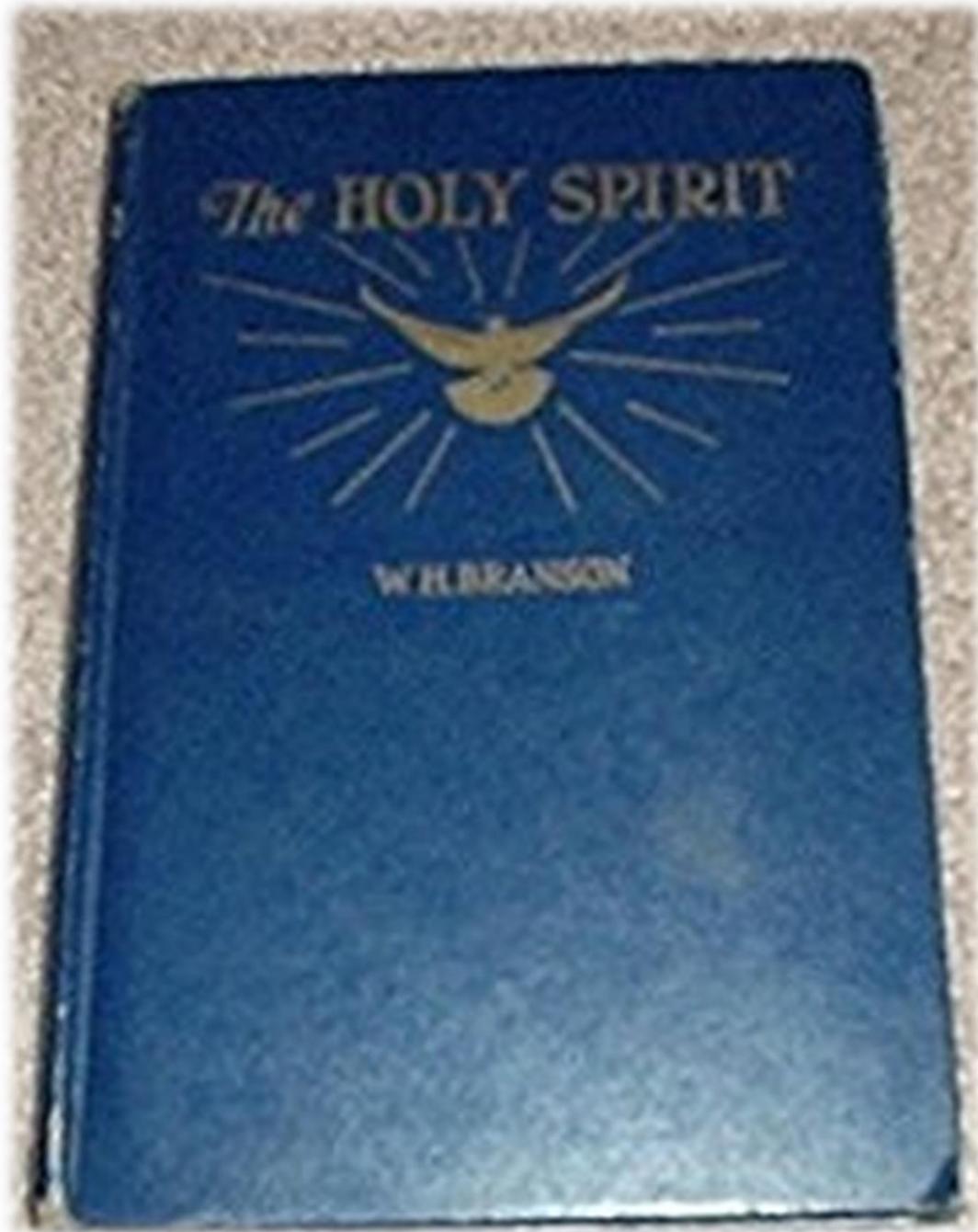


# Book Review: The Holy Spirit

Review and comments by Lester Atkins



# The Holy Spirit by William Henry Branson

Compiled by

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April 18, 2015

**Subtitle:** His Office and Work in the World

**Note:** This paper is a compilation of quotations taken from the book *The Holy Spirit* by William Henry Branson, 160 pages, published by Southern Publishing Association, copyright 1933, Revised 1952. The quotations were selected to show Branson's views on the Holy Spirit in particular and the Doctrine of the Trinity in general. Unless otherwise noted, **all boldface and underlining are mine**. The page numbers refer to the page in the book where the following quote was taken from.

The book from which I quote below was first published in **1933 (only 18 years after Ellen White died)** and was written by a very prominent Seventh-day Adventist leader and author, **William Henry Branson (1887-1961)**. Branson served as the SDA General Conference President 1950-1954.

Branson (then General Conference General Vice-President) served as chairman of the 1941 Baptismal Certificate Committee to place the Trinity Doctrine into the baptismal vow.

p. 11 (The first page of the first chapter)

“The nature and work of the Holy Spirit is a divine mystery---far too great for the finite mind to fathom fully.”

**My Comments:** Branson starts off in the first sentence, confusing the how [nature] with the what [work]. The work (what it does) of the Holy Spirit is made clear in the Bible. The nature, the essence, or how it works is a mystery.

“Jesus aptly illustrated this fact by His significant statement to Nicodemus when He explained to him the mystery of the new birth.”

**My Comments:** In John 3:4 & 9, Nicodemus asked how? Jesus responded with what the Holy Spirit does, not how it does it.

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“Nicodemus saith unto him, **How** can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?” John 3:4.

“Nicodemus answered and said unto him, **How** can these things be?” John 3:9.

p. 12

“Some day, of course, we shall understand. Some day this dimming veil which now separates God and His people will be withdrawn, and these deep and hidden mysteries will then stand revealed.”

**My Comments:** See the quotes below from Ellen G. White:

“The work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart is shrouded in mystery. It can no more be explained than can the operation of the winds. The Lord has never explained to humanity how the soul is impressed by the Spirit of God, affecting the mind and heart of the believer, or how the Spirit puts words into the mouth of the Lord's messengers to give to his people. The prophets, who were especially enlightened by the Spirit of God, often could not understand the meaning of the words they wrote upon the paper, or explain the significance of what they uttered when the Spirit caused them to speak, but the word of the Lord accomplished the very work which he designed that it should, and the fruits of the work testified to its divine character.” *Sabbath School Worker* by Ellen G. White, August 1, 1892, par. 7.

**“The plan of redemption, by which the merciful divine-human Redeemer rescued man from the thralldom of sin, is beyond the comprehension of men or of angels. It is a mystery so surpassing, so grand, so sublime, that we can never hope fully to understand it.** Christ's sacrifice for fallen man has no parallel. It is the most exalted, sacred theme on which we can meditate. Every heart that is enlightened by the grace of God is constrained to bow with inexpressible gratitude and adoration before the Redeemer for His infinite sacrifice.” *The Signs of the Times* by Ellen G. White, September 23, 1908, par. 1.

“The mightiest human being, whatever may be his claim, is not infinite. He can not understand infinity. Christ plainly stated, "No man knoweth the Father but the Son." A teacher was once endeavoring to present the exaltation of God,

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when a voice was heard saying, "We can not as yet understand who He is." The teacher nobly replied, "Were I able fully to set forth God, I should either be a god myself, or God Himself would cease to be God." **The mightiest created intellect can not comprehend God; words from the most eloquent tongue fail to describe Him; in His presence silence is eloquence.** *The Signs of the Times* by Ellen G. White, June 28, 1899, par. 7.

**“There are three living persons in the Godhead:** the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. (See Matthew 28:19.) **Not three Gods, but one God in three persons.**”

**My Comments:** They all use the same texts to try and prove their preconceived ideas. Matt. 28:19 says nothing about the Godhead, or “God in three persons”, nor is there any evidence anywhere in the Bible of anyone ever being baptized in the name of three persons. Neither the phrase “one God in three person” nor the concept is found in the Bible.

“Just so with the Holy Spirit, **He is the third person of the heavenly trio.**”

**My Comments:** Nowhere in the Bible do we find language or concept that the Holy Spirit “is the third person of the heavenly trio”. First we would have to find the phrases “third person” and “heavenly trio” in relation to the Godhead, but these are not found in the Bible.

“The Spirit is not merely an influence emanating from God, but **is a distinct person in the Godhead**, working in unison with the Father and the Son in all things pertaining to the kingdom of God.”

**My Comments:** Nowhere is there the slightest hint, certainly no command, that the Holy Spirit is to be worshipped. Nowhere do we find in the Bible that the Holy Spirit is seated on a throne in the Universe. Nowhere in the Bible is the Holy Spirit defined as God.

The Bible is quite clear that God the Father and the Son of God are to be worshipped, are seated on thrones, and are certainly referred to as God. These discrepancies should raise a red flag to anyone familiar with the Bible.

p. 13

“Knowledge is spoken of as one of the attributes of the Spirit. ‘The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth

the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.' 1 Corinthians 2:10, 11."

**My Comments:** Paul places the clause "**which is in him**" after the phrase "**the spirit of man**", thus establishing the point that the spirit of man is **IN** the man, **NOT outside** of the man as some other person, or another man.

Paul does not place this same clause "**which is in him**" after the phrase "**the Spirit of God**", but in order to maintain Paul's analogy or parallelism, the clause must be *understood* to be there. Otherwise, Paul's analogy or parallelism breaks down, if the Spirit of God is not in Him, but were another person other than God. In other words, Paul does not say, **the Spirit of God which is not in Him**, nor is such a thing implied, as it would destroy Paul's logic.

What Branson is trying to draw from this verse, is that the Spirit of God is some other person than God the Father and is the Holy Spirit, the Third person of the Godhead. However, in doing so, they destroy Paul's logic.

Please note, in the quotes below, that Ellen G. White excludes any such third person of the Godhead from entering into the counsels of God the Father. The Son of God is the only being in all the Universe that can know the mind of God or enter into all the counsels of God the Father.)

"Christ, the Word, the only begotten of God, was one with the eternal Father--one in nature, in character, in purpose--  
**the only being that could enter into all the counsels and purposes of God.**" *Patriarchs and Prophets* by Ellen G. White, p. 34.

"Before the assembled inhabitants of heaven the King declared that **none but Christ, the Only Begotten of God, could fully enter into His purposes**, and to Him it was committed to execute the mighty counsels of His will." *Patriarchs and Prophets* by Ellen G. White, p. 36.

"**Christ the Word, the Only Begotten of God**, was one with the eternal Father,--one in nature, in character, and in purpose,--**the only being in all the universe that could enter into all the counsels and purposes of God.**" *The Great Controversy* by Ellen G. White, p. 493.

p. 14

“He [The Holy Spirit] directs the servants of God. . . .’Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers.’ Acts 20:28.”

**My Comments:** I place the entire verse below. Please note that Branson left the rest of the verse off. Especially note the last clause of the verse, “**which he hath purchased with his own blood**”. The question is, who is the pronoun “he” referring to---God or the Holy Ghost? We know that it was the Son of God, Jesus Christ, that purchased us with his blood, therefore it cannot be God the Father that “he” is referring to.

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, **which he hath purchased with his own blood.**” Acts 20:28.

If we examine other texts in the book of Acts, it becomes obvious that when the author uses the word “God”, he is referring to God the Father. In the following texts, I **boldfaced and underlined** “**God**” which in the context is obviously referring to God the Father, and I only underlined words that are referring to the Son of God, Jesus Christ, etc., which in contrast to **God the Father** are referring to the Son of God.

30 “The **God** of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.

31 “Him hath **God** exalted with his right hand [to be] a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.” Acts 5:30 & 31.

“And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of **God.**” Acts 7:56.

“And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of **God.** Acts 8:37.

“And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of **God.**” Acts 9:20.

38 “How **God** anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and

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healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for **God** was with him.

39 "And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:

40 "Him **God** raised up the third day, and showed him openly;" Acts 10:38-40.

Based on the texts above, drawn from the book of Acts, God is referring to God the Father, not Jesus.

The only remaining choice in Acts 20:28 is that "he" is referring to the Holy Ghost. We know that the Son of God, Jesus Christ, is the only One that "**purchased**" us "**with his own blood**". Therefore, the Holy Ghost cannot be the third person of the Godhead, else we would have to accept that two persons of the Godhead shed their blood for us. Thus the Holy Ghost must be the personal presence of Jesus or the Spirit of Christ.

Please note that Ellen White concurs with the premise that the Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost is indeed the Spirit of Jesus. In fact, she says that "**The Holy Spirit is Himself divested of the personality of humanity and independent thereof**".

"Cumbered with humanity, Christ could not be in every place personally; therefore it was altogether for their advantage that He should leave them, go to His father, and send the Holy Spirit to be His successor on earth. **The Holy Spirit is Himself divested of the personality of humanity and independent thereof. He would represent Himself as present in all places by His Holy Spirit, as the Omnipresent.**" "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall (although unseen by you), [THIS PHRASE WAS ADDED BY ELLEN WHITE.] teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" [John 14:26]. "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will come not unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you" [John 16:7]" *Manuscript Releases Volume Fourteen* [Nos. 1081-1135], pp. 23 & 24, (1990), MR No. 1084 - *Individual Responsibility to Accept Truth; Christ, the Great "I AM"; The Holy Spirit and His Work* (**Written February 18 and 19, 1895**, at "Norfolk Villa," Prospect Street, Granville, N.S.W. Part of the manuscript appears to be a letter, but we do not

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know to whom the letter was addressed. Part seems to be entries in Ellen White's diary.). {14MR 23.3}

In the clause “**He [Christ] would represent Himself**”, the word *represent* is a *transitive verb*. The direct object of the *transitive verb* is **Himself**, a reflexive pronoun. It is a rule of English grammar that the only case where the *direct object* of a *transitive verb* refers back to the subject is when the *direct object* is a *reflexive pronoun*. In all other cases, a transitive verb transfers the action to another noun or pronoun, other than the subject of the sentence.

A pronoun takes the place of a noun. Nouns and pronouns can be substituted for each other without losing the meaning of the sentence. I will place these two clauses from Acts 20:28, one above the other and please note the similarity between them. The noun and the pronoun are both flanked with the words “which” and “hath”.

“which **the Holy Ghost** hath made you overseers”  
“which **he** hath purchased with his own blood”

The point I am trying to make here is that Branson only quotes the first part of the verse to prove his concept that the Holy Ghost is the third person of the Godhead, whereas if he had quoted the whole verse it would have proved that the Holy Ghost could not be the third person of the Godhead.

p. 15

### “*The Deity of the Spirit*”

“Let it first be noted that the very names that apply to God are also applied to the Spirit, as is seen in the following texts:

“Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.’ 2 Corinthians 3:17.”

**My Comments:** In this section, Branson is attempting to establish the deity of the Spirit and thus further support his preconceived idea that the Spirit is the third person of the Godhead. However, if we look at the larger context of 2 Cor. 3:17, we will discover that the Lord is referring to Jesus Christ and the word “is” is the copula which can be replaced with an equal sign. Thus we have:

### **The Lord = that Spirit**

I place the greater context of 2 Cor. 3:17 below:

13 “And not as Moses, [which] put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished:

14 “But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which [veil] is done away in **Christ**.

15 “But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart.

16 “Nevertheless when it shall turn to **the Lord**, the veil shall be taken away.

17 “Now **the Lord is that Spirit**: and where the Spirit of the Lord [is], there [is] liberty.

18 “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of **the Lord**, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, [even] as by **the Spirit of the Lord**.

#### Chapter 4

1 “Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not;

2 “But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

3 “But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:

4 “In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious **gospel of Christ**, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

5 “For we preach not ourselves, but **Christ Jesus the Lord**; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

6 “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to [give] the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of **Jesus Christ**.”

2 Cor. 3:13 – 4:6.

From the above greater context, we can see that “the Lord” is referring to Jesus Christ. Thus we can conclude the following:

**The Lord = Jesus Christ = that Spirit**

p. 44

“Now He [the Holy Ghost] was to become **the Vicar of Christ.**”

**My Comments:** Get God’s people to take their eyes off Jesus and focus on another person who supposedly is to take the place of Christ.

**Vicar** – “a person who acts in place of another” *Webster’s New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language*

“Do not take your eyes off Jesus.” *The Review and Herald*  
by Ellen G. White, January 31, 1893 par. 8.

p. 46

“It was in this sense that the Holy Ghost had not been given before Pentecost. He was to assume an entirely new relationship, **taking Christ’s place as head of the church upon earth.**”

**My Comments:** How does the above statement compare to what the Apostle Paul wrote, after Pentecost, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit:

“For the husband is the head of the wife, even as **Christ is the head of the church**: and he is the saviour of the body.”  
Eph. 5:23.

p. 81

“It was on the day of Pentecost, following the ascension of our Lord, that **the Holy Spirit** entered upon His new office as **the Vicar of Christ.**”

**My Comments:** , The word **vicar** does not appear in the Bible (KJV). The word “**vicar**” is found at least 20 times in the writings of Ellen G. White, but in all cases it refers to **the Pope of Rome as the vicar of Christ.**

p. 89

“[After Pentecost] **The true Leader** [the Holy Ghost] was now in control of the church of Christ, and it was ready to enter at once upon the execution of its world-wide commission.”

**My Comments:** Examine the following statements from Ellen G. White in contrast to the above statement by Branson:

**“Since His ascension Christ has carried forward His work on the earth by chosen ambassadors, through whom He speaks to the children of men and ministers to their needs. The great Head of the church superintends His work through the instrumentality of men ordained by God to act as His representatives.”** *The Acts of the Apostles* by Ellen G. White, p. 360, par.1.

**“As the Head of the church, Christ is authoritatively calling upon everyone** who claims to believe on Him to follow His example of self-denial and self-sacrifice in working for the conversion of those whom Satan and his vast army are exerting every power to destroy. God's people are called upon to rally without delay under the bloodstained banner of Christ Jesus.” *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 7, p. 30, par. 1.

**“Christ is the head of the church. The members of his body follow the directions of the Head,** just as the members of the human body obey the impulses of the mind.” *The Review and Herald* by Ellen G. White, July 18, 1882, par. 21.

**“The great Head of the church has chosen his people out of the world, and requires them to be separate.** He designs that the spirit of his commandments shall draw them to himself, and separate them from the elements of the world. To love God and keep his commandments is far from loving the world's pleasures and friendship. There is no concord between Christ and Belial. **The people of God may safely trust in him alone**, and without fear press on in the way of obedience.” *The Review and Herald* by Ellen G. White, July 15, 1884, par. 12.

**“He who is the divine Head of the church,** the mightiest of conquerors, would point his followers to his life, his toils, his self-denials, his struggles, and sufferings, through contempt, through rejection, ridicule, scorn, insult, mockery, falsehood, up the path of Calvary to the scene of the crucifixion, that they might be encouraged to press on toward the mark for the prize and reward of the overcomer.” *The Review and Herald* by Ellen G. White, July 24, 1888, par. 14.

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“As the members of our natural body are directed by the head, so as members of the spiritual body, **we should submit ourselves to the direction of Christ, the living head of the church.** We are as branches of a common vine. Christ speaks of us as branches that have been grafted into himself, the True Vine. If we are true believers, living in daily, hourly connection with Christ, we shall be sanctified through the truth, and shall act our part in blessed union with the other branches of the True Vine.” *The Review and Herald* by Ellen G. White, July 9, 1895, par. 1.

“Christian fellowship is one means by which character is formed. Thus selfishness is purged from the life, and men and women are drawn to **Christ, the great center.** Thus is answered his prayer that his followers may be one, as he is one with the Father.” *The Review and Herald* by Ellen G. White, January 14, 1904, par. 2.

“**Christ is the head of the church on earth, and he requires that every one who believes in him as the Redeemer, shall surrender himself to obey his word,** to love God supremely, and to love as Christ loved those who are perishing in sin.” *The Youth’s Instructor* by Ellen G. White, November 7, 1895, par. 1.

“**Christ is the only Head of the church. He only has the right to demand of man unlimited obedience to His requirements.**” Manuscript Releases Volume twenty-one [Nos. 1501-1598] (1993), p. 274, par..1.

p. 97

“And after a few short years following the passing of the apostles, we behold the church shorn of her power and rapidly sinking into a state of apostasy and worldliness that is unparalleled in sacred history.

“But this apostasy on the part of the church did not come as a surprise to her divine Leader. Faithfully had the voices of the prophets warned of the impending danger as they spoke under inspiration of the Holy Spirit. **In detail had they outlined the decline and fall that awaited the church if she in any way rejected the continued leadership of the Vicar of Christ.**”

**My Comments:** History repeats itself. The Children of Israel wanted a visible leader and in so doing **rejected** the Son of God.

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6 “But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD.

7 “And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for **they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.**

8 “According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee.” 1 Sam. 8:6-8.

So today, we are rejecting the leadership of the Lord Jesus Christ---in the Spirit of Christ---and accepting the leadership of another person---the Holy Spirit, defined as the third person of the Godhead.

p. 99

“Soon the Roman bishop acquired the title of ‘pope’, or papa (father); and this was followed by the assumption of other titles belonging only to Deity, such as ‘holy father’, ‘**the vicar of Christ**’, etc., and finally, ‘another God on earth’.”

**“In the acceptance of the leadership of the pope of Rome the church turned her back upon her rightful leader, the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, and exalted a man to occupy the usurped throne.**

There was, therefore, nothing left to the Spirit but to withdraw from the organic church and leave her to the course of her own choosing. What a fateful hour was this for the church!”

**My Comments:** What Branson completely ignores is that the most important theological development that happened in the 4<sup>th</sup> century was the establishment of the Doctrine of the Trinity. **The Council of Nicæa in 325**, which focused on the Son of God, and **the Council of Constantinople in 381**, which focused on the Deity of the Holy Ghost.

“At this council no new symbol was framed, but the Nicene Creed, with some unessential changes and an important addition respecting the deity of the Holy Ghost against Macedonianism or Pneumatism, was adopted. In this improved form the Nicene Creed has been received, though in the Greek church without the later Latin addition: *filioque*.”

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“The emperor ratified the decrees of the council, and as early as July, 381, enacted the law that all churches should be given up to bishops who believed in the equal divinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and who stood in church fellowship with certain designated orthodox bishops. The public worship of heretics was forbidden.” *History of the Christian Church* by Philip Schaff, Vol. III, pp. 639 & 640.

My point is that the Doctrine of the Trinity was the single most important doctrine that established the orthodoxy of the Catholic Church in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, so shouldn't that be a red flag to those of us today. The beginning of the Dark Ages began about that time along with the persecution of heretics who would not subscribe to the Doctrines of the Catholic Church, so why would we want to follow suit and reestablish the Doctrine of the Trinity after the founding fathers of the SDA Church rejected it?

p. 109

“Just as there were prophecies of an apostasy, the Bible also abounds with predictions of a final reformation and complete restoration of the truth that will prepare the world for the final harvest. **This is to be accomplished under the restored leadership of the Holy Ghost.**”

**My Comments:** This will only happen under the restored leadership of Christ under His Spirit, NOT some other third person of the Godhead.

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