

Truth Uncovered in Trust: Ellen G. White’s Practical Theology of Uncertainty in Conversation with Martin Heidegger on the Trust-Relation of Language in the Garden of Eden

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Abstract

Modern intellectual culture typically equates truth with what can be measured, demonstrated, and rendered certain. Yet both Martin Heidegger and Ellen G. White—despite radically different ultimate theological commitments—philosophically criticize this reduction in ways that illuminate the spiritual stakes of epistemology. Heidegger argues that modern “calculative” reason and the technological drive toward control conceal primordial truth as disclosure (*aletheia*). White insists that the gospel addresses not the intellect alone but the heart, and that distrust of God corrupts knowing at its root. This article develops their parallels through a theology of everyday life: trust and faith in God are not episodic religious feelings but the daily posture in which truth is properly “uncovered.” Illustrating this is White’s interpretation of Genesis 2:16-17, 3:2 (Eve’s addition to God’s command to “neither shall ye touch it”) as a case study in how experimental suspicion in moral-spiritual matters becomes a mechanism of deception that even penetrates the natural world. The same logic also reframes Creationism and the whole primeval history of Genesis 1-11: the creation account does not ask readers to ignore evidence, but to receive the Creator’s Word in trust rather than subjecting it to a posture of suspicion and control.

Introduction: Why “Truth vs. Certainty” Becomes an Everyday Spiritual Issue

In many modern settings, “truth” is tacitly treated as the kind of thing produced by method: observe neutrally, measure carefully, infer

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rigorously, and eliminate uncertainty. In the natural and even social sciences this aspiration can *sometimes* be fruitful, even morally responsible. Yet when the same posture is transferred wholesale into theology and spirituality, it can distort the very realities it seeks to know—because spiritual realities involve the knower’s moral stance, not merely the knower’s cognitive skill.

This is why “uncertainty” is not merely an academic inconvenience. In ordinary life it becomes a spiritual question: Will we live as though God is trustworthy even when we cannot secure certainty on demand? Put differently, is faith a technique for plugging gaps in knowledge (Heb 11:1), or is it a lived orientation—an everyday way of inhabiting reality—through which truth is disclosed as trust is either maintained or abandoned?

The philosophical conflict underlying this spiritual question is far from abstract. It has manifested itself concretely in the broader cultural divide between what C. P. Snow famously called the “two cultures” of the sciences and humanities—a division that has developed over many years and through a wide variety of historical circumstances and whose “crisis” has had longstanding and continuing consequences.¹ The divide between these two cultures is not only an academic affair (although it is *also* an academic one!); it shapes how ordinary believers relate to questions of truth, certainty, and faith. Indeed, religionists themselves have divided as well, with religious modernists favoring the sciences and religious postmodernists favoring the humanities, as they realized the depth and implications of the issues separating the two cultures.² Understanding this broader cultural context helps explain why the demand for mathematical-style certainty in theology is not merely a philosophical error but a symptom of a deeper cultural pathology—one that affects the everyday spiritual life of believers on both sides of the divide.

¹ Charles P. Snow, *The Two Cultures* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998); as discussed in Michael F. Younker, “The Theological Significance of the Relations of Freedom and Time in the Sciences and Humanities: An Evaluation of the Contributions of David Bohm and Pauli Pylkkö” (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 2019), 5–6.

² Younker, “Theological Significance of Freedom and Time,” 117. For further discussion of how these divisions manifest within Christian eschatology and socio-political life, see Michael F. Younker, “Adventist Eschatology in Relation to the Religious Left and the Religious Right,” in *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 23, no. 2 (2012): 190–242; and Younker, “The American Socio-Political Spider Web and the Rise of Global Christianity,” in *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 25, no. 1 (2014): 132–188.

This article advances its argument in six steps. Section 1 examines how the modern prestige of measurement has produced a cultural demand for control that quietly reshapes theological method. Section 2 turns to Heidegger's diagnosis of mathematical certainty as "non-binding" and his retrieval of truth as *aletheia*—unconcealment. Section 3 sets Ellen White's account of "heart-knowing" alongside Heidegger's critique, demonstrating an unexpected convergence between secular phenomenology and practical theology. Section 4 evaluates competing theories of truth and argues that the deepest threat to faith arises not from atheism but from the unwitting adoption of a "methodologicalism" that treats God's Word as an object to be mastered. Section 5 develops the practical climax through a close reading of Genesis 2–3, where Eve's overstatement and her experimental probing of God's command illustrate how distrust functions epistemically to conceal the very truth it seeks to verify; it then extends that logic across Genesis 1–11 to show that Creationism, at its best, is not a program for mastering origins but a posture of trusting the Creator who speaks. Section 6 traces the same pathology into ecclesiastical and institutional life, where "form and machinery" displace vital experience and truth itself becomes a tool of manipulation. The Conclusion gathers these threads into a constructive proposal: that trust in God belongs to ordinary life as the very posture in which truth is uncovered.

1. Certainty, Measurement, and the Modern Demand for Control

1.1. The prestige of measurement (and its temptation)

The modern period often treats measurement as the gold standard of knowing. A frequently invoked emblem of this outlook is Lord Kelvin's dictum linking knowledge to quantification—commonly paraphrased as the claim that when you can measure and express something in numbers, you "know" it; otherwise knowledge is "meager."³ The point here is not to criticize quantification (which is indispensable in many domains), but to note the cultural spillover: what cannot be measured is easily treated as less real.

Kelvin's statement captures the modern ideal of certainty with unusual clarity:

³ For the dictum's emblematic use in discussions of measurement and objectivity, see Julian Reiss, "Scientific Objectivity," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2014), sec. 4.1.

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In physical science a first essential step in the direction of learning any subject is to find principles of numerical reckoning and practicable methods for measuring some quality connected with it. I often say that when you can measure what you are speaking about and express it in numbers, you know something about it; but when you cannot measure it, when you cannot express it in numbers, your knowledge is of [a] meager and unsatisfactory kind; it may be the beginning of knowledge but you have scarcely, in your thought, advanced to the state of science, whatever the matter may be.⁴

That spillover becomes spiritually consequential when applied to faith. If the heart is trained to demand the kind of certainty produced by measurement, then trust in God is quietly reframed as inferior knowing—at best private preference, at worst self-deception.

As argued elsewhere, this was not merely a cultural spillover but a deep philosophical commitment. Kelvin quipped that “mathematics” was “the only good metaphysics,” expressing what became, through the anti-metaphysical period of the twentieth century, the dominant assumption: that metaphysics refers most properly to that which is “after,” “beyond,” or “not” “physics”—and that only mathematics can legitimately fill this role.⁵ The consequences of this assumption have been far-reaching for the study of *physics* itself, becoming a *proto-physical* presupposition, so to speak. But, more than this, as Philip Regal has observed, “when a complex subject matter is reduced to numbers and structure, we have not necessarily made it scientific, though that is where the quest for scientific respectability has sent some disciplines.” Regal adds that “it can be that a discipline is actually heading off into a mediocre or even sterile direction by reducing its subject matter largely to items that can be quantified, schematized, or experimented with easily.”⁶ The pressure to quantify has thus reshaped not only the sciences but theology and *theological method* itself, tempting believers to reduce the rich, morally demanding encounter with God’s Word into something that can be managed, predicted, and controlled, through tools such as the ‘historical-critical’ or ‘historical-grammatical’ method, which is often treated as the linguistic equivalent of

⁴ William Thomson (Lord Kelvin), “Electrical Units of Measurement,” in *Popular Lectures and Addresses*, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1889), 73–74.

⁵ E. T. Bell, *Men of Mathematics* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2014), xvii.

⁶ Philip J. Regal, *The Anatomy of Judgement* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 308.

mathematics for the humanities-oriented subject matters of history and linguistics.⁷

1.2. Determinism mourned: Bellman and the unease of scientific uncertainty

As twentieth-century science increasingly embraced probabilistic descriptions of nature owing to advances into the quantum realm, some thinkers lamented the loss of a “serene” deterministic picture built upon Newtonian mathematics. One oft-cited expression of this unease appears in Richard Bellman’s admission that scientific life would no longer feel as “satisfying and serene” as in the era when determinism “reigned supreme.” The longing is understandable: determinism can feel like epistemic security.

Bellman’s lament is striking:

It must, in all justice, be admitted that never again will scientific life be as satisfying and serene as in days when determinism reigned supreme. In partial recompense for the tears we must shed and the toil we must

⁷ As I have argued, “both the historical-grammatical and historical-critical methodologies appeal to an identical ‘scientific’ method, as does scientific methodological naturalism” (Yunker, “Theological Significance of Freedom and Time,” 128). The popular “historical-grammatical” approach to biblical hermeneutics is, in practice, conditioned by scientific—and hence mathematical, Platonic, and timeless—presuppositions; specifically, it operates under certain scientific presuppositions about the ontology of language, such that “language is also scientized” (ibid., 129 n. 373). As David Paul Parris has observed, “during the Enlightenment, with the rise of the modern scientific method and its claims to objectivity by means of repeatable methodology, the humanities came under increasing pressure in the universities. How could fields like theology, history, or music validate their truth claims? One of the solutions put forward and widely accepted was that by emulating the sciences the humanities could employ some form of methodology so that they too could make objective truth claims.” In biblical studies, this “filtered down to us in various forms of the historical-grammatical method.” Parris notes that “the Platonic ideal that a text . . . possesses one, timeless, unchanging meaning stands behind this method’s goal to recover the author’s intentions. It is a static conceptualization of meaning” (Parris, *Reading the Bible with the Giants* [Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015], 91–92). See also R. Daniel Shaw and Charles E. Van Engen, who observe that through such a method, biblical “inerrantists” have tried “to [scientifically] prove the validity and truthfulness of the Bible based on certain scientific, historical, grammatical, demonstrable, and rationalist categories” (Shaw and Van Engen, *Communicating God’s Word in a Complex World* [New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003], 35). Cf. Tiago Arrais, “The Influence of Macro-Hermeneutical Assumptions Upon Biblical Interpretation,” in *Scripture and Philosophy*, eds. Tiago Arrais, Kenneth Bergland, and Michael F. Yunker (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 2016), 295–319.

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endure is the satisfaction of knowing that we are treating significant problems in a more realistic and productive fashion.⁸

Yet the spiritual danger emerges when religious people adopt a parallel longing in theology—seeking an invulnerable certainty not only about God’s character (which Scripture invites) but also about every contested detail, such that faith becomes psychologically dependent on total cognitive closure. The result can be brittle belief and an anxious relationship to both science and Scripture. Yet, as will be shown below, Bellman’s admonition that a lack of verifiable certainty may accompany a more realistic and productive spirituality may also take us closer to ‘truth.’

The present author’s earlier research illuminates the deeper roots of this anxiety. The conflict between determinism and indeterminism in nature is not merely a scientific question; it is one of the most enduring and fundamental philosophical and theological problems. The concepts of freedom and time underlay all other philosophical and theological questions, and the dispute over whether nature is ultimately deterministic or free has generated a widespread implicit contradiction in many academic disciplines, the consequences of which are just now beginning to reach an explicit or critical stage throughout societies at large.⁹ This means that the longing for deterministic and objective certainty in theology or theological *method* is not an isolated phenomenon but part of a much larger cultural crisis—one that touches everything from quantum physics to political theory, and whose resolution requires not merely more data but a fundamental reorientation of the heart’s posture toward truth.¹⁰

1.3. Conservative reactions: probability-free hopes

It is worth emphasizing how the crisis impacts theologians and Christian philosophers of science. A telling illustration of the epistemic desire for ‘control’ over truth appears in the hope—expressed by many ‘conservative’ Christian philosophers—for a “probability-free”

⁸ Richard Bellman, *Adaptive Control Processes: A Guided Tour* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 129–130.

⁹ Younker, “Theological Significance of Freedom and Time,” Abstract, 1; and 52–53. See also Michael F. Younker, “A Dialogue Between Contemporary Perspectives and Ellen White on Divine Action and Quantum Physics,” in *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 23, no. 1 (2012): 120–154, for an earlier treatment of the relationship between quantum indeterminism, divine action, and Ellen White’s theology.

¹⁰ See also, Kenneth Bergland, “Reading as a Disclosure of the Thoughts of the Heart: Proto-Halakhic Reuse and Appropriation between Torah and the Prophets” (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 2018), 432–463.

interpretation of quantum mechanics. Among such Christians, for example, Lydia Jaeger has clearly expressed a desire for such an outcome.¹¹ Regardless of whether this hope is scientifically plausible, it reveals a spiritual-epistemic pattern: the recoil from uncertainty itself, as though uncertainty were always an enemy rather than sometimes the condition of humility and a cooperating partner of freedom.¹²

¹¹ Lydia Jaeger, *What the Heavens Declare: Science in the Light of Creation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 59, 77.

¹² It should be noted that several thinkers working from Heideggerian and post-phenomenological perspectives regard the hope for a probability-free physics as not merely premature but philosophically misguided. Michael Eldred argues that even “with observational indeterminacy . . . modern mathematical physics has come up against an (unbeknownst to it: temporontological) obstacle in its striving to govern motions of all kinds by mathematically formulated laws and has had to retreat from totally precalculable determinacy to probabilistic precalculability, which is still quantifiable and calculable. This is still removed, however, from the insight that movements can have wholly unforeseen outcomes or that they can be free” (Michael Eldred, *The Digital Cast of Being: Metaphysics, Mathematics, Cartesianism, Cybernetics, Capitalism, Communication* [Lancaster, UK: Gazelle Books, 2009], 146). Eldred concludes that “the break with the scientific conception of time as a one-dimensional variable, *t*, that ties time to a real instant must be made to see quantum superposition properly, but at the price of sacrificing the causal-determinist time-evolution of a quantum wave-function provided by the Schrödinger equation. Time itself must be conceived as three dimensional” (ibid., 162). Pauli Pylkkö presses further, arguing that “the status of the quantum formalism as a macrophysical entity is fictional, and, therefore, there is not much point to insist that the Schrödinger equation and other related formalisms provide realistic descriptions of some microphysical processes” (Pauli Pylkkö, *The Aconceptual Mind: Heideggerian Themes in Holistic Naturalism* [Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1998], 104). Pylkkö’s interest in the sciences is unmatched amongst contemporary Heideggerian philosophers today (Yunker, “Theological Significance of Freedom and Time,” 355), and his view that “bald randomness [is] at the very ground of existence” (Gordon G. Globus, *Quantum Closures and Disclosures*, 108) directly contradicts the mathematical hope that probability can be eliminated from nature. Trish Glazebrook arrives at a complementary conclusion from a different angle, arguing that “mathematical descriptions of physical reality fail, as apparent from the paradoxical results they engender” (Trish Glazebrook, “Zeno Against Mathematical Physics,” in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62, no. 2 [2001]: 209). The deeper implication, as I argued in Yunker, “Theological Significance of Freedom and Time,” 393, is that the concepts of “depth” and “flesh” introduced by Maurice Merleau-Ponty may point most directly to the major philosophical development and train of thought that is pertinent here, building on the Heideggerian insight that science has “inner limits” it cannot penetrate. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that the desire for a probability-free physics is itself a symptom of the ontotheological demand for “secure possession” that this article critiques. As society advances deeper into the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI), one can only ponder the new ways the tension between the sciences and humanities will both paradoxically increase and decrease.

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Jaeger's position is that although "quantum mechanics introduced the idea of *chance* at the most basic level of our physical theories," "nonetheless, quantum probabilities can still be described by strict mathematical formulae. Quantum theory has not left us in a disturbing world of fairy tales, where anything can happen." Jaeger advocates what amounts to a "mathematicalism," believing that a deep mathematical "description of Cosmic Order" remains possible.¹³ However, this creates a hard dualism, of sorts, between the heart and nature, one that inadvertently reinforces the very split between the sciences and the humanities that lies at the root of the modern epistemological crisis.¹⁴ Her approach, while theologically and sincerely motivated, effectively concedes to the scientific culture's demand that reality be fully describable in mathematical terms—leaving the "heart" side of faith without philosophical grounding in the structure of any 'physical' reality itself. The spiritual cost is subtle but significant: if nature is exhaustively mathematical, then whatever escapes mathematical description—including the trust-relation between creature and Creator—is implicitly demoted to a secondary or subjective status epistemically. That is to say, what, exactly, would it mean if our trust in God depended upon the mediation of a perfectly objective Creation rather than our conversations with God, the Person, even in the unfallen world? The study will explore this question later. First, however, it must address the philosophical reaction that arose precisely against the modern demand for certainty just surveyed: the postmodern critique—and most especially Heidegger's diagnosis—of how the drive for total cognitive control transforms truth itself into an instrument of domination.

2. Postmodern Critique and Heidegger's Diagnosis: When Certainty Becomes Domination

2.1 The Enlightenment and the road to nihilism

Where modern determinism sought certainty, postmodernity often sought liberation from certainty—especially liberation from the social power that certainty can 'accidentally' or incidentally enable—whether we are conscious of it or not, whether we are correct or not, *coercion* occurs

¹³ Lydia Jaeger, *What the Heavens Declare*, 59, 77; and Lydia Jaeger, "Cosmic Order and Divine Word," in *Spiritual Information*, ed. Charles L. Harper, Jr. (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2005), 151. Cf. Younker, "A Dialogue Between Contemporary Perspectives and Ellen White on Divine Action and Quantum Physics," 120–154.

¹⁴ Younker, "Theological Significance of Freedom and Time," 139.

most often when people claim their actions are necessary because of their own epistemic certitude (“convictions”). In Martin Heidegger’s case, the Enlightenment’s self-portrait as human emancipation is recast as another step toward modern “nihilism,” insofar as it became dominated by “mathematical natural science” and “rational thinking.”¹⁵ Michael Zimmerman summarizes Heidegger’s worry: rational-scientific frameworks can become instruments of control—and can even control their users by silently delimiting what counts as thinkable.¹⁶

Heidegger himself stated the danger with characteristic vividness. He claimed that the “fundamental trait” of modern metaphysics is that it is “determined by the fact that the entirety of the traditional problematic comes under the aspect of a new science, which is represented by mathematical natural science.” He then connects this explicitly with theology: “if metaphysics asks concerning the first causes, concerning the most general and highest meaning of beings, in short concerning what is highest, ultimate, and supreme, then this kind of knowing must be commensurate with what is asked about. Yet that means: it must itself be absolutely certain.”¹⁷ Heidegger went so far as to claim that the application of mathematics to nature, via technology, “rages about in the ‘world’ today like an unshackled beast,” and warned that if the call toward genuine ontological reflection is not heeded, “the rule of metaphysics [as ontotheology] may rather entrench itself, in the shape of modern technology with its developments rushing along boundlessly.”¹⁸ Heidegger’s rhetoric is extreme, but the underlying concern is precisely the one this article addresses: when the demand for mathematical certainty colonizes every domain of knowing, spiritual realities are either forced into an alien mold or dismissed as unreal. Indeed, late in his career Heidegger pressed this concern to its logical terminus: if a universal mathematical formula for all motion were ever discovered, it would mean

¹⁵ Michael E. Zimmerman, *Heidegger’s Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, and Art* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 178–180.

¹⁶ Zimmerman, *Heidegger’s Confrontation with Modernity*, 178–180.

¹⁷ Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 54.

¹⁸ Martin Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, trans. Michael Heim (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 215; and Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 72.

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“the end of physics”—and with it, the transformation of the human being into just another technological object to be produced according to a plan.¹⁹

This diagnosis resonates with a theological concern: if ‘truth’ is treated as absolute possession, the psychological temptation to control others ‘under that knowledge’ becomes severe. The danger is not only error, but spiritual deformation—pride, coercion, and an inability to receive truth as a gift.

2.2 “2 times 2 is 4”: the model of “secure possession”

Heidegger’s critique of traditional philosophy (and by implication, theology) targets the desire for an “ultimate” knowledge that everyone can hold in “secure possession,” modeled on mathematical certainty (“2 times 2 is 4”).²⁰ The critique is not that mathematics is false, but that modernity subtly treats mathematical-style certainty as the paradigm of all genuine knowing. When that happens, moral-spiritual realities—where the knower’s posture is part of the matter—are forced into the wrong mold. It is making a square peg fit in a round hole.

Heidegger’s point can be stated in his own idiom:

[Traditional, i.e., Greek] Philosophy is something ultimate, extreme. This is precisely something everyone must have and be able to have in their secure possession. As what is supreme, it must, after all, also be what is most sure—this is clear to everyone. It must be what is most certain. What everyone understands without any strenuous human effort must have supreme certainty. And behold—what is accessible to everyone straightaway like 2 times 2 is 4 is something we know in its

¹⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Four Seminars*, trans. Andrew Mitchell and François Raffoul (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 55. Heidegger was recounted to observe: “Actually, modern experimental physics constantly searches for the laws of motion, just as Aristotle had. This would be the meaning of the fundamental universal formula, insofar as all the possibilities of movement in their infinite variety could be deduced. Heidegger now asks what the discovery of this formula would mean for physics. The answer runs: the end of physics. Such an end would entirely alter the human situation.” He continued: “Here, more disturbing than the conquest of space, there appears the transformation of biology into biophysics. This means that the human can be produced according to a definite plan just like any other technological object. In this context, nothing is more natural than to ask whether science will be able to stop in time. Such a stop is nevertheless fundamentally impossible.” See the discussion in Younker, “Theological Significance of Freedom and Time,” 114, n. 333, 355–356.

²⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected “Problems” of “Logic,”* trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 16.

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extreme and developed form as mathematical knowledge. It is, after all, as everyone likewise knows, the highest, most rigorous, and most certain knowledge.²¹

What this line of research makes clear is that Heidegger saw this elevation of mathematical certainty as generating an endless cycle of philosophical “catastrophes.” As Heidegger put it, “if it is as clear as day that philosophical truth is absolutely certain truth, why does precisely this endeavor on the part of philosophy never succeed? Regarding this endeavor concerning absolute truth and certainty, do we not instead throughout the history of philosophy constantly see one catastrophe after another? Thinkers such as Aristotle, Descartes, Leibniz, and Hegel have to put up with being refuted by a doctoral candidate.”²² The irony is cutting: the very demand for invulnerable certainty produces, not security, but an unending succession of overthrows—because reality (especially moral-spiritual reality) is not the kind of thing that can be held in “secure possession” like a mathematical formula. This observation has direct bearing on theological method: when theologians model their work on the mathematical ideal, they set themselves up for the same cycle of catastrophe—each new generation “refuting” the last, not because truth has changed but because the wrong standard of certainty was being applied.

2.3. Truth as more than “true statements”: personhood and disclosure

In this framework, the contrast between “true things” and “truth” becomes crucial. Heidegger resists the elevation of mathematical certainty to the measure of “truth” as such, because mathematical knowledge can be (in a moral-spiritual sense) “non-binding.” He draws a sharp contrast between mathematical certainty and the richer “binding” character of what he considers true (temporally/ontologically grounded) philosophical knowing:

What does it mean to uphold mathematical knowledge as the measure of knowledge and as the ideal of truth for philosophy? It means nothing less than making that knowledge which is absolutely non-binding and emptiest in content into the measure for that knowledge which is the most

²¹ Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, 16.

²² Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, 16.

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binding and richest in itself, i.e., that knowledge which deals with the whole [of reality]²³

[A]lthough it objectively comprises a great wealth, mathematical knowledge is in itself, in terms of its content, the emptiest knowledge imaginable, and as such is at the same time the least binding for man. . . . Mathematical knowledge does not necessarily need to be borne by the inner substance of man. Such a situation is impossible in principle for philosophy. . . . This emptiest and at the same time least binding knowledge as regards human substance—mathematical knowledge—cannot become the measure of the richest and most binding knowledge imaginable: philosophical knowledge.²⁴

This maps closely onto Heidegger's retrieval of truth as *aletheia*—unconcealment rather than merely propositional correctness.²⁵ It also prepares the way for a Christian claim that Heidegger cannot supply from within his own system, although he does acknowledge its possibility: ultimate truth is not merely disclosure but disclosure grounded in the character of the personal God who speaks.

A closer analysis of Heidegger's relationship to science further illuminates this point. As Trish Glazebrook argues persuasively, Heidegger was very much a philosopher of science, and "what are taken to be Heidegger's many and significant contributions to philosophy—that is, his overcoming of metaphysics, his rereading of the ancients, his critique of technology and representational thinking, his vision and revision of language, truth and thinking—have at their core an inquiry into science that drove his thinking for sixty years."²⁶ This means that Heidegger's critique of mathematical certainty as "non-binding" is not the complaint of a thinker ignorant of science but of one deeply engaged with its philosophical foundations. Richard Polt has noted that "Heidegger is not a radical relativist who would say that Einstein's theories are on par with astrology. Einstein's theories are true: that is, they do unconceal things, and much more so than astrology." Yet, Polt adds, "this unconcealment is made possible for us by a historical context which, like

²³ Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, 16.

²⁴ Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, 16–17.

²⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2010), 31–32; and Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth," in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 136–154.

²⁶ Trish Glazebrook, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Science* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2000), 12–13.

all historical contexts, is limited and is open to innovation.”²⁷ In other words, scientific truths are genuine partial disclosures of reality, but they do not exhaust what truth is, even in nature—and the demand that they do so actually further conceals or buries the deeper, more “binding” truths that require moral engagement from the knower.

2.4. The “god of philosophy” and the limits of conceptual mastery

Heidegger’s later warning can be stated with explicit religious force: “the god of [mathematical Greek] philosophy” is not the God before whom one prays, sacrifices, kneels, sings, and dances:

For [with] the god of philosophy. . . man can neither pray nor sacrifice to this god. . . man can neither fall to his knees in awe nor can he play music and dance before this god. . . The god-less thinking which must abandon the god of philosophy. . . is thus perhaps closer to the divine God.²⁸

Read theologically, this is not a recommendation to abandon God, but a warning against mistaking conceptual possession for worshipful knowledge—against turning “God” (or the Bible) into an object that guarantees cognitive *control*.

Heidegger’s concern is with what he calls the “ontotheological condition” of Western metaphysics—the tendency, stretching from the Greeks through medieval theology to modernity, to treat God as the most fundamental ontic piece in the metaphysical puzzle, the ground upon which everything else depended, in a manner reminiscent of the role of mathematics for everything. In such a picture, the freedom of Being, even the human being, necessarily becomes an afterthought or cumbersome addition, ontologically obliterated or emasculated in such a way as to correspond to the metaphysical structure.²⁹ Heidegger’s full statement deserves to be read carefully: “The god-less thinking which must abandon the god of philosophy, god as *causa sui*, is thus perhaps closer to the divine

²⁷ Richard Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999), 125.

²⁸ Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 72.

²⁹ As I discuss further in Younker, “Theological Significance of Freedom and Time,” 314–315. See also Younker, “From Metaphysics to Templephysics: Situating the Significance of Fernando Canale’s Contributions for the ‘Christian Philosopher,’” in *Scripture and Philosophy: Essays Honoring the Work and Vision of Fernando Luis Canale*, eds. Tiago Arrais, Kenneth Bergland, and Michael F. Younker (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 2016), 194–259, for a fuller treatment of the ontotheological problem in relation to Christian philosophical theology.

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God. Here this means only: god-less thinking is more open to Him than onto-theo-logic would like to admit.”³⁰ The implications are profound for everyday faith: the God who is worshipped—prayed to, sung before, danced before—is not the static, timeless abstraction of philosophical theology or its projection on to nature (what we often call ‘science’) but the living, personal God who addresses the heart and calls for trust. When theology reduces God to an object of “secure possession,” it has already lost contact with the God of Scripture.

What follows is one of the more striking convergences in twentieth-century thought. Heidegger’s concerns are parallel in remarkable ways to Ellen White’s, despite the fact that the two writers shared no intellectual context, no confessional commitments, and no possibility of mutual influence. Heidegger was a German philosopher trained in Catholic scholasticism who developed a phenomenological ontology aimed at recovering the question of Being from the wreckage of Western metaphysics. White was an American Christian writer with limited formal education whose theological vision emerged from devotional engagement with Scripture and a sustained sense of prophetic calling. That two writers separated by such an immense intellectual and spiritual distance should converge on the same diagnosis—that the modern over-mathematization of knowing has hollowed out truth from within—is itself a datum requiring explanation. Heidegger, on his own terms, was attempting to expose or *unconceal* within secular philosophy what theologians usually call the “heart.” What he could only gesture toward as a structural lacuna in the Western tradition, White names directly as the moral-spiritual reality the gospel addresses.

3. Ellen White’s “Heart-Knowing”: Theology as the Concerns of Practical Life

3.1. The gospel is not addressed to intellect alone

Ellen White writes that the gospel “does not address the understanding alone,” contrasting it with “mathematical formulas” that relate to the intellect alone; rather, the gospel’s “aim is the heart” and addresses “our moral nature.”³¹ Her statement is worth quoting in full:

³⁰ Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 72.

³¹ Ellen G. White, Manuscript 69, 1897, par. 1, in *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 12 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), 164.1.

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“We are not creatures devoid of moral nature. The gospel does not address the understanding alone. If it did, we might approach it as we approach the study of a book dealing with mathematical formulas, which relate to the intellect alone. . . . [Rather, the gospel’s] aim is the heart. It addresses our moral nature.”³²

This is not anti-intellectualism. It is a claim about the particular kind of subject/object under discussion and the nature of its reality: when the matter at hand is reconciliation to God, repentance, trust, and holiness, the knowing required is inseparable from moral transformation which occurs within oneself, not merely externally.

The full force of White’s contrast is again seen when placed alongside a related statement she made in 1897:

Were the men for whom Christ has died devoid of moral nature, or were the gospel to be submitted to the understanding, to be decided by the intellect alone, men might approach it as they approach a mathematical problem. But this is not the case. The great truths of salvation are to be planted in the heart. The science of redemption is as high as heaven, and its value is infinite.³³

As can be clearly seen, White’s views directly express and illustrate a tacit awareness of the ‘two cultures’ phenomenon within Christianity itself, and sympathize directly with Heidegger’s concerns arrived at, ironically, through secular reason alone.³⁴ She recognized, long before the academic formalization of the science-humanities divide observed by Snow and Heidegger, that reducing the gospel to an intellectual problem amenable to mathematical treatment would destroy its transformative power. Her additional observation—that “while logic may fail to move, and argument be powerless to convince, the love of Christ, revealed in personal ministry, may soften the stony heart, so that the seed of truth can take root”³⁵—underscores that the “binding” character of spiritual truth (to borrow Heidegger’s term) is not merely cognitive but relational and moral.

Here the parallel to Heidegger is structural: both resist the reduction of truth to detached cognition. But White goes further: the heart is not

³² Ellen G. White, Letter 5, 1898, par. 6; and Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1900), 57.

³³ Ellen G. White, Manuscript 69, 1897.

³⁴ Younker, “Theological Significance of Freedom and Time,” 56.

³⁵ White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 57.

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merely “philosophically” or “ontologically” deep; it is morally unreliable. Jeremiah’s diagnosis is blunt:

The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it? (Jer. 17:9).

Therefore, “heart-knowledge” requires divine grace, not merely authenticity, as some in the humanities/post-modern circles advocate.

3.2. Faith “above what men call science”

White also describes faith as “above what men call science,” even calling it “the science of eternal realities,” while warning that human science is “often deceptive and misleading.”³⁶ The point is not to disparage empirical inquiry *per se*; rather, it is to insist that the conditions of spiritual truth include trust in God’s self-revelation, and that a ‘scientific’ method alone cannot generate that necessary trust:

Faith in Christ is not the work of nature, but the work of God on human minds, wrought in the very soul by the Holy Spirit, who reveals Christ, as Christ revealed the Father. Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. With its justifying, sanctifying power, it is above what men call science. It is the science of eternal realities. Human science is often deceptive and misleading, but this heavenly science never misleads. It is so simple that a child may understand it, and yet the most learned men cannot explain it. It is inexplorable and immeasurable, beyond all human expression.³⁷

This is where the practical thesis of this article becomes explicit: trust and faith in God belong to everyday life as the posture in which reality is rightly apprehended. Without that posture, the self can become clever but untruthful.³⁸

³⁶ Ellen G. White, Manuscript 44, 1904, par. 4 (published in *Our High Calling*, 117.2, and *In Heavenly Places*, 51.4).

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ White’s illustration of the brazen serpent powerfully reinforces this point. Commenting on the Israelites’ “continual distrust” of God in the wilderness, she describes God’s remedy for the serpents’ fiery sting: a brass serpent raised on a pole, to which the bitten must simply look in order to be healed. White observes: “It was not chance that preserved the children of Israel, but a living power from God. God in His wisdom planned this matter. There was no virtue in the serpent. All the virtue was in the divine wisdom that appointed the remedy. There was no need of a natural connection between the disease and the remedy. It was a supernatural remedy, something beyond their reasoning and

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A complementary passage deserves attention here, one in which White addresses the relationship between nature and Scripture with striking directness. She writes: “Science is too limited to comprehend the atonement; the mysterious and wonderful plan of redemption is so far-reaching that philosophy cannot explain it; it will ever remain a mystery that the most profound reason cannot fathom. If it could be explained by finite wisdom, it would lose its sacredness and dignity.”³⁹ She also observed that “many illustrations from nature are used by the Bible writers, and as we observe the things of the natural world, we shall be enabled, under the guiding of the Holy Spirit, more fully to understand the lessons of God’s Word. It is thus that nature becomes a key to the treasure house of the word.”⁴⁰ The relationship between nature and Scripture is thus neither adversarial nor merely complementary—they are intertwined, provided the knower approaches both with a posture of trust rather than suspicion. White’s point anticipates, in practical terms, the philosophical insight that the two cultures of the sciences and humanities need not be enemies of faith—but they become so when either is absolutized at the expense of the other. That is to say, any form of polarized compartmentalization, where each is seen as separate and not intimately connected, such as suggested by Stephen J. Gould’s popularized “non-overlapping magisteria,”⁴¹ is not helpful. But the rejection of

comprehensive powers. Learned doctors or the greatest reasoners could not understand the philosophy of it, nor is it God’s plan that those who talk of higher education shall approve of the plan of His work.” The remedy demanded not comprehension but obedience: “The raising of the brazen serpent put the way of salvation in such a clear light that they understood that they were to be obedient to God’s Word, and trust in Him, without worrying or murmuring. This would bring the reward of faith.” White then connects this directly to Christ: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:14–15). See Ellen G. White, Manuscript 155, 1898, “The Brazen Serpent,” pars. 1–5.

³⁹ Ellen G. White, “Man’s Obligation to God,” *Signs of the Times*, April 3, 1884; and Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4 (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1884), 345–346.

⁴⁰ Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1903), 120.

⁴¹ Stephen Jay Gould’s well-known proposal of “non-overlapping magisteria” (NOMA)—assigning science the domain of empirical facts and religion the domain of moral values and ultimate meaning—has been widely embraced as a pragmatic truce between science and religion. See Stephen Jay Gould, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (New York, NY: Ballantine, 1999), 5–6. Yet this division fails on multiple levels. First, Gould’s overture of ‘friendship’ toward religion comes at a price: it requires religionists to accept, often unconsciously, the central tenet of the scientific

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compartmentalization raises a deeper question: if Scripture and nature are intimately related rather than partitioned into separate magisteria, what theory of truth governs that relationship? The answer is consequential, for whether one approaches Scripture and nature as objects of correspondence-style verification or as participatory disclosures determines, in advance, what counts as knowing them rightly.

4. Science, Scripture, and Competing Theories of Truth

4.1. Scientific realism, “correspondence,” and biblical metaphor

Many scientists function as realists and assume a correspondence view of truth: statements match the world perfectly and completely.⁴² Theologically, the worry is not that correspondence is useless, but that it becomes exclusive—flattening the layered ways Scripture communicates (poetry, metaphor, typology, analogy). When Scripture compares God to a “lamb” or speaks of “light,” the question is not merely what object the term denotes in physics, but what spiritual reality is being disclosed through creaturely and historically contextualized language and the natural world.⁴³

J. P. Moreland, among others, helpfully notes that multiple theories of truth exist and that the scientific method is not suitable for all of them.⁴⁴ He summarizes scientism as the claim that science is the paradigm of truth and rationality, and that whatever is not “amenable to scientific methodology” is neither true nor rational—before reminding us that

worldview—that ‘supernatural explanations and concepts’ have no place at the table of science—thereby cementing a permanent dualism between the two domains. Second, the appearance of non-overlap merely ‘kicks the can down the road’ until developments in both the sciences and the religious humanities again force a conflict, particularly in explicitly overlapping areas such as protology and eschatology, where questions of freedom and time cannot be neatly quarantined to one magisterium or the other. Third, and most fundamentally, the division presupposes that science and religion operate with genuinely different methods, when in fact both the “historical-grammatical” method, favored by conservative theologians, and the “historical-critical” method, favored by progressive scholars, appeal to an identical scientific methodology, differing only in their objects of study, presuppositions, and conclusions. Religionists who accept Gould’s truce thus unwittingly leave open the conflation of methodological naturalism with ontological naturalism, while ignoring the scientistic methodologicalism already operative within much of theology itself. See the fuller discussion in Younker, “Theological Significance of Freedom and Time,” 119–132.

⁴² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 31–32.

⁴³ Job 26:14; 28:12.

⁴⁴ J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 307–367.

science itself rests on philosophical assumptions (about logic, epistemology, and truth) that are conceptually prior to science.⁴⁵ This is an important point, and as far as it goes, it is correct. Yet it must be observed that Moreland and his frequent collaborator William Lane Craig, despite their valuable critique of scientism, continue to operate within a broadly Platonic metaphysical framework—one that preserves the very mathematized, timeless, ontological structure that Heidegger identifies as the heart of the ontotheological problem. Craig, for instance, in his treatment of physics and cosmology, consistently favors what can only be described as an abstract Platonic but still mathematized reasoning, and Moreland's substance dualism maintains the Platonic/Kantian dualism between mind and nature that leaves the heart side of knowing philosophically ungrounded in the structure of reality itself.⁴⁶ Their critique of scientism is thus necessary but insufficient: it identifies the disease at the cultural level while leaving the deeper philosophical infection—the Platonic-mathematical framing of all genuine knowledge—untreated within the theological system itself.

John Haught similarly argues that the enemy of religion is often not science but “scientism”—the belief (not itself scientifically demonstrable) that science is the only appropriate way of knowing. In his wording:⁴⁷

It may not be science but scientism that is the enemy of religion. The implicit conflation of science with scientism, they [harmonizers] will argue, is what lies at the root of most modern opposition by scientists to religion. Without usually being aware of it, scientific skeptics have uncritically fused the scientific method with scientism, a belief system

⁴⁵ Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 307–367.

⁴⁶ As I have argued, Moreland and Craig's critique of scientistic naturalism, while useful, does not escape the deeper problem: Craig's own philosophical framework advocates an abstract Platonic but still mathematized reasoning that preserves the ontotheological structure Heidegger critiques. See Younker, “Theological Significance of Freedom and Time,” 228; and cf. J. P. Moreland, “A Defense of a Substance Dualist View of the Soul,” in *Christian Perspectives on Being Human*, eds. J. P. Moreland and David M. Cioocchi (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993), 55–79, which maintains the Platonic/Kantian dualism at issue. For my earlier critique of the Platonic-mathematical metaphysical framework operative in much Christian philosophical theology, see Younker, “From Metaphysics to Templephysics,” 208–230.

⁴⁷ John F. Haught, *Science and Religion: From Conflict to Conversation* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1995), 17.

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that assumes, without any scientific demonstration, that science is the only appropriate way of looking at things. . . .⁴⁸

And so it is little wonder that they quite ingenuously conclude that science opposes religion. [This]. . . method of contrast, however, prohibits the conflation of scientific method with any belief system, be it religious or secular, since sooner or later such a facile sort of union leads to unnecessary conflict.⁴⁹

Haught's distinction is valuable, and its implications have been explored elsewhere at length. Notably, what Haught's position clearly suggests is that methodologically, agnostic naturalism and biblical naturalism (and also theology!) should not really be any different operationally and even conceptually. It is only their presuppositions and conclusions, which affect their choice of content from the available scientific, biblical, historical, and archaeological data, that are sometimes radically different.⁵⁰ However, a subtle but important disagreement must be registered with the trajectory of Haught's argument. And that would be that his harmonizing intentions historically have and will inevitably fail. The reason is that religionists may be attuned to complaining about *methodological naturalism* as it is used by openly antagonistic atheists, but most of them don't complain about scientific *methodologicalism* and its limits. In this, they leave open unconsciously the possible conflation of methodological naturalism with *ontological naturalism*, while ignoring the scientific or *scientistic* methodologicalism already operative in much of religion and theology.⁵¹

By "methodologicalism" is meant the assumption that proper methodology solves all problems—more specifically that the scientific approach, by virtue of its intrinsic method, will resolve problems in any domain to which it is applied, whether nature or Scripture, if it is only followed correctly and *completely*.⁵² The practical consequence for

⁴⁸ Haught, *Science and Religion*, 17.

⁴⁹ Haught, *Science and Religion*, 17.

⁵⁰ Younker, "Theological Significance of Freedom and Time," 122.

⁵¹ See Younker, "Theological Significance of Freedom and Time," 126–127.

⁵² By "methodologicalism" I mean the belief that proper methodology solves all problems—scientific methodologicalism thus naturally assumes that whether its "object" is nature or the words of Scripture, the scientific approach by virtue of its intrinsic method will resolve either domain's problems. In this sense, both the historical-critical and historical-grammatical methodologies appeal to an identical "scientific" method, merely with differing presuppositions and objects. See Younker, "Theological Significance of

theology is severe. This is because both the popular “historical-grammatical” method favored by conservative scholars and the “historical-critical” method favored by progressive Christian or agnostic/atheist scholars in fact appeal to a nearly identical ‘scientific’ method, through their scientized *methodologicalism*. While the *presuppositions* of the historical-critical method are more widely, and often correctly, scrutinized by believers, the historical-grammatical method’s scientized methodologicalism and its consequences are often unwittingly accepted. The target here is not the careful philological work of conservative interpreters, who rightly seek humility before the historical otherness of the ancient text; rather, it is the absolutization of method into a technocratic procedure that displaces divine encounter and dismisses the possibility of lower-critical ambiguities or corruptions.

That is to say, the historical-grammatical method is also conditioned by scientific—and hence mathematical, Platonic, and timeless—presuppositions about the ontology of language, despite its otherwise explicit acceptance of the reality of *history*. Thus, even in the historical-grammatical method, the language of Scripture is often “scientized”: treated as an object amenable to the same kind of detached, calculative analysis that one might apply to chemical compounds or geological strata.⁵³ This approach still relies on the Platonic ideal that a text possesses one timeless, unchanging meaning—recoverable through a repeatable method. What is lost is precisely the “binding” character of truth that Heidegger describes and that White insists upon: the moral-relational dimension of knowing, in which the knower’s posture of trust or distrust is constitutive of what *can be known*. This is not to suggest that words lack meaning or that we can *never* retrieve a word’s original (“timeless”) meaning; we can, *generally*, understand words (including in the Bible).

Freedom and Time,” 128. Here, in contrast to many others, the point is that *science* in itself does posit a problematic challenge for theological method.

⁵³ Note again (see n. 7), as Parris explained, “during the Enlightenment, with the rise of the modern scientific method and its claims to objectivity by means of repeatable methodology, the humanities came under increasing pressure in the universities.” In biblical studies, this “filtered down to us in various forms of the historical-grammatical method.” Parris observes that “the Platonic ideal that a text . . . possesses one, timeless, unchanging meaning stands behind this method’s goal.” See Parris, *Reading the Bible with the Giants*, 91–92. Importantly, through such a method, biblical “inerrantists” have tried “to [scientifically] prove the validity and truthfulness of the Bible based on certain scientific, historical, grammatical, demonstrable, and rationalist categories,” Shaw and Van Engen, *Communicating God’s Word in a Complex World*, 35 (addition mine). See also Arrais, “Influence of Macro-Hermeneutical Assumptions,” 295–319.

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Rather, the point here is that to assume that language can simply be flattened to a Platonic ideal of meaning will, in itself, weaken the relational reality of language. In fact, it is not always so simple to retrieve the exhaustive original meaning of a word or phrase and temporally translate it successfully into today's parlance.

This is where the present article's disagreement with both Haught and Moreland becomes theologically consequential. Haught correctly insists that scientism, not science, is the enemy of religion—but he does not probe deeply enough into the *scientized* methodologicalism that has already colonized modern theology from within. Moreland correctly insists that science rests on philosophical assumptions prior to itself—but he does not reckon with the fact that his own Platonic-mathematical metaphysics replicates, at the philosophical level, the very structure of “secure possession” that Heidegger critiques. Neither thinker escapes the deeper problem: the scientific method, when treated as the paradigm for all knowing—including the knowing of God's Word or even just the natural world—imports into theology the Platonic demand for timeless, static certainty. Rather, scientized methodologicalism has come to dominate the academy to the point where it functions as “an enframing of life and world,”⁵⁴ and its influence extends into the most basic tools of biblical interpretation, often without the interpreter's awareness. Such a scientized methodologicalism may lead one to some true ideas or conclusions, but not always or completely, nor inwardly in the person's heart.

This distinction—and its insufficiency as typically drawn—helps clarify the White–Heidegger parallel. Heidegger's critique of technological modernity is not a total refutation of physics or biology; it is a critique of the totalizing frame that turns all reality into what can be controlled—and that frame has penetrated not only conceptions of science and secular culture but Christian theology and hermeneutics, and Christian views of nature. White's critique of unbelief is not a rejection of intellectual investigation; it is a critique of the posture that insists God must submit to verification on adversarial terms. Both diagnoses converge on a point that neither Haught nor Moreland fully addresses: the deepest threat to faith is not the atheist's denial of God but the believer's unwitting adoption of a method that treats God's Word as an object to be mastered rather than a voice to be trusted.

⁵⁴ Richard N. Williams, “Introduction,” in *Scientism: The New Orthodoxy*, eds. Richard N. Williams and Daniel N. Robinson (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

This point bears directly upon Creationism. If Creationism is defended only as a counter-system of data, it risks accepting the terms of the methodologicalism it opposes. Genesis 1-11 certainly makes claims about real beginnings, real human history, and real divine action. But it does so by summoning the reader to trust the Creator's Word before reality becomes an object to be controlled. The argument below therefore treats Eden not as a narrow case of moral psychology but as the threshold to the whole primeval history.

5. Genesis 2-3 and the Primeval History as Practical Epistemology and Ontology: How Distrust Conceals Truth

If the diagnosis is correct, the place to test it is the narrative in which trust and suspicion first diverged. The most concrete convergence between White's theology and Heidegger's critique appears in White's understanding of the history of the Fall in the Garden of Eden. Here "truth" is not a theory; it is a lived relation. To appreciate the value of White's interpretation, we must first attend carefully to the biblical text itself—both God's original command and Eve's subsequent retelling of it—because the interpretive challenge lies precisely in the gap between the two. Yet Genesis 2-3 is not an isolated proof-text. It is the hinge of the whole primeval history (Gen 1-11): the same trust relation violated at the tree is first established by the Creator's speaking the world into being and then tested through Sabbath, image-bearing, sacrifice, violence, flood, covenant, and Babel. The Eden narrative therefore provides the interpretive key to Creationism as a doctrine of trust in the Creator, not merely as an argument about origins.

5.1. The command and the retelling: a close reading of the text

God's original command is recorded in Genesis 2:15-17 (NASB):

Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. The Lord God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die."

Several features of this passage deserve careful attention, and a glance at the underlying Hebrew sharpens what the English translation conveys. First, the command is preceded by emphatic generosity. The Hebrew *mikkol* ("from every/all") stresses the comprehensive scope of the gift, and

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the verbal construction *'akhol to 'khel* employs the infinitive absolute—a Hebrew intensifier that can be rendered “you may *freely* eat” or “you may *surely* eat.” God’s command thus opens with a double emphasis: *all* the trees, and emphatically *free* permission. The prohibition is not a deprivation but a single boundary set within an otherwise unlimited gift. Moreover, the divine speaker is identified by the full covenantal name YHWH *'Elohim* (“the LORD God”), underscoring the personal and relational character of the One who speaks. Second, the prohibition itself is specific and unambiguous: “you shall not eat.” The forbidden act is eating, and nothing else is mentioned. Third, the consequence is stated with absolute directness—again using the infinitive absolute (*mot tamut*, “you will *surely* die/dying you will die”): “in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.” There is no ambiguity, no qualification, and notably no mention of *touching* or the physical methods (poison, malnutrition?) by which the death would be enacted.

When Eve recounts this command to the serpent in Genesis 3:1–3, however, the wording has shifted in several revealing ways:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” The woman said to the serpent, “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.’”

The interpretive challenge can now be stated precisely. When the Hebrew of these three speeches is compared, a three-stage degradation of God’s Word becomes visible. In God’s original command, the emphatic *mikkol* (“from every”) combines with the intensifying infinitive absolute to express lavish, emphatic generosity. The serpent, in Genesis 3:1, retains the word *kol* but inverts its function: “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall *not* eat from *any* tree of the garden?’” The same word that in God’s mouth expressed unlimited permission now, attached to a negation, insinuates unlimited restriction. The serpent’s rhetorical genius is to use God’s own vocabulary of totality against Him. The serpent also strips the personal, covenantal name YHWH *'Elohim* (“the LORD God”) down to the generic *'Elohim* (“God”)—subtly depersonalizing the Heavenly Commander. Eve, in her reply (3:2–3), completes the degradation. The word *kol* disappears entirely: she says simply “from the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat.” The infinitive absolute is also absent—God’s

emphatic “you may *freely* eat” is flattened to the bare “we may eat.” She follows the serpent’s usage of the impersonal *’Elohim* rather than the covenantal YHWH *’Elohim*. And she narrows “tree” (Hebrew *’etz*) to “fruit of the tree” (*peri ’etz*)—a shift from the tree itself, as the locus of God’s gift, to its produce, as though the gift were merely utilitarian. The overall trajectory is unmistakable: God’s Word moves from emphatic personal generosity (in the divine command), through a cunning inversion of its key term (in the serpent’s question), to a flattened, depersonalized, and diminished restatement (in Eve’s reply).

Additionally, and most significantly, Eve adds a clause that biblical exegetes have long pondered, though without attaining any clear resolution of its significance, and that is that the text does not record God as having spoken: “or touch it.”⁵⁵ God prohibited eating; Eve expands the prohibition to include touching, and the reader is left uncertain what this discrepancy means.

⁵⁵ It is a well-known exegetical question why Eve’s retelling of God’s command includes the clause “or touch it,” which is absent from God’s original prohibition in Genesis 2:17. The discrepancy has generated extensive discussion across the history of interpretation. The classic rabbinic treatment appears in *Genesis Rabbah* 19:3, where the serpent is said to have pushed Eve against the tree, demonstrating that touching it did not cause death, and then arguing that eating it would likewise prove harmless—a reading strikingly parallel to White’s own interpretation. Rashi, following this midrashic tradition, comments on Genesis 3:3 that Eve’s addition illustrates the danger of adding to God’s commands, since such additions create vulnerabilities that can be exploited. Among modern commentators, see Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 73–75, who discusses the discrepancy between God’s command and Eve’s version as reflecting an already-shifting posture toward the divine word; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 188–190, who observes that Eve’s embellishment may signal either excessive caution or a misunderstanding of the command; Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 24–25, who notes that Eve both weakens and strengthens the original prohibition; and Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Continental Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 238–240, who treats the addition as evidence of the narrative’s literary artistry in depicting the progressive distortion of divine speech. The question of whether Adam himself may have added the prohibition against touching when he relayed the command to Eve (since God’s original command was given to Adam alone, before Eve’s creation) adds a further layer to the interpretive puzzle. What is significant for the purposes of this article is not the resolution of these historical-critical questions but the structural observation that God’s Word has, by this point in the narrative, become an object of human management rather than a word simply received in trust.

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Whether Eve's alterations represent an insignificant or meaningless detail, a deliberate embellishment, a gradual drift in memory, or even a sympathetic expansion of the original command to further guard herself from eating it, is not a question that the text resolves—and, for the purposes of this article, her precise reason does not need to be resolved. The theological and epistemological point is structural: by the time Eve enters the conversation with the serpent, God's Word is no longer simply received as given. It has become an object of management—something to be expanded, softened, and experimentally probed—all this *before* any of the noetic effects of sin have been realized: Eve's human nature is still, at this time, 'sinless'! Eve had not yet sinned, yet her mind and words were capable of 'error' even in their sinless state. The addition of "or touch it" is especially consequential, as White's reading will demonstrate, because it introduces a 'scientifically' testable condition that God never imposed—and thereby opens the door to a form of empirical verification that subverts the posture of trust.

A striking irony attends this textual observation, and one that drives home the point that we today will also struggle with Eve's scientific aspiration in our quest to understand Nature as well as inspired writings. Ellen White herself, on multiple occasions throughout her written corpus, replicated Eve's very error! White clearly identified Eve's addition of "neither shall ye touch it" as an unauthorized erring overstatement of God's command—and yet, in other writings which do not fully or deliberately exegete the passage, White cited Eve's added phrase as though it were God's own prohibition, without comment. In one passage, she wrote: "God created our first parents and placed them in Paradise. God made only one restriction. 'The fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.'"⁵⁶ Similarly: "The beautiful Eve was beguiled by the serpent to eat of the fruit of the only tree of which God had forbidden them to eat, or even touch it lest they die."⁵⁷ She also described Adam as having eaten "the fruit of which he had been forbidden to touch."⁵⁸ In these passages, occurring throughout her lifetime, White conflates Eve's unauthorized

⁵⁶ Ellen G. White, *Temperance* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1949), 283; Ms 27, 1893.

⁵⁷ Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4A (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1864), 120.

⁵⁸ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1904), 288.

addition with God's actual command, attributing to God words He did not speak.

Yet in her 1874 *Review and Herald* article, White plainly identified the discrepancy: "Eve had overstated the words of God's command. . . . In Eve's controversy with the serpent, she added the clause, 'Neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.'"⁵⁹ And again, in 1896: "The woman erred when she entered into controversy with the serpent. The Lord had not said, 'Ye shall not touch it.'"⁶⁰ Eve and White thus made similar 'mistakes' over precisely the same issue: how they described God's actual prohibition in the Garden of Eden.

White expressed, at times, a deep appreciation and awareness of the potential 'depth' behind this ambiguous 'detail' in Scripture but, like Eve, on occasion, glossed over it while citing it and failed to elaborate upon its significance when a deep exegesis wasn't her objective. However, to be clear, it is important to emphasize that although White did occasionally gloss over the details inaccurately or incompletely when she merely 'touched' the topic, whenever she paused to 'eat' deeply into the verse, she expounded on the significance of the error Eve and she herself made. Furthermore, each passage where White conflates Eve's addition with God's command occurs in a practical or devotional context rather than an exegetical one, and the moral lesson she draws remains sound. That is to say, White could also be right even when she was incorrect.⁶¹ Her commentary on the Genesis 3 narrative thus poignantly illustrates the

⁵⁹ Ellen G. White, "The Temptation and Fall," *Review and Herald*, February 24, 1874.

⁶⁰ Ellen G. White, "The Test of Loyalty," *Signs of the Times*, February 13, 1896, par. 5.

⁶¹ For example, in *Temperance* the statement appears within an appeal against intemperance and the indulgence of appetite: there is "no sin in eating and drinking to sustain us physically," she observes, but sin "comes in" when "we lose eternity out of our reckoning, and carry these necessary things to excess"—and Eden's "only one restriction" is invoked to teach fallen humanity the discipline of strict self-denial. The *Spiritual Gifts* and *Testimonies* references likewise frame the episode as a warning about the ruin that follows trifling with what God has forbidden. The irony is instructive. In unfallen Eden the clause "neither shall ye touch it" was an over-cautious fence that, as White elsewhere observes, betrayed an incipient distrust where the issue was trust rather than avoidance; but for fallen humanity, who can no longer safely "handle" evil at all in order to test it, the maxim of not so much as touching the forbidden is sober practical wisdom (cf. 2 Cor. 6:17; Prov. 5:8). White's imprecise attribution thus alights upon a true principle precisely because she deploys it in the post-Fall situation of her readers, where keeping clear of even the approach to evil is prudence rather than overstatement. The detail wavers; the lesson holds. See *Temperance*, 282–283 (Manuscript 27, 1893); *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4a, 120; and *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, 288.

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subtleties of the paradoxical interplay between ‘verbal’ and ‘thought’ inspiration.

5.2. Implications for the theory of inspiration

Indeed, the above pattern of variance carries implications that reach well beyond a single biblical detail, bearing directly on the doctrine of inspiration itself. Within Christianity, including Seventh-day Adventism, scholars have usually organized the question of how God’s revelation relates to human language around two competing models or theories of inspiration (for Scripture, prophets, etc.). The first, *verbal inspiration* (in its strongest form, *dictation*), holds that the Holy Spirit supplied the inspired writer with the very “words” of the text so that the wording itself is divinely guaranteed and, on the strictest accounts, inerrant in every detail. The second, *thought inspiration*, holds that the Spirit impressed “thoughts” and convictions upon the prophet, who then expressed them in the language available to a particular person in a particular time and place; the message is from God while the wording bears the marks of its human author.

For the central question, White is unambiguous. In a manuscript written in 1886 she set out her own position with a memorable image: “The writers of the Bible were God’s penmen, not His pen.”⁶² A pen is an instrument that contributes nothing of itself; a penman is an author whose mind, vocabulary, and temperament shape what is written. As she developed the point: “It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. . . . But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.” Of the Bible itself, she likewise wrote: “The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God’s mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented.”⁶³

⁶² Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 21 (Manuscript 24, 1886, written in Europe). The fuller statement reads: “It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man’s words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.”

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 20. Cf. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), v–vi (Introduction): “The Bible points to God as its author; yet it was written by human hands; and in the varied style of its different books it presents the characteristics

White was equally direct in denying that she had ever claimed verbal inspiration for herself. Responding in 1906 to Dr. David Paulson—who had held that every word she wrote was “as inspired as the ten commandments”—she answered: “you have never found that I have made any such claims.” She was no less plain about infallibility: “I never claimed it; God alone is infallible.”⁶⁴ On the strength of statements like these, the mainstream Adventist position has long held that White, like the biblical writers she described, was a “thought-inspired” author rather than a divine stenographer—a reading this article does not dispute.

Yet the tidy opposition of “words” and “thoughts” in the two dominant models conceals a difficulty that the variance over “neither shall ye touch it” brings into the open. Two conclusions follow, and the second is the more important. First, the variance decisively excludes strict verbal or dictation inspiration—and it does so on White’s own terms. A dictating God does not render the same command in three or four different ways, one set of renderings flatly contradicting another. The shifting wording is exactly what the “penmen, not His pen” model predicts: the words are the author’s own, bearing “the impress of the individual mind,” including its habits, its memory, and its occasional imprecision. On the verbalist hypothesis, by contrast, White’s casual conflation would be nothing short of God dictating an error—an absurdity no defender of verbal inspiration would accept. The data refute the theory.

Second—and here the standard account proves insufficient—the same variance also resists reduction to a simplistic thought inspiration in which an inspired or inerrant “thought” is merely clothed in fallible “words.” Consider what the “thought” in this case actually is. In the passages where White exegetes the text, her insight is itself a claim *about wording*: that

of the several writers. . . . The truths revealed are all ‘given by inspiration of God’; yet they are expressed in the words of men.”

⁶⁴ Ellen G. White to David Paulson, June 14, 1906, in *Selected Messages*, book 1, 24–26 (citing Paulson’s April 19, 1906 letter to White at 24). White added: “the testimony is conveyed through the imperfect expression of human language, yet it is the testimony of God.” On her denial of personal infallibility, see *ibid.*, 37 (“I never claimed it; God alone is infallible”). On the inadequacy of a verbalist reading of White’s occasion-specific counsel, see George R. Knight, *Reading Ellen White: How to Understand and Apply Her Writings* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1997), 105–112. Knight illustrates the point with White’s seemingly contradictory counsel on eggs—“eggs should not be placed on your table” (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2 [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1885], 400) versus the later instruction to “get eggs of healthy fowls” (*Counsels on Diet and Foods* [Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1938], 204)—to show that a timeless-verbalist reading collapses under such occasion-specific guidance.

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Eve *added* words, that the addition created a vulnerability, that the serpent triumphed by “using her own words.” The theological content is inseparable from attention to the precise verbal form of the command. One cannot extract a wording-independent “thought” here and discard the words as disposable packaging or merely an alternate, accurate perspective, because the thought is *about* the words; in her deepest reading, White’s exact language carries the interpretive weight. Moreover, Eve’s lapse—and White’s repetition of it—is not a mere verbal slip but a matter of *which command God actually gave*, a content-level question rather than one of phrasing alone. The human element thus penetrates deeper than the model’s neat partition allows—and yet, remarkably, without overturning the truth of her message. On the substance of the Fall, as explored more below—that the issue in Eden was trust rather than chemistry, loyalty rather than biology—White is entirely consistent across every passage, careful and casual alike.

White herself anticipated precisely this. “The Creator of all ideas,” she wrote, “may impress different minds with the same thought, but each may express it in a different way, yet without contradiction. The fact that this difference exists should not perplex or confuse us.”⁶⁵ What she said of the several biblical writers applies, in miniature, to her own pen across the decades. The framing is deliberately incarnational: as the divine and the human were united in the person of Christ, so the divine and the human are united in the inspired word. The two are not separable into a divine “thought” and a merely human “word,” any more than the two natures of Christ can be peeled apart, and Adventist confessional statements have preserved precisely this balance—affirming the full authority of Scripture as the standard while declining to claim verbal inerrancy for the prophetic writings.⁶⁶ The reader who demands a verbally inerrant prophet is, in

⁶⁵ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), vi (Introduction). The statement is offered as White’s explanation of the diversity of expression among the biblical writers, and it describes, in advance, exactly the phenomenon observed in her own pen across the decades.

⁶⁶ On the incarnational analogy—“the divine indwelt the human in a mysterious blending of the two natures”—see the discussion in Knight, *Reading Ellen White*, 105–112. Cf. *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .* (Washington, DC: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988), 227: “The writings of Ellen White are not a substitute for Scripture. . . . The Holy Scriptures stand alone, the unique standard by which her and all other writings must be judged.” Knight describes the demand for verbal inerrancy as “a human-made problem” (Knight, *Reading Ellen White*, 111)—a phrase that captures, in pastoral idiom, the epistemological pathology this article has been tracing.

George Knight's apt phrase, fighting "a human-made problem" that neither Scripture nor White ever undertook to solve—and in doing so, ironically repeats Eve's own error in a new key: demanding of God's Word a kind of total, verifiable security that God never offered and so misses the trust the Word was given to evoke.

The constructive consequence for the present argument is that White's writings reflect neither simplistic verbal dictation inspiration nor casual thought inspiration, but a complex fusion of the two that defies standard historical-scientific analysis. The spiritual implication is that even an inspired writer can reproduce the very pattern of linguistic drift identified in pre-Fall Eve—suggesting that the relationship between divine truth and human language possesses a relational "depth" beyond its details (see below on Maurice Merleau-Ponty) that resists the calculative precision demanded by either strict verbalist- or reductive thought-inspirationists (can thoughts contain errors?). This is why hermeneutic "methodologicalism" is an enduring "scientific" temptation in itself.

5.3. Eve's curiosity as a "scientific aspiration"

White's interpretation frames Eve's temptation in epistemic terms: her "curiosity was aroused to know how death could be concealed" in the fruit.⁶⁷ The inference is that Eve assumed death must be concealed within unfallen nature such that closer examination could unconceal it—touching, testing, verifying.⁶⁸ Eve thereby reduces what Heideggerian phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty⁶⁹ would call the "depth" of

⁶⁷ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1890), 53–54.

⁶⁸ See the discussion of Eve's experimental posture in Younker, "Theological Significance of Freedom and Time," 433–434; interpreting Genesis 3:6 with reference to Genesis 1:31.

⁶⁹ As further discussed in Younker, "Theological Significance of Freedom and Time," 141 n. 393. The concepts of 'depth' and 'flesh' may point most directly to the major philosophical development and train of thought that is pertinent here. Building off of the conceptual framework laid down by Heideggerian insights, they were introduced formally by the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology*, trans. Carleton Dallery (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 172–173; and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible: Followed by Working Notes*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 143. "Merleau-Ponty depicts a dynamic depth of the flesh that unfolds in and through encounters with difference. The flesh, he explains, is 'a new type of being,' pregnant with potential sense expressions, with an ever expanding horizon of possibility" (Molly Hadley Jensen, "'Fleshing' Out an Ethic of Diversity," in *Merleau-Ponty and Environmental Philosophy*, ed. Sue L. Cataldi and

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embodied encounter—which for Merleau-Ponty is the “dimension of dimensions,” prior to the subject-object confrontation and inseparable from the temporality of memory—to a flat, testable, ‘timeless’ surface.⁷⁰

William S. Hamrick [Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007], 199). Sue L. Cataldi explains: “By *Flesh* Merleau-Ponty intended to indicate something which had no name in traditional Western philosophy. . . . *Flesh*, as a voluminous medium, is a ‘pure’ depth—a depth without any distance on itself” (Cataldi, *Emotion, Depth, and Flesh: A Study of Sensitive Space* [Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993], 60). The relevance to the Eden narrative is that Eve’s addition of “or touch it” reduces the “depth” of embodied encounter—the pre-objective, participatory dimension of bodily contact that Merleau-Ponty’s “*flesh*” describes—to a flat, empirically testable surface. Touching, in Merleau-Ponty’s framework, is never mere mechanical contact; it is a mode of disclosure through which the “*flesh*” of reality reveals itself to the embodied knower, that is to say, *eating* which joins the object to the subject. Eve, however, treats touch as a scientific instrument—a controlled externalized experiment to verify or falsify God’s Word. In so doing, she collapses the phenomenological “depth” of her lived relation to the fruit (and to God) into the calculative framework that both Heidegger and White critique. For the relationship between depth, memory, and time in Merleau-Ponty’s thought—particularly his insight that time “emerges within depth” rather than serving as its container, and that memory is an embodied “re-membering” rather than additive storage—see Glen A. Mazis, “Merleau-Ponty: The Depth of Memory as the Depth of the World,” in *Merleau-Ponty, Interiority and Exteriority, Psychic Life and the World*, eds. Dorothea Olkowski and James Morley (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 227–240.

⁷⁰ Eve’s implicit distinction between touching and eating the fruit invites comparison with the philosophical concepts of “depth” and “*flesh*” developed by Merleau-Ponty. He attacked a very old assumption: that the world is made of dead matter on one side and conscious minds on the other. The philosopher René Descartes split reality into *res extensa* (extended stuff) and *res cogitans* (thinking stuff). Merleau-Ponty thinks this is fundamentally wrong, and “*Flesh*” is his attempt to describe what reality is actually like before we impose that split. For example, start with a simple observation. When your left hand touches your right hand, something strange happens. The touching hand and the touched hand can *switch roles*. For a moment, you cannot cleanly say which is the subject (the one experiencing) and which is the object (the thing being experienced). Both are happening at once, in the same body *and mind*. The body is simultaneously the one who perceives and the thing that is perceived. You are inside the world sensing it, not a ghost looking at it from outside (contra Descartes). Then Merleau-Ponty makes a bigger move. He argues this reversibility is not just a feature of your body—it describes the relationship between your body and the world itself.

When you touch a tree’s bark, the texture of the bark and the sensitivity of your fingers are somehow made for each other. Your vision and the visibility of things seem to belong to the same fabric. The world is not simply “out there” as dead matter awaiting a mind to observe it. The world is already structured to be sensed, and your body is already structured to sense it. He calls this shared fabric *Flesh*—not *flesh* in the biological sense, but an *ontological* element (a fundamental feature of being itself), like how ancient philosophers called water or fire an element.

The point being, what Eve did is what any normal modern scientist would want to do. Eve, therefore, was humanity's first scientist, and her aspirations had significant consequences. She was logical in her approach to the fruit, though not rational in her approach with God.

This becomes pivotal for a theology of everyday life: a "test-and-verify" stance can be appropriate within most empirical domains, but it becomes spiritually lethal when applied to God's Word as though God were a suspect whose trustworthiness *must* be established by experiment. Heidegger would describe this as the totalization of calculative thinking; White describes it as the casting away of faith.

5.4. "There was nothing poisonous in the fruit itself"

It is White's statement that "there was nothing poisonous in the fruit itself"⁷¹ that blocks any reduction of the Fall to biochemistry. The crisis is relational and moral, although it also very much took place as a real, physical, historical event. Yet "she coveted what God had forbidden; she distrusted His wisdom. She cast away faith, the key of knowledge."⁷²

White's concrete reading of Genesis foregrounds not only Eve's deception, but her overstatement ("neither shall ye touch it") as an epistemic and moral vulnerability. Now the full force of the textual discrepancy becomes visible:

At present, the suggestion is that a *knowledge of evil* is not some *thing* to be studied or observed externally, but evil is of such a nature (being both objective and subjective through social relationships) that it awaits an opportunity itself to *touch* you, that is, become part of you (be eaten), as it *ontologically* responds to your *ontological* sensitivity to it, which exceeds the ontic or scientific touch alone.

That is to say, Merleau-Ponty's other term, "depth," applies here. When you actually look at something (e.g., a fruit), "depth" isn't a measurement you calculate between yourself and the fruit. It's the sense that the world has more to it than what is currently showing. Things recede into backgrounds, hide behind other things, have sides you cannot yet see. Depth is the dimension of *inexhaustibility*—the world always exceeds your current grip on it, and only *time* can reveal more of it, though always by masking parts of it yet again. At the same time, put precisely, depth is what makes things *real* rather than *flat*. E.g., a photograph is flat; the actual room you're sitting in has depth. That depth isn't just geometric distance—it's the sense that the chair could be walked around, touched from the other side, opened, or, *eaten*, such that it *always* exists beyond what you're currently seeing. Combined, the two concepts of "flesh" and "depth" illustrate what Eve missed in her "Cartesian" analysis of the fruit—it was more than meets the eye. Yet, that Eve's initial unfallen inclination was Cartesian reveals the enduring philosophical temptation to objectify and control what our mind thinks and examines.

⁷¹ White, *Education*, 25.

⁷² White, *Education*, 24.

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Eve had overstated the words of God's command. He had said to Adam and Eve, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." In Eve's controversy with the serpent, she added the clause, "Neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die." Here the subtlety of the serpent was seen. *This statement of Eve gave him advantage, and he plucked the fruit, and placed it in her hand, and used her own words, "He hath said, 'If ye touch it, ye shall die.' You see no harm comes to you from touching the fruit, neither will you receive any harm by eating it."*⁷³

The mechanism of deception is now epistemologically precise. Eve's addition of "or touch it" created a logically testable prediction that God never authorized: if touching the fruit causes death, then touching it without dying would constitute evidence against God's Word. The serpent exploits this self-generated prediction by placing the fruit in her hand—proving, on her own unauthorized terms, that no harm follows from contact. Having "falsified" a claim that God never made by employing methodological doubt, Eve is now psychologically positioned to doubt the claim God actually did make: that eating would bring death. The logic is that of a controlled scientific experiment applied to the wrong domain—a "test-and-verify" procedure applied not to an empirical hypothesis but to the Word of a trustworthy Person.

In this light, truth is not merely a correct scientific description of the tree and its fruit. Truth is uncovered (or concealed) by the posture of trust toward God. Faith is therefore not ornamentation laid upon the tree of scientific evidence; it is epistemic obedience—the everyday condition for seeing God's description of the tree rightly.

White's understanding of the tree of knowledge directly addresses the relationship between freedom, time, and morality, emphasizing that human freedom was paramount in God's original design. Again, in White's view, "there was nothing poisonous in the fruit of the tree of knowledge itself, nothing that would cause death in partaking of it. The tree had been placed in the garden to test their loyalty to God."⁷⁴ The issue in Eden was not chemistry but covenant: the key factor that made eating the fruit sin was not that the fruit was bad for them, but that God asked them not to eat it.⁷⁵

⁷³ White, "Temptation and Fall."

⁷⁴ White, "The Test of Loyalty," par. 7.

⁷⁵ Younker, "Theological Significance of Freedom and Time," 433–434.

God had provided everything Adam and Eve needed for sustenance; the real fruit that mattered was on the tree of life, which somehow *did* provide special life-sustaining power.⁷⁶ The theological significance of this contrast is considerable: if immortality itself was not an autonomous possession but a gift continually received through trust and obedience *in the same manner as it could be lost*,⁷⁷ then the tree of knowledge was not

⁷⁶ White's view that the tree of life provided genuine, supernatural life-sustaining power—not merely symbolic significance—is a striking theological claim. She states explicitly that “man was dependent upon the tree of life for immortality,” and that after the Fall God “took these precautions [in removing humankind from access to the tree] lest men should eat of that tree ‘and live forever’—become immortal sinners” (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* [1923], 134; cf. Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* [1882], 126–127). The implication is that the tree of life mediated a “conditional immortality”: Adam and Eve's continued existence depended not on an inherent property of their created nature but on an ongoing, sustained relationship with God through the means He appointed—a relationship that was at once both physical (eating the fruit) and proto-physically covenantal (trusting the Giver).

⁷⁷ The question of animal death before the Fall is one of the most vexing puzzles in a biblical philosophy of science, and it is far from clear that it can be fully resolved on the basis of the available evidence. White's statements on the tree of life consistently apply its life-sustaining power to human beings: “Man was dependent upon the tree of life for immortality” (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* [1923], 134); “In order for man to possess an endless life he must continue to eat of the fruit of the tree of life. Deprived of that tree, his life would gradually wear out” (*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3 [1864], 64); and “The fruit of the tree of life in the Garden of Eden possessed supernatural virtue. To eat of it was to live forever. Its fruit was the antidote of death” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8 [1904], 288). Notably, White never states that animals ate from the tree of life, nor does she describe their immortality as depending upon it. Yet she also describes pre-Fall Eden as a place of perfect peace, in which “the lion and the lamb sported together peacefully and harmlessly” around Adam and Eve (*Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1 [1870], 26), and she affirms that “through man's disobedience, death entered the world” (*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, 988)—a claim that would seem to encompass animal death as well.

This creates a theological gap: if human immortality required the tree of life, by what mechanism were animals sustained? White's silence on this point is itself significant. At least two possibilities suggest themselves, neither of them conclusive. First, it may be that God sustained animal life by a direct providential act—a continuous creative sustaining not mediated through any tree but simply intrinsic to the unfallen order of creation, which was withdrawn or altered as a consequence of human sin. Second, it is possible that animals, lacking moral agency, stood in a different metaphysical relationship to death altogether—that the “death” introduced by sin was not biological cessation per se (which may have had a natural place in animal life cycles, as with plants) but the covenantal rupture between creature and Creator that made death a curse rather than a ‘positive’ transition for at least plants, if not also some animals.

The first option appears more inviting and harmonious with White's overall perspective. One might assume that only Adam and Eve—as bearers of the *imago Dei* and moral agents capable of trust and disobedience—were ‘sensitive’ to the two trees in a way

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the only tree with epistemological import. Rather, the tree of life actually taught an ontological lesson which illustrated, experientially if not technically scientifically, the very truth God had spoken of concerning death being a result of eating from the tree of knowledge! That is, the tree of life was already teaching Adam and Eve, daily and bodily (temporally/ontologically and ontically), that their existence depended on receiving from God rather than securing for themselves—precisely the lesson that the demand for objective calculative certainty destroys. Eve and Adam's lived experience existed in a 'middle-path' between immortality and death, where their free-willed choices *for* the miracle of life *or* death were evident continually. In Merleau-Ponty's ontological terms, the tree of life mediated a "depth" of time and memory that was not additive or informational but participatory: an embodied, ongoing "remembering" of creaturely dependence that could not be extracted from the lived relation and held as an objective datum. Special fruit must be eaten: choose freely and wisely, from either the miraculous fruit or the forbidden ordinary fruit.

Thus, the problem of sin is primarily about trust in God, which requires a temporal extension of existence through freedom.⁷⁸ White's understanding of the Eden narrative implies that the sin of Eve and Adam was not a failure of intellect (though their intellect did fail them before sin, yet God did not punish them for this!) but a failure of trust—and the "scientific" attempt to verify God's Word through experiment, by touching the wrong fruit to see if death would follow the same as eating it, was itself the mechanism by which trust was destroyed. The parallel to the modern demand for verification on adversarial terms is exact.

that animals were not. White's own observation that "there was nothing poisonous in the fruit of the tree of knowledge itself" (White, "The Test of Loyalty," *Signs of the Times*, February 13, 1896, par. 7) suggests that both trees operated within a relational-covenantal rather than a merely biological register. If the tree of knowledge could only bring death through disobedience to a command addressed to moral agents, perhaps the tree of life could only confer immortality upon beings capable of receiving it in trust. Animals, on this reading, would have inhabited a different order of sustenance entirely—one governed by God's direct will rather than by covenantal mediation through the trees. Ultimately, the honest conclusion may be that the question cannot be resolved with the data we possess. White herself warned against the compulsion to explain every mystery: "Human philosophy has attempted to search out and explain mysteries which will never be revealed" (White, *Signs of the Times*, April 3, 1884, par. 7). The problem of animal sustenance and death before sin may be one such mystery—a question that reveals the limits of our calculative reach and invites precisely the posture of trust that this article commends.

⁷⁸ Younker, "Theological Significance of Freedom and Time," 434.

5.5. From Eden to Genesis 1-11: Creationism as Trust in the Creator

The same dynamic broadens naturally from the tree to the whole primeval history. “Creationism” is often treated in modern controversy as a set of claims to be secured by scientific proof, or as an apologetic program for defeating rival origins accounts. This is understandable, because Genesis 1-11 makes assertions about the real world and real history. Yet the argument of this article suggests that biblical Creationism must be more than a strategy of evidence. It is first a response of trust to the Creator who speaks. Genesis begins not with a laboratory procedure but with divine speech: “God said.” The world is disclosed as creaturely gift before it is available as an object of analysis. The Sabbath in Genesis 2 likewise makes time itself a site of trust: humanity receives a blessed and sanctified rhythm from God rather than manufacturing its own mastery of existence.

Read in this way, Genesis 1-11 forms a sustained trust-history. The creation week teaches that reality is personal before it is calculable; humanity in the image of God receives identity as gift rather than achievement; the garden and its two trees disclose freedom as a covenantal relation rather than autonomous self-possession. The Fall shows that distrust distorts the reading of both word and world. Cain’s sacrifice and violence show the same pattern socially: refusal to trust God’s evaluation leads to rivalry, resentment, and fratricide. The genealogies and the narrowing through Seth preserve the memory that human history is received through divine promise amid mortality. The Flood does not suspend the trust-theme; it intensifies it. Noah must act on a divine word about a judgment not yet visible, while the postdiluvian covenant and rainbow teach that nature’s regularity itself is not an autonomous mechanism but a mercy secured by God’s promise. Finally, Babel gives the primeval history its corporate anti-Eden: humanity uses technique, architecture, and a unified language to secure its own name and future, turning creaturely capacities into a tower of control.

Such a reading does not make Creationism anti-scientific. It does, however, critique a Creationism that seeks to ground faith in a complete evidentiary system capable of eliminating every mystery. Genesis 1-11 calls for faithful investigation under the authority of God’s Word, not a suspicious interrogation of God’s speech under the authority of contemporary method. The question is therefore not whether believers should study genetics, geology, archaeology, linguistics, or ancient Near

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Eastern backgrounds. They should, insofar as these studies are pursued with humility. The question is whether such studies become the court before which the Creator's testimony must stand trial. When that happens, both secular naturalism and defensive religious evidentialism can mirror Eve's mistake: both assume that truth becomes secure only when it can be placed in human hands, tested on human terms, and possessed without the risk of trust.

For Seventh-day Adventists, this has special significance because the Sabbath binds Creation to worship, history, and eschatology. The Sabbath is not merely a memorial of a past event; it is a weekly practice of trust in the Creator's ordering of time. To keep Sabbath is to receive the world as gift and one's own life as dependent upon God, which is the opposite of Babel's self-securing project. Thus, Genesis 1-11 is not only an origins narrative but an epistemological and liturgical training ground. It teaches readers how to know: not by abandoning evidence, but by refusing to let evidence be severed from covenant trust.

This is the sense in which the issue of trust addresses Creationism. A faithful doctrine of Creation affirms that God truly created, that Genesis bears real witness to that act, and that the primeval history is not dispensable myth. Yet it also refuses to turn Creationism into the kind of totalizing explanatory system that White warns against. The trust demanded by Genesis 1-11 is not gullibility; it is the creaturely humility that receives the Creator's word as reliable while acknowledging that the beginning of the world, the origin of life, the relation of pre-Fall nature to post-Fall nature, and the full mechanics of judgment and covenant within the Flood narrative remain deeper than any finite method can master. In this way, the Revelatory theology of trust gives Creationism a more spiritually durable foundation: not certainty as control, but faith as the posture in which the created world and the inspired text can be rightly received.⁷⁹

5.6. "Mysteries which will never be revealed": humility against total explanation

If Eve's mistake was experimental verification on adversarial terms, the broader pathology White names is the compulsion to verify *everything*:

⁷⁹ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1890), 113: "Just how God accomplished the work of creation He has never revealed to men; human science cannot search out the secrets of the Most High. His creative power is as incomprehensible as His existence."

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“Human philosophy has attempted to search out and explain mysteries which will never be revealed through the eternal ages.”⁸⁰ This does not forbid inquiry; it rebukes the spiritual compulsion to make explanation total—especially in domains where God has not promised exhaustive disclosure.

Rather, White’s complete passage reads:

To many, scientific research has become a curse; their finite minds are so weak that they lose their balance. They cannot harmonize their views of science with Scripture statements, and they think that the Bible is to be tested by their standard of “science falsely so called.” Thus, they err from the faith, and are seduced by the devil. Men have endeavored to be wiser than their Creator; human philosophy has attempted to search out and explain mysteries which will never be revealed, through the eternal ages. If men would but search and understand what God has made known of himself and his purposes, they would obtain such a view of the glory, majesty, and power of Jehovah, that they would realize their own littleness, and would be content with that which has been revealed for themselves and their children.⁸¹

White then adds what may be her most arresting statement on the subject:

It is a masterpiece of Satan’s deceptions to keep the minds of men searching and conjecturing in regard to that which God has not made known, and which he does not intend that we shall understand. It was thus that Lucifer himself was cast out of Heaven. He became dissatisfied because all the secrets of God’s purposes were not confided to him, and he entirely disregarded that which was revealed concerning his own work in the lofty position assigned him.⁸²

Yet White’s posture is not anti-scientific but contemplative. Elsewhere she casts the same insight in a more constructive register, tying the limits of human inquiry to a posture of humble wonder:

He who studies most deeply into the mysteries of nature will realize most fully his own ignorance and weakness. He will realize that there are

⁸⁰ White, “Man’s Obligation to God,” *Signs of the Times*, April 3, 1884, par. 7; and White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, 345–346.

⁸¹ White, “Man’s Obligation to God.”

⁸² White, “Man’s Obligation to God.”

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depths and heights which he cannot reach, secrets which he cannot penetrate, vast fields of truth lying before him unentered. He will be ready to say, with Newton, “I seem to myself to have been like a child on the seashore finding pebbles and shells, while the great ocean of truth lay undiscovered before me.”⁸³

White voices a closely parallel insight in *The Ministry of Healing*, while further connecting it directly to God’s Word:

Men of the greatest intellect cannot understand the mysteries of Jehovah as revealed in nature. Divine inspiration asks many questions which the most profound scholar cannot answer. These questions were not asked that we might answer them, but to call our attention to the deep mysteries of God and to teach us that our wisdom is limited; that in the surroundings of our daily life there are many things beyond the comprehension of finite beings. Skeptics refuse to believe in God because they cannot comprehend the infinite power by which He reveals Himself. But God is to be acknowledged as much from what He does not reveal of Himself, as from that which is open to our limited comprehension. Both in divine revelation and in nature, God has given mysteries to command our faith. This must be so. We may be ever searching, ever inquiring, ever learning, and yet there is an infinity beyond.⁸⁴

The spiritual pattern is unmistakable: the compulsion to know what God has not revealed—to make explanation total—is not merely intellectual overreach; it is the recapitulation of Lucifer’s own rebellion. It is the demand for cognitive control over God’s purposes even as revealed in Scripture, and it produces not illumination but spiritual blindness. For everyday faith, the lesson is direct: humble contentment with what God has clearly revealed, combined with faithful investigation of the Word and the created world under the guidance of the Spirit, is the posture in which truth is uncovered. The refusal to accept mystery and a lack of total control, by contrast, is the posture in which truth is concealed.⁸⁵

⁸³ Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1903), 133–134. See also Younker, “A Dialogue Between Contemporary Perspectives and Ellen White on Divine Action and Quantum Physics,” 120–154.

⁸⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1905), 431.

⁸⁵ White’s claim that “there is an infinity beyond” finds an unexpected corroboration—from a wholly secular philosophical direction—in the convergent conclusions of the two thinkers evaluated at length in Younker, “Theological Significance

5.7. C. S. Lewis and the impossibility of “seeing through” everything

Christian apologist C. S. Lewis’s warning reinforces the same point: one cannot go on “explaining away” forever; to “see through” everything is eventually to see nothing.⁸⁶ Read alongside White and Heidegger, Lewis underscores the self-defeating nature of total suspicion. A world in which everything is only an object of reduction leaves no stable ground for meaning, morality, or worship.

White’s Eden narrative supplies the theological reason: when distrust becomes the stance of the heart, the self demands visibility where God calls for trust—and in doing so, loses the very “evidence” by which spiritual realities are grasped.

White’s observations about mystery in the natural world echo this point. She wrote: “In the natural world we are constantly surrounded with mysteries that we cannot fathom. The very humblest forms of life present a problem that the wisest of philosophers is powerless to explain. Everywhere are wonders beyond our ken.”⁸⁷ These statements do not coddle ignorance; they counsel humility—the recognition that the natural world itself is layered with mysteries that point beyond what calculative reason can master. The demand to “see through” everything, in Lewis’s phrase, is thus not only philosophically self-defeating but spiritually destructive: it refuses the posture of a wonder *beyond* mathematical beauty that both nature and Scripture are designed to evoke.

of Freedom and Time.” David Bohm and Pauli Pylkkö, working from the philosophy of physics rather than theology, both arrive at views of nature that exceed the totalizing reach of calculative reason. Bohm posits an “infinity of [implicate] layers” constituting the depths beneath the explicate order—a “holomovement” he describes as “beyond definition, utterly undefinable and immeasurable” (ibid., 391–395). Pylkkö, by contrast, locates the inexhaustibility of reality not in vertical layers but in an “aconceptual experiential flow” in which “bald randomness” stands “at the very ground of existence” alongside interconnectedness, resistant to all conceptual schematization (ibid., 355, 361). Despite their sharp divergences, both converge on a structurally similar conclusion: any account of nature that limits itself to what can be calculated and rendered fully explicit will mistake an abstraction for the whole. As I argue, this opens the possibility of God and Nature being infinitely complex so to speak, in a way that is also open to freedom precisely because it represents an infinite depth to plumb. The philosophical insight is structurally parallel to White’s theological one: the calculative impulse, however refined, cannot exhaust reality, because reality is constituted by a depth that exceeds calculation.

⁸⁶ C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2001), 81.

⁸⁷ Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (1892), 106.

6. Form, Machinery, and the Manipulation of Truth

The critique of methodologicalism developed thus far has focused on epistemology and hermeneutics: the temptation to treat truth as the product of correctly applied procedure rather than the gift of disclosure to a trusting knower. Yet the same diagnosis—structurally identical—extends into ecclesiastical and institutional life. Just as the individual mind sought, in Eden, to manage the divine command through empirical test, so the ecclesial community is tempted to manage the Spirit's work through programmatic machinery. White's 1893 essay "Formality, not Organization, an Evil" recognizes the pattern as it manifests in the Sabbath-school work and the missionary society of her own day. Her position is carefully calibrated: organization as such is not evil; the evil is "making organization everything, and vital godliness of little moment." When "form and machinery take the pre-eminence, and a laborious task is made of carrying on the work that should be done with simplicity, evil will result." The structural pathology is the same one named in Heidegger's critique of calculative thinking: an external apparatus is allowed to displace the relational reality it was built to serve, with the consequence that "little will be accomplished in proportion to the effort put forth."⁸⁸

White's diagnosis runs precisely parallel to the article's hermeneutical argument. Just as a method, when totalized, can hollow out truth-as-disclosure into the mere correctness of well-formed propositions, so ecclesiastical form, when totalized, hollows out vital faith into ceremony. The pattern is the same: "evil results have been seen, both in the Sabbath-school work and in the missionary society, because of making much of machinery while vital experience was lost sight of." Especially striking is White's observation that the same drift had taken hold in the churches themselves, where "formality, pride, and love of display have taken the place of true piety and humble godliness." What is described is not a defect of organization itself but the substitution of mechanism for encounter—the same substitution that occurs when Eve treats God's Word as a hypothesis, or when the historical-grammatical method treats Scripture merely as a scientific specimen.

White names a particularly revealing form of this displacement: the assumption that, given organization plus staff, the spiritual work will run by itself. "Many have seemed to think that all that was essential in

⁸⁸ Ellen G. White, "Formality, not Organization, an Evil," in *Christian Education* (Battle Creek, MI: International Tract Society, 1893); reprinted in *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1923), 253–254.

Sabbath-school work was to organize the school, and drill the scholars so that they would act in harmony with a set of ceremonies and forms; and that if persons could be secured as teachers, the Sabbath-school would run itself.” But “teachers are often secured who cannot lead souls to Christ because they know not what it is to find him precious to their own souls.” The structural lesson is unmistakable: vital experience cannot be replaced by mechanism. A teacher who has not personally found Christ precious cannot, by procedural diligence alone, mediate that preciousness to others—just as a hermeneutic, however refined, cannot supply the trust that allows truth to be received. “Form and machinery,” whether of laboratory, lectern, or sanctuary, must remain instruments of vital relation, lest they become tombs of it.

What begins as the displacement of vital experience by form and machinery culminates, ultimately, in the use of religious truth itself as an instrument of control. Commenting upon the philosophical situation described in this article, Chris Hall and Steven Boyer describe Friedrich Nietzsche’s experience of “God” as the name used by “ecclesiastical paper pushers” to support customs and prejudices—an image of God as manipulable instrument.⁸⁹ Nietzsche rejected such a deity, and Hall and Boyer correctly observe that ironically “he was right to do so.”⁹⁰ This serves as a warning to believers: if “truth” is treated as absolute possession, it can be wielded to control. Heidegger’s concern about rational systems becoming tools of domination here intersects with a Christian confession: religious language can be co-opted by the heart’s will to power. White’s insistence that the gospel addresses moral nature—not intellect alone—directly confronts this risk. It is a lesson all Christians everywhere must learn.

In practical terms, the antidote is not relativism; it is repentance and reverence: truth as a gift that judges the knower, not a tool the knower uses to dominate.

Conclusion: Faith as the Everyday Site Where Truth Is Uncovered

The parallels between White and Heidegger are best stated as convergences of diagnosis rather than identity of doctrine. Heidegger helps name a cultural pathology: modern life trains people to treat reality as what can be calculated, secured, and controlled, shrinking truth into

⁸⁹ Christopher A. Hall and Steven D. Boyer, *The Mystery of God: Theology for Knowing the Unknowable* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 65.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

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“correctness.” White offers a theological diagnosis of the same posture at the root: distrust of God and the substitution of experimental suspicion for obedient trust.

White’s reading of Genesis 3 provides the practical climax, and it also clarifies how the argument bears on Genesis 1-11 and Creationism. Eve’s addition (“or touch it”) and her curiosity to locate death empirically portray a subtle spiritual drift: treating God’s Word as something to be verified under adversarial conditions. This same question reverberates across the primeval history: will creatures receive the world, time, morality, judgment, and covenant as gifts of the Creator’s Word, or will they seek to secure them by suspicion, rivalry, violence, and technique? White’s conclusion is stark: the fruit was not chemically poisonous; the poison was distrust—casting away “faith, the key of knowledge.”

Thus, trust and faith in God belong to ordinary life as the posture in which truth is disclosed. Truth is uncovered not only by gathering data but by becoming truthful—receiving God’s Word as reliable, allowing the heart to be corrected, and refusing to turn every mystery into an object of mastery. Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of “flesh” lends philosophical weight to this claim: the most primordial dimension of experience is not the measurable distance between subject and object but the participatory, relational, temporal, memorial “depth” that precedes and grounds all objectification—a depth that, theologically understood, is the very medium in which trust operates. For a doctrine of Creation, this means that evidence is received within covenant rather than replacing covenant; Creationism is most biblical when it witnesses to the Creator’s trustworthiness rather than becoming another machinery of secure possession.

This is not merely a theoretical conclusion but an urgent practical one. The division between the sciences and humanities—which has longstanding and continuing consequences for both the academy and ordinary life—has itself replicated within Christianity, dividing believers into those who favor scientific certainty and those who favor humanistic intuition. Neither side, taken alone, can do justice to the biblical vision of truth as trust. The sciences, when absolutized, reduce truth to what can be measured and become heartless; the humanities, when absolutized, reduce truth to what can be subjectively experienced, often without serious consideration of a God who speaks and acts. The biblical alternative, as White articulates it, is a posture of faith that honors both investigation and mystery—a posture in which “nature becomes a key to the treasure house of the Word” precisely because the knower approaches reality in trust

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rather than suspicion.⁹¹ White's vision thus offers not merely a critique of modernity but a constructive alternative: an everyday epistemology grounded in covenant relationship with the God who speaks, who reveals, and who invites trust even in the face of what remains hidden and mysterious.

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⁹¹ Ellen G. White, *Education* (1903), 120.