, and a soul-to-soul union of finite man with Infinite God.

White's most important pieces of writing on union with Christ during the 1880s are the two letters to Battle Creek in 1882. The first, "Important Testimony," was addressed to Uriah Smith regarding the mistreatment of a teacher. White spelled out her disappointment at the spiritual state of affairs at the school in Battle Creek, which she attributed to them not reading nor heeding the testimonies. As a result, they were not living in union with Christ. Genuine repentance, faith and the putting away of sin were presented as the basis for forming a union with Christ. In this letter, White made an explicit connection between faith and union with Christ. While exercising faith, the believer must also do a painstaking work to form and maintain a union with Christ.

In "An Appeal," White outlined steps for Seventh-day Adventists to take to form a union with Christ. She wrote that repentance and faith result in being cleansed from sin. This is based on Christ's atoning sacrifice and the sinner becoming a partaker of the divine nature. Sinners receive the righteousness of Christ. The permanence of faith that the believer exercises in Christ becomes the condition of union with Christ. Keeping the Ten Commandments is a consequence of this union, based on faith. For White, union with Jesus is what Seventh-day Adventists desperately needed. Those living in Battle Creek, White contended, had only a pretended union and not a real union with Christ.

While “Important Testimony” and “An Appeal” contain White’s clearest and fullest expressions of union with Christ up to that time, they represent her writing on union with Christ, which emphasized the human aspect of the relationship. In the early 1880s, White also wrote about union with Christ concerning the divine side of the relationship, explaining what Christ does to effect, this union. Using the metaphor of the mystic ladder, which White identified as Christ, she used Jacob’s dream at Bethel to explain the gospel, the significance of the incarnation, becoming partakers of the divine nature, and the progressive nature of sanctification. Christ was presented as the connecting link between heaven and earth. The top of the ladder represented Christ’s divine nature while the bottom, His human nature. Believers are connected to Christ, to His divine nature, which allows them to progress to heaven. Believers climb the ladder by faith and perseverance, growing continually in spiritual maturity and Christian virtue as they ascend the ladder. Each rung represents the attainment of different Christian graces.

By 1890, White’s theology of union with Christ was thoroughly Trinitarian, receiving its fullest expression in her statement that union with Christ is also union with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. During the 1890s White brought together many of the ideas she previously wrote about in letters and articles into two highly significant works, *Steps to Christ* and *The Desire of Ages*. These two books represent the culmination of her thought on union with Christ. The theme of the love of God explained the total engagement of all of heaven in the reuniting of humanity with God. While *Steps to Christ* outlined the process of conversion in broad, practical terms as steps a believer must take to form a union with Christ, *The Desire of Ages* contained many ideas related to union with Christ taken from the life of Christ. The point of this book is that the reader

may contemplate Christ and in so doing, may strengthen their union with Him.

Ellen White appears to have grown in her understanding and expression of union with Christ over the period of the 1860s to the 1890s. While she viewed faith, surrendering the will, obedience and perseverance as essential to a relationship with God, she greatly expanded her presentation of the divine role in forming and maintaining a union with Him. Illustrating the nature of this relationship through metaphors and examples, she described the role of the Father in pouring His love upon the world through Christ in the golden chain. Through the metaphor of the vine and the branches she illustrated how believers are connected to Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit, who joins the believer to Christ spiritually and energizes the sinner through the life of Christ in the soul. She employed the mystic ladder to explain twin truths: the significance of Christ's incarnation to reconnect heaven and earth and the role of believers to climb the ladder by faith and perseverance. In the next section, Demarest's five approaches to union with Christ will be used to evaluate White's concept of union with Christ.

Did White View Union with Christ as an Ontological Union?

While Demarest held a positive view of authentic Christian mysticism rooted in a relationship with God as outlined in chapter 2, he described the approach of ontological union with Christ as primarily held by Neoplatonists and mystics as unbiblical. Ontological union, described by Demarest as a union of essences, occurs when the believer is absorbed into the divine, and loses their personality. He also referred to ontological union as "metaphysical mysticism," contrasting it with "biblical mysticism," where the individual maintains their personal identity in their relationship with Christ.

Ontological union or metaphysical mysticism, according to Demarest, is said to involve a union of the essence of God with the essence of the believer, the suspension of all human faculties of the participant, reaching a state of ecstasy and rapture and by so doing entering into a new order of life in “deification.” To reiterate an important point made in chapter 2, one of the great dangers of this approach to union with Christ for Demarest, is that ontological union loses the distinction between the believer and God and thereby threatens to collapse the Christian worldview into pantheism.

Following the framework of approaches in the history of Christianity identified by Demarest and that I am using to evaluate White’s approach to union with Christ, I will begin this section by using the category of ‘ontological union’, as Demarest has articulated this approach. This will then be followed by a reflection on some pertinent issues that this categorization raises. According to Demarest’s view of ontological union, the question that needs to be addressed here first is whether White viewed union with Christ as a union of essences. In other words, does the essence of the believer and of God become dissolved into one another in union with Christ? Further, did she regard the achievement of union with Christ to involve the suspension of all human faculties? Does the believer reach a state of ecstasy or rapture in union with Christ? Or result in the deification of the follower of Christ? This summarizes Demarest’s basic description of the category of ontological union.

The answer to the first question is that White would reject the idea that the essence of God and the believer become dissolved or absorbed into one another in union with Christ. Although White did not directly use the term ‘ontology,’ which refers to the reality and Being of God, she had a very clear conception of the person of Christ in

heaven. She viewed Christ as performing His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. She also viewed the Father as in heaven, while the Holy Spirit was sent to the earth at Pentecost to be with and in believers as the personal presence of Christ through the Spirit. This topic must be handled extremely carefully as White wrote about Christ being in the believer by faith. This requires looking more broadly at some ideas that White rejected to help clarify this issue. These issues are discussed in the Excursus. White's position can be ascertained, in part, based on her response to religious fanatics she met during her early as well as later years of ministry who claimed that Christ was in them so that they could not sin and had reached a state of sinless perfection. This issue, as well as her response to the Holy Flesh Movement, reveals that she did not believe that the union of Christ with His followers resulted in their physically or essentially merging into one so that the believer becomes God or Christ, or is essentially united to Christ so that they cannot sin.

White held that believers could experience God in the world and know the witness of the Spirit within. She also called on believers to agree in thought and to act in unity, to become one in Christ, but it would be a far-stretched and untrue argument to suggest that she thought such a union resulted in the dissolution of the essence of the self with the essence of God. A further argument to support this assertion can be found in White's rejection of the mysticism that she found in John Harvey Kellogg's book, *The Living Temple*. That is, the ideas expressed by Kellogg that God is in humans and all living things in the world prompting basic physical needs such as hunger and thirst, she rejected as pantheistic. She explicitly warned Seventh-day Adventists against speculating as to the presence and personality of God. In other words, how God is present to us and in the world is a mystery. She affirmed that Christ is in the heavenly sanctuary and on earth

His spiritual presence is available to believers through the Holy Spirit. Her response to the Kellogg crisis discussed in the Excursus makes it clear that White rejected a pantheistic view of the universe.

To answer the question of whether White viewed union with Christ as involving the suspension of all human faculties, the answer, is no. White never taught her readers that union with Christ would result in them not thinking, engaging or acting in relationship with God. Believers are not absorbed into God but continue to have a human nature, will, desires and personality. For White, to be in union with Christ is to be both willing to contemplate the life of Christ through Bible reading and to commune with Him in daily, hourly prayer and be fully engaged in life through the Spirit. There is never a point where the living believer stops being in their union with Christ. Believers are always in the presense of God and His holy angels, though they may not be conscious of this reality. God does not suspend human thinking or response when sinners enter into a union with Him. There is never a state that believers reach when in union with Christ when their body or mind, are suspended.

White expressed the idea that believers should not expect their union with Christ to result in a state of ecstasy or rapture. White was clear in *Steps to Christ* that there may be no ecstasy of feeling but there should be a peaceful, abiding trust in Christ. She encouraged her readers to daily read the Bible and place their faith in Christ and His word. Union with Christ for White, is not a flight of feeling, neither is it an exclusive spiritual experience of the few. Union with Christ is part of the daily rhythem of the Christian life and is open to all who will repent and exercise faith in Christ in response to

God's gracious invitation. It is not an elusive, one off experience but a continual relationship in which the believer is united to Christ.

Another evidence that White's approach cannot be called an ontological union in Demarest's sense of the term is that she never promoted union with Christ as an esoteric or otherworldly experience to her readers. Though she herself experienced visions and dreams from God, she never advocated her experience as what her readers should emulate. Her prophetic gifting was never promoted as a sign of union with Christ. White never pointed her readers to herself as their example to follow or to emulate in their experience of God or of Christ. Her life was not a model for others to copy. White always pointed believers to Christ as their example and that union occurs through faith.

White would also reject the idea that union with Christ results in the deification of the believer. The follower of Christ who is in union with Him and partakes of the divine nature does not in any sense become a god, or God. For White, believers are to reflect the divine image and become like God in character, but their flesh, or body, does not become holy because of the spiritual presence of Christ. Becoming like God means life transformation through the surrender of the will. The goal for White is sanctification through union with Christ, meaning character development and holy living. There remains an important distinction between God and His followers, who are transformed to become like Him but do not become divine or gods through their union with Christ. For the above-mentioned reasons, White's concept of union with Christ cannot be described as an ontological union, as Demarest has described this approach.

A criticism of Demarest's use of the term 'ontological' as a category is that from a general perspective it may be too narrowly conceived. If the word ontological is

understood in a general sense, all of the approaches to union with Christ that he described reflect different understandings of the ontology, that is, the reality or Being of God. To label one as ontological seems to overlook this. For example, the sacramental approach would also have an understanding of the reality or being of God, particularly related to the sacraments and how God manifests His presence in them and in believers. The experiential approach would also have an understanding of the ontology of God in how those elected to salvation are regenerated and experience God in their lives. The larger question for all of Demarest's approaches that he identified is how is God present to believers and in the world? While it is not the purpose of this dissertation to discuss how the different approaches understand and relate the reality of God to union with Christ, it is perhaps a mislabeling, or weakness in Demarest's approach to label this one perspective as ontological union. Perhaps the term, 'essential union' or 'absorption into the divine' may have been a better way to describe this approach.

What I presented in this dissertation using Demarest's categories is that there are multiple approaches to union with Christ. Another criticism of Demarest therefore, is that it may be an overstatement to apply his description of the term ontological primarily to Neoplatonists and mystics. McGinn's and Butler's observations that I mentioned in chapter 1, regarding mysticism as related exclusively to the experiences of the mystics are important critiques of holding too narrow a view of mysticism as pertaining to only ecstatic, rapture, vision-like experiences of God. Mysticism may therefore have multiple meanings in both historical and contemporary writings on union with Christ that offer different views as to how union with Christ is achieved that do not fit the category of Demarest's description of ontological union.

There remains the issue of Kuhalampi's definition of White's approach to union with Christ as an ontological union. A weakness of Kuhalampi's view is that he does not consider the diversity of approaches to union with Christ in the history of Christianity or how such approaches may or may not apply to White, other than simply applying the term ontological to her approach. Based on the issues raised in this section, I think it is not helpful to describe White's approach to union with Christ as an ontological union, even if all that that means, according to Kuhalampi, is that Christ is somehow present in each believer who responds to and experiences His transforming and empowering activity. This term is open to misinterpretation and misunderstanding.

On the one hand, while the idea of ontological union is very broad and could potentially apply to any of the approaches to union with Christ according to how God's presence is conceived relative to the world and to humans; yet, narrowly conceived by Demarest it does not apply to White. Given the review of approaches to union with Christ offered by Demarest, and given the presuppositions and issues that are inherent in the term 'ontological,' White's approach should not be described as an ontological union.

Did White View Union with Christ as a Sacramental Union?

Demarest described Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Anglo-Catholics as holding the view that union with Christ is a sacramental union. This is the idea that union with Christ is dependent upon participation in the sacraments of the church, such as baptism and communion. Based on what has been presented, it is clear that White did not make union with Christ dependent on either baptism or communion. She rejected the idea of the Lord's Supper as a sacrament and the idea that Christ is sacrificed anew in this

practice. In *The Desire of Ages*, White referred to the ordinance of humility, with the Savior washing the disciples' feet as Christ's appointed preparation for the sacramental service. This is a memorial service. If sins are confessed, the soul receives the subduing grace of Christ who draws hearts together in a blessed unity. For White, the ordinance of humility and the Lord's Supper can bring about a union with one another, but she never presented these as the basis upon which union with Christ is formed. In addition, an approach, which bases union with Christ on participation in the sacraments, cannot apply to White as she rejected the idea that union with Christ is dependent on external forms, rituals or practices. Neither does it depend on the work of priesthood to effect union with Christ. The church is not the direct channel for extending union with Christ to the sinner. That is the role of Christ and the Holy Spirit in conjunction with the Father.

White did teach the idea of eating the bread and drinking the blood as a metaphor for receiving Christ as a personal Savior. It referred to receiving the word of God into the soul, which molds the thoughts and develops the character. Christ imparts new life through eating His flesh and drinking His blood. For White, this referred to daily Bible reading and participation in communion. But this is not a sacramental understanding. Union with Christ does not automatically extend to all members of the Christian church. Nor does Bible reading and taking communion automatically result in union with Christ. White did not believe that church membership or its practices necessarily leads to union with Christ and salvation. The church is God's appointed instrument for the salvation of souls therefore union with Christ and fellow believers should exist in the church. But the church does not mediate union with Christ. According to White, activities such as daily Bible reading, prayer and participation in the ordinance of humility and Lord's Supper, if

done in faith, can strengthen union with Christ for believers, individually and corporately.

Did White View Union with Christ as a Covenantal Union?

Demarest described the position of Reformed covenantal theologians on union with Christ as a covenantal union. White would reject the idea that union with Christ is based on a pre-ordained covenant that elects some to salvation and others to condemnation. However, she would not necessarily reject the idea of covenant as the basis for God planning to save humanity and reunite them with Himself. The reuniting of humankind with God could only take place as a result of the covenant that Christ pledged with the Father before the foundation of the world. White gave no indication, however, that covenantal union based on God's eternal decree is the thrust of her overall approach to union with Christ, in the sense employed by the proponents of this view in Demarest's writings. She never described union with Christ as a covenantal union or that union with Christ took place in eternity past as though souls were objectively bound to Christ with their eternal destinies decided and their union with Him formed. For White, union with Christ involves the free choice of humans to repent and accept Christ by faith and to reunite with God. She would reject the idea that union with Christ is based on the foreordained election of some to salvation and others to condemnation, because this opposes her understanding of the free agency of humans through God's grace.

Did White View Union with Christ as a Moral or Filial Union?

Demarest presented the idea that the approach to union with Christ as held by Socinians, Rationalists and Liberals is a moral or filial union. Proponents of this view

spurned supernatural explanations of union with Christ and favored naturalistic ones. Because the views associated with this approach in Demarest's work differ, I will respond to the three writers mentioned in chapter 2: Lyman Abbott, Adolf von Harnack and Shailer Matthews. Abbott called himself a Christian evolutionist and believed that humans must be restored to God through the forces of moral and spiritual evolution. He believed that God fills human consciousness with Himself so that in the future, humans will be faultless, having the divine fullness within them. Matthews, in a similar vein to Abbott's evolutionary idea, taught that God is active through nature and social evolution, although he viewed union with Christ as voluntary. His idea was that God is leading humanity to live in accordance with His will and the mind and values of Jesus.

Demarest viewed the moral or filial approach as embracing the idea of God's natural presence in all humans who are evolving. White differed from this view significantly. She taught that fallen human nature does not naturally possess the Spirit of Christ and that humans are not naturally under the Spirit's control. It requires supernatural power, God's grace, and the Holy Spirit wooing the sinner to Christ, repentance for sins, and the exercise of living faith that results in forming a union with Christ. Neither did White advocate that humans become faultless as a result of union with Christ because of the divine presence within. She would reject the evolutionary idea that humans are evolving so that naturally, they become filled with the fullness of God and His consciousness as part of the moral and spiritual evolution of humankind.

Harnack's view that union with Christ is an ethical relation that was incorrectly elevated to a mysterious and supernatural union following the death of Jesus and His first disciples, does not accord with White's approach either. Harnack believed that Jesus was

a good example, but there is nothing supernatural about the relationship people had with Him. It was a friendship union between Christ and His first disciples based on their devotion to Him. White did write about praying to Christ as to a friend in *Steps to Christ*, but as I have presented in this dissertation, White held strongly to the idea that the relation between Christ and His followers is a vital, spiritual union. White described the followers of Christ as having a filial affection for Him, but this relationship is not merely a friendship union. Jesus is the example of ethical behavior, but He is not just an example to His followers devoid of supernatural power, as Harnack taught. Christ also draws humans into a living, spiritual relation with Himself through the Holy Spirit.

White's approach to union with Christ is therefore not a moral or filial union according to the proponents of this approach, as described by Demarest. For White, union with Christ is a spiritual, supernatural union that has moral implications. It is not a natural union with all human spirits, nor is it the result of the processes of evolution. The relation is moral in the sense that it leads to obedience to the will of God in the life of the believer. Through the moral and spiritual power imparted by the Holy Spirit, the believer is enabled to obey God and His commandments.

Did White View Union with Christ as an Experiential Union?

The approach to union with Christ Demarest labeled as experiential union, he attributed to many evangelicals, including Augustus Strong. Of all of the approaches mentioned, this may appear to fit White's concept in a limited sense. White employed some of the ideas also used by her contemporary Augustus Strong. Both taught common points such as: union with Christ is a union with the life of God; the Holy Spirit is the

energizing power of God in the soul; union with Christ is a vital union, which joins believers spiritually to one another in Christ; a spiritual union; and an indissoluble union. White also described union with Christ as a mystical union, though she was not advocating the tradition of mysticism to her readers. There are similarities between her views and those of Strong. Yet, I think she would disagree with Strong (who was a Calvinist for most of his life, then attempted to reconcile his theology with science and evolutionism in the twentieth century) regarding the meaning of “indissoluble.” For White “indissoluble” did not mean that union with Christ could never be dissolved. Rather, by “indissoluble” she meant that Satan could not dissolve this union. Once formed, union with Christ can be dissolved only by a person’s individual choice. It is God’s purpose that union with His followers will never be dissolved even as He allows them the choice to do so. When Christ’s strength is united to human weakness the spiritual union between Christ and His followers is indissoluble, in this sense.

The best argument that can be made for describing White’s approach as an ‘experiential’ union in a limited sense, is her own repeated call for Seventh-day Adventists to experience Christ and to “experimental religion.” This is the idea that sinners are not saved by intellectual knowledge alone, but by knowledge that is based upon personal experience. White whole-heartedly supported gaining knowledge of God through reading Scripture, but she also supported the idea that believers are to experience Christ and be in a personal relationship with Him. Can her approach be labeled experiential? In a limited sense, yes, but labeling anyone’s approach that is as complex, rich and deep as White’s by one single word is to engage in gross reductionism. One word, even “experiential,” cannot define in full her thinking on this topic. This is one of

the inherent weaknesses of a models approach.

Furthermore, the term experiential places an emphasis on the subjective aspect of union with Christ. White had a strong, yet balanced view that embraced both the divine and human sides of this relationship. The term experiential does not express the objective aspect of salvation, what God has done to effect union with Christ in the redemption of humans, but rather is a subjective emphasis that union with Christ is simply about what believers' experience. For White, experience alone cannot describe her broad theological thinking about this relationship. Union with Christ is not a feeling. It is a daily, hourly relationship that is marked by increasing knowledge, spiritual maturity and communion with Christ amidst the struggles of life. Believers are not to constantly search for mountain top experiences with God, but through faith they can trust that God has and is working for their salvation no matter what difficulties they may experience. They may not be consciously aware of this union, but through faith they may receive spiritual life and blessings from God as they surrender their will to His.

Demarest, who argues that the experiential approach is the closest to Scripture, taught that union with Christ frees the believer from keeping the commandments of God. White would disagree with this. She presented the idea that keeping the commandments is a consequence of being in union with Christ. In fact, union with Christ enables the sinner to keep the Ten Commandments, which are a transcript of God's character. For White, Christ's keeping of His Father's commandments, is to be an example for believers to do the same through His divine power.

Another reason why experiential union does not fit White's approach is that Demarest did not view union with Christ as a union that may be formed by a free will

response to God by grace. Both Strong and Demarest are from the Reformed tradition and therefore, union with Christ is based on predestination, God's foreordained election. Demarest identified John Calvin as a proponent of the view of experiential union. White's approach to union with Christ is not Calvinistic or Reformed in orientation, it is Wesleyan-Arminian in the sense that she fully supported the idea that union with Christ, in fact, salvation is a synergistic relationship between the individual and God.

Demarest's categories need to be questioned, as they do not reflect a view of union with Christ that supports the free agency of humans to respond to Christ based on God's love and grace toward humanity. Does such a view exist? It appears that it does in the writings of Ellen White, that union with Christ is a synergistic relationship with the weaker human relying on Christ who is all-powerful. Categories such as those identified by Demarest do not provide the reader with the type of nuanced insights into a particular Christian thinker or theologian's approach to union with Christ; because each person's approach is not purely conceptual but a living reality of how they experience and practice union with Christ. This is an inherent limitation of prototypes labeled with one or two defining words for heuristic value and comparison. Nonetheless, such types are interesting and helpful for discussing the flow of ideas in general terms in any given area of knowledge. They are helpful in identifying different trends of thought in general in the history of Christianity.

Ellen White's Concept of Union with Christ

White's approach to union with Christ is complex. It doesn't fit neatly into one of the approaches Demarest described in the history of Christianity. To label her position by

one approach would not only be a gross reductionism, it would be untrue. An approach that is one-sided, placing emphasis on salvation as subjective and experiential, for example, does not reflect the whole range of White's writings on this subject. White had a broad understanding of salvation as firmly rooted in both divine activity and human response. Over the course of forty years she expressed a balance in her writings regarding the synergistic nature of salvation. Her descriptions were detailed and represent an attempt to balance the divine and the human aspects of the relationship. Perhaps the best way to describe her approach is that union with Christ is, a vital spiritual union that is Trinitarian in character, involving the entire Godhead in the salvation of humans who are joined to Christ by the Holy Spirit. For White, union with Christ is, above all, a relational union. In this section, White's approach to union with Christ will be presented in answer to the following questions: What is union with Christ? What is the nature of union with Christ? How is union with Christ formed? How is union with Christ maintained? What are the consequences of union with Christ?

What is Union with Christ?

Union with Christ is the spiritual relationship and living connection between a follower of Jesus Christ and the Triune God based on Christ's salvific work to reunite humanity with Himself. White referred to this relationship as the union of the soul between finite man and Infinite God. It is a Trinitarian union, a union with God through Christ that includes union with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Union with Christ encompasses the entire scope of salvation for White. From Christ's covenant pledge to save humanity in eternity past, to the eschatological future of the Kingdom of God on

earth when heaven and earth will be united as one, union with Christ defines White's soteriology. Christ's incarnation, life, sacrificial death and atonement and ongoing ministry in the heavenly sanctuary are the context for divine action in effecting union with Christ. Union with Christ embraces the divine initiative and work of God to bind humanity to Himself and the human response necessary to form this union. God is the primary initiator and cause of union with Christ based on His grace. It is a union of the individual with the life of God, also described as the life-giving principle of the Holy Spirit, who energizes this vital, spiritual connection to enable believers to partake of the divine nature. It is through the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit that spiritual life, according to White, is begun. The divine-human relationship effected by the Spirit of God makes Christ spiritually present to the believer who is also connected to His spiritual body, the church.

Illustrations of Union with Christ

White explained the nature of union with Christ to her readers using metaphors and examples taken from Scripture and everyday life to teach spiritual truths.

1) The Vine and its Branches. This explains how believers are connected to Christ. The phrase fiber by fiber, vein by vein illustrates how believers are vitally, spiritually connected to the vine, which is Christ and receive constant spiritual strength from Him. The Holy Spirit works mysteriously on the human heart to form a vital, spiritual union between the soul and Christ. White referred to the Holy Spirit as the vitalizing power in the soul, the life-giving principle received from Christ to impart the transforming power of the life of God to the believer. This metaphor explains how

believers partake of the divine nature through their spiritual connection to Christ.

Through this connection they bear the fruit of the vine, exhibit Christian virtues and the fruit of the Spirit in their character and life.

2) The Mystic Ladder. The mystic ladder in Jacob's dream and Christ's reference to Nathanael are significant metaphors White used to illustrate twin truths. First, through the incarnation of Christ, His divine-human nature becomes the bridge for humanity to reunite with God and partake of the divine nature. Christ is the Mystic Ladder. The ladder in Jacob's dream is the gospel for White. It represents Christ grasping the throne of God in the sanctuary in heaven with one arm and with the other arm stretched out around the earth, that reaches sinners to form a personal, spiritual union with them. Second, the idea that the believer must climb the ladder in faith, rung by rung, represents the work that believers must do in loving obedience to God. They must climb the ladder by faith and perseverance. Aided by the Spirit they must continually look to Jesus, trusting Him to provide everything they need for life and salvation.

3) The Golden Chain. This metaphor illustrated for White, the link between the throne of God, where the Father is seated and the believer. It represents the love of the Father who is connected to believers on earth through the golden chain. The love of Christ is also the love of the Father that is poured into the hearts of His followers, so that they may be filled with the love of God for them and for others. White identified Christ as the golden chain who connects His followers to God in heaven.

What is the Nature of Union with Christ?

White described the spiritual relationship between the believer and Christ using

rich and varied language. In this relationship God and the believer retain their own personal, unique personalities. She viewed this relationship as a spiritual, supernatural connection that enables the believer to live a new life for Christ. He is the Source of their spiritual life and strength. White described this relationship as having a mystical or mysterious element; that is, the work of the Holy Spirit on the heart, in the life of the believer is a great mystery that cannot be explained. It also points to the spiritual character of the relationship that occurs through constant communion with Christ, who the believer cannot see, because Christ is in heaven. Yet, in a very real sense, Christ indwells the believer on earth and is present in them. This is what White called the mystery of godliness, Christ in you. In her own life she experienced this as the assurance of an indwelling Savior that she recorded about her own conversion experience.

White painted a picture of the nature of union with Christ using the following adjectives to define this relationship. Union with Christ is:

1) A spiritual union. Christ through the Holy Spirit initiates and maintains a believer's union with Himself and the entire Godhead. This spiritual connection between the believer and Christ is a synergistic, free will response to God based on grace. This is an act of God brought about in response to faith through the Holy Spirit. "It is through the Spirit that Christ dwells in us; and the Spirit of God, received into the heart by faith, is the beginning of the life eternal."¹ White explained that Christ became one flesh with us, in order that we might become one spirit with Him. Union with Christ is a spiritual union.

2) A vital union. This implies constant action on the part of the Holy Spirit whom

¹ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 388.

White taught awakens the soul dead in trespasses and sins to spiritual life. There is virtue that goes forth from Christ to draw the sinner to repentance, to bestow the gift of faith, to unite the newly awakened sinner to Christ and to partake of the divine nature. The moral and spiritual power imparted by the Holy Spirit is living, active and vital.

3) A heart union. The heart for White is the seat of the will, of feelings and volition. It is also the place she identified as the interior room of the soul. That is, the deepest part of human self-reflective consciousness. This deepest part of the self is united to Christ, not just the mind, or intellect, but the heart as the seat of the will, emotions and desires.

4) A mystical union. The spiritual relationship of the believer to Christ is in a sense mysterious. White wrote, “Union with Christ is an union with God through Christ. There is a life in the soul of everyone who has formed this mystical, spiritual union with Christ that never fades or fails.”² She used the term ‘mystical’ in various contexts and viewed it positively as something beyond human knowing. For example, she referred to Christ as the “Mystic Ladder.” For White, God is Infinite Being and it is not possible to explain how He regenerates sinners to transform the mind, heart and character. It is a mystery as to how the Holy Spirit connects believers to Christ.

5) An indissoluble union. Christ is the stronger power and partner in the relationship of union with Christ. Satan tries to break this union by diverting the attention of the follower of Christ to look to self, former idols or through temptations to forget Christ. Satan however, cannot break this union. Once formed, it can only be broken by

² White, MR No. 848—A Knowledge of God Through Christ, 389.

the believer's choice based upon free will. Believers must persevere to maintain their union with Christ by faith and engage in activities that will help to strengthen this union such as prayer and Bible study.

6) A moral union. Union with Christ imparts a constant flow of moral power to believers, enabling them to keep the commandments of God and to receive the righteousness of Christ. Out of love for God they will surrender their will to Christ and seek to obey the will of God in everything. Union with Christ encompasses a moral and ethical dimension that leads to right choices and actions in the life of the believer that are consistent with God's character and commandments.

7) A union with the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit who binds believers to Christ is also the bond of union between all believers, the body of Christ throughout the world. This does not mean that all believers think and act the same. White recognized that Christ calls many different personalities and temperaments to be His disciples and that God works with His followers as individuals and as a group. Yet, she also taught that individual believers must strive to act in unity with one another upon a platform of truth. Individuals should not insist on forcing their own way, but should come together in unity and love. According to White, believers will also act in union with the good angels who minister to them in their everyday life, who also carry out the will of God.

How is Union with Christ Formed?

Union with Christ is formed in the context of a synergistic relationship, having both a divine and human aspect. Once the sinner learns of their need of Christ and of Christ's atoning sacrifice for them and they respond to the influence of the Holy Spirit

upon the heart that leads them to repentance, true confession of sin, and to exercise faith in Christ, a union with Christ is formed. This occurs at conversion. The sinner surrenders to Christ. At the same time, the Holy Spirit comes to abide in the soul, bringing the presence of Christ in the believer.

How is Union with Christ Maintained?

As mentioned already, God plays an important role in maintaining union with Christ by imparting a constant supply of spiritual life, the vitalizing power of the Holy Spirit as a life-giving principle to each person who surrenders to Him. There is also the human side to maintaining union with Christ. It is maintained, according to White, by the exercise of living, active faith on the part of the believer. This is simply, faith and trust in Christ who is the stronger partner in the relationship. Believers recognize that the self is weak and completely dependent on God for spiritual life. There is never a point they reach when they take over from Christ and establish their own righteousness or spiritual life apart from union with Christ. But there are things that the believer may do to strengthen their union with Christ and to develop their spiritual relationship with Him.

1) A life of prayer. The follower of Christ is called to a life of prayer and constant communion with Christ who is in heaven. White referred to unceasing prayer as “the unbroken union of the soul with God, so that life from God flows into our life; and from our life, purity and holiness flow back to God.”³ Earnest prayer also connects the believer to the mind and Spirit of Christ.

³ White, “Conditions of Prevailing Prayer.” Also found in White, *Steps to Christ*, 97.

2) Knowledge of God through Bible study. Another important way to maintain union with Christ is increasing in the knowledge of God through daily Bible study. In *The Desire of Ages*, White presented the life of Christ as a model for believers to study and contemplate. By doing so, they come to learn how God wants them to behave. Christ's life on earth was presented as the role model for them. Studying Scripture helps to connect the believer to the mind of Christ through the knowledge of divine truth in God's revealed word and to understand what is the will of God for them, His general will and His specific will. White called this eating the flesh and drinking the blood.

3) Daily surrender of the will to Christ. The sinner must make a daily surrender to Christ. When the sinner becomes one with Christ they embark on a lifelong journey of continual spiritual life and growth. In both intellectual and moral development, they are continually being restored to the divine image through a life of faith and obedience to the will of God for them. Believers are thus involved in maintaining their spiritual union with Christ. God reveals Himself in nature, He reveals the plan of redemption in His Word and by studying it with a prayerful spirit, believers' can strengthen their union with Christ by a daily surrender to His revealed will.

4) Engaging with others. Christians are called to be kind and sympathetic toward others and to share the light they have received. This strengthens their union with Christ. They may also strengthen their union by participating in the life of the church. Participating in the ordinance of humility, and partaking of the Lord's Supper may also strengthen the union of the believer with Christ as local church members are brought together in communion and fellowship with one another through this service. Partaking of the bread and grape juice symbolizes taking Christ within and the spiritual renewal that

results from this deep, personal and abiding relationship that the believer has with Christ.

5) Exercising faith in Christ. Prayer, Bible study and spiritual activities such as participating in the Lord's Supper, according to White may strengthen union with Christ, but it is by faith that union with Christ is maintained. "The permanence of our faith is the condition of our union."⁴ White holds to a high view of simple trust in Christ to maintain the believer's spiritual connection to Him. While it is recognized that faith does not take place in a vacuum, White appeared to place an emphasis on the importance of faith in Christ supported by prayer, Bible study and a life of constant activity and surrender to God as the means to maintain this union from the human side of the relationship. Faith, according to White, is a gift from God that the believer must exercise. It is more than just belief or intellectual assent it implies action on the part of the follower of Christ.

What Are the Consequences of Union with Christ?

For White, the consequences of union with Christ are multiple.

1) Justification. When a sinner repents and exercises faith in Christ for the first time a union is formed. Based on this union their sins are laid upon Christ and they are freely forgiven and justified.

2) Sanctification. God imparts moral and spiritual power to the sinner to enable them to obey God and to live a fruitful life. This is a continual, lifelong process of spiritual growth and maturity. God gives: the strength of Christ, His wisdom, His righteousness and His power to live a victorious Christian life through a constant spiritual

⁴ White, "An Appeal," 14. Also found in White, "Union with Christ," *The Review and Herald*, December 13, 1887; and White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 231.

connection to Christ through the exercise of active, living faith. The Spirit of Christ dwells in the deepest part of the human self where decisions are made and character is formed. Christ imparts spiritual life to those with whom He forms a union, which is the beginning of eternal life. This relationship leads the believer on a life-long process of sanctification, being daily transformed into the divine image and bearing the stamp of the character of God on the heart, soul and mind.

3) A life of obedience to God's commandments. The believer is enabled to obey the commandments of God. Obedience is a consequence of union with Christ.

4) A life of active service. The consequences of union with Christ are a Spirit filled life of full and active service and surrender to God. Believers give evidence of their faith relationship with Christ by bearing the fruit of the Spirit in their life. They have the Spirit of Christ. They imitate the life of Christ and do the works of Christ. They may not experience an ecstasy of feeling, but they have a peaceful, abiding, trust in Christ.

5) Spiritual unity with the body of Christ. The union of the soul with Christ spiritually connects the believer to the body of Christ on earth. They become one with God and act in unity with one another. Putting aside personal differences, they maintain the unity of the Spirit and answer Christ's prayer to become one with God. Christ in one responds to Christ in another.

6) Participation in God's mission to save humanity. Union with Christ enables the church to carry forward the mission of Christ to the world. Believers radiate the light of Christ wherever they go and impart the knowledge of God, giving testimony of their own relationship with Christ. They carry forward the will of God on earth. Their mission coincides with God's mission to redeem humanity. They demonstrate to the world the

character and love of God. They are co-workers with God, who is seeking to bring an end to the great controversy between Christ and Satan, restore peace and harmony to the universe and reunite all with God.

Conclusion

This dissertation has helped to clarify White's concept of union with Christ. After presenting a background to the problem of the need to clarify White's concept of union with Christ, I traced the development of her ideas on union with Christ in her published writings from the 1860s to 1898. Using the approaches to union with Christ identified by Bruce Demarest in the history of Christianity, White's approach was evaluated. It was discovered that White presented a multi-faceted approach to union with Christ that cannot be limited to one model or approach to union with Christ identified by Demarest in the history of Christianity. White's approach embraces both the divine and the human aspects of the relationship. It can be described as a Trinitarian, spiritual union with God through Christ based on a synergistic understanding of salvation whereby the sinner exercises repentance and faith toward Christ in response to God's gracious invitation to become one with Him and partake of His divine nature.

For White, union with Christ is a union of the life of Christ connected to the life of His followers. This involves the entire person, spirit, soul, mind and body. For God it involves imparting the Holy Spirit to the sinner. The Spirit quickens and energizes the sinner to renew him or her in the image of God. Through cooperation with God, the human person as a self-conscious relational being may carry out the will of God on earth. God desires to be in a personal, intimate relationship with all humans. Union with Christ

is about being in a vital, heart and soul relationship to Christ and through this receiving all the benefits of the Godhead's salvific redemptive activity including the love of God, forgiveness of sins, the daily cleansing and energizing power of the Holy Spirit, and the righteousness of Christ by faith.

Union with Christ was multi-faceted for White. She admonished her readers to experience God for themselves. White repeatedly called Seventh-day Adventists to experience this union and practice "experimental religion" and not only possess intellectual knowledge, the truth. She taught that union with Christ begins at the moment of faith and is maintained by the continual exercise of living faith. While spiritual rituals or practices are not the basis of forming a union with Christ, prayer, the daily reading of Scripture, surrendering to God's will and engaging with others both in and outside of the church are ways that believers can help strengthen and maintain their vital union with Jesus. White used many adjectives to describe union with Christ, calling it: a vital union, a heart union, a mystical union, an indissoluble union, as well as a spiritual union that imparts a continual supply of moral and spiritual power to the believer. She also employed various illustrations and examples to describe union with Christ: the vine and its branches, the mystic ladder, and the golden chain.

While believers partake of the divine nature through faith, it was discovered that Christ was not presented as in the human soul in the sense of absorbing the individual in an ecstatic type experience. Christ is in heaven, but He is also present to believers through the Holy Spirit. For White, believers do not become 'god' or sinless due to the divine presence through the Spirit. God subdues the soul and influences the nature to bring about transformation, but He does not remove sinful human nature, nor does He

remove human personality and individuality. White continually pointed to Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. Union with Christ is a spiritual union with God, formed by the Holy Spirit and through Him, the entire Godhead. Based on the arguments presented in the Excursus on White's view of the soul, a union of soul with Christ is interpreted to mean a union with the life and character of Christ, the self, but not an ecstatic, visionary experience resulting in the dissolution of the person into the being of God.

In her book *Steps to Christ*, White taught readers how to form a union with Christ but she never pointed to her own life as a model or example for others to follow. She did not share her visions and dreams with others in order for them to emulate her experience. Her early experiences as a child, her conversion, and her dreams and visions of Jesus played a formative role in her developing understanding of God as love. The dream she had of ascending the staircase to Jesus at the top of the stairs showed His approval and love for her. The receiving of the green cord to be kept near her heart represented the connection she could have with Christ. This became a powerful theme for White. The metaphor of 'steps' to Christ was revisited throughout her life, particularly in the vision of Jacob's ladder that became the basis for *Steps to Christ*. Because she understood this to be the exercise of faith, of stretching out the green cord kept near her heart in order to stay connected to Jesus, White throughout her writings continued to point to exercising faith as central to forming and maintaining a union with Christ.

Union with Christ was eschatological for White. The only way humanity can reconnect with God is through the mediator Jesus Christ. Yet, believers have a work to do on earth with Christ. As the stronger partner in the relationship to which the human self must cling, White repeatedly presented Christ as the only answer to the problem of sin

and the way of salvation. She described Jesus as the vine, the mystic ladder, the golden chain, the connecting link between heaven and earth. Christ's goal is to make humanity one with Himself, with the Trinitarian God and with the inhabitants of heaven. A grand mystery that began with Christ's incarnation continues with the members of Christ, the church, growing to spiritual maturity and fulfilling the mission of Christ to save the world and reunite it with God.

At the beginning of this dissertation I raised the question, should Seventh-day Adventists be concerned about union with Christ? The answer to that question is yes, because Ellen White was concerned over the course of four decades to teach, admonish and guide her readers on the necessity of forming a union with Christ. She was also concerned that Seventh-day Adventists should be united to answer Christ's prayer in John 17 to become one with God and to partake of His divine nature. White believed that union with Christ was the answer to the spiritual weakness, decay and death in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. To address the problem of backsliding and the lack of a deep experience of God, she counseled Seventh-day Adventists to form a vital, spiritual union with Christ. She wanted them to have the witness of Christ within, to live a life of unbroken prayer with Christ, to be converted and come into a full union with Christ. To this end she encouraged them to surrender the will to Christ, to study their Bibles daily and to meditate on God's word, to participate in the life of the church working in union and harmony with one another, exercise faith and trust in Christ and to become active missionaries for God. Union with Christ was not just a theological motif in White's writings, but the essence of practical religion.

White made a valuable contribution to Christian theology in her teaching on union

with Christ. This ought to be reclaimed and taught by Seventh-day Adventists. This profound relationship ought to be understood intellectually, spiritually and experientially. Union with Christ is deserving of recognition as a major theological theme in White's writing career to stand alongside her two other major theological themes: the love of God and the great controversy. Her teachings on this important Christian doctrine should also be presented to the broader Christian and non-Christian world. The academic fields of mysticism and Christian spirituality, in particular, would benefit from her spiritual wisdom and insight in the context of a nineteenth century female Christian author, prolific writer and thinker who wrote extensively on the topic of union with Christ.

Suggestions for Further Research

While this dissertation has helped to clarify White's concept of union with Christ, there is a need of further study to provide examples of Christian writers who present a Wesleyan-Arminian approach to union with Christ. It also may be useful to do more research into other phrases that White used in relation to union with Christ, such as "vital connection," and "dying to self". While I drew some tentative conclusions on White's view of the soul in the Excursus, a comprehensive study of her view of the soul in the context of the nineteenth century is needed. In addition, further research may be done into White's understanding of ontology and other Christian doctrines in relation to union with Christ. The context in which White wrote on union with Christ, comparing her to other Christian authors and to the historical setting of religion, piety and spirituality, theological doctrine and Christian writings could help shed further light on her ideas.

APPENDIX A

Excursus: Ellen White's View of the Soul

Introduction

The soul, its nature and location, has been a perennial topic of interest for thousands of years.¹ Two major views of the soul have predominated in Western thought. The view dominant throughout most of Western history is that the soul is spiritual, immaterial and immortal; the second is that the soul is material and mortal.² The soul has been described as being located in a specific organ of the human body, such as the heart, or mind, or anatomic structure; or as a pan-corporeal pervading the entire body; or as a pan-cosmological and trans-human entity.³ Prior to the twentieth century, the heart was believed to be a place where the soul and emotions were located.⁴ What some thinkers attributed to the heart, others attributed to the brain, as the seat of mental function. The

¹ Giuseppe Santoro, Mark D. Wood, Lucia Merlo, Giuseppe Pio Anastasi, Francesco Tomasello, and Antonino Germano, "The Anatomic Location of the Soul From the Heart, Through the Brain, to the Whole Body, and Beyond: A Journey Through Western History, Science, and Philosophy," *Neurosurgery* 65, no. 4 (Oct. 2009): 633-643.

² For an excellent discussion of the history of ideas regarding the soul see Santoro, et al. "The Anatomic Location of the Soul," 633-643; also Adelheid End and Ernst Wolner, "The Heart: Location of the Human Soul—Site of Surgical Intervention," *Journal of Cardiac Surgery* 8, no. 3 (May 1993): 398-403; and Maxwell R. Bennett, "Development of the Concept of the Mind," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 41 (2007): 943-956.

³ Santoro et al., "The Anatomic Location of the Soul," 633.

⁴ While the ancient Greeks, such as Plato, placed the rational part of the soul in the brain, Aristotle believed the soul was located in the heart. Although the brain had replaced the heart as the center of emotional life by the fourth century B.C., the heart as the place of conscience originated in the Middle East, according to End and Wolner. End and Wolner, "The Heart: Location of the Human Soul—Site of Surgical Intervention," 398, 400, 401.

debate over the location of the soul and its existence, along with the findings of medical science, and the arguments of religion and philosophy, continued through the centuries.⁵ It was not until 1628 that William Harvey, a professor of anatomy and surgery, discovered that the heart is a pump responsible for the flow of blood.⁶ Yet, in the late seventeenth century, the heart was viewed as the house of the soul in the popular cult of the sacred heart in mysticism.⁷ In the eighteenth century, John Wesley promoted the view that Christ indwells the regenerated heart, sets up His kingdom and reigns therein.⁸⁹

⁵ In the second century A.D. the physician Galen established that psychological capacities are associated with the brain. In the seventeenth century, Rene Descartes would argue that the incorporeal soul is identical with the mind. Bennett, "Development of the Concept of the Mind," 943.

⁶ By the late nineteenth century, the heart as a site for medical intervention was still considered unthinkable, even taboo, because of its deep-rooted connection in history as the site of the soul. End and Wolner, "The Heart: Location of the Human Soul—Site of Surgical Intervention," 401.

⁷ End and Wolner have noted that by the end of the seventeenth century the devotion of the sacred heart developed in Roman Catholic mysticism, focused on the heart of Jesus and depicted in imagery by flaming hearts or hearts with crowns in front of the cross. End and Wolner, "The Heart: Location of the Human Soul—Site of Surgical Intervention," 401.

⁸ John Wesley, "Chapter 7 – Popular and Radical Holiness Contrasted: The Indwelling Christ," in *The Wesley Center Online*, accessed March 31, 2015, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/other-theologians/elmer-ellsworth-shelhamer/popular-and-radical-holiness-contrasted-e-e-shelhamer/popular-and-radical-holiness-contrasted-chapter-7/>.

⁹ The view that Christ indwells the human heart continued to be promoted in such books as *The Indwelling Christ* by James M Campbell, who believed that Christ present in the soul, indwelling and reigning in the human heart is the Christ that saves. It is not Christ on the cross, within the Bible, nor Christ in heaven that saves but Christ deeply hidden in the inmost spirit and constantly present in the life. James M. Campbell, *The Indwelling Christ* (Chicago, IL: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1895), 11. This doctrine of Christ in the heart he thought to be revolutionary. He wrote, "If Christ be within, there He must be sought, there is He to be found. Alas, that His presence, while not denied should so often be unrealized. Many Christians seem hardly to be aware that a Royal Guest has taken up His abode within their hearts. Their consciousness of His indwelling is at best fitful and dim. . . were the discovery to be made that spiritual supplies are not to be fetched from afar; that infinite resources have been placed within easy reach; that deep within the living sanctuary of the soul there is an unfailing fountain which renders every one who avails himself of it perfectly independent of outward circumstances and surroundings." Campbell, *The Indwelling Christ*, 12, 13.

In the context of the nineteenth century, Ellen White lived during the age of Romanticism, which viewed the human soul as connected to the soul of Nature. She also lived during the time of the developing science of anthropology with its evolutionary ideas of man, including the notion that certain races did not possess a 'soul'. The predominant Christian view of her time, which dated back to the early church fathers, was that the soul was immortal. The immortal soul doctrine derived from Platonic dualism, in which the immortal, immaterial soul is housed in a material body until death when it ascends to heaven. In this historical milieu, White developed her view of the soul. This Excursus offers a brief topical study of White's view of the soul. Given the vast nature of her writings on the soul, the descriptions offered and the conclusions drawn must be taken as tentative, at best. The purpose is to shed some light on White's concept of the soul, as it is pertinent to her teaching on union with Christ.

Non-Immortality of the Soul

White recounted the story of the development of her understanding of the soul from immortality to non-immortality as a child, where she overheard a conversation between her mother and sister that led her to question and ultimately reject the popular Christian teaching on the immortality of the soul.¹⁰ White saw that the soul does not

¹⁰ "One day I listened to a conversation between my mother and a sister, in reference to a discourse which they had recently heard, to the effect that the soul had not natural immortality. Some of the minister's proof texts were repeated. Among them I remember these impressed me very forcibly: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." "The living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything." "Which in His times He shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of Lords; who *only* hath immortality." "To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life." "Why," said my mother, after quoting the foregoing passage, "should they seek for what they already

naturally, possess immortality and that this popular teaching negated the purpose of the future resurrection and judgment. If souls were to go immediately to heaven at death there was no need for the resurrection of the righteous. Thus she came to understand that “the entire being was slumbering in the grave” awaiting Christ’s return. Those who are saved receive immortality from Christ at the resurrection of the dead.¹¹

In *A Word to the Little Flock*, White described the Second Coming of Christ based on a vision in which she saw those raised receiving immortality.¹² In another vision she received on January 26, 1850 White saw that immortality has never been given to fallen humans.¹³ Rather Adam and Eve were given conditional immortality and that based upon their obedience to God would be granted immortality after a period of testing.¹⁴ The teaching of the immortality of the soul was the same lie perpetuated by

have?” I listened to these new ideas with an intense and painful interest. When alone with my mother, I inquired if she really believed that the soul was not immortal. Her reply was that she feared we had been in error on that subject as well as upon some others. “But, mother,” said I, “do you really believe that the soul sleeps in the grave until the resurrection? Do you think that the Christian, when he dies, does not go immediately to heaven, nor the sinner to hell?” She answered: “The Bible gives us no proof that there is an eternally burning hell. If there is such a place, it should be mentioned in the Sacred Book.” Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1 (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1868), 39.

¹¹ White, *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 1, 40.

¹² Ellen G. White, *A Word to the Little Flock* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1847), 14.

¹³ Then I was pointed to Adam and Eve in Eden. They partook of the forbidden tree, and then the flaming sword was placed around the tree of life, and they were driven from the Garden, lest they should partake of the tree of life, and be immortal sinners. The tree of life was to perpetuate immortality. I heard an angel ask, “Who of the family of Adam have passed that flaming sword, and have partaken of the tree of life?” I heard another angel answer, “Not one of the family of Adam have passed that flaming sword, and partaken of that tree; therefore there is not an immortal sinner. The soul that sinneth it shall die an everlasting death; a death that will last for ever, where there will be no hope of a resurrection; and then the wrath of God will be appeased.” Ellen G. White, “To the ‘Little Flock,’” *The Present Truth*, April 1, 1850.

¹⁴ “God, in counsel with his Son, formed the plan of creating man in their own image. He was placed upon probation. Man was to be tested and proved, and if he should bear the test of

Satan to Eve in the garden of Eden, that Eve would not die if she ate the forbidden fruit¹⁵ and is connected to the doctrine of eternal hell fire, that those who reject God will burn in hell forever because they possess an immortal soul.¹⁶ Such a lie, White believed, is what has turned many away from God and from understanding His character as love. For White, the Bible teaches that immortality is received only at the Second Coming of Christ when the righteous are resurrected, and given immortal life in Christ, and again, receive access to the tree of life.¹⁷

The Constitution of Humans

A statement on White's view of the constitution of humans can be found in "The Barren Fig Tree" published in 1881. In this article, White described the relationship between the various aspects of the human person—soul, body and spirit—that have been defiled by sin and need to be thoroughly cleansed by Christ.

God, and remain loyal and true after the first trial, he was not to be beset with continual temptations; but was to be exalted equal with the angels, and henceforth immortal." Ellen G. White, "Redemption—No. 1," *The Review and Herald*, February 24, 1874.

¹⁵ In the Garden of Eden, Satan lied to Eve regarding her mortal state: "Here the father of lies made his assertion in direct contradiction to the expressed work of God. Satan assured Eve that she was created immortal, and that there was no possibility of her dying." White, "Redemption—No. 1."

¹⁶ This doctrine has led many to reject the Bible as God's Word and to view God as hateful. "In consequence of the popular error of the immortality of the soul, and endless misery, Satan takes advantage of another class, and leads them on to regard the Bible as an uninspired book. They think it teaches many good things; but they cannot rely upon it and love it; because they have been taught that it declares the doctrine of eternal misery." Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 1 (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1858), 114.

¹⁷ Adam and Eve were denied access to the tree of life after they had fallen into sin and angels guarded the way in case they should take the forbidden fruit and become immortal. "The angels who had been appointed to guard Adam... were now appointed to guard the gates of paradise and the way of the tree of life, lest he should return and gain access to the tree of life and sin be immortalized." White, "Redemption—No. 1."

Christ has bought man with an infinite price. Soul, body, and spirit,—all that constitutes the man,—is the rightful property of our Saviour; and when he sees the body, the temple of the soul, defiled and degraded by indulgence of appetite and lustful passion, and the heart polluted and defiled by sin,—when he sees the soul which was the purchase of his blood, proving a curse rather than a blessing to the world, he dooms it as he did the fig-tree, and it becomes a fearful monument of his righteousness and avenging wrath. Jesus is wounded and insulted by his professed followers whose unconsecrated lives disgrace their profession. He would purify the temple courts of the soul; but if his efforts to warn and reprove are not heeded, his forbearance and compassion will be changed to severity and judgment.¹⁸

Here White identified the human person using the temple metaphor. The body, degraded by appetite and passion, is the temple of the soul, and the heart also defiled by sin results in the entire person, becoming a curse to the world. Throughout her writings the human body was regarded by White as a temple and place for the habitation of the Spirit of God.¹⁹ In this statement the body, heart, soul, and soul temple are all used to describe the human person who receives Christ's rebuke and ultimate rejection if they do not choose to consecrate themselves to Him.²⁰

White's first statement on the "soul temple" in 1879 is in answer to the question of why there is not more power in the church. "The theory of the truth has converted the

¹⁸ In a message to those who profess to be the commandment-keeping people but demonstrate that they are not doing the will of God, Jesus' pronouncement on the fruitless, barren fig-tree was a lesson for White to the professed followers of Christ in every age. Ellen G. White, "The Barren Fig Tree," *The Review and Herald*, January 11, 1881.

¹⁹ In her book *Education*, White writes, "Let pupils be impressed with the thought that the body is a temple in which God desires to dwell, that it must be kept pure, the abiding place of high and noble thoughts." Ellen G. White, *Education*, 201. In *An Appeal to Mothers* written in 1864, White declares "your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you... therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." Ellen G. White, *An Appeal to Mothers* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1864), 22. "The body, He tells us, is the temple of the Holy Ghost, the habitation of His Spirit, and He requires all who bear His image to take care of their bodies for the purpose of His service and His glory." Ellen G. White, "Chapter 7—Neglect of Health Reform," in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, 70.

²⁰ The mind is implied in this statement, as Christ's warnings must be heeded.

head, but the soul temple has not been cleansed from its idols.”²¹ For White, the mind can be converted, without the soul being converted at the same time. What does she mean by this? In the following, White equated the heart with the soul temple.

The heart is the soul temple, and until that is fully on the Lord’s side it will be the stronghold of the enemy... When the mind has thus become confused, when right is considered to be unessential, when wrong is not termed sin, then it is an impossibility to dislodge the enemy, or to make these deceived souls feel that it is the adversary that has confused the senses and polluted the soul temple.²²

White appears to connect the soul most closely with the heart more than any other organ. This view is consistent with the era in which she lived and would therefore speak to her reader audience.

In *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5 White explained that truth must be planted deep in the soul, in the heart where it can control the life.

If the truth is first planted deep in their own souls, then they will seek to plant it in the hearts of others. The truth is kept altogether too much in the outer court. Bring it into the inner temple of the soul, enthrone it in the heart, and let it control the life. The word of God should be studied and obeyed, then the heart will find rest and peace and joy, and the aspirations will tend heavenward; but when truth is kept apart from the life, in the outer court, the heart is not warmed with the glowing fire of God’s goodness.²³

Studying the word of God, apprehending truth and obeying it, affects the heart. It is in the inner court, that is, the inner self, that must be touched by God’s goodness and warmth. This sheds light on her earlier statement about truth converting the head, understood as the mind, but not being allowed deep in the soul, in the heart to change the life.

²¹ Ellen G. White, “Spiritual Life in the Church,” *The Review and Herald*, August 28, 1879.

²² Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Physicians and Medical Students*, 1885, 9. Pamphlet 167.

²³ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948), 547.

In the following quote, White continued the sanctuary metaphor in reference to the heart explaining what she means by the heart, the inner sanctuary of the soul, being cleansed of its evil occupants by the Spirit of God.

Let each one closely examine himself to see whether he is in the faith, whether the truth which he professes to believe has been kept in the outer court, or brought into the inner sanctuary of the soul, that he may be sanctified thereby. The whole heart must be entered and purified by the searching Spirit of God. Jesus will not abide in the soul where pride exists; and if we desire His presence, the soul temple must be cleansed of all evil occupants. If the door of the heart is open to Jesus, he will come in, and His presence will expel every unholy thought, and by faith we may hold sweet communion with God.²⁴

The inner sanctuary refers to the heart, which must be opened to Jesus to enter to abide in the soul. Based on the quotes I have reviewed so far, the heart is in the inner sanctuary of the soul and the soul temple refers to the human person.

White described the heart as the seat of the emotions, having intents and purposes. “Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart,”—the human heart, with its conflicting emotions of joy and sorrow,—the wandering, wayward heart, which is the abode of so much impurity and deceit. He knows its motives, its very intents and purposes.”²⁵ In today’s language, White used the word heart to refer to the inner self, the place of deepest emotion and response in a person.²⁶ She appears to

²⁴ Ellen G. White, “Separation from the World,” in *Special Testimonies Concerning the Work and Workers in the Pacific Press*, 1897. Pamphlet 152.

²⁵ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 333; see also White, *Steps to Christ*, 34 where White added: “Many accept an intellectual religion, a form of godliness, when the heart is not cleansed. Let it be your prayer, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.” Psalm 51:10. Deal truly with your own soul. Be as earnest, as persistent, as you would be if your mortal life were at stake. This is a matter to be settled between God and your own soul, settled for eternity. A supposed hope, and nothing more, will prove your ruin.” p. 35.

²⁶ “Viewed from its human side, life is to all an untried path. It is a path in which, as regards our deeper experiences, we each walk alone. Into our inner self no other human being can

conflate the mind with the heart. Yet, if the motives, intents and purposes are part of what makes a human a self-conscious relational being, it would make sense that White is using such terms as mind and heart to signify the whole human person.

In the following statement, White presented the idea that the soul is in the body, that is, in the flesh. She explained, truth must be engraved on the soul.

The flesh, in which the soul tabernacles, belongs to God. Every sinew, every muscle is His. In no case are we by neglect or abuse to weaken a single organ. We are to cooperate with God by keeping the body in the very best possible condition of health, that it may be a temple where the Holy Ghost may abide, moulding, according to the will of God, every physical and spiritual power. The mind must be stored with pure principles. Truth must be graven on the tablets of the soul. The memory must be filled with the precious truths of the word. Then, like beautiful gems, these truths will flash out in the life.²⁷

White viewed the soul as tabernacling, or residing in the flesh. Truth must be engraved, that is, written on the soul so that it may “flash out” in the life of the Christian who is filled with the Holy Spirit. Truth must become a part of the soul, stored in the mind and written on the heart. The soul-temple defines the person, body, soul, and spirit, in a word, the human self or personhood but it requires the Spirit of God to bring spiritual life to the soul even as the mind embraces divine truth. While White wrote about the spirit, soul, body, mind and heart as separate aspects or functions of the human self,²⁸ she did not

fully enter. As the little child sets forth on that journey in which sooner or later he must choose his own course, himself deciding life’s issues for eternity...” Ellen G. White, *Education* (1903), 255.

²⁷ Ellen G. White, “Ye are Not Your Own,” *The Bible Echo*, October 15, 1900.

²⁸ Peter van Bemmelen has noted that “self” is a prominent concept in White’s writings used in both positive and negative connotations. She used self with a spiritually positive connotation (E.g., self-abnegation, self-denial, self-forgetfulness, self-renunciation, self-sacrifice, self-surrender), even more than those with a spiritually negative connotation (E.g., self-abuse, self-aggrandizement, self-conceit, self-deception, self-exaltation, self-glorification, self-gratification, self-importance, self-indulgence). Self can also refer to an individual’s God-given individuality. Peter M. van Bemmelen, “Self, Overcoming,” in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*,

regard them as separate or separable. The spirit, soul and body form the whole person.²⁹

The Mind and the Soul

For White the mind is the medium through which God communicates with humans and affects their innermost life.³⁰ She viewed the mind, the higher mental function as the governing power in humans and the avenue to the soul.³¹ She wrote about

ed. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2013), 1144-1146.

²⁹ White explained the connection between the soul and body in the following statement: “But if the body is abused, it becomes diseased, and the relation between soul and body is so intimate that one suffers with the other, and the temple of God is defiled. By virtue of creating us God has a right to our bodies, our souls, our spirit. “Hath not the potter power over the clay?” God has actually produced the entire being of man, and therefore ye are not your own.” Ellen G. White, “Words to the Young,” *The Youth’s Instructor*, August 24, 1893.

³⁰ White believed that communication with heaven may be severed if the electric currents in the nervous system are disturbed. “The brain nerves which communicate with the entire system are the only medium through which Heaven can communicate to man and affect his inmost life. Whatever disturbs the circulation of the electric currents in the nervous system lessens the strength of the vital powers, and the result is a deadening of the sensibilities of the mind.” Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, 347.

³¹ Examples of White’s view of the mind as the avenue of the soul: “Christ came to our world to engage in single-handed combat with this enemy of man, and thus to wrest the race from Satan’s grasp. In the accomplishment of this object, he withheld not his own life. And now, in the strength that Christ will give, man must stand for himself, a faithful sentinel against the wily, plotting foe. Says the great apostle, “Walk circumspectly,”—guard every avenue of the soul, look constantly to Jesus, the true and perfect pattern, and seek to imitate his example, not in one or two points merely, but in all things. We shall then be prepared for any and every emergency. Unceasing watchfulness is a great help to prayer. It keeps the mind from drifting away from right principles. It shuts out that vanity and trifling which prevails in the world everywhere, and to an alarming extent among professed Christians. He whose mind loves to dwell upon God has a strong defense. He will be quick to perceive the dangers that threaten his spiritual life, and a sense of danger will lead him to call upon God for help and protection.” Ellen G. White, “Watchfulness and Prayer,” *The Review and Herald*, October 11, 1881. “Every Christian must stand on guard continually, watching every avenue of the soul where Satan might find access. He must pray for divine help, and at the same time resolutely resist every inclination to sin. By courage, by faith, by persevering toil, he can conquer. But let him remember that to gain the victory Christ must abide in him, and he in Christ.” White, “Important Testimony.” “We are living at a time when Satan’s power is great. “As a roaring lion, he walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”

the mind and soul as functions of the human person. “Shall the powers of mind and soul be misapplied?”³² “Train the whole mind and soul to act in faith.”³³ To those who teach God’s word she says, “You should lay your souls open before God, that you may be filled with heavenly inspiration. You should keep the fountain of the soul pure, that the streams coming forth from it may be untainted with evil. The whole mind and soul should become imbued with the truth, that you may be a living representation of Christ.”³⁴ White referred to herself as using all the powers of her body, mind and soul in relation to her life of active service: “I have thrown all the energies of body, and mind, and soul into every undertaking...”³⁵

The relationship between the mind and the body is a “mysterious and wonderful

Anon, he will quell his roar to the faintest whisper, that he may deceive the unsuspecting by his hellish arts. The glories of the world are presented in glowing colors to fascinate the senses, to beguile unstable souls. What have professed Christians done to close every avenue whereby Satan can approach them? Have they given proof of the work wrought in them by the Holy Spirit? Have they erected barriers, firm and strong, between their soul and every earthly idol?” Ellen G. White, “Burning of the Magical Books,” *The Signs of the Times*, May 18, 1882. “This is a matter that rests between God and our own souls. We are living amid the perils of the last days, and we should guard every avenue by which Satan can approach us with his temptations. A fatal delusion seizes those who have had great light and precious opportunities, but who have not walked in the light nor improved the opportunities God has given them. Darkness comes upon them; they fail to make Christ their strength, and fall an easy prey to the snares of the deceiver. A mere assent to the truth will never save a soul from death. We must be sanctified through the truth; every defect of character must be overcome, or it will overcome us, and become a controlling power for evil. Commence without a moment’s delay to root out every pernicious weed from the garden of the heart; and, through the grace of Christ, allow no plants to flourish there but such as will bear fruit unto eternal life.” Ellen G. White, “Love Among Brethren,” *The Review and Herald*, June 3, 1884.

³² Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 589.

³³ Ellen G. White, “The Substance of Things Hoped For,” *The Signs of the Times*, March 18, 1889.

³⁴ Ellen G. White, “The Need of a Deeper Knowledge of God,” *The Review and Herald*, December 3, 1889.

³⁵ Ellen G. White, *In Memorium: A Sketch of the Last Sickness and Death of Elder James White*, 49.

relation” according to White.³⁶ She viewed them as reacting upon one another. The body must be brought under the subjection of the mind and the being is likened to a harp of a thousand strings, which must work together in harmonious action.³⁷ She wrote in 1866: “There will be possessed by the devoted Christian, a living principle in the soul, influencing the mind, employing the affections, and guiding the will, which will give force to the whole character.”³⁸

In the previous section, White viewed the heart as the innermost sanctuary of the soul that controls the life. In the following statement, she wrote that it is the mind that controls the human and has a role to play in the soul’s relation to God.

We are God’s workmanship, and his word declares that we are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” He has prepared this living habitation for the mind; it is “curiously wrought,” a temple in which the Lord himself has fitted up for the indwelling of his Holy Spirit. The mind controls the whole man. It is that mind that worships God, and allies us to heavenly beings. Yet many spend all their lives without becoming intelligent in regard to the casket that contains this treasure.³⁹

The temple is a living habitation for the mind that Christ has prepared for the indwelling

³⁶ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3 (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1875), 485, 486. “There is an intimate relation between the mind and the body, and in order to reach a high standard of moral and intellectual attainment, the laws that control our physical being must be heeded.” Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 601.

³⁷ “It is not only the privilege, but the sacred duty, of all to understand the laws God has established in their being, and to be so governed by these laws as to bring their habits into harmony with them. And as they more fully understand the human body, the wonderful work of God’s hand, formed in the image of the Divine, they will seek to bring their bodies into subjection to the noble powers of the mind. The body will be regarded by them as a wonderful structure, formed by the Infinite Designer, and given in their charge to keep this harp of a thousand strings in harmonious action. By intelligence they may be able to preserve the human machinery as perfect as possible. . .” Ellen G. White, “Words to Christian Mothers,” *The Health Reformer*, September 1, 1871.

³⁸ Ellen G. White, “Our Late Experience,” *The Review and Herald*, February 20, 1866.

³⁹ Ellen G. White, *Special Testimonies on Education*, no imprint, 1897, 33.

of the Holy Spirit. The mind is crucial for White, because it is that part of humans that worships God. Believers must have the mind and the Spirit of Christ.⁴⁰

In the following statement penned in 1888 she described the heart, mind, and soul as being taken in possession by the love of Jesus. The mind must grow in knowledge of the truth and dwell on it.

Cherish every new idea, every divine enlightenment, lest you let the truth slip from your heart, as water from a leaky vessel. Seek to walk in every ray of light that comes to you through the ministration of the word. As we grow in the knowledge of the truth, we shall have fellowship one with another, and the more we think of Jesus and his matchless love, the deeper will that love take possession of our heart, mind, and soul, and we will enter into the scenes of Christ's humiliation, and become partakers of the divine nature.⁴¹

Based on this statement, truth must be in the mind and cherished in the heart. Thinking about Jesus allows His love to take possession of the heart, mind and soul. Such a one becomes a partaker of the divine nature.

Two years later, in 1890 White reinforced the idea that Christ must be deeply connected to the mind, the heart and the soul of the believer. "To be renewed in the spirit of our mind. The Lord says, 'A new heart will I give unto thee.' The image of Christ is to

⁴⁰ "No one can truly confess Christ unless the mind and Spirit of Christ live in him... The powerful purifying influence of truth in the soul, and the character of Christ exemplified in the life, are a confession of Christ." Ellen G. White, "Testimony for the Church," *The Review and Herald*, April 22, 1862. This is what it means to be a Christian according to White "it is having the mind of Christ, submitting to the will of God in all things." Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 1, 152. "The mind of Christ dwells in his faithful followers; their desires are in accordance with his will; their petitions are indited by His Spirit. They obtain answers to their prayers..." Ellen G. White, "The Living Vine," *The Review and Herald*, September 11, 1883. "Let the Christ-like qualities of love, gentleness, kindness, possess the soul. Let the character of Jesus shine through your characters, showing that you have the mind of Christ..." Ellen G. White, "Unity in Christ," *The Review and Herald*, March 4, 1884.

⁴¹ Ellen G. White, "The Camp-Meeting at Selma, California," *The Review and Herald*, June 26, 1888.

be stamped upon the very mind, heart, and soul.”⁴² The mind, the heart and soul for White are intimately connected and must bear the divine image.

The Problem of Sin and the Entrance of Christ to the Soul

The state of unconverted humanity, according to White, is that they are inhabited by the evil one.⁴³ “The unconverted heart is the habitation of the evil one, and it is filled with unholy thoughts, with evil surmisings, envy, jealousy, falsehood, and uncontrolled passions, with strife and confusion and every evil work.”⁴⁴ Using the body as a temple metaphor, White described God’s intention from eternity past, to restore humankind.

From eternal ages it was God’s purpose that every created being, from the bright and holy seraph to man, should be a temple for God. Because of sin, humanity ceased to be a temple for God. Darkened and defiled by evil, the heart of man no longer revealed the glory of the Divine One. But by the incarnation of the Son of God, the purpose of Heaven is fulfilled. God dwells in humanity, and through saving grace the heart of man becomes again His temple. God designed that the temple at Jerusalem should be a continual witness to the high destiny open to every soul.⁴⁵

The high destiny of humans is to fulfill the purpose of heaven, achieved by Christ’s

⁴² “Without the transforming process which can come alone through divine power, the original propensities to sin are left in the heart in all their strength, to forge new chains, to impose a slavery that can never be broken by human power.” Ellen G. White, “The Righteousness of Christ,” *The Review and Herald*, August 19, 1890.

⁴³ This does not mean that each person lacks individuality. White stated, “Every individual has a soul to save or to lose. Each has an individuality separate and distinct from all others. Each must be convicted for himself, converted for himself. . . . Each must surrender by His own act and the mystery of godliness.” Each person possesses individuality. “The Lord does not desire that our individuality shall be destroyed; it is not His purpose that any two persons shall be exactly alike in tastes and dispositions. All have characteristics peculiar to themselves, and these are not to be destroyed, but be trained, molded, fashioned, after the similitude of Christ.” Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1961), 90.

⁴⁴ White, “Separation from the World.”

⁴⁵ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 161.

incarnation, so that the heart again becomes His temple. This requires a full surrender of the soul temple, in other words, the entire self, to God.

According to White, a partial surrender to God would still allow Satan access to the soul temple. Believers cannot partially belong to God; they must give their whole heart to Him. When the Word is not obeyed it hardens the heart so that it is not impressible by the Spirit of God. Satan's subtle suggestions become mixed with truth and confuse the mind and he has free access to them.⁴⁶ White explained how the soul temple could become a stronghold for the enemy instead of fully being on God's side.

The heart is the soul temple, and until that is fully on the Lord's side it will be the stronghold of the enemy... When the mind has thus become confused, when right is considered to be unessential, when wrong is not termed sin, then it is an impossibility to dislodge the enemy, or to make these deceived souls feel that it is the adversary that has confused the senses and polluted the soul temple.⁴⁷

The result is that there is no vitality, no heavenly impulse in the soul or vigor from an inward religious life because the soul is not in harmony with God.⁴⁸ The mind and the heart are intimately connected. When choices are made not to obey God the heart is hardened and Satan cannot be dislodged from the soul temple.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ White, *Counsels to Physicians*, 9, 10.

⁴⁷ White, *Counsels to Physicians*, 9.

⁴⁸ White, *Counsels to Physicians*, 10.

⁴⁹ It is interesting to note that John Wesley held the view that "every unruly subject" is also in the heart that Christ occupies. When a soul is converted Christ indwells the heart and become king in the regenerated heart and reigns supremely. The rivals in the heart are not cast out until the entire work of sanctification takes place. When Christ comes into the heart He binds and suppresses all the enemies, what Wesley called the "old man." When Christ enters the heart there is a war that wages, "He has come to conquer and drive out every inhabitant, and will surely do so, if He can keep the constant co-operation of the will." For Wesley, once entire sanctification takes place, every unholy temper and tendency is eliminated and Christ reigns within without rival. Justified souls however, have the Spirit and are temples of the Holy Ghost when Christ is crowned and acknowledged as Lord of lords and King of kings in their hearts. John Wesley,

Even though White taught that God's people prepare for heaven by cleansing the soul, they are to receive Christ now in the heart and soul. He resides in the heart however, only as an invited guest. In a sermon given in 1885 in Torre Pellice, Italy, White explained that Christ is knocking at the door of our hearts.

Christ is willing to take possession of the soul temple, if we will only let him. He is represented as knocking at the door of our hearts for admission, but Jesus never forces himself upon us; he will come in only as an invited guest. If we seek him, we shall certainly find him. Many seem to have an idea that Christ is a great way off... If we could only realize that we do not have to ascend into the heavens to bring Christ down, nor descend into the earth to bring him up, but that he is near to us, how different would be our actions. ...In order to let Jesus into our hearts, we must stop sinning.⁵⁰

For White, to be converted, Christ must take possession of the soul temple. Though Jesus is presented as coming to the heart, it is implied that the assent of the mind be made in order for Him to gain an entrance.⁵¹

In "Christ the Way of Life," published in 1890, White recognized that it is only by the grace of Christ and supernatural power that sin is discerned and finally driven

"Chapter 7 – Popular and Radical Holiness Contrasted: The Indwelling Christ," in *The Wesley Center Online*, accessed March 31, 2015, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/other-theologians/elmer-ellsworth-shelhamer/popular-and-radical-holiness-contrasted-e-e-shelhamer/popular-and-radical-holiness-contrasted-chapter-7/>. Ellen White's emphasis here is that the soul temple, the heart, must be fully on God's side in order to dislodge Satan's grip upon their lives. This grip is manifested in mental confusion, deception and pollution of the entire person.

⁵⁰ Ellen G. White, "Jesus Knocking at the Heart," Sermon at Torre Pellice, Italy, December 3, 1885, *The Signs of the Times*, March 3, 1890.

⁵¹ White later presented in *The Desire of Ages*, the view that Christ never forces His way into the soul temple: "No man can of himself cast out the evil throning that have taken possession of the heart. Only Christ can cleanse the soul temple. But He will not force an entrance. He comes not into the heart as to the temple of old; but He says, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him." Revelation 3:20. He will come, not for one day merely; for He says, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them; ... and they shall be My people." "He will subdue our iniquities; and Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." 2 Corinthians 6:16; Micah 7:19. His presence will cleanse and sanctify the soul, so that it may be a holy temple unto the Lord, and "an habitation of God through the Spirit."

from the soul temple. “Through divine grace, supernatural power is imparted to the man, and works in mind and heart and character. It is through the impartation of the grace of Christ that sin is discerned in its hateful nature, and finally driven from the soul temple.”⁵² Supernatural power must aid the sinner, a power that works in their mind, heart and character. In 1892 White wrote, “A power above and outside of man is to work upon him, that solid timbers may be brought into his character building. In the inner sanctuary of the soul the presence of God is to abide.”⁵³ Thus it is an act of divine grace upon the soul that drives Satan from the soul temple.

In 1894 White explained what Christ does for the soul. “The soul that is brought into personal contact with Christ, becomes a holy temple unto the Lord; for Jesus is made unto the believer wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. He who has fully surrendered to God has a consciousness of Christ’s presence.”⁵⁴ White noted the following year that God does the work of cleansing through the Holy Spirit. “If we ask Him, the Lord will give us the Holy Spirit to cleanse the habitation of the soul; for every room of the temple of God must be entered and purified.”⁵⁵ She also pointed out that the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul does not destroy the person’s powers. “The work of Christ in the heart does not destroy man’s powers. Christ directs, strengthens, ennobles,

Ephesians 2:21, 22” White, *The Desire of Ages*, 161.

⁵² Ellen G. White, “Christ the Way of Life.”

⁵³ Ellen G. White, “The Necessity of Co-operation with God,” *The Review and Herald*, October 25, 1892.

⁵⁴ Ellen G. White, “Fellowship with the World Forbidden,” *The Review and Herald*, December 4, 1894. She further stated, “What is the joy of the Christian?—It is the result of the consciousness of the presence of Christ. It is the effect of the operation of the Holy Spirit... But this union of Christ with the soul is the union which Satan is ever seeking to disturb...”

⁵⁵ Ellen G. White, “Witnesses for Christ,” *The Review and Herald*, September 10, 1895.

and sanctifies the faculties of the soul. It is through personal acquaintance with Him that we become qualified to represent His character to the world.”⁵⁶ In other words, Christ does not obliterate human personality or selfhood.⁵⁷

White wrote in 1899, “Jesus takes possession of the sanctified soul, to renew, sustain, and guide all its impulses, to give vitality to its purposes. Thus we become temples for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁸ The work of cleansing the soul temple is a daily work. “Let the Spirit of God cleanse the soul temple day by day. Let Jesus in. He invites you to receive Him.”⁵⁹ She referred to the Holy Spirit as giving transforming energies to those who partake of the divine nature: “Let the transforming energies of the Holy Spirit into the temple of the soul.”⁶⁰ The Holy Spirit in the soul must be honored.⁶¹ “Christians are under obligation to God to keep soul, body, and spirit free from all that defiles.”⁶² Those who teach false doctrines or engage in unholy practices, White warned,

⁵⁶ White, “Witnesses for Christ.”

⁵⁷ “When Christ abides in the heart, the whole nature is transformed. Everything that defileth is banished from the soul’s temple. Lust, base passions, impure thoughts, pride, inordinate affections, revenge, retaliation, covetousness, envy, all these are prohibited; and what we once loved, now we hate; for we become new creatures in Christ Jesus. Christ’s Spirit, Christ’s love, softens the heart, subdues the soul, and raise the thoughts and desires toward God and Heaven.” Ellen G. White, “True Religion,” *The Signs of the Times*, January 13, 1888.

⁵⁸ Ellen G. White, “The Sanctifying Power of Truth,” *The Review and Herald*, July 25, 1899.

⁵⁹ Ellen G. White, “Changed into the Same Image,” *The Signs of the Times*, April 25, 1900.

⁶⁰ Ellen G. White, “Partakers of the Divine Nature,” *The Review and Herald*, August 28, 1900.

⁶¹ “The Holy Spirit must be honored in the temple of the soul, where he delights to dwell.” Ellen G. White, “A Neglected Work,” *The Review and Herald*, October 9, 1900.

⁶² Ellen G. White, “The Temple of God,” *The Review and Herald*, November 6, 1900.

are defiling not only themselves but also the church.⁶³ The entrance of Christ to the soul is aided by supernatural power from without to strengthen, ennoble and sanctify the self, within so that the Spirit of God may daily cleanse the soul and dwell within.

Eschatology and Cleansing of the Soul Temple

The soul temple as a sanctuary for the indwelling Holy Spirit has personal and eschatological dimensions for White. The soul temple is closely connected to her understanding of the ministration of Jesus Christ in the heavenly sanctuary and is part of the plan of redemption. White believed that since October 22, 1844, Christ has been engaged in a work of atonement, cleansing the heavenly sanctuary from the sins of the people. She understood the cleansing work of Christ to have a counterpart on earth. While Christ cleanses the sanctuary in heaven, believers are to cleanse the soul temple on earth. In *Testimony for the Battle Creek Church*, written in 1882, White declared, “Each should cleanse his own soul temple from its defilement.”⁶⁴ This cleansing is to be followed by the reception into the soul temple of the Spirit of God. This action, White believed places “a little heaven in our hearts.”⁶⁵

⁶³ White, “The Temple of God.”

⁶⁴ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Battle Creek Church*, 1882, 76. She further writes, “The soul’s temple courts have been converted into places of unholy traffic. Selfishness, mammon, malice, envy, pride, passion, are all cherished in the human heart... I entreat you who have long professed the faith and who still pay outward homage to Christ, do not deceive your own souls. It is the whole heart that Jesus prizes. The loyalty of the soul is alone of value in the sight of God. “If thou, even thou, hadst known in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace.” “*Thou, even thou*”—Christ is at this moment addressing you personally, stooping from his throne, yearning with pitying tenderness over those who feel not their danger, who have no pity for themselves.” p. 55.

⁶⁵ “Let the soul be uplifted from the lowlands of sin to contemplate the God of all goodness, mercy and love, but who will in no wise clear the guilty. Meet goodness with

In “The Need of Complete Consecration,” published in 1890, White explained to her readers that the work of cleansing the soul temple is the counterpart to Christ’s work in cleansing the heavenly sanctuary in preparation for His return.

We are in the day of atonement, and we are to work in harmony with Christ’s work of cleansing the sanctuary from the sins of the people. Let no man who desires to be found with the wedding garment on, resist our Lord in his office work. As he is, so will his followers be in this world. We must now set before the people the work which by faith we see our great High-priest accomplishing in the heavenly sanctuary. Those who do not sympathize with Jesus in his work in the heavenly courts, who do not cleanse the soul temple of every defilement, but who engage in some enterprise not in harmony with this work, are joining with the enemy of God and man in leading minds away from the truth and work for this time.⁶⁶

The work of the cleansing of the soul temple is connected to the reception of the latter rain. “May the Lord help his people to cleanse the soul temple from every defilement, and to maintain such a close connection with him that they may be partakers of the latter rain when it shall be poured out.”⁶⁷ The cleansing of the soul temple is necessary for God’s people to be translated to heaven.⁶⁸

goodness. Cleanse the soul temple from all defilement and open it to the blessed Spirit of God. We may be bright and shining lights in the world. Let us search our Bibles, digging into its mines for the precious jewels of truth; and all the time we may bear a brighter and a brighter testimony to the glory of God. We have a little heaven in our hearts as we journey on toward the heaven above.” Ellen G. White, “Is It Well With My Soul?” Morning talk at South Lancaster, Mass., January 13, 1889 in *The Review and Herald*, March 19, 1889.

⁶⁶ Ellen G. White, “The Need of Complete Consecration,” *The Review and Herald*, January 21, 1890.

⁶⁷ Ellen G. White, “Among the Churches of Switzerland,” *The Review and Herald*, July 20, 1886.

⁶⁸ “There is to be a people fitted up for translation to heaven, whom Enoch represents. They are looking and waiting for the coming of the Lord. The work will go on with all those who will co-operate with Jesus in the work of redemption. . . . The truth must be brought into their hearts, sanctifying and cleansing them from all earthliness and sensuality in the most private life. The soul temple must be cleansed.” Ellen G. White, “The Sin of Licentiousness,” *The Review and Herald*, May 24, 1887.

Heretical Views and White's Response

A number of heretical movements in the Seventh-day Adventist Church led White to issue responses related to her understanding of God and how He relates to the human soul, or soul temple. In her early years in the Advent movement, White had met a number of people who claimed that Christ had not entered the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary on October 22, 1844, rather He had descended to earth and entered their hearts. Because Christ was ontologically present in them, they were sinless and could not sin. These former Millerites have been called 'spiritualizers' because they believed the Second Coming was a spiritual and not a literal event.⁶⁹ White had to meet such fanaticism in the late 1840s and 1850s of people who claimed to be perfect and holy because Christ was in them. She regarded them as being greatly deceived. While claiming to be holy, White found them to be overbearing, dictatorial, and oppressive and held captive under a bewitching power of Satan.⁷⁰

Other heretical ideas arose in the views of Ellet J. Waggoner whose teachings on the righteousness of Christ by faith White had supported at the 1888 General Conference session in Minneapolis. However in the 1890s, Waggoner gradually developed a distorted view of the indwelling of Christ.⁷¹ Though White considered these as pantheistic

⁶⁹ Jerry Moon, "The Adventist Trinity Debate, Part 2: The Role of Ellen White," *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, vol. 41, no 2, 278, 279.

⁷⁰ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, vol. 2, 27.

⁷¹ Woodrow Whidden noted that Waggoner's subjective justification is similar to the Roman Catholic Council of Trent (1545-1563) and the views of Andreas Osiander, whereby the effective righteousness of the former and the infused righteousness of Christ of the latter, makes the believer righteous and justified by the internal working of grace. In other words, sanctification is the basis of justification and not vice versa. Waggoner believed that the indwelling Christ communicates His blood mystically to the believer absorbing the guilt of sin and removes sinful impulses. The believer is then declared righteous. See Woodrow Whidden, *E. J. Waggoner: From*

tendencies, they were what we would call today panentheism, an overemphasis on the immanence of God. What set Waggoner's views apart was his belief that the personality and presence of God was everywhere and in everything. At the 1897 General Conference session he lectured on God's personal presence stating: "The Lord Jesus is in everything that He has made. He upholds all things, because He is in them. He is cohesion even to inanimate nature. It is the personal, powerful presence of God that keeps the mountains together, and the stones from crumbling to pieces; because God is there with His personal power."⁷² The consequence is that he taught the presence of Christ in every soul, even in the ungodly, awaiting recognition.⁷³ In addition, Waggoner subjectified Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, so that the only thing that needed to be cleansed is the soul temple, presenting a mystical view of the atonement. The presence of Christ in the believer cleanses them through His life-giving blood.⁷⁴ In other words, there is no need for Christ's cleansing work in heaven. Because Christ literally and personally indwells the believer and everything, the human body and all of nature become the mystical, earthly sanctuary of God.

White's response can be found in a letter she wrote to Waggoner where she addressed him regarding his views about God's personal indwelling of nature.

Had God desired to be represented as dwelling personally in the things of nature—in the flower, the tree, the spear of grass—would not Christ have spoken of this to His disciples? To take the works of God, and represent them to be God, is a fearful

Physician of Good News to Agent of Division (Hagerstown, MD: 2008), 288, 289.

⁷² "Studies in the Book of Hebrews—No. 8," General Conference Bulletin, February 22, 1897, 22 in Whidden, *E. J. Waggoner*, 277.

⁷³ Whidden, *E. J. Waggoner*, 286.

⁷⁴ Whidden, *E. J. Waggoner*, 273.

misrepresentation. This misrepresentation of God I was called upon to oppose at the beginning of my work, when the Lord sent me forth to proclaim the message that He should give me to speak. My labors on this line began when I was seventeen years old, and since then I have been over the ground again and again.⁷⁵

White warned Waggoner that the view of the impersonality of God in *The Living Temple* written by John Harvey Kellogg, a prominent Seventh-day Adventist and medical superintendent of the Battle Creek Sanitarium, was dangerous.⁷⁶ “I am warned that we are not to talk of God as He is spoken of in *Living Temple*. The sentiments there expressed are a dishonor to His greatness and His majesty. God forbid that our ministers should entertain these ideas.”⁷⁷ She described the reason such views were seductive.

The theory that He [God] is an essence, pervading everything, is one of Satan’s most subtle devices. I warn you to beware of being led to accept theories leading to any such view. I tell you, my brother, that the most spiritual-minded Christians are liable to be deceived by these beautiful, seducing, flattering theories. But in the place of honoring God, these theories, in the minds of those who receive them, bring Him down to a low level, where He is nothingness.⁷⁸

White clearly rejected the idea that God is an essence in humans, or in nature. Today we would use the term ontological indwelling or essential indwelling of God in which His divine being is immanent in creation. The consequence of employing such a theory of God is that it brings the person and being of God down to the level of nature.

Perhaps the most significant controversy that misused White’s teaching on the

⁷⁵ Ellen G. White, Letter 230, Oct. 2, 1903, to E. G. Waggoner, quoted in E. G. White, “The Danger of False Views About God,” *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 21 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1993), 172.

⁷⁶ White condemned the book as inspired by the devil. Kellogg defended his idea in the living temple that he did believe in a personal, divine being as essential to religion, someone to love, obey and trust but he argued that personality does not mean a person. Brian C. Wilson, *Dr. John Harvey Kellogg and the Religion of Biologic Living* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014), 89, 90.

⁷⁷ White, Letter 230 to E. J. Waggoner, 172.

soul temple was John Harvey Kellogg's pantheistic conception of the natural world in *The Living Temple* (1903).⁷⁹ White had pled with Kellogg not to publish it.

I have been instructed by the heavenly messenger that some of the reasoning in the book, "Living Temple," is unsound and that this reasoning would lead astray the minds of those who are not thoroughly established on the foundation principles of present truth. It introduces that which is naught but speculation in regard to the personality of God and where His presence is. No one on this earth has a right to speculate on this question. The more fanciful theories are discussed, the less men will know of God and of the truth that sanctifies the soul.⁸⁰

White refuted the idea made by some that Kellogg was merely expressing the ideas White had been teaching in her writings for years.⁸¹ She stated that we must not speculate about the personality of God neither about where is His presence.

White argued that Kellogg's mysticism and spiritualistic theories regarding the personality of God would "sweep away the whole Christian economy."⁸² By arguing that God is everywhere and in everything, Kellogg did away with the incarnation, the need for the atonement, Christ's ministration in the heavenly sanctuary, the Sabbath and His Second Coming. It would also suggest that Christ is present essentially in every soul

⁷⁸ White, Letter 230 to E. J. Waggoner, 172.

⁷⁹ John Harvey Kellogg, *The Living Temple* (Battle Creek, MI: Good Health Publishing Company, 1903). Some of the troubling parts of this book include the following: "So there is present in the tree a power which creates and maintains it, a tree-maker in the tree, a flower-maker in the flower,—a divine architect who understands every law of proportion, an infinite artist who possesses a limitless power of expression in color and form; there is, in all the world about us, an infinite, divine, though invisible Presence, to which the unenlightened may be blind, but which is ever declaring itself by its ceaseless, beneficent activity." p. 29.

⁸⁰ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church Containing Letters to Physicians and Ministers Instruction to Seventh-day Adventists*, 51 in Special Testimonies, Series B.

⁸¹ "In the controversy that arose among our brethren regarding the teachings of this book, those in favor of giving it a wide circulation declared: "It contains the very sentiments that Sister White has been teaching." This assertion struck right to my heart. I felt heart-broken; for I knew that this representation of the matter was not true." White, *Testimonies for the Church Containing Letters to Physicians and Ministers*, 53.

temple, a view that White would reject. The problem is that Kellogg's theology in *The Living Temple* introduces the idea that God is ontologically present in all created things, including the human soul. This goes back to the same issue of the early Adventist fanatics who believed that Christ was literally present in their hearts and not in heaven. It would become the same issue faced by Seventh-day Adventists in the Holy Flesh Movement.

How does Kellogg's view differ from White's? Kellogg presented the view that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. He carried this further to argue that in its various functions the body has evidence of divine intelligence within, independent of man's control but controlled by the divine will.⁸³ The instincts of the body are the voice of God within, so that thirst is the divine call for water, or hunger is the divine voice to eat. "In food and air are locked up the divine forces which replenish the stores of life within the body; so hunger says, "Eat and live."⁸⁴ Regarding *The Living Temple* White wrote that such dangerous lies could lead people away from the truth of God.

We do not need the mysticism that is in this book. Those who entertain these sophistries will soon find themselves in a position where the enemy can talk with them, and lead them away from God. It is presented to me that the writer of this book is on a false track. He has lost sight of the distinguishing truths for this time. He knows not whither his steps are tending. The track of truth lies close beside the track of error, and both tracks may seem to be one to minds which are not worked by the Holy Spirit, and which, therefore, are not quick to discern the difference between truth and error.⁸⁵

⁸² White, *Testimonies for the Church Containing Letters to Physicians and Ministers*, 54.

⁸³ For example in regard to the animal kingdom, the homing instinct of pigeons is the divine voice in them saying "This is the way, walk ye in it," or the higher intelligence of a horse to which a master bows and is saved by the divine voice which the horse hears, but he cannot. Kellogg, *The Living Temple*, 55.

⁸⁴ Kellogg, *The Living Temple*, 57.

⁸⁵ Ellen G. White, "Teach the Word," *The Review and Herald*, October 22, 1903.

Though White's view of the soul temple may look similar on the surface, Kellogg's book deifies nature and presents a mystical approach to the personal indwelling of God in nature and all humans that White would reject.

In *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 8 published in 1904 White explained that, "God is perpetually at work in nature. She [nature] is His servant, directed as He pleases. Nature in her work testifies of the intelligent presence and active agency of a being who moves in all His works according to His will."⁸⁶ Everything in nature occurs as a result of God's power. Nature does not have power in itself, rather God is actively engaged producing every leaf, flower, drop of rain, or snow.⁸⁷ Relating these thoughts to humans:

The mechanism of the human body cannot be fully understood; it presents mysteries that baffle the most intelligent. It is not as the result of a mechanism, which, once set in motion, continues its work, that the pulse beats and breath follows breath. In God we live and move and have our being. Every breath, every throb of the heart, is a continual evidence of the power of an ever-present God.⁸⁸

White appears to be presenting the idea that humans in their natural state exist by virtue of the power of God. This does not mean however that in their natural state humans are under the power of the Holy Spirit or that Christ is present in the heart, as this required faith in God and a personal union with Christ.

Another movement that White responded to is the Holy Flesh Movement, manifested in loud demonstrations in churches and at camp meetings in Indiana in 1900.

⁸⁶ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 259, 260.

⁸⁷ "The God of heaven is constantly at work. It is by His power that vegetation is caused to flourish, that every leaf appears and every flower blooms. Every drop of rain or flake of snow, every spire of grass, every leaf and flower and shrub, testifies of God. These little things so common around us teach... nothing is too small for His attention." White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, 260.

She denounced the movement as not of God, based on the false idea that humans can have ‘holy flesh’. Because of Christ’s presence in the believer, the leaders of the movement taught that they could no longer sin, but had achieved a state of sinless perfection, ready for translation to heaven.⁸⁹ White addressed the leaders of the movement at the 1901 General Conference Meeting held in Battle Creek, Michigan stating that humans will never have holy flesh in this life.

The teaching given in regard to what is termed “holy flesh” is an error. All may now obtain holy hearts, but it is not correct to claim in this life to have holy flesh. ... To those who have tried so hard to obtain by faith holy flesh, I would say, you cannot obtain it. Not a soul of you has holy flesh now. No human being on earth has holy flesh. It is an impossibility.⁹⁰

In contrast to the idea of having holy flesh, White believed that the followers of Christ may have holy hearts or what she calls “Christian perfection of the soul” but not, of the flesh.⁹¹ This lends credence to the idea that White viewed the flesh and the heart or soul as distinct but they are not indivisible. The soul tabernacles in the flesh. While humans may perfect Christian character through their being renewed in the divine image by the Holy Spirit, they cannot possess holy flesh or bodies in this life.

Contemporary Seventh-day Adventist View of the Soul

According to the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, the Seventh-day Adventist view of the soul is based on the Hebrew word *nephesh* used in Genesis 2:7: “The Lord

⁸⁸ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, 260.

⁸⁹ S. S. Davis, *The Two Adams and Their Relation to the Two Covenants* (Logansport, IN: L. F. Elliott, 1898), 48.

⁹⁰ White, *Selected Messages*, vol. 1, 32.

⁹¹ White, *Selected Messages*, vol. 1, 32.

God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath [*neshamah*] of life; and man became a living soul [*nephesh*].” *Nephesh* refers to a living being or person; it also means life.⁹² Seventh-day Adventists reject the idea that a separate immaterial entity, or soul possesses a conscious existence apart from the body that survives the death of the person. This false idea of the immortality of the soul was derived from Plato and entered the early church through the influence of Greek philosophy in the writings of the early church fathers. The concept of the natural immortality of the soul is a pagan concept. Seventh-day Adventists believe rather that:

The Scriptures teach that God “only hath immortality” (1 Tim 6:16), that humans can attain to immortality only in Christ (John 3:16; 2 Tim 1:10), that humans receive title to this gift when they accept Christ (1 John 5:10-13), and that immortality will be bestowed upon all the saved simultaneously at the resurrection and the second coming of Christ (Rom 2:7, 8; 1 Cor 15:20-26, 51-54).⁹³

Humans are both material and spiritual. “On the question whether human beings are material or spiritual, SDAs would say that, in ordinary language, they are both. Their intelligence and conscience are not usually understood as material functions.”⁹⁴

Furthermore, because Adam and Eve chose to sin, all humans have inherited a sinful nature with the propensity to sin and therefore “both their material bodies and their spiritual intellects or consciences have come under the dominion of sin.”⁹⁵

The *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* supports the view of humans

⁹² “Soul,” in *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, M-Z, 2nd rev. ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1996), 628, 629.

⁹³ “Soul,” in *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, M-Z, 629.

⁹⁴ “Humanity, Doctrine of,” in *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, A-L, 2nd rev. ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1996), 727.

⁹⁵ “Humanity, Doctrine of,” in *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 726, 727.

from the perspective of biblical monism. Rejecting the dualism that divides the human being into two (soul and body) or three (spirit, soul and body), Aecio E. Cairus explained:

All expressions of the inner life depend on the whole of human nature, including the organic system. The components of a human being function as a unit. There is no separable soul or spirit capable of conscious existence apart from the body. Thus the words “soul” or “spirit” describe intellectual, affective, or volitive manifestations of the personality.⁹⁶

The soul or spirit according to Seventh-day Adventists refers to the inner life of the human. It does not have a separate existence from the body; rather the soul is equated with the body. As Cairus phrased it, “Man *is* a soul rather than having one.”⁹⁷

In *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: An Exposition of the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, the unity of man’s nature is discussed under the heading, “The Nature of Man.”⁹⁸ When God formed man of the dust of the earth and breathed into him the breath of life, man became a living soul (Gen 2:7) made up of the earth’s elements and the breath of life.⁹⁹ The term soul is regarded as an indivisible unity and constitutes the person. “Expressions such as ‘my soul,’ ‘your soul,’ ‘his soul,’ etc. are generally idioms for the personal pronouns ‘I,’ ‘me,’ ‘you,’ ‘he,’ etc.”¹⁰⁰ In the Old Testament *nephesh* can refer to the appetites, desires or passions; the seat of affections;

⁹⁶ Aecio E. Cairus, “The Doctrine of Man,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, Commentary Reference Services, volume 12 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 212.

⁹⁷ Cairus, “The Doctrine of Man,” 213.

⁹⁸ Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: An Exposition of the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, 2d ed. (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 2005), 93-97.

⁹⁹ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 93, 94.

¹⁰⁰ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 95.

and at times represents the volitional part of man.¹⁰¹ In the New Testament, *psyche* is similar to *nephesh* and refers also to animal life; life; people, personal pronouns; the emotions; the mind; or the heart. “Biblical evidence indicates that sometimes *nephesh* and *psuche* [*sic*] refer to the whole person and at other times to a particular aspect of man such as the affections, emotions, appetites, and feelings.”¹⁰²

Human beings are a unity of body, soul and spirit. The spirit refers to the life principle, the divine energy or energizing spark of life necessary for individual existence, denoted by *ruach* in the Old Testament. *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* interprets two instances in Scripture where Jesus referred to man as a soul and body. “Soul” in Matthew 10:28 “refers to the higher faculty of man, presumably the mind through which he communicates with God.”¹⁰³ When Paul refers to body and spirit in 1 Corinthians 7:34 “spirit” refers to this higher faculty.¹⁰⁴ The body here includes the physical and emotional aspects of the person.¹⁰⁵ It is important to note that for Seventh-day Adventists, “Although the Bible views the nature of man as a unity, it does not precisely define the relationship among body, soul, and spirit.”¹⁰⁶

Where Paul writes of humans as a threefold union of spirit, soul and body (1 Thess 5:23), ‘spirit’ is interpreted as “the higher principle of intelligence and thought

¹⁰¹ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 95.

¹⁰² “This usage, however, in no way shows that man is a being made up of two separate and distinct parts. The body and soul exist together; together they form an indivisible union. The soul has not conscious existence apart from the body. There is no text indicating that the soul survives the body as a conscious entity.” *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 95.

¹⁰³ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 96.

¹⁰⁴ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 96.

¹⁰⁵ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 96.

with which man is endowed, and with which God can communicate by His Spirit” through the mind. The ‘soul’ is interpreted as “that part of man’s nature that finds expression through the instincts, emotions, and desires. This part of one’s nature can be sanctified too.” The body is controlled by the higher or lower nature.¹⁰⁷ In conclusion, according to *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, “It is clear that each human being is an indivisible unit. The body, soul, and spirit function in close cooperation, revealing an intensely sympathetic relationship among a person’s spiritual, mental and physical faculties.”¹⁰⁸ From reviewing these contemporary statements of Seventh-day Adventist theology the soul can refer to the mind or intellect of humans, the heart or the emotional aspect of human nature, or to the whole human person.

Conclusion

White’s view of the soul was simple yet complex. Rejecting anthropological dualism and the idea that the soul has a separate and self-conscious existence apart from the body, White adopted a view of the conditional immortality and non-immortality of the soul related to creation and the state of the dead. Her basic view was that human beings are constituted by an intimately connected spirit, soul, and body. She referred to this threefold constitution as the soul temple. In her writings, the term soul, at times referred to the heart as the inner sanctuary of the soul, but it also stood for the entire person, the ‘soul temple’. White used the term ‘soul temple’ as a metaphor for body, soul,

¹⁰⁶ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 96.

¹⁰⁷ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 97.

¹⁰⁸ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 97.

and spirit that included the heart and mind of the individual. Her major metaphor of the soul as a sanctuary reflected the eschatological narrative of Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, which White taught has its counterpart in the personal cleansing of individual souls on earth after October 22, 1844.

White's reactions to heretical movements within Seventh-day Adventism may help to further clarify her views regarding the soul. While she advocated the view that Christ indwells His followers through the Holy Spirit, she appeared to reject the idea that the personal Being of God was essentially present in nature or humanity. White also rejected the idea that receiving Christ as an indwelling Savior means that the follower of Christ becomes perfect and sinless as a result. It may be concluded that White's view of the soul is in harmony with the contemporary Seventh-day Adventist view of the soul as referring to the self, the individual person who is a self-conscious relational being, called to be in a personal, spiritual relationship with their Creator God. Given White's extensive writing on the soul and the voluminous nature of this topic, the conclusions offered here are tentative. Further extensive study is required to ascertain White's views on the soul that deal with this subject both topically and that trace the development of her concept of the soul in its historical context.

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