

M.K. Eckenroth

to

L. E. Froom

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In the summer of 1937 I was conducting my first conference 'Tabernacle' evangelistic campaign in Huntington, Indiana as the conference evangelist for the northern part of the field...

One night, following the preaching of the prophecies of Daniel 7 the Nazarene preacher arose and spoke to me publicly before my audience. He was kind but stated, 'Some of my people are interested in joining the SDA church and so I want to publicly ask you some questions so they will know what they are getting into.' I thought this was fair and a wonderful opportunity. Confidently I said, 'Surely, friend, this is fair. I'll be glad to answer your questions if they are asked in good faith.'

He then held up a copy of a book and asked, 'Is this book published by you people? It is 'Daniel & Revelation' by a certain Uriah Smith.' I answered, 'Yes, sir, it is.' 'Does this book discuss these prophecies substantially as you explained them tonight?' 'Yes, it does. It is a standard work among us.' 'Is this man recognized as one of your leaders?' 'Indeed so. He was one of our finest writers and authors until the time of this death.' 'Then sir, please explain your position on the nature of Christ as stated on page 430, 'But while as the Son he does not possess a co-eternity of past existence with the Father, the beginning of his existence, as the begotten of the Father, antedates the entire work of creation, in relation to which he stands as joint creator with God. John 1:3; Heb. 1:2. Could not the Father ordain that to such a being worship should be rendered equally with himself, without its being idolatry on the part of the worshiper? He has raised him to positions which make it proper that he would be worshiped, and has even commanded that worship should be rendered him, which would not have been necessary had he been equal with the Father in eternity of existence. Christ himself declares that 'as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself.' John 5:26. The Father has 'highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name.' Phil. 2:9. And the Father himself says, 'Let all the angels of God worship him.' Heb. 1:6 These testimonies show that Christ is now an object of worship equally with the Father; but they do not prove that with him he holds an eternity of past existence.'

This was a new challenge. I was totally unprepared. My feeble response was, 'Sir, you must be mistaken. Our Uriah Smith didn't

write that. The book you have in your hand must be of another.' 'But, Mr. Eckenroth, this book is published by the 'Pacific Press of Mt. View, California.' Is that your publishing house?' I was caught on a hook I knew nothing about. I was certain I was tricked. I couldn't believe the statement was authentic. It must be forged!

My final reply was, 'I ask you for 24 hours to investigate this and will publicly discuss it tomorrow night.' He agreed. The meeting closed.

I hurried to my study and pulled from the shelf my trusted copy of Daniel & Revelation, the one we used as a text book in college. I was sure I would show this preacher to be a fraud. Quickly I turned to page 430 confident the statement would not be there. Amazed, bewildered and absolutely dumb-founded I read there the very words the preacher had read! In college we had conveniently skipped the page!

I just couldn't believe it! Crushed, disillusioned and deeply perplexed I finally called Elder S.E. Wight, the president of the conference. At that time he was a man well advanced in years. He was a living link with the most important era of Seventh-day Adventism and I hadn't heard so much about it as even its being mentioned. He invited me to his office the next day. Early in the morning, I arrived and stayed all day.

Patiently he told me of 1888. A date barely mentioned in my class notes. Now the future course of my work was trembling. The campaign was hard. After the people found out I was an Adventist and following the Sabbath question the crowd fell away. I was told this was to be expected. People were opposing us. This also was a sight of progress, I was assured. But his issue was something else. My Lord was central here! What did my church believe? Elder Wight told me the story of 'Desire of Ages' and its marvelous statement 'in Him is life, original, unborrowed, underived.' But I trusted and loved Uriah Smith, what now? I still trust him. I still love him. But I understand him and the issues now.

I hurried back to my tabernacle. The place was packed. Word had gotten around that the Nazarene preacher 'had that young Advent preacher over a barrel.' Everyone was expectant. After the opening exercises I arose to preach. The Nazarene preacher was there. So were his members.

I began by recounting my dismay at the discovery of this statement. I told of my visit to the Conference President's office. I retold what little I could learn of 1888 in one day and read the statements from the Spirit of Prophecy that now had become a firm anchor to my faith that was so severely tested in the crucible of the evangelistic campaign. I then said, 'Rev. sir, you have done me a great service. I am sure this evangelistic campaign will mark the

turning point in my own life too. I long to know more of my Lord and preach Him more completely. This is the mission of my church.'

The minister arose. A hush fell over the audience. Tears flowed freely. He began to speak. 'This is a remarkable statement. I honor you and your church for your stand for Christ. If a whole church can stand for the truth individuals can and if any of my members leave our church for yours I am satisfied they will know Christ as Lord supreme.' The meeting ended! The crowd was impressed. Many of his people were baptized. But I had a long, long view to learn and study.

It was then that I read those amazing statements in the Spirit of Prophecy. But I needed to know more. I requested of the conference that I be granted a study leave at the Seminary that was then in its infancy in Washington. The request was granted. I started to major in Systematic Theology during the professorship of Elder Andreason. My concentration of course was on the Trinity and the Nature of Christ. Then came another jolt.

In my study I read J.H. Waggoner's book on the Atonement and read his denunciations of the Trinity and his Arian-like views on the Nature of Christ. Contrasting this with his son's views, (E.J. Waggoner) the depth of these issues became ever more pronounced. I took the statements to Elder Andreason and asked 'Is it possible that we would ever publish this. Is this really our Waggoner? How do you explain.' In typical cryptic fashion he replied, Yes, it is our Elder Waggoner. Read on. It is for you to explain.'

Elder Arthur White opened up the files, he patiently explained more of 1888. I read, studied and now completely changed in heart and viewpoint I determined never again to preach legalism, work anonymously or try to win by debate. I returned to my field of labor and learned that the Christ-centered approach won more souls, left the field in a kindly spirit toward us and that I could continue much longer in one place by repeat campaigns with increasing success.

In due time I was invited to unite with the Ministerial Association of the General Conference. My warm and precious fellowship with Elder Froom and Anderson has grown dearer with the passing days. I thank God that while yet young I could associate with these men. I confided in them my longing to extend the Cruciform and Christ-centered preaching ministries. Once again a larger vista opened before me. Elder Froom shared with me the burden, vision and longing of Elder Daniels and shared with me the words of Elder W. W. Prescott."